

“Ik stel me niet voor als vriend, ik stel me ook niet voor in een kader van **intimiteit**.”

(Meijer). “En ik vraag ook altijd van ze: **kun je dat, kun je dat in mijn handen leggen: dat vertrouwen?** “Voor mij zijn de

personages zo vormend dat ze ook de film vormgeven.”(Lataster-Czisch). “Ja, je bent gewoon **de zoveelste journalist** die iets van ons komt halen en dan horen we nooit meer van je.” (Knibbe). “Bij alle mensen die ik heb gefilmd, bij wijze van, die kun je ook op twintig andere manieren over laten komen.”

(van Zantvoort). “Ik moet daar heel eerlijk in zijn, **ik doe dit ook gewoon voor mijn ego**.”

(van der Wiel). “**Gelijkwaardig is de relatie met het personage nooit.**”

(Vlaanderen). “Ik vind het eigenlijk een excuus, om door middelen van een film, binnen te dringen in het leven van een ander.” (Appel).

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‘Documentary filmmakers and their ethical decisions’

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Synopsis

This study aims to gain more insight into the experiences of Dutch documentary makers working with subjects under the circumstances of inequality between the two parties and how, from this position of a power imbalance, the topic of representation is approached. In scrutinizing the experiences of these documentary makers, this research seeks to understand what these experiences mean in terms of ethical decision making processes in media and how they link to underlying values and motivations connected to meaning making (in media making).

The inequality of power, through the power held by the documentary maker because of the possession of a camera (and crew), is inherent to the relationship between filmmaker and subject. Apart from this, all ten documentary makers who are part of this explorative, qualitative research have experience working with subjects who have either refugee status or background; or worked with a subject with a non-western background in a situation of (economical) exploitation and/or oppression, creating a socio-economic or socio-politic inequality. Because of these inequalities, documentary filmmakers are confronted with ethical problems and ethical dilemmas in their work at a much higher rate than other professions. Another factor that is also considered in this research is the representation of the subject. There is little qualitative research on documentary ethics based on the experience of the documentary makers concerning their relationship with their subjects. Between the professionals, there is no habit of (informally) discussing their experiences, but instead most decision making processes are based on internal, 'intuition'-based processes. This research found similarities and differences between the documentary makers' ethical stances, motivations and aspirations as well as possible approaches that show how documentary makers handle inequality and representation of their subjects. The most poignant approach on how to counteract inequality is to find some form of 'exchange', which was experienced and used in terms of taking (from the subject) and giving (to the subject). Others found a way to incorporate their subjects into the making of the film, which also decreased inequality and had positive effects on representation.

Prologue: On a beach in Greece

During my studies at the University of Humanistic studies (UvH), I have continuously been working as a documentary filmmaker. For a long time, these two aspects of my life have been parallel lines, close to each other but rarely intersecting. Slowly this has been changing. I started to develop myself as a normative professional, both as a filmmaker and at the university. I focused more and more on the possibilities of studying media development from a humanistic perspective, which, for me, often means a perspective with a strong ethical connotation. Still, these were initially mere loose thoughts with small implications for my film projects or minor papers I wrote for assignments at the university. This drastically changed when I worked on my latest film project.

‘Good People’, my latest production, was filmed in 2015 on the island of Lesbos in Greece. In 2015 more than 1 million people fled to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea. 3770 of the died or went missing. More than half of the arrivals past through the island of Lesbos, attracting countless journalists, photographers and news reporters. The film is an ‘ego-documentary’ – a documentary in which the personal experience of the maker plays a significant part in the film itself. In the film, co-director Josefien van Kooten and I purposefully try to determine where we (as human beings and filmmakers) stand towards what has been generally called ‘the refugee crisis’. Confronted with the refugees’ suffering, their acute needs and requests for help, my colleague and I researched the role of the media, of which we ourselves were a part. In an essayistic manner, the film reflects on the value of documenting social problems and on the moral boundaries which are crossed in the process of filmmaking.

What has stayed with me ever since completing the documentary, is the question how I, as an undeniably western filmmaker, can make a documentary about a subject who is in such a different social position than me, who has such a different background and different needs. Questions that have become apparent include: How do I relate to the needs of the person in front of my camera? Can we meet on equal footing, me holding the camera? The code of moral conduct of the filmmaker may differ greatly from the interests of the subjects in the film. What if the interests of the subject conflict with the “needs” of the film, thus my needs as a (professional) filmmaker? While the main goal of a filmmaker is to make a film, the subject(s) of this film may have a very different interest (or no interest at all) in participating in the film. All this can easily raise ethical dilemmas.

The most effective way for me to describe the ethical dilemma I encountered is to use a concrete example from my film ‘Good People’, when I had to choose if my hands would either operate the camera or reach out to help someone by steadying them while they disembarked from a boat, or holding the baby that was put into my arms, while the mother was helping her other child. And so it came about that this concrete experience, somewhere on a beach in Greece, presented the impetus for the research of my master thesis.

Chapter 1: Documentary filmmakers and their ethical decisions: an introduction to the research

1.1 Objectives of the research

This master's thesis researches the relationship of documentary filmmakers to their subjects from an ethical viewpoint. The research will focus on ethical questions that present themselves in the relationship, as well as on ethically charged decisions taken by filmmakers concerning their subjects. The ethical charge in those decisions relates to the inequality between filmmaker and subject.

There are two kinds of inequality between the filmmakers of this study and their subjects: firstly, the difference between their positions within the hegemonic power structure in society, and secondly the inherent inequality caused by the possession and use of the camera by the filmmaker. "The filmmaker controls the camera and thus possesses a power others don't." (Nichols, 2010 p.58). This study aims to deepen our understanding of the ethical frameworks which different documentary makers develop in their work. To understand these frameworks means to understand more about their concomitant strategies, their motivation and their aspirations concerning their subjects. By doing so the study explores how meaningfulness is found, formed or possibly lost in work situations of documentary makers.

To conduct research in documentary filmmaking – as part of the media – is a step towards exploring a 'new' field. In times where the media plays such a big part in shaping our world, this can lead to new and beneficial knowledge (Appadurai, 1996). In her oration *Operating in reality*, Pisters explains how filmmakers actually create imaginary landscapes through their films and how these (co)shape reality (Pisters, 2005). Her vision concurs with what Appadurai calls 'mediascapes'. The images featured in television and cinema influence the way people perceive reality (Appadurai, 1990), which consequently means that the media (co)shapes reality. To research documentary filmmaking and the ethical questions that play a role therefore will help to understand how films (co)shape reality. For a long time, research on documentary ethics was predominantly focused on the study of documentary text¹. Only relatively recently the experiences and opinions of documentary filmmakers have been included in the discourse about documentary ethics (Nash, 2011).

This study aims to understand the relationship between filmmaker and subject by studying the experiences of documentary makers. The focus will be on documentary makers who work(ed) with film subjects who either have a refugee status or – background; or a film subject with a non-western background who is generally considered (economically) exploited and/or oppressed. Therefore, the filmmakers and their subjects in this study are a priori not equal, because of their different

¹ 'Analysis of the documentary text' refers to the analysis of the documentary itself.

nationalities, the privileges and challenges which come with skin-color and/or their socio-economic circumstances. How documentary makers experience situations concerning their subjects, how they feel and think about it and what kind of strategies they have developed to deal with ethical questions and how they think about the representation of their subjects will be guiding questions in this study. The first objective is to contribute to knowledge development about media making in connection with meaning making, as well as an analysis of how professionals handle ethically charged situations in which there is no straightforward code that can be applied.

Since 2014, the University of Humanistic Studies (UvH) shows explicit interest in media and humanism. A course was introduced focusing on media and meaning making in the Humanistic Studies master program. Also, a close relationship between the university and the broadcast station Human exists. In this context, the second objective of this study is to provide knowledge that can contribute to an emerging body of knowledge at the UvH about media studies and may provide more clarity on how to approach the topic of media and humanistic practices. In addition, documentary filmmakers are an interesting research population concerning ethical decision-making processes because of the high probability of encountering ethically difficult situations in their work (Nichols, 2010). Studying how and why such decisions are made may lead to new knowledge that in return can be used in research within other disciplines and/or professional fields (such as health care, the justice system or the military sector).

In addition to these objectives, some of the information that will be gained will be helpful for documentary makers themselves. Aufderheide et al. describe documentary filmmakers as professionals for whom ethical behaviour is at the core of their work (Aufderheide et al. 2009). At the same time, in a discipline where financial pressure and strong competition influence the work environment, filmmakers are pushed into situations where they need to find compromises between ethical responsibilities and practical considerations (Aufderheide et al., 2009). In their research ‘The honest truth: Documentary filmmakers on ethical challenges in their work’, Aufderheide et al. resolved that filmmakers make these decisions as case-by-case ethical decisions on an ad-hoc basis. His research also showed that filmmakers share unarticulated general principles on work ethics (Aufderheide et al., 2009).

The research conducted by Aufderheide et al. is one of the first based on an empirical study. For a long time, documentary makers have been very silent concerning their ethical stance in relation to their filmmaking (Nichols, 1991). The result is a culture in which ethics depend mainly on ‘unwritten rules’ that are passed down by teachers to students or discussed informally among colleagues. Sometimes there are questions raised in Q&A’s², which challenge the ethical position of the maker, but overall it is a very ‘grey’ area. All filmmakers choose for themselves, which approach towards a subject fits them best. The consequences of ‘unethical’ behaviour usually only

² Q&A’s are often given after screenings of films. The documentary maker will be interviewed by a moderator and afterwards there is room for the audience to pose questions for the documentary maker to answer.

show themselves in retrospective, in the form of critical press about the end-product (the film) or maybe as criticism by fellow filmmakers or the audience. Just very recently, the topic of creating a documentary code of ethics started to be discussed. In 2010 at AIDC³, there was a panel session organized with the topic “Why let ethics get in the way of a good story?”. That same year, the International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature and Media (IGEL) organized a panel on the empirical study of documentary ethics.

There is a general consensus on the necessity of a more public and focused conversation about ethics concerning documentaries (Nash, 2011, Aufderheide et al., 2009, Sanders, 2012). Some call for a code of ethics, others focus on further research. This thesis is not focused on searching for a written codex, but by using explorative qualitative research, the main objective is to achieve a different perspective and approach to the research of documentary ethics. Considering that for most filmmakers ethical decision making is an individual process⁴, because they are not per se bound to an institution or group of colleagues, researching ethical decision making could mean to include the notion of collective development. Professionalism implies individual and collective development of qualities and skills (Van Ewijk and Kunneman, 2013). To compare the professionalism of different filmmakers and to explore if there are similarities and differences could illuminate an already existing collective development or help to initiate a possible collective development. Conclusively, the third objective of this research is to further awareness and consciousness of documentary filmmakers regarding their relationship with their subjects.

1.2 Problem statement and research questions

The central problem which will be addressed in this study is rooted in the difference and inequality between filmmakers and their film subjects, and what this inequality means in terms of the ethical questions documentary filmmakers face in their work and how it connects to the representation of the subjects.

The discrepancy of power held by filmmaker and participant “(...) remains the besetting ethical problem of the documentarist/participant relationship even in the most casual, normal and deviant of circumstances” (Winston, 2000 p.147). Inequality in the relationship documentary filmmaker-film subject is a problem, because it can lead to a victim-perpetrator relationship, where one side is being (ab)used and the other is guilty of exploiting another human being. In this study the possible victimization of the film subjects is solely researched from the perspective of the filmmaker. This research sets out to explore the different ways the documentary filmmakers handle ethical decision-making born out of this inequality by collecting examples of situations they have encountered and how they handled these situations. The type of inequality encountered by the documentary makers and their strategies to handle them connect to an underlying construct of meaning making. To reveal this the ethical problems and decision-making as well as the

³ The Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC).

⁴ Documentary makers in most cases work as freelancers (Aufderheide et al., 2009).

construction of meaning (making) by the documentary makers would be a valuable addition to the body of knowledge of humanistic studies with a focus on media.

This study will begin with an exploration into existing knowledge by reviewing multidisciplinary literature on film studies and cultural studies in order to achieve a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the ethical framework of documentary making and the ethical questions that can arise in the relationship between filmmakers and film subjects.

In the exploration of existing knowledge, I will particularly focus on the genre of political cinema studies, and more specifically *third cinema* studies, as well as on the concept of subaltern. The goal of the literature review is to develop an informed critical perspective on the subject of this study as well as on representation in film. This knowledge I will use to prepare the interviews I will conduct with selected filmmakers, but will also allow me to develop a critical perspective on my own role as researcher.

Subsequently, the main objective of this study is to explore how ten Dutch documentary filmmakers⁵ experience the relationship between themselves and their film subjects, and how they, as professionals, understand and give meaning to this relationship.

The main research question in this study is:

How do Dutch documentary makers deal with ethical decision making and ethical dilemmas concerning the unequal relationship with their subjects and the representation of their subjects?

Four subsidiary questions will guide the research:

1. What kind of inequality(ies) do Dutch documentary makers experience between themselves and their subjects?
2. What are the key differences and similarities between the ethical norms and understanding(s) among Dutch documentary filmmakers regarding the relationship to their subjects?
3. What are the key differences and similarities between the motivations and aspirations of Dutch documentary makers and how are they related to the relationship to their subjects?
4. How do Dutch documentary makers approach ethical questions regarding the inequality in the relationship to and the representation of their subjects?

1.3 Conceptual framework

⁵ This translates to non-fictional filmmakers from the Netherlands, who have worked with subjects who have at some point in their lives lived as subaltern, and who have produced films which feature the life story/-journey of these subjects.

The conceptual framework of this study emerges from literature from three different academic domains. Two within the field of film studies, which – each in their own ways – focus on ethical questions (in filmmaking), problems of inequality (between filmmakers and their subjects) and representation of subjects in documentary films. The third academic domain is cultural studies, which also focuses on inequality and representation, but not necessary connected to film. In this multidisciplinary review, the elaboration of the conceptual framework will be divided in two parts, namely: (a) film studies on ethics and (b) political film studies and cultural studies on the subaltern.

Each focus will be briefly discussed below and elaborated upon in chapter two of this thesis.

(a) Film studies on ethics

A key author in the domain of film studies concerning documentary is Bill Nichols, the ‘father of research into ethical connotations of documentary filmmaking’ (Nash, 2011). Nichols was the first to write about – and still is considered the most important expert on – representation in documentary film and its ethical connotation. “Nichols’ (1991) concept of axiographics represents the most systematic attempt to articulate the connection between the documentary text and the ethics of its production.” (Nash, 2011 p. 2). His focus on ethical space in documentary film (Nichols, 1991) will help to develop a conceptual base of this study. Michael Renov is an author who has developed a concept of the different tendencies of documentary film (Renov, 1993). His model will function as an orientation in this study to distinguish between ambitions and motivations of different documentary makers (in their work) and how they can influence their relationship towards their subjects. In addition to these two writers, other representatives of various specifications in (ethical) film studies will be mentioned concerning the definition of documentary, like Grierson (Grierson, 1966) or Hans Richter (Richter, 1986); Pat Aufderheide concerning the relation between filmmaker and subject (Aufderheide et al, 2009); Kate Nash about the ethics of documentary (Nash, 2011) alongside Butchart (Butchart 2006), Brian Winston (Winston, 2000, 2005), Willemien Sanders (Sanders, 2012), Kay Donovan (Donovan, 2008) or Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1999) about the relation of the filmmaker to reality.

The key concepts deriving from the domain of film studies on ethics are ‘ethics of documentary making’, ‘motivations of the documentary maker’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘trust’.

(b) Political film studies and cultural studies on the subaltern

Within political film studies, Patricia Pisters is an important writer (Pisters, 2005). In this study, the focus lies specifically on the socio-political contrast between filmmakers and their subjects. The movement of *third cinema* (part of political film studies) addresses this topic thoroughly. Films made within the tradition of *third cinema*, in tandem with their theoretical background, open up criticism of the representation of non-western subjects by western filmmakers (Naficy, 2001). Even though *third cinema* does not focus explicitly on ethical dilemmas in filmmaking,

its criticism of western filmmaking touches many sensitive areas where these ethical issues (otherwise) arise. This is strongly represented in the ‘question of representation’, which was first addressed in *third cinema* (studies). The ‘question of representation’ is a normative approach to the question: who is represented by whom and how?

A similar question has been raised in a different academic disciplinary field: Cultural studies on the subaltern or ‘Subaltern studies’. ‘Subaltern studies’ were started by a group of South-Asian scholars researching post-colonial societies. They subsequently became a broader movement of research, which focuses on a history-from-below, on a study of the masses rather than a study of the elite within the academic domain of Cultural Studies. The term subaltern refers to the Gramscian notion of people outside the hegemonic power structure who have little or no means to access social mobility and who are highly limited in their awareness of their political interests, as well as their political strength (Gramsci, 1971).

In her well-known essay “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak, 1988), Gayatri Spivak discussed very critical notions of the representation of the *subaltern*. She argues: “Leftist intellectuals who romanticize the oppressed (...) essentialize the subaltern and thus replicate the colonialist discourses they purport to critique.” (Spivak, 1988 p. 126). But she is not only writing about research, “For Spivak, both political representation (speaking for, *Vertretung*) and representation as in art and philosophy (*Darstellung*) make representation the most important concept for understanding the ideological nature of reality, and hence for speaking about reality itself” (Bignall, 2010 p. 202).

Spivak’s criticism of how representation is done in research is closely related to criticism of representation practices in third cinema studies. In both domains the difference of position in the hegemonic power structure is seen as an obstacle to effectively ‘represent the other’. The difference in position keeps the researcher/filmmaker from fully grasping the reality of his subject – his needs, his conduct, his motivations. This point of view goes further than anticipating moral dilemmas and ethical issues in representing another (by filming, etc.), it actually implies the impossibility of doing so.

The key concepts deriving from political film studies are ‘victimization’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘representation’.

1.5 Research Methodology

To answer the main and its subsidiary research questions, the empirical base of this research consists of interviews with ten documentary filmmakers by means of a qualitative and explorative approach. The qualitative character of the research ensures that there is room and attention for meaning making and the subjective experiences and perceptions of the interviewees (the filmmakers) themselves (Evers, 2007). The base of qualitative research is the fact that people

attribute meaning and value to their social surroundings and that they act according to this 'meaning making' (Boeije, 2005).

For this research ten filmmakers have been purposefully selected. They all fall in the category of non-fictional filmmakers, working from a base in the Netherlands, but not necessarily in the Netherlands, who have experienced socio-political contrasts between themselves and their subjects in their work.

The following list of filmmakers makes up the research population:

Niels van Koevorden, John Appel Petra Lataster, Kees Vlaanderen, Joost van der Wiel, Menna Laura Meijer, Ton van Zantvoort, Morgan Knibbe, Ingeborg Jansen, Kim Brand.

The research methodology of this study will be further discussed in chapter 3.

1.6 Relevance of this study

The research will generate knowledge about ethical decision making in general, as well as particularly in the discipline of documentary filmmaking. This is relevant for humanistic studies as it is expanding the scope on its core themes of 'meaning making' and 'humanization' to include media studies. Given the high probability of ethically challenging work situations in documentary filmmaking, it is a valuable research environment to further knowledge about ethical decision making (Nichols, 2010). Thus far, there has been little research within film studies on documentary ethics based on the experiences of documentary makers themselves (Sanders, 2012). The focus of documentary ethics has thus far been based almost exclusively on textual analysis (Nash, 2011) or on questions of truthfulness rather than relational dynamics between filmmaker and subject (Sanders, 2012). The present research differs in that it places the experiences of filmmakers at the heart of the study.

The study also aims to further ethical awareness of documentary filmmakers themselves. Aufderheide et al. (2009) researched the ethical relationship between numerous American documentary filmmakers and their subjects (as well as the audience). His research uncovered that filmmakers felt that they lacked a forum to discuss the ethics of their craft (Aufderheide et al., 2009). To research normative learning processes of professionals in a follow-up to Aufderheide's study, could heighten the quality of professional work (product and process) and could also have a positive effect on the equanimity of the mind of the professional (Van den Ende, 2011).

By researching similarities and differences between the ethical norms and understandings of selected documentary filmmakers, new light could be shed on their collective stance on ethical matters. The study could be a first step towards new ways of reflecting on the ethical dilemma's faced by filmmakers as normative professionals. It could be very beneficial for documentary filmmakers to learn from each other by reflecting. Reflection in a group on how individuals

handle certain situations in their work is a valuable and constructive practice (Van den Ende, 2011).

1.7 Brief overview of the chapters

The thesis will consist of five chapters. This introduction is the first chapter which frames the research by discussing its objectives, conceptual orientation and its research methodology.

The second chapter focuses on a literature review. It will start with a short summary of the tradition of documentary making by discussing the definition of documentary. It will then venture into ethics and style by discussing a prominent theory developed by Nichols, called axiographics, which allows to deduct the filmmaker's ethical stance from the documentary style. Combined with a categorization of documentary motivation and ambition by Renov, these theories form the conceptual base from which I can prepare the interview questions for the filmmakers and will guide me in the data analysis of the interviews in a later stage. The second chapter also includes a short introduction into documentary ethics as a discourse as well as a description of the relationship of documentary filmmaker and his subjects. The chapter finishes with a critical perspective by including political cinema studies and its perspective on representation.

In the third chapter, the research methodology will be elaborated. This includes an explanation of the criteria and process for the selection of the respondents as well as a reflection on the role of the researcher. Lastly, it will discuss its methods of data analysis.

The fourth chapter will consist of a presentation and analysis of the empirical data that was generated in the interviews. The empirical findings which address the four subsidiary questions will be discussed in this chapter.

The final and fifth chapter will consolidate all parts of the study and discuss the main research question in a conclusion as well as a discussion on possible follow-up research.

Chapter 2: Ethical decision making and documentary makers – a conceptual frame

The main focus of this study is ethical decision making of documentary makers, which entails the relationship to their subjects and the representation of their subjects. In this chapter this focus will be further elaborated by pairing, comparing and connecting literature from different disciplines.

First, in paragraph 2.1, the context and definition of documentary will be discussed to explain the tradition from which the documentary makers come. This elaboration introduces several topics that will feature repeatedly throughout the chapter, such as the role of ethics in connection to aesthetics, the relationship of documentary film to journalism and journalistic ethics and a differentiation of documentary and fiction. The introduction to documentary film will be followed by an illustration of the theory of axiographics. This is a way to analyse documentary style, which will be discussed in order to understand the filmmakers' ethical stance. This will be followed by a categorization of the main tendencies in documentary making in terms of the filmmakers' motivations and ambitions. These theoretical perspectives combined will enable this study to develop a conceptual frame in which each of the interviewees can be positioned in terms of their ethical stance, their motivations and ambitions.

In paragraph 2.2 the chapter will continue with a short summary of documentary ethics as a discourse, touching on the topic of inequality of the film subject for the first time. This will be followed by an introduction into the types of possible relationships between documentary maker and his or her subject and the practical stages this relationship experiences: selection process, filming period and post-filming follow-up. Elaborations on the relationship between filmmaker and subject unavoidably lead to a discussion on the representation of subjects by documentary makers as well as on trust as part of their relationship.

Paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 will draw from literature out of the domain of film studies on ethics, while paragraph 2.3 concentrates on literature of political film studies and cultural studies on the subaltern. In 2.3 a critical perspective on representation will be introduced by venturing into the domain of political cinema: 'the philosophy of giving: a critical approach'. Political cinema and *third cinema* especially takes a strong stand on representation regarding the socio-economic inequality between filmmakers and subjects. By including this critical perspective, the study considers the context in which filmmakers are located and influenced by as well as broadening the framework to analyse the interviewees strategies, comparing them with third cinema strategies. The chapter will close with a compact summary of the operationalization of the concepts.

2.1. Documentary film, style and ethics

2.1.1 The context

The context of documentary making is dependent – in addition to technical improvements of equipment⁶ – on four main factors: institutions that support documentary production and reception, the creative effort of filmmakers, the lasting influence of specific films and the audiences (Nichols, 2010 p.16). ‘The creative effort of filmmakers’ refers to the influence of individuals in the field, who may change or transform the ‘rules’ and traditions of the makers before them. Sometimes this happens in dialogue with other makers, sometimes as an autonomous effort which influences through the end product – the film.

Given these conditions, it is impossible to arrive at one fixed definition of documentary. The variable, open ended, dynamic quality of the form itself asks for a flexible definition encompasses a constant process of analysing and recognizing the conventions of films already being identified as documentaries.

2.1.2 Defining ‘documentary’

There are multiple definitions to be found of the concept of documentary. To provide a basic layer of understanding of documentary tradition and documentary context, the focus of the selected definitions and their elaborations in this study is on three points: (1) the relation of documentary to fiction; (2) the complex role of aesthetics in documentary; and (3) the relation of documentary to journalism, specifically in terms of similarities to and differences from journalism.

The term ‘documentary’ was first coined by John Grierson in 1930. According to Grierson, documentary should be an instrument of information, education and propaganda as well as a creative treatment of reality (Grierson, 1966). His definition has been elaborated and challenged many times since. Michael Renov describes Grierson’s definition of documentary ‘as a creative treatment of actuality’ as an oxymoron (Renov, 1993). It has often been assumed that the creation of beauty and the task of the documentary of historical representation are incompatible altogether. Grierson says: “The trouble with realism is that it deals not in beauty but in truth”.⁷

In Renov’s opinion, the definition of documentary is highly dependent on the dividing line between fiction and documentary, especially concerning aesthetics (Renov, 1993). According to him, the conflict between *truth* and *beauty* is connected to the (western) dualism between science and art, mind and body (Renov, 1993). Renov argues to not discard a documentary as fiction because of a challenging or innovative manner of representation, but to look at the question of expressivity

⁶In the 1960’s, the practice of documentary making changed because the filmmakers and their crews were not dependent on heavy 35mm equipment anymore, which is large and heavy, but could film with the much lighter 16mm camera, which meant a whole new form of documentary was possible (Aufderheide, 2007).

⁷ *Of Great Events And Ordinary People* by Raoul Ruiz (1979)

always as a matter of degree. He stresses “(...) the ability to evoke emotional response or induce pleasure in the spectator by formal means, to generate lyric power through shadings of sound and images in a manner exclusive of verbalization, or to engage with the musical or poetic qualities of language itself must not be seen as mere distractions from the main event” (Renov, 1993 p.35). He also emphasizes the potency of artful documentary communicating ideas and feelings, especially through its innovative quality.

An opposing opinion on aesthetics in documentary film can be found in Hans Richter’s work where he states that a fact can’t remain a fact if represented too beautifully. His argument is that a beautiful image cannot be obtained without losing its “(...) closeness to reality” (Richter, 1986 p.43). According to Richter, the image must suppress something essential in order to achieve beauty (Richter, 1986). Even though Richter’s view might be outdated from a modern perspective on (creative or artful) documentary, the thought that ‘beauty’ and ‘truth’ cannot coexist still lingers on. Especially documentary makers who position themselves close to or within the discipline of journalism are not only often found to believe content should outweigh form, but even somewhat detest aesthetics according to Richter’s argumentation.

Documentary traditionally hinges on journalism. The ‘truth-claim’, the idea of ‘the greater good, the ‘viewer’s right to know’ and the intended objectivity many documentary filmmakers strive for, is very similar to the professional standards of journalism (Nichols, 2010). However, not all rules that apply to journalism are adapted. In journalism, there are also values like impartiality, fact checking or hearing both sides, which are not necessarily adopted by documentary makers. This brings a certain freedom that journalists do not have, which defines documentary making. The filmmaker recruits, films, directs even, and represents people as he/she chooses. “It is (...) this freedom to represent others that brings along ethical questions for which the filmmaker cannot rely on established or generally accepted rules and guidelines.” (Sanders, 2012 p.5).

There is another similarity between journalism and documentary filmmaking: the obligatory detachment of the filmmaker towards the situation in front of the camera. Even though reflexive styles of documentary making have broken with this tradition, it is still the dominant way of making a documentary: the filmmaker seems absent in the image, physically, but also emotionally or ethically. S/he is not there. The effect is this: “The ethics attached to “being there” on the scene become replaced by the ethics of objectivity and good journalism or displaced into the ethics of rhetoric and argumentation, of what can be said at a distance, from somewhere else” (Nichols, 1991 p.90). The filmmaker creates an empty ‘window’ in the historiographic space, where the presence of the filmmaker would have been (Nichols, 1991). The viewer can see the world through this window. A filmmaker who distinguishes him/herself through absence is difficult to categorize or analyse ethically. But even if the filmmaker is absent, his/her style of filmmaking is visible. Nichols developed a way to analyse documentary text/style in order to understand documentary ethics, or the axiologicals, which will be explained below.

The relation to fiction, the similarities and differences with journalism and the role of aesthetics in documentary and documentary making are all factors which have a strong influence on ethical decision making. In the following parts, these influences and correlations will be discussed, starting with the analysis of ethics and style.

2.1.3 Ethics and style

Nichols coined the term axiographics to describe the concept of ethical space in documentary film (Nichols, 1991). Axiographics still is the most systematic attempt to show the interrelation between documentary text and documentary ethics (Nash, 2011). It is based on the assumption that by analysing the documentary text, evidence of the ethical stance of the documentary maker can be derived. The gaze (or camera) holds an implicit ethical code (Nichols 1991). The image carries an emotional tonality which results from the selection in image and sound (filming and editing), which implies a normative stance and in addition an implied ideology. This hints at an ethical framework in which the filmmaker operates.

By analysing the ‘empty window’ (as mentioned in the previous part of this chapter), the documentary makers’ ethics can be revealed. In the context of this research, this concept can be used to link data from the interviews about style to the process of ethical decision making of documentary filmmakers. By analysing the ‘gaze’⁸ in a documentary, Nichols can conclude the ethics that are represented. In connection with the four tendencies of documentaries by Renov, the axiographics will be used to position the filmmakers and to understand their ethical decision making in their practice.

Nichols distinguishes between six different kinds of gazes documentary filmmakers can display:

1. the accidental gaze

Nichols links the accidental gaze to the ‘low-order’ *ethic of curiosity*. “A thin line separates the accidental gaze from morbid curiosity” (Nichols, 1991 p.82).

2. the helpless gaze

This describes a passive and at the same time active position of the filmmaker (passive, because there is no action towards the situation itself; active, because the act of filming is considered active and occurring even though the position/attitude is inactive). Nichols links this gaze to an *ethic of sympathy*.

3. the endangered gaze

⁸The camera’s gaze: two operations of the term 1. “the literal, mechanical operation of a device to reproduce images”; and 2. “the metaphorical, human process of gazing upon the world”. The camera can be seen “as an anthropomorphic extension of the human sensorium which reveals not only the world but its operator’s preoccupations, subjectivity, and values” (Nichols, 1991 p.79).

The filmmaker is taking a personal risk to serve ‘a greater good’, therefore Nichols links this gaze to an *ethic of courage*.

4. the interventional gaze

“The camera abandons the precondition of distance, transforming the detachment of a gaze into the involvement of a look” (Nichols 1991 p. 85), therefore it is an *ethic of responsibility*, often aligned with the interactive mode of documentary filmmaking; or an *ethic of irresponsibility* in case the intervention is participatory rather than oppositional.

5. the human gaze

In this gaze, the relationship between filmmaker and subject is in the foreground as an empathic bond. Often the goal of the filmmaker is to help or to understand.

This gaze is connected to an *ethic of responsibility*, which shows itself through empathy rather than intervention, and empathy legitimates the process of continued filming.

6. the clinical/professional gaze

This gaze is based on a professional code of ethics based on personal detachment from the situation that is filmed. The display of personal involvement would go against the idea of a service of the greater good (see journalistic ethics p. 18) It can be characterized as an *ethic of the greatest good and the professional needs to exempt him- or herself from intervention in order to serve that good*.

2.1.4 The ambitions of documentary filmmakers

The ambition of the documentary maker shows itself in the tendencies of a documentary. Renov distinguishes four types of tendencies in documentaries. The application of Renov’s system to this research enables a detailed comparison and differentiation of documentary filmmakers with regards to their ambitions. While the axiographics unveil information about the ethical stance of a documentary maker, Renov’s tendencies provide a way to distinguish between different underlying motivations of documentary makers, which can play an important part in the relationship with their subjects and any of their ethical decisions concerning this relationship. The ambition of the documentary maker with his/her film – without a doubt – has great influence on the process of making the film. Conflicts can and do arise, because the motivation of the subject and the ambition of the filmmaker can clash – as mentioned in the introduction. In this clash, ethical questions and dilemmas can reveal themselves. Understanding the documentary maker’s ambition in combination with his/her ethical stance is valuable because it can deepen our understanding of how ethical decisions are made by documentary makers.

Renov describes the tendencies of documentary as rhetorical and/or aesthetic functions which are attributed to documentary practice (Renov, 1993). Renov states that these tendencies are not

comprehensive or exclusive, but can overlap each other. More than one of the tendencies can be exhibited in a single documentary. There are many paradigms in documentary poetics, like the impossibility of separation between the indexical sign status of documentary and the tendency to promote. Without recording and preservation, there is no persuasion, nor can expression as tendency ever completely be separated from persuasion. According to Renov, persuasion might even be the basis of all forms of documentary. With his approach, Renov hopes to “(...) dislodge the sense of historical inevitability attached to whatever (im-)balance may obtain within the field of current practices (e.g., the rhetorical function overshadowing the analytical) in order to engage with the wider potential, repressed but available” (Renov, 1993 p. 22). The four tendencies are:

1. to record, reveal or to preserve

Renov means a “(...) replication of the historical real, creation of a second order reality cut to the measures of our desire – to cheat death, stop time, restore loss.” (Renov, 1993 p.25). He states that documentary has been most often been motivated by the wish to reveal the ‘truth’ or the actual state of things, situation, beings – the preservation of the fleeting moment. Often this goes hand in hand with the ignorance of the manipulation through which the ‘real’ is transfigured by the process of filming and filmmaking (Renov, 1993).

2. to persuade or promote

In the tradition of John Grierson’s definition of documentary, this can be seen as the dominant ambition in documentary: to persuade or to promote a certain view on reality. The ‘truth claim’ of documentary is the key element. It is the baseline of persuasion, regardless of which documentary (from undeniable propaganda like *Triumph of the Will* (1935) to a documentary like *Een Bitterzoete Verleiding*⁹ (2007) focusing on a small, seemingly insignificant detail of life). The persuasion itself often lies in the use of the images and sound as well as in the way the story and its characters/subjects are constructed. Especially sound is – since the 1920th – used in a variety of ways: audio commentary, sound effects, speech and music, which are all useful instruments in matters of persuasion (Renov, 1993).

3. to analyse or to interrogate

Renov describes this tendency as a “cerebral reflex” of the record/reveal/preserve function of documentary (Renov, 1993 p.30). Films made in this modality often acknowledge the mediational structures and underlying processes that are part of filmmaking (filming and editing), some reflect on it in the medium itself. An early example of an analytical film is Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which reveals the workings of the camera as well as showing the construction of the film¹⁰.

⁹ A documentary about surprise eggs produced by Ferrero, the design of the ‘surprise’ and about people collecting the ‘surprises’ and their lives.

¹⁰ An example: On screen we see horses galloping, then the frame is stopped, the sequence is reversed, so the horses appear to be running backwards.

4. to express

The last function is the aesthetic function which entails, as mentioned earlier, the science versus beauty discussion (definition of documentary), a difficult discussion in documentary making. Traditionally, expressive documentaries in the discipline of nonfiction film are met with weariness. Renov's opinion is that documentation and artfulness do not exclude each other, instead the combination holds the potential to carry feelings and ideas better than pure documentation. "What emerges via distortions of the accurate representation of reality is the real – that is the trauma around which social reality is constructed" (Žižek, 1994 p.26).

By combining the theories of Nichols' axiographics and Renov's tendencies into one grid (the ethical stances and gazes in the vertical position and the four tendencies in the horizontal, see figure 1), in which the documentary makers can be positioned, their ethical stance as well as their underlying ambitions can be made visual.

This analytic frame will be used in response to the main research questions in chapter five of this study, as a visual aid.

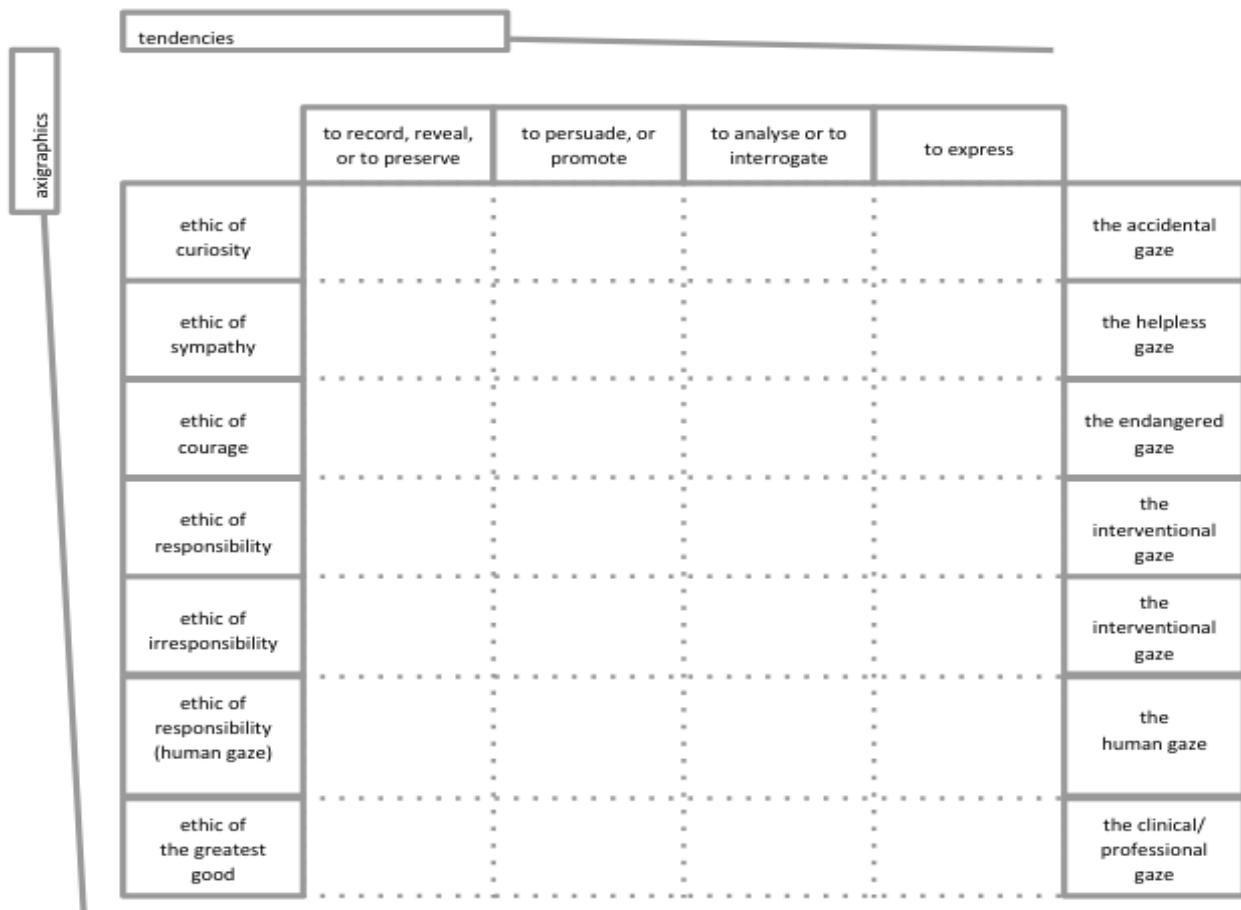


Figure 1 Combination of Axiographics by Nichols and tendencies by Renov

2.2. Documentary ethics

2.2.1 Discourse

Before the 1970s, there was little attention for ethical considerations concerning the making of documentaries (Winston, 2000). In the last 35 years, this changed. There have been extensive discussions about films like *Roger and Me*¹¹ (Michael Moore, 1989 USA), *Sweetie*¹² (Menna Laura Meijer, 2008 NL) or *Enjoy Poverty*¹³ (Renzo Martens, 2008 NL/BE), just to name a few. Documentary ethics, as a discourse, emerges when the rights and interests of those with a stake in documentary reach an impasse (filmmakers, audiences and participants) (Butchart, 2006). The debates around it usually crystallize in a number of key theoretical ideas: consent, duty of care, rights (to both privacy and free speech), the problem of representation (Nash, 2011), disclosure (how much is revealed), reciprocity and the rights of the filmmakers to record (Sanders, 2013). Questions about ownership of images, payment to subjects, commercial profits of the film and the use of release forms¹⁴ are also prominent (Nash, 2011). The list of concepts which play a role in documentary ethics is long and multifaceted. Some of the key factors will be discussed later in the subchapter on the relationship between documentary maker and subject, such as release forms, payment for the subjects and the ownership of the images.

There have been calls for the development of codes of ethics from different institutions of academic research of documentary filmmaking (Aufderheide et al., 2009), (Donovan, 2008), (Nash, 2011), (Nichols 2001), mainly in Europe, America and Australia. But up until now, textual analysis has been the main form of research. Textual analysis focuses on the act of representation concerning the camera's gaze and the role of the filmmaker who depicts a shared reality (Nichols, 1991). It falls short in the research and analysis of the ethics of documentary practices, which includes issues that exceed the text (Nash, 2011). Scholars have only recently started to include empirical research in the study of ethics of documentary filmmaking, by including filmmakers, their practice, their experience and views (Aufderheide et al., 2009) as well as the perspective of participants (Donovan, 2006), (Thomas, 2010), (Sanders, 2012). These empirical researchers found that there is a presupposed understanding of the practice of documentary makers, which underlies the discourse on ethics. It includes an ethical evaluation of this practice which – as their research show – reveals a discrepancy between the supposed and the actual practice of documentary makers (Sanders, 2012). Nash also points to a discursive weakness, which she calls

¹¹Moore portrays the economic impact of General Motors closing several auto plants in Flint, Michigan, reducing GM's employees significantly and the consequences this had for the region. The documentary has received a huge amount of good reviews but at the same time has been criticized for editing events in a way that suggests they happened in a different time order than they actually occurred. Also, the film has been accused of exaggeration.

¹²A Dutch documentary about the death of Maja Bradaric, which was highly stylized and strongly criticized, with the argumentation of 'desecration of corpses'.

¹³An auto-referential film that shows the political claims of contemporary western art and the exploitation it causes/is. Martens uses repetition of exactly this exploitation to reveal the exploitation. The film has on the one hand been criticized immensely on the other won several prizes.

¹⁴A release form is the same as a quit claim, which was mentioned earlier in chapter 1.

“(…) the incommensurability of its central concepts”¹⁵ (Nash, 2011 p.2). A commonly uttered filmmakers’ response to the question on ethics in the documentary practice is: ‘It depends’ (Sanders, 2012). An ethical decision is made depending on the situation, the individual, the possible choice of action, and the possible constraints (Sanders, 2012). “Every film establishes normative patterns of its own, conventions that are part of the style and rhetoric of that one work, but that draw on a repertoire of techniques and styles available to films of a similar type or to the cinema generally.” (Nichols, 1991 p.92)

In addition to the documentary maker him-/herself, there are two other factors which raise ethical questions in the documentary discourse: the participant and the audience. The participant is an equally new subject to empirical research concerning the ethical discourse, while the ethics concerning the obligation of the documentary maker towards the audience are a well discussed topic, primarily with a focus on questions of truthfulness (Nichols, 2010) (Sanders, 2012).

This study focuses on the ethical decision-making processes of documentary makers and their practices and will not venture into audience experience. However, the relationship between the filmmaker and a subject and the possible purpose or ambition filmmakers have in mind for their subjects are part of this research. Therefore, the following subchapter will discuss the position of the subject and his/her possible victimization or empowerment.

2.2.2 Ethics in practice: The subject as a victim?

The relationship between documentary makers and their subjects in the discourse on ethics in documentary making is frequently discussed with an emphasis on ethical dilemmas. The reason for this is that the relationship between filmmakers and subjects is generally perceived as an imbalance of power (Nash, 2011). The discrepancy of power held by filmmaker and participant “(…) remains the besetting ethical problem of the documentarist/participant relationship even in the most casual, normal and deviant of circumstances” (Winston, 2000 p.147). This view is rooted in a long tradition of observational documentary, based on the Griersonian tradition, in which the exploitation of the subjects seems almost inevitable (Nash, 2011).

Nichols argues that this power imbalance is created by the absence of the documentary maker in the film/shot (Nichols, 1991). “When both filmmaker and social actor coexist within the historical world but only one has the authority to represent it, the other, who serves as subject of the film, becomes displaced into a mythic realm of reductive, essentialist stereotype, most commonly romantic hero or powerless victim.” (Nichols, 1991 p. 91). At this point it is important to mention that in film studies there is a dominant way of seeing (and describing) the documentary subject, as we see expressed in Nichols’ interpretation. The subject is vulnerable, ignorant of possible consequences of his/her likeness being featured in a film and is seen as having nothing to gain

¹⁵ “Consequentialist arguments and the principle of harm minimization sit uneasily alongside rights claims and deontological perspectives” (Nash, 2011 p.2). This results, according to Nash, in an unresolvable discussion of dilemmas and confusion of moral arguments (Nash, 2011).

from his/her participation (Sanders, 2003). Brian Winston calls for a renegotiation of power in the relationship between filmmaker and subject on the one hand (Winston, 2000), on the other hand he acknowledges the improbability of such a change in a media environment that is built on exploitation of the powerless (Winston, 2000). Nash promotes the idea to change documentary practice from observational to participatory. She encourages a practice wherein the subjects become part of the creative process, a co-creator (Nash, 2011). Another approach to documentary with a less victimizing connotation comes from Renov. He proposes that documentary (and film) should consider its own processes, it should encourage inquiry and offer space for judgment. He also suggests that documentary should include the possibility for evaluation and even encourage further action (Renov, 1993).

2.2.3 The relationship of the documentary filmmaker and the subject

In order to understand the relationship between filmmakers and their subject and its implications of inequality and ethical dilemmas, it is important to focus on what this relationship entails: the different steps the selection process of subjects as well as on the question of the responsibility of documentary makers towards their subjects.

The selection process of documentary subjects

Subjects¹⁶ in documentary films are not actors but social actors (Nichols, 2010). Their lives transcend the story (of the film) by far – unlike in fiction, where actors are paid to play a part that is often unlike their personal lives (Nichols, 1991). Whilst actors work under contractual agreement and are directed in their actions and expressions in front of the camera, in documentary film the idea is usually that people continue their lives while being filmed. This also often means that the personal history of the social actor forms the context of the story that is told in the film, even though the depth of the story can vary enormously from one film to the other. The depth of the narrative of a subject's life story can have great influence on the accuracy, integrity and authenticity of the representation of the subject (in the eyes of the subject and people around him/her).

In order to find a promising social actor/subject, the documentary maker (or his researcher) searches for subjects, usually by using different methods (recommendations of others, advertising on different (media) channels, recruiting on location just to name a few), followed by meetings with the possible subject in persona. The subject has to fulfil certain criteria, which are connected to the idea the filmmaker has about the story he or she wants to tell. The criteria can be connected to 'hard facts'¹⁷ but also to a less definable quality the filmmaker is looking for. "(...) Documentary filmmakers often favour individuals whose unschooled behaviour before the camera conveys a sense of complexity and depth similar to what we value in a trained actor's performance. These

¹⁶ 'Subjects of documentary film' can stand for two things: 'the social actor' or 'the topic of the film'. In this study the term 'documentary subject' is always used as the social actor, unless otherwise mentioned.

¹⁷ gender, age, profession, family situation, geographics, health, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, etc.

individuals possess charisma: they attract our attention, they hold our interest, they fascinate” (Nichols, 2010 p.46).

After a subject has been found and has agreed to be part of the film, the filmmaker asks the person to sign a quitclaim or ‘release form’. These forms usually grant the filmmaker the right to use the image or likeness of the subject with no or little say by the subject itself. There are different reasons for this practice: The filmmaker secures his or her artistic freedom to decide anything concerning the film in order to achieve the end result he aims for (and most likely) promised to the institution that provides the financial support. The quitclaim states what are and what are not the rights and conditions the subject agrees to by participating in the film. Of course, the form can be altered, and the subject can be granted more influence on the making process or the film itself, but usually the filmmaker will try to prevent this from happening, because it means that his work will possibly get much harder or s/he might not even achieve to make what s/he wants to make. Also, if the film has – at present or in the future – any financial success, filmmaker secure themselves from claims by subjects. There have been court cases regarding these situations which favoured the position of the filmmakers, who argued that it is not justified to pay people for being themselves even if in front of the camera. By doing so, the documentary tradition would be damaged (Nichols, 2010).

The question of responsibility

In 2005, Brian Winston argued that, ‘we have confused media responsibilities to the audience with the ethical duties owed participants as if the outcomes of taking part were the same as spectating’ (Winston, 2005 p.181).

At the time the subject makes the decision to participate, he or she can rarely anticipate the full impact of said participation (Nichols, 2010). Therefore, filmmakers have obligations towards their subjects resulting from the consequences of documentary representation (Nichols 2001) and/or the differences in power and knowledge between them (Maccarone 2010; Winston 2000). Usually there are two periods, which can be of great influence on the subject: the time of participation in the filming process and the time of the screening of the film, when the subject him-/herself and/or others react to the film. Both periods can last from days to months to years.

There are numerous documentaries following people over long periods of time. Their lives evolve throughout the filming process. In *An American Family* (Craig Gilbert, 1972) or the *Up series* (Michael Apted, 1964), families or spouses who are being filmed experience relationship troubles. In both series, relationships end in divorce. In *An American Family*, the divorce was dominant in the series’ narrative. The presence of the camera and the availability of visual evidence to the people involved may have influenced the turn of events. This could happen unintentionally by the director, but there is also the possibility of intent, because the dramatic intensity of the series is heightened. Filmmakers can also face outside (e.g., from the producer or financial backer of the project) pressure to inflate drama or character conflict as well as to create drama where it does not naturally exist (Aufderheide et al., 2009). But not everything done by the filmmaker in order to

produce a better film is done consciously, nor is he or she able to foresee all possible consequences (Nichols, 1991).

Another immensely important aspect of the responsibility of the filmmaker is the representation¹⁸ of people. The picture that is painted in image and narrative can potentially hurt the subjects' self-image as well as cause other negative consequences in the subjects' life. Here is an example: in the film *Hoop Dreams* (Steve James, 1994), the father of the main subject is seen dealing drugs in the background of an image of his son playing basketball. This image can be used as legal evidence in a courtroom against the father. In this case, the filmmaker consulted with his lawyer about the possibility of the image actually being used and also talked to the family and the father himself. He was prepared to remove the image from the film, but the family and the father all agreed that the scene should stay in the film. The father was arrested during the course of the filming process for a (different) drug charge, which – according to himself and the family – changed him for the better and he wanted the scene to stay in the film to demonstrate and dramatize his own development into a better parent. Another example is the documentary *On the bride's side* (Antonio Augugliaro, Gabriele Del Grande and Khaled Soliman Al Nassiry, 2014), in which a group of Syrian and Palestinian asylum seekers travel illegally from Italy to Sweden disguised as a wedding party. The camera crew, director and producers as well as the people who are seen helping them during their travels are all in danger of being prosecuted for human trafficking, for which the film could provide necessary visual evidence. While the filmmaker in the case of *Hoop Dreams* initially was the one seeing the danger in using the images, in *On the bride's side*, the possible legal consequences were discussed beforehand as well as repetitively during the film (off and on camera) and included in the edit. This was possible, because it was part of the style choice of the documentary (reflexive/interactive¹⁹).

Nichols predicts that ethical considerations by the filmmaker can help minimize possible harmful effects of the film on the subject as well as the viewer and last but not least the filmmaker himself (Nichols, 2010). According to him, “Developing a sense of ethical regard becomes a vital part of the documentary filmmaker’s professionalism” (Nichols, 2010 p.59).

Another aspect of the responsibility of the filmmaker towards his subject concerns the aftermath of a film(process). This can mean that the filmmaker keeps contact with the subject; sometimes it even means supporting, caring for or (legal or emotional) counselling the subjects for several years. It is not unheard of that filmmakers have stayed in touch with their subject until their death. But the aftermath of a film can also concern the future of the film itself. Often filmmakers try to prevent material featuring their subjects from being used in another (media) contexts than what was originally intended. The main thought behind this is that the subject can be misrepresented (Aufderheide et al., 2009) in another context. In his work, Gordon Quinn provides an example: “I

¹⁸ Representation in film: definition of “representation” as in likeness, model, or depiction; a photographic and aural likeness of the world (Nichols, 1991 p.111)

¹⁹ “Only the interactive and reflexive modes routinely acknowledges the presence of the filmmaker, and of these only the reflexive calls this presence into question” (Nichols, 1991 p.89).

made a film in the '70s about an 11-year-old girl growing up. Twenty years later, some people making a film about abortion wanted to use some of our footage to set the historical context of the times. I insisted that they show me the cut and when I saw that they were implying that the girl had had an abortion, I said, 'You have to change that. She's a real person and you can't imply something about her that never happened.'" (Gordon Quinn in Aufderheide et al., 2009 p.5).

The trust between a subject and a documentary maker is often based on the expectation that the filmmaker will act with respect and consideration while filming, but will also protect the subject from this kind of 'misuse' of their likeness. The same applies to situations in which third parties want to contact the subject. In such cases, the filmmaker is usually contacted first and he or she therefore can become the 'gatekeeper' for media approaches. The filmmaker often keeps his contact (the address or phone number of his/her subject) secret, in order to protect the subject.

There are also examples of films with a very different approach to subjects. For example, films that represent a subject in retrospective, therefore often without the consent of the subject itself, but usually in agreement with kin of the subject or sometimes a legal representative.

An interesting case is the film *Grizzly Man* by Werner Herzog from 2005. The film is partly made with material that was recorded by Timothy Treadwell, the main character of the film, himself. The film tells the story of a charismatic, enthusiastic and slightly manic man (Timothy Treadwell) who devoted his life to protecting the Grizzly Bears in the Rocky Mountains. Treadwell worked with a foundation, but also by making countless videos featuring himself in the direct vicinity of the bears, talking about his love for them and their endangerment. Eventually, Treadwell and his girlfriend, camping in the wild, were killed by a Grizzly Bear, captured on camera by sound without image. The picture that is painted of Treadwell in the film is completely constructed by Herzog. It is based on facts (life events of Treadwell) and film material of Treadwell, but the selection and therefore character construction of Treadwell, lay in the hands of Herzog. He used the material that was made by Treadwell himself (often featuring himself), but he used it in a (completely) different way and context than intended by Treadwell. Treadwell recorded himself often in several shots repeating the same message, until he got the image and message right. Herzog uses the outtakes²⁰ of these sessions in his documentary. The question whether Treadwell would have agreed with this is mute, but the case illustrates "(...) the difference between the indexical image as evidence and the argument, perspective, explanation, or interpretation it supports" (Nichols, 2010 p.35). It shows the complexity in the relationship between representation and reality.

Another aspect of representation of subjects is the representation of 'a people' or 'the people' (*ein Volk*). If a documentary maker makes a film about a certain culture, it can potentially become a dominant perspective of the audiences who watch the film. The problem of representation of 'a people' as one cultural collective has different layers: The filmmaker can knowingly or

²⁰ Scenes or shots that are staged, but something went wrong.

unknowingly represent a whole group and therefore inspire the forming of stereotypes or confirm or negate existing stereotypes. The filmmaker can be held accountable for this by the audience, the subject (as in one person) or the whole group, that feels misrepresented. But subjects themselves can also be held accountable for the (mis)representation, by the group they are assumed to be part of. It comes down to the expectation of the audience to see ‘the truth’. Documentary filmmaking addresses the historical world by shaping its representation (of this world) from a distinctive perspective or point of view (Nichols, 2010 p. 253) and it is crucial that the audience acknowledges this distinctive perspective. The problem of misinterpretation or misconception often lies in the fact that the image refers to an assumed reality, a reality we experience in our (daily) life. The truthfulness for this belief is visually provided: we recognize what we see on screen, so it must be true (Nichols, 2010 p.42): Seeing is believing. The problem lies in the restriction of the provided image. The image only partly represents the place and event it was filmed in or at. The images can be altered after they were filmed (manually or digitally) and even though the image itself may be authentic and verifiable, it can be set in a context which claims it represents something different. “Our attempts to “fix” on celluloid what lies before the camera – ourselves or members of other cultures – can be fragile if not altogether insincere efforts. Issues of selection always intrude (which angle, take, camera stock will best serve); the results are indeed *mediated*, the results of multiple interventions that necessarily *come between* the cinematic sign (what we see on the screen) and its referent (what existed in the world)” (Renov, 1993 p.26).

One movement that critically focusses on the representation of ‘a people’ in film is called *third cinema*. Being part of political cinema studies, third cinema particularly focuses on power structures in traditional film making, especially in post-colonialist contexts. It poses critical questions about the possibility of gaining voice and the (im)possibility of giving voice to subjects. A focus on studies from the field of third cinema and political cinema will provide a deeper understanding of the political dimensions of films which cannot be ignored when discussing ethical dimensions of filmmaking. Insight into (the history of) political film making will help to achieve a deeper understanding of representation and the vicimization and/or empowerment of the subject by the filmmaker in a context-bound manner.

2.3 The philosophy of giving a voice: a critical approach

2.3.1 Political cinema

In the previous subchapter, the focus was on the inner workings of the relationship between filmmakers and subjects, and discussed what happens between subject and filmmaker on a micro level. This subchapter will focus on the macro scale of representation of a subject, its historical context and the political dimensions. By venturing into political cinema and third cinema studies, a critical perspective will be achieved.

The definition of documentary film by Grierson (see p. 17), especially the first part: ‘a documentary should be an instrument of information, education and propaganda as well as a creative treatment of reality’ (Grierson, 1966) testifies to the connection between documentary and politics. Documentary has great potential to persuade (as explained through the four tendencies of documentary by Renov and therefore can be used as a political instrument (Renov, 1993; Pisters, 2005). In contrast with traditional arts (painting, sculpting, etc.), film is undeniably connected with reality: “The cameraman penetrates deeply into (reality’s) web” (Benjamin, 1999 p.227).

Another aspect which makes film a political practice is the fact that it was one of the first – of the arts – to talk to the masses (Pisters, 2005). Looking at the two dominant movements in the 1930’s: fascism and communism, film became a powerful instrument in two opposing ways. One was to persuade people in uncritically believing a political message by using aesthetics. “The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values” (Benjamin, 1999 p.234). An eminent example is the documentary of Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (1935). By featuring speeches of members of the NSDAP, the film referred to the problems of a post-World War I disarray in Germany, whilst at the same time offering a solution by nominating the same leaders and of course Adolf Hitler as saviours from this exact situation. This form of organizing a film is called ‘problem solving’ and the story of the film always leads (more or less commendatory) to a recommendation or solution that the film encourages the viewer to adapt personally (Nichols, 2010).

Another way in which film was historically used to talk to the masses, was as a critical weapon in the fight for their emancipation, or the emancipation of minorities (Pisters, 2005). The latter is the direct opposite of how the Nazi’s used film, as propaganda. In *Triumph of the Will*, politics are aestheticized, art (film) is being politicized (Benjamin, 1999). In communism, film was used to mobilize the masses against the rule of the tsar family. “The radical potential of film to contest the state and its law, as well to affirm it, made documentary an unruly ally of those in power. Documentary, like avant-garde film, cast the familiar in a new light, not always that desired by the existing governments.” (Nichols, 2001 p.583). An early example of this was the film *Battleship Potemkin*²¹ by Sergei Eisenstein (1925), which tells the story of the rebellious activities of the battleship Potemkin against the tyrannical tsar rule in Russia in 1905, which were supported by the Russian population.

2.3.2 The problem of ‘giving a voice’

To fight for emancipation of ‘a people’ by means of (documentary) filmmaking can originate from two directions: from the outside or from within. Supporting emancipation from the outside often shows up as the notion of ‘giving a voice’. ‘Giving a voice’ is the expressed ambition/motivation

²¹ *Battleship Potemkin* is a fictional film.

of many documentary makers: ‘Giving a voice’ to the unprivileged, uneducated, the suppressed, the illegal, the exploited, the misunderstood, the forgotten, the invisible or the ignored. The philosophy of giving a voice has been criticized repetitively over the years. NGO’s using media (video and radio) to give a voice to the voiceless (Burnett, 1995) is a very common practice, which seems to imply that there was no voice to begin with. This does not take into consideration the voice of people might already have in their own community or within traditions of oral history that preceded media technology. Such oral traditions are strong in Asia, Africa and among indigenous population (Vinebohm, 1993).

Another perspective on ‘giving a voice’ is the probability of misinterpretation or representation from a certain angle that leaves out or even censures (knowingly or unknowingly). Gayatri Spivak wrote about the same problem concerning research as well as ‘Darstellung’ (a term that she uses to distinguish the representation in art and philosophy). In her influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Spivak gives examples of how the voices of Indian women were (and still are) represented: altered and thereby silenced by the British colonizer. In her opinion, the subaltern, or oppressed, cannot be politically or intellectually represented by others, because in the process of representation the subaltern subject is again silenced, as they still do not speak for themselves (Spivak, 1988). This argument shows well what can also be criticized in representation by film, regarding the motivation of ‘giving a voice’.

In the context of ‘giving a voice’, there is one movement in film studies that has treated this topic thoroughly and with deep criticism: third cinema. For this study, it is valuable to include studies by this movement, especially because of its criticism. *Third cinema*, essentially calls for decolonization through a counter-cinema (Hayward, 2001) -in an extension of Spivak’s notions on representation- doubts the possibility of a western filmmaker being able to truly represent a subaltern/oppressed or marginalized group of people. To use *third cinema* as a literature based critical concept, including Spivak’s subaltern, political cinema studies and third cinema studies create the possibility to add a non-western perspective²². Third cinema is a source of (the) most critical thought on representation in connection to socio-economical differences between filmmaker and subject, and its concomitant effects of post-colonialism).

2.3.3 Third cinema: from victimization to empowerment

In 1969, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino wrote a manifest with the title ‘Towards a Third Cinema’. Films made in the tradition of *third cinema* aim to decolonize culture and fight against inequality of materialistic and cultural means (Pisters, 2005). *Third cinema* was supposed to achieve for the subaltern and the oppressed what couldn’t be achieved from an outside position. The movement came from within, and was not motivated by ‘giving a voice’ but by ‘gaining a voice’. It was supposed to become a counter-cinema to the two cinemas that already existed: *first*

²² Still regarding the fact that literature about political cinema, third cinema and the subaltern are written or published in a western based academic milieu.

and *second cinema*. *First cinema* is associated with Hollywood film productions, and have a commercial background. The general model which *first cinema* follows, is individual characters in a storyline that entertains a (passive) audience. This is the dominant type of films played in the world's cinemas and promotes mainstream western norms and values. *Second cinema* refers to European arthouse cinema and author film, which is characterized by expressive freedom: a very different use of image, sound and characters than featured in Hollywood productions. It rejects the commercial background of *first cinema*, but also tries to establish a different perspective and film-making, often toward a non-individual focused production.

Third cinema originally referred to films (but not all films) made in the 'third' world, as opposed to the two dominant powers at the time of its origin: the East and the West, before the Soviet Union fell. *Third cinema* is a fluid concept. It was once seen solely as a movement from South America (where the term was coined); then it also included India and Africa; and later developed into a concept that describes activist cinema around the world (Aufderheide, 2007). Filmmakers outside the western world, as well as filmmakers around the globe who felt marginalized, seized upon the concept.

Teshome Gabriel argues that the relationship between memory, identity, history and cinema is crucial. The key is that not official history is represented, but rather personal memory (Gabriel, 1989). Therefore, *third cinema* can originate from anywhere in the world. But the question what can be considered as *third cinema* does not only concern the place of origin or the socio-economic situation of the filmmaker. Pisters describes the four key elements of *third cinema*: - history is understood as a process of change, contradiction and conflict; - films feature a form of political awakening of the subject (which aims at a political awakening of the audience); - the perspective is not trying to be objective but sides with the people/minority/oppressed; - it always speaks from a cultural specific situation, with knowledge and insight of this culture (Pisters, 2005). These four elements of third cinema pose a challenge to history, by taking the form of counter-cinema: open-ended narrative, multiple points of view and a style that grows out of the material of the film (Hayward, 2001). It sets out to politicize cinema and to create new cinematic codes and conventions.

The question whether the concept of third cinema also includes filmmakers who see themselves and their work as representing the oppressed, but who are not necessarily part of an oppressed minority, has been discussed for years (Aufderheide, 2007; Hayward, 2001). It refers to the same criticism Spivak expresses about the representation of the subaltern. The issue of representation is very complex. There are different layers, which include: what to do about western funding, commercial funding, appropriation, censoring or misinterpretation, just to name a few. These kinds of questions are pertinent within discussions about what third cinema is. What is agreed upon in

the literature on third cinema is the common desire of third cinema filmmakers to address the effects of colonialism²³, neo-colonialism²⁴, exclusion and oppression (Hayward, 2001).

2.3.4 Representation in film as ‘speech acts’ and ‘scapes’

An essential attribute of early political cinema and third cinema is the invention of ‘a people’/ ‘the people’. The people who would free themselves from their colonizers, from their oppressors. A people with their own self-expressed collective identity. This identity could be created through film. An example is *Battleship Potemkin*²⁵ by Sergei Eisenstein (1925), but also films such as *La hora de los hornos* by Solanas en Getino (1968) or *The battle of Algiers* by Gillo Pontecorvo (1966).

Nowadays, Gilles Deleuze states that the notion of ‘a people’ does not exist anymore (Deleuze, 1989). Deleuze’s view on representation is that film cannot represent anymore, because there is nothing to represent. In his opinion, filmmakers are mediators between their own voice and the voice of a people in the making. He calls films ‘*speech acts*’, visualized stories that shape reality. From this point of view, making any kind of film becomes a political act. Pisters describes *speech acts* as imaginary landscapes, which are (become) part of reality; they shape the image we have of the world (Pisters, 2005). These imaginary landscapes coincide with what Arjun Appadurai calls *mediascapes*²⁶ and *ethnoscapes*²⁷. For Appadurai, these scapes “(...) are the building blocks of...*imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (Appadurai, 1990 p.329). Filmmakers therefore become storytellers who use ‘free indirect discourse’²⁸ to interpret between their own view and the story of the subject in larger networks of imaginary constructions. Therefore, film cannot be a (direct) representation of reality, but merely an interpretation of the historical reality.

A *speech act* refers to the space between filmmaker and subject, which becomes the film. The filmmaker as a person becomes part of the film by his/her choices, presence or absence, by his/her use of the material. The other part of this space is occupied by the subject: his/her person, choices and performance. An example to illustrate this interaction, or reciprocity, can be found in a case

²³ Africa and India

²⁴ South America, some African countries and Asia, including the Indian continent

²⁵ *Battleship Potemkin* is a fictional film.

²⁶ “(...) refer both to the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios) which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai, 1990 p.330). “Tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality” (Appadurai, 1990 p.331)

²⁷ “(...) landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons” (Appadurai, 1990 p.329)

²⁸ The free indirect discourse lies between the direct discourse (the subjective perception of the subject) and the indirect discourse (objective images of the subject made by the camera from an ‘objective’ outside perspective), the dividing line is blurry.

study by Kate Nash on documentary ethics (Nash, 2011). She interviewed several documentary makers as well as their subjects. The subject of the documentary *Facing the Music* (Connolly, 2001) viewed participation in the documentary as an opportunity to voice her political concerns (Nash, 2011). Every time Boyd (the main character) used the camera to make a political point, the filmmaker Bob Connolly switched off the camera. Boyd became aware of it and confronted Connolly. A negotiation process began, in which the filmmaker and the subject sought to influence the text through their actions and acts of resistance, consequently achieving a consent over the boundaries of documentary performance which worked for both parties. Seeing films as *speech acts*, changes the (power) dynamics in the relationship between filmmaker and subject. Third cinema studies suggest that at least some aspects of inequality between filmmakers and subjects— independent of the socio-economic context of subject and filmmaker – which occur within the process of making a film could be avoided. Filmmaker and subject can become co-creators (co-authors) and therefore both shape or/and influence reality. This assumption changes the power imbalance and consequently could have an important effect on how documentary makers meet, see and approach their subjects ethically.

2.4 Summary

After a short introduction of the documentary tradition, the theory of axiographics by Nichols was introduced in the first part of this chapter. This theory offers a way to analyse documentary style and to understand the documentary maker's ethical stance (Nichols, 1991), which lays a conceptual basis to answer subsidiary question 2. It was followed by a focus on documentary tendencies theorized by Renov, which will be a guide to answering subsidiary question 3 (Renov, 1993). In paragraph 2.2, the discourse of documentary ethics was described with a focus on the concept of inequality, which will assist in answering subsidiary question 1. Paragraphs 2.3 discussed political film studies and cultural studies on the subaltern. The findings of these studies combined will be helpful in answering subsidiary question 4.

Finally, in chapter 5 two main theories (as seen in figure 1) will be combined with the empirical findings of this study to answer the main research question.

Considering that this study is explorative paring, comparing and connecting literature from different disciplines helped to form a (new) framework through which the empirical data can be analysed and compared to existing research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This research uses a qualitative exploratory method, which will be discussed in this chapter. First, the research design will be described and the question why qualitative exploratory research is used will be answered. This includes the approach and a reflection on the role of the researcher. Then, the selection of the research population will be explained and characterized as well as a detailed description of the selection criteria. Subsequently, the data collection and processing will be outlined. The chapter finishes with a short description of the reliability and viability of the research.

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Approach

To help answer the main research question, the research draws upon empirical data which consists of interviews with ten documentary filmmakers through a qualitative and exploratory approach. Individual interviews are suitable to investigate the subjective experience of the respondent (Evers, 2007). The qualitative character of the research ensures that there is room and attention for ‘meaning making’ and the subjective experiences and perceptions of the filmmakers themselves (Evers, 2007). Through the analysis of the empirical data, the results of the literature study will be confirmed, supported, challenged or possibly disproven.

An interrelational perspective on humans forms the ontological assumptions at the base of this study. People construct their own reality, which does not objectively exist outside of the person. It is socially constructed, their meaning is given/made in interaction (Creswell, 2013). The fact that people attribute meaning and value to their social surroundings and that they act according to this ‘meaning making’ is the reason qualitative research is chosen for this research, given that the concept of ethical decision making in documentary filmmaking is based on an individual, situational process based on the filmmaker’s own reality and his/her way of attributing meaning to the situation (Visse, 2012). The data generated through the interviews consists of interpretations, assumptions and opinions, which is typical for qualitative research, which often produces descriptive results. Qualitative research usually does not provide hard facts and statistics, but researches new patterns and can pave the way to a new perspective on a matter. Also, it is often used as a first step into a new research field/-subject (Boeije, 2005).

3.1.2 Research Design

Because of the exploratory and descriptive nature of this research, semi-open interviews were chosen. The same core interview guide was used in all interviews. This guide was developed through the literature study and phrased in language that would relate to the language of the research population. In every interview the question was posed if the respondent would prefer anonymity. None of the respondents chose this option, but one did ask to read the study before it

would be published. The researcher agreed with this proposition.

The model that was used for the interviews is called a tree-model (Evers, 2007). This style is less focused on depth than on exploration. In the interviews, the researcher focuses on the answers to the questions, but also poses follow-up questions, if necessary. The follow-up questions always target a deeper/more thorough understanding of the answer the respondent gives, or offer a different approach to the question, in case the respondent has difficulties relating to the question. There was a focus on five to six questions and based on the answers to these questions, more topics were explored in some cases (Evers, 2007). The length of the interviews varied from half an hour to one and a half hours. Six interviews took place in cafés, which were chosen by the researcher, keeping in mind the amount of privacy the establishment would offer as well as a suitable soundscape for the recording (not too noisy). One interview took place at the home of the respondent and three at the respondents' studios. The interviews were all recorded with an audio device for transcription purposes.

The questions in the interview guide were adjusted after a pilot interview and again after conducting the first interview. Also, – as the literature study showed – because the practice of documentary makers differs with each film and subject, the respondents were asked if their answers could include examples of specific situations from their work experience (a specific film or subject) (Sanders, 2012). The initial and final version of the interview guide can be found in Appendix I.

3.1.3 The role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher must be aware of his/her own subjectivity and must reflect on it (Boeije, 2005). The reflection on the role as researcher has been of great importance in this study. In Chapter 2, Gayatri Spivak was quoted about her critical view on the representation concerning research and *Darstellung* (as in Arts). Because this study emphasizes critical reflection on the role of the filmmaker concerning his or her position in the world in relation to representation of his/her subject, a reflective stance on the role of the researcher herself is almost inevitable, especially because the motivation for this research stems from her own work experience. The fact that the researcher herself is also a documentary film maker offer advantages for this research, but also means that possible presumptions need to be critically considered and reflected upon. The researcher's connections to and knowledge of the world of documentary filmmaking are helpful for the research, because of her access to respondents, her awareness of their work through prior informal discussions with some of them about ethics in documentary filmmaking. This gave the study an advantage concerning access and focus. At the same time, the researcher therefore also had become aware of her own presumptions that could influence the research, especially with regard to the interviews, in the form of e.g. 'fishing for an answer' or nudging the respondent in a certain direction. Because of this, a reflective stance of

the researcher is crucial. No researcher is value-free, but the ambition of the researcher to act value-free is prudent (Boeije, 2005).

During the development of the interview guide, a lot of thought was put into posing the questions in a way that gave respondents the freedom to express their own experiences and opinions. The researcher tried as much as possible to keep every question as well as follow-up questions, open-ended and always with the intention to understand better what the respondent wanted to express, instead of asking a question from the researcher's own belief system or holding the answers of the respondent against the results of the literature study. In order to understand the respondents better with regard to their personal understanding of their work, the question “What is a documentary film?” was added after the pilot interview. Even though the question did not directly link to the main research question of this study, it helped to better understand the answers to the other questions. It provided a basic understanding of the tradition the filmmaker placed him-/herself in.

In about half the cases of the interviews, the filmmakers asked the researcher about the content and context of the questions. Some inquired about the personal opinion of the researcher; the background of the question; or about the position of other filmmakers that were interviewed. The researcher always finished the interview first – after allowing necessary time for the answers of the filmmaker – and then, after officially closing the interview, gave answers to the questions to the best of her knowledge and with all respect to the other respondent's privacy (and privacy wishes).

Reflection after each interview, both inwardly as well as with peers from the university, helped the researcher to develop her own research skills immensely. It also influenced her professional development as a filmmaker by allowing her to reflect on her own position, ambition and relationships with subjects. This reflection was also relevant for her development as a humanistic. The depth of reflection and research on ethics helped to further develop her ethical stance in a work environment and her skills to (help) articulate ethical stances of others.

3.2 Research Population

The ten filmmakers who participated in this research were selected through a purposeful sampling strategy of choosing key informants, reputational sampling, as well as sensitizing concept exemplar sampling (Patton, 2013).

Key informants are people with great knowledge (by reputation) of the researched subject, while sensitizing concept exemplar sampling is about selecting “(...) information-rich cases that illuminate sensitizing concepts: terms, labels, and phrases that are given meaning by the people who use them *in a particular context*” (Patton, 2013). To do so, these terms, labels or phrases have to be identified in either previous interviews or previous informal talks.

The selection of filmmakers started in and through the network of the researcher. The filmmakers

who were chosen because they are key informants have a ‘background of rich cases’ which, in this research, means they have worked on projects in which they have dealt with (great) inequality between themselves and their subjects, for example a subject who is serving time in prison or a subject who is an illegal immigrant. The table below shows an overview of the backgrounds and circumstances of the selected filmmakers.

	Film subject with a refugee status (in a refugee camp or asylum seeker centre in the Netherlands or another European country)	Film subject with a refugee background (first generation)	Film subject from a non-western background who is being (economically) exploited and or oppressed	Film subject from a non-Western country, seeking refuge in a Western country/the Netherlands
Joost van der Wiel			x	
Niels van Koevorden		x		
Ton van Zantvoort			x	
Kim Brand	x		x	
Petra Lataster-Czisch	x	x		
John Appel	x	x		
Menna Laura Meijer		x		
Ingeborg Jansen	x	x		
Kees Vlaanderen	x	x		x
Morgan Knibbe	x			x

The information, which films were made by each documentary maker, is public knowledge, easily

found on the internet, unless the projects never resulted in a film. Therefore, the selection was made based on information on the content of the films. The categories in the table above were determined prior to the selection and only filmmakers who scored in one of the categories were selected for the research.

Eventually, ten filmmakers were selected, who fall in the category of Dutch documentary filmmakers. This refers to non-fictional filmmakers, working from their base in the Netherlands but not necessarily filmed in the Netherlands, who have experienced socio-political contrasts between themselves and their subjects in their work.

The research population was between the age of 25 and 65 and made a minimum of two feature length films²⁹ and worked at least for 5 years as documentary makers³⁰, this selection criteria was made to guarantee that all filmmakers have enough experience in their discipline to respond to the interview questions. All respondents are still active in the field of documentary making. Six of the filmmakers are male, four are female. The choice to select respondents with a variety of age and to achieve a reasonable division between gender was an aim of this study. The goal was to manage a clear distinction between general patterns, specific work situations and personally bound data (Patton, 2013).

The initial contact with the filmmakers varied in each case. Some filmmakers were approached by phone (if possible). The telephone numbers were usually received through contacts (own network, befriended filmmakers). Other times, emails were sent (either to the filmmaker himself/herself or the contact was made with the producers). The filmmakers were all provided with information about the research via email, sometimes after already having received the information via the phone. Everybody was informed beforehand about the sound recording of the interview as well as the possibility to remain anonymous in the end product.

The decision to select a total of ten filmmakers was made based on data saturation and in consideration of the limited size and possibilities of this study. It is not the goal of this study to generalize its findings, considering its exploratory and qualitative character. Therefore, the amount of interviews was chosen according to data-saturation (Boeije, 2005). Data-saturation refers to the point in a study when no new topics come up in interviews. Data-saturation was achieved in the last interview.

The following list of filmmakers became the final research population:

Niels van Koevorden, John Appel, Petra Lataster, Kees Vlaanderen, Joost van der Wiel, Menna Laura Meijer, Ton van Zandvoort, Morgan Knibbe, Ingeborg Jansen, Kim Brand.

²⁹ Films with a length of at least 50 minutes

³⁰ The filmmakers are not necessarily financially dependent only on documentary making. Documentary making is considered their main work-activity (timewise).

The selection was made on the basis of the above mentioned method of selecting respondents. In the process of the study, more filmmakers were approached, considering their availability for an interview. All filmmakers who were approached satisfied the selection criteria above.

All of the filmmakers have signed an informed consent form which can be found as appendix II. Apart from one documentary filmmaker, who agreed under the condition to first be informed which of his quotes exactly would be used in the final document, none of the filmmaker had any conditions that were not already incorporated in the informed consent form. Some of the documentary makers did take care – during the interviews – not to compromise their subject's privacy, apart from the information that had already been distributed in the documentaries themselves. Because almost all the documentaries of the chosen documentary makers are easily accessible through internet data-bases like npo.nl, but also youtube or vimeo, it is difficult to keep the respondents anonymous. Nonetheless, it would be possible to feign and generalize data in order to protect the professional and personal privacy of a respondent.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

As mentioned earlier, the semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the interview guide approach (Patton, 2013) (Baarda et. al., 2001). This model ensures a certain amount of control, in order to search for and use the sensitizing concepts, but at the same time allowed for enough space for interviewees to express their own experiences. For the analysis of the interviews, the interviews were transcribed and coded using the qualitative data-analysis program Atlas.ti.

Because of the exploratory character of the research, the first phase of coding was open: (re)reading and close reading, posing questions, comparison of fragments and documents, ascribing codes to data (Boeije, 2005). The discovered sensitizing concepts were more of an aid while coding, used as guidelines rather than as deductive codes.

After the first phase of open- or *in-vivo coding*³¹, these codes have been derived from the answers the respondents gave in the interviews. The second phase of axial coding took place to arrange the resulting codes (Boeije, 2005). In this phase, several codes were joined, cancelled and added. This resulted in a list of codes called a 'code-tree' (Boeije, 2005, p. 94).

The last phase consisted of *selective coding* (Boeije, 2005). The links and correlations between the codes and code-groups were determined and connected to the results of the literature study. This phase needed careful consideration because many concepts were overlapping and referring to one another. Different groups were formed and split up again, the final organisation of the codes can be seen in figure 2, and corresponds with the four subsidiary questions.

³¹ The creation of codes which develop from the original data



Figure 2 Different groups of codes organised according to the subsidiary questions

The main concept that came forth from the literature research was the concept of (1) *inequality (between filmmaker and subject)*. It forms the base of the research regarding the formulation of the research problem, this concept was further explored during the analysis of the empirical data, which resulted in the division of four kinds of inequality. Under the umbrella-concept of *responsibility* the concepts of *trust, dependency, consent, post film responsibilities, giving and taking* were clustered. Followed by the concepts of *intuition, ethical learning process and self-defined ethics*.

Subsidiary question three was divided in two columns to organise the data easier: *Motivation of the documentary makers* and *ambitions for the subjects*.

Finally, the last subsidiary question, under the umbrella-concept of *representation*, was divided into the concepts of *voice of the subject, nuanced storytelling, reduction to role, empowerment and co-authorship*. Chapter 4 will be organised along the conceptual lines explained above, drawing on the analysis of the empirical data.

3.4 Validity and reliability

The internal validity is assured through consistency in method, methodology and epistemology (Carter & Little, 2007). The present empirical research has been based on in-depth interviews and the analysis has been conducted by only one researcher. To ensure the researcher asked adequate questions, translating the research question of the study into an interview guide, a pilot-interview was conducted to hone the questions. This method guaranteed a higher standard of the final interview guide and increased internal validity.

Furthermore, in the process of systematic research supervision at the University of Humanistic Studies, the different components of this thesis have repeatedly been revised. The empirical component of the research was designed and carried out on the basis of a solid review of the literature. This enhanced the internal validity of the study, because – even though triangulation has not been applied – through a combination of different data sources and the setting-up of an accurate and tested interview guide based on insights from the literature study, the researcher is able to measure what she/he intended to measure (Boeije, 2005, p.145). Even though the research population was small, it was chosen with care and an orientation on cases with a high degree of saturation in regard to data collection, therefore -according to Boeije – the results can transcend the unique research situation, because the results are relevant for other, not yet researched situations (Boeije, 2005). In this way, the external validity is also addressed.

The diversity between the respondents in terms of their experience, gender and age as well as the volume of respondents also contributes to the validity of the research. The data thus became rich and again the chance of saturation of the research was higher.

At the same time, as mentioned earlier, this research is not designed to produce generalizable valid data, but is exploratory in nature and seeks new knowledge and understanding with regard to the main and subsidiary research questions.

The reliability of research is indicated by its repeatability (Boeije, 2005). To guarantee this, the interview guide plays a key role. It assures that all respondents were asked the same main questions, even though the follow-up question could be different, if done by another researcher. Also, the process of transcribing and coding ensures a certain degree of reliability, showing the decisions and steps of the process. But again, a different researcher could make different choices concerning the matching between quotes and codes. So the reliability could be compromised because of these individual considerations.

Chapter 4: Ethical decision making and documentary makers: empirical data analysis

Empirical data analysis

In this chapter, the results of the data-analysis will be reviewed, and the four subsidiary questions will be answered. This chapter will present the research data that was obtained from the interviews. The chapter's structure is based on the the subsidiary questions. Firstly, the experience of Dutch documentary makers concerning inequality between themselves and their subjects will be analysed. Then their experiences with ethical dilemmas and problems will be discussed to analyse similarities and differences. Then follows a subchapter on the documentary maker's motivations and aspirations. The chapter concludes with an elaboration on the documentary film maker's approaches of ethical questions concerning the representation of their subjects. The interviews were conducted in Dutch and have not been translated to English in order to stay as close a possible to the original expressions and tone the documentary makers used.

4.1. Inequality

4.1.1 Analysis

In this paragraph, a picture of the experience of inequality between documentary filmmakers and subjects from the perspective of the documentary maker will be drawn. It addresses the subsidiary research question: What kind of inequality(ies) do Dutch documentary makers experience between themselves and their subjects?

In the literature study of this thesis, inequality was divided in two categories. Inequality regarding the difference of the subjects and documentary makers position within the hegemonic power structure in society, as well as the inherent inequality caused by the possession of a camera (Nichols, 2010). In the qualitative empirical data analysis, four different types of inequality were categorized: (1) socio economic inequality, (2) inequality of knowledge/experience, (3) inequality of reciprocal interest, and (4) situational inequality of power (often caused by the possession of a camera and presence of a film crew). In the process of close-reading and coding, the distinction between four types of inequality seemed necessary to achieve a more nuanced representation of the experiences of the respondents.

(1) Socio-economic inequality

“Zoals ik zei, het was heel confronterend dat ik daar één van de aasgieren was. Het enige wat die mensen nog hadden op dat moment was hun leed en hun armoede. En dat werd vervolgens door ons, rijke westerse journalisten vastgelegd en weer verkocht (...) En ik maak daar dan weer een film van die bedoeld is mensen juist daarmee te confronteren,

maar die ook deels voor mij een succes oplevert (...)” (Knibbe about Those who feel the fire burning (2014)^{32,33}

The situation Knibbe describes refers to a scene in a documentary which he filmed on Lampedusa, when coffins of drowned and burned refugees were transported from the land to a ship. The pier was crowded with refugees and journalists (including Knibbe), the refugees in emotional pain, suffering and mourning, and the journalists documenting the situation and the emotions of the refugees. The inequality based on difference in nationality as well as possession of resources between filmmaker and subjects, is very distinctive and representative of this type of situation, wherein documentary makers film without a possibility to actually connect with the subject(s). Ton van Zantvoort describes a situation of inequality, also based on a difference in possession of resources, but with a less grim image connected to it.

“Ik heb iemand gefilmd in Gambia, die was taxichauffeur. Ik filmde hem, tijdens zijn werk en toen, daar liep die al door mij inkomsten mis, en toen ging zijn auto kapot. Toen werd ik ook voor een dilemma gesteld. Ja, wat draag je bij? Ik heb in het begin steeds gezegd: ik wil de realiteit observeren. En dan zit je dus vijf dagen in de garage, en ze zitten met plastic zakjes de draden te isoleren, omdat ik geen geld geef, terwijl uiteindelijk heb ik wel een soort van vergoeding gegeven, maar ik wil niet dat dat te veel de film bepaalt. Voor mij waren de vijf dagen in de garage juist interessant.”³⁴

The thought of a (possible) exchange of money, connected to a need of the subject for it was a topic that was repeatedly mentioned in the interview by almost all respondents, apart from one. It connects directly to a form of inequality, but it doesn't always connect to an obvious ethic issue. The topic of giving money will be further discussed in paragraph 4.3.2

(2) Inequality of knowledge/experience

“Het gaat over een gevoel van gelijkheid, van iemand die tegenover jezelf zit. Als je geen directe verantwoordelijkheid voor degene voelt, dan is diegene misschien gewoon gelijk. En andersom, als je iemand moet beschermen, eventueel voor zichzelf, dan is er sprake van ongelijkheid.”³⁵

This quote by Vlaanderen plays on the ‘naïvité’ or understandable lack of knowledge regarding the participation in a documentary. Vlaanderen talks about a need to protect which he connects to the inability of the subject (in this case an inmate) to foresee possible consequences of the

³² A documentary film, premiered at IDFA 2015, which tells the story of a ‘wandering ghost’ of a refugee, who died on one of the burned and sunken boats in the waters surrounding Lampedusa, Italy.

³³ Date of interview: 04.10.2017

³⁴ Date of interview: 26.07.2017

³⁵ Date of interview: 12.09.2017

finished film. His concern is connected to the representation of the subject (by the subject himself), but also the interpretation of this representation by the audience (which can include the justice system, former victims of the inmate, or family members). Ingeborg Jansen, Niels van Koevorden, Joost van der Wiel, and Kim Brand described similar cases in their practice.

“Ik vind eigenlijk soms wel heftig, dat je mensen eigenlijk tegen zichzelf moet beschermen.” (Niels van Koevorden).³⁶

John Appel expresses the discrepancy in knowledge and precaution as follows:

“Als je regisseur bent, dan weet je wat je doet met alles wat je verteld wordt en dat heeft de andere (the subject) natuurlijk niet. Die legt zijn ziel op tafel, (...) dus ik ben een beetje heer en meester over de toevertrouwde informatie.”³⁷

(3) Inequality of reciprocal interest

Through the interviews, an inequality closely connected to an ‘intimate’ relationship, which can evolve between documentary maker and subject, emerged: the inequality of reciprocal interest between maker and subject. This inequality has different layers and nuances and is not easily measured. It is connected to the (emotional) interaction between documentary maker and subject, wherein the roles become more fluid. Especially in situations where the two spend large amounts of time together. Joost van der Wiel:

We (van der Wiel and his subject, with whom he spends weeks alone in the Norwegian wilderness while filming) kregen zo wel een scheve relatie. Je brengt heel veel tijd samen door. En ik ben daar om te filmen en hij (the subject) ziet zichzelf als het middelpunt van de wereld, dus dan heb je meteen een ongebalanceerde relatie. Terwijl het dan heel vriendschappelijk leek, maar het interesse is maar vanuit één kant, vanuit mij. Eenrichtingsverkeer, dus dat is dan een maffe, rare vriendschappelijke relatie.³⁸

The term ‘one-way traffic’ was also used by John Appel to describe his relationship to the subjects.

(4) Situational inequality of power

As mentioned earlier, this form of inequality is inherent to the filming process. The experience of this inequality differs between the interviewees, but they all acknowledge it as part of the filming process:

³⁶ Date of interview: 24.07.2017

³⁷ Date of interview: 31.08.2017

³⁸ Date of interview: 28.06.2017

“Gelijkwaardig is de relatie met het personage nooit. Omdat je altijd met een camera bent en in iemand zijn gezicht staart.” (Van Zantvoort).³⁹

Menna Laura Meijer expresses this experience of situations where the subject is being filmed in terms of who is holding the power: namely, herself:

“Ik ben de baas over die mensen, de personages en de crew (...) Ik stel me niet voor als vriend, ik stel me ook niet voor in een kader van intimiteit. Ik zeg altijd: we zijn er met een hele crew, alles wat we met je filmen, of dat nou een seksscène is of we filmen bij je overleden man, we zijn er met een hele crew.”⁴⁰

Meijer’s reference of not introducing herself to the subject in a framework of intimacy links to the manner of relationship a documentary maker builds with his or her subject. In Meijer’s case she makes sure she is clear about not wanting emotional involvement with the subject, which doesn’t translate to not having a feeling of responsibility towards the wellbeing of the subject.

4.1.2 Conclusion: *Inequality(ies) between themselves and their subjects as experienced by Dutch documentary makers*

According to the qualitative data analysis, Dutch documentary filmmakers experience four different kinds of inequality between themselves and their subjects: socio economic inequality, inequality of knowledge/experience, inequality of reciprocal interest. The fourth kind of inequality is the situational inequality of power which relates directly to the documentary maker being in charge of crew and camera and therefore becomes inherent to the filming process. Socio economic inequality was one of the primary selection criteria for the research population of this study, and can furthermore be expected, because all interviewees are experienced, trained documentary makers, while none of their subjects are. The inequality of reciprocal interest between filmmaker and subject was not part of the preselection conditions connected to the specific research population. Situational inequality of power related to crew and camera are in line with the idea that a subject rarely anticipates the full impact of participation in a documentary when deciding to participate.

4.2. Ethical norms and understandings of documentary makers regarding their relationship to their subjects

The following section (4.2) addresses subquestion two: *What are the key differences and similarities between the ethical norms and understanding(s) among Dutch documentary filmmakers regarding the relationship to their subjects?*

³⁹ Date of interview: 26.07.2017

⁴⁰ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

Through the interviews, different ethical concepts of documentary making crystallized: *responsibility*, on various levels: (1) *responsibility to avoid suffering of the subject because of participation*, (2) *trust*, (3) *dependency*, (4) *consent*, and (5) *post film responsibility*. Another concept was *the act of taking* which will be elaborated by setting it against the concept of *the act of giving*, which even though the act of giving is closely related to the documentary maker's ethical stance, the experience doesn't count as an ethical problem, except in cases where 'giving' becomes demanded and exceeds the documentary maker's capacities or willingness to give, as in the case of van Zantvoort. The *concept of taking* and the *concept of giving* are closely related, which will be further explained in this subparagraph. There will also be an elaboration on the concepts of an *ethical learning process* and *intuition*. The chapter will close with a summary of the ethics some of the documentary makers give form to in their work and which they clearly state as a conscious choice based on an ethical norm they shaped, opposed to a set of internal norms and understandings which are shown in behaviour, but not expressed intellectually.

4.2.1 Ethical concepts documentary makers apply in their practice

4.2.1.1 Responsibility

(1) Responsibility to avoid suffering of the subject because of participation

The responsibility to avoid suffering of the subject as a topic was very prominent especially in two cases of Meijer and Ingeborg Jansen, both concerning subjects who suffered emotionally or physically through participation in their documentaries. Both filmmakers state clearly, (having had the experience) that a film is not worth causing a subject hurt. Meijer specifically considers the representation of the subject: the self-image of a subject can be damaged through a film.

“Ik heb wel een heel sterk besef dat ik hun niet mag schaden. Dat is wel heel belangrijk voor mij. En dat komt voor mij heel nauw. Ik ben heel alert op wat mensen van zichzelf willen zien.” (Meijer).⁴¹

Not only the subject her-/himself can react negative to the film, also third parties can react negative on behaviour and quotes of a subject, which are featured in a film. Vlaanderen talked about a young man he filmed in prison, who was talking about his drug-dealing on the street as a 'healthy entrepreneurship' he thought the Dutch society would be able to appreciate. Vlaanderen doubted that his statement would have the desired response and hesitated to use this part of the interview.

“Je kan iemand tegenover je hebben waarvan je denkt, die is zo naïef, die ja, die bedenkt het niet en dat geeft dan een grotere verantwoordelijkheid.” (Vlaanderen).⁴²

⁴¹ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

⁴² Date of interview: 12.09.2017

Van Koevorden describes it very similarly:

*“Ik vind soms best wel heftig, dat je mensen eigenlijk tegen zichzelf moet beschermen.”
(van Koevorden).⁴³*

Protecting the subject from unknowingly harming her-/himself can extend to a care for the subject that goes beyond not wanting someone to suffer, but to actively take care of someone. Brand engaged in a relationship that transcended the project she was working on:

“Meneer M. zou een van mijn hoofdpersonages van de bejaarden film zijn, maar die werd heel ziek toen ik begon met draaien. Uiteindelijk tot aan zijn dood, ben ik daar gebleven, nog mee naar het hospice en, ja, ik was ook op zijn crematie. Terwijl het eigenlijk niet nodig was, want, ik heb hem nooit meer gefilmd. Maar omdat we zoiets hadden meegemaakt, en hij op sterven lag, vond ik het wel heel belangrijk, omdat ik ook nog een van de weinige mensen was, om hem heen die met hem praten. Dus dat ja.” (Brand).⁴⁴

Vlaanderen, Brand, van Koevorden, Jansen, van Zantvoort, Appel, and especially Lataster-Czisch all have stories wherein they kept contact to subjects after filming.

The wish to care for the subject will be discussed further while exploring the concepts of *the act of giving* and *the act of taking*.

(2) Trust

To win the trust of your subject is one of the most vital steps in the filming process. All filmmakers who were interviewed mention ‘trust’ as part of their relationship with the subject. Vlaanderen explains the relevance of trust as a mutual concept:

“Waar het om gaat is, dat er vertrouwen is, wederzijds. Dus zij moeten het vertrouwen hebben dat ik -ik zeg dat altijd- dat ik hun niet ga naaien.”⁴⁵

Trust needs to be cultivated. Vlaanderen explained how he sometimes –in an interview situation – lets the subject continue to tell her/his story, even though he knows that the material will not be used. But by giving subjects space and time to tell their story, he gains their trust. Brand mentioned the exact same as part of her work practise. Vlaanderen mentioned that he does feel an ethical ‘tension’ when doing this, because he already knows this will not make the final cut of the film.

⁴³ Date of interview: 24.07.2017

⁴⁴ Date of interview: 12.09.2017

⁴⁵ Date of interview: 12.09.2017

Knibbe also mentions the importance of trust in his relationships to subjects. He has experienced several situations wherein he was not able to establish trust.

“Er waren heel veel mensen die mij gewoon zagen als één van die aasgieren, dat ik ook niet genoeg wederzijds vertrouwen kon opbouwen. En een paar keer in vluchtelingenhuizen waar ik ben geweest, waar ik dan ben gaan filmen was het zo dat de vertaler dan toch eigenlijk niet goed had besproken met sommige vluchtelingen wat de grenzen waren. Een man die wilde niet gefilmd worden en die filmde ik dan toch, die werd heel boos en agressief.” (Knibbe, about experiences on Lampedusa as well as in Greece)^{46, 47}.

Van Koevorden talks with the subject about the topic of trust:

“Het gaat om één ding: Dat zij snappen dat ik integer met hun omga. En dat zij daarop vertrouwen. En ik vraag ook altijd van ze: kun je dat, kun je dat in mijn handen leggen: dat vertrouwen? (...) Ehm, en ik zeg ze altijd, je mag er op elk moment mee stoppen.”⁴⁸

Van Koevorden seems to expose himself by emphasising the possibility to stop participating at any point to his subjects, but he explains that it seems to have the opposite effect: the subjects' trust is reinforced by van Koevorden's statement.

Appel values the trust of his subject to tell him their life stories without holding back. He differentiates between information that he feels is given to him –as a person– from information that he feels he can use in the film:

Degene die ik film, die zit tegen een vreemde te vertellen, terwijl, het is natuurlijk een onderwerp wat je vervolgens aan andere mensen laat zien. Je filmt het, dus je maakt het publiekelijk. Dus wat in vertrouwen wordt meegedeeld, wordt aan iedereen die het wil zien, vertoond. Maar dat beseffen heel veel mensen vaak niet. (...) Ik probeer wel, als ik het gevoel heb, dit vertelt zij aan mij, maar dit is niet voor andere oren bestemd, dan laat ik het ook voor de film achterwege. Ik heb een behoorlijke ethiek over hoe ver ik ga ondanks mijn voorkennis. Die is veel groter dan wat ik in film naar voren laat komen.” (Appel)⁴⁹

Comparing the experiences of the documentary makers, the co-relation between time spent with the subject and trust that is given seems evident, but not always necessary. Even though most documentary makers mention spending a lot of time with the subjects, some have developed other

⁴⁶ While he was shooting his documentary *Those who feel the fire burning* he was in Lampedusa for a week, October 2013, after 360 refugees died of fire and drowning in front of the coast. There was a lot of news coverage at the time and Knibbe took the opportunity to film the interaction between journalists, photographers, and filmmakers and the refugees. The specific situation he refers to was in the harbour, when the coffins were taken on board of a transport ship.

⁴⁷ Date of interview: 04.10.2017

⁴⁸ Date of interview: 24.07.2017

⁴⁹ Date of interview: 31.08.2017

approaches, if a long-term approach was not possible. The example of van Koevorden's openness over his ambitions (to be part of the subject's intimate space), but to also promise the subject free choice of participation at any moment, helped him to very quickly connect to his subjects and win their trust. Meijer also doesn't spend a lot of time with her subjects before filming, she works with a researcher who does this for her and van Zantvoort has experience with the same method. In all the cases which were not preceded by an extensive getting-to-know period, a brief open and straight forward introduction between filmmaker and subject took place, wherein both parties had the opportunity to pose their questions. Meijer describes it as "*contract-like*", a professional work agreement of kinds. Trust in her case becomes something she approaches less 'emotional', but rather 'professional'.

(3) Dependency

When examining the role of *trust*, it is impossible to ignore the concept of *dependency*, which is closely related. Trust is not one-sidedly given from the subjects to the filmmakers, but is returned by the filmmakers to the subjects.

"Je moet iemand hebben, waar je ook gewoon mee kunt samenwerken, die zijn afspraken nakomt, dat je weet wat je eraan hebt." (van Zantvoort).⁵⁰

The filmmaker needs the subject's participation. This can come voluntarily, but there are also situations wherein the subject questions the underlying motives:

"'What's in it for me?' Of: 'Jij verdient daar een leuke boterham mee, en ik dan? 'Ja, ga dan maar eens uitleggen: 'Maar mijn onafhankelijk vereist, dat jij niets krijgt. 'Dat zijn ingewikkelde dingen.'" (Vlaanderen).⁵¹

Van der Wiel explains the way he experiences dependency in a relationship with his subjects. To him, it also means that he has to follow the subject in what s/he does and wants, sacrificing his own needs and wishes for the time being. Van Koevorden paints a similar picture: one of his subjects threatened to stop participating, if his demands were not met, after the filmmaker had already invested a lot of his own resources (money and time). In van Koevorden's case he searched for a compromise, which would satisfy all parties sufficiently, in the process he himself had to reconsider his own normative framework. It resulted in stern 'negotiations' wherein he also established that if the subject's answer to continue to participate was 'yes', he also agreed to participate until the end:

*"Maar als het ja is, dan gaan we tot het eind. Dan wil ik gewoon geen gezeik meer."*⁵²

⁵⁰ Date of interview: 26.07.2017

⁵¹ Date of interview: 12.09.2017

⁵² Date of interview: 24.07.2017

Which could be seen as a contradiction to what van Koevorden said before: that his subjects can at any point decide to stop participation. This example illustrates that the relationship between a documentary filmmaker and his subject is very individual and evolves over time according to the situations the two experience together. Brand talks about a certain “*forwardness*” she sees as crucial in the contact with her subjects. With which she has convinced subjects to participate, who doubted that they wanted to continue participating⁵³. Brand experiences this ‘forwardness’⁵⁴ as a part of her professionalism as a documentary maker.

(4) Consent

Almost every filmmaker acknowledges the concept of *consent*, but differ about its meaning. One of the filmmakers does not consider consent as important as others. While Knibbe, despite feeling very uncomfortable in the situation, finds it more important to document the situation he witnessed on Lampedusa with his camera, than having the consent of the subjects in front of his camera, other filmmakers would not make the same choice. This is also dependent on the kind of topic their documentaries are about, as well as the circumstances of filming.

Based on the data already presented, consent can be the result of a time-intensive relationship, based on trust, or it can be a result of an almost ‘business’-like agreement between filmmaker and subject. Conclusively, it can be said that it is always an important topic for the filmmaker, which usually is approached through an ethical consideration of the documentary filmmaker.

(5) Post film responsibility

There are several examples wherein the extent of responsibility went far beyond the actual length of the film process. Van Zantvoort experienced a situation with a subject who asked for financial help for years after the film was finished. Morgan Knibbe experienced something similar with a film subject who tried to make his way from Greece to North-Europe and needed financial support. The question when the filmmaker feels his ability to respond is finished often leads to ethical questions and dilemmas.

There are other examples of post film responsibilities. The subject can be confronted with negative (media-)attention and other consequences after the release of the film, as in the examples of Jansen and Meijer. Lataster-Czisch made a film after which the main character was heavily criticised by the media. She explains that she always tries to estimate if a subject is resilient enough to handle possible negative reactions:

⁵³ “*Met ouderen*⁵³ *ben ik best heftig, hoor. Ik heb heel lang in de ouderenzorg gewerkt. Ik had op gegeven moment die vertrouwensband met A. (one of the main subject of the film) en het gebeurde best vaak, dat ze de deur opendeed en dat ze zij: Nee, ik wil echt niet, nu niet die camera.’ Dan zij ik: ‘A. kom op. Ik wil heel graag een gesprek met uw, over dit en dit. En het is heel kort’ en ik heb op deze manier vaak mensen overgehaald. Omdat ik anders gewoon -Bij haar is veiligheid gewoon ‘Nee’. Dat is gewoon standart. De ‘Nee’ is gewoon standart. Daar moest ik gewoon af en toe doorheen.*”

⁵⁴ or “brutality”, depending on the translation

“Kunnen we redelijkerwijs aannemen dat die persoon die we draaien daarmee overweg kan, en niet volledig in zak en as zit, als die reacties komen. En wij vertellen dat tegen iedereen, dat dit kan gebeuren.” (Lataster-Czisch)⁵⁵

Lataster-Czisch therefore takes precautions to prevent a subject from suffering by making sure they know what to expect and that they can handle it.

Another aspect of protecting the subject from harm is to have an eye on the future of the film. A filmmaker usually does not have the sole rights to her/his work, usually a broadcast station produced the film and therefore holds the rights. Jansen:

“Ik neem bijvoorbeeld in contracten op dat fragmenten van mijn films niet los gebruikt mogen worden (...) dat kan mensen gewoon schaden”⁵⁶

4.2.2 The act of giving and taking

The act of giving and *the act of taking* are closely related, because the documentary makers usually use them in reference to each other. The term ‘taking from subjects’ was used by all documentary makers, making it the most significant sensitizing concept of the empirical part of the study. Most documentary makers refer to their preferred state of work and relationship with the subjects as a balance of *taking* and *giving*.

“Ik vind het heel ingewikkeld om alleen maar te halen, alleen maar dat film ding te doen.” (van Koevorden)⁵⁷

“Ik wil niet mijn ding halen en weer weggaan.” (Vlaanderen)⁵⁸

Van der Wiel talks about his experience with filming a subject to make a film based on an already constructed storyline:

“Ik heb het geschreven en ben het gaan halen en daar ben ik een film van gaan maken, ja, dat zou ik zo snel niet meer doen.”⁵⁹

Jansen also takes a position concerning *taking* connected to an already ‘fixed’ storyline:

“Ik kijk liever wat rond, dan dat ik enorm gestructureerd ga -plat gezegd- ga halen wat ik van tevoren had bedacht. Dat vind ik heel vervelend. En volgens mij gaat dat ook tegen de

⁵⁵ Date of interview: 21.08.2017

⁵⁶ Date of interview: 07.09.2018

⁵⁷ Date of interview: 24.07.2017

⁵⁸ Date of interview: 12.09.2017

⁵⁹ Date of interview: 28.06.2017

aard van documentaire in. Om van tevoren van alles te bedenken en dat dan te gaan halen.” (Jansen).⁶⁰

Jansen implies that the concept of taking not only concerns the relationship with the subject (and the responsibility to the subject) but also the ‘truth claim’ or code of staying close to the turn of reality of documentary film. But also, she sees *taking* and *giving* as related concepts in which she searches for a balance in her exchange with the subjects:

“Ik ben degene die de film wil maken. Ik krijg veel van hun (the subjects), ook buiten de film. Ik leer veel in de omgang met mensen. Dus meestal vind ik het ook belangrijk als zij daar iets uit krijgen. Dat het niet voelt als ‘nemen’. (...) Dus ik vind ook dat je op de koffie moet of mag gaan, gewoon dat mensen het gevoel hebben dat ze iets aan je hebben. Ik doe ook wel iets voor mensen, als het uitkomt, of dat ze vragen. Het is geen vriendschap, maar je kan wel af en toe iets doen. Dus zoals ik hun iets vraag kunnen ze mij ook iets vragen.”

⁶¹

In many situations, subjects already have a negative impression of journalists or news reporters; the documentary makers are ascribed to the same group. Knibbe describes this situation:

“Soms was het heel moeilijk om het vertrouwen te winnen van mensen, omdat ze dan zeiden, ja, je bent gewoon de zoveelste journalist die iets van ons komt halen en dan horen we nooit meer van je. (...) Ik bedoel, ik wilde het wel anders aanpakken, maar uiteindelijk kwam ik daar wat filmen en dan ging ik weer weg. Dus we hebben daar heel lang over gepraat vaak. Ik ben daar heel eerlijk over geweest en heb gezegd van: Dat kan bijna niet anders en dat is ook zo, ik kom hier iets van jullie halen en dat vind ik eigenlijk heel kut, maar ik wil wel proberen jullie een podium te bieden wat zouden jullie echt willen vertellen?” (Knibbe).⁶²

Knibbe’s experience shows different sides of *taking*. *Taking* without giving back, *taking* without explanation, *taking* with explanation, and *taking*, but meant as a form of giving: *giving a voice/creating a podium*. *Taking* becomes connected to *giving* and an exchange takes place. This ‘exchange’ can be attached to very emotional values: Knibbe, Appel Lataster-Czisch, Brand, Zantvoort, van der Wiel, van Koevorden, Jansen, and Vlaanderen all share stories in which there were meaningful exchanges between themselves and their subject: eating together, rejoicing together, helping, keeping in touch, following life stories, etc. All experiences which were described by the documentary makers as meaningful. There are also stories wherein the exchange between documentary maker and subject is much less emotional, more practical.

⁶⁰ Date of interview: 07.09.2018

⁶¹ Date of interview: 07.09.2018

⁶² Date of interview: 04.10.2017

Connected to *taking and giving*, multiple stories came up wherein money was given to the subject. This can vary from very small amounts –for phone-cards or bus tickets from Jansen and Vlaanderen (filming in prison)– to larger amounts of money given to the subject to start a business (like in a case of van Zantvoort) or for the travel of a refugee through Europe (Knibbe). Van Koevorden decided to give a financial compensation to subjects in a documentary he made, based on his feeling that while he was getting material for his film, they were not taking enough away from the experience. This was the only project of his where he felt this way. In other projects he always felt that the participants were taking something positive away from it (e.g., the experience itself or documentation of a life event). Also van Zantvoort experiences this consideration: Did his subject gain enough from the experience, while he himself was becoming successful with the film? On the one hand he and his subject were trying to work against the same oppressive power, van Zantvoort –like Knibbe– wanted to provide his subject with a podium/give her a voice. But later, after the film was released, van Zantvoort also wanted to share his financial rewards with his subject, feeling guilty because of gaining financially through the success of the film.

The fact that documentary makers earn their living by making documentaries can cause a problematic dynamic between documentary maker and subject. The question that was already discussed earlier through the quote of subjects by Vlaanderen: “*What’s in it for me?*” especially posed by subjects whose socio-economic background and opportunities (a refugee-status (Jansen and Vlaanderen) or a situation of oppression (through a Dutch based company, like in van Zantvoort’s case) differ greatly from the documentary maker’s, doesn’t seem far-fetched. None of the documentary makers ‘paid’ a subject. Exchange of money was always in forms of compensation afterwards, which were not promised up front. This remains a grey area; wherein documentary makers make their own (ethical) choices. By comparing the data from the interviews, no communication between different documentary makers on how they deal with these situations appears to take place.

4.2.3 Intuition and an ethical learning process

While three documentary makers (Jansen, Appel, Meijer) have experiences wherein their choices had noticeable negative consequences for the subject, which made them reconsider their approach in future cases, implicating an ethical learning process, others talk about ‘intuition’ as an ethical ‘tool’ and part of their work practice. Brand named ‘intuition’ as a major factor in her ethical decision-making process. Appel, Meijer, van Zantvoort, van Koevorden, and Lataster-Czisch referred to intuition as the key internal guide concerning ethically challenging questions. The definition of ‘intuition’ by the documentary makers varies from exclusive intuitive to inclusive of gathered information and previous learning processes. Meijer describes a concept she experiences which seems to be a combination of intuition and a body of knowledge which forms her professionalism and (ethical) side of her craftsmanship of her filmmaking:

“Ja, maar het is wel iets wat sterker is dan intuïtie, ook omdat het echt gebaseerd is op wat ik denk dat klopt bij mij als filmmaker. Dus het is wel een intuïtie, maar wel echt aangestuurd door mijn kennis van mijn eigen werk en ook verlangen wat ik heb om een bepaald soort werk te maken.”(Meijer) ⁶³

4.2.4 Self-defined ethical understandings of documentary filmmakers

During the interviews a few self-formulated ethics were mentioned by the documentary makers. These are the ‘ethics of love’, ‘ethics of editing’, and ‘ethics of style’.

Ethics of love

The two documentary makers van Koevorden and Lataster-Czisch both used the term ‘ethics of love’ while talking about their relationship to their subjects:

“Je moet -ik ben er wel van overtuigd-, zeker met een langere film, dat je echt een beetje verliefd moet zijn op en personage.” (van Koevorden) ⁶⁴

He explains that this love is also essential in his feeling of responsibility. Lataster-Czisch describes her relationship to her subject also in terms of love:

*“Ik zou de relatie met een personage als een zeer eng verband, close verbintenis beschrijven. Een verbintenis die je aangaat, voor de lengte van een film. En soms verder bovenuit. Je kan niet met iedereen bevriend zijn met wie je filmt. Maar ik vind, je bent het aan jezelf verplicht en je bent het ethisch verplicht als filmmaker om dat heel intens, heel alert en liefdevol aan te gaan, die relatie. Ik kan het steeds maar weer op de liefde houden.”
Lataster-Czisch ⁶⁵*

Ethics in editing

Five documentary makers (Jansen, Brand, Knibbe, Appel, and Meijer) mentioned their ethical considerations concerning their subjects during the editing process. Most of the cases are about discarding material because it could harm the subject, while at the same time using it would be in favour of the film itself. One documentary maker’s (Meijer’s) ethical consideration showed the function of guilt or a feeling of unease concerning the representation of the subject: Even though it could be argued the relationship between documentary maker and subject is more distant in this part of the process (because there is no actual contact with the subject), at the same time the possible representation of the subject is mainly formed and constructed here. Meijer describes her development of her relationship with the subject throughout the process:

⁶³ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

⁶⁴ Date of interview: 24.07.2017

⁶⁵ Date of interview: 21.08.2017

“Ik bouw intimiteit op tijdens het draaien, tenminste, ten eerste bouw ik intimiteit op om iemand binnen te halen en dan bouw ik intimiteit op om, zeg maar in een film dat te kunnen bereiken wat ik wil met iemand, om dan in de montage alles los te laten, dus die mensen totaal vergeten en daar ook niet meer over nadenken, want anders kan ik niet, anders voel ik me altijd belemmerd.” (Meijer) ⁶⁶

Meijer compares herself to Lataster-Czisch and her husband:

“En terwijl ik toch -je zou kunnen zeggen: bij de Latasters is de mens in de film en achter de camera en voor de camera, allemaal, het ultieme, he? Dat is een heel sterk humaan gevoel. Dat is bij mij minder sterk, maar toch wil ik niet dat de film, ja, de film is het gewoon bijna nooit waard, dat dat zo verontrust, of mensen kwetst of ja.” Interviewer: “En heb je daar altijd overzicht over?” Meijer: “Nee. Nee, want het rare is natuurlijk ook, als je gaat monteren, dan heb je op gegeven moment ook gewoon schijt.” ⁶⁷

Later in the interview, Meijer answers the question to elaborate on her feeling of trouble and worry, but also guilt. She states that it is a difficult and paradoxical situation in the editing process:

“Je moet je in feite vrij voelen om die film te kunnen maken in een montage, die je wilt. Aan de andere kant heb ik wel steeds vaker dat die belasting, dat is ook wel een middel om jezelf bij zo een mens te houden. En je te realiseren, dat een film ook iemand niet schade mag berokkenen.” ⁶⁸

Meijer suggests that the tension between feeling free as an author and at the same time feeling responsible in terms of not harming the subject, (concerning her/his representation) results in a feeling of unease. Finally, this feeling of unease helps her to keep connected to the subject and her/his self-image.

Ethics of style (aesthetics)

One of the documentary makers (Knibbe) very specifically talked about using aesthetics or style to confront the audience with their own position in the narrative:

“Ik hoopte, op dat moment dat ik het aan het filmen was, dat op een manier te doen waardoor het confronterender was dan wat de journalisten filmde. Dus ik wilde juist een hele subjectieve ervaring creëren, waarbij ik het publiek tegelijkertijd, op een hele filmische manier meenam. (...) En ik probeerde een metareflectie te geven op de vorm en op wat daar gebeurde. (...) Wat ik voelde aan frustratie en teleurstelling over hoe wij met

⁶⁶ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

⁶⁷ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

⁶⁸ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

*elkaar in de wereld omgaan en wat daar op die plek op dat moment gebeurde (Lampedusa), dat probeerde ik te stoppen in hoe ik het had gefilmd.”*⁶⁹

Knibbe strives to communicate his ethical stance and message not (only) through content but through the way he ‘designs’ the reality in front of his camera. He chooses very strong stylistic manners to influence the experience the audience has. His aim is to let the audience feel and force them into self-reflection.

Apart from Knibbe, who chooses to connect aesthetics and ethics, but at the same time is confronted with the ethical dilemma of filming subjects without consent, other documentary makers only mentioned a connection between aesthetics and ethics and subjects because of the choice the filmmaker has to make with consideration of esthetical aspects when choosing a subject: Does the subject ‘work’ on camera (this is not usually a question of a subject being ‘beautiful’ enough, but of being charismatic or interesting). It is not possible to pinpoint the aspects that make a subject a *good* subject in front of the camera, but the documentary makers are very aware of this choice. Most see it as a part of their professionalism to be good in making this choice. But it can seem like an ethically challenging decision: “*We waren op zoek naar het meest ideale gehandicapte kind voor de film.*” (van Zantvoort about a project in Kenia). It is part of the documentary process to find a fitting subject, but it also shines light on the fact that a subject is often instrumental to a story.

4.2.5 Conclusion: *Key differences and similarities between the ethical norms and understanding(s) among Dutch documentary filmmakers regarding the relationship to their subjects*

In the empirical data analysis, many shared ethical norms and understandings have been found. The main concepts that emerged from the empirical data were *responsibility*, which in this context is understood as the *responsibility of the documentary maker to his subject to not cause harm*. Because *responsibility* seemed to connect almost all ethically charged experiences of the documentary filmmakers, it was divided into four sub-concepts: *dependency*, *trust*, *consent*, and *post film responsibility*. *Trust*, *consent*, and *post film responsibility* were all concepts that also appeared in the literature study. *Dependency*, as an ethical concept came forth solely of the empirical data analysis. Another concept that is important concerning *responsibility is responsibility of representation*, which will be further elaborated in subchapter 4.5.

Dependency, of the documentary maker to the subjects, first, is true for all documentary makers, but three in particular had experienced ethically challenging decision-making processes because of it. The ethically challenging decision that presented itself in all cases was one of persuasion of a subject to participate, which possibly challenged the free choice of the subject to decide her-

⁶⁹ Date of interview: 04.10.2017

/himself to participate. Persuasion of a subject to participate is seen by many documentary makers as a professional skill, but it can also become an ethical question, referring to an inequality of knowledge or skill between documentary maker and subject. One documentary maker talked about a 'forwardness' or 'brutality' she instrumentalizes to persuade subjects who feel reluctant to be filmed. All these lead to the conclusion that documentary makers handle different ideas on 'how far is too far'. Also, this documentary maker mentioned feeling a certain border in using her 'brutality'. Every documentary and therefore documentary maker establishes normative patterns individually, which makes it difficult to state clear rules that documentary makers applied in their work. Even though the ethical borders seem to be flexible, it can be concluded that there are ethical borders which are, if not the same, similar and therefore shared by documentary makers.

Another shared understanding between all ten documentary makers was the notion of *trust* as a crucial element of the subject-documentary maker relationship on an ethical level. In documentary filmmaking, it is not possible to make legal agreements binding and official in a way that the question of *dependency* and therefore *trust* will truly be futile. The empirical data showed *trust* to be a very important concept that all (with very few exceptions) documentary makers strive for in their relationship with their subjects, with very few exceptions. This *trust* in the relationship between filmmaker and subject from the perspective of the filmmaker is again based on the documentary maker not harming the subject. Two documentary makers had experiences with subjects suffering emotionally or physically, because of their participation in their documentaries, both cases connected to how much was revealed and the rights of the filmmaker to record. The documentary makers therefore felt the obligation to care and protect the subjects. Jansen and Meijer both clearly stated that they could not have anticipated the harmful outcomes. Both documentary makers were very troubled by the experiences of their subjects and felt that they had somehow failed the subjects with the trust they had put into them. Both indicated an ethical learning process caused by the experience.

Another (shared) norm was the need of *consent* between documentary maker and subject which also showed the most differences in opinions of all concepts. While for most filmmakers consent between themselves and the subjects was a non-negotiable condition before starting the filming process, one filmmaker found himself in a situation, wherein he chose to film without consent, which suggests an affinity with journalistic norms. This case will be discussed in paragraph 4.4.

This case also brought up the concept of the *act of taking*. The filmmaker in question referred quite directly to the exploitation of the powerless. It is very difficult to compare the ethics surrounding the documentary maker's choice with other documentary makers' choices, because the context is not comparable. Almost all filmmakers very clearly stated that a balance between *taking and giving* is desired in the relationship with their subjects. Sometimes this could result in financial help after a project was finished, sometimes –concerning very small amounts of money– during the filming process. More than half the filmmakers strove for a non-materialistic exchange between themselves and their subject: therapeutic, empowering, meaningful, human, enriching. Other ways

of giving did not come up as an ambition of the documentary makers towards the subjects. Conclusively, in the concept of *giving and taking* it seems as if in cases where the documentary maker was only able to *take*, or chose to solely take, the inequality between documentary maker and subject increased, while in cases where the documentary maker felt an 'exchange' took place, the documentary maker also experienced less unease concerning the feeling of inequality.

A sense of post-film responsibilities is shared by most of the documentary makers, even though, again, the definition of how far this form of care is taken differed greatly between them. Seven documentary makers kept (sometimes lifelong) relationships with the subjects, others stated they cared for subjects but did not have a close relationship after the filming process. Apart from the contact, there was also mention of protection from the material being used in a different context after filming.

Two other concepts showed up concerning ethical decision making, which were *intuition*, mentioned by five documentary makers, and the conscious act of an *ethical learning process*, mentioned by three documentary makers. The fact that *intuition* seems key to ethical decision making is not surprising seeing that there is no general set of ethical codes in the industry.

Lastly, the empirical data analysis showed three types of wittingly defined ethical understandings of documentary filmmakers: *Ethics of love*, mentioned by two documentary makers, which are based on the idea that an emotional connection (similar or the same as friendship) should be the basis for all ethical decisions of documentary makers. *Ethics of editing*, which were mentioned by five documentary makers and focused on the fact that especially in the phase of editing, the documentary maker can be tempted to cross ethical borders in connection to the representation of her or his subject, because the focus is on making a good film, while the subject becomes a figure in the narrative. The mention of *guilt* or *unease* as a moral device not to stray too far from a truthful, honest, and caring representation of the subject was mentioned by one of the documentary makers.

The last concept was *ethics of style* or *aesthetics*. One documentary maker very consciously chose to show his ethical stance through the style of his film or the gaze of his camera. Other documentary makers mention the need to instrumentalize subjects in a way, because they chose them according to different aspects, including aesthetic considerations.

4.3 Motivations and aspirations of documentary makers and how they correlate to the filmmaker-subject relationship

The following section (4.3) addresses subquestion three: What are the key differences and similarities between the motivations and aspirations of Dutch documentary makers and how are they related to the relationship to their subjects?

The concept of motivation is split into eight sub-concepts: *nuanced storytelling*, *recognition as a maker*, *interest in people*, *earning money*, *telling a compelling story*, *aesthetics*, *giving a voice*, and *creating consciousness*. While the motivations are not necessarily connected to the relationships the filmmakers have to their subjects, the aspirations are specifically connected to what the documentary makers aspired for their subjects through participating in the film and through their relationship. The latter concept was divided into three sub-concepts: the notion *to give back*, *to fight for a common cause*, and *to create a truthful representation of the subject*.

4.3.1 Motivation

Nuanced storytelling (similar to truth seeking)

The motivation of documentary makers to create a nuanced story was very prominent in the interviews. Six of the documentary makers (Knibbe, van der Wiel, Jansen, van Zantvoort, Vlaanderen, Lataster-Czisch) mentioned it as their main motivation, some specified it as a motivation in regard to/owed to their subjects. Nuanced storytelling as a concept is not very different from ‘truth seeking’. It usually refers to ‘digging deeper’ into a story that has already appeared in the media or to add another nuance to the image that already exists. This can also be defined as ‘shedding light on the untold side of a story’, ‘revealing the unrevealed’ or, to be even more specific, ‘emphasising a side or aspect of society that is underrepresented’. *Nuanced storytelling* therefore becomes an umbrella concept for motivations of documentary makers, which differ slightly from each other, but still overlap in their general ambition. While Jansen defines her motivation to make documentary film as:

“Aan de ene kant is het een soort bevrediging van een hele brede nieuwsgierigheid en aan de andere kant om een genuanceerde verhalen te laten zien. Dat doe ik eigenlijk bijna altijd. Net een wat ander beeld geven of een genuanceerder beeld geven dan ik denk dat er al gegeven wordt.” (Jansen)⁷⁰

Vlaanderen mentions his wish to reveal the unrevealed: *“om zichtbaar te maken wat onzichtbaar is”*. He makes films in surroundings that are literally not accessible for every member of society (detention centre, asylum seeker centre, etc.) and Vlaanderen sees this ‘revealing of the unrevealed’ as part of his duty to society, which makes it a ‘meaningful’ task to him. In a bigger perspective, Vlaanderen sees this rooted in his desire to tell a nuanced story. He wants to disclose different perspectives in a story.

Lataster-Czisch’s motivation to make films is linked to *telling a nuanced story* by her desire to emphasise an aspect of society which, in her perspective, is undervalued. Contrary to Vlaanderen, it is not invisible because it is inaccessible, but because there is not a lot of attention for it or the general impression people have of it is (in her eyes) (too) negative. She wants to enlarge or enrich nuance in the story she is telling.

⁷⁰ Date of interview: 07.09.2018

Two documentary makers, Knibbe and van der Wiel, very specifically mentioned their wish to address a stereotype in a different and more nuanced way. Their motivation is connected to empowerment and victimization and therefore will be discussed in subchapter 4.5. The motivation of *nuanced storytelling* is, in most cases, connected to the relationship with the subjects, but it often relates more to the representation of a group of people than to an individual subject.

Recognition as a maker

The only documentary maker who clearly stated *recognition as a maker* as his motivation was van der Wiel:

“Ik moet daar heel eerlijk in zijn, ik doe dit ook gewoon voor mijn ego. Ja, en esthetiek, je probeert iets moois te maken, maar volgens mij doe ik het allemaal voor het schouderklopje als ik heel eerlijk ben. Andere zullen het vast veel meer uit idealisme doen.” (Wiel)⁷¹

Also, recognition does not include any link to the relationship with the subject. Aesthetics were also mentioned by other makers and will be discussed further on in this subchapter.

Interest in people (satisfaction of curiosity)

Jansen, Brand, Appel, and van Zantvoort all mention *interest in people* as a secondary motivation to make documentaries.

“Ik ben heel erg geïnteresseerd in mensen en ik ben ook heel erg geïnteresseerd in nuances. Documentaires maken, maar ook journalistiek geven je ook een excuus om in allerlei werelden te gaan kijken, waar je normaal niet zou komen en waar je normaal geen contact zou mee zou hebben.” (Jansen)⁷²

“Je komt in andere werelden, buiten je comfortzone. Soms als ik op reis ben, vind ik dat het meest interessant. Daar is documentaire misschien juist het middel toe, om jezelf te dwingen om bij bepaalde mensen te komen, die je anders nooit zal ontmoeten.” (Zantvoort)⁷³

“Ik vind het eigenlijk een excuus, om door middelen van een film, binnen te dringen in het leven van een ander. Dat vind ik eigenlijk vrij bijzonder. Zonder het excuus zou je het niet doen.” (Appel)⁷⁴

⁷¹ Date of interview: 28.06.2017

⁷² Date of interview: 07.09.2018

⁷³ Date of interview: 26.07.2017

⁷⁴ Date of interview: 31.08.2017

Van Koevorden even mentions this as his main motivation for documentary making. He wants to not only meet new people, but to connect to them on an essential level;

“Het is toch zo dat personages mijn leven binnenkomen en ik kom met al mijn camera shit en zo, hun leven binnen en daar gebeurt iets, (...) daar botst iets of speelt iets, daar is liefde of iets (pauze) en daar komt het filmen uit.” (Van Koevorden)⁷⁵

This motivation suggests a direct connection to the relationships the documentary makers form with their (potential) subjects. The subjects and the relationship to the subjects (the bond that is built and the connection that is formed) are key elements in this motivation.

Earning money

Earning money was only (specifically) mentioned by one of the filmmakers, Meijer:

“Ik moet wel zeggen: het geld staat nooit in verhouding met het werk wat je doet. Maar het geld is wel de belangrijkste motivatie.”⁷⁶

Also, in this case there is no connection between the motivation of the documentary maker and the relationship to the subject.

To tell a compelling story (to touch people)

The motivation to tell a compelling story was shared by five documentary makers: van Zantvoort, Vlaanderen, Koevorden, Meijer, and Lataster. Like the concept of *nuanced storytelling*, the notion of *telling a compelling story* is an umbrella concept which is interpreted differently by different documentary makers. Also, the two concepts have some overlap like in the case of van Zantvoort. He describes his motivation as the personal urgency to tell a story, which he states as the incentive of filmmaking. Vlaanderen quotes his motivation as:

“Het is leuk om te kijken of je een spannend verhaal kan vertellen, een meeslepend verhaal.” (Vlaanderen)⁷⁷

“Als ik een verhaal heb of een idee, dan wil ik dat ook echt heel graag. Draaien en monteren is gewoon het leukste wat er is. Dus ik denk dat dat het is. Ik ben heel nieuwsgierig wie iemand is en wat ik daarmee zou kunnen doen.” (Meijer)⁷⁸

Even though *telling a compelling story* as motivation does not seem to be necessarily connected to the relationship to subjects in most cases, in Meijer’s case there is a connection, but it is focused

⁷⁵ Date of interview: 24.07.2017

⁷⁶ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

⁷⁷ Date of interview: 12.09.2017

⁷⁸ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

on the instrumental value of the subject in order to help in the telling of a story. One documentary maker who strongly connected *telling a compelling story* with the relationship to his subjects is van Koevorden. Van Koevorden mentions that in cases where he does not feel a bond strong enough with his subject, he feels unable to tell a compelling story and therefore cancels these projects.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics and statements about *aesthetics* are a difficult concept to compare between the different documentary makers, because even though they use the same terms, their meaning can vary greatly. Lataster-Czisch for example views the specific style or aesthetics of a documentary as the trademark of the documentary maker, which gives it authenticity and originality. These qualities, according to Lataster-Czisch, are what makes the difference between documentary and a reportage. Documentary making in her view is writing history, and the form –artistic and authentic– is crucial. She sees documentary as cultural heritage.

Brand's view on the importance of aesthetics is linked to the importance of image compared to spoken information:

“Soms vind ik het beeld belangrijker dan wat iemand zegt.” (Brand)⁷⁹

Similar to Lataster-Czisch, this also hints at the difference between documentary and reportage. Knibbe sees aesthetics and style as linked to his ideology:

“Door gekunstelde elementen in te bouwen, waardoor het publiek de mogelijkheid krijgt zich te realiseren, dat wat ze zien gekunsteld is.”⁸⁰

He uses style elements to transport meaning (even though he admits that his attempts to communicate this to the audience have failed).

Van der Wiel, Vlaanderen, and Appel mention aesthetics as a secondary motivation to make a film, while Meijer mentions it in a much more specified manner. The 'looks' and aesthetics of a subject and her/his surroundings are something she talks about in length:

“Ik kijk vaak ook heel erg naar uiterlijk. Ik zou niet zo snel mensen filmen, ja, ik bedoel niet letterlijk 'lelijk' maar wel, wat ik zelf onaantrekkelijk zou vinden. Dat klinkt heel oppervlakkig, maar ik denk heel erg na over beeld. En over wat iemand met die fysiek en met die uitdrukking en die mimiek en die lichaamstaal extra toevoegt aan het verhaal wat ze uitspreken.” (Meijer)⁸¹

⁷⁹ Date of interview: 12.09.2017

⁸⁰ Date of interview: 04.10.2017

⁸¹ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

Meijer's approach might seem more extreme than that of other filmmakers, but there is a possibility that she is more reflective and outspoken on the matter than other filmmakers, who make similar choices regarding aesthetics but in a less conscious process.

The motivation, even though initially very much connected to the subject, later becomes something that is rather disconnected from relationship to the subject in most cases. Aesthetics have a stronger connection with the audience than with the subject.

Giving a voice

Giving a voice was a motivation for several of the documentary makers. This point will be discussed later in subchapter 4.5.

Create consciousness

While *creating consciousness* is somewhat inherent to the nature of documentary, in the interviews five of the documentary makers especially mentioned *creating consciousness* as (part of) their motivation to make documentaries: Knibbe, Zantvoort, Appel, Lataster-Czisch, and van der Wiel. In most of the cases, it is directly connected to the theme of the film and therefore to the subject/personage. Van der Wiel wanted to create consciousness about an image of Ethiopia distorted by stereotypes, Lataster-Czisch about the life of women with breast cancer. Zantvoort sees creating consciousness as inherent to the definition of documentary making. Knibbe's motivation to create consciousness was linked to his ambition to show people that documentaries are not equal to reality, aspiring form of meta-reflection:

“Het is gewoon belangrijk dat mensen weten, ja, dat verhalen op een bepaalde manier worden verteld, dat er elementen inzitten, waardoor mensen weten, dat het niet echt is.”
(Knibbe)⁸²

Appel's motivation is maybe slightly different than creating consciousness. He wants to show people how other people deal with life challenges (loneliness, loss, resilience).

*“Op het moment dat ik iemand ontmoet, die op een mooie manier met zijn of haar lot omgaat. Dit op een mooie manier overbrengen in een film, dat is mijn blijvende motivatie.”*⁸³

This motivation maybe shows the strongest connection between the relationship the documentary makers have with their subjects, because it is directly based on the live story/-events of the subject.

4.3.2 Aspirations

⁸² Date of interview: 04.10.2017

⁸³ Date of interview: 31.08.2017

Three main different aspirations the documentary makers have regarding their subjects emerged from the interviews. While the motivations of the documentary makers were not necessarily linked to the relationships the filmmakers have with their subjects, in this definition of aspiration it was the goal to specifically research the aspirations the documentary makers have towards their subjects. The aspirations often formed preconditions which the documentary makers see as part of their ethical code, while for others, their aspirations are part of their primary motivations to make the documentary in the first place. The aspirations can therefore be distinguished into two groups: the action of the filmmaker in order *to give back* (which has similar attributes as a restoration or compensation but can also be seen as an exchange similar to those in friendships) as well as aspirations which align with the intrinsic motivation of the documentary maker. The second group can be divided into two sub-concepts: *to fight for a common cause* and *to create a truthful representation of the subject*. The three aspirations will be further explained in this paragraph.

To give back

Giving back is a concept which has already been discussed in paragraph 4.2.2.2. It is interpreted differently by different filmmakers, but also often depends on specific situations. Jansen, Vlaanderen, Knibbe, and Appel all have experienced situations wherein they offered their help to their subjects (during or after the making of the film). They all see it as their aspiration to help subjects when possible by using their own resources (time, money, work) seeing it as a form of *giving back*. Another form of *giving back* is the documentation of an important life event (Van Koevorden, Lataster-Czisch, and van der Wiel).

Another form of *giving back* has been described by Appel, Lataster-Czisch, and van Koevorden: the aim to evoke (self-) reflection and/or oversight of their own story by subjects, which then leads to emotional processing and possibly healing.

To fight for a common cause

This aspiration is shared by van Zantvoort and Knibbe. For both filmmakers, it is essential to share their aspiration for the film with the subject. Van Zantvoort talks about “*whistleblowers*” in this context, which is a term originating from journalism and law-practice, used for informers on people or cooperations that are involved in illegal or un-humanitarian activities.

To create a truthful representation of the subject

In the case of a ‘*truthful*’ *representation*, the focus is on the self-recognition of the subject. This aspiration is related to the motivation of *nuanced storytelling* but focuses rather on the recognition of the subject with her/his likeness in the documentary. This aspiration was shared by van der Wiel, Meijer, van Zantvoort, Knibbe, Jansen, Lataster-Czisch, and Vlaanderen. These documentary makers explicitly termed this as their aspiration connecting to their subjects, which the other documentary makers did not, which does not necessarily mean they do not share the same aspiration:

“(…) ik probeer een eerlijk beeld van ze (the subjects) neer te zetten, waar ze zichzelf in herkennen. (…) Iedereen heeft natuurlijk allemaal kanten en dat die kanten zo veel mogelijk, of zo eerlijk mogelijk belicht worden.” (van der Wiel)⁸⁴

4.3.3 Conclusion: Key differences and similarities between the motivations and aspirations of Dutch documentary makers and how they relate to the relationship to their subjects

The data from the empirical study about the motivations the documentary makers is organized according to the four tendencies Renov (see chapter 2).

The tendency *to record/to reveal/to preserve* proved to be a greatly shared motivation of making a documentary. One documentary maker (Latatster-Czisch) described her ambition for making documentaries as ‘to reveal and preserve history’. She also pointed out the significance of doing so through an authentic style specifically connected to the documentary maker. Lataster-Czisch, believes that the personal style and aesthetic of the filmmaker does not refute the power of the film, but through “lyric power” and “musical or poetic qualities” they emphasize the potency of communicating ideas and feelings.

To record/to reveal/to preserve also showed up in the form of two other concepts: *nuanced storytelling*, which was shared by six of the documentary makers as well as *interest in people* or *satisfaction of curiosity* which was mentioned by four documentary makers. *Nuanced storytelling* in most cases is connected to the relationship with the subjects, though it relates more often than not to the representation of a group of people rather than an individual subject.

It is noteworthy that none of the documentary makers mentioned the tendency to persuade or promote as their underlying motivation to make films.

The tendency *to analyse or to interrogate* was described by five documentary makers as their motivation in terms of *creating consciousness*, which logically is also done by ‘revealing’, but it also asks for an analysis, the documentary makers include in the film.

The tendency to express corresponded with two concepts which emerged from the empirical data: *to tell a compelling story (to touch people)* and *aesthetics*. *To tell a compelling story* as a motivation was mentioned by five of the documentary makers while *aesthetics* was mentioned by six, two of whom considered it their main motivation, while four saw it as a secondary goal. This makes *to express* together with *to reveal* the most shared tendencies.

⁸⁴ Date of interview: 28.06.2017

From the empirical data the concept of *giving a voice (to the subject)* also emerged as a motivation of the documentary makers. The same applies for the concepts of *recognition as a maker*, which was stated by one of the documentary makers, as well as the motivation *to earn money*, which was mentioned by another. Both motivations were clearly stated as core motivations to make documentary films by the documentary makers and do not show a direct relationship to the subject.

The aspirations of Dutch documentary makers in this study were defined concerning their relationship to and ambitions towards the subjects. While in the literature study aspirations towards the subjects were mainly termed as *responsibilities to care or not harm*, the empirical study also concentrated on the documentary maker's desires transcending these concepts. Three aspirations crystallized through the empirical data: *To give back*, *to fight for a common cause* and *to create a truthful representation of the subject*.

The aspiration *to give back* was shared by seven of the documentary makers and was shared most. In most cases, the actions coming forth of this aspiration were independent on the documentary itself, while *to fight for a common cause*, which was cited by two documentary makers, is quintessentially connected to the subject and the final film. Compared with the aspiration *to give back*, which can be independent of the circumstances and context of the documentary, *fighting for a common cause* is only relevant for films concerning topics of injustice (which was the case for both documentary makers).

The third aspiration *to create a truthful representation of the subject* was shared by seven of the documentary makers. This aspiration towards the subjects related to the motivation of *nuanced storytelling*, but with a specific focus towards the subject and their perception of their image about themselves. This is not to say that the final documentary could not show the subject a new facet of her-/himself, but the importance being that the subject recognized her-/himself in the film. The capacity (and ambition) of the documentary maker to achieve this goal can be seen as part of their professionalism. Not only does the documentary maker aspire to represent what she/he envisioned, but vicariously in the eye of the subject her/his likeness must correspond to her/his ideas of who she/he is.

4.4 Ethical questions and dilemmas regarding the inequality in the relationship to and the representation of their subjects

The following section (4.4) addresses subquestion four: How do Dutch documentary makers approach ethical questions regarding the inequality in the relationship to and the representation of their subjects?

Throughout chapter four, the topic of representation has repetitively been mentioned because it forms a cross connection between the different concepts. In the next section representation of the

subject will be discussed by first giving a short insight of how the documentary makers view the topic of representation in documentary film and how they integrate this vision in their work (*subjective storytelling and representation*), which will be followed by elaborations on *victimization/instrumentalization, empowerment and co-authorship*.

4.4.1 Representation

Subjective storytelling and representation

On the one hand, the documentary makers all included either the term *subjective (storytelling)* or the phrase *author-film* in their own definition of documentary, which both emphasize the importance of the personal view and opinions of the documentary maker in the final film. On the other hand, they stress the importance of their subjective storytelling in a setting of reality. Reality is often seen as the base of the film, but not as a steering or controlling factor:

“Ik zou (...) zeggen dat een documentaire over het algemeen een auteurs-gebaseerde visie is op een situatie of een thema of een verhaal dat gebaseerd is op de werkelijkheid.”
(Meijer)⁸⁵

In subchapter 4.4.2, the aspirations of documentary makers towards their subjects were discussed. Six documentary makers (Wiel, van Zantvoort, Knibbe, Jansen, Lataster-Czisch, and Vlaanderen) *strive to create a truthful representation of the subject*. They generally define a ‘*truthful representation*’ as achieving that both sides, filmmaker and subject, are content with the representation of the subject in the film, which means a ‘*truthful representation*’ in this case refers to a subjective definition of the term.

The question arises: *What is representation?* Jansen described an experience she had working on a film in Greece, with an elderly couple who became the leading character(s) in her documentary. The images and stories she chose for the final edit of the film were all supporting an image of the elderly couple wherein they were funny and endearing. In reality, the couple also displayed signs of xenophobia on a regular basis. Jansen choose to present the couple (more) positive, because it helped the story and she did not want to harm the couple by representing them negatively. Other documentary makers also described cases wherein they enhanced positive qualities of subjects and left out negative traits. In this case, even though subject and documentary maker agree on the representation being ‘*truthful*’, third parties/the audience can disagree with this perception and representation and can even feel hurt. In these cases, the documentary maker can be confronted with an ethical dilemma on how much she/he distanced her-/himself from the basis of reality. Apart from this (ethical question), it is questionable if a documentary has the technical capacity to include all of a subject’s characteristics. According to Vlaanderen, actual representation is never a possibility, because a subject cannot be portrayed in her/his entirety. Apart from the sheer

⁸⁵ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

complexity of wanting to portrait a human in its entirety, Zantvoort stresses the influence of (stylistic) choices and editing:

“Bij alle mensen die ik heb gefilmd, bij wijze van, die kun je ook op twintig andere manieren over laten komen.” (van Zantvoort)⁸⁶

Victimization/Instrumentalization

In the interviews, the term victimization was not mentioned by the filmmakers. What they did mention was the concept *instrumentalization (of the subject)*. Four of the documentary makers, Knibbe, van der Wiel, Jansen, and Meijer, experienced situations in which their subject's representation/character-build was 'reduced' to fit the role they were playing in the documentary. The example of Jansen and the Greek couple is one of the cases. Shown as 'loveable' the couple worked better in the storyline. Also, earlier discussed (see 4.2.2) was the case of Knibbe, when he was filming on Lampedusa for *'Those who feel the fire burning'* wherein his subjects did not want to participate, but Knibbe chose to continue filming because he felt the need to tell the story and reveal the circumstances to the audience. The subjects became instrument to the story of the film. In the interviews, Meijer was very straightforward with her view on subject participation:

“Ik heb voornamelijk interesse in een film. En in wat zij (the subjects) vertegenwoordigen binnen die film (...) uiteindelijk gaat het erom dat die mensen dat verbeelden en vertegenwoordigen in mijn films, wat ik wil.” (Meijer)⁸⁷

The relationship between documentary maker and subject, especially in the example of Knibbe, shows a high degree of inequality, because the documentary maker is the one holding all the power. Van Koevorden had an interesting view on the subject as an instrument (or not):

“Ja, ik weet niet of de personages het middel zijn om het verhaal te vertellen, maar misschien meer dat hun verhaal, dat hun verhaal een middel wordt om een groter verhaal te vertellen.”⁸⁸

The question if the subject becomes an instrument in his viewpoint stays open.

Empowerment

With two documentary makers, representation came up in terms of empowerment: Knibbe and van Zandvoort (Knibbe showing the most controversial perspectives and approaches). Both had multiple examples of projects wherein they aspired to supply the subject with a podium for their story and opinion on the matter:

⁸⁶ Date of interview: 26.07.2017

⁸⁷ Date of interview: 14.07.2017

⁸⁸ Date of interview: 24.07.2017

“Ik wilde hun ook juist een podium bieden om hun verhaal te vertellen. Maar niet op zo'n slachtoffer manier, van wat je normaalgesproken ziet.” (Knibbe)⁸⁹

The aspiration of *giving a voice* is seen in terms of empowerment. In both cases, the subjects were in situations where they were either suppressed and/or exploited. Through the participation in the films, they could gain power (to some degree) of their situation, in form of voicing it in a public way with some reach (national and international). Even though documentary maker and subject were socio-economically positioned far from each other, the documentary makers experienced a decrease of a feeling of inequality because of the shared goal.

Co-authorship

The topic of *co-authorship* is not easy to discuss, because the term is new to the field of documentary making. Therefore it can be defined in different ways. Four of the documentary makers expressed their willingness to change the narrative of their film to make it fitting for the subject. This kind of flexibility can take form of small changes in the filmplan, but it can also mean that the subject actively influences the final film. While Meijer is willing to change a story because she is intrigued by a subject, this is entirely her choice and there is no shared decisionmaking with the subject whatsoever. Jansen has a similar approach.

Lataster-Czisch and van Koevorden both have examples of films, where –through communication with their subjects– they decided to change integral parts of their storyline to meet the ideas and wishes of their subject:

“Voor mij zijn de personages zo vormend dat ze ook de film vormgeven” (Lataster-Czisch)⁹⁰

Both filmmakers expressed their content of how (after the changes) the subjects were (re)presented in the film. In both cases, the changes made were content-based, not stylistic. There is no mention of a full *co-authorship*, but in the cases of Lataster-Czisch and van Koevorden, elements of *co-authorship* can be found. In both cases, the process had a positive effect on the feeling of equality between themselves and the subject according to the filmmakers.

4.4.2 Conclusion: Dutch documentary makers' approach to ethical questions regarding the inequality in the relationship to and the representation of their subjects

To draw conclusions, first the question of how the Dutch documentary makers of this study view the representation of their subjects needs to be answered. The documentary makers generally share the view that documentary is based and dependent on reality, which evolves around their subjects,

⁸⁹ Date of interview: 04.10.2017

⁹⁰ Date of interview: 21.08.2017

but -at the same time- is also an art form. The tension between a documentary being a representation of reality (and the therefore attached *truth claim*) and being a subjective interpretation by the documentary makers creates a situation which can lead to ethical dilemmas and problems. It could be argued that a documentary, if seen as a subjective narrative and art form, therefore is also free of needing to meet claims of representation. But being heavily dependent on the subject and her/his likeness as a main feature of the film, representation is difficult to be dismissed as a topic (and claim) important to documentary. The subject will be confronted with her/his representation in the film, which also includes the factor of the audience seeing and reacting to this representation (and again affecting the subject and documentary maker both).⁹¹ The audience seems to recognise ‘the world’ in the setting of the film and assumes to see reality. However, this can be a misperception which can cause frustration, distress or even harm to subjects as well as documentary makers.

Seven of the documentary makers strive for a ‘*truthful representation*’ of their subjects. They define a ‘*truthful representation*’ as achieving that both sides, filmmaker and subject, are content with the representation of the subject in the film. If this is achieved, a form of representation that is based on a *general truth claim* becomes irrelevant, because both parties agree with something that is in its nature subjective. This agreement between documentary maker and subject is based on trust between the two. In fact, the filmmaker holds all means to make this decision in her/his hand. The trust therefore must substitute for equality (in power) in the relationship.

The question how the documentary makers handle the representation and inequality of their subjects shows itself essentially in their motivation to make documentaries. If the motivation of the documentary maker is *giving a voice* or to *supply a podium* for the subject, representation is seen in terms of what the subject wants to communicate. This can take on a form of *empowerment*, which is a tendency or ambition found in political film. *Giving a voice* does hold the danger of misinterpretation or misrepresentation. The question is if the subjects actually speak for themselves or, if in the end, it is the documentary makers’ voice/vision that speaks for them. Apart from the question of representation, both cases in which the documentary makers aspired to *give a voice* were examples of films which form a *counter-culture*. The filmmakers in this study all shared the desire to address the effects of exclusion and oppression.

Opposing the notion of *giving a voice* is seeing the subject as *instrumental* to the film, which enlarges the inequality between documentary maker and subject, because all the power over the situation lies in the hands of the filmmaker without/with little consulting of the subject. While creating this situation itself is not the motivation of any of the documentary makers, it can be the consequence of other motivations, like *telling a compelling story* or *truth seeking*.

⁹¹The film being publicly screened can influence or enhance the reaction of the subject to her/his likeness (representation), as discussed in subchapter 4.2.2 on *responsibility to avoid suffering of the subject because of participation*.

The analysis of concept of *co-authorship* showed that four documentary makers have tendencies (two have *strong* tendencies) to incorporate content-relevant ideas of their subjects into their films, consequential for the subject's representation, even if in contradiction to their original concept.

It is striking that the documentary maker who defines his/her motivation of making documentaries as '*writing history*' (Lataster-Czisch) also is one of the two leaning towards co-authorship. The film is influenced by both: the filmmaker (her/his choices, style, and individual approach) and the subject (her/his person, story, and performance). Filmmakers (like Lataster-Czisch and van Koevorden) therefore are storytellers who use *speech acts* to interpret between their own view and the story of the subject in larger networks of imaginary constructions.

Therefore, filmmakers agree that films cannot be a (direct) representation of reality, but merely an interpretation of the historical reality. Seeing films as *speech acts* presented also an alternative approach to experiencing the power dynamics in the relationship between filmmaker and subject. As in the cases of Lataster-Czisch and van Koevorden, some aspects of inequality between filmmakers and subjects– independent of the socio-economic context of subject and filmmaker – which occur within the process of making a film, were attempted to be avoided. Instead, filmmakers and subjects tried to become co-creators to a certain degree and therefore both shaped or/and influenced reality.

Chapter 5: Dutch documentary makers, ethical decision making, inequality and representation

5.1 Reflections on the main research question of this study

This final chapter addresses the main research question of this study: *How do Dutch documentary makers deal with ethical decision making and ethical dilemmas concerning the unequal relationship with their subjects and the representation of their subjects?*

To answer this question, the main conclusions from the empirical research will be connected with the findings of the literature study.

Firstly: The empirical research showed that four different kinds of inequality were experienced by documentary makers. Two of those also emerged in the literature study, namely (1) socio-economic inequality and (2) situational inequality of power. In addition, the interviewees further differentiated with (3) inequality of knowledge/experience and (4) inequality of reciprocal interest. Especially the second form of inequality, which also emerged prominently in the literature study (see chapter 2), was -in one form or the other- experienced by all documentary makers. As expected, the inequality between them and their subjects often led them to consider ethical problems or dilemmas (Nichols, 2010, Winston, 2000).

A second important step towards answering the research question is to understand the different focal points, or components, of ethical decision making processes by filmmakers. Based on the research findings of Aufderheide et al., filmmakers share many unarticulated general principles on work ethics (Aufderheide et al., 2009). The present research confirms Aufderheide's conclusion. An analysis of the empirical data revealed that the documentary makers share a focus on selected ethical concepts which will be discussed below.

The most important concept was the sense of *responsibility* felt by documentary makers towards their subjects to avoid suffering as a consequence of participating in the film, during and post-filming. In their research, (Maccarone (2010) and Winston (2000) came to a similar conclusion.

The sense of responsibility which is felt by documentary makers is interlinked with a sense of *trust* of the subject towards the documentary maker, and *dependency* of the documentary maker on the subject. In most cases, trust, connected to how much could be revealed in the film and was reflected in the rights of the filmmaker to record (Sanders, 2013). Dependency often linked to situations, wherein documentary makers -in order to not lose their subjects- persuaded them to continue participation. The interviewed documentary makers in this study often considered their persuading skills to be part of their professionalism, in line with the findings of Aufderheide and Nichols (Aufderheide et al., 2009; Nichols, 2010). At the same time, it could also lead to ethically difficult

situations, connected to the difference in knowledge and power between the two (Maccarone 2010; Nichols, 2010; Winston, 2000).

Consent is another concept, which is closely linked to ethical considerations. Consent is seen by most documentary makers as the basis of an ethical understanding between documentary makers and subjects. This finding is in line with the research of Nash (2011). One of the most significant concepts enshrined in the relationship and the inequality between documentary makers and subjects was the concept of *taking and giving*. The filmmakers base this process of ‘taking and giving’ on the belief that without ‘exchange’ (which can vary from emotional caretaking based on an intimate, friendship-like relationship to (materialistic) practical ‘gifts’ based on a pragmatic relationship), the subject is exploited by participating in the film. This is in line with Winston’s theory on exploitation of the powerless (Winston, 2000). The filmmakers experienced similar ethical problems and dilemmas around the difficulties, and sometimes even impossibilities, to achieve a balanced exchange between subject and filmmaker. The exchange of money (as a form of reparation) was generally combined with a feeling of unease (unless the sums were very small). This finding too was comparable to the findings of Nash (2011).

The third step towards answering the research question was to research the underlying motivations and aspirations of the documentary makers, to understand on what basis ethical decisions are made. To compare the ethical stance of the interviewed documentary makers, they are positioned in the graph below, which combines Nichols’ axiographics and Renov’s tendencies in documentary filmmaking as discussed in chapter two. (Nichols, 1991; Renov, 1993).

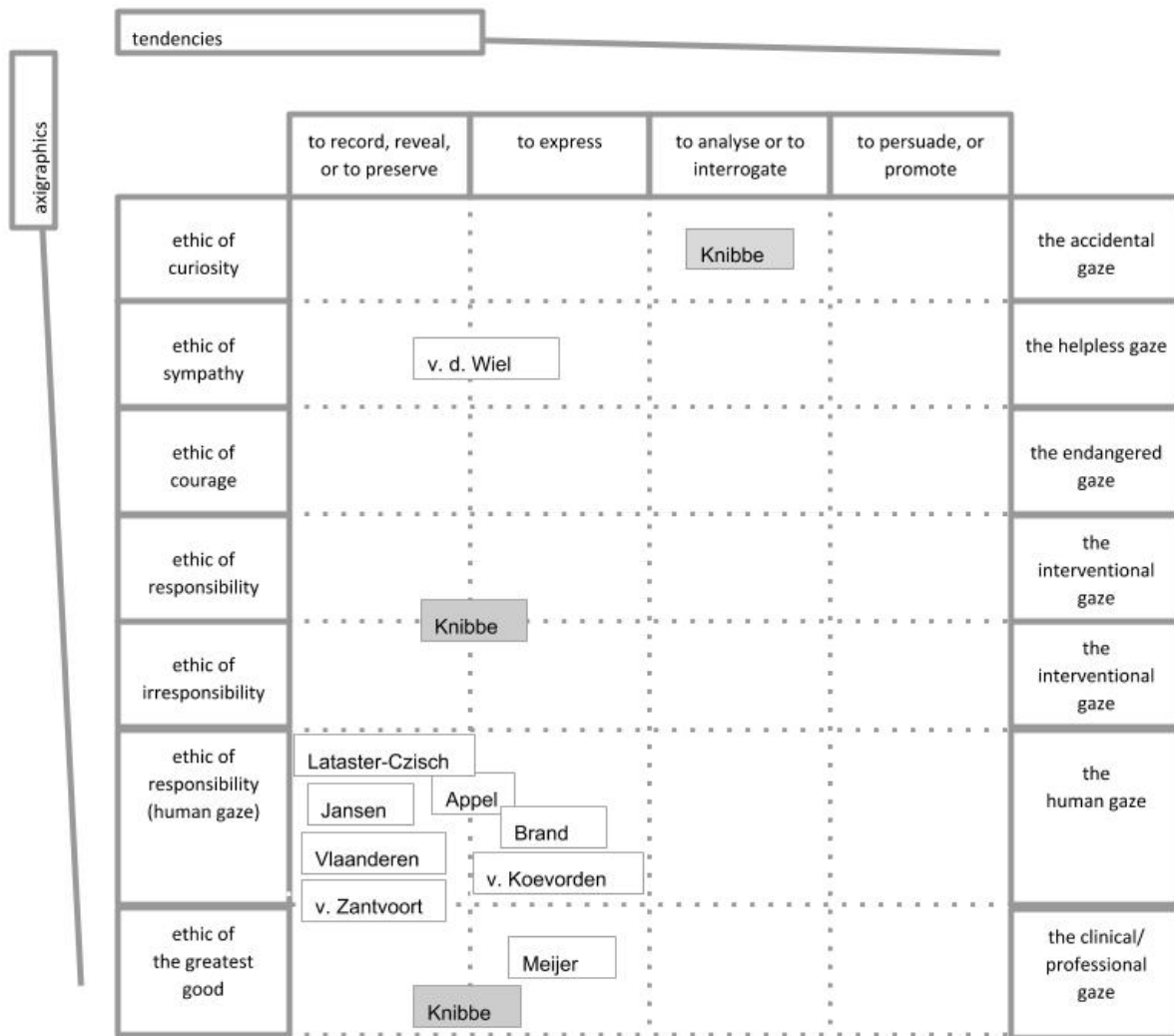


Figure 3 Combination of Axiographics by Nichols and tendencies by Renov showing the ethical and motivational position of the documentary makers

Most interviewed filmmakers work from an *ethic of responsibility*, connected to what Nichols calls ‘the human gaze’ (Nichols, 1991) and their tendency is to either record/reveal/preserve or to express. One documentary maker (Lataster-Czisch) described her ambition to make documentaries precisely in the terminology of Renov: to reveal and preserve history. She also pointed out the significance of doing so authentically and thus different for different film makers. Her perspective resonates with Nichols’ theory of documentary filmmaking addressing the historical world by shaping its representation from a distinctive perspective (Nichols, 2010), but also with Renov’s theory of the function of aesthetics (in the context of the discussion truth claim versus aesthetics). Like Lataster-Czisch, Renov also believes that the personal style and aesthetic of the filmmaker does not refute the power of the film, but through “lyric power” and “musical or poetic qualities” (Renov, 1993, p.35) emphasizes the potency of communicating ideas and feelings.

Two documentary makers show signs of ‘the clinical gaze’, which is often found in journalistic practices, an *ethic of the greatest good*, and one of ‘the helpless gaze’ which is connected to an *ethic of sympathy*.

Most documentary makers, even though they all vary in their approaches and show flexibility according to the circumstances of the project, showed consistency in their ethical stance as well as in their ambitions⁹². This is in line with Nichols’ conviction that every film establishes normative patterns of its own (Nichols, 1991). The different kinds of gazes also give an impression of how documentary makers view, approach, and treat their subjects. A *clinical/professional gaze* suggests distance, while a *human gaze* speaks of empathy (and often intimacy). It reveals the relationship between the documentary makers and their subjects.

Their level of reflexivity on their own ethical stance varied. Most filmmakers had a rather distinct ethical stance, but –with a few exceptions- mentioned that they were not used to describing it. This finding is in line with the theorem that documentary ethics is not a topic that documentary makers easily express, because they consider it part of their individual, private considerations (Nash, 2011, Aufderheide et al., 2009, Sanders, 2012).

The empirical data revealed that, broadly speaking, there are two ways of making ethical decisions in situations that pose ethical dilemmas or ethical problems. Firstly, there is intuitive decision making and secondly decisions are made as a consequence of a (conscious) ethical learning process. Sometimes these two concepts intertwine. Some of the documentary makers defined intuition as a combination of an ‘ethical feeling’ and reflection on past experiences with ethical dilemmas and problems. This description concurs with Nichols’ notion of an ethical learning process of documentary makers (Nichols, 2010).

A few documentary makers, who showed a higher degree of ethical reflection, mentioned ethical understandings that they noted for themselves. Two documentary makers work from an *ethic of love*, one with an *ethic of editing*. Both kinds of ethics focus on the relationship and representation of their subjects. Some documentary makers mentioned the importance of an *ethic of style*, which is connected to representation, but with a focus on the audience (Butchart, 2006).

Coming back to the motivations of the filmmakers: while the graph above (figure 3) was helpful as a tool to bring together theory and empirical data, the concepts of the empirical study showed more nuance and exceeded the graph. *To record/to reveal/to preserve* related to motivations of *nuanced storytelling*, *interest in people* and *satisfaction of curiosity*. *Persuasion* did not show up as a motivation of any of the interviewed documentary makers, while *to analyse* showed up in form of *creating consciousness*. *To express* identified as *to tell a compelling story* and *aesthetics*. Some of the concepts overlapped. *Giving a voice*, *recognition as a maker*, and *earning money* were

⁹² Only Knibbe (in the graph marked in gray) seemed to adapt different ethical stances and also tendencies per project.

concepts which came solely from the empirical data, though *giving a voice* related strongly to ambitions found in *Political Cinema* (Hayward, 2001; Pisters, 2005).

The aspirations documentary makers have for their subjects were *to give back, to fight for a common cause, and to create a truthful representation of the subject*. That these concepts did not surface in the theoretical study on documentary ethics is not surprising, because the discourse on ethics shows that it falls short on researching the experiences of documentary makers concerning their relationship to their subjects (Aufderheide et al., 2009; Donovan, 2008; Nash, 2011; Nichols 2001; Winston, 2000). Nevertheless, the concept of *creating a truthful representation of the subject*, related specifically to the subject and their perception of themselves. Not only do documentary makers aspire to represent what they envision, but vicariously in the eye of the subject, her/his likeness must correspond to her/his ideas of who s/he is. This is what Nichols originally described as a problem regarding the expectations of the audience: “to see an assumed reality” is also true for the expectation of the subject (Nichols, 2010 p. 253). As seen in the empirical data as well as in the literature study the documentary maker has to make choices which can compromise one of these two aspirations as well as having consequences for the films’ connection to reality, a third factor, which often has an ethical dimension, because it could either hurt the subject or compromise the integrity of the filmmaker. The problematic is therefore also linked to representation and its relation to reality (Nichols, 2010; Sanders, 2012).

Fourth and lastly: By reviewing the literature on representation and comparing it with the empirical findings, it was clear that representation is linked to many of the concepts which were mentioned above and often connects to ethical dilemmas and questions, as expected based on the literature study (Sanders, 2012). The aspirations of the documentary makers for their subjects were closely connected to the representation of the subject, as were some motivations. Representation also plays an important role concerning the responsibility of the documentary makers and the trust given to them by their subjects. All interviewed filmmakers agreed that their work –even though based in a setting of reality- is largely subjective and therefore the representation of the subject will also always be subjective in line with Renov’s theory of intrusion and mediation between cinematic sign and its referent (Renov, 1993 p.26). Some documentary makers even doubted the possibility of representation through documentary. At the same time representation was often linked to ethical problems and dilemmas (Nichols, 2010). One such dilemma they expressed is the (often) paradoxical relationship between reality and subjective storytelling (Nichols, 2010; Renov, 1993). In the literature study this topic was thoroughly discussed concerning the definition of documentary. While originally documentary was seen as strongly based in reality, stressing the aspect of it being an instrument of information (Grierson, 1966) and seeing the connection between beauty/aesthetics and documentary as dangerous (Richter, 1986), Renov emphasised the potency of artful documentary (Renov, 1993). Most of the documentary makers saw aesthetics as an important and powerful part of their work, in line with Renov’s theory.

Another ethical dilemma is the possible victimization of the subject, which played a role in several cases of the documentary makers in terms of *instrumentalization* of the subject. Instrumentalization increases the power imbalance between subject and documentary maker (Nash, 2011; Winston, 2000). The chances of reductive, stereotyping and a reestablishment of the subject as powerless victim increases according to Nichols (1991). Studying the cases documentary makers experienced wherein the subject was instrument to the story this proved to be true more often than not.

Several documentary makers expressed their aspiration to give their subjects a voice, to create a podium for them that would lead to *empowerment* (as the opposing concept to victimization) of their subjects. As discussed in chapter two, in the part on third cinema and subaltern studies, the possibility of representing a subject by *giving a voice* can be critically questioned (Spivak, 1988). The findings of this study too showed that there are ethical dilemmas that surround this topic. For one, the subjectivity of the documentary makes it doubtful that subject empowerment can indeed be achieved, because of the alteration of the ‘voice’ of the subject through the ‘voice’ of the documentary maker (Hayward, 2001; Pisters, 2005; Spivak, 1988; Vinebohm, 1993). Also, in third cinema studies, the question arises if the ambitions of the documentary makers ‘to give a voice’ is possible from a position outside of the group s/he wants to represent (Aufderheide, 2007; Hayward, 2001). The problem refers to the same criticism Spivak expresses about the representation of the subaltern (Spivak, 1988).

The last concept connected to representation was *co-authorship*, which held a positive note with regard to the ‘problem of representation’ as well as on how to handle the inequality between documentary makers and subjects. By seeing film as ‘the space’ between documentary maker and subject with space for negotiation, the film can become a *speech-act* (Appadurai, 1990; Deleuze; Nash, 2011). Two of the interviewed documentary makers applied a similar form of practice in their work. They listened to, and incorporated the suggestions of their subjects with regard to the content of the film. This experience was described by documentary makers as very positive, decreasing the feeling of inequality and improving the end result.

In summary, the present research shows that Dutch documentary makers largely deal with ethical problems and dilemmas individually, even though as a professional collective they do approach similar issues and situations. In most cases, their ethical decisions are based on an inner unexpressed/unconscious ethic that is closely connected to their motivation for their work. If the motivation of documentary makers is disconnected from their aspirations for the subject, they are more likely to encounter ethical dilemmas concerning inequality between subject and filmmaker. The possibility to encounter problems with representation is also enhanced.

In general, apart from co-authorship-like approaches, the concept of *taking and giving* was applied to handle ethical dilemmas or take precautions to avoid such dilemmas. By achieving a relationship wherein a balanced *exchange* (of different kinds) took place, the documentary makers felt that they could avoid some of the inequality caused by the filming process.

5.2 Objectives of the research

Understanding how ethical decisions are made in documentary film, based on an examination of the motivations and aspirations of documentary makers and especially their relationship to their subjects, gives an ethically focused insight of how documentary films are made, films that (co)shape reality as we perceive it.

Along the way, the study gives more insight in what drives the documentary makers. This finding contributes to the development of knowledge on media making and meaning making, as well as on humanization in media studies. Furthermore, this research unearths knowledge on how ethical decisions are made in a professional field in which there is a high chance of encountering ethical dilemmas and problems, without a general code of ethics. The knowledge generated in this study can be compared to ethical decision making processes in other disciplines (for example health care or the justice system).

5.3 Limitations of the research

The documentary makers all worked on various film projects in different countries with different subjects and topics. The interviews made use of exemplary cases that the filmmakers chose to highlight in response to the topics of the interview guide. Describing different examples of their experiences at times made it difficult to compare the work practices of the filmmakers and could have had a negative influence on the validity of the research. Despite the use of exemplary cases, through the combination of theories (Nichols, 1991; Renov, 1993) a high degree of consistency could be found in the ethical stance of the documentary makers.

In the analysis, framework concepts emerged, all connected to the experiences of the documentary makers. These concepts were sometimes mentioned by the interviewer as ‘sensitizing concepts’ and could therefore be very close to the terminology of the documentary makers. However, there were also umbrella-terms used by the researcher to organize different concepts, which were close in meaning or comparable. The danger of using umbrella terms and comparing different experiences is that one loses nuance and simplifies its meaning.

Apart from possible simplifications of the research results, there could also be a distortion because of the quintessentially personal nature of the experiences, which in most cases have not previously been discussed by the respondents. It is unclear to what extent the entire meaning of the statements is captured, because they are frequently based on intimate and inward considerations, sometimes connected to feelings of suffering and guilt.

Lastly, the empirical data did not always seem to concur with the findings of the literature study. . This calls for further research. The theories, and the combination of the theories, did however support the structure of the research as shown in figure 1 and 3, which were valuable as guidance throughout the research process.

Given that the research is exploratory, it is not unusual for the empirical data to exceed the literature findings, also considering the fact that the literature study was largely based on studies of documentary text, while this study made use of interviews based on the experience of the documentary makers themselves.

As mentioned in paragraph 3.4 this research is not designed to produce generalizable data, but is exploratory in its nature, based on a rather small, but well-chosen research population. The validity and reliability of the research have been guaranteed by applying different measures according to Boeije, Carter and Little (Carter & Little, 2007; Boeije, 2005).

5.4 Recommendations for further research

The exploratory character of the research creates a basis for further research. One possible starting point for further research would be to focus solely on cases in which documentary makers work with subjects who currently are oppressed and/or exploited, choosing documentary makers who vary in their ethical approaches. By comparing their experiences, the research could venture deeper into specific data on representation and inequality in this research population, having established through this study that these cases have a high probability of data rich experiences. This research could add to the understanding of how documentary makers deal with this specific inequality. A case study which could develop knowledge concerning humanization of media (while consoling subaltern studies). This is relevant to humanistic studies because of its relevance to globalisation as well as dialogue (between different cultures) as well as possibly concerning topics as social justice.

Realizing that some of the documentary makers have been utilizing aspects of co-creation/co-authorship as described by Connolly and Nash, it would be valuable to collect more cases in which documentary make use of methods of co-authorship (Connolly, 2001; Nash, 2011). To expand and deepen the knowledge of this topic could lead to a new kind of discussion on documentary ethics, representation, and inequality, which has been started in political film theory, but has hardly been empirically researched. As concluded from the empirical data, the documentary makers who used methods of co-authorship felt a higher degree of content about their relationship with their subjects, combined with a decreased feeling of inequality. To research co-authorship could also further knowledge development on meaning-making in media making, relevant to humanistic media studies, again because of its connection to humanization as well as dialogue on a global level. The methods used in co-creation could possibly be transferred to other disciplines, creating new ways of communication and dialogue between foreign cultures and countries.

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Films

An American Family (Craig Gilbert, 1972)

Battleship Potemkin (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925)

Een Bitterzoete Verleiding (Monique Rahel Nolte, 2007)

Enjoy Poverty (Renzo Martens, 2008 NL/BE)

Facing the Music (Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, 2001)

Grizzly Man (Werner Herzog, 2005)

Hoop Dreams (Steve James, 1994)

Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, 1929)

Of Great Events And Ordinary People (Raoul Ruiz, 1979)

On the bride's side (Gabriele Del Grande, Antonio Augugliaro, Khaled Soliman Al Nassiry, 2014)

Roger and Me (Michael Moore, 1989)

Sweetie (Menna Laura Meijer, 2008)

The battle of Algiers (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966)

Triumph of the Will (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935)

Up series (Michael Apted, 1964)

Appendix I

Interview Guide (in Dutch)

Ter voorbereiding: (bij de sommige vragen is het makkelijker om voorbeelden aan te halen)

1. Naam, beroep/professie
2. Wat is een documentaire? (voor jou)
3. Hoe benader je een personage in eerste instantie?
4. Hoe zou jij je relatie met je personages beschrijven? (bijvoorbeeld een moeilijk moment, of een mooi moment)
5. Was je ooit in een moreel dilemma m.b.t. een personage (relatie met een personage)?
6. Was je ooit in een moreel dilemma m.b.t. een personage (relatie met een personage)?
7. Weet jij waarom een personage meewerkt?
Wat vind je hiervan?
8. Wat is je motivatie voor dit werk?
9. Heb je een doel/aspiratie met/voor je personage(s)?
10. Is er een verbinding tussen het eindproduct/de film en de personage? (Wat is de relatie tussen de twee)