CHAPTER 9

Niccolò Bruna's Ethical Process as Social Engagement: Upholding Human Stories against a Backdrop of Globalisation

David H. Fleming and Filippo Gilardi

> The different perceptions of the same event are interesting. I like the idea that individuals manufacture of themselves or the image of themselves that they build to be shown to others.
>
> Niccolò Bruna[1]

Introduction

Born in Turin, Italy, Niccolò Bruna is an independent filmmaker and producer who has been experimenting with the expressive tools of documentary-film since attending the EICTV (Escuela Internacional de Cine y Television) filmmaking School in Cuba in 1999. He moved to Barcelona in 2014 adding his name to the Italian phenomenon known as the 'fuga dei cervelli' (a 'brain drain').[2] Somewhat appropriately, his growing body of films highlights the effects of moving bodies and shifting identities undergoing, in one form or another, migration in-between different nation states. In this chapter we take the opportunity to view Bruna's documentary corpus holistically and investigate what it means to be an ethical documentary filmmaker in the epoch that the Mexican-Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel calls the age of 'globalisation and exclusion'.[3]

The independent forms that Bruna's work assumes are informed by his formative experiences as well as by the topical subject-matter of his *impegno* (social engagement), which is characterised by a personal humanist approach, as discussed hereafter. Certainly, Bruna's work is that of a global itinerant, foregrounding human interest stories against the prejudicial and exploitative backdrop of globalisation. Although this demands that he research and film in a diverse range of global locations (which now includes Italy, Brazil, India, China, Cuba and Ethiopia), we can still identify a loose yet consistent series of themes, tropes and motifs that stitch together his expanding body of heterogeneous (and heteroglossic) work. These can be broadly adumbrated here as being linked to: (1) the director's

preference for a dispersed or distributed mode of storytelling that leads to a multi-perspectival and polycentric view of a given situation, milieu, or event; (2) an ethically 'withdrawn' or absented *auteur* persona, that foregoes any authoritative 'voice-over' conventions, while allowing framing, editing and the characters themselves to build and convey the multi-aspectual stories; and (3) a tropological favouring of female perspectives and characters with regard to the various events and stories.

Modus operandi

Over the past fifteen years, Bruna has striven to produce quality films with a distinctive human interest that grant his viewers a variety of perspectives onto important global events and issues. During this time, he also honed his skills and praxis by studying with master filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami in 2003, and Werner Herzog in 2008. To date, Bruna's films have won several international accolades and awards, including a nomination for the David di Donatello award for *Dust: The Great Asbestos Trial* (2011). His more recent film *Magicarena* (2014), co-directed with Andrea Prandstraller, has received theatrical releases in Canada, mainland China and Taiwan. The film inspired a follow-up project, the co-directed *Hui He. The Soprano from the Silk Road* (2017), a film on the globally renowned Chinese opera singer Hui He, considered the best Aida and Butterfly in the world.

Bruna's first attempt at documentary filmmaking occurred when he was a student (he variously studied in Turin, Cuba and Rome). Arguably, the best way to approach Bruna as a filmmaker is in terms of what we might call an 'ethnographic documentarian': a label that helps account for his extended forms of covert participation in his subjects' daily lives, 'watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through formal or informal interviews . . . gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of the inquiry'.[4] When asked, however, Bruna describes his own filmmaking practice in different terms. In a filmmaking workshop in China, for instance, he compared his filmmaking process to that of preparing a meal, and in such a context highlighted how Chinese and Italian gastronomic cultures were comparably renowned. In an interview with the authors of this chapter, he described his work in terms of an open and evolving process, informed by prior critical thought. Throughout his career the central idea or constant ideal informing his filmmaking has been his conviction that in order to remain true to life, filmmaking must be an ongoing process, because 'life itself is a process':

> As John Lennon said '*Life is what* happens while you are busy making other plans'. I am interested in showing these events in life that people are not probably

> noticing at the moment they occur, but are interesting for me. Despite my goal being the final film, my interest is in the process of documenting what happens. If we were focussing more on the processes than on the results people would be happier. It is so boring when you have something achieved, fixed, finalised because . . . the process is the story to be told. I took that from Pirandello, an Italian writer. He was focussing on how things are changing and transforming and the impossibility of being there when things are getting fixed because . . . they die and [thus] creativity dies as well.[5]

Somewhat complicating the idea that his filmmaking should emerge from the organic process of life, as it unfolds before his camera, we must also recall that Bruna was educated at EICTV in Cuba, where he describes having learned to become a 'Marxist filmmaker'. He recalls benefitting from the pre-production sessions that were practiced there, where debate and dialectics with other crew members and filmmakers helped shape a theoretically sound pitch and plan. 'When I learned filmmaking in Cuba, the debates and arguments that happened before shooting were very productive. It was wonderful. We had to justify and think about everything'.[6] Here, the goal became to critically work through the entire filmmaking project in advance, before recording a single frame. Paradoxically, the ideal project thus informs and impacts the subsequent act of filmmaking, which is anterior to an encounter with the unfolding process of life that becomes the subject of the film. In this sense, the organic 'process' originates in the mind of the director, who then uses his camera – which Bruna describes as a 'democratic tool' for investigating and engaging with the world – and editing, to craft and sculpt this filmic idea out of the unfolding process of life.

If we noted above that Bruna typically absents himself as a voice of authority in his films – which would be ethically problematic for a white European director filming in post-colonial Africa, China and India – he does still recognise his directorial role as a privileged one with regard to documentary storytelling. In trying to explain this, Bruna says that, though there is a 'shared reality' everyone must confront, it is a reality on which we each have our own unique perspective. The role of a documentary filmmaker is to offer his or her perception of 'the truth', while trying to remain fair and true to their and others' visions. In this sense we can recognise parallels emerging between Bruna's multi-perspectival filmmaking techniques, his notions of documentary truth and the forms of *perspectivism* generated by Werner Herzog's work – a director with whom he studied in 2008. Indeed, as Katrina Mitcheson reminds us, rather than 'merely observing or recording' his characters, Herzog's films interweave their various different perspectives, along with the director's own characteristic worldview.[7] As such,

she and others describe a 'Nietzschean' notion of truth emerging in Herzog's films, emerging from the manifold web of perspectives and vantages onto the story or event.[8] No doubt, we can locate echoes of these ideas in Bruna's (otherwise paradoxical) pedagogical advice to younger student filmmakers, when advising them to use the camera in a 'democratic' fashion, while simultaneously recognising that as filmmakers, they ultimately 'make reality in the editing room'.[9]

Panorama of Global Stories

Bruna's artistic film *Magicarena* (2014) may be regarded as a cypher that helps to make tangible the director's abstract or diagrammatic approach to documentary storytelling. This film gravitates around the magnificent 2000 year old *Arena di Verona*, capturing the trials and tribulations of the workers and artists as they prepare for a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, during the Centenary show of the most famous operatic festival in the world. Bruna consciously decided in advance not to focus on the story of the main divo or diva, and to instead foreground the collective effort: the experiences of a mime artist, a prop man, a trombone player, a background extra, a chorister and the assistant stage director. As such, the collective preparatory process leading up to the realisation of this spectacular show becomes the dynamic centre of the film. By offering the perspectives of so many remarkable individuals, who came together to make the event happen, the film – which, thus, one may regard as connotatively Marxist – allows life and art, fact and fiction, local and global, past, present and future, to overlap: the contemporary reality of the international production, the historical story of *Aida* set in ancient Egypt which is reinvigorated with a distinct futuristic science fictional aesthetic, Verdi's nineteenth-century opera which is housed and articulated within the magnificent setting of the imperial Roman amphitheatre.

At an abstract or symbolic level we can recognise how Bruna adopts a typically postmodern or postcolonial attitude in *Magicarena*, demonstrating that even if (to momentarily purloin a line from Shakespeare) 'all the world's a stage' or vice-versa, the ethical thing to do is to bring to the fore the stories of the typically backgrounded or less privileged 'off-stage' characters and players. For if the story of *Aida* itself focusses upon a 'transnational' struggle, important historical bodies – and their associated Leviathan-esque bodies politic – from Egypt and Ethiopia, the production of the contemporary show is also marked by countless transnational cooperations, including amongst others: the direction of the Catalan team *La Fura dels Baus*, the contributions of a Moldavian

performer, and a Chinese opera singer star – who subsequently is the focus of Bruna's next co-directed documentary.

Recognition of *Magicarena*'s cross-border themes, alongside its foregrounding of multiple marginalised perspectives upon the grand events, allows us to use this artistic film as a key for identifying comparable themes, tropes and concepts at work in Bruna's other – arguably more politically and socially engaged – global filmmaking projects. For example, while it would be possible to (tenuously) geopolitically link together the historical Ethiopian character of *Aida* to the strong female subjects of *A Closed Mouth Catches no Flies* (2015) – filmed on location in the contemporary Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia – it is arguably the two films' interwoven multi-perspectival forms, and their privileging of otherwise peripheral characters, that makes them the most interesting from an auteurial perspective.

The latter documentary begins and ends with the lively sounds of Ethiopian jazz saxophonist Gétatchèw Mèkurya's track *Akalé wubé*. Although this is initially deployed as an extradiegetic score, the vibrant tune is soon-after diegetically grounded, so that it appears to emanate from the tinny speakers of a bajaj (a small taxi-tricycle), which literally leads the film's audience into the town of Wuchale, of a 'predominantly female' population – as dutifully conveyed by the bajaj's male driver. Thereafter, Bruna opts to zoom in on four different female characters: Tsehai, a police officer and single mother who deals with crimes against women and children (such as rape and domestic abuse); Asrebab, a domestic house cleaner; Toiba, a shopkeeper and mother of three, who escaped forced labour in Saudi Arabia; and Tringo, a student who walks two hours back and forth to school, each day, to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

Using his camera to frame and follow these four women as they go about their daily lives, Bruna manages to document various interactions, in and around their communities, and milieu. All the while each protagonist talks reflexively about their lives, hopes and dreams, directly to the director/audience. Such methods ultimately allow Bruna to open up a network of vistas into this marginalised world, and unearth a series of intersectional issues that make tangible a variety of overlapping social, geopolitical and biopolitical, problems related to poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, exclusion and the lack of opportunities. In this manner, the sum of *A Closed Mouth*'s four separate threads combine to become greater than its parts: the four complimentary biographical narratives draw the viewers' attention to broader patterns and in-forming events relevant to other contemporary Ethiopians, and toward a broadened geopolitical tapestry.

At the level of his oeuvre, we might recognise how the different geopolitical locations that Bruna opts to film both *Magicarena* and *A Closed Mouth* in allow for radically diverging and asymmetric vantage points upon the nature and realities of globalisation, and upon his pespective view of the Global North and Global South. Thus, those filmed in Italy can be seen to benefit from the flows of bodies and ideas coming together to create fantastic spectacles that enrich the cultural lives of many, while the excluded and marginalised women in the horn of Africa reveal the negative dimensions of these same processes from that particular geopolitical location. Similar thematic concerns become knitted together most overtly in the complex multidimensional story of *Dust* (2011), which demands that Bruna increasingly follow the tangle of different story threads all across the globe, interconnecting a multitude of worlds, characters and locations.

The Glocal Perspective

Dust begins by focussing on a key international court hearing taking place in Bruna's hometown of Turin, involving the multinational company Eternit, which faces claims of having caused the deaths of around 30,000 former Italian plant workers and members of the local population at Casale Monferrato. The film initially focusses on the stories and feelings of the victims and surviving family members of those affected by the poisonous material, which over a protracted period of time is known to slowly suffocate and overcome those exposed to it. In an early scene, Bruna invites the audience to ride along with the plaintiffs and witnesses in a bus, heading to the court room. There, a man shows the camera a two-page spread in a local newspaper, which is covering the trial he will later give evidence in. Later, viewers are introduced to other key figures, including Luisa Minazzi, who Bruna joins inside her home as she rakes through her own personal archive of press clippings. In her front room Minazzi speaks of being the founding member of the environmental association in Casale, in the 1980s. She subsequently became the town's environmental councillor between 1990 and 1995, and then an activist, who was responsible for kick-starting the asbestos decontamination process in Italy. Dealing with Eternit has been a colossal lifelong struggle, she explains, as the ongoing battle against them begins to unfold in court. Throughout the film the intimate access to personal experiences, which Minazzi offers Bruna, extends to her trips to the hospital for various scans and treatments, after she became diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2006 as a result of asbestos contamination. In this sense, Minazzi is traced fighting a battle on two

fronts and scales: the biological and the political. Such ideas are reinforced by her comments – given to the camera whilst having her hair dyed in her bathroom – when she explains that after her diagnosis, she wanted to show other victims that sufferers can continue to live, uphold a positive attitude and fight for justice, despite their shortened life expectancy.

Undoubtedly, the recorded testimony of such characters grants the film an intense emotional texture, but on account of the deep historical nature of the story, and the complex politics surrounding the finances of the multinational market with its various 'bodies' – raw materials, industrial asbestos, transportation vessels, legal bodies, transnational labourers and contractors, and so on – mapping the boundaries of this complex story demanded that Bruna also zoom out, to direct his attention elsewhere, on events unfolding or transpiring in far-flung locations, including India, Brazil and Canada. Whatever the subject matter, Bruna encourages viewers to perceive the unfolding story on an ever-larger scale: while local Italian justice is sought for the deceased and still suffering, the struggle is not merely local in nature, but it is rather a struggle against a multi-million-dollar multinational corporation, that yields considerable lobbying power, is able to take advantage of various legal loopholes and can manipulate various international legal authorities. By opening his film up to these larger fractal dimensions – exploring the economics of an asbestos mine in Canada, the needs of builders and the homeless in India and so on – Bruna refuses to let go of the emotional trials and tribulations of the Italian individuals with whom the film began.

Later in the film, Bruna re-directs viewers' attention to the Italian bus on the way to court. This time, two eighty-year-old women erupt into a heated discussion, ignited by their shared frustrations at the slow pace of the trial. The first claims that the victims have ultimately 'obtained very little'. In response to this, Bruna then pans left to pick out another character, seated on the opposite aisle of the bus, and wearing an eye patch, who contests this idea: 'What? We have obtained a trial!' she retorts, and then continues, 'after thirty years of struggle we have made a big step: the most important trial in Europe!' The hand-held camera here zooms in on her visibly angered countenance, as she continues: 'So it's nothing!? How can you say we have achieved nothing?' Conceding some ground, the first woman now attributes her dissatisfaction to the other victims and plaintiffs, who chose to stay home, as the trial drags out. Her interlocutor then reminds her: 'But you do it for yourself, I do it for me, [and] for those who have died. And for my friends who have gone'. It is in this sense that we can grasp Bruna's work more generally, as offering a human (if not humanist) perspective upon the wider processes of globalisation.

The end of *Dust* delivers forth a mixed bag of emotions and feelings. For if the actual Turin trial is ultimately lost in the end – allowing companies such as Eternit to continue to expose around 70 per cent of the world's population to an incredibly dangerous (and highly profitable) carcinogenic material – Bruna ethically foregrounds many of the small battles won by the victims, whose struggles demonstrate that it is the very act of standing up against powerful opponents that is important, as this can inspire change and offer hope. The final information relayed to viewers before the film's credits roll is constituted by three screens of white text overlaying a silent black background. The first informs viewers that Minazzi sadly lost her fight to mesothelioma in 2010, before the trial reached its end. The second notes that: 'The asbestos industry is still growing in the world. The Government of Quebec is supporting the reopening of the second asbestos mine in the country, encouraged by new Indian investors'. Only the final message offers a glimpse of some form of future hope or justice:

> On 13 February 2012 the court of First Instance of Turin sentenced [the company's president] Stephan Schmidheiny and [the company's CEO] Jean-Louis Marie de Cartier de Marchienne to 16 years of prison and around 100 million Euro in compensation.

Global Migration and Exclusion

After *Dust*, Bruna's next feature-length documentary, *The Travel Agent* (2015), chose to focus on the human dimensions and consequences of US–Cuban geopolitical relations. Filmed on the streets of Cuba, this documentary foregrounds the life and work of a woman named Lourdes, a 58-year-old Cuban national, whose job involves counselling thousands of Cubans seeking out entry visas for travel to the US. Bruna's camera is drawn to Lourdes, constantly gravitating around her home and work as she coaches countless hopefuls on how to best answer the tricky US embassy visa questions. The film builds up an intense intimacy with Lourdes, as Bruna captures her expertly plying her trade, in a series of medium-close-ups, or in a close-up angle for the director/camera as she reflexively discusses her life and work with others. In key scenes, recorded in her small office or the surrounding street, Bruna's intimate framings manage to capture the shrewd and savvy practitioner helping to fine tune her customers' stories, so that they have the best chances of succeeding. By collaging together a series of such encounters, which blend the life stories of the visa seekers with the experiences and anecdotes of Lourdes, the film builds up a dynamic living picture of the broader contextual situation: the forced and painful separation of countless families and loved ones.

Ironically, despite helping many other Cubans to travel to the US, Lourdes tells Bruna that she has never been able to visit her own mother, son, five brothers, two grandsons and twenty-three nephews who now live in Florida: 'I quench the thirst of others every day', she says mournfully to the camera, 'yet there's not a drop of water for me'. Throughout the film, the focus upon human relations highlights how organic communities can spontaneously emerge, with people coming together to pool their knowledge, skills and resources, in order to help others. Capturing these moments of human connection results in a string of memorable scenes, including one where a group of friends and helpful strangers, band together to host a farewell party for a successful candidate, who will shortly depart for the US – presumably forever. After a long wait over the course of the film, Lourdes' own interview date is finally set. She thus switches roles from objective professional expert to subjective and vulnerable applicant.

As Lourdes' interview date grows nearer, Bruna's intimate access to her home and life makes her mounting excitement and anxiety palpable. Viewers thus become emotionally drawn in to her story, as she speaks of her heartfelt desire to visit her dying mother, who emigrated during the Sixties. In a series of memorable scenes Lourdes also locates, befriends and hires a traditional *Santería* healer, to help her petition supernatural beings, in order to positively influence the upcoming decision. At these moments Lourde's emotional investment is expertly relayed by close-ups that capture her affected speech, face and body language. On the day of the interview Bruna records Lourdes entering the embassy with many other hopefuls. His camera, though, remains outside with her partner, who frets and worries alone in her absence. Cutting to a later moment, after what seems an eternity, her partner appears framed alone on the street. When she finally spots Lourdes emerging from her bureaucratic ordeal, the perception of her flat dejected body language directly communicates the negative result of the decision. As she and her partner hug, we learn that the dejected Lourdes must continue to endure her indefinite separation.

The multiple sad stories, interwoven throughout the documentary with Lourdes' own story, make clear what is meant by the notion of 'exclusion and difference' in the era of globalisation. Indeed, the film not only allows the voice of multiple excluded Cubans from the Global South to be heard, but also makes us ask questions about the few who go on to become illegal or legal US migrants in the Global North. What realities and futures lie in wait for these poor Cuban migrants entering the US, where different forms of economic and cultural exclusion, exploitation, persecution and marginalisation surely await them?

The theme of migration, so central to *The Travel Agent*, also becomes an important thematic vector threading together Bruna's wider body of work. The social and human consequences of migration become the central subject of several other documentaries and shorts, including *Storie di paglia* (*Straw Stories*, 2003), *Verso casa* (*Homeward*, 2004), *My Nigerian Sisters* (2005) and *Taormina Taj Mahal* (2008). Common to these films is Bruna's focus on migrant and displaced communities that attempt to recapture or retake possession of ancient and traditional ways of life, including now forgotten rituals and practices. Among other things, these films capture and convey how permanent migrants and diasporas can come to idealise their native land, or how returning migrants often struggle to rediscover what they remember/imagined was once there and is now lost.

Storie di Paglia, for instance, focuses on a rural population forced to leave the Italian Alps at the beginning of the twentieth century in order to find employment in France, Switzerland and Germany. Bruna documents the consequences of depopulation upon the mountain villages surrounded by fields of rye, while also showing how a cereal crop, far from being a mere source of nutrition, plays a major role in defining a community's identity. *Storie di paglia* thus attempts to testify to a nearly lost culture and ecology, emerging from a trans-kingdom nexus of plants, animals, humans and habitat. In one of the short episodes entitled *L'orso di paglia* (*Rye Bear*) Bruna records the events of a traditional carnival, where villagers fashion bear costumes out of the rye straw, which is then worn by a male villager as he scares children and entertains the adults. Villagers openly discuss the figure of the rye bear, highlighting that although they have been performing such a ritual since they were little kids, they retain no memory of how the tradition started, or from what it derived. As one resident explains in a voice-over: 'During Carnival every possible kind of joke is made. I do not know who dreamed to make this one of the bear, though'.

A concomitant migration period becomes the focus of *Taormina Taj Mahal*, wherein Bruna explores the relocation of Italian peoples to the United States during the nineteenth and twntienth centuries. The Italian communities of Brooklyn and Atlantic City allow Bruna to investigate the idealisation of a lost native land, while interrogating the population's nostalgic feelings and desires to return to, or uphold, more traditional customs. The focus here is very much on the preservation of an imagined national identity within a different geopolitical space – albeit one that is itself based on symbolic objects bound up in the living memory of the past, rather than on the actual evolving state of the country and its organic relation to unfolding events. Such ideas are made overt in one scene where the owner of a record shop explains that he himself prefers the 'old America', in the

same way that he prefers the 'old Italy', which he believes to be better than the contemporary one.

The idea of immigrant idealisation is investigated again by Bruna in *Verso casa* (*Homeward*) and in *My Nigerian Sisters*. In juxtaposition to the romanticising of Italy as a longed for 'home country', these documentaries paint a picture of Italy as a dreamed of geopolitical 'Promised Land'. In *Homeward*, for example, Bruna incorporates the story of nine people hailing from Morocco, Albania and Nigeria, who ended up being expelled by the Italian government[10] following their various and harrowing migratory experiences. The migratory process is here framed in terms of what we might call a deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of unwelcomed people, who are torn between the impetus to seek a better future outside their homeland and their conscious (and/or self-conscious) re-routing and re-rooting back to their home countries. These include the stories of Khalid, a young Moroccan man who struggles to find employment; Edmond, a 29 year-old Albanian man who travelled to Italy to find a proper job in order to support his retired parents; Faith, a 25 year-old Nigerian woman who feels she has lost time by living outside Nigeria, and Becky, another Nigerian who thanks to the Alnima project learnt how to become an hairdresser in Italy, in order to then better reintegrate into her home country.

In these films Bruna blends ethics and aesthetics in an expressive manner. To take but one illustrative case in point, we might turn to when Bruna interviews Edmond, an Albanian topographic engineer. First, Bruna opts to frame Edmond in medium close-up standing in the streets of Albania. In an off-centre framing, Edmond speaks in Italian of working for the Albanian regime for over thirty years before moving to Italy. As he tells in voice-over his story of migration and spiralling return, Bruna inserts a montage of beautiful long shots depicting Edmond moving through, or seated within, beautiful and bucolic aestheticised landscapes. The first shot frames him jogging through fields and along a dilapidated train track, which is scored with melancholic music, as he speaks to the audience in voice-over: 'When the new party took power they wanted to put me in prison, because here politics operates on a system of revenge. People who work for one party cannot work for another'. The next scene shows him in silhouette, sat within an unusual wooden structure, which appears somewhat cage-like in its dark outlines. Being left without a job, and threatened with arrest, Edmond was forced to leave his family and country: first attaining a Greek visa in order to expatriate, and then move on to Italy. Returning several years later, Edmond voices his frustration that his prospects have not improved. 'Things only changed cosmetically', he says. As if to highlight this idea aesthetically, Bruna here opts to frame

Edmond standing in front of the old buildings where his parents live, and which have recently been painted over with bright new colours in an attempt to make them look more modern.

Unfortunately, many other characters appearing in the film also fail to be successfully reintegrated into their countries of origin. This also becomes an emotionally charged topic explored in *My Nigerian Sisters*, which relates the experiences of three Nigerian women – Rita, Rosemary and Joy (fictional names) – who were repatriated after working as prostitutes in Europe. In this film, Bruna opts to record interviews with his subjects, building relationships with the women as they tell of their experiences of prostitution in Italy, Spain and France. Throughout the course of the film, viewers are also shown their failed attempts to reintegrate back into Nigerian life, after having been forced to return in 2005. While *My Nigerian Sisters* highlights a range of comparable topics and themes to those which appeared in *Homeward* – including human trafficking, migration, repatriation from Europe and the double identity of migrants – the three protagonists here encounter uniquely incredible difficulties when they return to their homeland. Indeed, these women appear to be nearly destroyed by their migration experience, and left seemingly without any hopes for their future, in a country where their own kin initially encouraged them to take up the challenge of parting from. The latter are the very families and communities that invested in their emigration out of Nigeria in the first place. For various reasons, the three women do not want to travel again. One of them, now with child, has developed AIDS. Another is in a state of depression and had previously attempted suicide. The third had run away from her relatives in order not to succumb to their demands, and as a result feels deprived of any meaningful relationships.

Their shared perceptions of having hit-rock-bottom ultimately serve the purpose of bringing these three women together. In the interview they note that they now also recognise each other as 'sisters'. By bringing these women to viewers, through a series of shots that frame all three bodies together, the film aesthetically underscores how they created a new supportive community, held together by mutual solidarity forged by their shared experiences of globalisation's exclusion effect. This is the human story Bruna opts to salvage from this documentary excursion, showing his global audiences how strong women can come together to help each other survive. Once more Bruna manages to use his camera, framings and editing, to highlight how human dignity defies the contingency and catastrophe of a given situation. It conveys the message that it is these women's resilience, or what we might call their 'survival intelligence', that allows them to seize a future, whatever challenges this may involve.

Concluding Thoughts

Despite his having recently moved to Barcelona Bruna remains an important Italian filmmaker and documentarian whose work is instructively symptomatic of, and critically engaged with, processes of globalisation. Over the past fifteen years, Bruna has endeavoured to carry out quality film productions with an unique human interest for human plight, which concomitantly offers viewers a range of perspectives on various national and international social issues. As we have shown, his documentary films defy institutionalised formulas and invariably strive to open up the worlds of, and grant a voice to, those who for various economical (*Dust*), logistical (*Magicarena*), or political (*The Travel Agent, My Nigerian Sisters*) reasons are not normally heard, and are cast away from the limelight. Although his films often intercept the stories of people undergoing or enduring intense and exceptional hardship (including disease, legal fights, visas applications and international migration), the ethical and emotional motivation driving Bruna's work is the need to draw attention to human stories and crises, as they are catalysed by processes of globalisation, and which give us cause for concern but which are not completely deprived of hope. Our analysis of Bruna's documentaries has also shown how the filmmaker most often works to interweave his idiosyncratic and directorial point of view around a diverse range of stories and perspectives that collectively draw our attention to a range of political issues, which are pertinent to the era of globalisation and exclusion. By so doing, his films also demand that viewers in turn examine and question their own global situations and situatedness in relation to such unsettling depictions.

Notes

1. Fleming and Gilardi (2016).
2. The expression refers to the thousands of well-educated, creative and innovative Italian people leaving the country due to the lack of opportunities, poor working conditions and high living costs.
3. Dussel (2013), p. xv.
4. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), p. 3.
5. Fleming and Gilardi (2016).
6. Ibid.
7. Mitcheson (2013), p. 348ff.
8. For example, see also Eldridge (2019).
9. Fleming and Gilardi (2016).
10. Under Article n.12 of the law of the 6 March 1998 Bill, n.40, allowing the Ministry of Interior to expel foreigners for reasons of public order or state security.

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Verso casa (*Homeward*), documentary, directed by Niccolò Bruna, Italy: Kinoetika, 2004.