Travel Report

Generous support from Pembroke and the Sandrew Fund enabled me to spend a week in New York City conducting principle shooting for my short film ‘Remania, USA’, a documentary on the lives of Romanian migrants in the US at the dawn of the Trump era. For me the most exciting aspect of any documentary project is opening a window into hidden lives and representing diverse identities. My aim for this project was to turn my lens on marginalized immigrant communities in the US at a time of unprecedented global movement of peoples and contention surrounding migration. I conducted a series of personal interviews with Romanian immigrants to NYC, asking them about their reasons for migrating, their family status, their views of the welcome they have received after Trump (anecdotally and institutionally), and about the challenges and hurdles they have faced.

Research and serendipity both played roles in the success of the project. Prior to my arrival in New York, I prepared the ground with significant research and by reaching out to Romanian expatriates resident in the States. I felt that I had a good core group of subjects: several Romanian-American business leaders, an immigration lawyer serving the Romanian community, an art curator, and a Romanian artist who has become a celebrity photographer in the art world of New York, with studios in Soho and Brooklyn. I also secured interviews with working-class subjects, including waiters and a limo driver.

In general it was more challenging to interview subjects from less advantaged backgrounds, as they expressed understandable diffidence about appearing on-camera, due to immigration statuses that were often less straightforward. Some prospective subjects suggested that the current political climate surrounding immigration made the choice to appear on film more unsettling than it would have been during the previous administration.

Fortunately the core group of interviewees was able to introduce me to others who were interested in telling their stories. I also benefited from good fortune while shooting b-roll in the Romanian community in Queens. While getting shots of a beautiful Romanian Orthodox Church, I was able to meet with the priest, a relatively recent immigrant to the US and the spiritual father of a large portion of the community. He agreed to an interview, as did his son, and he even allowed me to film portions of a religious service. Through the church community I encountered other subjects who were able to narrate the story of the Queens Romanian community. Finally, I met a kind restaurateur, who not only treated me and my crew to some savoury Romanian and Moldovan delicacies, but also introduced me to friends who were willing to speak openly about their difficulties with immigration.

The documentary looks at cases of migration and permanent residency; recent migration; illegal immigration; and aspiration to emigrate. Further interviews will be filmed in Bucharest over the next several months. The resulting film will raise the question: is New York a welcoming destination for migrants in the age of the Trump?

Following post-production, I will engage in the broader international dialogue around immigration by entering the documentary in film festivals in the United States and Europe, including ‘The London Migration Film Festival’. I am grateful for the support I received from College. This project would not have been possible without it.