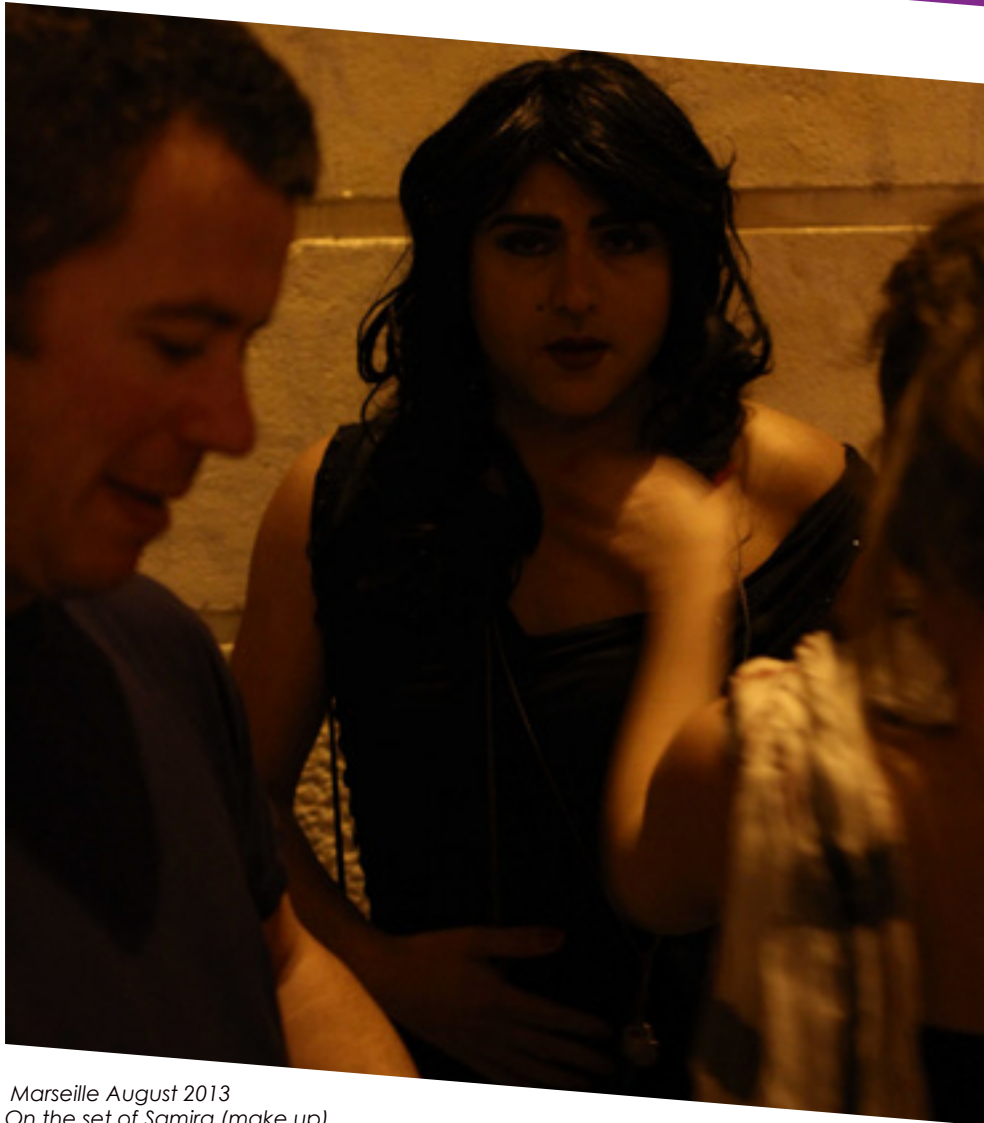


SAMIRA

A two-screen ethnofiction by Nicola Mai

KARERON



Marseille August 2013
On the set of *Samira* (make up)

THE STORY

Karim is an Algerian migrant man selling sex as Samira at night in Marseille. He left Algeria as a young man as his breasts started developing as a result of taking hormones.

Ten years later Karim is granted asylum in France as a transgender woman, Samira, thanks to his breasts, which allow him to defend his asylum application as that of a transgender woman risking her life if deported back to Algeria.

Twenty years later, as his father is dying and he is about to become the head of the family, Samira surgically removes her breasts and marries a woman in order to get a new passport allowing him to return to Algeria to assume his new role.

THE ETHNOFICTION

Samira is a 28-minute art-science ethnofiction available both as a film and as a two-screen installation. The project pushes the boundaries of ethno-fiction by using actors to represent real people and by juxtaposing the different versions of the self that emerge in the context of ethnographic observations and humanitarian borders.

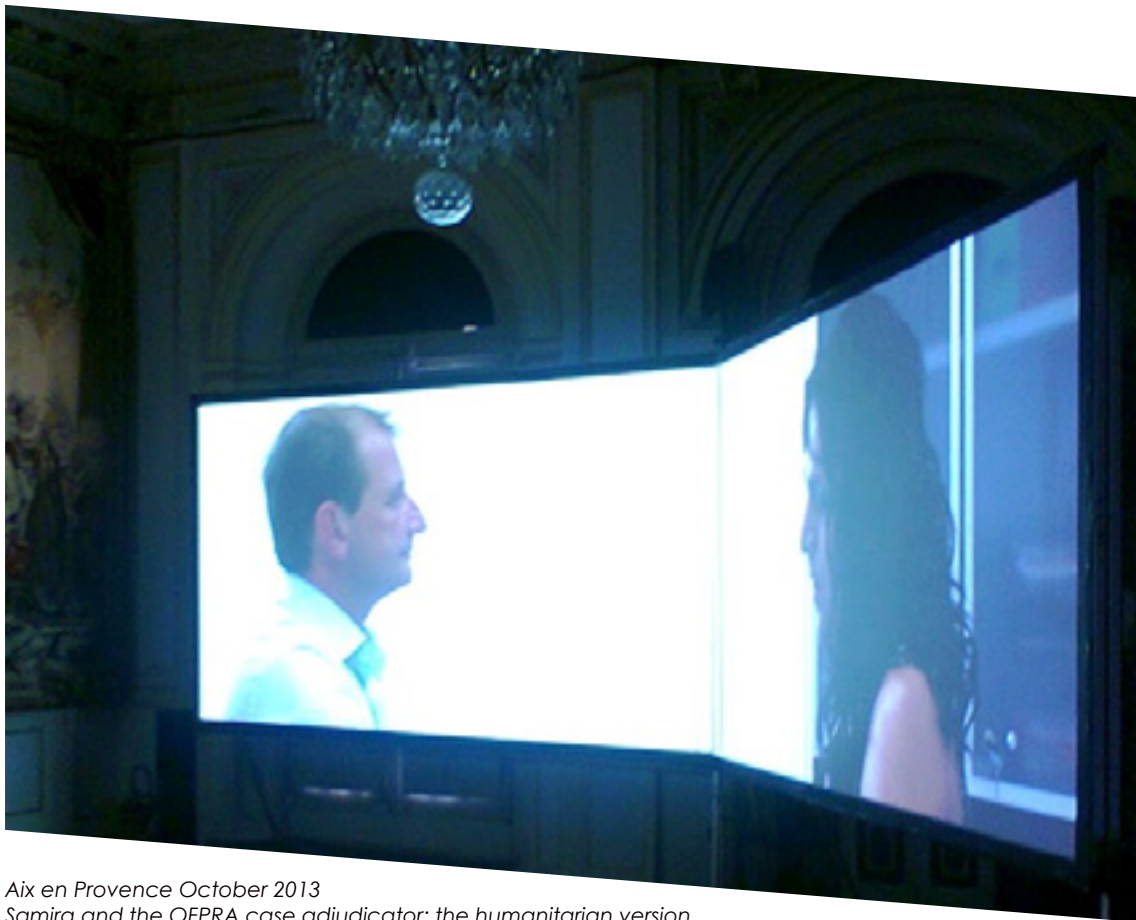
By using actors and filming their performances of real research scripts and acts the project also protects the identities of people that are marginalized and stigmatised.

The scientific and artistic approach adopted in *Samira* analyses the way humanitarian borders are inscribed within the subjectivity and bodies of migrants.

The project also challenges the criteria of authenticity underpinning humanitarian borders, documentary filmmaking and academic research.

The story of Karim is presented by juxtaposing the multiple versions and narrations of the self emerging in different situations, relationships and settings: the ethnographic observation in the street and at Samira's, the medical visit, the interview with the OFPRA case adjudicator (French Office for the Protection des Refugees and Stateless People), shopping in the city centre, sitting at a café next to the street market.

Each situation highlights contradictory or coherent aspects of the subjectivity and history of Karim. However, the aim of the project is not to demonstrate his lack of authenticity or that he lies. Each version of the self presented by Karim/Samira is authentic, proving that every subjectivity is incoherent and that the real privilege is not to have to be verified, evaluated, recognised or believed in relation to the biographical borders that are enforced by humanitarian protection.



Aix en Provence October 2013
Samira and the OFPRA case adjudicator: the humanitarian version.

NOTE OF INTENTION BIOGRAPHICAL BORDERS

How can we film the 'biographical borders' or the different life scripts we must perform in order to cross a humanitarian border?

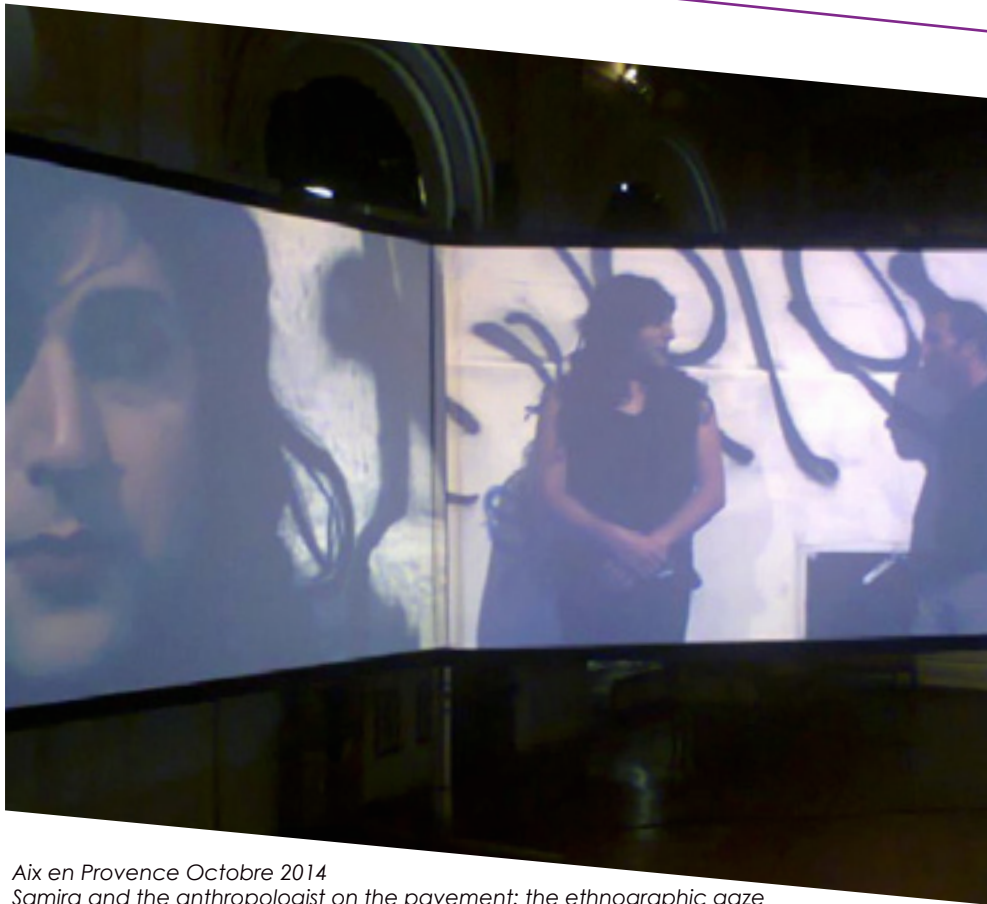
Samira is a textbook case in the study of biographical borders. Her subjectivity is marked by incoherence and absence as her life unfolds between the contradictory requirements of being a 'transgender woman' in France and a 'real man' in Algeria. Which form can cinema give to this exile from herself and to the different versions of her identity highlighted by the analyses and approach of the researcher?

How to avoid voyeurism, given the desire to show 'the real' that characterise both documentary and fiction filmmaking? The ethnofiction shows Samira as she changes identity, crosses borders, moves from one screen to another, and leaves a setting to inhabit another in order to exist in multiple dimensions.

The two screens try to embody the concept of biographical border by representing the dualisms and normativities that fragment and aggregate subjectivities in relation to research and humanitarian initiatives.

EMBORDERS

Samira is the first of four planned two-screen ethno-fictional installations forming the *Emborders* art science project, which will be completed by the end of 2015.



Aix en Provence Octobre 2014
Samira and the anthropologist on the pavement: the ethnographic gaze



Marseille June 2013
Shooting Samira

In the last thirty years migration flows have increased and diversified. Neoliberal policies have included gender and sexuality amongst the criteria of eligibility for humanitarian protection, while restricting access to the labour market in the global north. In this context humanitarian protection and asylum became strategic borders allowing (and more often denying) people access to their rights and to the labour market.

Emborders questions the effectiveness and scope of humanitarian initiatives targeting migrant sex workers and sexual minority asylum seekers. In order to get their rights recognised and avoid deportation migrant women, men and transgender people reassemble their bodies and perform their subjectivities according to standardised victimhood, vulnerability and gender/sex scripts.

SCREENINGS AND SHOWINGS

Samira is available in two formats: installation and film.

The installation was showed at the Museum of Tapestries in Aix en Provence in October 2013 and at la compagnie, lieu de creation gallery in Marseille from December 2013 to March 2014 in the context of the *antiAtlas of borders* art-science project.

The film was screened at IMéRA in Marseille and at the Pavillon Vendôme in Paris in 2013. In 2014 it was presented at the Cube in the context of Digital Anthropologies (Anthropologies Numériques) and at the UCLA as part of its Art-Sci programme.

PARTNERS

Samira was produced by IMéRA and SATIS, which are respectively the Institute for Advanced Studies and the Department of Sciences, Arts and Audio-Visual Techniques of the Aix-Marseille University, in collaboration with Isabelle Arvers, independent art curator.

The association KARERON is in charge of the diffusion of *Samira*.



Los Angeles 1 April 2014
Screening *Samira* at the UCLA

NICOLA MAI

Nicola Mai is an ethnographer and a filmmaker working as Professor of Sociology and Migration Studies at the Working Lives Research Institute of London Metropolitan University. His academic writing and films focus on the experiences and perspectives of migrants selling sex and love in the globalized sex industry in order to live their lives.

Through experimental ethno-fictions and original research findings Nicola Mai challenges the humanitarian politics of representation of the nexus between migration and sex work in terms of trafficking, while focusing on the ambivalent complexity of dynamics of exploitation and self-affirmation that are implicated.

In his *Sex Work Trilogy* he explores different experiences of the encounter between migration and the globalized sex industry. (<https://vimeo.com/album/2188492>)

In 2014 and 2015 Nicola will be based at the Mediterranean Laboratory of Sociology - LAMES (MMSH/Aix -Marseille University) in order to direct the *Emborders* project, comparing the impact of humanitarian interventions targeting migrant sex workers and sexual minority asylum seekers in the UK (London) and France (Marseille/Paris) through ethnographic research and experimental filmmaking.

FILMOGRAPHY: SEX WORK TRILOGY

The three documentaries forming the Sex Work trilogy are:

Comidas Rápidas – Fast Food (Mai 2010 ; 5 min)

Mother Europe (Mai 2011; 5 min)

Normal (Mai 2012; 48 min)

COMIDAS RAPIDAS – FAST FOOD



The cafeteria of Seville's bus station



A hustler bar in the Seville bus station area

Comidas Rápidas – Fast Food (Mai 2010; 5 min) on young Moroccan and Romanian migrant men selling sex at Seville's bus station.

The film presents its protagonists and the settings where they live and work through video filters protecting their identities and expressing the centrality and invisibility characterising their migratory trajectories and survival strategies.

Comidas Rápidas was screened at the MIX LGBT Festival in Copenhagen 2010.

MOTHER EUROPE

Mother Europe (Mai 2011; 5 min) on the relationship between tourism, the sex industry and the migration of young men from Tunisia.



Love fishermen on the beach of Sousse



The medina of Sousse, where you can buy everything

The film presents the story of a young man performing love for Western female tourists in order to obtain the marriage documents allowing him to migrate to Europe.

The voice-off of the protagonists accompanies us through a labyrinth of images referring to the intimate economy and the commodified landscape that have developed around the tourist industry in Sousse.

NORMAL



The six characters of Normal

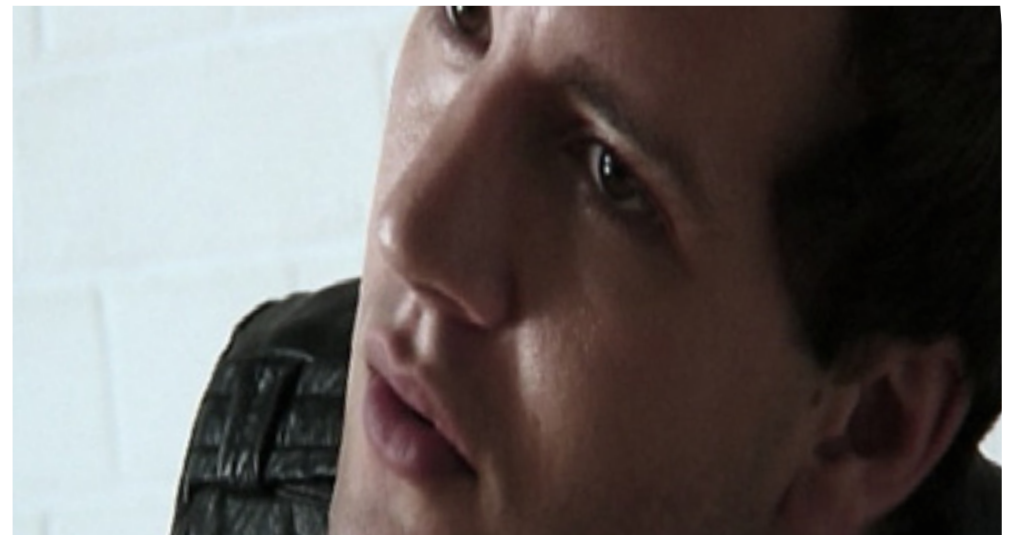
Normal – real stories from the sex industry (Mai 2012; 48 min) portrays the experiences of self-affirmation and of exploitation of male, female and transgender migrant sex workers working in the sex industry in Albania, Italy and the United Kingdom.

Normal presents real life histories and real people, who are performed by actors to protect the identities or original interviewees, to reproduce the performative dimension characterising their self-representations in the context of research interviews, and to challenge the criteria of authenticity underpinning humanitarian borders, documentary filmmaking and academic research.

The film was selected for the international Raindance Film Festival 2012 in London and was screened in the context of several academic and artistic events in the United Kingdom, France, Denmark and in the United States.



Annie Labura plays Alina, a young Moldovan woman who decided to work in the sex industry independently after having been trafficked.



Matthew Crowley plays Adrian a young pimp from Romania who does not use violence.

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