

# Chapter 14

## Chant Down the Walls: Exploring the Potential of Video Methods in the Study of Immigrant Politics and Social Movements



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### 14.1 Introduction

When I arrive on site, I see a group of people with drums, amplified guitar and bass, and other instruments. They are standing on a very narrow sidewalk opposite a grey, massive building, with several rows of tiny windows. I am right in front of the detention centre [LAPD's Metropolitan Detention Centre, Los Angeles]. [...] I am handed a banner to hold. Instinctively, I take out my phone and I start filming some of this. The atmosphere is exciting. Some people are dancing, others are chanting slogans. [...] I see that people next to me keep waving towards the centre, but only after speaking with one of them it dawns on me the reason: the immigrant inmates can see us and maybe even hear the music being played outside. I look more carefully and I notice several human silhouettes standing behind the barred windows of the centre.

The above vignette and footage frames describe a performance by the *Jornaleros del Norte* (day laborers of the North), a music band composed of Latino day labourers and part of the National Day Labourer Organising Network (NDLON), an immigrant rights organisation based in Los Angeles. The occasion is the “Chant Down the Walls” initiative, a weekly gathering of immigrant activists in front of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Detention Centre. On the one side of the street, the band is performing. Some people are dancing, others (including myself) are holding banners. Others are recording and taking pictures of the action, moreover offering their interpretation of what is happening for an external audience. On the other side stands the towering detention centre, holding undocumented immigrants awaiting deportation. I try to record as much of the action as possible in my field diary, but it

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K. Nikielska-Sekula, A. Desille (eds.), *Visual Methodology in Migration Studies*, IMISCOE Research Series, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67608-7\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67608-7_14)

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is only after analysing footage of the action shared by NDLO staff<sup>1</sup> that I notice a key detail: lights are being switched on and off inside the detention centre, in sync with the music. Inmates are attempting to communicate with the outer world and are responding to the band's outreach efforts.

This small example shows how video footage can contribute to capturing complex social interaction, in this case between activists (outsiders), inmates (insiders) and the public (externals). It also hints at how, in the context of a political action, video-making and image-taking play a role in themselves in shaping social interaction. In this chapter, I am interested in discussing how video methods can complement more conventional qualitative data and methodologies. I will here particularly examine the potential of video as data source and as process. In order to do so, I will draw on a few examples from my fieldwork in Los Angeles, and particularly from my experience filming the music performances of the *Jornaleros del Norte*. The structure of the chapter is organised as follows. The first section briefly discusses the potential of video in social science, and particularly for researching migration and collective action. The second section describes the circumstances and terms under which I began creating and collecting audio-visual material in connection with my research on immigrant rights activism in Los Angeles. The third section describes how video provided me with an opportunity to gain access to research participants and to engage in reciprocity. The fourth and fifth sections draw on a video sequence to highlight the potential of recorded video data to complement interviews, written notes, archive material and audio data. The sixth section instead underscores how video as process can help generate additional data as well as theoretical insights.

## 14.2 Video as a Tool to Study Migrants and Politics

Just like images, video has been an integral part of anthropology and sociology since the beginnings of those disciplines (Banks, 2001; Emmison, Smith, & Mayall, 2012; Erickson, 2011). After a period of disenchantment, video has since the 1970s and 1980s become a common tool for researchers in disciplines as diverse as workplace studies (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010, pp. 6–7), education (Moss & Pini, 2016), social psychology (Erickson, 2011), sociology of conflict (Collins, 2008; Klusemann, 2009). Researchers have argued that both the recording process and the analysis of the recorded material offer a multitude of possibilities for studying social phenomena in a way that interviews or other more conventional methods alone cannot (Fele & Knoblauch, 2012; Knoblauch, 2012). Resurgence of video as a research tool can be partly explained by the increasing technological sophistication and affordability of audio-video recording devices (Heath et al., 2010; Knoblauch, Tuma, & Schnettler, 2014). Renewed interest in video also owes to the growing importance that audio-visual recordings themselves have acquired for the general

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<sup>1</sup>The frames displayed above are taken from this footage.

public as a tool to communicate and interact with others (both off- and online) (Knoblauch et al., 2014).

Alternative methodological standpoints underpin different uses and purposes of video (Harris, 2016; Banks, 2001; Pink, 2013). Realist approaches, more common in sociology, psychology, or criminology, focus on video as content in order to generate insights about social processes, approaching video as a relatively neutral (and direct) representation of reality (Heath et al., 2010). Some of these approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, entail the design of highly formalised data collection and analysis procedures, drawing exclusively on externally generated video material (Collins, 2008; Klusemann, 2009; Levine, Taylor, & Best, 2011). In such studies, demonstrating causality in interaction is perhaps the main analytical concern (Nassauer & Legewie, 2018). Others strands of video research, such as ethnomethodology, while similarly concerned with studying video primarily as data, instead adopt an interpretive approach that tries to account for the social construction of human interaction (Knoblauch, Schnettler, Raab, & Soeffner, 2012). Scholars in this tradition combine researcher-generated video material with participant observation or other qualitative methods in order to enhance the contextual knowledge for understanding the video material – an approach also known as *videography* (Knoblauch et al., 2014). In all of these approaches, the main object of analysis is video itself rather than the process through which video is produced. The role of the researcher is problematised only to the extent that any potential biases or behaviour may affect the validity or reliability of recorded data (Heath et al., 2010; Nassauer & Legewie, 2018).

On the other side of the spectrum, a “reflexive” perspective, emerged in anthropology under the influence of post-modernism, has called for greater attention to the socially constructed nature of video representations (Bates, 2015; Harris, 2016; Pink, 2013). Within this perspective, video is not a neutral data-recording device; knowledge “is produced in conversation and negotiation between informants and researcher, rather than existing as an objective reality that may be recorded and taken home in a note book, camera film or tape” (Pink, 2013, p. 79). It is therefore difficult to disentangle the video product from the conditions of its production, and the recording process should be an object of analysis as much as the final product (Banks, 2001; Pink, 2013). It follows that researchers in this tradition also tend to favour participatory and action research methodologies, involving research participants in co-creation and sometimes even co-analysis of data (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Harris, 2016).

In migration and ethnic studies, researchers have drawn attention to the analytical potential of audio-visual material, particularly to complement methods such as interviews and statistics (Ball & Gilligan, 2010; Gold, 2004; Martiniello, 2017). Nevertheless, use of visual methods in this field remains rather limited (Yalaz & Zapata-Barrero, 2018; see also introduction to this volume). Moreover, the few migration scholars incorporating visual methods in their work have mostly focused on still images (Martiniello, 2017; Ball & Gilligan, 2010; Gold, 2004; Fedyuk,

2012; but see Piemontese, Verstappen, Desille and MacQuarie, this volume, for examples with video).<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the visual has a long history in social movements and public protests, often grounded in the connection between arts and cultural practices on the one side and collective identity formation and political mobilisation on the other (Jasper, 1997; Reed, 2005). Researching such practices is even more relevant for migrants who, due to their liminal position and legal vulnerability within societies of destination, are often constrained with respect to the type and forms of politics they can engage in, and moreover face the challenge of doing politics with very limited financial means. At the same time, unlike natives, migrants can draw on the cultural repertoire of their places of origin (or previous settlement) to produce social and cultural innovation, including in organisations (Gnes, 2018; Kasinitz, 2014; Levitt, 1998). Interpretive researchers have argued that video may be a powerful means to convey “the epistemologies and experienced realities of ...people” (Pink, 2013, p. 5), as well as to investigate individual and collective forms of knowledge, such as *tacit, practical or elusive knowledge* (Torald, Islam, & Mangia, 2018), that would be difficult to capture otherwise. In the following sections I would like to highlight different ways in which video has facilitated, enriched and expanded my understanding of migrant political action.

### 14.3 The Case Study: NDLO, the Jornaleros del Norte and Immigrant Activism in Los Angeles

This chapter describes the use of visual methods in the context of my PhD research on immigrant rights activism in Los Angeles, California. When I began my inquiry, I was primarily interested in uncovering the historical elements that have made Southern California such an extraordinary site for progressive politics, organisational innovation and inter-ethnic collaboration (Gnes, 2018; Milkman, Bloom, & Narro, 2010). To address this question, I initially relied on archive material from immigrant organisations and local foundations, as well as on interviews with local activists. However, while in the city, I also encountered the “there-and-now” of immigrant activism. It was during one of my fieldwork stays, on November 2014, that I stumbled upon the “Chant-Down-the Walls” initiative (described above) and the activist work of the National Day Labourer Organising Network (NDLO) and its in-house band, the *Jornaleros del Norte*.

NDLO was founded in Los Angeles between 2000 and 2002 as a US nationwide network of immigrant-led advocacy organizations (Dziembowska, 2010). Its coordinating structure, led by Salvadoran organiser Pablo Alvarado and a handful of supporting staff, soon became an organization in its own right, primarily focused on

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<sup>2</sup>Outside of migration and ethnic studies, anthropologists have however explored the use of video to research migration (see, for example: Haaken & O’Neill, 2014; Torresan, 2011; Harris, 2016).

supporting Latino day labourers<sup>3</sup> (Nicholls, 2016; Valenzuela Jr., 2003). Alvarado, an immigrant himself with a past as educator and community organiser back home, came to Los Angeles in 1990. Struck by the dreadful conditions of day labourers, many of whom were virtually illiterate, Alvarado began to work as a volunteer educator with the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), a local community organization (Bacon, 2008; Gnes, 2018). In the mid-1990s, together with Salvadoran day labourer, activist and musician Lolo Cutumay, Alvarado founded the *Jornaleros del Norte* (or “day labourers of the North”) (Gnes, 2018). Alvarado and Cutumay invited other immigrant day labourers with music skills to join the band. Its members, many of whom have since come and gone, mainly come from Mexico, Salvador and Guatemala. The band began to perform for other day labourers at parking lots, but has since played at political demonstrations, marches, labour union strikes or fundraisings. Since Alvarado’s move to the newly created NDLO in the early 2000s, the *Jornaleros* have become the organisation’s unofficial “in-house band.”

The “Chant Down the Walls” campaign was conceived by NDLO staff on May 1st 2014, during the annual May Day Rally. As the demonstration approached downtown LA’s Metropolitan Detention Centre, the *Jornaleros del Norte* were performing on a moving truck. The band members noted that several detainees were curiously peeking through the narrow window slits, waving their hands. NDLO organizers realised that inmates – most of them awaiting deportation– could hear the music, and considered that performing in front of such centres could bring detainees some measure of relief.<sup>4</sup> In October and November 2014, as well as intermittently throughout 2015 and 2016, NDLO organized music events in front of detention centres and prison facilities across California and beyond (e.g. Georgia and Alabama). The events were organised to protest the surge in immigrant deportations carried out by the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and featured the *Jornaleros del Norte* but also other Southern Californian artists and bands.

Back in November 2014, attending Chant Down the Walls provided me with a window into NDLO’s bold political work, all the more extraordinary in light of the organisation’s very limited financial and human resources. I kept a field diary of my attendance and recorded some short videos with a low-quality smartphone – mainly with the intention of preserving it as a memory of what I had experienced. It was only upon my return in Europe, after attending a training on social science filmmaking at Budapest’s Central European University (CEU), that I was pushed to reflect on the potential sociological value of video. Such course also provided me with the basics of filmmaking and film production. My initial plan was to shoot a

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<sup>3</sup>In Los Angeles, many Central American and Mexican immigrants, due to their limited formal education credentials and undocumented status, can find employment only in highly informalized and unprotected niches of the labour market as construction, gardening or carpentry (Valenzuela Jr., 2003). Such jobs are generally solicited on a daily basis – hence the name “day labourer”, or *jornalero* in Spanish, to designate those workers – at informally designated street corners and parking lots throughout Southern California, where recruiters come to recruit their workforce for the day.

<sup>4</sup>Omar León, NDLO organiser, personal interview.

short documentary about the band. However, I began to develop a sense that video would also prove useful to better understand NDLO's political work in action.

Between February and May 2015, I followed NDLO staff and the *Jornaleros del Norte* in several of their public actions, recording video footage and keeping written diary entries whenever possible. The over tens of hours of footage covered public events, such as protests, concerts or demonstrations, as well as private rehearsals and interviews. In addition, I also collected video footage of previous actions by the *Jornaleros* and NDLO: such material was either publicly available on YouTube or was in the possession of NDLO's staff, who agreed to share it with me. Drawing on the example of other migration scholars (Gold, 2004), I used video as a tool to complement other qualitative data. I conducted 17 recorded interviews with NDLO's staff and with members of the *Jornaleros*, some of which were also recorded on video. I also collected organizational material produced by the staff for NDLO's official website (press releases, public statements, reports), as well as by the band itself (their CDs and music). In the following sections I will discuss more in detail some of challenges, opportunities and limitations that came from using video and from combining it with other data.

#### **14.4 The Process of Filming: Access, Role in the Field and Reactions**

Some of the most challenging aspects of qualitative research are about gaining access to the field and establishing an ethical working relationship with research participants. It is common (and understandable) to encounter mistrust, scepticism or outward hostility when approaching potential research participants. In the context of this research, while video certainly brought to the fore other types of ethical concerns, it also allowed me to gain access to and create a more equal relationship with research respondents.

Unlike other researchers that have chronicled immigrant activism from an insider position, I approached advocacy organisations in Los Angeles as a sympathetic outsider but without strong activist credentials.<sup>5</sup> Gaining access to the field and to research participants was difficult. In early 2014, still unaware of the *Chant Down the Walls* initiative, I had already tried to reach out to several NDLO's staff via email and phone but had received no response to my interview requests. In November 2014, when an acquaintance informed me of the actions at the detention centres, I attended mainly out of curiosity since I had already given up on interviewing the staff. The prospect of engaging with the band on a documentary project, however,

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<sup>5</sup>My sympathy for immigrant organizations working on inclusion stems from my own background as son of a foreign-born mother, as well as from my experience in non-profit organizations in Europe and in the Middle East. Those experiences have also made me more aware of the entrenched inequalities within contemporary migration systems and of my privileged position therein as a male, white, middle-class European citizen.

gave me renewed motivation upon my return in Los Angeles in January 2015. As it turned out, it also provided me with a more “useful” role in the field for the band and NDLON.

I started following NDLON and the *Jornaleros* on Facebook and Twitter to learn about their upcoming actions/concerts. I became a familiar presence at their public events, including outside of Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup> I introduced myself to NDLON staff and the band, and I began helping out with practicalities, such as setting up the music infrastructure, holding banners, or carrying instruments and amplifiers. In the meantime, one of my dissertation supervisors, who had a direct connection with NDLON’s leadership, supported my case. When I finally approached Pablo with the idea of filming the *Jornaleros del Norte*, including recording a video interview with him, he agreed. It was on the day of our first interview, at NDLON’s headquarters, that he proposed I stay longer and also film *Jornaleros del Norte*’s rehearsal. There I had the chance to formally meet all the members of the band. I presented my proposal for filming the work of the band in the context of my PhD research on immigrant activism, with the end goal of also making a documentary. I expressed my admiration for NDLON’s work and for the music of the *Jornaleros*, and exchanged some words with the percussionist and the drummer. They were in fact surprised that somebody coming from Europe would take an interest in the band, but even more that I could understand and speak some Spanish.<sup>7</sup>

While band members on that evening agreed to be filmed, we also later discussed the terms and conditions of filming. In general terms, we agreed that any resulting product (i.e. documentary), beyond the fact that it could not be distributed for profit, would also have to be approved by the organisation and the members of the band before being publicly distributed. Soon thereafter, we also agreed I would share all my video footage with the organisation at the end of my film project. This possibility first came up in an exchange with Marco Loera, NDLON’s communication coordinator, and Pablo Alvarado following a performance of the *Jornaleros* where Marco was also present and filming:

Marco is packing up his video gear so I take the opportunity to go introduce myself. [...] We start talking about the footage. He thanks me for filming the band around these days [as he was not around], and tells me they are working on a crowdfunding campaign for the next album. I tell him I’d be happy to share footage with him if he needs that for the campaign, he thanks me for that. He says that if I need footage from previous stuff, like the old *Chant Down the Walls*, he’d be happy to share it with me. Pablo joins the conversation. [He must have been listening to our exchange] He looks at me: “So you are going to share your footage with us, right? That’s the agreement, right?” [...] “Yes, I am going to use the material for my own research, but I will also share it with you” He goes, “good, that’s the agreement

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<sup>6</sup>One action took place in Adelanto, a desert town in San Bernardino County 140 km from Los Angeles, and almost 3 h away due to the dreadful traffic jams that congest Southern California.

<sup>7</sup>While perfectly comfortable in speaking English, all band members are native Spanish speakers and generally talk to each other in Central American Spanish rather than English. Initially thinking I was an American graduate student based in Los Angeles, they showed surprise and curiosity when I mentioned my studies in the Netherlands and Spain and my Italian origin. Notwithstanding the clear differences in our life trajectories, it was perhaps this common experience of being “from somewhere else”, as well as our exchanges about colorful Spanish expressions and the *marimba*, a type of xylophone very popular in Guatemala, that facilitated our relation.

then. You share it with us, and you can use it for yourself [...] We'll also give you the old material, and the pictures, you can use all that."

This exchange, recorded in my field diary, prompted further conversations with other staff and the rest of the band, who proposed that NDLO and the Jornaleros would have the right to use my footage for their own promotional purposes. On the one hand, video therefore gave me the opportunity to provide the organisation with something of potential value in return.<sup>8</sup> Such reciprocity, as hinted above, also entailed I could access and use the organisation's own video, photo and other archive material –very valuable material that would have otherwise been inaccessible. On the other, my role of researcher/film-maker shaped my field experience in a different way from what I was used to as an interviewer. For example, I felt I could better justify to others spending several hours a day at NDLO's offices – particularly to staff not involved with the band. As a result, I also had the impression that it became easier not only to interview band members but also other NDLO staff who may have otherwise been difficult to reach.

Filming NDLO's and the Jornaleros' activities afforded new possibilities as much as it raised additional ethical concerns (Pink, 2013). Securing the consent of the band to be filmed did not eliminate the risks of me potentially harming its members, the organisation and/or bystanders (particularly in situations in which it was practically impossible to inform the latter of me filming). This risk may be significant in the case of an advocacy and service-provider organisation working with immigrants in vulnerable situations, particularly in the current polarised political context around immigration. For this reason, while I tried to film as much as possible, I continued to ask the band for permission for filming events and situations, moreover relying on its members' word-of-mouth to learn about the agenda of their performances (and therefore implicitly giving them the option of *not* having me around). Regarding data handling, I saved all collected video footage on three separate external drives, which were then encrypted and password-protected.

For this chapter, I drew reference to snapshots of video footage material – both self-generated and externally generated.<sup>9</sup> To protect the identity of external participants, I used post-production imaging software to blur their faces so as to make them unrecognisable. Once this chapter was finalised, I shared it with NDLO staff and Jornaleros' del Norte band members, who gave their permission to appear – recognisable – in the footage stills. As cautionary measure, I included the real names only of those individuals who are part of NDLO's staff and are already known public figures (and who agreed to be named). Lastly, I sought and obtained permission by the original owner – a member of NDLO staff – to include here snapshots extracted from his footage (Frames 14.1–14.14).

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<sup>8</sup>Whether my video footage would actually prove useful (or usable) for NDLO's purposes is a whole different story. While I shared all my footage material at the end of my fieldwork in May 2015, to my knowledge it has not yet been used by the organization for any promotional purposes.

<sup>9</sup>Due to technical and creative challenges, and much to my regret, the documentary about the band has so far remained an unfinished project. This also means that I made no video footage publicly available.





Frames 14.1–14.2 The Jornaleros del Norte playing facing the detention centre



Frames 14.3–14.4 Activists facing the detention centre holding banners



Frames 14.5–14.7 Activists dancing while the Jornaleros del Norte are performing



Frames 14.8–14.13 Close-up of portion of LA Metropolitan Detention Centre. Light inside a window slit is switched on and off



**Frame 14.14** Inmates inside detention centre waving at activists and bystanders outside

In this section I highlighted how video provided me with new research opportunities and allowed me to engage with research participants in a way that ensured some level of reciprocity. I will now move on to discuss a concrete example of the social interactions I captured on video.

## 14.5 Using Video to Record Micro-interactions in the Field

A key aspect of video data is its ability preserve the temporal sequence and situational arrangements of a particular context, and to allow for endless reproduction and manipulation for analysis and interpretation (Heath et al., 2010; Knoblauch et al., 2014). Video also allows to record fine details of social interaction, including verbal and non-verbal communication (gaze, gesture, facial expression, etc.) – some of which may go unnoticed by the observer (Nassauer & Legewie, 2018; Harris, 2016; see also Collins, 2008). In this section I would like to draw on a video sequence to show how it complemented other types of data to better understand NDLO's political work through the performance of the *Jornaleros del Norte*. In particular, I intend to show how video allowed to capture the interactive dimension of the relationship between the band, the message of its music and the audience.

In his interviews with me, Pablo Alvarado claimed that the idea of creating a band of day labourers was inspired by one of the key tenets of popular education – the use of culturally resonant practices as a community-building tool to foster solidarity amongst stigmatized groups. The political dimension of the band's music



**Frame 14.15** Parking lot. Two members of the Jornaleros, one of them carrying part of the drum set, wave at three men. They greet each other. The Jornaleros invite them to join them

became clear when I began analysing the titles of the songs and their lyrics.<sup>10</sup> For example, the *Corrido de Industry*, written by Omar Sierra- one of the first day labourers to join the band in the 1990s – describes the musician’s dreadful encounter with immigration authorities in the midst of a health check-up in the city of Industry. *Serenata a un indocumentado*, written by Omar León and sung by Loyda Alvarado, instead tells the story of a pained woman who comes every night in front of the detention center where the husband is detained awaiting deportation, hoping to communicate with her husband. *Ese guey no paga*, an upbeat cumbia tune written by Omar León, recalls instead the familiar experience of many day labourers of not getting paid by their employers after a hard day’s work. The lyrics are therefore strongly informed by the lived experiences of immigrants living in Southern California. The style of music is rather eclectic – *cumbias*, *rancheras*, *reggae*, *corridos* – reflection of the skills and taste of leading band members, but nevertheless reflecting a range of music genres that resonate in Mexico and Central America.

On the basis of this information, one may well understand the band’s intention and mission. However, she will still wonder about the actual unfolding of the performance, the audience’s reaction, or the resonance of the message. These questions are difficult to answer only with interviews, documents and artefacts. To show the potential of video, I will then take the example of one of my first experiences accompanying the Jornaleros del Norte, starting with my field notes.

<sup>10</sup>I collected all the CDs recorded by the band: *Cruzando Fronteras* [“Crossing borders”], *Que no pare la lucha* [“Don’t stop the fight”], *Hatze contar* [“Make yourself count”], and *Chant Down the Walls/Tumbando Muros*.



**Frames 14.16–14.17** Men pointing their arms at white pick-up truck, trying to catch the attention of its driver [out of the frame in frame 16]. In frame 17 the truck lowers its right window but does not stop. Men in the frame do not pay attention to the band



**Frames 14.18–14.19** Men are standing near the fence [some 15–20 m from the band]. One man is tentatively looking in the direction of the band, another one is busy with his phone. Band member looks in their direction and shouts: “Come closer, we’re about to start!”

We’ve been driving for a while, Pablo and Omar looking for the ‘right’ place to stop for the band’s performance. There is no official action or demonstration planned for the day, so I am not sure what to expect [...]. I am in the car with Omar, Julio and Eduardo, trailing Pablo and Fernando’s pick-up [...] We see Pablo’s car turning right at the crossroads and entering a Home Depot parking lot. Omar shouts, ‘look, right there!’; he turns there too and follows Pablo. There are about some 10–15 people standing on the side of the parking lot, the one closest to the main road [opposite the Home Depot]. They look like they could be between their early 20s to mid-40s - most of them are dark-skinned. They are wearing baggy brown work pants, t-shirts or basketball sport jerseys, some also straw hats. [...] We park in a corner. I take out my Nikon camera, I attach the external microphone on top, I prepare the GoPro and start filming.

The following sub-section presents the analysis of several video sequences spanning the performance of the Jornaleros del Norte over a period of roughly 35–40 min. I recorded interaction with two different cameras: a GoPro HERO4 and a Nikon DSLR camera with a ZoomHn5 external microphone. Once on the location of the performance, I used the GoPro as tripod-held camera with a broader frame of view and the Nikon as a hand-held camera for close-ups. I selected this scene for analysis because the quality and extensiveness of the video data were sufficient to capture important moments of the interaction between the band and the audience. I catalogued the video clips and proceeded to summarise their content, moreover using the audio feed to include verbal communication between those participating in the



**Frame 14.20** The Jornaleros del Norte begin to play. Here they are performing *Ese gey no paga* (first time)



**Frame 14.21** [The Jornaleros are about to start playing the *Corrido de Industry*]  
 Audience: in listening mode, but not actively engaging. Still at 15 m from the band  
 Band member [voice over from the other side of the frame]: “This was written by a friend of mine, Omar, who wrote this and also started the band. The *Corrido de Industry* is about an immigration raid [*redada*] that took place nearby”



**Frame 14.22** The Jornaleros are playing the *Corrido de Industry*  
 Audience: moved 10 m closer to the action. Posture is more relaxed, everyone is looking in the direction of the band

interaction. Using post-production software, I selected a number of video frames that are exemplary of a number of band-audience interactions, and added a short description of visual cues and a transcription of the audio feed for each instance.<sup>11</sup> Since all spoken exchanges take place in Spanish, they have been translated into English for the reader's convenience.

## 14.6 Sequence Analysis

With the above footage I tried to capture the more fine-grained details of the band-audience interaction, including the shifts in attention span, mood and general attitude of the audience towards the band. The Jornaleros quickly take out their string instruments, set up the drums and start playing. Day labourers, intent on waiting for potential employers and recruiters, are their audience. Video shows the progression of this relationship over the course of the musical performance, including the changing spatial composition of the scene and the verbal and bodily

<sup>11</sup> This method loosely draws inspiration from Video Data Analysis (VDA) (Nassauer & Legewie, 2018) and Sequential Analysis (Knoblauch et al., 2014).



**Frames 14.23–14.24** [after completing first round of songs]

Band member: “Please add us on Facebook, so that we can invite you when we have concerts. We’ll be playing also at the May Day Marches. And this song *Ese guey no paga*, it sounds funny but in reality...”

Audience: “Play it again! The song about the sleazy employer... [whistling]”

Band member: “Yeah, [you guys feel] exploited, right? And what is the motto of the day labourers...? A worked day [*dia trabajado*] is a...”

Audience: “...paid day! [*dia pagado*]”

Band member: “And if they [the employers] want to pay you with a cheque...?”

Audience: “No! no! Cash!” [a man makes a gesture with his hand to mimic handing over cash]

Band member: “Yes, only cash! And [you will accept] nothing of the sort, like “tomorrow I pick you up again and I pay you...””

A man from the crowd: “Here a friend of mine had a bad experience as he was beaten by an employer”

Another man: “Yes, here always comes somebody that doesn’t pay, that’s Mr. Lopez...”

Audience: “Yes, that’s true!”



**Frames 14.25–14.26** Performing *Ese guey no paga* [second time]

Band member: [Sings *Ese guey no paga*]

“I jumped on a truck of sleazy employer [indicates a pick-up truck to the right]

And I realised that I was a migrant

And I realised that I was a migrant”



**Frames 14.27–14.28** Performing *Ese guey no paga* [second time, continues]

Audience: smiling, relaxed posture, taking pictures with their phone

Band member: [Sings *Ese guey no paga*]

“I went to earn a living [*chambear*] here at the Home Depot

I went to earn a living here at the Home Depot”



**Frame 14.29** End of the concert. Exchanging contact details and handshakes

Audience: smiling and engaging with one of the band members. One person is holding the band member’s accordion while he’s talking

communication. In particular, it shows how the attitude of several members of the audience transitions from suspicion and/or indifference towards the band to active engagement (if not support). As the *Jornaleros* begin to play, the day labourers are drawn in by the music, but they remain at distance. Some are taking videos, some keep looking in other directions, hoping that one of the pick-up trucks will stop to hire them, others remains with their arms crossed, unsure of what to make of this all. But slowly, the content of the lyrics sinks in. Several people get closer, some even smile. The final frame shows the band and the day labourers discussing at arms’ length, as if the initial barriers have been broken.



The scenes featuring the performance of *Ese guey no paga* and the discussions around it are perhaps the most illuminating to understand the political function of the music of the *Jornaleros del Norte*. Omar takes the end of the first round of songs to return to the message of the song, warning day labourers against accepting checks from their employers, as the latter may make them impossible to cash. This opening works like a trigger for the audience, that recognises a very familiar situation, and encourages them to share their own (or their friends') negative experiences with abusive employers. At the very least, the song triggers a reflection amongst the audience – testified by the fact that at the very end several day labourers approach Pablo and Omar to ask for more information about NDLO's work.

It is worth discussing also the limitations of this approach. First of all, due to the technological limitations of the devices (quality of video recording, lens capabilities, battery constraints), as well as to my own limitations in handling the recording equipment, video clips significantly varied in length, quality and usability. Second, my choices regarding composition, angle and distance also limited my capacity for comprehensive analysis, (e.g. close-up shots on certain actors limited the possibility of simultaneously observing the interaction among individuals, while wider angles made it more difficult to observe changes in facial expressions and bodily movements). This challenge was only partially offset by using two cameras (a fixed and a hand-held one). Third, recording multi-directional, good-quality audio also proved very difficult – this making transcription sometimes very challenging. In spite of these limitations – some of which I believe may be solved with better equipment and mastery of the equipment – I believe video holds great potential to complement existing qualitative methods, particularly for the study of micro- social interaction.

## **14.7 Reactivity and the Use of Video to Generate Different Insights and Data**

In the previous section, I treated video footage primarily as an “objective” record of a given social interaction. That is, I focused on video primarily as content in itself, paying less attention to the process of filming. In this last section, drawing on the discussion on reactivity, I would instead like to show how video, and particularly the very filming process and its function for research participants, holds the potential for generating alternative insights. I would also like to suggest that film-making itself can help generate different data in combination with other visual methods, for example through recorded photo-elicitation.

One of the issues often discussed in relation to video methods is reactivity, that is, of how the presence of a camera may alter people's supposedly “authentic” behaviour. This issue, of course, relates to the more fundamental debate regarding the nature of video representation. Depending on their methodological standpoints, researchers have tried to either minimise reactivity, in order to preserve the “objective” character of the interactions recorded, or rather to use reactivity in order to

gather different kinds of data that are effectively co-constructed together with research participants (Banks, 2001; Harris, 2016; Knoblauch et al., 2014; Pink, 2013). Pink (2013, p. 80), a proponent of reflexivity, has argued that a “camera becomes part of the its user’s identity and an aspect of the way he or she communicates with others”, and that “ethnographic video makers need to be aware of how the camera and video footage become an element of the play between themselves and informants, and how these are interwoven into discourses and practices in the research context.” Others have instead argued that the issue of reactivity has been exaggerated, since it is wrong to assume that participants are always preoccupied with the camera (Heath et al., 2010). For this reason, they recommend to address the issue as it presents itself –noting when participants notice the camera, and for what reasons, and how that impacts their behaviour (Heath et al., 2010).

Regarding external audiences, it is difficult to precisely assess how my presence affected the scene. In the above scene with day labourers, my presence seemed to draw only some curious looks but no open reactions. I was introduced as part of the band crew, and I was in fact not the only person filming: Marco, NDLO’s communication officer, was also present onsite, and with bulkier equipment than mine. In other situations – a concert at the fundraising event of a community-based organisation, a demonstration on May Day, a rally organised by a local union of port workers – I was in fact surrounded by tens, if not hundreds of other people taking pictures and/or recording video, and I barely drew any attention from the attendees (except when they were chanting slogans directly in my microphone).<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the members of the Jornaleros, my experience of filming revealed instead the key role that video played (and still plays to this date) for NDLO’s outreach, advocacy and campaigning. As I was to learn during my fieldwork, NDLO staff and band members regularly posted videos and pictures of their actions on YouTube and on social media platforms (especially Facebook and Twitter). Those included amateur clips shot by individual staff via their smartphones, as well as professional footage prepared by NDLO’s communication staff.<sup>13</sup> Reciprocity agreements of the type I mentioned in an earlier section therefore made a lot of sense for the organisation: through video, NDLO’s actions – including the performances of the Jornaleros – can reach a plurality of audiences, from those who are present to those who will potentially view it online. In this context, as film-maker – embodying the prospect of potentially bringing the work of the Jornaleros to others’ fruition – I moreover contributed to creating social situations that may have not otherwise taken place.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>As others have argued, protests and demonstrations are typical social situations where most participants expect the possibility of being recorded or photographed and are therefore used to adjusting their behavior “for the cameras” (Nassauer & Legewie, 2018).

<sup>13</sup>See, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMxC-Dp-wUg>

<sup>14</sup>In one instance, we (the band and I) drove to a parking lot that had a historical and emotional significance for the band, only to find out that the place had since changed and day labourers were no longer congregating there. Even though there was nobody there besides the band and myself, Pablo told me to take out the camera and start filming. He began with a speech where he recalled

Last, I would like to also suggest that video may also be used, to its turn, to create new data, for example by eliciting in research participants long-forgotten memories (Banks, 2001). While I was at NDLO's office, waiting for a rehearsal to start, I was shown by one of the staff old archive material including tapes, pictures and documents. Some of the photos depicted old members of the band during the 1990s and the early 2000s. The film project provided me with the perfect excuse to ask Pablo Alvarado to describe a few of the pictures to me, particularly to reminisce about the early days of the band. It is in this context that I learned more about the lives of former members, as well as about the internal politics within the band.

## 14.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I drew on my fieldwork experience in Los Angeles to discuss the potential of video for qualitative research on migration and political action. I focused specifically on three aspects: access to the field, research respondents and data; video and the study of micro- social interaction; video as a tool to generate new insights and data. I argue that video has facilitated, enriched and expanded my understanding of migrant political action in several ways, some of which were entirely unexpected at the beginning of this research. Within the field of migration studies, video appears particularly suitable to research the terrain of politics and culture, since it provides the means to study a key social aspect that is extremely difficult to investigate in detail only with other types of methods (except perhaps ethnography): interaction. In my case, it proved a very useful complement to interviews, artefacts and archive documentation.

To highlight the potential of video does not mean to gloss over the open questions and the risks that such method brings. Using visual methods, particularly with no prior experience, presented a number of challenges, including ethical (how to respectfully engage with research participants), technical (how to properly master the video equipment, how to effectively handle video data) and more broadly methodological ones (what is the status of video data, what is the role of the researcher in the process, and so forth). While these are all real challenges, I believe they should not deter researchers from using video in migration studies, rather encourage them to keep reflecting on how video methods can advance the field. As argued by Harris (2016, p. 29), "video does not have one singular use or "right" way of functioning as a research tool, nor one context that is most appropriate, either disciplinary or in the field. Perhaps the most exciting part of considering using video as a method is its flexibility and adaptability."

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the early days of the band, and then invited the rest of the band to share their thoughts before playing a few songs.

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