

Documenting Migration in Contemporary Video Art: Bouchra Khalili's *Mapping Journey Project*

In the past decade, images of refugee boats and other related footage from the Mediterranean have been widely produced and circulated both online and in broadcast media, making the refugee question in Europe not just a humanitarian and political crisis, but also a crisis of images.

In this overwhelmingly mediated political landscape, it is perhaps unsurprising that works in film and video dealing with the subject of Mediterranean migration have increased exponentially, forming what art historian T. J. Demos calls a “migratory turn” in the arts and humanities. Caught between documentation and critique; witnessing and formalizing; works of visual art dealing with migration or other humanitarian issues are often precariously positioned in terms of the ethics of their production and spectatorship.

This paper will analyze French-Moroccan artist Bouchra Khalili’s video installation *Mapping Journey Project* (2008 – 2011) through the lens of the ethics of representation. Drawing from documentary filmmaking scholarship, it will look at the ways in which the work performs many of the debates around the aestheticization and sensationalization of individual stories of displacement. How does Khalili push back against mainstream media representations through her formal choices? How does she use the language of the displaced in relation to the language of images? How does her unique representation of memory and testimony compare to other video and film works dealing with the subject of migration?

Short bio

Argyro Nicolaou is a scholar and filmmaker from the island of Cyprus. She received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and Critical Media Practice from Harvard University in 2018. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies at Princeton University, where she is working on her first book, about the representation of Mediterranean migrations in literature, film, and visual art from the mid-20th century to the present.