Refugee Selfies and the Media of Migration (with Eszter Zimanyi)

[opening music]

00:22 **Juan Llamas-Rodriguez**: Welcome to the Global Media Cultures Podcast. I am your host Juan Llamas-Rodriguez. Today we were discussing selfies, representation, and the uses of mobile media by people migrating in precarious conditions. Our guest is Eszter Zimanyi. She is a PhD candidate and Annenberg Fellow in Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Southern California. Her work has been published in the journal Transnational Cinemas, Visual Anthropology, Feminist Media Studies, Intermédialités, and the Media Fields Journal. She is a former programmer of USC's Middle East film screening series, and served as a consultant for the Wende Museum's 2019 exhibit, "Watching Socialism: The Television Revolution in Eastern Europe." Eszter's research interests include migration, diaspora and refugee studies, global and transnational media, post-colonial and post-socialist studies, militarism, documentary and digital media. Eszter, welcome to the Global Media Cultures podcast.

01:24 **Eszter Zimanyi**: Hi, thank you for having me.

01:27 **JLR**: I wanna start by, how did you get to this set of varied interests? Why are these topics interesting to you? And also, why are they an important area to study?

01:38 **EZ**: I think, similarly to a lot of people, my research questions are quite personal. They're my way of trying to understand myself and my place in the world. So, I am an immigrant. I was born in Hungary and I immigrated to the United States with my mom when I was two years old, at the very end of 1991, which was at the same time that the Soviet Union was collapsing. And 10 years later, we have 9/11 and the beginnings of the War on Terror. So for me, my childhood is very much book-ended by the Cold War and the War on Terror as these two ideological projects that have really shaped global politics for the past 60 plus years. And I also have the experience of a certain kind of displacement, all of my extended family still live in Hungary for the most part. It's just my mom and my brother in the United States with me. I think, broadly, my research is asking questions about the relationship between contemporary media and migration with attention to how both of these things intersect with military and humanitarian

interventions, expressions of nationalism, and the production and enforcement of various kinds of borders.

03:01 **EZ**: In my work, I focus primarily on non-fiction media objects, so everything from documentary films, photographic and broadcast journalism, to government-sponsored media campaigns, things like billboards, advertisements, voter booklets that gets sent out to potential voters, maps and data visualization projects, and also social media, which we'll be talking about today. But I also consider archival materials that get remediated through contemporary art exhibits and installations. So I see my work as being quite interdisciplinary, but I'm always asking all of my research questions through media objects that I analyze and I'm always in conversation with media studies.

03:46 **JLR**: That's great, but why engage with these topics in relation to media studies?

03:51 **EZ**: I think media studies is such an incredible field because it gives us the tools to interrogate not only what we see, so what's presented to us within a given frame, but also how we see what we see. So, how are images constructed and presented to us, from whose perspective are they being shown, how do images circulate, how do they create and accrue meaning as they migrate from one context to another, and what do images actually do in the world? Media studies also guides us to question the things that we don't see, so either because they're left out of the frame or made invisible or because they're taken for granted and seen as natural or unremarkable. And finally, media studies asks us to move beyond the visual and attend to the ways in which we engage media through sound and touch as well. So by asking us what and how we do or do not see, hear, and feel media around us, media studies allows us to examine how the world and our understandings of it take shape. And we have to remember, that media is not something that simply represents the world to us, but it has an active role in producing and shaping our surroundings as well, so it carries really important implications for our political environment, our social environment, and how our lives are managed and constructed and navigated by all of us.

05:20 **JLR**: Okay, so today we're discussing your article, “Digital Transience: Emplacement and Authorship in Refugee Selfies,” which is published in the *Media Fields Journal*, issue 12, in 2017. Can you give us a brief history of this particular article, like when you begin working on it, how did it come about? And then whether and how did the ideas change in the process of working through it?

05:47 **EZ**: So in 2015, in the summer, which was the summer after my very first year of graduate school, I had decided to go to Istanbul just as a tourist for two weeks. This was in June, in late June, so it was a little bit before what would become known as kind of the European migrant or refugee crisis, and the long summer of migration really kind of kicked off in global news media. And I was in Istanbul, it was an amazing time, it was during Ramadan, it was a lot of fun, and I was with friends and we went to this cafe, and our server was this young guy, who I call Amer, who was really sweet and we were just chatting and talking about places to go and... I forget exactly. I think we tried to be nice and say thank you in Turkish. We went all in with our pronunciation, as often people do when they're tourists, and he sort of responded like, "Oh, I'm actually not Turkish." We were like, "Oh, where are you from?" And he was like, "Well I'm from Syria." And so then we started chatting about how exactly he ended up in Istanbul, and he told us that he had been there for two years, working under the table. And I guess, I just felt like I had a connection with this person and we exchanged information and we were like, "Let's stay in touch."

07:23 **EZ**: So we sort of stayed in touch casually, and after I had left Istanbul, like a few weeks later, he messaged me and he was like, "I'm going to Germany." And I was like, "What do you mean you're going to Germany? Like how?" And he was like, "Don't worry about it." And didn't tell me anything. So I was like, "Okay, please be safe." At this point, it started to become more visible, the numbers of people who were moving in unauthorized fashion, if you will, from Turkey to Greece and then making their way northward. And so I wasn't really checking in on him that closely because I didn't want to kind of bug him or stress him out, but I noticed that when he would arrive in new places he would be taking selfies. And not only that, but he would be geo-tagging these selfies, and then I was like, "Wait a minute, you're posting these publicly, what's behind that?" And I started thinking about like, "Well, I wonder if other people are doing this. This is sort of interesting and not something that I would have expected to see." I mean, obviously, there were a lot of photographs of refugees who were in the process of taking selfies that were being circulated in the global news media, but we weren't seeing the selfies themselves, and so I thought, "Well, I wonder if I can find these through the geotags.

08:53 **JLR**: So we could say that the main object of study in your article is "The refugee selfie." Quote, unquote. And I say "quote unquote" because as you point out, the term "refugee selfie" even as you are using it, remains somewhat imprecise or uncertain in some way. So, both as an object of study for you but also as a political category more broadly, and all the implications that come with categorizing someone as a refugee.

Can you talk to us about that, both working through this imprecise object of the refugee selfie, but also why it must remain imprecise? It's not like it's going to be a thing that we can grab in the world.

09:37 **EZ**: Yeah, definitely. So I think, first, if we can give ourselves some grounding and talk about what is the actual legal definition of a refugee. That legal definition, it comes from the 1951 Geneva Convention, which was in direct response to the events of World War II. So, the original definition of who is a refugee is, in the convention, “As a result of events occurring before the 1st of January 1951, and owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such a fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who not having a nationality and being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or owing to such a fear is unwilling to return to it.” So in this original text, the word “events” is very much understood to be events that occurred in Europe. And in 1967 there was a protocol that then removed these temporal and geographical limits found in the convention, so now it's just, “A person who, owing to a well-founded fear,” everything that I read.

11:08 **EZ**: But we have to ask certain questions about, how does this actually get decided? How do you acquire status as a refugee? The process of identifying refugees and providing them with protection is primarily the responsibility of state governments. So the United Nations Human Commissioner for Refugees, the UNHCR, it advises and it assists state governments in providing and making status determinations and providing services to states that don't have the resources to do everything themselves, but really the decision's left to the representatives of governments in countries who are processing these claims to decide, "Yes, this person meets our criteria for receiving refugee status, or no." So there are a lot of potential issues, right, that can come up in making these determinations. How exactly does one establish proof of persecution, or that they have a well-founded fear? Particularly if you've left very quickly, maybe left a situation within a matter of hours because something has changed on the ground and you need to get out. You might not have everything you need with you to be able to provide what then the state considers permissible evidence that you can present to a court.

12:26 **EZ**: So that presents a huge issue, that you have to perform the notion of a victim, of someone who's been persecuted, allegedly, to people who don't speak your

language, have not grown up in your culture, who may have very different understandings of what fear or sadness or stress or so on looks like and is emoted as. So when I was thinking about "Why am I calling these refugee selfies?" I mean, certainly, I have in a way of knowing, unless I ask the person, "Have you been given legal refugee status?" Which is different than receiving asylum as well. I have no way of knowing whether or not they're actually considered refugees by the state, but I felt that when I was writing this, again, in late 2015, so while the "refugee crisis" or "migrant crisis," these names get used interchangeably, was pervasive in global news media, I mean it was everywhere, just these horrific images of hundreds and hundreds of people dying at sea or washing up on shore or waiting at different border checkpoints or marching and refusing to stay in place and making their way forward and taking their autonomy to move to the place that they felt that they could be safe.

13:56 **EZ**: In the midst of all of that, I felt like these selfies that I was finding, they were participating in this discourse about a refugee crisis. And they were interacting with other images about this crisis and followed patterns that, to me, made it likely that they would identify themselves as refugees or would be seeking asylum. And I wanted to use the word "refuge" at the time because I felt that the word "migrant" had really been appropriated by sort of right-wing, politically, to undermine these people's cases. To say that these are not people who are in need of protection, they're people who are coming for economic reasons, who are just trying to take advantage of the benefits they can get in Europe, and they're fraud essentially. And this word "migrant" became used almost like a slur to dismiss the stories that these people were telling about the very real hardships that they were facing and the impossible conditions from which they were coming, like they could not make a life in where they were coming from. And there are many reasons for that, which we might need a whole other podcast to get into. But I felt at the time that "refugee" to me, affirmed that they were deserving of protection from a host country, that they were being in some way persecuted or living with immense fear and deserve to have a hearing and to be safe.

15:39 **JLR**: Right, and I think one of the things that's really helpful is, as you point out, by calling them refugee selfies you're sort of also importing this idea of the selfie as a gesture rather than a stable media object. One of the interesting things about thinking through and analyzing selfies is we're interested in the act and the performance of what we ultimately see as the image, but rather how we got to that. So, as you're pointing out, "refugee" as a category, sometimes, it's very much just a bureaucratic category, it is determined by the governments that are receiving people claiming asylum, for example, or asking for protections.

16:26 **JLR**: So it might just be a category that is designated to you by some authority or some institution. So it might not be a social category that people might identify with. But for you, calling them "refugee selfies" is in some way pointing to the gesture of taking the selfie and of posting it as already enough proof to show the people who are representing themselves in these images are already making a claim for why they would want these protections, as why they would need these protections. So the refugee selfie is not... At least the way I'm reading it, is not determined by the status of the person. It's not a refugee selfie because a refugee took it, but rather the refugee selfie itself is a way to talk about that condition of being someone trying to look for refuge, if you will. Someone taking that trip as a way to apply for those kinds of protections in some way.

17:24 **EZ**: Yeah, and for me that's where this active geo-tagging I think became really important, because I was thinking about the affirmative power that that process of putting yourself on the map provides you in a period of time in which you actually have an incredibly unstable relationship to place. You're moving, you don't know where or when, or if you might be apprehended, if you might be deported or pushed back over multiple borders. People have to remember that these journeys are not a straight line from A to B, they're not smooth. They take years for many people, and people get sort of trapped in these sort of cycles of making it to a certain point and then being apprehended and being deported and trying again. I know you know, because you do similar work, that very often migrants and refugees refer to this as "the game" of trying to cross a certain border.

18:28 **EZ**: So that sort of instability and that uncertainty, for me, was answered with this act of map making, which is in many ways so simple, but it's also a way to take ownership of your own narrative and to give yourself a sense of coherency to what's happening. "Where am I, where did I come from, where am I going? I can see it." I can look at these pictures and remember, the good times and the bad times, and see how far I've come, and it's on my own terms, it's not being constructed for me by outsiders who are already trying to determine whether or not I constitute the proper refugee subject for them, whether or not I'm properly sympathetic or legible as a victim. And that, again, to go back to that process of having to prove a well-founded fear, that relies on people reproducing victim narratives about themselves.

19:37 **EZ**: It's a very limiting subjecthood to be reduced to only your suffering. Because no matter how much anyone suffers in the world, we also have different capacities, we

have capacities for joy, we have capacities for hope, we have capacities for asserting ourselves and for being ambitious and for making plans for the future and for trying and to kind of put someone into this tiny box of helpless victim who is only ever gonna be that and is just gonna sit in some kind of camp and get aid. That's all limiting, a limiting narrative to assign for someone. And so I think that the selfie does something very different when you find yourself in this prolonged state of uncertainty and legal eligibility, because it's a way of maintaining some kind of normalcy as well, and sometimes normalcy is really pleasurable and really necessary to feeling okay, to have the one thing that you can keep doing, which is sending silly photos or posting silly photos of yourself, and not constantly feeling stressed out about all of the things that you can't control.

20:51 **JLR**: Right. Yeah, I think as you've been talking about it, I keep going back to thinking about the refugee application process, or the bureaucratic part of it, is a representational process. You have to present yourself to the authority as someone who is in danger and suffering and therefore needs that protection. But as you point out, it's a very limited and a very limiting representational process, because you are reduced to your suffering. All that authority is interested in is whether you're in danger and whether you've been suffering and therefore that will grant you the proper status. But part of what's so interesting about looking at these selfies or thinking about the selfies is that it opens up to say: even when they're selfies of joy or self-representations of a happy moment, that in itself is still evidence and it's still a marker of the need for that protection, the need for these migrants to be protected by, let's say in this case, the European governments, because they have nowhere else to go.

21:54 **JLR**: Because if I'm posting a very happy picture on my way somewhere else, it's also proof that I'm happier than I was in the place where I was probably persecuted or fearing for my life. But it's a different way of articulating that need than the one that the institutions currently ask for, which is, "Just show me the suffering and show me the persecution, and I want those representations, those media, as opposed to the happiness ones." But as you point out, we contain multitudes, even in the worst of conditions people find moments of joy, find moments of pleasure. And being able to self-represent those in the absence of any authority, whether it's the governments, the journalists, the media, so on and so forth, doing that is in itself a very powerful act.

22:41 **EZ**: Yeah.

22:42 **JLR**: So, one of the things that you point out, which I thought it was fascinating, is in the corpus of selfies that you look at, one of the trends that you notice a lot is that most of these selfies were posted by men, or at least let's say male-presenting people, and most of the ones that you found that could be considered selfies that included women or children who seem like they were also migrating, they were not posted by them but they were posted usually by aid workers or someone that seemed like they weren't the person migrating, but they'd come across the person migrating. Can you tell us more about that and how this speaks to a broader distinction in the category of refugee and the sort of gender dynamics of that?

23:27 **EZ**: Yeah. So to clarify, I mean, it's not the case that women and children are not taking selfies. What is not happening is that I wasn't finding them publicly available. So where they're sharing them is the question, they're either keeping their accounts private or they're sending them through text messages. But certainly we've seen many photographs of women and children taking selfies that have been from a third person perspective, so a journalist or somebody who is there to meet them as they arrive on shore or at a certain place and captures them in the act of taking a selfie. The difference is that I was only finding photographs of men publicly available on Instagram. And, again, it would be speculation, I haven't gone back to do that kind of ethnographic research that would be necessary to find out, why men seem to be more comfortable sharing their photographs publicly than women or children.

24:26 **EZ**: There is this really fascinating dichotomy that emerges, and one of the primary reasons I think that men are left out of the refugee imagination is because in this sort of classic narrative of war, women and children are always sort of allowed humanitarian passage, you protect the women and children and it's the men who go to fight. So men are thought of as members of the military. And that, again, is another very limiting identity that is ascribed to people, and that also perpetuates this notion that men are threatening. And so what we were seeing in a lot of the sort of anti-migrant discourses around this moment of the European migrant or refugee crisis, was that people were trying to prove the inauthenticity of these refugees by saying, "These are all men, they're all fighters, they're all coming here to invade our territory or to harass and rape our women and to steal our jobs." And so on and so forth, "Why aren't they back in their country fighting?"

25:42 **JLR**: Yeah, and in some ways it shares a lot of the insights that, let's say, some feminist media studies does on thinking about selfies of young women, for example. If most of mainstream media replicates this idea of how do we present women's bodies,

is only for the male pleasure or for being looked at, young women taking selfies is a way for them to intervene in that and say, "I actually want to be presented in these ways." And a lot of the scholarship mentions this. So I think one of the interesting resonances that you find is, this is a similar thing for men who are migrants. It's mainstream media will always present us threats, because it feeds into these easy narratives about invaders or men as militaristically force invading another country. So how do we take back some of that power and have some intervention into these? And it's presenting ourselves as, "Hey, we're regular people just having some hopes and dreams and moving." Right?

26:51 **EZ**: Yeah. And the selfie itself is in many ways was this kind of intimate exchange. You mentioned earlier the idea of the gesture, which Paul Frosh writes beautifully about selfies as gestural images that are asking for some kind of return, like a like or a comment or something, but it's meant to feel that it provides some kind of communicative exchange between the producer and the viewer of the selfie. And that sort of intimacy that selfies provides us I think, again, stands in juxtaposition to the journalistic photographs that we get which, again, you have their reasons, because journalists are there to document things as they see them and to try and capture the scale of events. And of course, photo journalists don't always have a choice for which of their photos is gonna be picked up by a news agency to be circulated, but what we see so often, if you just Google the word "refugees" you see these images of just masses and masses of people or overcrowded boats taken from an aerial viewpoint, which re-establishes the sort of hierarchy of looking. It's us as the viewers who have the God's eye view, who can see everything, who can see how many people are showing up here.

28:14 **EZ**: And there's that tension between, on the one hand, the sense of authority that that viewing images gives to people, like seeing as a form of power, as a form of gaining knowledge, and then the reality of just how many people have been displaced, that can cause people to be very afraid. But again, we have to be careful not to reduce people to just that, and to understand that the people have entire life histories that we need to really be thoughtful about and consider. And also consider not just what's happened to them over there, but how are we a part of it, what's our connection to the systems that are leading to mass displacement around the globe. Because we're not innocent spectators, we do have very quite direct relationships with what's happening in the world, by virtue of the fact that we pay taxes and those taxes fund the military and we make lots of arms sales and that perpetuates war and war perpetuates displacement. And so I think it's also an invitation for us to think about ourselves in

relation because we're meeting on sort of different terms, I mean virtually meeting in a sense, or encountering each other on different terms. And there is that sort of shared silly experience of taking selfies that we all do and we all recognize and we understand the form and the genre.

29:49 **JLR**: Right. So we've been talking a lot about the self-representational aspect of selfies, but as you've pointed out, one of the other interesting aspects of selfies, and particularly these selfies, are their geolocation, so how they also mark a point in space. So the key concept that you trace in your article is this of digital transience. And it's interesting because it's trying to do a mediation between thinking about the condition of being uprooted or being in movement with the trend in thinking about geo-locative media as placing people, or putting people in a particular place, given that you can tag them. So can you talk to us a little bit more about this idea of digital transience and how you're bringing in these two different ways of thinking about uprootedness and placeness?

30:46 **EZ**: So, the term "digital transience" was my direct building from the work of Larissa Hjorth and Sarah Pink, who have written a really beautiful essay on locative media where they create the concept of the digital wayfarer. And they were really thinking about, again, the sort of everyday person who has this stable relationship to place and is moving from home to the coffee shop to school, to work, wherever, and is taking photographs and geo-tagging them and as they go about their day-to-day. And they write that the digital wayfarer entangles online and offline as they move, and that that creates this emplaced visuality. So it's part of place and it makes place, and it connects and traverses the material physical with the digital intangible. I really loved that sort of way of conceptualizing what locative media does for us, but I wanted to think about, "Well, what happens to this experience of sort of making place and entangling online and offline when you're, again, moving in these very precarious ways, and there's a lot of certainty about where you're going to be the next day or two days from now?"

32:10 **EZ**: And so I built out from that to think about this idea of transience, so this sort of movement that is unpredictable in terms of length of time and stay in any place, and to think about digital transience as a way to describe the specificity of digital content that's created by someone whose life conditions forced this less stable relationship to any place, both symbolically and materially. So, symbolically in the sense that when you enter a new space and people see you, they visibly mark you as someone who's not supposed to be there, but also materially in the sense that if you don't have the

legal authority given to you by the state to be in a place you're gonna be forced again to move, and that affects your material life conditions.

33:11 **EZ**: So, in that context, where you as a person don't know where you're going to be, when you're going to be able to stop moving, when you're going to be able to settle and feel safe and start your life again (not to say that life stops when you are in this place of refugee-dom) but to be able to kind of live it on your terms again, what does this process of geo-tagging provide you with? And I argue that the digital transient is staking a claim. Staking a claim to the right to exist in any place that they are, and also inviting whoever views that claim to acknowledge both their right to be there and the precarity of their existence in that place.

34:06 **JLR**: Yeah. You mentioned this in your article, but could we talk a little bit about the ethical implications of dealing with images of people who are maybe still in precarious states. So, you have the two examples of two men who actually gave consent for you to be able to use your images, their names have been changed but those images are still reproduced, right? And we should note, all of these images you found publicly on a social media platform. So it's not like in any of them you went in and found something that was meant to only be shared privately. Whoever posted it, was posting it with the assumption that anyone who has an Instagram account can see it. But what are some of the ethical implications? What are some of the considerations in thinking about, how do we talk about, how do we write about these kinds of images, in your work or generally?

35:06 **EZ**: Yeah. It's such an important question, and I think it's a question that I continue to struggle with all the time. What are the potential risks of making someone more visible who might be in a position in which it's safer for them to stay under the radar? So, it is true that I found these photos publicly. Amer, of course, I already knew, I met in person and so I was connected to him on social media, but he had left those posts public. And then Nassim was one of the people I found through Explore Places, and I had reached out directly to say, "Can I speak with you about this?" And it took me some while and I had to work with a translator to get him to agree to talk to me before he then gave me permission to reproduce his photos. In both cases I obscured their names and the names of anybody else who appeared in the comments, the usernames of accounts, and the photos that I reproduce are screenshots off my phone, so the metadata is gonna be from me, not from them, so that adds a sort of small layer of protection. But when we're thinking about the ethical implications of taking these images out of their original context and circulating them to a wider

audience, there's multiple things I think about. One is consent. So even if the person has posted their image publicly, they might not be envisioning that this photo is gonna take a life of its own, that they might lose control of.

36:47 **EZ**: And so to do that without trying to make contact and asking for permission I think is, for me, unethical. Another consideration is actual potential legal harm and personal safety. So when someone decides to post their photo publicly, they're assuming a certain amount of risk, no matter who they are. But again, if I take that image or someone else takes that image and it goes viral, the visibility you've now placed on that person can cause way more consequences than it just sitting sort of in an obscure place of the Internet, where even though it's there people weren't necessarily finding it or coming across it. I mean I had to work, in a sense, to find these photos. So in terms of Explore Places, the methodology I used is in many ways like not ideal, because it's very slow and it's subject to a lot of technical issues and that when you're just scrolling forever your app might crash unexpectedly. But I was really just by myself, personally going through in this inefficient way, in order to see what had been geo-tagged in a particular place. And I did that because I wanted to have the kind of sensory experience of scrolling the grid and seeing what images appear under any geotag, because that tells us about how a place is imagined, and then seeing how the kind of moment of the refugee selfie might disrupt that imaginary.

38:25 **EZ**: That was what I was trying to envision. But it's not the same as if you want an actually scientifically sound sample size, where you wanna extract tons and tons of data and be able to see patterns, right? Like a social scientist is not gonna like this method, because the sample size is small and it's a speculative argument. The ethics of it are a real conundrum, because on the one hand I think we need to really change the narratives about refugees and how we understand them and what constitutes a right to protection. I feel very strongly that climate refugees are real, and right now under that Geneva definition, there's not a line that says, "Owing to the collapse of your habitat, you deserve protection." But this is something that is gonna be affecting our world... Is affecting our world, and will continue to affect our world for the years to come. And so I think we need to start rethinking these definitions and also rethinking the narratives we produce about what a refugee is and complicating those and thinking more expensively about people's humanity, people's existences. And in order to do that, I think media studies provides us with the tools to be able to talk about these images and narratives with more nuance, but I wanna make sure that when I do that, that I'm doing that in the most thoughtful way possible, that I'm not unintentionally putting someone in harm's way.

40:10 **JLR**: A lot of the threat or the risk of putting your image out there on social media, it's not just the context where you put it on. It's not that you putting it on is bad or that it shows anything that might affect you in that moment, but it can be re-contextualized, it can be taken up and then used for all of these other things, so being aware of those issues in advance is, I think, one of the best strategies. And also, I think, as you pointed out, the method not being perfect or excellent for social scientists is in some way performing that care that you're interested in, right? 'Cause if you, say, had developed an algorithm to search through all these images and scrape their data and be able to sort them in some way, you are already facilitating the surveillance process for the government to be able to track, even if your intentions are extremely noble and you just wanted to know more, you are unwillingly doing that work already. So in some way, the methodology, even if it's in some way pointing out to not be perfect, the not perfect still gets you enough of the evidence to be able to make your argument without also replicating the forms of surveillance and the forms of power that might be even more disenfranchising to the people whom you're writing about.

41:36 **JLR**: I would also say, I think you pointed this out earlier, but I think one of the advantages of the way you structure the argument is that you do point out that it is a speculative argument and it is very consciously about addressing the “us,” let's say. Addressing the people who might encounter these images who themselves are not in the position of migrating under precarious conditions or applying for asylum or so on and so forth. So it is, you are speaking from and to a public who might just be encountering these images and thinking about, "What are the implications of that? Why should we watch these images and rethink our position, vis-a-vis people who are migrating for a variety of reasons, especially when we encounter images of them being happy and joyous as opposed to only suffering, which is the narrative that we're used to. And I think as scholars, media scholars, but just in general scholars, that is one of our impetus, is to provide alternative narratives and different ways of thinking than the one that we might just be used to in mainstream discussions. Okay, so how have you built on this work since its publication? Where is it going now, what are you working on, is it related, not related to these issues?

42:55 **EZ**: So the topic of the paper itself is not, at this point, going into my dissertation. My dissertation has taken a slightly different shape. So it's a bit on the back burner in terms of consistently working on it. But my dissertation is very much focused still on this question of the migrant or the refugee crisis. I focus specifically on

the Balkan route as a site that mediates between the Cold War and the War on Terror, as it's managing these different inflows and outflows of migrants and refugees. Why is the Balkan route so fascinating to me? And I should say that I'm anchoring it in the contemporary, so it's over the past five years. I'm thinking about the Balkan route as the site that is both geographic but also a mediating site that we need to pay attention to. But what makes the Balkan route so interesting to me is that, one, not all of the nations in this region are members of the European Union.

44:03 **EZ**: So when I was tracking different kinds of non-fiction media, news reports, videos, etcetera, about migrants and refugees who had become kettled there, sort of trapped there because of border closures, I noticed that there is this consistency in which people were demanding to be allowed to go to Europe, and I'm really fascinated in how our conception of what Europe is and where it starts and ends takes shape in and through media and circulates around the globe. How do people come to understand that if I'm in Serbia, which is on the European continent, I'm somehow not in Europe, I'm not in the Europe I wanna be in. So that's one question where I think this space reanimates a lot of anxieties from the Cold War about what Europe is and who belongs to it, and which nations are envisioned as proper European subjects and allowed to join the European Union Club. Of course, this is a project that could be done in a number of different fields, but I think approaching it through the lens of media studies allows us to think more about how our imagination of Europe comes into being and circulates through global media, and also how these geographic spaces themselves become mediating objects and places where different actors are trying to exert different types of control in order to manage movements of people.

45:35 **EZ**: Yeah, so that's sort of the larger project that I've been working on now, and certainly, I mean, migrant and refugee-authored media is very much a part of that. I was born somewhere else, and I'm a child of an immigrant who really distinctly lives an immigrant experience, that's really shaped so many of my research questions in trying to understand what migration and displacement means in the world and how media interacts with it. And I'm really interested in asking questions about the enactment of borders and the performance of national identities and how media shapes political and public discourses about these issues, about migration and displacement. But also asking questions about how media provides possibilities for us to imagine differently, to express different sensations of time and space and mobility and visibility that are otherwise difficult to articulate with language. How does media allow us to imagine different ways of being and organizing ourselves? I think that's what's so exciting for

me about approaching these questions through media objects and media studies broadly.

46:54 **JLR**: Eszter, thank you for joining us.

46:57 **EZ**: Thank you so much for having me, it was a pleasure.

[closing credits music]

47:04 **JLR**: This episode of The Global Media Cultures Podcast was produced by me and edited by Alan Yu. Opening sound by Podington Bear and closing credits music by Cloudmouth. This project is supported in part by the School of Arts Technology and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas. The Global Media Cultures Podcast introduces media scholarship about the world to the world. I'm Juan Llamas-Rodriguez, thank you for listening.