**Guidelines for the European EnFem Project**

**Projet EnFeM “S’engager à mieux intégrer les femmes migrantes”**

Molenbeek Guidelines (version 30.08.2017 by Sonja Simonyi)

**Introduction**

This document serves as a practical guideline as well as a tool providing conceptual frameworks for developing a film/video production workshop that unites migrant and non-migrant women participants. The institutional context of the project that encompasses the workshops provides a transnational network of organizations. It is important to emphasize that the implementation of the workshops will combine an agreed-upon basic outline for the project with markedly specific local institutional conditions. These include the particular institutional structures of each participating organization, the distinct sociocultural environment of its location(s), and significant diversity with regards to both the “local” and the “migrant” population to be found in each locality. In light of such notable variability, this guideline presents general issues at stake in mounting the project, keeping in mind that each local institutional framework will have to address the concrete challenges and opportunities posed by their particular geopolitical and socio-cultural situation in order to successfully implement the project.

Additionally, while general trends can be understood as affecting virtually all migrants to some degree (including marginalization, stereotyping, and widespread socio-economic exclusion) the diversity and individualized aspects of the migrant experience, in particular as pertaining to women, is something that needs to be at all times taken into account when aiming for the successful completion of the project. Migrant women come from diverse backgrounds. They have different levels of education, perceived socio-economic status in their former and new homelands, and the reason for their relocation can be varied. It is hugely significant to keep this diversity in mind when establishing the conceptual and practical frameworks for the workshops. Thus despite referencing the “migrant women” throughout the project, one must remain actively aware of the individual challenges, set-backs, as well as achievements of the individual women the project engages. This will require flexibility and open-mindedness when managing the specific experiences of the members of the workshop and an openness with regards to recalibrating certain aspects of the program once it is executed.

What follows provides a general outline of key ideas at stake in the project, and the key steps each organization might undertake in order to achieve successful implementation and subsequent management. The guideline consists of three broad areas of discussion:

* It introduces key concepts and critical contexts for the implementation of the film workshop.
* It sketches the objectives for the project at various levels of implementation
* It provides a set of concrete guidelines for the project detailing ways to implement its various elements.

**1. Conceptual Frameworks**

* 1. **“Local” and “migrant” women**

The terms defining the two groups of women to be involved with the project raise significant questions about the complexity of European identity. Despite an emphasis on the refugee crisis of recent years, the ethnic, social, and religious diversity of Europe’s inhabitants and the relentless relocation of people globally is hardly novel. Given this fact, the notion of **diversity** also applies to numerous women who are full-fledged citizens of a given European country. Of this group, a significant number has a migrant background or a comparable family heritage. Thus while the notion of “local” (originally defined by the rather restrictive label of “native”) women and “migrant” women is an important part of the project’s conceptualization, in reality there is a large group of Europeans who do not identify with the single, fixed identity that corresponds to these terms. The successful strategies of the project will have to sustain some level of openness and flexibility with regards to these terms and the women to be placed under these labels.

Taking Molenbeek as a case study, the percentage of citizens of the municipality who have “migrant backgrounds” is at 90% (a number that includes current foreigners, those foreigners who have recently obtained Belgian citizenship as well as their offspring.). Given Molenbeek’s remarkably diverse population, the “local” group in this context will foreseeably reflect this reality, moving away from trying to stick to a traditionally defined, but in reality already convoluted “Belgian” (i.e.: Flemish or Walloon) national/regional/linguistic identity. While the workshops cannot fully mirror a city’s particular multi-ethnic constituency, the workshop organizers working in multicultural environments should critically reflect on these issues when selecting possible participants. While Molenbeek’s demographic reality suggests a unique socio-political situation, it provides a unique constellation for the local women / migrant women binary the workshop builds on. As such, it also opens up thinking about these terms more generally, in ways that might benefit other participating organizations in other national contexts.

In short, just as the “migrant woman” is a reductive identity that in reality references a complex set of identities, so is that of the “local woman” if defined through limiting understandings of the “host” society’s ethnic make-up. Actively considering these issues, this project can foster a deeper understanding of the ways in which communities relate to these labels when considering the broader objective of community-building and societal integration.

* 1. **Women/ Media/Migration**

The status of migrant women relates to various forms of marginalization within European society and audiovisual culture. Mainstream media dominates our everyday lives. Images are all-around and influence thinking and actions in both individual and collective forms. They emerge in various contexts, related to advertisement, relentless news updates, social media platforms or popular and artistic cultural forms of expression such as narrative and documentary cinema, soap operas or video clips.

The exclusionary practices of much of this media relates both to issues of (non-)representation, and to the production of these images and the stories attached to them. Minorities and migrants, due to their peripheral and precarious status within society overall, become especially excluded from opportunities to engage with image-production. When images of these groups circulate in media, they often depict racist and xenophobic stereotypes or trite narratives of victimhood, rarely defining them as fully formed, productive individuals. While some improvement can be noted over the last few years due in part to the proliferation of non-centralized media platforms such as YouTube, the overall situation remains dire. Providing such groups with an audiovisual voice through this project should be seen from this perspective. The workshop will provide participants agency to make their own films and counter their caricatured image or invisibility in mainstream audiovisual culture both in front of and behind the camera.

Women within these groups face a double marginalization as their gender can render them quasi voiceless. Despite slow change, women in particular continue to globally function predominantly as passive consumers, rather than active producers of media and moving images. Such passivity is especially notable within traditional religious communities that uphold rigid gender roles, notable across Molenbeek. Additionally, women in environments where such family structures are coupled with socio-economic limitations are frequently relegated to performing domestic and nurturing roles within the family away from public sites and educational opportunities, while also being excluded from professional work environments. These various levels of potential exclusion must also be taken into account both when selecting the group of participants and when considering the role that the workshop might play in providing them with a network of interpersonal exchanges and educational opportunities that may also lead to strategies of professionalization.

* 1. **A word on Muslim faith and image-production**

For those workshops that will include Muslim participants, it is important to keep in mind the complex relationship Islamic culture upholds with regards to the production of images. It is significant to emphasize that a rejection of image-production does not typify Muslims as a whole. But the most orthodox forms of the religion do ascribe to an aniconic perspective, which means a rejection and distrust of images and image-making even if individual Muslims unavoidably function within contemporary societies flooded with images and even embrace them through social media and other social networks. On top of this faith-driven distrust, Zacharia El-Bakkali notes two additional elements that play a role in this distrust. There is a notable suspicion of media among this community that is attached to the often reductive, negative, and clichéd representation of Muslim minorities, coupled with a restricted (and somewhat misguided) notion of what cinema is, namely an expensive and elitist product associated with big-budget studios.

The possible challenges of inviting Muslim women to the workshop thus needs to be understood within these specific religious, social and cultural frameworks that might provide tensions between a desire to participate in a creative workshop and the specific limitations of one’s understanding of what film is, driven by cultural and religious connotations. If nothing else, it is important for the workshop leaders to be cognizant of these issues before planning to engage with the workshop participants.

* 1. **Film Workshops:**

**community filmmaking, co-creation, collaboration, and inter-cultural dialogue**

This project, by virtue of building solid social networks through filmmaking mobilizes activities that have become important concepts within the field of media scholarship. Signaling these terms and how they relate to the project is helpful in managing its different aims and the creative strategies by which these should be achieved.

The role of filmmaking in fostering the above outlined issues has been studied in a variety of geographic contexts. Other cultural forms of expression, (cooking, knitting, sports, etc.) can have therapeutic effects for those individuals who feel otherwise excluded from society, including refugees and other marginalized groups. But while many of these forms engage a solitary creative activity or a momentary release of tension, (moving) images have a fundamental communicative aspect that serves a particularly important role in achieving the aims of the project. Their creation is connected to a willingness to produce and share ideas, emotions, private stories and histories with a wider public, which is essential to using this medium in processes of social cohesion and societal integration. Their creation within the workshop specifically is designed to enhance **peer-to-peer learning**, the sharing of both skills and resources, and the general managing of a group activity. Additionally, films, and to some extent still images, are made for the distinct purpose of conveying a set of thoughts, emotions or personal narratives to a broader public. They place the creator in direct contact with the outside world and produce a tangible creative product that belongs to them. This product will also have an afterlife, and will continue to engage audiences long after the process of its creation has been completed. It thus establishes a mode of communication both through the collaborative nature of film production, and through the extended life of the film once it is exhibited and discussed in public contexts.

**Community filmmaking** is a term that implies a range of meanings. Its most relevant meaning for the project concerns a participatory amateur activity (i.e.: non-professional and outside of the habitual networks of a commercial/for-profit networks) that is managed by, and uniquely involves members of a community. A community, loosely defined, is a group of people who are connected through the place they live in, but also possibly through shared ideas, norms, and values. The workshop will ideally appropriate this strategy, not merely pulling people from disparate communities together for a joint project, but importantly expanding their networks and forging new bonds through the shared experience of filmmaking. As such, the workshop will have a community-building function as well, creating a dynamic cultural space for shared experiences.

The successful completion of the project hinges on the issues of **co-creation** and **collaboration**. The process of filmmaking at the workshop will build on the essential collaborative nature of film, whereby individuals are assigned different roles, assisting each other and combining skills with the communal aim of planning, shooting, and completing a film. This will to some extent remove the emphasis on individual authorship habitually connected to creative production, and instead stress strategies of working together and sharing abilities, resources and ideas. In short, the final film is just one of the tangible outcomes of the joint creative process that is at the heart of the project.

Central to these engagements is the notion of **inter-cultural dialogue**, defined **by the European Migration Network** as an “open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect”. The dialogue will provide both the basis of the film workshops and be the end result of the creative process. Additionally, the very experience of this exchange might function as a possible subject of the films themselves.

**2. Objectives of the Project**

The expected outcomes of the project will play out on an individual, local, and wider (policy) level. These different contexts within which

At the **individual level** the project will:

* Empower migrant and refugee women through the process of creative audiovisual activities.
* Give self-confidence and a sense of purpose to the “local” population (who in the case of Molenbeek might be largely excluded from mainstream Belgian society).
* Give agency to migrant and refugee women with regards to their (self-) representation. This concerns both their role as active, creative individuals behind the camera (as opposed to their widespread image in media as passive “victims” or active threat to society) and the possibilities for them to choose which stories/images of their lives and worldview they want to communicate to the outside world.
* Provide a creative outlet for a diverse group of women who would otherwise be unable to engage with educational/cultural activities.
* Establish and facilitate individual connections between “migrant” and “local” women who would otherwise have a difficult time to meet.
* Provide a learning experience that concerns both the technical skills pertaining to film production and the broader context of cultural and societal insights acquired through the informal setting of the workshop that foregrounds a peer-to-peer structure, instead of a teacher-student structure.
* Teach a diverse group of women the basic skills of filmmaking that might facilitate their trajectory towards continued education or professionalization.

**At the local level the project will:**

* Provide an environment for local, migrant and refugee women that fosters intimacy, social cohesion, exchange of ideas and collaboration within the group as well as with the wider local population that will positively affect their level of integration and how they function in European society long term.
* Anchor the presence of migrant and refugee women within a welcoming, open-minded local institutional context that provides them with a sense of place and purpose.
* Illustrate the benefits of creative collaboration between disparate social groups.

**At the policy level the project will:**

* Give visibility to often societally marginalized group of women specifically, and form a level of cohesiveness between migrant/refugee women and those in local communities.
* Highlight film as a tool for communication and collaboration that fosters social cohesion.
* Counter negative stereotypes about migrant women by highlighting them as creative engines of the film workshops.
* Emphasize the diversity that is present within European society, as well as in various local contexts. These processes will negotiate various personal and cultural values related to cultural heritage, ethnic and religious background, and age, while underlining the widespread appeal of sharing stories about one another through collective filmmaking. The final films serve to extend these discussions beyond the specific environment of the workshop and thus extend the reach of these discussions.
* Move beyond often-reductive, hostile, and exclusionary label(s) and nuance the binary of the “migrant woman” / “local woman” through working with a range of personal trajectories and private experiences. That is, show how to connect, rather than separate, women with diverse backgrounds, while highlighting the very real socio-economic conditions and societal status that limits the full integration of certain individuals.
* Provide a workable model for subsequent projects that aim for the integration of migrant and refugee women.
* Foster inter-cultural dialogue.

**3. Preliminary Guidelines**

As suggested above, the approaches outlined in this document serve to function as basic guidelines, drawn largely from the experiences of Molenbeek’s Maison des Cultures to be adapted to the particular context(s) and visions of each participating institution. Two projects conceived in Molenbeek stand out as relevant models for the workshop. One is an ongoing film/video workshop for local youth. The second is a theater workshop that engaged the youth of the municipality and refugees under the banner of the European Commission-funded NICeR Project.

**3.1. Preliminary considerations / points of discussion**

* Identify and reach out to local organizations and state institutions engaged with issues of integration, particularly of migrant women (those assisting refugees, those offering courses to migrants, etc). Questions to discuss with the organizations include: Who are the various migrant groups at a local level who would best benefit from the workshop? What are the specific issues connected to their integration at the localized level? What are the quotidian challenges/practical difficulties migrants face within this local context? What are some practical difficulties migrant women face that might make it challenging for them to attend workshops, weekly courses, etc. (these might include familial issues such as childcare and a lack of stability in their daily lives)? How can a film workshop address / keep into account such challenges?
* Identify, after research and discussions with local stakeholders, the demographic this project is aimed at. This concerns both specifying “the migrant” and the “local” population. Various religious, racial, ethnic, and linguistic parameters will produce different types of challenges and opportunities for the individual participants and the project. Returning to the already discussed notion of site specificity and the dismantling of the idea of a homogenous “migrant” group, each participating institution may reconsider the way to define not just its migrant but also its local population. In Molenbeek, “locals” are to be largely understood as those women (predominantly of Maghrebi origin) who have resided in Belgium for at least a decade. They form the majority population of the community and will therefore appear within the workshops under the local “label” which will produce a markedly different interaction between the two groups than in other European contexts.
* Assess internally possible ways to negotiate the diverse personal background of women that the workshop can accommodate. This might for example include diverging levels of education or established language skills, notwithstanding the possibility of introducing language courses attached to the project.
* Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of drawing up a homogenous group of migrant women as participants (for example 10 recent Syrian refugees), or indeed a more diverse group (diversity in its broadest sense as defined above). While the latter may provide for a richer experience of intercultural exchange, there is an evident logistical challenge to this route, but both appear to fit the general context of the EnFeM project.
* Depending on the local context, some organizations might have to recalibrate the ways in which filmmaking enters the workshop. Taking into account the issue of the Muslim community’s relationship with images, the Molenbeek workshop will categorically de-emphasize filmmaking at the start of the workshop, and will introduce it gradually as the workshop participants have sufficiently come together as a group. The emphasis in the early weeks (and in promotional materials) will be a general invitation to learn the language and culture of the “host” country.

**3.2. Key institutional preparations**

* Identify the physical location of workshops. (August)
* Identify workshop leaders (Early September) [active workload 5-7 days]

Ideally, the workshop will accommodate two instructors. Given that the workshop emphasizes an all-female participation, and with some older participants inevitably abiding by traditional gender divisions (as confirmed by participants at workshops held in Molenbeek), both instructors should be women:

1: The film instructor will educate the participants on the technical aspects of filmmaking. It is thus someone who needs to have an overarching understanding of the various elements of film production (editing, cinematography, script, etc). Recent film students might have this wide range of knowledge while also often having flexible work rhythms that may more easily accommodate the weekly schedule of the workshop.

2: A second instructor will have a more flexible function. She will work as a language instructor, but predominantly focus on facilitating conversations and discussions within the group, acting as a go-between. She will ideally also have a strong cultural connection to a minority group. In the case of Molenbeek, we are seeking an individual with exceptional social skills and some background working with migrants who can handle the more delicate interpersonal challenges of the group.

* Communication/Recruitment (Late August – Early September) [active workload: 4-5 days]

Reaching out to potential participants will happen in several stages.

* With the traditional communication strategy of both digital and paper copies of flyers, emails and posters to be disseminated to relevant organizations working with migrant women and local women’s groups. These should feature basic information about the workshop (a short description of the project), contact information for the organization in charge (i.e.: an email address and telephone number where interested individuals can sign up), date of an info session (see below), and an implicit message of inclusion that emphasizes the project’s aim at the migrant community as well as a striking visual image that illustrates this idea.
* With contact “on the ground.” Reaching out to individual instructors or educators at organizations that work with migrants and refugees (and handing them some promotional materials) can yield even more immediate results. It is advisable to reach out to specific individuals who are in direct contact with the relevant groups and who can explain, invite, and encourage women to join who might not be reached with traditional communication strategies. For Molenbeek’s “local” group, a similar informal network will be implemented through people who have worked at or participated in previous workshops and other volunteers. They can more efficiently reach out to friends, family members, and their local social and religious groups for the purposes of advertising (and importantly legitimizing) the workshop.
* Sign-up process (Mid-September to October)

[active workload depends on number of people signing up]

Given that participants grappling with unclarified legal situations might feel distrustful towards the “institutionalized” nature of the workshop, signing up for the sessions should be a low-key and flexible process. The first meeting (and the workshop in general) should be advertised as an informal get together open to all. Demanding detailed information about age or nationality appears counterproductive to that process. After the second or third session (see 3.4), the instructors can introduce an informal attendance list that asks for first names to keep track of returning participants. Despite the basic premise of the project that defines participants as either migrants or non-migrants, formally seeking out information regarding the legal status of participants is to be avoided. Related to this, while the group should ideally follow the 10 migrants / 10 non-migrants ratio of the proposal, there should also be some openness with regards to managing the exact numbers, in particular during the early weeks.

**3.3. Logistical considerations**

* Rental/Purchase of materials (Late September – Late March) [active workload 1 day]

While each local instructor might provide additional feedback regarding the necessary materials for the workshop, we propose the following as a basic list of essential items:

* 1 video camera with tripod
* 1 photo camera with lenses
* 1 camera pole mount
* Computer with editing program (the state of the art is the Mac run Final Cut Pro but PS alternatives such as Adobe Premiere Pro might be acceptable)
* Photo paper
* Projector
* Accessories: memory cards, hard drive(s) to store footage, USB memory stick, blank DVDs
* The schedule for the workshop needs to take into account the daily habits and (religious and social) rituals of the demographics the workshop is aimed at. For Molenbeek, given the expected presence of a large Muslim group, these include taking into consideration Friday prayers. Afternoons are generally discouraged as many women are taking on after school childcare duties during that time. For now, the expected schedule for the program is a two-hour morning slot each Tuesday.

**3.4. Workshop Structure**

* Introductory phase (Late September 25 – Early October)
* Assessing the participants. The number of interested participants is difficult to gauge before the actual signing-up process. Nevertheless, based on prior workshops at Molenbeek what is almost guaranteed is an inevitable shift that will occur after classes have started. Women will drop out for many reasons, including any number of personal challenges or shifts in legal status (this is inevitable, in particular given the highly fragile social status of many participants). In light of this, it appears advisable to start out the workshop with a larger number of participants than the expected 10/10 structure that has been agreed upon previously. The flexibility of the number of participants will depend on the infrastructure of the workshop site, the number of women who sign up and the ability of the workshop leader to cope with the group.
* First Informal meeting/Info session

Before the official start date of the workshop, it is advisable to organize an informal informational session that provides a comfortable way for participants to get to know each other, the organizers, and the location where the classes will be held. Given that women who feel marginalized within both the local and the migrant communities might have a considerable amount of distrust towards any type of institutional system (including cultural and educational ones), such an informal/social event might put them at ease. Inviting (male) partners might also provide some additional level of transparency, essential for those women whose activities depend upon male approval (attached to the conservative/patriarchal familial structures within which they live).

This meeting can also serve to already assess the individual participants with regards to their ethnic/religious background, approximate age, general interests and language skills. Discussing these issues with the workshop leaders can be helpful in fine-tuning the exact structure of the classes and the potential challenges and opportunities the specific make-up of the group might pose.

The specific execution can take on different forms, but an hour long meeting with tea/coffee and cakes seems the most straightforward.

* Start of the workshop and content
* Introductory period (Early October) 3 sessions

The aim of the first few sessions is to establish a comfortable learning environment within the workshop and to put participants at ease with each other and the general class room setting (as an extension of the info session). For Molenbeek, this will mean the further elaboration of a non-filmic theme, such as cooking or singing. While participants will be asked to engage with the given theme, the topic of filmmaking can be slowly introduced as part of this process (possibly by the third session). This can occur for example by exploring the filmic documentation of whatever activity is presented (i.e.: cooking or singing). It is also possible to organize the first few sessions away from the classroom, which may further alleviate any anxiety participants might have regarding a strictly organized workshop

* Film production period

To be developed with the instructors.

* Filming footage for the planned documentary. The recording of the workshop will depend largely on the general predisposition of the participants. If after the first few months they appear at ease with each other and the project they are working on, they could be asked to film the classroom interaction themselves, which could be in itself an exercise. This might resolve the issue of introducing an “outsider” into the classroom and the additional challenge of finding a volunteer to film the sessions. Regardless of the approach, however, there needs to be absolute transparency towards the group with regards to their rights when being featured in these recordings.