When I Became a Threat

A TV Documentary about the Historical Roots and Political Instrumentalisation of Migration

by
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A dissertation by practice submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for MA in Journalism & Media Communications (QQI)

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August 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism & Media Communications, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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Dated: 7th August 2025

ABSTRACT

"When I became a Threat" is a TV documentary that critically investigates contemporary political discourse and its role in the construction of the immigrant as a threat within the contexts of the Global North. Structured in three acts, the film outlines a historical panorama of migration, from its constant presence throughout human history to its recent political instrumentalisation. The film adopts an essayistic approach, combining personal experience, a subjective tone, interviews, and archival footage to explore when and how the migratory phenomenon became embedded in political narratives that associate migration with the loss of national identity, economic crisis, and social insecurity.

The audiovisual format was chosen for its ability to reach a broader audience and offer more tools for constructing a narrative that merges elements of collective history to build a personal story and vice versa. The narrative techniques employed were selected to facilitate a deeper understanding of both macrostructural contexts and the individual human stories that are intertwined within the migration debate.

The film also aims to provide viewers with a better understanding of the use of fear politics as a strategy, the binary simplification between "us" and "them" in media and political discourses, and the symbolic construction of the immigrant as a scapegoat during times of crisis. The work further identifies the effects of this discursive construction on the legitimisation of authoritarian policies and the weakening of public debate and social justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest thanks go to my family, who remained on the other side of the ocean. To my parents, Cristiane de Fátima and Hélio Rosa, for being my foundation, even from afar. To my sisters, Karina and Bianca, who have always offered me support and laughter.

And to Bruno, my companion in this journey. Thank you for walking beside me, for sharing both silence and words, and for reminding me that together we are a force in living, feeling, and perceiving. Here, far from home, I found in us another place of belonging.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This Dissertation by Practice is a TV documentary called When I Became a Threat. It investigates the construction of the immigrant as a threat within contemporary public discourse. The film aims to challenge dominant narratives surrounding migration, critically examining the symbolic and political frameworks that inform public perception and media representation of immigrants.

The origin of this research lies in a personal interest in the complex relationship between migration, identity, and belonging. As an immigrant living in Ireland, I have directly experienced the cultural, social, and emotional impacts that such displacement entails. From that lived experience emerged the desire to understand and explore, through the documentary language, how the figure of the immigrant has been constructed, instrumentalised, and perceived within the contemporary collective imagination.

The objective of this work is to critically investigate how the image of the immigrant has been increasingly associated with discourses of threat, instability, and crisis, especially in contexts of political and media polarisation. In contrast to this reductionist approach, the film seeks to reclaim the historical perspective of migration as a recurring, structural, and essential phenomenon in the formation of modern societies.

The choice of the television documentary format stems from the power this language offers in weaving together personal narratives, critical analysis, and audiovisual resources to construct a message that is both sensitive and informed. By positioning myself as narrator-character, the documentary begins from a personal perspective but aims to engage in a global debate. Subjectivity, in this context, is not an obstacle but a tool for engagement and connection with the viewer.

Inspired by authors such as Hein de Haas, who, in '*How Migration Really Works?*', deconstructs widely disseminated myths about migration, I realised the urgency of expanding this debate beyond the generalisations and simplifications that often characterise public discourse. His work

was decisive in shaping the conceptual direction of this project, as it challenged some of my own beliefs, formed through both personal experience and everyday conversations.

The documentary, therefore, is born from the tension between experience and theory, between lived reality and narrative construction. It proposes a more humanised view of migratory processes, reclaiming their complexity and historicity while questioning the dichotomous narrative of "pro" or "anti-immigration" that so often impoverishes the debate.

In this context, Brazil, my country of origin, also becomes a key element for reflection. It is a country whose identity has been historically shaped by migratory flows, cultural encounters (and confrontations), and by the constant reinvention of its modes of belonging. It is based on this understanding that the documentary seeks to build bridges between past and present, between subjective experiences and global dynamics.

The following chapters of this thesis will address the many aspects of the research question. Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework that supports the work, discussing authors who examine identity, representation, migration policy, and discourse. Chapter Three describes the methodological process of documentary construction, detailing the narrative, aesthetic, and ethical decisions involved. Chapter Four discusses the main findings and reflections that emerged throughout the project, contextualising them in relation to the initial objectives. Finally, Chapter Five presents the conclusions, limitations, and possible future developments of the work.

CHAPTER TWO: EVIDENCE OF RESEARCH

This chapter presents the main lines of investigation that supported the creation of the documentary, both in terms of content and form. It begins by examining migration as a constant phenomenon throughout human history, highlighting how the levels of influx have remained relatively stable. However, changes in ethnic profiles have become a notable feature in recent decades. This historical and sociopolitical perspective is what enabled a better understanding of the complexity of current discourses on immigration and the interests behind its instrumentalisation.

In addition, the documentary as a medium of expression and investigation will be addressed, with emphasis on the use of voice-over as a tool to articulate memory and narrative. The research also includes the analysis of audiovisual works that deal with similar themes or that, although with different approaches, offer relevant narrative strategies and techniques for the aesthetic and narrative conception of the project. In this way, this chapter seeks to highlight the breadth and depth of the research undertaken, articulating academic, media, and technical references that supported the construction of the final artefact.

Immigration as a natural occurrence of the human species

The analysis of academic articles in the field of migration studies highlights the need to define key concepts for a more in-depth understanding of the field, given that the phenomenon is marked by a significant multiplicity of experiences that make its conceptualisation difficult. The term "immigration," for instance, is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as the act of "entering and settling in a region or country to which one is not native," thereby emphasising the idea of displacement and reterritorialisation.

For an individual to be considered a migrant, it is necessary that they reside in a country different from the one in which they were born for a period that generally varies between six and twelve months, regardless of the motivations for the displacement. Migrants can be classified into various categories, such as labour migrants, family reunification, international students, entrepreneurs, and forced migrants, the latter also recognised as refugees (de Haas, 2023).

According to data from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in 2020, there were approximately 281 million international migrants, which represented about 3.6% of the global population. This figure becomes particularly relevant in light of the growing anti-immigration rhetoric promoted by right-wing parties in Western Europe, especially in countries such as Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom (Kehrberg, 2007).

One of the main myths propagated in this context is that the world is experiencing an era of unprecedented migration. It is claimed that factors such as extreme poverty, climate change, and armed conflicts are the main drivers of these flows. However, according to the United Nations Population Division, although the absolute number of migrants increased from 93 million in 1960 to 247 million in 2017, their proportion relative to the global population remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 2.5% and 3.6%. This indicates that it is not a migratory explosion but rather a proportional and continuous growth, which undermines part of the alarmist narrative disseminated in public and political spheres.

It is undeniable that migration constitutes a historical phenomenon deeply rooted in the human experience. What has been observed in recent decades, however, is a significant change in the ethnic composition of migratory flows and in the directions they take. These transformations, although markedly contemporary, have historical antecedents and are shaped by structural forces of economic, political, and social nature that act as push and pull factors. As argued by Singer (1998), understanding this phenomenon, which is one of the most relevant social developments of contemporary times, requires taking into account the historical context, socioeconomic and political structures and systems, the social agents involved, and the socio-spatial configurations of countries embedded in the global economy.

When analysing historical patterns of migration, it is observed that during the Age of Discovery, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe was the main point of origin of migratory flows, driven by economic interests, religious disputes, political motivations, and above all, the colonisation process (de Haas, 2023). Europeans played diverse roles in this process, acting as colonisers, soldiers, enslavers, missionaries, settlers, and later, as civilian migrants. Between 1850 and 1914, it is estimated that around 55 million Europeans migrated to the so-called "New World,"

encompassing regions of South America, North America, and Australasia (Hatton and Williamson, 1998).

From the twentieth century onward, this dynamic is reversed: Europe becomes a destination for migration. Between the post-war period and the 1970s, guest worker programs attracted migrants from southern Europe, Turkey, and North Africa, significantly altering the ethnic and cultural composition of countries such as Germany and France (Castles et al., 2013). The signing of the Schengen Agreement in the 1980s facilitated intra-regional mobility, while southern European countries began to receive migrants from Africa and Latin America, reflecting the new geopolitical and economic configurations of the continent.

Public perception of the immigrant began to shift more sharply after the 11 September 2001 attacks, when the issue of national security gained centrality in political discourses. The Muslim population, in particular, became a target of surveillance and suspicion, fueling Islamophobic sentiments and amplifying anti-immigration rhetoric (Helbling, 2012). Currently, a considerable change is observed in the ethnic composition of migratory flows: whereas European migrants previously predominated, there is now a significant increase in people originating from Asia, Latin America, and the African continent. This transformation demands a critical review of the prevailing narratives in the media and politics, which frequently reduce the migrant to a negative stereotype, disregarding the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon.

The rise of nationalist ideologies in various parts of the world illustrates how the political right has aggressively instrumentalised anti-immigration rhetoric. In contrast, sectors of the political left argue that migratory flows promote economic growth and help address demographic decline in developed countries. This polarisation, however, represents a significant risk by reducing the debate to simplistic dichotomies and favouring the construction of an "external enemy."

Stuart Hall (1992) observes that in postmodernity, the traditional model of the nation-state is in crisis, as it loses its capacity to function as the sole identity reference for citizens. Globalisation, by challenging cultural boundaries and exposing national identities to the influence of multiple cultures, destabilises conventional parameters of belonging and identity. In this scenario, the

migratory phenomenon not only persists but intensifies in its complexity, demanding more comprehensive and less ideologically biased approaches.

Relevant Productions

During my research, I watched various documentaries on similar topics. Some stood out for their use of animation, while others impressed me with their cinematography or the personal approach of the protagonist. The way these elements were introduced made me reflect on which narrative strategies could most effectively convey the complexity of the migratory experience in my own documentary.

Flee (2021) caught my attention because it combines animation and documentary to recreate memories. The choice to tell Amin's story in this manner protects his identity and creates an intimate environment, allowing his recollections to come to life without the limitations of archival footage or traditional reenactments. Using the audio interview as the guiding thread made me think about the power of subjective narration. Incorporating this type of approach in my documentary could give more depth to the characters' experiences, capturing the facts and emotions behind their stories.

In El Maldito Darién (2024), what struck me the most was the use of photography to convey the sense of immobility and uncertainty that permeates the crossing of the jungle towards the United States. The choice of high-exposure images with slight movement creates an almost dreamlike effect, reinforcing the brutality and precariousness of this journey. In the short film, the selection of fixed images is intentional and represents, in many moments, the hunger, thirst, robberies, kidnappings, and rapes of the group of immigrants. Although sensitive, this is an interesting way to emotionally connect the audience to the topic.

Human Flow (2017) presents a broader perspective on the migration crisis, combining interviews and aerial shots that highlight the scale of the problem. The contrast between grandiose scenes and intimate testimonies creates a powerful impact, showing the refugees' journey and the political and social context behind it. This structure made me reflect on the need to balance the macro and the

micro in my documentary. I want to capture the individual stories and the systems and discourses that shape immigration in the contemporary world.

CHAPTER THREE: CONSTRUCTING/DESIGNING YOUR PRODUCT

Design

The documentary was designed to adopt a contemporary aesthetic that departs from the exclusive focus on large social groups by approaching collective themes through individual trajectories. The fusion of the tragic and the subjective was carried out by intertwining historical and documentary research with symbolic and personal traces. This approach seeks to bring greater sensitivity to the topic. The proposal is to juxtapose my own trajectory with recent political developments, especially regarding conflicts related to immigration.

The film begins by introducing the social phenomenon through its symbolic relationship with sea crossings. Next, a brief reflection is presented on my own nationality, as a Brazilian, shaped by a historical heritage deeply intertwined with one of the most significant migratory movements in the world: the great transatlantic migrations. To demonstrate the recurrence of immigration throughout human history, the story of Analu is told, a Brazilian woman of Italian descent whose great-grandparents migrated to Brazil after World War I. Decades later, she would live in different countries, even returning to the nation that her ancestors had left behind. This narrative structure prepares the audience for the tone of the documentary, as it proposes to normalise migratory flows as part of human history.

The film's language is simple, reflective, and poetic, incorporating elements such as first-person point of view, family archive footage, and the presence of the author in front of the camera. These resources are used to make it clear that, beyond examining the political instrumentalisation of immigration, this is also a personal work, since "films are always about us" (FELDMAN, 2018, p. 233).

Although the film reveals the construction of the immigrant figure as a threat, it was necessary to draw on historical milestones to explain such fabrication. For this, a wide range of archival images was employed. The decision to use this volume of material only emerged after the interviews were completed, as it was expected that the experts involved would mention such historical contexts. The main challenge was first to locate and select this material, and then to establish a narrative

rhythm that avoided monotony, especially in the second act, where these images are more concentrated.

Practical Construction

The entire documentary was filmed using a Canon R50 V and a Sony A7S, with 50mm and 18-45mm lenses depending on the needs of each shot. A Smallrig tripod was used, allowing a variety of framings as it also functioned as a monopod. For audio capture, a camera-mounted microphone was used for ambient sounds, along with a wireless lavalier microphone used for both interviews and voice-over recordings. Some images captured during a protest in Dublin were recorded using an iPhone 13. The visual aesthetic was explored through bold cinematography (detail shots, low angles, camera movements) to emphasise the focal situation.

Practical Decisions: Interviews

Since the beginning of the project, it became clear that it was necessary to include characters capable of bringing tangibility and sensitivity to the theme. I sought to interview different profiles of immigrants. Initially, I looked for a Brazilian person of Italian or Portuguese descent, which proved viable given Brazil's migratory history. I found Analu Maiolli, who shared her migratory, personal, and family journey. Her narrative addressed how her ancestors' migration in 1916 shaped her identity and how the process of obtaining Italian citizenship enabled a reconnection with her family history, as she realised that elements she considered typically Brazilian were, in fact, of Italian origin.

There was also an attempt to interview refugees, aware of the ethical complexity that this kind of approach entails. However, none of the organisations contacted responded in time, nor was it possible to find an available person for the interview. The initiative was unsuccessful.

Another sought-after profile was that of a highly qualified professional who migrated to Ireland with a work visa. Through social media, I found Vinicius, a Brazilian with a strong digital presence who supports other immigrants in career development and visa processes. Although the interview was recorded, I realised during the scriptwriting process that it was challenging to include his contribution cohesively. Therefore, I decided to exclude it in the final editing phase.

As for the interviews with specialists, I faced logistical and timing challenges. Approval for participation was only received as the deadline approached. Around 40 emails were sent to researchers in the field, but not all responded. Professor Gabrielle Oliveira, based in New York, unable to participate in person, joined through a Zoom meeting, which was recorded both digitally and via screen capture with a camera. Due to the time zone difference, it was necessary to confirm the time several times. The professor highlighted how narratives based on scarcity and identity contribute to the construction of the immigrant as a threat, fueling racial and nationalist prejudices. According to her, nationalism has been instrumentalised as a tool of internal exclusion, often mistaken for patriotism.

The final interview was conducted with Professor Claire Dorrity. For unknown reasons, the invitation email was directed to her spam folder, which delayed a prompt response. Due to the limited time and the need to minimise logistical complications, it was decided not to travel to Cork, where she resides, and the interview was conducted online. Her insights on the role of patriotic discourse and the consequences of colonial and imperialist thinking were decisive for the tone adopted by the documentary. All interviews were essential for deepening the topic, offering diverse and complementary perspectives from different contexts such as Brazil, Ireland, and the United States.

Filming the Private Sphere: the inclusion of Voice-Over

The decision to incorporate autobiographical elements into the documentary stems from the need to address the topic of immigration beyond its structural aspects, aiming to challenge the most widespread perceptions among the public without transferring the full weight of reflection to the interviewees. Considering that Brazilian nationality is deeply intertwined with historical processes of miscegenation, colonialism, and migration, it became clear that including my own context would not only be legitimate but also productive for the film's objectives.

By choosing to share personal experiences, the intention is not to turn the narrative into an exercise in confession, but rather to use this resource strategically to foster a connection between the viewer and the subjective processes involved in the migratory experience. Even if the inclusion of the

author's perspective at the heart of the narrative may sound dissonant, this choice arises from an ethical reflection: it would be inappropriate to place solely on the shoulders of the interviewees, the immigrants, the responsibility of embodying the figure of the "threat," even if the documentary's very aim is to demystify this imaginary.

Subjectivity, therefore, is mobilised not as an end but as a means to promote openness to otherness. The first-person narration is conceived as a tool that prompts the audience to engage with reality in a more involved way, raising questions such as: "What is my place in this debate?" and "From what perspective am I observing this phenomenon?". The goal is to encourage this same kind of questioning in viewers. In this sense, the work aims to lead the audience toward a closer approach to the experience of the "other."

The adopted approach is based on the idea that memory is a connecting axis between the personal and the political, being evoked not only as an instrument of recollection but, above all, as a key to understanding the present. As Gutfreind and Rech (2011, p. 139) argue, "memory emerges when it is debated, requested, made possible." By drawing on memory, the documentary seeks to offer interpretive layers that go beyond chronological accounts, investing in the creation of a space for listening and reflection.

Right in the film's opening shot, a visual and intimate atmosphere is established: I walk by the seashore, evoking the crossing as a central metaphor of the work. The choice to begin the documentary with a poetic reflection on the beginning of sea crossings responds to the fact that this milestone was one of the driving forces of modern migratory flows. The mastery of the seas, made possible by technical innovations and colonial expansion, exponentially increased human mobility on a global scale.

In the second voice-over, the filmmaker inserts herself more directly, starting with her origin and her connection to colonialism. By presenting data on the volume of enslaved Africans and Europeans who migrated to the so-called "New World," it is suggested that this historical period constituted one of the largest recorded population displacements. This historical acknowledgement

seeks to place the autobiographical account within a broader context, connecting it to the structural dynamics that shape contemporary identities.

Guimarães (2007, p. 1) argues that "if my subject is reality, I am not exempt from it, and it is not exempt from me either." According to the author, there is an exercise of reciprocity and surrender in constructing narratives that intertwine the narrator's subjectivity with that of the other. Thus, the aim is not to objectify reality but to allow for a mutual contamination of perspectives.

The insertion of childhood as a backdrop in the second act arose from the need to build a cohesive narrative line capable of sustaining the film both structurally and emotionally. Initially, there was no intention of including the filmmaker as a character. However, it became evident that the authorial presence would allow for a more balanced distribution of the film's symbolic weight, avoiding the risk of the interviewees solely embodying the figure of the "threatening immigrant," even though the aim of the film is precisely to dismantle this discursive construction, as previously mentioned.

This decision proved even more relevant when connecting the filmmaker's upbringing in the 2000s with the intensification of polarised discourse on immigration. Events such as the 9/11 attacks and the so-called "refugee crisis" reconfigured public debate, making the topic increasingly politicised and fraught. By bringing this temporal perspective, the documentary proposes a critical reading of the intersection between personal experiences and historical events, revealing how particular meanings only become evident in retrospect, in this case, when I became an immigrant upon moving to Ireland.

Finally, although the first-person narration is used throughout the film, its purpose is not to highlight the author's figure, but to offer a connective and reflective analysis between the addressed themes. The voice-overs function as articulation points between narrative segments, weaving together different discursive layers and provoking in the viewer a mode of listening that is both sensitive and critical.

Post Production

The editing stage, in the context of documentary filmmaking, offers a wide margin of creative freedom. This is due to the fact that, unlike fiction, documentaries often do not begin with a closed script, but with an initial hypothesis that transforms throughout the process. The director, therefore, is not bound to follow a rigid chronology or a pre-established narrative structure. In this genre, post-production holds an undeniable centrality in shaping the final meaning of the work.

With the completion of filming, the process of breaking down all captured scenes began. From there, the editing revealed a structure completely different from what had been envisioned in the original script. During the development of that initial script, difficulties arose concerning the narrative rhythm, which resulted in a considerable amount of time spent attempting to resolve certain chapters. It was only during the editing process that such obstacles were overcome. This experience reinforces the famous assertion by French filmmaker François Truffaut, who said that "a film script is born to die twice and reappear afterwards." In other words, the writing of a film reinvents itself at each stage, and it is in the editing that it finally reveals itself.

The editing process, while intellectually stimulating, was also exhausting. Given the documentary's extensive use of archival footage, an intense research effort became necessary, particularly to locate specific historical records, such as scenes of immigrants arriving in Brazil (a rare and often hard-to-access material). After locating the footage, it was necessary to select the best excerpts and decide on their narrative insertion: when to use them, whether to retain the original audio, and which segments required the inclusion of voice-overs to ensure fluidity and coherence between the themes.

Letterings play a strategic role throughout the documentary. They were used to provide statistical data that lends credibility and anchors the narrated events in verifiable facts. In specific segments, they also serve as a contrasting device between objective information and interpretations or perceptions disseminated in the collective imagination, revealing the tension between actual data and dominant narratives.

The images captured were recorded in S-Log2 colour profile, which required, from the outset, a colour correction and colour grading process. These stages were anticipated and were executed

with the goal of unifying the film's visual aesthetic. However, due to time constraints during the final stages of production, it was not possible to fully develop the initial proposal of applying distinct visual styles to each of the documentary's three acts. This planned visual differentiation, intended to mark shifts in tone and thematic focus throughout the narrative, had to be sacrificed in favour of completing the project within the established deadline.

Ethical Aspects and Limitations

From an ethical standpoint, the documentary proposes a critical reflection on the supposed impartiality in the audiovisual field, particularly within the documentary genre. The presence of voice-over narrations makes clear that the content presented is shaped by a subjective perspective, constructed from the author's own experiences and worldview. Although grounded in verifiable data, such as historical facts and statistics, these narratives do not claim neutrality. On the contrary, they embrace their situated nature, offering an interpretation of contemporary social reality. This choice aligns with the tradition of the auteur documentary, which acknowledges the filmmaker's positionality as an integral part of the work. In this context, reflexivity is not a limitation, but rather a form of ethical and epistemic transparency regarding the paths taken and the stances adopted.

Regarding the interview participants, full freedom of expression was ensured, along with the right to decline questions, to interrupt the interview at any time, and to withhold authorisation for the use of certain statements. None of the interviews were conducted in a way that directed or induced participants to adopt a particular tone or ideological position. All documentary participants were informed about the project's objectives, the intended use of the footage, and the recording context. The commitment to each interviewee's narrative autonomy was upheld throughout all stages of production, following the ethical principles that guide conduct under the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) (see appendix).

As for the limitations encountered, a significant challenge was the difficulty of representing, in the final work, the diversity of migratory profiles intended initially. Attempts were made to include refugees and immigrants from different backgrounds and experiences, but due to logistical and accessibility constraints, these interviews could not be completed in time. In addition, during the production period, only one protest took place, and it was in support of immigration. This limited

the possibility of directly capturing and understanding opposing perspectives, which had also been among the project's goals. As a result, the hearing of different sides of the debate remained limited, affecting the breadth of the sociopolitical portrait the documentary aimed to construct.

Another significant limitation relates to the heavy reliance on archival footage, particularly in the film's second act. Although this material helped to situate the themes addressed historically, its intensive use was partly a consequence of the challenges in recording certain events or contexts in real time. This demanded a rigorous curation of the available material, along with the need to adapt the narrative rhythm to the visual language of the archival footage.

Finally, during filming, it became apparent that additional equipment was needed to achieve the aesthetic previously established in the project proposal. The university provided only a mobile journalism kit, whose technical quality and operational limitations were not aligned with the desired visual and artistic approach. The decision to invest in personal equipment was therefore a response to the need to maintain consistency between the project's creative goals and the technical means employed in the documentary's production.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

The idea of producing a documentary that explored the construction of the immigrant figure as a threat emerged from an informal conversation among friends, during which we discussed the contemporary dynamics of migration policies. At the time, I was already living in Ireland, and there were no native Irish citizens at that table. We were all immigrants reflecting on how our presence was increasingly being perceived in a different, and often negative, light. We were mainly discussing how the very act of being there seemed to be becoming more and more difficult.

During that conversation, I remember someone defending the idea that there should be no borders between countries. That statement initially struck me. Perhaps due to my own position as an immigrant, I agreed at first. However, I soon realised the complexity of the topic and stepped back from such a simplistic embrace of that idea. The absence of borders, although it may appear to be a liberating solution, overlooks the multiple historical, cultural, and political layers involved in state sovereignty. I came to understand that what was unfolding in society went beyond the mere creation of territorial barriers. It was a deeper transformation in the way identities, belongings, and displacements were being conceived.

Months later, driven by personal curiosity, I read the book How Migration Really Works? by Hein de Haas. The content of the book deeply impacted me because, even in previous discussions with friends and family, I realised that I myself had reproduced recurring myths about migration, which the author later deconstructed through empirical data and critical analysis. That theoretical engagement brought me back to that initial conversation with friends. It reinforced my conviction that the topic of migration is immensely more complex and multifaceted than it often appears in public and media debates.

The original plan for the documentary had as its central goal the demystification of the main myths associated with immigration, in an attempt to contribute to a more informed understanding of the phenomenon. However, as the conceptual process evolved, it became clear that beyond the spread of falsehoods, the most urgent and disturbing aspect was the shift in public perception regarding immigrants. This symbolic transformation, which reconfigures the immigrant as a threat, proved to be a critical dimension to be investigated and represented.

During my first meeting with my supervisor, Conor, I was still strongly attached to the original proposal. I shared with him that, although my background in the field leaned towards journalism, my previous projects had always carried a sensitive dimension. Initially, I considered developing the narrative based on multiple immigrant experiences, addressing their personal journeys. However, due to the specificity of each experience and the limitations of time and resources, I realised that it would be unfeasible to gather a representative number of interviewees.
It was at that moment that the idea of including myself as a character in the documentary emerged. The decision arose from a personal reflection on my nationality. Brazil is a country shaped by encounters among diverse peoples. It is a territory whose cultural identity has been built through mixture: in flavours, in gestures, in languages. The very constitution of the Brazilian people results from the intersection of both forced and voluntary paths: of the Indigenous peoples who were already there, of the Africans forcibly brought during slavery, and of the Europeans who came to exploit or settle.

As Darcy Ribeiro points out, the construction of Brazilian identity is still ongoing. We are a people marked by a history of violence, but also of resistance and reinvention. Our cultural diversity is the result of centuries of encounters, conflicts, and adaptations. We still face enormous challenges, such as structural racism and the historical exclusion of Black and Indigenous communities. However, we strive to recognise these issues and move forward in building a fairer society, through legislation that criminalises discriminatory practices and initiatives that promote equity.

It was from this perspective, rooted in the complexity of Brazilian identity, that I proposed an alternative view on immigration. The documentary seeks to break with the dominant narrative that associates immigration with crisis or threat. Instead, it presents immigration as a continuous and vital element of human history. By questioning the simplistic labels of "pro" or "anti-immigration," which often reduce the debate to sterile polarisations, the project invites critical reflection. And understanding this may perhaps help us build fairer societies, aware that human displacement is, and always has been, a fundamental part of our collective history.

CONCLUSION

This documentary was created to understand how immigrants have become figures that are politically manipulated and symbolically perceived as threats within modern public discourse. The narrative explores how images, statements, and silences have contributed to an atmosphere of fear, and how this perception influences people's bodies, borders, and concepts of belonging.

The film sought to combine the collective and the personal, positioning itself within a tradition that rejects the supposed neutrality of the documentary gaze. On the contrary, subjectivity here is embraced as method, language, and ethical stance. It is through my personal experience as an immigrant, displaced, observed, and silenced that a broader critique is developed against the politics of exclusion and otherness.

By choosing an essayistic and performative format, this film aligns itself with a tradition in documentary cinema that understands that political truth is not found solely in numbers and headlines, but also in intimacy, memory, trauma, and voice. By integrating personal experiences, interviews with specialists, and archival materials, the film aims to offer a sensitive and historically grounded perspective on the subject.

The research was anchored in theoretical frameworks drawn from migration studies, political sociology, and documentary theory. Works such as Hein de Haas's were fundamental in dismantling misguided views on migratory flows, while also providing empirical foundations to reposition the public debate on immigration. The audiovisual production, in turn, relied on studies of memory, identity, and first-person narrative, highlighting the importance of subjectivity as a legitimate tool for social reflection.

Throughout the process, the documentary evolved from an initially more didactic proposal, focused on the deconstruction of myths, into a more authorial and sensitive product that combines historical data, critical analysis, and personal narratives. The decision to include my own trajectory as an immigrant was not driven by a desire for centrality, but rather as an ethical and narrative

device capable of sharing the symbolic weight of representation with the characters and connecting the intimate to the collective.

The production process also became an opportunity to reflect on the limits and possibilities of the documentary language as an instrument of inquiry and transformation, for the personal is political. The editing process, in particular, was a key moment in shaping the narrative structure, allowing for a reconfiguration of the meaning of the recorded material and aligning form and content in a way that was more coherent with the project's objectives.

By focusing on the historicity of migration and the contemporary dynamics of exclusion, the documentary proposes a critique of the oversimplification of the debate into categories such as "pro" or "anti-immigration." Migration is not a modern anomaly, but a constant of human existence, a trait that transcends civilisations, borders, and centuries. Understanding this may be the first step toward overcoming alarmist discourses and proposing more inclusive, informed, and evidence-based public policies.

The symbolic impact of the documentary is not confined to the academic field. It engages with civil society, communication professionals, educators, and policy makers. By shedding light on the ways in which fear of the "other" has been constructed and disseminated, the work also invites listening, empathy, and questioning.

There is significant potential for future development in this project. The documentary could be enhanced by including new interviews, particularly with immigrants from various backgrounds, as well as with individuals who oppose immigration. This would enrich the range of perspectives and deepen the understanding of current divisions. Additionally, the material could be adapted into other formats, such as short videos for social media.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONTRIBUTOR APPEARANCE RELEASE

Production Date(s): ____/_____/_____

Program Title: When I became a Threat

Participant's Name: _____

Producer: Amanda Oliveira

Production Location: _____

I hereby authorise Producer to record and edit into the Programme and related materials my name, likeness, image, voice and participation in and performance on radio, documentary, film, tape or otherwise for use in the above Programme or parts thereof (the "Recordings"). I agree that the Programme may be edited and otherwise altered at the sole discretion of the Producer and used in whole or in part for any and all broadcasting, non-broadcasting, audio/visual, and/or exhibition purposes in any manner or media, in perpetuity, throughout the world.

The producer may use and authorise others to use all or parts of the Recordings. Producer, its successors and assigns shall own all rights, titles, and interests, including copyright, in and to the Programme, including the Recordings, to be used and disposed of without limitation as Producer shall, at its sole discretion, determine.

Signature of Person Appearing:

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Analu Maiolli:

1. Tell me a bit more about your Italian heritage.
2. When did your ancestors migrate to Brazil? Do you know why they left Italy?
3. Are there any family stories about what life was like back in Italy?
4. You were raised in southern Brazil, a region strongly influenced by Italian immigration. What did that influence look like in your daily life?
5. Your great-grandfather migrated in the late 1800s. What doors did that open for your family in the following generations?
6. You now hold Italian citizenship. What does it feel like to "return" to Europe with the same nationality your ancestor once left behind?
7. Now living in Ireland, do you feel like you're in some way retracing your great-grandfather's path?

Gabrielle Oliveira:

1. Would you say that migration has always been part of human societies? And if so, how do today's migration flows differ from those in the past?
2. Do you think that the backgrounds of today's migrants influence how they are received? And what kinds of social or political implications does that bring?
3. In a lot of public discourse, we often hear people or policies described as 'pro-immigration' or 'anti-immigration.' Do you think those labels are actually helpful in shaping the conversation, or do they end up oversimplifying a much more complex issue?
4. Scholars in cultural studies often suggest that we are experiencing a crisis of identity in postmodernity. And in that context, nationalism seems to be gaining strength as a way to reassert a sense of belonging. Would you agree with that? And what kind of impact does this resurgence have on how we talk about or respond to migration?
5. Given how polarised the topic of immigration has become, what do you think are some more constructive ways to approach the conversation? (Is multiculturalism still a helpful framework, or do we need new ways to understand and respond to these dynamics?)

6. From your perspective, what are policymakers still missing when it comes to addressing migration? Are there key aspects that tend to be left out of the conversation?

Claire Dorrity:

1. Even though migration has existed for centuries, why do we have the impression today that we are living through an era of unprecedented migration?
2. How has public perception of migrants changed over the past decades?
3. What are the dangers of framing migration in binary terms, as something one is either "for" or "against"?
4. The United States has, at several points in history, actively encouraged immigration. When did this begin to change, and what were the main reasons behind that shift?
5. Ireland has a long history of emigration. How and when did public attitudes toward inward migration begin to change? What particular tensions or challenges does Ireland face today concerning migration policy and social integration?
6. Are we currently experiencing a real crisis in migration policy, or is it rather a crisis of political instrumentalisation of the issue?

APPENDIX C: NUJ CODE OF CONDUCT

Members of the National Union of Journalists are expected to abide by the following professional principles.

A JOURNALIST:

1. At all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed.
2. Strives to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair.
3. Does her/his utmost to correct harmful inaccuracies.
4. Differentiates between fact and opinion.
5. Obtains material by honest, straightforward, and open means, with the exception of investigations that are both overwhelmingly in the public interest and which involve evidence that cannot be obtained by straightforward means.
6. Does nothing to intrude into anybody's private life, grief or distress unless justified by overriding consideration of the public interest.
7. Protects the identity of sources who supply information in confidence and material gathered in the course of her/his work.
8. Resists threats or any other inducements to influence, distort or suppress information, and takes no unfair personal advantage of information gained during her/his duties before the information is public knowledge.
9. Produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's.
10. age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation.
11. Does not by way of statement, voice or appearance endorse by advertisement any commercial product or service save for the promotion of her/his own work or of the medium by which she/he is employed.
12. A journalist shall normally seek the consent of an appropriate adult when interviewing or photographing a child for a story about her/his welfare.
13. Avoids plagiarism.