The Borders On Our Minds

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Once the most prosperous country in Latin America, Venezuela is now fully in the midst of a profound humanitarian crisis. Egregious governmental mismanagement, lack of medicine and food, increased mortality and crime rates, reappearance of previously eradicated diseases and resource scarcity have aggregated into unprecedented mass migration of a continental scale.

The number of displaced Venezuelans is predicted to surpass 8 million in 2020,1 becoming the largest exodus in Latin American history. However, only recently has it started being addressed as a refugee crisis.

Colombia accounts for the largest Venezuelan refugee population of approx. 1.2 million2. Crimes committed by Venezuelan migrants, many of whom are refugees, fuel xenophobia and exacerbate the relations between the hosts and the hosted. Colombian officials have pledged to keep the borders open, but the tensions persist.

We believe that things may change for the better if only people who live across the borders had the chance to listen to the other side. Building on our skills, interests and areas of expertise, we will produce a documentary that calls for empathy between Venezuelans, including the refugees, and Colombians, including those who had taken refuge in Venezuela during the Colombian guerrilla conflict. The documentary will provide an account of the social effects of Venezuela’s crisis, narrate the subjects’ life stories and examine how their paths relate to one another. We found little effort to reconcile or explore the conflict’s human dimension in similar works on the issue. For this reason, we believe, our work is pertinent to alleviate the tensions and promote peace.

We will work out of Bogotá, the capital and the economic powerhouse that draws the majority of immigrants and refugees. We will also visit the border town of Cúcuta to interview Venezuelan refugees arriving in the country. We will post daily vlogs and background research as the project unfolds, thus ensuring the transparency of our work, fostering audience engagement and allowing for interactivity and collaboration. The documentary will be supplemented by a long-form feature article to be published in OU Daily and Medium as well as to be pitched to bigger outlets. Lastly, screenings of the film and following discussions will be held at the University of Oklahoma, College of the Atlantic and at least one affiliated movie theatre in the U.S. (Reel Pizza in Bar Harbor, ME).

The film will bring together four of the major modes of documentary:

- Expository — providing an intimate account of a subject through commentary and illustration;
- Observational — following and observing social subjects as they go about their lives;
- Poetic — featuring cinematography that captures the beauty of human life and their natural surroundings;
- Interactive — created through pre-production vlogs, social media presence and promotion that allows for the audience to shape the filmmakers’ contacts, experiences and perspectives.

Furthermore, the documentary will consider the following:

**Potential ethical issues:** Represent social actors with respect; avoid deception, misrepresentation, false impression of objectivity; provide factual accuracy.

**Scope:** Focus limited to Bogotá and Cúcuta to avoid scope creep — these two places are among the highest refugee concentration areas.

**Intended audience:** Colombians, Venezuelans, refugees, foreign audiences dealing with similar crises, broader public that may be persuaded to support the cause. Subtitles in multiple languages (Spanish, English, French, Russian, Ukrainian et al.) will be generated.

**Intended impact:** to establish a peaceful dialogue, a precedent for others to follow; to inform the outsiders, to break down the stereotype about vicious immigrants and hostile hosts; to produce an art piece that captures and documents a flagrant historic crisis.

**Release platform:** Screenings at schools; social media (Youtube, Vimeo, Facebook, Instagram, Medium, Wordpress), OU Daily and COA HeLaCell. The supplementary feature article will be pitched to various popular legacy and digital media upon completion, depending on the story format.

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1 Acosta, Vargas - “Number of Venezuelan migrants could double to eight million: OAS.”, Reuters, June 2019

2 “New Research: The Venezuelan Migration Crisis in Colombia” IRI, September 2019
We will explore the possibility of crossing the border into Venezuela, visa permitting, and will document the process to underscore its (in)efficacy. We also seek to organize two public screenings for locals and refugees to watch our documentary and have an opportunity to hold a discussion. We have already contacted Gimnasio Femenino in Bogotá and continue reaching out to the schools in Cúcuta.

**Why us?**
As a Venezuelan, Angeles is determined to document her nation’s ongoing struggle, confront the violence and denounce the international reduction of Venezuelans to an image of despair and poverty. She wants her fellow citizens to be safe and to feel likewise. She wants to give them a voice and more agency in how they are being represented abroad. She wants Venezuelans in need to be welcome abroad, starting with Colombia. She studied film production and theory for two years at UWC ISAK Japan. She currently develops an independent study on refugee economies and communities at her college.

Coming from a Ukrainian-Russian family, Vlad feels for the Venezuelan cause. He hopes to convey the message of peace and reconciliation not only to Latin Americans but also to all those who hold a grudge against their neighbor. Vlad is a senior journalism major, film studies minor and OU Daily reporter. Apart from his print, broadcast and online journalism schooling and film theory studies, he has experience in script writing and documentary studies. Moreover, he has a firm command of the Spanish language.

Additionally, we will be accompanied by Christian Voloschenko, a professional videographer from Ukraine who will provide most of the necessary video equipment. Christian’s experience in commercial and art videography will augment our technical background. The three of us have experience producing short-form documentary on topics including the Libyan Civil War, Ecuador’s 2019 protests, the Amazon fires, the Chinese occupation of Tibet, corruption in Ukraine. Apart from our academic, strategic and practical skill sets, we bring to the table both local and outsiders’ perspectives. Furthermore, we have great experience in travel, living abroad, intercultural communication and cultural acquisition, which will facilitate our exploration of the human and cultural dimensions of the project. Lastly, we are certain that we will succeed because we believe in our ideas and, most importantly, we believe in ourselves.

**Disclaimer:** This is an ambitious art and advocacy project that requires substantial funding. Reaching out to the Projects for Peace for your kind support and guidance, we assume full responsibility to make our documentary happen. However, we also hold that overplanning will likely impede the creative development of our documentary. In fact, provisionalisism, the ability to adjust and tweak on the go, is the fundamental stimulant for artistic creation. In other words, we genuinely believe that filmmakers who have pre-arranged and booked every second of their work before getting deployed in the field are not exploring all the subjects, perspectives and truths. We hereby solemnly request your trust in our zeal, diligence and determination. Nevertheless, here are our **Timeline and Action Plan:**

**Preparation - in progress - (January 1 - April 21):** Narrowing down the pool of subjects, establishing relationships. Continuing to reach out and scheduling visits to refugee camps and neighborhoods. Canvassing for schools and other venues for screenings and discussions. Doing thorough historical research of Venezuelan-Colombian relations and gathering data on the refugee crisis.

**Pre-production (April 22 - July 1):** Confirming the schedule (interviews, visits and screenings) with the subjects as soon as the funding comes in. Finalizing a detailed script, storyboard, location list and shot list. Reserving video equipment. Booking flights and accommodation.

**Production:**  
- **Bogotá (July 2 - July 18):** Arriving to Colombia. Meeting up with Vanessa Taylor, human ecologist and part-time videographer, who agreed to guide us through the city, introduce us to the local culture and community as well as assist the filming process. Meeting with our community sources in the city, Juan Piñeros and Milebis Benavidez. Shooting interviews, B-roll and establishing shots, recording soundscape, meeting Venezuelans in the Cedritos neighborhood and conducting street interviews. Making connections with locals.  
- **Cúcuta (July 19 - July 23):** Visiting the city’s contrasting neighborhoods, rich and poor. Interviewing Milciades Álvarez, a displaced Venezuelan in Cúcuta. Approaching the border, visiting the refugee camps, conducting street interviews with locals and refugees.  
- **Bogotá (July 24 - July 31):** Reviewing the footage, additional shooting, gathering archival materials. Following up with the sources. Final touches.

**Post-Production - Bogotá (August 1 - August 15):** Editing, sound design. Returning the equipment. Releasing the final product, possibly with a trip back to Cúcuta. Wrapping up the social media campaign. Screenings and discussions at the two participating institutions — next school term.