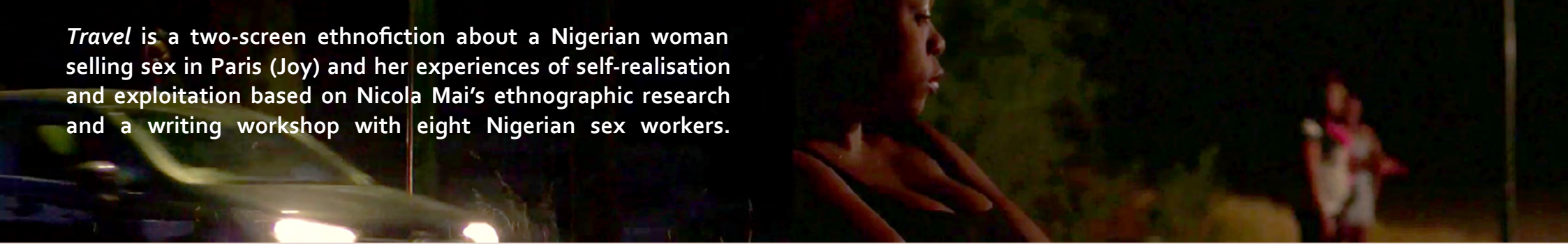


TRAVEL



An ethnofiction by Nicola Mai

Travel is a two-screen ethnofiction about a Nigerian woman selling sex in Paris (Joy) and her experiences of self-realisation and exploitation based on Nicola Mai's ethnographic research and a writing workshop with eight Nigerian sex workers.



the story

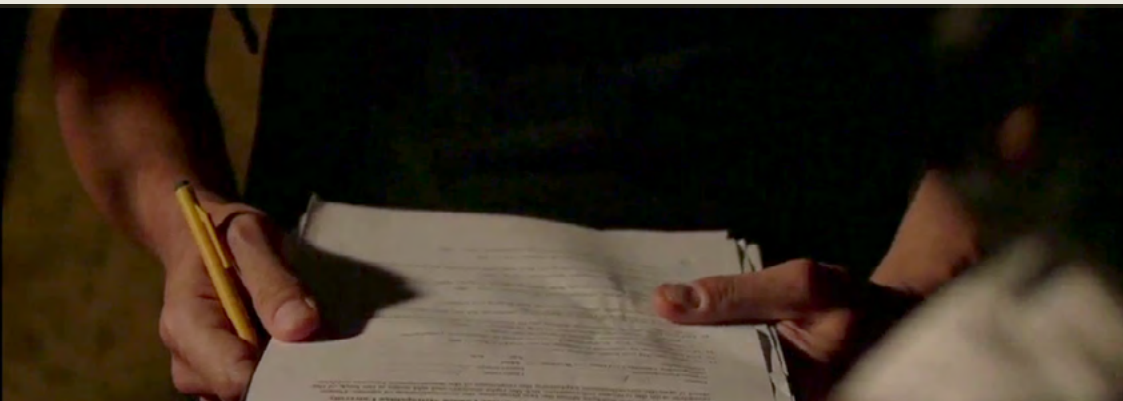
Joy left Nigeria to help her family after her father's death. She knew that she was going to sell sex in France, but she was unaware of the degree of exploitation she would face. *Travel*, the term used by Nigerian women to describe migration,

shows Joy as she gradually reframes her initial experiences of self-realisation as exploitation and trafficking. With the help of an association she obtains asylum, but to help her family and live her life she keeps selling sex at night.

the ethnofiction

This documentary ethnofiction was co-written by Nicola Mai and eight Nigerian sex workers assisted by the Bus des Femmes association in Paris. Their collective experiences are pictured through the life history of Joy, a fictional character embodying their collective and individual experiences while protecting their identities. *Travel* is presented

on two screens to express the contradictions, situations and power relations faced by migrants claiming humanitarian protection. The use of 4 actresses to play different phases of her life also questions what constitutes authenticity in scientific, documentary and humanitarian terms.





the emborders project

Travel (2016) and its sister film-installation *Samira* (2013) are part of the *Emborders* art-science project questioning 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 need to represent their biographies and experiences according to stereotypical canons of victimhood and suffering, which often act as humanitarian borders excluding vulnerable migrants from protection and asylum.

The stories of the protagonists of *Samira* (Karim) and *Travel* (Joy) are presented by juxtaposing the multiple versions and narrations of the self emerging in different situations, relationships and settings: the ethnographic observation in the street, 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. By using two screens the two ethnofictions represent the power relations, conflicts and contradictions characterising the encounter between the necessity to migrate, the tension between self-realisation and exploitation characterising sex work and humanitarian criteria and processes.

Each situation highlights contradictory or coherent aspects of the subjectivity and history of Karim and Joy. However the aim of the *Emborders* project is not to demonstrate their lack of authenticity or that they lie. On the contrary, the two film-installations aim to show that each version of the self presented by the two protagonists is authentic, proving that every subjectivity is incoherent and that the real privilege is not to have to be evaluated, recognised or believed in order to obtain humanitarian protection.





nicola mai

Nicola Mai is a sociologist, an ethnographer and a filmmaker working as Professor of Sociology and Migration Studies at Kingston University London. His academic writing and films focus on the experiences and representations of migrants working 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 dynamics of exploitation and agency that are implicated.

He developed a participative, creative and filmmaking-based methodology inspired by Jean Rouch's ethnofictions, which included research subjects as active producers and performers of their own interpretations by transcending the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, participation and observation, knowledge and emotions.



This resulted in the production of his *Sex Work Trilogy* and in the *Emborders* diptych. The *Sex Work Trilogy* includes *Comidas Rápidas – Fast Bites* (2010; 5 mins) on Moroccan and Romanian young men selling sex in Seville; *Mother Europe* (2011; 5 mins) on Tunisian young men selling sex and performing love to female tourists in Sousse; and *Normal* (2012; 48 mins) on the intricacy of the experiences of love, exploitation, autonomy and dependency of 6 migrants (including women, men and transgender people) working in the sex industry in Albania, Italy and the UK.

The *Emborders* diptych includes *Travel* (2016; 63 min) on the life history of Joy, a Nigerian migrant woman selling sex in the Bois de Vincennes in Paris after having obtained asylum as a victim of trafficking; and *Samira* (2013; 27 min) on the story of Karim, an Algerian man selling sex as a transvestite (Samira) at night who having obtained asylum as a transsexual woman now wants to return home as the male head of his family.





technical specifications

Travel is available in two versions: a movie or or a two-screens installation.

Equipment required for the installation:

- a computer with 2 HDMI output
- 2 video projectors
- 2 HDMI cables
- softwares required: Quicktime & Max Runtime 6.1 : <http://cycling74.com/downloads/runtime/>
- stereo sound installation
- 2 large format screens 16:9 joined at 120 degrees and standing directly on the base of the screen

The installation is composed of to synchronised video files: in h264 or uncompressed, in progressive full HD (1920x1080), stereo sound 48khz 16bit.

