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The Arhuacos, film, and the politics of representing the 'Other' in Colombia

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2017

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own

and it has not been submitted for a degree at another university

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Agata Lulkowska

Abstract

This thesis focusses on the contemporary politics of visual representations among the indigenous communities of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. It discusses various methods used to represent the 'Other' and reflects on the processes of practice-based research. Centering on the figure of the Arhuaco filmmaker Amado Villafaña and the Zhigoneshi and Yokosovi Collectives which he leads, the thesis argues that his initiatives push indigenous filmmaking towards a more widespread inclusion in mainstream cinema, transcending beyond the indigenous context. The Zhigoneshi's work focusses on the potentiality of intercultural communication, including its challenges and practicalities. In addition, it provides an alternative to non-indigenous representations of the 'Other', fighting for the right of self-representation.

This thesis is concerned with the wider context of representing the 'Other' in Colombia and beyond, forming part of a practice-based research project which includes a collaborative video documenting the work of Villafaña and his team. The practical part of the research is thoroughly analysed, focusing on its successes, challenges and contributions. The theoretical part of this work considers the rationale behind the projects of indigenous self-representation. Selected film case studies illustrate the contemporary context of practices of representation, while the methodology chapter reflects on the possibilities and limitations of these approaches. This thesis discusses the implications of using audiovisual media to represent and communicate inter-culturally, suggesting that such efforts are often prone to suffer from oversimplifications and stereotyping, especially when the context where they get displayed bears the 'ethnographic' label.

This thesis concludes by examining the extent to which the struggle demonstrated in Arhuaco filmmaking can result in a positive and constructive outcome,

offering a promising change in indigenous representation practices. In addition, the potential for reaching intercultural audiences suggests the emergence of a platform for genuine intercultural dialogue.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all the individuals and institutions which helped make this work possible. My fieldwork in Colombia would not have been possible without a generous support of many of my friends and their families, whose limitless hospitality and advice was vitally important in achieving my goals. *Casa Indígena* in Santa Marta proved invaluable not only with supplying me with the Zhigoneshi films archive but also with providing space for all my meetings and work with the Zhigoneshi Collective. I would particularly like to thank Pablo Mora for his mentorship and assistance, and for putting me in touch with the main actors of the indigenous filmmaking in the Sierra Nevada. However, most of all I am incredibly grateful to Amado Villafaña for allowing me to work with him, and for making me part of his filmmaking team during the time of my stay in the region. His patience, support, enthusiasm, and sense of humour made this collaboration an unforgettable experience. Without him and Pablo Mora, this work would not be possible. I would also like to thank Amado's children and collaborators, Dilia, Angel, Jean-Carlos, and all the friends who participated in the filmmaking. They all treated me as a friend and as an integral part of the team, for which I am immensely grateful. I would also like to express my appreciation to the indigenous authorities who allowed me to enter their territories and participate in the endless assemblies and meetings.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0.1. Rationale, aims, and research questions

The aim of my research is to investigate the politics of representation strategies among the indigenous communities of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia in relation to non-indigenous filmic representations of the 'Other'. In the process, I also analyse the contexts of dissemination of indigenous and ethnographic films. My main interest lies in the contemporary self-representation productions of the Arhuaco peoples of the region, most specifically, the case of Zhigoneshi and Yokosowi collectives, both led by Amado Villafaña and supported by Pablo Mora. In this practice-based research, I investigate the possibilities of intercultural dialogue in the attempt to redefine the ways of using visual media in artistic, ethnographic, and academic contexts.

My research includes two elements: practical, consisting of the collaborative documentary made with the Arhuacos, and a theoretical one, exploring the relevant theories and case studies. The case studies and literature review focus on the broad ideas of representing the 'Other' while the practical part of my research looks at the consequences of that phenomena. The efforts of my participants to establish and maintain the intercultural communication result from the unfortunate experience of being misrepresented by external filmmakers. This conflict and struggle link the theoretical and practical parts of my research. My interest lies in approaching the question of visual representations of the communities of the Sierra made from the external point of view, as compared to the internal, indigenous one. As a context for my analysis, I examine a number of international film festivals, a TV series, and a gallery video installation, along with other relevant pieces of filmmaking. I also introduce the

historical background of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia. Finally, I discuss the perspectives for the future of indigenous filmmaking and its circulation, keeping in mind that these authors were traditionally excluded not only from the access to mainstream production but also from this intercultural debate about the politics of representation.

My research questions focus on the ways in which visual media negotiate representations of its subjects and the extent to which such representations function outside of their original contexts. I investigate the implications and responsibilities of creating visual imagery of fairly-secluded communities, with a strong attention to ethics. Despite the increasing possibilities of creating competitive visual images of themselves, most of these communities still lack wider access to participation in the intercultural dialogue about these productions. Similarly, on many occasions, they also lack any control of external filmmaking among their communities and their distribution. As a result, 'we' often study 'them' in isolation, using mediated depictions and missing the opportunity for intercultural communication. Traditionally, the images portraying indigenous communities were exclusively the non-indigenous filmmaker's vision and interpretation of these communities. Indigenous filmmaking provides a stimulating response to this trend, and although it is not free of challenges, it definitively changes the contemporary audiovisual landscape.

The purpose of the practical part of my research is to explore the role of audiovisual technologies as an element contributing to a cultural self-discovery and vehicle of intercultural communication. In this endeavour, I attempt to detach myself from the traditions of ethnographic filmmaking and concentrate on the very process of filmmaking as a meaning-making activity, together with its implications. Coming from an artistic background, I am interested in the practicalities of the application of visual media in collaborative work with indigenous communities, and the far-reaching

consequences of this process, rather than in ethnographic insight and the analysis of the indigenous culture in itself.

I find my research increasingly important in a world dominated by visual media, where the understanding of reality is less dependent on direct experience, and instead hugely mediated by the information provided by visual materials. In the case of highly isolated communities, these visual mediations acquire particular relevance. The few existing videos and documentaries made by European filmmakers in the Sierra promote quite homogeneous views of the communities inhabiting it. Until these days, most of the indigenous communities tend to be represented as naive or simplistic, deprived of the 'blessings of civilisation' and very unified across the globe. What appears even more troubling is the lack of a consistent platform for discussion between the filmmakers and the communities, with a few festivals being an exception to this rule. Moreover, the presence of a camera and its significance as a mediating tool tends to be nearly completely ignored and made invisible in many existing representations of the 'Other'. By offering such limited (and unified) view on indigenous communities, and by restricting the distribution of indigenous filmmaking to few, very specific events (ethnographic or 'indigenous' film festivals or 'ethnographic' sections of international festivals), these stereotypical views are only getting reinforced. Finally, my research also offers a reflection on visual methodologies and their consequences for widely understood contemporary culture.

The complexity of the questions I am interested in forces me to locate my research on the crossroads of many fields of study. Insights from various theoretical disciplines (film studies, Latin American and indigenous studies, representation analysis, reception studies, documentary filmmaking and ethnography, and visual anthropology) inform my research and contribute to answering my research questions. One of the main elements of this body of work is the exploration of indigenous

responses to decades of misinterpretation in films made by the non-indigenous 'Other'. In order to do so, I scrutinise the ideas concerned with the representation of cultures and the power relations implied when depicting the 'Other'. In my attempt to understand how the idea of representation varies in different cultural contexts, I identify the challenges of the intercultural unification of this process. I do so by conducting an analysis of selected case studies and identifying the key aspects characterising the approach specific to, accordingly, indigenous and non-indigenous filmmakers. The idea of representation and communication is constantly renegotiated in the process of the exchange of audiovisual information between different cultures.

1.0.2. Indigenous representations: definitions

The definition of 'indigenous' has changed over time. Since the 1970s, it had a strong political meaning, reflecting a 'growing awareness of the role of ethnicity in national cultures.'[1] Currently, 'it refers to people who are minorities in their own homeland, who have suffered oppression in the context of colonial conquest, and who view their political situation in the context of neocolonialism.'[2] In the face of changing concepts of who can call themselves 'indigenous,'[3] and the increasing adoption of Western technologies in an original way, we should reflect on the relevance of Western criteria applied to the expectations of the new indigenous filmmaking. The compatibility of these two should neither be disregarded nor taken for granted. This awareness should become useful in understanding the differences between the Western and indigenous

[1] Leuthold, 1998: 3.
[2] Leuthold, 1998: 3.
[3] This becomes even more apparent later in this thesis (Chapter 2.4.2.), when analysing the case study of Borman as a leader of Cofán community.

motives for reaching for audiovisual media. 'Is it a truism that men, regardless of country and culture, love gadgets?,' asks Michel Bravo describing the experiments in technology and skill in the Arctic[4]. In his view, the Inuit do not feel any less traditional in their identity on account of using technology. On the contrary - it helps them be more efficient in their traditional lifestyles.[5] It is not any different in the Sierra, I argue, where technology helps the Arhuacos reinforce their indigenous views. Perhaps, as Bravo suggests, '"gadgets and gear" are a way of breaking the ice in a cross-cultural conversation.'[6] Jay Ruby underlines that indigenous peoples acquire the technical knowledge essential to make their films in workshops and training provided by Western filmmakers, and the funding for these productions also usually comes from Western sources. Such situation might appear paternalistic, although it remains the only way in which most indigenous peoples can gain the skills and obtain the technology they require to satisfy their filmic ambitions.[7] However, this tends to be the case only at the initial stage, until the indigenous communities feel confident enough to run their own workshops and internal training. Such initiatives could be observed in the Indigenous House[8] in Santa Marta during my fieldwork. The Four Nations of Sierra Nevada got to the stage where they are becoming increasingly independent in their filmmaking practices, whilst still relying on the non-indigenous collaborations for the distribution and dissemination of the fruit of their audiovisual work.

Stuart Hall's definition that 'Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully, to other people' proves relevant in this context.[9] The understanding of 'language' is more universal here,

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[4] Bravo, 2011: 39.
[5] Ibid: 41.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ruby, 2000: 216.
[8] Casa Indígena.
[9] Hall, 1997: 15.

referring not only to the spoken or written word, but also to visual materials, music, and other forms of communication. Moreover, 'meaningful' implies understanding, a successful communication process between the author and the audience. However, this could never be fully guaranteed, as the reception tends to be culturally (and socially) determined. Taking Hall's definition of culture (as a practice concerned with exchanging meanings) as a point of departure, Rose defines representation as 'made meanings', which 'structure the way people behave in everyday life.'[10] However, as Rose reminds us, these representations are never transparent, and never innocent: they always remain mere interpretations.

1.0.3. Structure of the thesis

This research consists of the sixty-four-minute documentary, 'The Voice of Sierra Nevada', which is accompanied by this thesis providing the theoretical analysis and the background contextualisation. The film is divided into five chapters: 'Production', 'Dissemination', 'Beginnings, or this is not an art', 'Indigenous communication or the bigger Picture', and 'Recognition and perspectives for the future'.

This thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 1 presents the general concepts of this research and introduces the communities of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, providing a historical background and an insight into the contemporary situation.

Chapter 2 analyses key theoretical concepts which contextualise my research. It concentrates on the ideas of representing reality and cultures, introducing the concept of the 'Other' which is inextricably linked to the symbolic violence of stereotypes and preconceptions. It looks at the controversial comparison of ethnography and

[10] Rose, 2012: location 396 of 933.

pornography. Following that, it investigates the strategies and modes of visual representations, discussing concepts of culture on display and interpretations. It introduces psychoanalysis and feminist theory in relation to representing the 'Other'. Chapter 2 also scrutinises the idea of documentary realism in ethnographic films and the ethnographic encounter. This is followed by the analysis of indigenous media and cultural mediations. I introduce the idea of the indigenous communicator and indigeneity as performance. Chapter 2 concludes with the analysis of indigenous self-representation strategies and their dissemination.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods applied in this research, starting from the analysis of contemporary reflections on visual methodologies. The following section examines the differences between direct experience and one mediated by the image, analysing concepts such as non-existing photographs and the idea of 'translation'. I also reflect on my own photographic practices and differences between artistic photography and that produced for research purposes. I discuss the benefits and limitations of being a one-team researcher and film-maker, paying attention to the importance of context in similar productions. The following section considers the practice of what I labelled 'reversed audiencing,' as well as the reception of the ethnographic film. The chapter concludes with the detailed study of ethical issues relating to similar projects, among others, anonymity and consent-giving. I close the chapter by analysing the subjects' exclusion from the contemporary mediascape.

Chapter 4 concentrates on various contexts of presentation of films concerned with the indigenous, or more generally, with the 'Other'. I look at selected examples of various film festivals of different profiles, as well as several film case studies of different genres. Such selection provides an enriching input for understanding many diverse contexts and strategies of representing the 'Other'.

In Chapter 5 I focus on indigenous filmmaking in Colombia from the historical viewpoint. I start by introducing the pioneers, followed by the analysing the body of work of the Zhigoneshi Collective, and ending with indigenous collaborations.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I reflect on my own fieldwork and its outcome. I analyse the preparation stage and the contemporary politics of visual representations in the Sierra, as observed during my collaboration with Amado Villafaña and the Collective Zhigoneshi. Among others, I look at ideas of the ownership of the image, the relevance of the point of view, ideas of indigenous communication, dissemination and audiences, and culturally determined pre-assumptions. I also reflect on the experience of forming part of an indigenous film crew.

In conclusion, in Chapter 7, I offer a reflection on intercultural auto-representation strategies among the communities of the Sierra, summarising the 'Golden Era of the Arhuaco filmmaking' and pondering perspectives for the future.

Many other elements of my investigation could further contribute to answering my research question, among others, a semiotic approach, detailed audiencing study, comprehensive analysis of documentary modes or representation, reflection of how representing others is a portrait of ourselves, analysis of utopian visions of the indigenous world, and countless additional case studies. They did not make it to the final draft of this thesis, giving space to the most crucial and relevant aspects. Together with the accompanying documentary, this thesis provides a thorough reflection on indigenous communication, the politics and power relations involved in representing the 'Other', the practicalities of using audiovisual media for this purpose, and the potential of creating a platform for intercultural communication.

Unless indicated otherwise, all the translations from Spanish to English are mine (both in the film and in this thesis).

1.1. The peoples of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

1.1.1. The Four Nations - historical background

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region, located on the Caribbean coast of Colombia (Figure 1), is inhabited by four indigenous communities: Arhuacos, Kogui, Wiwa and Kankuamos. This research focuses on the indigenous filmmaking collective which originally consisted of representatives of each of these communities but now is led by the Arhuaco director, Amado Villafaña. All four communities are the direct descendants of the great Tayrona (or Tairona) culture, which dates back to the first century AD,[11] and they are among several remaining indigenous communities living traditionally in Colombia.[12] In the past, the Taironas, with their 260 villages, occupied the Sierra Nevada on various altitudes. Their four most important cities were: Teyuna (or Ciudad Perdida), Pueblito, Noanasangui, and Pociueica. The Taironas developed a sophisticated production and exchange system.[13] According to Lizarralde *et al.*, 'the urban tradition of the ancestral people of Tairona has disappeared among their present-day descendants. But behind this development is a social organisation, a leadership and a religious life which have been transmitted from the Taironas without major changes.'[14] The Arhuacos, Kogui, Wiwa and Kankuamos are significantly connected, and despite some cultural differences between them, they are united by a common goal - the preservation and conservation of nature together with maintaining the equilibrium between man and

[11] Mendoza, *et al*.: 1995.

[12] It is estimated that there are about eighty-one remaining indigenous communities in Colombia nowadays, although many of them, unlike the Kogui or the Arhuacos, have fully embraced Western lifestyle.

[13] Murillo, 2001: 121.

[14] Lizarralde *et al.*, 1987: 68.

nature.[15] They inhabit various locations of a pyramid-shaped mountain, and their terrains stretch between La Guajira, Cesar and Magdalena departments, on the northern and southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (Figure 2). The mythical Black Line (*La Linea Negra*) surrounds the Sierra, which for the indigenous communities represents the heart of the world.[16] Today, some non-indigenous settlers occupy territory within the Black Line, which leads to regional conflicts. Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is a geological phenomenon, rising from the sea level to 5,700 meters (19,00 feet) within 40 km (26 miles). Its highest peak, *Pico Cristóbal Colón* (known as *Gonawindúa* for the Kogui), is considered by the communities to be its most sacred place. It is also the highest peak in Colombia. The Sierra Nevada's climate is quite extraordinary, starting with the tropical heat in the lower levels, through tropical jungles, to temperate areas, cold areas in the higher levels, and finishing with permanent snow at the mountain's peaks.[17] Different references provide different numbers of inhabitants of the region. According to Lizarralde *et al.*, the governmental Indigenous Affair Office (*Asuntas Indígenas*) issued the figure of 3,615 Arhuacos in 1972, whereas in 1980 the Ministry of National Planning (*Ministerio de Planeación Nacional*) estimated it to be 8,680. According to Medoza *et al.* (1995), the estimated number of the Kogui was around 9,911 and about 22,134 Arhuacos.[18] Finally, according to Villafaña, there are currently (2016) about 47,000 Arhuacos living in the Sierra. The Kankuamos are the

[15] Ulloa, 2005.

[16] It passes through 18 geographical points: Pozo Hurtado, Cerrillo, Patillal,, Kuma, Nivaluban, corral de Piedra, Vigilante, Quebrada Andrea, Dibuya, Palomino, Bonda, Taganga, Pozo Lucila, Santa Rosa, Camperucho, Rio Clavo y Jimaika; Murillo, 2001: 124.

[17] Mendoza, *et al*.: 1995: 249.

[18] Mendoza, *et al*.: 1995: 230.

only nation out of the four which abandoned the traditional lifestyle. In the events of significant decision-making, the four indigenous nations of the Sierra collaborate.

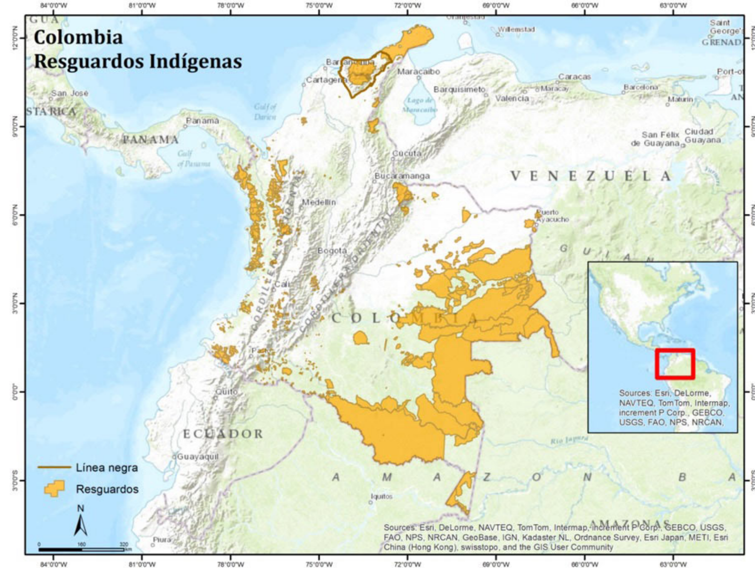

Figure 1. Indigenous reserves in Colombia, with focus on the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, surrounded by the *Linea Negra* - mythical Black Line. Source: https://whitefeatherfoundation.com/news/protection-of-sacred-site-for-the-kogi-people/

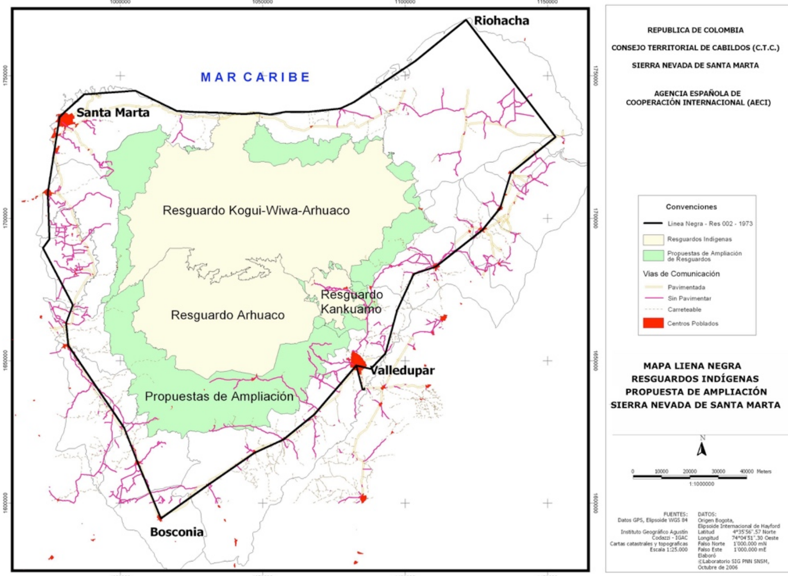

Figure 2. The Black Line and the territories of the communities of the Sierra. Source: *Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona*; https://gonawindwa.org/territorio-ancestral/linea-negra/

Each community of the Sierra speaks their specific language, all of which belong to the arhuaco language group from chibcha language family.[19] They do not have a written

[19] Murillo, 2001: 54.

language tradition; however, this is recently starting to change with the introduction of bilingual schools in the communities. Nevertheless, most of the elders and women do not speak Spanish.[20] The written version of the Arhuaco language is strictly restricted to schools and has no practical use in the community.[21] This, paradoxically, reinforces the role in strengthening the oral traditions within the community, while Spanish remains the written language used for external communication.[22] The first contact between the four nations and Western cultures dates back to the early sixteenth century, around the time when the city of Santa Marta was founded (1525). This was due to Spanish interest in gold, which was found and produced on the northern slopes of the Sierra Nevada. In the 16th century, the Spanish divided the territory into provinces, each province being an area of indigenous people with similar characteristics. There were 10 indigenous provinces in the Sierra Nevada, one of which was Arhuaco.[23] When the Arhuaco province was conquered in the second part of the 16th century, they were forced to accept the implementation of new organisational forms, among others, the *comisarios* (superintendents). This led to the development of civil powers, which was further reinforced when the first *cabildo gobernador* (indigenous councillor) was established by law in 1980.[24] We can speculate that this gave the Arhuacos means to understand the economic, political and social aspects of the non-indigenous society. The 18th century brings the colonist, an evangelical centre, and the first chapel in the area, resulting in further assimilation by the Arhuacos of some elements of Western culture, such as sugar cane, wheat, potatoes, plantains, onions and westernised house construction, together with matches and axes.[25] According to Lizarralde *et al.,* we can distinguish three agents

[20] Murillo, 2001: 219.
[21] Murillo, 2001: 186.
[22] Murillo, 2001: 188.
[23]Lizarralde *et al.,*1987: 43
[24] Lizarralde *et al.,*1987: 43
[25] Ibid: 43.

of acculturations in the Sierra in the 19th century: the missionaries, the creole colonists, and the political refugees who settled in various regions of the mountains and colonised indigenous land. Some of the effects of that period and influence can be identified as: domestication of goats, sheep, and mules, adoption of Western clothing by some of the Arhuacos, attendance at masses, consumption of rum, and finally the first attempts to learn Spanish.[26] Finally, in the 20th century, the creoles from Valledupar established the village of Pueblo Bello on the road to Nabusímake. This enabled the Arhuacos to start selling coffee which they grow in the region.[27] The year 1915 marked the Arhuaco initiative to break from the colonists and prohibit the use of alcohol bought from the creoles: 'En 1915 […], una delegación conformada por Juan Bautista Villafaña, Juan Antonio Mejía, Diego Torres, Salvador Izquierdo y Ramon Izquierdo, fue enviada a la ciudad de Bogotá para solicitar directamente al presidente de la república un maestro "civilizado".'[28] Murillo underlines that the delegation made it explicitly clear that under no circumstances they wished to change their indigenous lifestyles.[29] As a result, the government cancelled the debt the Arhuacos owed to the creoles, which then created tensions between the creoles and the Arhuacos.[30] In the same year, the Capuchins arrived in Nabusímake and established their mission there, which had a long-standing consequences for the community.

The nations of the Sierra call themselves *Hermanos Mayores* (Elder Brothers), as opposed to non-indigenous *Hermanos Menores* (Younger Brothers). The Elder Brothers are distinguished by having a thorough knowledge of nature, although what they

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[26] Lizarralde *et al.,*1987: 43-44.

[27] Ibid: 44.

[28] In 1915 […], a delegation made of Juan Bautista Villafaña, Juan Antonio Mejía, Diego Torres, Salvador Izquierdo and Ramon Izquierdo, was sent to Bogotá to ask the president for a "civilized" teacher; Murillo, 2001: 56.

[29] Ibid: 56.

[30] Lizarralde *et al.,*1987: 44.

understand by 'nature' is very different from the Western approach. According to them, having this knowledge makes them responsible for protecting the world.[31] All Kogui, Arhuacos and Wiwa wear simple white tunics (men also use simple long, white pants). The clothing is similar but has significant differences between the three communities. The Kogui walk mostly barefoot while the Arhuacos use sandals made of used tyres. Both men and women of all three communities wear their hair long and loose.

Every village has two or more Mamos (or Mamus), the spiritual and political leaders, who are the most prominent members of the Kogui and Arhuaco communities.[32]

> For an Arhuaco, the Mamu is like a scientist with a great factual knowledge of astronomy, meteorology, and ecology, but in addition, the Mamu has a particular knowledge of village social structure, and of every single individual's needs, capabilities and demands. […] the authority of the Mamu is based on religious principles. An important factor here is the private or public confession of 'sins' which are redressed by the Mamu's giving advice, correction, and sometimes punishment. […] The Arhuacos see the Mamu as a protector and a defender and ofter refer to his as *'un abogado'* - a lawyer - who is placed between the individual, the society, and the holy gods. The Mamu is never considered a possible enemy, dangerous or evil. He is referred to as the good and the almighty.[33]

The Mamos always act 'objectively' by distancing themselves from their own feelings, so that whenever they need to punish someone, it is never carried out with aggression - 'even when it consists of direct physical violence, it will be interpreted as an expression of wide chieftainship which relieves stress, sorrow and worries from the shoulders of individuals and reinstates them at the right point of balance between nature and man.'[34] From my personal observations, even for the Arhuaco living in the city, like Villafaña, the Mamos still represent the highest authority whose advice is extremely respected and

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[31] Mendoza, *et al.*: 1995: 249-259.

[32] Mendoza, *et al.*: 1995: 257.

[33] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 69.

[34] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 69-70.

valued. Finally, it should be said that the position of the Mamos does not grant them any apparent privilege, and they are the first ones to obey the society's principles. Moreover, 'spiritual knowledge gives status, never material wealth. […] The Mamo occupies the highest rank in society primarily because he knows more than anyone.'[35] This relates to the fact that, according to the Arhuacos, prosperity is a 'target of jealousy, scepticism, and hostility. In some ways, wealth runs counter to the idea of moderation which is a precondition for receiving spiritual knowledge.'[36] The consequence of the idea that 'knowing much' gives prestige was also to differentiate themselves from the Western systems based on wealth.[37] The process of choosing a new Mamo is also ruled by the traditional laws. As Murillo explains, a child who is trained to be a Mamo has to exclude salt from his diet and starts to be trained by an existing Mamo. For years, he practices meditation, abstinence, and self-control, which not only helps him learn how to be a good Mamo, but also gain him the trust of his community.[38]

Lizarralde *et al.* reinforces the life-long scope of the Mamo's formation:

> The position of Mamu is developed after a life-long education where the acquisition of knowledge of Arhuaco history and culture is fundamental. As a priest, the Mamu is the intermediary between the Indians and supernatural powers. A Mamu is first and foremost a priest but also a curer, chief and judge. The Arhuaco have built a centralised political institution around the Mamu which has defended their right to autonomy over the centuries.[39]

Each Mamo represents the link between humans and the spiritual forces of nature. They are also the main decision-makers for their society: 'Los Arhuacos deben obtener el consejo y el permiso de los mamos para organiser su vida cotidiana de acuerdo a los

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[35] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 70.
[36] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 70.
[37] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 71.
[38] Murillo, 2001:137.
[39] Lizarralde *et al.,*1987: 42.

principios espiritualeles.'[40] As Murillo notices, the duties of a Mamo, as a representative of the traditional law, are to maintain the social health of the community through the teaching of the tradition and various ceremonial acts. The social organisation revolves around him because it is the Mamo's duty to take care of the world and everything related to it, making sure that the community members are faithful to the law. A Mamo directs the community through rules and advice by giving names to newborns, approving the convenience of marriages, controlling all processes of the life cycles or giving permission to travel. He also has the power over healing of earth and crops. The forms by which the Mamo exerts its function are payments, divination, confession and a ritual of the life cycle. The Mamo is always a male figure.[41]

Among the communities of the Sierra, the rights of an individual are subordinated to the community's interests, and the traditional rules are obeyed. In this sense, they have a very distinct understanding of personal freedom from Western societies. One of the Arhuacos interviewed by Murillo admitted: 'lo que más he aprendido y me gusta del bunachi es eso de la individualidad, de poder elegir la persona con quien uno quiere vivir... vivir por amor no por que a uno se le obliga.'[42]

Most of the Kogui and the Arhuacos have little relation with the outside world, but the Mamos tend to travel to various villages and Santa Marta. For the participants of this study, the traditional lifestyle has been disrupted by the violence in the region, which resulted in their migration to the nearby cities of Santa Marta or Valledupar. However, this has not prevented them from keeping a very close relationship with the traditional authorities and from visiting the indigenous villages on a regular basis. Murillo notices that the living conditions of the Arhuacos who live in the cities is

[40] The Arhuacos have to get the advice and the permission of the Mamos to organise their everyday lives according with the spiritual principles; Murillo, 2001: 136-136.

[41] Murillo, 2001: 137-138.

[42] What I like most from what I learnt from the non-indigenous people is this of individualism, of being able to choose the person I want to live with… live because I am in love, and not because I am obliged; Murillo, 2001: 157.

significantly different from those who stay in the traditional villages. The first group, which Villafaña belongs to, uses mobile phones and cars, and their children often do not wear traditional clothing and do not speak the Arhuaco language as their first language. But at the same time, in recent years we can observe a recovery of the interest in traditional clothing. Murillo quotes an Arhuaco who was asked why he had recently started wearing the traditional clothing: 'por que nos han dicho que si bajamos al pueblo con el vestido indígena nos van a respetar, así el ejercito y la policía no se van a meter con uno por que uno esta demostrando que es indígena.'[43] She wonders if this revival of indigenous values and culture can be seen as a form of resistance: 'Mirado desde este punto de vista, volver a las costumbres indígenas no necesariamente significa un creciente deseo de autonomía cultural, pero si un mecanismo de defensa ante las crecientes formas de violencia en la Sierra Nevada.'[44]

Jaramillo mentions that the contemporary Arhuacos are involved in significant coffee cultivation on the commercial level, with many of these plantations located in zones recovered and purchased using money donated by international supporters. One example is the Café Aney brand, harvested by the community and recognised at a national level as 'Sierra Nevada Coffee' marketed by Juan Valdéz, one of the biggest coffee brands in Colombia, related to the National Federation of Coffee-producers of Colombia.'[45]

The Sierra Nevada is thought to be sacred and is perceived as the human body of the mythical Mother. The snowy peaks represent the head; waters of the plateaus are the heart; rivers represent veins; layers of the earth are muscles, and the scrublands are thought to represent hair. There is a belief that the end of the world is approaching

[43] Murillo, 2001: 146.
[44] Murillo, 2001: 146.
[45] Jaramillo, 2014: 139.

because the Younger Brother continuously fails to protect nature.[46] Like many other indigenous communities, The Kogui and the Arhuacos have a very close relation to nature and are very spiritual. However, what makes them unique is their sense of responsibility to warn us against the destruction we cause. Astrid Ulloa suggests the that in the popular thinking, the Kogui and the Arhuacos, like the majority of other indigenous communities, fall under the category of the 'ecological native'. She argues that the environmental proposal of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra has transnational ambition and reaches both of governmental institutions and NGOs.[47] Despite their traditional way of living, the Kogui, the Arhuacos, and the Wiwa are very proactive in fostering international dialogue on the issues which concern them, mainly related to environmental and territorial problems. Concerns about their territories result both from colonialism and the contemporary violence which has led to much forced displacement of the communities of the Sierra. The next section looks at the historical background of the Arhuacos.

1.1.2. The Capuchin mission and education

The Arhuacos live in the valleys of the rivers Piedras, San Sebastián de Rábago, Chichicua, Ariguaní and Guatapurí, between three departments of the Sierra Nevada: Cesar, La Guajira, and Magdalena. They are known for their active approach when defending their causes; however, they have traditionally been non-aggressive. Their capital is located in Nabusímake, known as *'Ciudad donde nace el sol'* (City where the

[46] Ulloa, 2005: 58.
[47] Ulloa, 2005: 55.

sun is born). It used to be called San Sebastián de Rábago by the Spanish.[48] It is formed of about fifty houses, surrounded by a wall. The Arhuacos call themselves *Iku* or *bintukuas*,[49] while the term to describe the non-indigenous people is *bunachi*.

The history of the Arhuacos has been full of persecution. Capuchin missionaries arrived in their territories in the early 20th century, and between 1915 and 1920 their mission was established in Nabusímake. According to Lizarralde *et al.*:

> [it was] based on farming with cheap indigenous labour. They used traditional methods of acculturation by first institutionalising children in an orphanage and destroying their culture by catechisation, forbidding them to talk their own language, cutting their hair and making them wear western clothes. Sometimes the missionaries tried to defend them against the Creoles, who, in turn, wanted to turn the Arhuaco away from the priests.[50]

By those who were forcibly educated under the Capuchins, catechisation was seen as the symbolic attempt to erase Arhuaco culture by forbidding not only the use of their language but also other forms of cultural identity. According to Murillo,

> Los alumnos recibían educación civil y religiosa, albañilería, zapatería, agricultura, cuidado de rebaños. Las niñas indígenas preparaban la comida, confeccionaban, bordaban, lavaban y remendaban ropa, hilaban y tejían mantas de lana. Mediante su enseñanza, los Capuchinos no solo alteraron el estilo de vida propia de la cultura Arhuaco, sino que se le prohibió a los indigenas hablar su lengua.[51]

New forms of work division were introduced, together with excessive punishments with the objective of 'civilising' the indigenous.[52] This traumatic incident became an

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[48] https://www.lamochilaarhuaca.com/2010/11/15/quiénes-son-los-arhuacos/, accessed on 27 January 2017.

[49] The word *iku* means 'people' or 'person'.

[50] Lizarralde *et al.,*1987: 44.

[51] The students received civil and religious education, brickwork, shoe-making, agriculture, herd care. Indigenous girls prepared food, tailored, embroidered, washed and patched clothes, spun and wove wool blankets. Through their teaching, the Capuchins not only altered the style of life typical of the Arhuacos, but they also forbade the use of indigenous language; Murillo, 2001: 58.

[52] Murillo, 2001: 58.

inspiration for some of their filmmaking which I discuss in further chapters. Vicencio Torres Marquez, the author of the 'Los indígenas arhuacos y "La vida de la civilización"',[53] was an orphan from an early age and he was taken to the Capuchin orphanage in Nabusímake. In one of the passages of his testimonies he states: 'Nos cambiaron el modo de vestir contra del deseo de los jefes indígenas que era que nos dejaran con nuestro cabello largo y el mismo vestido propio.'[54] Further, he states: 'Los misioneros siempre se opusieron a que siguiéramos nuestras costumbres propias y lo que querían era que siguiéramos la vida de la civilización.'[55] Padre Jose de Vinalesa, a missionary who wrote a book about Arhuacos in 1952, stated: '[…] la típica figura de los indios Arhuacos, sumidos en el fanatismo de un sistema religioso que los esclaviza.'[56] A few lines later he describes them of having 'los rostros inmutables que nunca sonríen.'[57] If this was not enough of an insult, the missionary added more: 'El indio Arhuaco arrastra consigo los defectos que son comunes a casi todos los indios; los cuales, generalmente, son egoístas, recelosos, sin aspiraciones; inclinados a la holganza y a la embriaguez.'[58] He then adds: '[…] están igualmente reñidos con la limpieza. Resultando de ello, un contraste, entre la abundancia de aguas cristalinas de estas regiones, y el poco caso que de ellas se hace'.[59] In other paragraphs he calls the Mamos

[53] Torres Márquez; 1978, Librería y Editorial América Latina.

[54] They changed the way we dress, against the order of our indigenous authorities who insisted to let us keep our long hair and traditional clothing; Torres Marquez, 1978: 8.

[55] The missionaries were always opposing that we continue our traditions; they wanted us to follow the rules of the civilization; Torres Marquez, 1978: 9.

[56] The typical figure of the Arhuacos, immersed in the fantasy of the religious system which enslave them; de Vinalesa, 1952: 31.

[57] Unchangeable faces which never smile; de Vinalesa, 1952: 31.

[58] The Arhuacos carry defects which are common to almost all the Indians; which are generally selfish, suspicious, without aspirations, inclined to laziness and drunkenness; de Vinalesa, 1952: 31.

[59] They are equally at odds with cleanliness. Resulting from this, there is quite a contrast between the abundance of crystalline waters of these regions, and the little use which is made of it; de Vinalesa, 1952: 32.

‘jefes y brujos’,[60] mocking their skills. He does not miss the opportunity to criticise every aspect of the indigenous life:

> Conociendo ya efectos que la cocaína produce en el organismo de los que la usan, y teniendo en cuenta que estos indios le agregan el extracto de nicotina, fácilmente podremos imaginarnos la resultante de tan peligrosa mezcla. Conviene tener esto siempre en cuenta, a fin de que no nos causan extrañeza, las anomalías y rarezas que vayamos observando en las costumbres de los arhuacos’.[61] […] El abuso de la cocaína produce en los arhuacos una serie de raros fenómenos tanto fisiológicos como de orden moral […] Los hace aparecer tímidos o cobardes; los vuelve taciturnos y misteriosos; manteniéndolos casi de continuo como semi- aletargados.[62]

De Vinalesa goes as far as suggesting that secret meetings of the Mamos mean that they have a contract with the Devil: ‘Ikanusi (El diablo): el Espiritu malo o el Demonio, tiene grande importancia entre los arhuacos.’[63] At the same time, he recognises that for the Arhuacos it is a very bad thing to talk about their internal secrets to outsiders.[64]

Interestingly enough, despite of the creation of the Arhuaco reservation in 1974, the Capuchins stayed in the Sierra until finally expelled on 7th August 1982.[65] Apart from the indigenous opposition, it was one of the missionaries, Javier Rodriguez, who initiated the process of returning the lands and livestock to the Arhuacos, focusing on restoring respect to the indigenous culture. In addition, he encouraged the creation of regional schools to avoid the forceful admission to the ‘orphanage’, as the Capuchins school was often referred to.[66] In 1975, a high school was opened in Nabusímake, which

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[60] Chiefs and sorcerers; de Vinalesa, 1952: 43.

[61] de Vinalesa, 1952: 42.

[62] Knowing the effects that cocaine produces in the organisms of those who consume it, and bearing in mind that these Indians add the extract of nicotine, we can easily imagine the result of such a dangerous mixture. We must always take it into account so that we do not get surprised by the anomalies and rarities that we observe in the customs of the Arhuacos. [...] The abuse of cocaine produces in the Arhuacos a series of rare physiological and moral phenomena […] It makes them appear timid or cowardly; it makes them taciturn and mysterious; they remain almost continuously in a semi-lethargic state; Ibid.

[63] Ikanusi, the Devil, has a significant importance among the Arhuacos; de Vinalesa, 1952: 5.1

[64] de Vinalesa, 1952: 61.

[65] Murillo, 2001: 60.

[66] Murillo, 2001: 59.

represented the next stage in securing the right to indigenous education. [67] This was achieved by sending another representation to visit the President of the Republic in September 1982, which resulted in the approval of indigenous education plan and bilingual curriculum.[68] Soon, more regulations follow, securing the right to design their own education plans and focus on an education which was compatible with Arhuaco culture and needs.[69]

Lizarralde, *et al.,* quotes a community member affirming: 'We want bilingual education, Spanish-Ika; we want our children to learn about the history of Colombia and the world, mathematics and all the sciences; we want the school to help us in teaching about collaboration and mutual aid between people and not about egoism.'[70] At the same time, Rosario Ferro quotes a response given to a *bunachi* by one of the members of the community, when suggested that everybody in the Sierra should be at least bilingual (implying the necessity to know both Ika and Spanish): 'El billingüismo de la Sierra consiste en conocer tanto el language ika como el lenguaje del silencio.'[71] According to the reviewed literature and my own observations, the contemporary Arhuacos want to return to their origins, considering 'white influence as negative and bringing only problems, alcohol and illness.'[72] According to a source from 1987, '80% of the Arhuaco speak Spanish, but they use their own language between themselves. They show a continuing desire to use indigenous teachers in their schools and to teach their own language.'[73]

In her detailed analysis of contemporary education in the Arhuaco community, Luz Murillo uses the case study of an indigenous school in Simunurwa, also known as

[67] Murillo, 2001: 60.
[68] Murillo, 2001: 66.
[69] Murillo, 2001: 67.
[70] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 41.
[71] Rosario Ferro, 2012: 66.
[72] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 45.
[73] Lizarralde, *et al.,* 1987: 45.

Las Cuevas, in order to explore the implications of the Capuchin mission on contemporary education and approaches to schooling systems among the Arhuacos. What is worth noting from her analysis is the ambivalent status of bilingual education (or even the education system in itself) for the community: on the one hand, it empowers children and becomes an agent in the process of conservation of the minority culture; on the other hand, it reinforces the non-indigenous values implemented and promoted by the Capuchins in the past, promoting acculturation and inspiring destabilisation within the community. If we consider the efforts it took to expel the Capuchins after almost 70 years (as the catholic education was believed to put the Arhuaco culture and language in danger), we can see the paradox of self-imposing education which - to a degree - mimics a similar system.[74] Murillo noticed a significant degree of mistrust towards the school among parents - not only did they claim that the school makes the children lazy (by taking their time and attention off their domestic chores), but they also fail to see the point in teaching children things they can learn at home (like farming or cooking). Many Arhuacos claim that the problem with the educational system is that is does not follow indigenous values.[75] Also, many Mamos refuse to send their children to school, questioning the need to write if knowledge has always been transmitted orally. In fact, Mamos and women are among the biggest groups of illiterates in the Arhuaco communities, which, paradoxically, contributes to the preservation and the strengthening of the indigenous language.[76] Finally, parents are suspicious towards the school as a potential tool of acculturation, destabilising the existing cultural order, because historically education was associated with the process of assimilation to the mainstream culture.[77] However, at the same time, education, together

[74] Murillo, 2001.
[75] Murillo, 2001: 202.
[76] Murillo, 2001: 219.
[77] Murillo, 2001: 19-27.

with the reclamation of the land, is considered to be the most important aspects of indigenous self-determination.[78] This is partly due to the fact that indigenous languages have not been sufficiently recognised and appreciated by mainstream culture, which also ignored and undermined the knowledge these cultures represent.[79] Murillo clearly points out that the Arhuaco language is used in the contexts of family, community, and spiritual life, while Spanish is used mainly for public functions as well as health and education outside of the Arhuaco territory.[80] However, according to Schlegelberger's report from 1995, as much as most of the Arhuaco society continues living in a traditional way, among those students who leave the community to carry on their studies, few return to work with their own people.[81] The report quotes Mamo Kuncha (who is present in the video which accompanies this thesis) saying that what worries him most is the change of mentality among his people.[82] Murillo identifies significant challenges in Arhuaco education, based on her case study: inefficient planning and time management, an almost complete lack of training materials including books, and a lack of coordination and consistency among teachers. Interestingly, Murillo also observed a certain reluctance to teach Arhuaco to the non-indigenous people. One of her subjects explained this attitude: 'Si dejamos que los bunachis hablen nuestra lengua y entran nuestras reuniones, entonces pronto todos sabrán lo que hacemos para protegernos de ellos.'[83] In summary, the case of the Arhuacos is an example of effective linguistic and cultural perseverance. The next section looks at other aspects of the traumatic past of the Arhuacos, this time related to Colombia's violent history.

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[78] Murillo, 2001: 28.

[79] Murillo, 2001: 28.

[80] Murillo, 2001: 82.

[81] Schlegelberger, 1995: 45.

[82] Schlegelberger, 1995: 46.

[83] If we let the non-indigenous speak our language and participate in our meetings, soon they will all know what we do to protect ourselves from them; Murillo, 2001: 115.

1.1.3. Political background and violence

The political situation in Colombia in the twentieth century is closely related to the fate of indigenous communities, affecting the lives of my participants on a very personal level. With this in mind, it is crucial to understand the current indigenous situation as a result of the complexities of the history of violence in Colombia.[84] The events which led to *La Violencia*[85] were a direct consequence of constant conflicts between the conservatives and the liberals. *La Violencia* officially ended in 1964, but it would be naive to believe that this is when the conflict finished. That period witnessed the creation of many self-defence groups and other illegal armed organisations. With the USA's involvement in the conflict through 'Plan Colombia' (which provided financial support and equipment), the armed struggle seemed to be more complex than ever. All the past attempts to reach peace between the government and the guerrillas regularly failed, with the ceasefire only giving the guerrillas time to strengthen their forces. In 2016, a peace agreement was finally signed, despite the unsuccessful referendum[86]. This culminated with a Nobel Peace Prize for President Juan Manuel Santos, to recognise his negotiations with the guerrillas and peace-building efforts.

In addition to the difficult political situation, for many years, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta was the hub for production and distribution of illegal cocaine and marijuana crops. As a consequence, it was controlled by guerrillas and paramilitary

[84] The conflict dates back to 1826 and the emergence of the two-party system. Simón Bolívar was elected the president, and Francisco de Paula Santander became the vice-president. The two parties resulted from the conflict between Bolívar and Santander (president of Gran Colombia during 1819-1826, and later President of the Republic of New Granada during 1832-1837). Bolivar's supporters formed the nucleus of what would be the Conservative Party, and Santander's followers initiated the Liberal Party.

[85] Which started on 9 April 1948 with assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a Liberal leader and presidential candidate; that event got labelled as 'Bogotazo.'

[86] http://www.acuerdodepaz.gov.co; accessed on 2 September 2017

armed groups, and the indigenous communities were often victims of this situation. However, as demonstrated, violence concerning indigenous communities in Colombia is situated within much longer tradition of injustice, dating back to the colonial period, rather than arising from any one of the three sources of Colombian conflict (classified by 'violentologos' as 'Bogotazo' and its consequences, the rural violence resulting from the guerrilla and paramilitary rise in the 1960s, and the urban violence which was the result of the cocaine boom).[87]

1.1.4. Contemporary perception of the communities of the Sierra

In contemporary Colombia, indigenous communities benefit from many forms of legislation which protect their culture. Many universities offer free entry for indigenous students,[88] and indigenous culture is acknowledged and appreciated by many. However, the Arhuacos still face issues which threaten their lifestyles. Among others, they encounter problems accessing some of their sacred places (due to the military presence there), or they face a decision of road construction (or TV antennas) in their territories. Tourism reaching their lands poses yet another threat. Finally, their way of life and culture have been subject to significant misinterpretations by filmmakers who visited the Sierra throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. In his book about the Arhuacos published in 1991, Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff describes this newly discovered interest in the region: 'La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta se puso de moda. Antropólogos, biólogos, fotógrafos, cineastas y hippies recorrieron la Sierra Nevada; se "descubrió"

[87] Hudson, R. A., 2010.

[88] http://www.imprenta.gov.co/gacetap/gaceta.mostrar_documento?p_tipo=05&p_numero=114&p_consec=42811; accessed on 19 March 2017.

una “ciudad perdida.”’[89] However, he claims, this interest proved superficial and not only none of those interested in the Sierra ever lived with the local indigenous communities, but also no book has been published as a result of this interest. Additionally, he claims:

> Se han hecho películas, se han organizado brigadas para “re-descubrir” a Colombia, se han publicado espléndidas fotografías que muestran un ambiente bucólico y se han publicado artículos populares que describen a los indios, sólo desde la perspectiva de la cultura nacional urbana, mencionando tal cual rasgo de la vida de “ellos” como si fuera algo raro, exótico, infantil.[90]

This external curiosity contrasts quite significantly with the interest which the communities of the Sierra inspire among the local non-indigenous inhabitants of the region. In his article published on 2 December 2014 in ‘Vive Caribe’, Carlos Varón, a journalist interested in indigenous issues, describes numerous occasions of European and North-American tourists arriving in the Sierra with the intention to live with the Kogui, in hope to find the ‘meaning of life’. Varón states that this attitude of tourists seems rather curious to most ordinary Colombians.[91] In another article, published on 17 June 2014, Varón observes that, for the average Colombian, there is not much difference between the four nations inhabiting Sierra. Kogui, Arhuaco, Kankuamo and Wiwa melt into one in common understanding, claims Varón, when in fact we can observe a significant cultural diversity in the Sierra.[92] I return to the views on the communities of

[89] Sierra Nevada became fashionable. Anthropologists, biologists, fotogrpahers, filmmakers and hippies travelled around the Sierra. The “lost city” has been “discovered”; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1991: 16.

[90] Films were made, groups aimed to ‘re-discover Colombia’ emerged, photographs depicting bucolic atmosphere were published, popular articles describing the indigenous were published, but all this from a urban national point of view, presenting ‘their’ lifestyle as if it was something strange, exotic, infantile; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1991: 17.

[91] http://vivecaribe.co/la-fascinacion-de-los-extranjeros-por-nuestros-pueblos-indigenas/; accessed on 27 September 2015.

[92] http://vivecaribe.co/culturas-de-la-sierra-nevada-de-santa-marta/#; accessed on 27 September 2015.

the Sierra in Chapters 5 and 6. Before that, I contextualise my research by placing it within an interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

Chapter 2

Literature review

The interdisciplinary nature of my research, reinforced by my multifaceted background in photography, film, and digital media arts results in focusing my interest on intercultural implications of creating visual representations by groups which were traditionally excluded from the audiovisual exchange, for a long time remaining a mere subject for Western filmmakers. In the face of this, I find it necessary to consider the significance of films about indigenous communities (or the 'Otherness' as such), and to understand the consequences of the existence of these productions in relation to their distribution and dissemination practices. This approach intends to move beyond the traditional classificatory terms in its attempt to monitor and analyse the position of 'us' describing 'them' in the rapidly evolving contemporary media landscape.

Throughout this chapter, I discuss selected theories which are particularly relevant to my research. This includes the concept of the 'Other', the modes and consequences of representing reality, documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, the performative aspects of contemporary culture and the contemporary 'spectacle' effect of transcultural documentaries. Finally, I examine the concept of indigenous media as an intercultural mediated vehicle of communication.

2.1. Interpretation of cultures

2.1.1. Thick description or the spectacle of the 'Other'

Representing cultures outside one's own society is prompted by a cognitive curiosity in the experiment of describing the 'Other'. The differences in approaching this task are culturally determined, and they result in different attitudes towards the use of audiovisual tools. In his efforts to redefine the concept of culture and possible ways to describe it, Clifford Geertz attempts to understand what observation, experience and storytelling really mean. He borrows the term 'thick description' (which aims to describe not only behaviour but also its context) from Gilbert Ryle and explains it as the object of ethnography. Its main characteristic is going beyond a mere report of what is happening ('thin description'), into a 'stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures'[93] in order to discover how the stories are produced, perceived, and interpreted. This last point is crucial for Geertz. He states that 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.'[94] This concept forms the basis for my understanding of what a visual representation of the 'Other' is. We can consider three stages of interpretation: the initial one during the real-life encounter with the subject, the second one during the 'translation' process (in case of my research, in the form of filmmaking), and the final one during the reception processes of the end product. Geertz formulates the idea of the 'enlargement of the universe of human discourse.'[95] This is echoed by Bill Nichols, who argues that ''anthropology' becomes an institutional discourse which has assigned itself the

[93] Geertz, 1973: 7.
[94] Geertz, 1973: 9.
[95] Geertz, 1973: 14.

challenge of representing others.'[96] I argue that describing others is far from an exclusively anthropological ambition, and most films (both documentary and fiction) respond to a similar task. Following this, various discourses are applied to different ways of representing the 'Other.'

The history of photography and film is inextricably linked to the positivist aim of providing a visible proof and documentation of differences between cultures. Cold, scientific anthropometry repeatedly reduced people to mere objects of the scientific gaze. These images were usually aimed for display outside the original context. Discussing the example of Félix-Luis Regnault's filming at the Exposition Ethnographique de l'Afrique Occidentale in Paris in 1895,[97] Fatimah Tobing Rony describes how the viewer was confronted with 'specimens of race and culture'. This is, she suggests, how the 'Other' or the 'Savage' was being portrayed in ethnographic films. It was never about an individual, rather, it was concerned with the outsider's concept of 'otherness.'[98] This curiosity influenced the relation between images and culture, as well as between images and power. Christopher Pinney reiterates that what interested early ethnographers was to obtain raw data depicting the diverse cultures and peoples across the globe.[99] However, the link between anthropology and photography was not unproblematic, resulting in objectifying culture in 'visual and material representation', as Pinney suggests.[100] Even Muybridge's 'Human Figure in Motion' (1884), claims Catherine Russell, can be seen as an example of an anonymous human body exposed to the scrutinising eye of the observer.[101] She warns us about the consequences of using visual methods, claiming that the 'reduction to sheer image and

[96] Nichols, 1995: 64.
[97] Which is considered to be one of the earliest examples of ethnographic filmmaking.
[98] Rony, 1996: 21-25.
[99] Pinney, 2011.
[100] Pinney, 2011: 25.
[101] Russell, 1999: 66.

spectacle always runs the risk of aestheticisation, of turning the Other into a consumable image.'[102] This can result in a fetishistic way of representing reality and the colonialist cinema of attractions[103], often applying exoticisation or eroticisation of the 'Other'. Reflecting on the fascination with 'Otherness' in early films, Russell states that 'The cinema provided its own logic of the spectacle: whatever is captured became an attraction by virtue of being filmed.'[104] She suggests that films replaced the 'native villages' by its own performance: 'early films took over these functions [of 'human zoo', and 'part performance circus and part laboratory for physical anthropology'], eventually replacing imprisonment with visual objectification.'[105] She concludes that 'in early cinema, as the real body is released from captivity, the simulacrum of the body becomes a fetish, and "culture" becomes a spectacle of ritualistic activities.'[106] All these elements (objectification, fetish, simulacrum and spectacle) become an integral part of describing the difference observed in the 'Other'. Fatimah Tobing Rony shares her perplexity about the commodification of the 'Other' in film, describing how somebody's glance, or way of looking at another person, is capable of marking that person as 'Other'. Referring to Du Bois, Rony explains the concept of the 'third eye' as a feeling of looking at oneself through the eyes of others.[107] This, she suggests, creates a socially induced self-alienation. Such effect is often achieved by the encounter with different cultures, where culturally different points of view meet. A movie screen pushes this feeling to yet another level, as in films we find ourselves reflected in the eyes of 'Others', suggests Rony. Various forms of racial objectification in the commercial cinema were consistently fixing the 'Other' under the gaze of the white audience

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[102] Russell, 1999: 62.

[103] A term coined by Tom Gunning in relation to early cinema, describing cinema's ability to display its own visibility in attempt to grasp audience's attention; Gunning, 1986.

[104] Russell, 1991: 51.

[105] Ibid: 52.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Rony, 1996: 4.

(similarly to the way in which female body was objectified by the gaze of white, heterosexual male, as suggested in the feminist theory of Laura Mulvey). The power of the one who is watching is not only confirmed by the passivity of the subject on the screen, but also by the fixations of gender and race power relations. These objectifying gazes are usually filtered through culturally inflected stereotypes, for example, the one of the 'Primitive' or romanticised 'Noble Savage'. However, as Rony argues, even for someone who is watching samples of ethnographic work about an 'unknown culture', it is never the 'first time' as the 'exotic is always already known.'[108] This knowledge is based on cultural pre-assumptions and stereotypes, and this is precisely what the participants of this study aimed to contest with their work. This raises a question about the status of films made from the perspective of the 'Other', where the identification (of the audiences) might occur on the border between the 'Self' and the 'Other'.

Definitions of 'Otherness' are based on the strict differentiation between the 'norm' and 'difference', accompanied by a strongly imposed power relations. Stereotyping is an important tool to exercise the distinction of 'Otherness', and it is essential for creating the boundaries of cultural meaning. Relating 'Otherness' (in fiction) to the idea of the cultural stereotype, Nichols states that 'The figure of the Other represents that which cannot be acknowledged or admitted within the culture that engenders it […]. The Other embodies evil or chaos, excess greed or indolence, horror or monstrosity, the nefarious and the destructive.'[109] Nichols suggests that mainstream cinema treats 'Otherness' as a catalogue of one's 'own disease, denial and anxiety.'[110] He also argues that 'the Other (woman, native, minority) rarely functions as a participant in and creator of a system of meanings',[111] and this is what I challenge in

[108] Rony, 1996: 6.
[109] Nichols: 1991: 204.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

this thesis. Such projection of the 'Other' as a fabrication, he concludes, does not help us to see other complexities and differences, which leads to the '(mis)representation' of the Other.[112] But it also serves a purpose, as, according to Steven Leuthold, 'The image of the other is fixed [by stereotypes] so that it becomes more manageable.'[113] This might help us to 'negotiate difficult parts of our own selves.'[114] This research concentrates on renegotiating the position of the 'Otherness', its agency, and the power relations concerned with it.

2.1.2. 'Symbolic violence' and stereotyping

The significance and impact of the first (visual) impression of the 'Other' should not be ignored when discussing the idea of representing cultures. Writing about the Algerian revolution and the importance of immediately perceptible 'visual differences' (here: clothing), Frantz Fanon notices that 'It is by their apparel that types of society first become known, whether through written accounts and photographic records or motion pictures.'[115] He reinforces his point by claiming that 'The woman seen in her white veil unifies the perception that one has of Algerian feminine society.'[116] This works similarly, I argue, for the external perception of indigenous peoples: a long-haired, barefoot man, dressed in a simple hand-made tunic is likely to unify the perception of the whole indigenous community of a region. Such a simplified approach to the visual aspects of an indigenous person (and their culture, by extension) might potentially lead

[112] Nichols: 1991: 207.
[113] Leuthold, 1998: 26.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Fanon, 1967: 35.
[116] Fanon, 1967: 36.

to distorted visions of 'Otherness' for Western audiences. This spectacle of the 'Other' relates to the fascination with 'Otherness' and the implications of the representational practices of difference. Hall proposes that '"other cultures" are given meaning by the discourses and practices of exhibition in ethnographic museums of "the West".'[117] These exhibitions have their own poetics (discourses) and politics (relations of power). In more contemporary contexts, ethnographic films and other forms of exhibition often acquire a similar role. The discourse surrounding these practices is significantly contributing to the fact of how these 'Other cultures' are being seen and given meaning. Therefore, the politics of representation cannot be seen as innocent.[118]

The danger of oversimplification which might result in stereotyping is the ever-present threat when interpreting cultures. Hall defines 'stereotyping' as a process which 'reduces people to few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature.'[119] The four aspects of stereotyping which he examines are: 'the construction of "Otherness" and exclusion, stereotyping and power, the role of fantasy, and fetishism.'[120] Stereotyping serves to fix the difference (and the boundaries), and exclude everything which does not belong, becoming 'part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order.'[121] The stereotyping of indigenous communities is often designed to bring a soothing reassurance to Western audiences, comforting them that they are 'in a better position' in comparison to the 'uncivilised' individuals depicted on the screen. This is often undertaken without a basic understanding of the cultural differences and the very different systems of values, frequently resulting in a paternalistic attitude and reinforced power relations. Like 'Otherness', stereotyping is centred around any form of

[117] Hall, 1997: 225.
[118] Hall, 1997: 223-225.
[119] Hall, 1997: 257.
[120] Ibid: 257.
[121] Ibid: 258.

difference: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, etc. Hall speaks about the symbolic cultural power, the 'power to represent someone or something in a certain way.'[122] He compares stereotyping to a 'symbolic violence' in this exercise of representational practices.[123] As I further demonstrate, this power tends to be frequently overused and taken for granted by many Western filmmakers working with the 'indigenous Other'. Russell suggests that early cinema, with its ethnographic curiosity to document novelties (but also parades, dances, performances and processions), is the moment when the radicalised body becomes standardised as a fetish and stereotype which is then continuously reproduced in visual culture.[124] Homi Bhabha, who also understands stereotypes as a fetish, argues that:

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference […], constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relation.[125]

Such omnipresence of stereotypes gets contested by the attempts of reversing the stereotypes, argues Hall.[126] Another technique consists of promoting positive images in order to replace the negative ones,[127] a strategy often adopted by indigenous media. This, I argue, becomes equally problematic and could result in the creation of just another 'reversed' stereotype.

The next section of this chapter looks at yet another way of exercising power relations when representing the 'Other', which focuses on the similarities between pornography and ethnography in their exaggerated hierarchy and fragmentation.

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[122] Hall, 1997: 259.
[123] Ibid: 259.
[124] Russell, 1999: 56.
[125] Bhabha, 1994: 107.
[126] Hall, 1997: 270.
[127] Ibid: 272.

2.1.3. Ethnography as pornography

The fascination with 'Otherness' has inspired many attempts to comprehend and interpret similarities and differences between 'us' and 'them' using different methods and approaches. Bhabha argues that the question of difference between the filmmaker and the film-subjects is a common catalyst for the curiosity which then inspires the creation of these films. Nichols suggests various possible ways of representing the 'Other' (and although his theory primarily refers to fiction, it can be applied to documentary films equally well). The first one is a cultural stereotype, resulting in simplification and fixation of the traits describing the difference. Nichols argues that 'seldom is the Other represented so that something of its singularity and distinction appears instead of the stereotypical or projected.'[128] Secondly, 'the cultural Other can be understood in relation to the mechanisms of narrative per se.'[129] Here, the function of the Other is understood to be a threat or obstacle to the hero in pursuit of a goal, taking the role of a villain. Lastly, 'the (mis) interpretation of the Other can be said to take place in relation to the gaze of the camera'[130] using limitless observation and constant curiosity, distance and power, and bringing ethnography close to pornography.[131]

Nichols' view on representing the 'Other' in documentaries is rather critical, raising questions of cultural practices of the 'Other' in their relations to the culture of the filmmaker. He suggests that pornography and ethnography share a discourse of domination, meaning that 'they represent impulses born of desire: the desire to know and possess, to "know" by possessing and possess by knowing.'[132] In the setting of the

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[128] Nichols, 1991: 206.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Nichols, 1991: 207.
[131] Nichols, 1991: 218.
[132] Nichols, 1991: 209.

canonical ethnographic film, 'our' culture assumes the task of representing 'theirs'. Nichols identifies this task with 'assumption, responsibility, or power'[133] at the same time arguing that ethnographic filmmakers tend to aim to understand rather than dominate.[134] This varies between different filmmakers, and it might be used as a form of justification, nevertheless this sense of responsibility to represent the 'Other' opens more questions about the politics of representation, and the discussion about who has the right to represent whom and why. Nichols suggests that distancing techniques imply control, and difference is the basis for building a hierarchy. Building onto his parallel between ethnography and pornography, he states that 'ethnography is a kind of legitimated pornography, a pornography of knowledge, giving us the pleasure of knowing what had seemed incomprehensible.'[135] This suggests that power relations in an ethnographic film cannot be made equal and that the justification of spreading knowledge and representing other cultures serves nothing more than the filmmakers' own pleasure. Nichols further argues that in ethnography 'the basic unit is a situation or event offering an example of cultural specificity presented from the perspective of as ideal an observer as field conditions allow.'[136] This assumed position of an ideal observer is privileged both in terms of their access to the subjects, technology, and the intellectual preparation to undertake the task of representing the 'Other'. In representing a body in ethnography, we witness its fragmentation similar to the one observed in pornography, where the body is an instrument of cultural performance. The only difference is the claim to do it in a 'scientific spirit'.[137] Other structural qualities shared by pornography and ethnography and supporting the representational authority are

[133] Ibid.
[134] Nichols, 1991: 209-210.
[135] Nichols, 1991: 210.
[136] Nichols, 1991: 214.
[137] Nichols, 1991: 220.

distance, excess, empirical realism and narrative and expository realism.[138] The first one relates to the 'separation between subject and object' which is essential to build 'realism, desire, and power'[139] but also hierarchy, stereotype, duality, and control. Excess often relies on the voice-over explanations to give us a clue of the 'real' meaning of what we see. Empirical realism suggests that 'what we see occurred much as it would have occurred were we not there to see it.'[140] And both narrative and expository realism 'brings with it the baggage of a Western tradition that conflates description with representation, information with knowledge, evidence with sight.'[141]

Both exoticisation and eroticisation of the 'Other' imply unequal power relations in representational practices. Ethnographers tend to concentrate on larger groups of people, not individuals, and such descriptions are based on the binary oppositions of the traits of difference. But how can one 'squeeze' the dynamic of a group into a single representable form? It seems that cultural hybridity transcends fixed identifications, and the spaces 'in between' the cultural differences, as advocated by Bhabha,[142] escape the eyes of ethnographers. Bhabha suggests that a situation of cultural hybridity potentially allows 'difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.'[143] Indigenous filmmaking seems to be aiming for this possibility. Bhabha also criticises the Eurocentric hegemony of knowledge, affirming that 'there is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged.'[144] We can apply a similar accusation to the power relations between filmmakers/ethnographers and their subjects. Bhabha blames the 'structure of symbolic representation itself' for

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[138] Nichols, 1991: 223-224.
[139] Nichols, 1991: 223.
[140] Ibid: 224.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Bhabha, 1994: 2.
[143] Bhabha, 1994: 5.
[144] Bhabha, 1994: 28.

the cultural text's insufficiency to become a satisfactory 'act of cultural enunciation.'[145] Furthermore, we face the problem of the 'ambivalence in [the] act of interpretation.'[146] The issue of ambivalence leads Bhabha to announce the victory of culture's hybridity and conclusion that 'it is the "inner" - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.'[147]

In conclusion of this section, I reiterate, following Nichols, that:

> Both pornography and ethnography promise something they cannot deliver: the ultimate pleasure of knowing the 'Other'. On this promise of sexual or cultural knowledge they depend, but they are also condemned to do nothing more than make it available for representation.[148]

Writing about the paradoxes of cultural knowledge in ethnography, Nichols argues that we strive to 'make the strange known', but 'we extract knowledge and yet never the knowledge that is represented (which is *their* knowledge);'[149] we wander between the familiar and the strange, and it fascinates us; 'we cannot help but be ambivalent about the image of an Other that is essential to our own identity but not under our corporeal or mental control.'[150] The only possible alternative arises in the form of an intercultural collaboration on the intersection of what is 'ours' and 'theirs'. The interpretation of cultures is never a straightforward process, as it is intricately embedded in cultural contexts which cannot be separated or ignored in the moment of intercultural encounter. If on one side we are confronted with stereotypes and preconceptions, on the other no meaning can ever be fixed, being a subject of constant negotiation between the author, the artefact (photograph/video), the viewer, and the context of the entire process (in

[145] Bhabha, 1994: 28.
[146] Ibid: 53.
[147] Bhabha, 1994: 56.
[148] Nichols, 1991: 225.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Nichols, 1991: 226.

particular, the context of the final presentation). Hall's idea that it is the participants of the culture who, by representing things, give them a meaning, is relevant here.[151]

So what kind of public are such films made for? Nichols claims that both in the case of pornography and ethnography, 'camera and sound, sequence and structure anticipate the logic of what an ideal spectator would want to see of sexual or social activity. We occupy this "ideal" position, seeing what we need to see when we need to see it.'[152] Therefore all the elements of narration and film language serve to 'channel and control the investment of desire.'[153] This suggests that the ideal spectator's journey is almost predesigned and to a certain degree manipulated by the filmmaker: we are almost 'programmed' to receive the film in one way and not the other. Of course, this can be contested by the audience. But on a deeper level, the meaning of such practice is that 'ethnography is an essential tool for the anthropologist who hopes to tell us something about ourselves by telling us about a more *savage* version of ourselves. Ethnography uses the actions of the one to signify the actions of the many.'[154] Film subjects end up being considerably simplified and reduced to a few stereotypes, easily recognisable by the Western audiences in order to fulfil this task. To paraphrase Nichols' words, we witness a practice where the 'Other' in an ethnographic film is being used to support the Western filmmakers' argument (of their simplicity, connection with nature). Nichols talks about 'great anthropological generalisation' and 'small quaint descriptions.'[155] However, this attempt to find universal values can be both helpful and very misleading: 'the value of an individual's action lies in its generalisation, its typicality within the culture in question.'[156] Another common characteristic of some

[151] Sturken and Cartwright, 2009: 3.
[152] Nichols, 1991: 214.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Nichols, 1991: 218.
[155] Nichols, 1991: 219.
[156] Nichols, 1991: 220.

ethnographic films is that 'an iconography of cultural authenticity prevails, usually indicative of an "untouched" state, sometimes of acculturation.'[157] This search for the purity of the world unstained by civilisation inevitably deepens the use of stereotype, increasing the gap between the filmmaker and the 'Other'. It also plays the role of reinforcing the notion of the 'sophistication' of the culture of the filmmakers, by contrasting it with the 'simplicity' of the 'Savage Other'. As a result, it is ultimately a portrait of the filmmaker who gains a deeper level of understanding himself by looking at the mirror of the 'Other'. This extends to the future audiences, who seek their 'lost paradise' in ethnographic films.

[157] Nichols, 1991: 219.

2.2. Representing reality and visual methodologies

2.2.1. Strategies and modes of representation

David MacDougall aptly argues that 'the representation of anything is by definition the creation of something different.'[158] As a result, it requires a set of tools and techniques to come into existence. Having introduced the concept of the 'Other' and the ideas of interpretation of cultures, it is now time to concentrate on various strategies and conventions employed to tackle this task. Nichols suggests several modes of documentary representation: expository, observational, interactive, reflexive and performative.[159] Expository documentary (the 1930s') directly addresses the real but remains overly didactic. It is identified by so-called 'Voice-of-God' commentary, with a very didactic approach. Observational documentary (the 1960s') avoids using any commentary, and attempts to observe things as they happen, but lacks history and context.[160] It is closely related to direct cinema/cinema verité, and it was enabled thanks to the use of the light, synchronous equipment. However, it is somehow limited by being constantly grounded in the present moment, without the possibility to detach itself from the events happening in front of the camera. Interactive documentary (the 1960s' - 1970s') uses interviews and interventions and attempts to retrieve history, but has an excessive faith in witnesses, which might produce a naive history. The interactive mode of representation 'makes the filmmaker's perspective more evident' by enabling the filmmaker to participate in the events more actively. It also involves the use of archival materials. Reflexive documentary (the 1980s') questions documentary form and

[158] MacDougall, 1998: 48.
[159] Nichols: 1991: 32-75.
[160] And, together with the interactive mode, it is probably the closest to the way in which I made the video which accompanies this thesis.

defamiliarises other modes, but the results are too abstract, risking losing sight of actual issues. It arose from a need to make the conventions of representation more visible. It aims to challenge the impression of reality. Nichols classifies it as the most self-aware mode, claiming that 'it uses many of the same devices as other documentaries but sets them on the edge so that the viewer's attention is drawn to the device as well as the effect.'[161] The reflexive mode forms an important element of my investigation, as it 'addresses the question of *how* we talk about the historical world;'[162] it becomes a form of a 'metacommentary, speaking to us [...] about the process of representation itself.'[163] Many of the indigenous films which I investigate display strong elements of the reflexive mode of representation. The reflexive texts are conscious about their own form, style, strategy, structure, conventions, expectations, and effects.[164] In this mode of representation, the filmmaker is 'less a participant-observer' and more an 'authoring agent.'[165] Nichols argues that the reflexive mode considers the presence of the potential viewer, focusing on the 'encounter between filmmaker and viewer rather than filmmaker and subject.'[166] This tendency is certainly very present in the work of Amado Villafaña and his collaborators, which only proves the maturity of their work. Reflexive documentaries ask about the adequacy of the representation to that which it represents.[167] Nichols concludes that 'this mode [...] is itself the least naive and the most doubtful about the possibilities of communication and expression that the other modes take for granted.'[168] Finally, performative documentary (the 1980s' - 1990s') stresses subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse, but its potential

[161] Nichols: 1991: 33.
[162] Nichols: 1991: 57.
[163] Nichols: 1991: 56.
[164] Nichols: 1991: 57.
[165] Nichols: 1991: 58.
[166] Nichols: 1991: 60.
[167] Nichols: 1991: 57.
[168] Nichols: 1991: 60.

limitations lie in the loss of referential emphasis, which might push it towards avant-garde and over-stylisation.[169] The above-described modes do not exclude each other; instead, they tend to overlap or interact. Each of them has its prime concerns, but very often what is talked about takes priority over how it is talked about. The exception would be the reflexive mode of documentary filmmaking, where 'how' becomes the object of scrutiny.[170] According to Nichols, we can associate each mode of documentary representation with a particular movement (and director): expository with John Grierson, reflexive with Dziga Vertov, observational with Flaherty, and interactive with Jean Rouch and the National Film Board of Canada.[171]

However, these modes of representation are not completely unproblematic. Nichols asks: 'To what extent and in what ways shall the voice of people be represented? If they are observed by someone else, to what extent do their own observations on the process, and results of observation deserve a place in the final film?'[172] These questions are vital for my investigation. Inevitably, any representation is a negotiated narration, and, as Nichols points out, stories offer structure, and they grant meaning and value. But 'they are themselves a product of history and culture.'[173]

This detailed characterisation of various modes of representation provides a basis for a critical approach to different ways of representing the 'Other' and the 'self', focusing on the importance of a self-reflective approach when using a visual medium. It forces us to reflect on the position of the filmmaker, the expectations of the potential viewer, and the limitations of the very process of representation.

[169] Nichols, B, 1994: 95.
[170] Nichols: 1991: 17.
[171] Nichols: 1991: 23.
[172] Nichols, B, 1994: ix.
[173] Ibid.

2.2.2. Visitability and culture on display

The 'visitability' of contemporary culture, as explored by Bella Dicks, refers to the effect of the distance we automatically produce by the very fact of placing the camera in front of our eyes.[174] Dicks claims that 'Places today have become exhibitions of themselves.'[175] Following Umberto Eco, Dicks describes one of the characteristics of the era of the culture on display: 'rather than travelling to places in order to interact with people who live there, visitors are travelling to places to interact with displays of these people.'[176] This principle could easily apply to the description of audiences of ethnographic film festivals, travelling (sometimes long distances) to countries and cities where the festivals take place. Dicks introduces a term 'visitable representations' to describe a common destination for contemporary travels. The characteristic of such 'visitable representations' is that they promise to offer a condensed, attractive essence of the local life. Often such experience acts as a satisfactory substitute for the real visit to the represented site. Effectively, technology enables culture to be reproduced.[177] But technology also distances us from the reality it aims to depict and converts in into simulations.[178] Dicks concludes that 'The careful construction of meaningfulness in visitor-hungry environments depends on techniques of "interpretation".'[179] Finally, we must acknowledge that the idea of culture on display implies that such display is designed to be a product which must be consumed.

I argue that visual representations of the 'Other' create a similar substitute of reality. Those who familiarise themselves with the films about, for example, the

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[174] Dicks, 2004: xi.
[175] Dicks, 2004: 1.
[176] Dicks, 2004: 4.
[177] Ibid: 9.
[178] I reflect on this deeper in Chapter 3.2.
[179] Dicks, 2004: 11.

Arhuaco community, might believe that they got to 'know' something about that culture (which can substitute for personally visiting the community in order to acquire that knowledge). Visual representations become first-hand tools for cognitive processes. Dicks suggests that a camera-centred perspective on contemporary realities has led to the creation of a new type of authenticity: 'one that is not dependent on aura but on mimesis, to the faithful reconstruction of reality.'[180] I argue that often storytelling becomes the main function of visual representation, regardless if the claims of authenticity are present or not.

What characterises the reception of culture on display is that 'whilst local groups are likely to want to recognise their own selves on display (with all the necessary complexity it entails), tourists may be expecting simply a reflection of received stereotypes about the other.'[181] This is what, inevitably, keeps getting reproduced in most (ethnographic) films, as well as in touristic photography. Referring to Dean MacCannell, Dicks reminds the argument that:

> Modernity […] generates its own guilt and regret for the pre-modern cultures and places it, transforms, even destroys, in the name of progress. This results in the constant and accelerating creation of enclaves wherein cultures can be preserved, or, if it is already too late, reconstructed.[182]

Creating idealised reconstructions of traditional cultures is a great example of that tendency. MacCannell's argument states that these cultures-turned-exhibitions paradoxically claim to display their 'authenticity.'[183] However, consuming the culture on display can only be done in a fragmented way. As a result, 'the commodification […] can turn it into essentialized images of "otherness" seemingly frozen in time',[184] warns Dicks. And this, I argue, is especially true in the case of the visual representations of

[180] Dicks, 2004: 20.
[181] Dicks, 2004: 30.
[182] Dicks, 2004: 30-31.
[183] Ibid: 31.
[184] Dicks, 2004: 33.

remote, isolated communities, because the new 'update' on the representation is unlikely to be produced on a regular basis, and the existing one is rarely sufficiently negotiated and contested. Inevitably, forms of cultural display suffer from a degree of superficiality. Dicks argues that the access to culture on display is very uneven and based on one's economic situation and geographical location (but also age, health, mobility, etc.). This results in a division between those who have access to the gaze of the 'Other', and those (still in the majority), who can just afford to be gazed at.[185] This, effectively, comes down to determining who has the power to display cultures and therefore to regulate them. I suggest that what many filmmakers aim for is guiding their audiences to what exactly needs to be seen and how. We are being shown a certain aspect of a culture, at the pace designed for us, where our gaze is directed at precisely selected elements.

2.2.3. In search for authenticity or truth versus interpretation

Visitors often transform indigenous cultures they come to see. Echoing MacCannell, Dicks suggests that visitors from highly industrialised and technological countries are in search for authenticity which they lack at their home places.[186] They frequently object the idea of modernisation of the 'authentic' indigenous places or peoples they encounter. Such attitudes, coming from people who take advantage of the comforts of modern technologies on a daily basis, but deny this right for the 'Other' by praising the beauty of the 'primitive cultures', seems hypocritical. In some cases, such 'living museums' are deprived of the right to progress and could only survive by being completely dependent

[185] Dicks, 2004: 40.
[186] Dicks, 2004: 58.

on the flux of intrusive gaze of the visitors who 'pay to watch'. In such situations, the performed display of cultural identity becomes a commodity to sell.[187] MacCannell argues that the need for authenticity encourages a local response in the form of 'staged authenticity'. This process of the re-enactment of local cultures[188] might lead to a conflict between subjective judgements of the visitors and the anthropological ambitions of impartiality. Informed by Geertz's work, Dicks distinguishes different sites of authentication: the academic's, the visitor's, the tourist planner/promotor's, and the local community's. She underlines that they are never equivalent.[189] The need for a narrative framework also gets employed when indigenous communicators propose their videos for the Western audiences, applying the universal values of storytelling. It comes down to Mitchell's famous question: who represents what to whom, with what, where and why.[190]

The concept of authenticity also relates to the positivist idea of the documentary value of an image as appreciated in science, medicine or the courtroom. These claims are contrasted with the unavoidably subjective attributes of the image, expressed by the photographer's choice of the framing, the point of view, subject, lens, etc. Also, the context can heavily alter the meaning of an image. That could be understood on different levels: the context of the sequence of the images (as proved by Dziga Vertov in the process of editing his revolutionary films), the context of the presentation (what sort of exhibition/festival/TV screen), or the social context of its creation (academic/entertainment/artistic etc.). Within the context of contemporary film distribution, it might be more useful to replace the problematic category of truthfulness with the idea of the culturally-specific interpretation in the process of negotiating the

[187] Dicks, 2004: 63.
[188] Something which I have observed during my fieldwork in the Peruvian Amazon.
[189] Dicks, 2004: 58.
[190] Mitchell, 1995: 420.

meaning. Also, any curatorial and distribution decisions inevitably determine the perception of a film. As a result, given the enormous amount of films being produced, we unavoidably rely on the judgements of a relatively narrow group of experts who guide us about what is worth our attention. Additionally, the judgements of the experts are very much dependent on the local trends or the particular moment in history. As a result, interpretation shifts depending on cultural and historical contexts. It is, therefore, unquestionable that meaning is not something fixed within the artwork, rather, it undergoes a constant renegotiation. It is a complex social process which, by appealing to our previous experiences, cultural preconceptions, and by contextualising the reception process, allows us to interpret the images.

2.2.4. The powerful gaze

However, representing reality in films and the viewer's role in this process also have power-related consequences. The essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' by Laura Mulvey, first published in 1975, remains a ground-breaking text on the psychoanalysis of the cinema. Despite the criticism about its primarily heterocentric point of view, it provides a set of very useful concepts for thinking about power relations between a spectator and filmed subjects. Mulvey's main argument relates to the division of imbalanced power relations between the active male who is watching, and the passive female who is being watched (both within the film, between the male and female protagonists, and also between the male viewer of the film contemplating the beautiful, passive female form on the screen). Mulvey uses the expression 'male gaze' to describe this imbalanced relation. Although in my research I am not interested in the male/female division of the power relations (which, in fact, are reversed: I am a

female filmmaker representing mostly male subjects), it still stands that the one who watches has the power over the one who is being watched, also on the meaning-making level. A person captured on the screen in most cases remains passive and defenceless against the judgemental, scrutinising eye of the viewer, becoming objectified in this process (unless there is a thorough platform for debate after the film has been made public, and both the filmmaker and the subject can fully participate in the discussion). Effectively, the way someone is represented has a direct influence on the way he or she will be perceived by others. Mulvey also identifies a visual, voyeuristic pleasure of watching films. Similar scopophilia can be observed when looking at 'unknown' cultures on the screen, as it simulates the pleasure of 'seeing something for the first time' and the sense of 'discovery'. Mulvey reminds us how Freud 'associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.'[191] A reductionist misrepresentation on the screen can have damaging effects. The pleasure of viewing could be associated either with the appreciation of a subjects' beauty or with the acknowledgement of one's superior position. The power of the film viewer is based on separation and distance: there is no threat of direct confrontation. The process of identification plays an important role too. Whereas in classical Hollywood cinema the viewer would be expected to identify with the male protagonist, in the case of documentaries about indigenous peoples, we, the viewers, are expected to identify with the white explorer introducing us to the 'unknown' culture on the screen, as we 'discover' it in the process of watching. This, as indicated, gets questioned with the emergence of indigenous self-representation attempts.

Despite the cultural and social specificity of Mulvey's theory (Hollywood movies and male heterosexual protagonist), it gives us a set of very useful concepts concerned with power relations in film, and the process of identification which stands

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[191] Mulvey, 1975: 835.

behind it. We can certainly draw a parallel between Mulvey's Freudian concept of fetishistic male gaze which turns female bodies into objects of a heterosexual, male desire and any ethnographic attempt to depict the 'Other', which usually conveys a similar power exercise. The passivity of the 'Other' is even deeper than the one of the observed female body as the picture of the 'Other' is very often placed 'out of context' for the purpose of display, that is, it is taken out of the original environment of the 'Other' and displayed in Western galleries, media, and film festivals. This prevents (or at least significantly diminishes) any attempt of the active voice of those represented as the 'Other', and places them almost entirely outside of the circle of distribution of the representations of themselves. In her essay 'The Persistence of Vision', Donna Haraway recalls the feminist theory of the vision and gaze, underlying the violence of visualising practices. She argues that 'The instruments of visualisation in multinationalist, postmodernist culture has compounded these meanings of dis-embodiment. […] Vision in the technological feat becomes unregulated gluttony.'[192] Haraway goes as far as suggesting that 'The Western eye has fundamentally been a wandering eye, a travelling lens.'[193] She describes the technologies as skilled practices of social orders, practices of visualisation, with pre-designed roles for these who interpret the visual field.[194] Inevitably, any visual representation remains a negotiation of power.

However, power relations in documentary filmmaking are very complex on many levels. MacDougall's apparently banal statement that the person looking 'so directly' at the camera is not seeing us is just illustrating this inequality between the spectator and the subject. That look can never be returned, and MacDougall describes this glance into the camera in categories of mutual recognition: 'At this moment we see

[192] Mirzoeff, 2013: 356.
[193] Ibid: 359.
[194] Ibid: 359.

ourselves through one another.'[195] He concludes that 'by fixing its subjects irrevocably in the past, a film encroaches on their freedom and identity.'[196] Also, the geographical distance between the filmmaker, the subject and the audiences (resulting in a lack of direct communication), and the uneven access to visual media, often contribute towards the strengthening of stereotypical views of the subjects (especially if they are seen as 'traditional' communities), effectively deepening the divisions. Additionally, power relations are exercised by making some theoretical hubs and centres more privileged than the others. Finally, MacDougall reminds us that we are used to seeing visual images as information,[197] so, for example, an image of a starving mother will be seen as an example of the 'problem of famine.'[198] That leads to treating images as yet another form of discourse, he claims, and it causes a rather problematic situation: 'A photograph ceases to show us a particular someone or something: rather, it announces a topic or makes a point.'[199] As a result, the images claiming to represent reality paradoxically cease to do so, giving space for visual propaganda. In response to the slightly naive hope to capture the 'objective' reality (and the assumption about the passivity of the subject in relation to the future audiences), MacDougall reflects: 'we observe the people in the film without being seen, assured they can make no claims upon us. The corollary of this, however, lies in our inability to reach through the screen and affect their lives. Thus, our situation combines a sense of immediacy with an absolute separation.'[200] I call it a one-way communication frozen in time with an ambition to represent the 'Other'.

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[195] MacDougall, 1998: 100.
[196] MacDougall, 1998: 36.
[197] MacDougall, 1998: 248.
[198] MacDougall, 1998: 249.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Hockings, 1995: 121.

2.3. Documentary and Ethnographic filmmaking

2.3.1. Historical background

The technological developments of the past century made it possible for relatively small teams to register 'real' life of remote cultures and 'bring it back' to enchant local, world-hungry audiences. We can speak about the spectacle of pleasure (aesthetic, epistemic, or purely narrative) of 'watching' distant lives while remaining within the comforts of our own civilisation. Throughout the decades, various types of ethnographic films have emerged. Emilie de Brigand describes early films as a 'visual recording of encounters with other societies.'[201] She notices that the expectation has always been that the ethnographic film is capable of 'revealing' something about other cultures that cannot be grasped otherwise. In her analysis of the colonial creation of 'Otherness' in the first films about Latin America, Freya Schiwy gives examples of films made as early as 1904 (French film 'Cristopher Colomb' or US-made 'Cowboys and Indians').[202] She suggests that these early films can be seen as a powerful propaganda tool, mostly promoting 'public health and patriotic feelings' and creating 'a visual archive of local culture.'[203]

The two most influential founding fathers of the contemporary documentary film are Robert Flaherty (1884-1951) and Dziga Vertov (1896-1954). Flaherty is known to be the first to use what we call today 'participant camera'.[204] In contrast, Vertov, with his ambitions to film the revolution, attempted to record the 'small elements of

[201] Hockings, 1995: 13.
[202] Schiwy, 2013: 651.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Hockings, 1995: 82.

reality'.[205] They are considered to be the pioneers of 'cinéma vérité' which emerged in the 1960s. Jean Rouch pondered: 'should we put reality on film ("the real life setting") as Flaherty did, or should we film it as Vertov did, without planning a particular setting ("life caught unawares")?'[206]

But it was only around the 1950s, that the film camera in Latin America started to be considered a revolutionary tool aiming to address US neo-colonialism. However, access to technology was only attainable to those with relative economic capital and education. Indigenous filmmaking in Latin America owes a lot to the Third Cinema movement which emerged around the 1960s -1970s and was focused on denouncing social injustice, racism and exploitation (as opposed to commercial Hollywood films and art cinema from Europe). Third Cinema was revolution-oriented, with a hope to reach audiences with any level of literacy.[207] In their manifesto 'Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World', Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas state: 'Films, the most valuable tool of communication of our times, were destined to satisfy only the ideological and economic interests of the owners of the film industry.'[208] The movement wanted to oppose this by assigning film with revolutionary tasks. Getino and Solanas screened films in community centres, Cuban filmmakers brought movies and electricity to villages, and Jorge Sanjinés distributed films in Quechua and Aymara rural communities.[209] In this experience, people represented in cinema could be incorporated into the production process.[210]. The limits between documentary and fiction tend to disappear in this 'cinema with people', suggests Schiwy. The aesthetic tendency leaned

[205] Ibid: 82.
[206] Hockings, 1995: 84.
[207] Castro-Klaren, 2013: 653.
[208] Martin, 1997: 33.
[209] Ibid: 653-654.
[210] Schiwy, 2013: 654.

towards reducing the number of close-ups in favour of long shots with minimal editing: a sign of supporting critical distance and collective, rather than the emotions of commercial cinema. Interestingly enough, these films proved very difficult to watch:

> Often the audiences these films sought were not only elusive because of lack of national political support for the distribution of these films (let alone distribution across national boundaries), but also because viewers preferred the narratives of suspense, melodrama, and comic entertainment that Hollywood brought to cinemas worldwide.[211]

A lot has changed in the cinema (including its language and technology) since Flaherty's or Gettino's era, yet one thing remains the same: the distribution of documentaries is hardly ever wide. It tends to reach a relatively modest size audiences, mostly those who have some specific interest in such films (academics, students, ethnographers and filmmakers). Rouch underlines the importance of this simple question: 'For whom have you produced this film, and why?'[212] One of his most revealing observations states that 'film is the only method I have to show another just how I see him.'[213] This demonstrates a strong belief in the representative powers of film and its communication abilities.

2.3.2. The illusion of documentary realism

Documentary is not only the genre of most of my case studies but also the form of the practical element of my own fieldwork. It is, therefore, crucial to understand some of its characteristics and its ability (or lack thereof) to represent reality. Unlike fiction cinema and its film language, many documentary films and ethnographic videos follow the assumption that their aim is not to 'create' or imply any additional 'meanings' but

[211] Ibid.
[212] Hockings, 1995: 94.
[213] Hockings, 1995: 95.

merely to attempt to 'represent the truth' (even if we agree how utopian this vision is). The relative arbitrariness of images in the signifying process is what makes this process challenging. Barthes suggested that 'Since every photograph is contingent (and thereby outside of meaning), photography cannot signify (aim at generality) except by assuming a mask.'[214] The attempt to create a meaningful documentary film is influenced by the narration, the choice of participants, and the editing process, as all these elements shape the final product. MacDougall's insightful quote that 'The real "crime" of interpretation is representation itself. […] By freezing life, every film to some degree offends against the complexity of people and the destiny that awaits them'[215] is a reminder of the pitfalls of documentary filmmaking. He underlines how 'a few vivid scenes in a film convincingly present us with a person as a whole,'[216] concluding that 'my image of you, or many images of you in different situations, forms much of what I know about you.'[217] Nichols suggests that the realist style in documentary and the camera's proof of the filmmaker 'being there' is what grounds the film in the historical world.[218] The traditional use of some documentary images as a 'proof' pushes the genre towards a place where quite a lot is expected from it, assuming a significant responsibility lying behind it. According to Nichols, the proximity of science and documentary in the case of ethnographic films results in 'highly problematic representations of the Other.'[219] He argues that documentaries are often based on 'longstanding assumptions,'[220] frequently treated like commodities (for example about the third world inferiority). A common expectation is that what we see in a documentary is as close to the real world as it could

[214] Barthes, 2000: 34.
[215] MacDougall, 1998: 38.
[216] MacDougall, 1998: 41.
[217] MacDougall, 2006: 5.
[218] Nichols, 1991: 181.
[219] Nichols, 1991: 201.
[220] Nichols, 1991: 11.

possibly be, but this promise cannot be fulfilled, as representation processes are ruled by their own politics. Also, a degree of subjectivity plays a significant role in documentary representation: 'What we learn may be restricted to what a single character or commentator knows or it might exceed any one source.'[221] Nichols suggests that social actors who are able to present themselves in a 'camera-attractive way' (that is, expressive, or in an 'emotionally revealing manner') are much more likely to be chosen to participate in the filming process. This is not so innocent, as their behaviour is likely to be influenced by the presence of the camera, even if it pretends not to be.[222] Effectively, by choosing participants with expressive capacity, a documentary film ultimately gain some degree of subjectivity, regardless of the 'objective' shooting style. At the same time, a subjective interpretation might be what a contemporary audience requires: 'What the average citizen needs is not a steady stream of facts, […] but interpretation, which might in other arguments be called editorialising, persuasion, orientation, ideology, propaganda, or, as here, representation.'[223] This bold statement suggests that any attempt to create a representation is effectively a form of manipulation, reinforced by the fact that 'our hunger is less for information in the raw than for stories fashioned from it.'[224] We seem to crave a structured narration in order to digest the raw facts and make them more comprehensive. Nichols concludes that:

> We enter a zone where the world put before us lies between one not our own and one that very well might be, between a world we may recognise as a fragment of our own and one that may seem fabricated from such fragments, between indexical (authentic) signs of reality and cinematic (invented) interpretations of this reality.[225]

[221] Nichols: 1991: 119.
[222] Nichols: 1991: 120.
[223] Nichols, 1991: 189.
[224] Nichols, 1994: ix.
[225] Ibid.

Would this suggest that in the contemporary media, nicely structured lies are welcomed and digested more eagerly than raw, unmediated facts? Nichols argues that stories are not a natural phenomenon, but a 'product of history and culture' and 'when stories set out to represent the world around us, they enter into the realm of […] blurred genres.'[226] These blurred genres 'use imaginative techniques to tell the tale of actual occurrences.'[227] We may conclude that even the attempts which claim a high degree of objectivity are far away from achieving this impartiality. After all, representing reality is not free of preoccupations: 'Unlike activists, who make a cause their own, filmmakers, like anthropologists, must retain a measure of remove, no matter how compassionate or dedicated they may be. Their loyalty remains divided: between making representations and taking on the issues represented.'[228] Therefore, the way films relate to the reality which they attempt to represent remains an important question. The narrative tendency, as suggested, is a significant element of documentary filmmaking as it enables us to condense a substantial amount of facts into a digestible form. Another function it fulfils is the way it 'eases' the reception of the facts. Nevertheless, no matter what techniques might be employed to tackle it, the ultimate goal of representing reality in a film seems to be a very complex task.

The potential challenges of ethnographic films lie in their reductionist way to represent 'Others', where a moment and single individuals might attempt to stand for entire cultures and the whole current (or historical) situation. The interpretation of cultures based on such a fragmented mosaic of images using isolated examples with huge ambitions to stand for the 'ethnographic truth' should leave us cautious and slightly sceptical about the reliability of these images. Reconstructing cultures on screen remains an unfulfilled illusion: 'The subjective voice is always mediated and

[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Nichols, 1991: 186.

fragmentary, however much it appears to be independent voice of another person. In a strict sense, the only subjectivity in film-viewing is that of the spectator, the only subjective voice that of the filmmaker.'[229] Nichols suggests that proximity of science and documentary in the case of ethnographic films results in a 'highly problematic representations of the Other.'[230] They apply patterns of hierarchy based on difference which describe the figure of the Other, and distance becomes means of control.[231] As expected, such situation gets contested as soon as the 'Other' gains agency.

2.3.3. The ethnographic encounter and the absence

Nichols underlines that the focus of some ethnographic films can shift from subjects to witnessing the ethnographer's presence:

> The ethnographic film offers an impression of authenticity by means of the arrival scene. This represents an ironic form of coming into the presence of the Other that certifies difference (the difference between the ethnographic visitor and his/her subject) and makes unity impossible. The ethnographer steps onto the scene, confiding to us his/her travails and hardships. The arrival scene offers an outward and manifest sign of the inner, subjective state of participatory observation. The irony is that the representation of the required subjectivity diminishes the material reality of encounter itself. Problems of interpretation, negotiations regarding space, supplies, physical assistance, the right to film or photograph, and the numerous everyday rituals of communication and exchange between human subjects slip from view. More important is the impression that the ethnographer was there and that his or her representation is, therefore, to be trusted.[232]

This tendency of focusing on the ethnographer will be visible in many films analysed in Chapter 4. As Barthes asserts, 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence.'[233]

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[229] MacDougall, 1998: 97.
[230] Nichols, 1991: 201.
[231] Nichols, 1991: 202.
[232] Nichols, 1991: 221.
[233] Barthes, 2000: 87.

Additionally, the ethnographic encounter might become a negotiation between the filmmaker and the subjects who might have different visions of the proposed representation. Rose suggests that some people 'may wish to picture themselves very differently from their representations in the mass media,'[234] a trend clearly visible in the Arhuaco filmmaking. However, it is important to avoid valorising one vision over the other. This implies the benefits of analysing the filming process together with its context, whenever possible. The encounter between the filmmaker and the filmed raises another question crucial for representing cultures in a film: what is the amount of time required for an 'outsider' to understand the life of the subjects? When is the moment one can safely decide that they know enough in order to make a film? Is 'knowing enough' ever possible? Mark McCarty suggests that a minimum of three months is required for a 'detailed visual and aural representation' and three weeks would be enough to get an 'exterior view'[235] (this, of course, started with Malinowski's ground-breaking approach to the fieldwork).[236] But can we safely say that the depth of understanding is proportional to the time spent with the subjects? What about the quality of that encounter? How does this encounter matter to those filmed? In his essay featured in the 'Principles of Visual Anthropology', McCarty provocatively suggests that 'Cultures other than your own tend to bustle along regardless of the honour you are trying to pay them, unaware of the elegance of previous scientific analyses, and innocently deranging the purity of your intended cinema.'[237] This illustrates the

[234] Rose, 2012: 315.

[235] Hockings, 1995: 70.

[236] It might be interesting to compare these instructions with a time spent to make an average commercial documentary, as discussed in Chapter 4. When a film crew has everything organised by the producers and local fixers, they come to precisely scouted places of shooting for just a few days, they do what they have perfectly planned to do, and they leave with a sense of an accomplishment.

[237] Hockings, 1995: 75.

separation between the filmmakers and the subjects, a tendency actively questioned in Arhuaco filmmaking.

Another important question which is the consequence of the ethnographic encounter is the decision of what gets included in the film and what does not. Nichols insists that 'documentary reference to the world around us is not innocent. […] What it includes and excludes, what it proposes and surprises remain issues of significance.'[238] An often-quoted observation by MacDougall illustrates the significance of omission in a film:

> The viewfinder of the camera, one could say, has the opposite function of the gunsight that a soldier levels at his enemy. The latter frames an image for annihilation; the former frames an image for preservation, thereby annihilating the surrounding multitude of images which could have been formed at that precise moment of time and space.[239]

Some, especially those coming from more artistic backgrounds, might argue that the image should speak for itself, and the effect it produces should not be supported by any additional explanations (so the awareness of the omissions is not needed). However, the awareness of the un-photographed and invisible might be critical to understanding the 'whole image', as we will see on the example of the films made with the Kogui in the Sierra. MacDougall suggests that 'Films prove to be poor encyclopaedias because of their emphasis upon specific and delimited events viewed from finite perspectives.'[240] He adds that 'a few images create a world. We ignore the images that could have been but weren't. In most cases, we have no conception of what they might be.'[241] As a result, we should be aware that documentary filmmaking offers a version of reality, out of many possible ones. Also, each attempt to read visual materials might result in different experiences: one, more intuitive and emotional, and another one, more

[238] Nichols, 1991: 140.
[239] Hockings, 1995: 123.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.

informed and epistemological (almost like Barthes' punctum and studium),[242] both heavily dependent on the context of the reception processes. It comes back to the fact that 'in truth, the drama of film, its attraction, lies not so much in what is shot (the drama of the subject), but in how it is shot and how it is presented.'[243] Ethnographic films claim to be objective, impersonal and knowledgeable scientifically, but they are based on a very personal experience of fieldwork, which may potentially lead to a conflict of the personal and scientific (as we learnt from Malinowski). However, despite all the subjectivity, we can still observe that many ethnographic films obey the same recipes: 'What is somehow remarkable […] is how often ethnographic films repeat similar cinematic qualities and narrative structures, without, apparently, knowing or acknowledging it,'[244] claims Nichols.

2.3.4. Blurred boundaries or a 'savage' self-portrait

Pointing to the failure of ethnographic film and institutional discourse around the documentary representation, Nichols partially blames the 'ground-breaking, convention-altering forms of self-representation by those who have traditionally been objects of anthropological study: women/natives/others.'[245] He advocates blurring boundaries between politics and culture, between 'here' and 'there',[246] posing a fundamental question: 'who has the responsibility and legitimacy (or power and authority) to

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[242] Barthes described studium as follows: 'The *studium* is a kind of education […] which allows me to discover the *Operator,* to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them "in reverse", according to my will as a *Spectator.'* (Barthes, 2000: 28.); whereas puncture is 'that accident which pricks me' (Ibid: 27.).

[243] Monaco, 2009: 190.

[244] Nichols, 1995: 72.

[245] Nichols, 1995: 63.

[246] Ibid: 64.

represent others, not only in the sense of rendering likeness but also in the sense of "speaking for" and "presenting a case"?'[247] Traditionally, other cultures on film were either fictional work of acclaimed filmmakers, political documentaries, or ethnographic accounts of the 'Other'.[248] So what really happens in the space between 'here' (the anthropology) and 'there' (the other culture)? Nichols insists that both anthropology and documentary filmmaking 'have caused themselves considerable vexation debating the issue of representation as a process of rendering likeness effectively, according to criteria of realism, objectivity, accuracy, or ethnographicness.'[249] What can be said about the legitimacy of these representations? I share some of Nichols' doubts: on many occasions during my fieldwork I asked myself the question: what gives me the right to film the Arhuacos? Could it be my arrogance as a researcher with some artistic ambitions (or an artist with some academic ambitions)? Nichols, slightly ironically labels 'us' as objective, professional and 'disciplined' suggesting that we vex each other at the expense of others.[250] He also questions the relevance of the created material to those filmed: 'In what way does this representation matter to those it represents?'[251] Could looking at others in order to represent them be so easily rationalised and justified by research and social science? Could we ignore the questions of power, knowledge, hierarchy and scopophilic pleasure in that process? Referring to Geertz, Nichols recalls the trouble with contemporary ethnography where 'representation becomes the province of Us discussing Them in ways that no longer matter very much to Them.'[252] However, my fieldwork proved that the way 'we' represent 'them' not only matters to 'them' but it can also inspire to action. Whilst the symbolic separation between 'us' and 'them' form

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[247] Nichols, 1995: 64.
[248] Nichols, 1995: 63.
[249] Nichols, 1995: 64.
[250] Nichols, 1995: 64 -65.
[251] Nichols, 1995: 65.
[252] Nichols, 1995: 86.

the basis of any anthropological description and ethnographic films, there is another significant split: 'between the world represented and its viewer.'[253] Nichols argues that authority and authenticity are the immediate effects of this effect of distance. Subsequently, this effect can be potentially contested, subverted or displaced.[254] Also, we should not forget that ethnographic and indigenous films are not created in isolation: 'Commercially successful Latin American cinema thereby contributes to the importance of audiovisual media as a practice that creates meaning and shapes the perception of reality.'[255]

Ruby advocates the transformation of the 'disappearing Other' from a passive film subject and a 'victim' of Western influence, into an engaged collaborator and author, suggesting that for a long time they remained mere transformations into 'aesthetic creations, topics of scholarly interest, news items, and objects of pity and concern.'[256] Moreover, he argues that 'it was assumed that the act of investigating, researching, and filming would do some good - cause something to be done about the problems.'[257] However, in many cases, the films do little to change the fate of their subjects. If anything, they become another form of entertainment of intellectual elites' anthropological hunger, potentially inspiring ethnological tourism. Ruby suggests that 'perhaps it is time to realise that the image by itself may be more impotent than powerful when it comes to changing the world and that a different justification for making these films is therefore needed.'[258] He suggests a paradigm shift in the relations between the filmmaker and the filmed. With the emergence of self-representation movements, came the realisation that 'cultural identity is not eternally fixed but

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[253] Nichols, 1995: 69.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Castro-Klaren, 2013: 647.
[256] Ruby, 2000: 199.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ruby, 2000: 199.

something that has to be regularly renegotiated.'[259] Moreover, the conventions of representation are culture-bound. However, as indicated, shifting the responsibility to represent from the hands of the external 'Other' to 'self' does not necessarily make these representations less problematic or less biased. According to Ruby, 'Human beings both perform their culture and observe others performing it. […] These are the basic building blocks that the ethnographic filmmaker has to work with - filmed behaviour and participants' meta comments about that behaviour.'[260] This involves a complex work of both observing these behaviours, listening to subjects' comments, and potentially providing one's own interpretation of the conclusions. Balancing the fidelity to the subject and clarity for the audience is not always easy, especially in intercultural contexts. Ruby argues that:

> The central issue for the ethnographic filmmaker is to be able to find culture in filmable behaviour, and then to generalise from the specific, to make concrete the abstract, and yet to retain the humanity and individuality of those portrayed while still making a statement about culture.[261]

In her article 'What we talk about when we talk about Indian', Yvette Nolan refers to Richard Ouzonian with his questions about 'how Indigenous creators are mediated, and by whom, and how the arbiter shapes the idea of Indigenous.'[262] This mediation process is often attempted in collaborative filmmaking, which gives the filmmaker and the subjects a chance to exchange points of view and ideas about the shape of the film. Postulating collaborative filmmaking, Ruby sets out the rules: 'for a production to be truly collaborative, the parties involved must be equal in their competencies or have achieved an equitable division of labour.'[263] This is not always an easy task, especially because the filmmaking process does not end with the shooting. The editing process,

[259] Ruby, 2000: 201.
[260] Ruby, 2000: 242.
[261] Ruby, 2000: 243.
[262] Gilbert and Gleghorn (Eds), 2014: 223.
[263] Ruby, 2000: 208.

fundraising, and distribution control are equally crucial in securing the impact of the film message. Even representing the film at conferences or festivals matters: is it the Western director, or the indigenous collaborators who take care of it? Shared responsibilities imply an equal understanding of the consequences and responsibilities of creating a film, which cannot be taken for granted.

As we have seen, representing cultures is a highly complex task, which relies on the ever-unfulfilled illusion of 'real life' being captured. Various theoreticians have attempted to capture the intricacy of unequal power relations and hierarchy involved in the process of filming the 'Other'. The next section analyses indigenous practices of adopting the audiovisual medium in the hope of responding with their own vision of the contemporary state of the indigenous world.

2.4. Indigenous media and cultural mediations

2.4.1. Indigenous cultures and Western technology

What makes indigenous productions and self-representation practices particularly relevant to this discussion is its place within a wider context of the exchange of audiovisual productions and the discourses they engage with. In this section, I explore the ideas behind indigenous communication, the reasons and strategies applied to conduct this task, its performative qualities, and the position of the indigenous media in a wider audiovisual scope.

The first question relates to the adoption of Western technologies by the so-called traditional communities. Schiwy suggests that the subaltern status of indigenous techniques of representation, as a reaction to the 'hegemonic structure of thinking' resulted from a colonialist geopolitics which implies that the North (West) produces theoretical knowledge while the Third and Fourth worlds only produce culture, or in best cases, 'local knowledge.'[264] She argues that 'when indigenous organisations employ the audiovisual medium, they are commonly considered oral cultures using Western technology.'[265] This suggests constant appropriations, implying that 'having emerged in capitalist, colonial and patriarchal contexts, audiovisual media carry the burden of a colonial geopolitics of knowledge.'[266] However, the situation in some countries (Colombia, among others) inspires optimism, which, according to Schiwy, is based on two observations: 'First, that video allows decentralised communication and representation; second, that the medium enables liberation from the requirements of

[264] Schiwy, 2009: 3.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.

literacy and state education.'[267] These two qualities offer some hope about the application of these technologies into indigenous lifestyles, providing an opportunity for relatively unconstrained self-expression. Such practices can serve to maintain communication which can reach beyond cultural divisions. Although the majority of indigenous media productions are not experimental and they avoid the confrontation with hegemonic cinematic codes, Schiwy claims that 'indigenous video activists demand the decolonisation of the medium and of geopolitics of knowledge.'[268] She sees the indigenous filmmaking practice as collective and non-specialised, inscribed into an 'indigenous notion of property and exchange' which makes the film a 'free market commodity.'[269] However, this is not always the case, as more individualistic and specialised indigenous filmmakers and communicators are certainly emerging in various parts of the world. One might assume a destruction of the culture of origin in the process of adopting the audiovisual medium which 'constitutes the society of spectacle in the West.'[270] However, Schiwy accepts the possibility of 'generating knowledge through video' adding that the 'basic tool to enact […] transcultural operation is primarily the visual quality of the film.'[271] She concludes that 'instead of subscribing to the division between the orality and literacy, indigenous media suggest that indigenous cultures have always been audiovisual, that is to say, oral and iconographic.'[272]

However, Steven Leuthold suggests that as a result of the traditional communities adopting technologies initially foreign to their cultures, there are some contradictions in the art and media of indigenous peoples today, and the way '[indigenous] aesthetic experiences inform, enrich, and challenge members of non-

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[267] Schiwy, 2009:3.
[268] Schiwy, 2009:4.
[269] Schiwy, 2009:7.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Schiwy, 2009:9.
[272] Ibid.

native cultures.'[273] This necessarily advocates a mutual influence of Western and indigenous media consumers. Leuthold proposes to look at definitions and discussions of the aesthetics beyond Western theories, as those might not be of any use for indigenous filmmaking; rather, they might be the result of 'cross-cultural generalisations.'[274] Discussing the concept of 'aesthetics', he suggests that it becomes an 'important aspect of self-representation to the larger non-native public.'[275] He describes indigenous aesthetics as the 'experience that developed independently of the Western tradition in various parts of the world: ideas about art held by indigenous peoples.'[276] However, by addressing the question of 'indigenous aesthetics' in a unified manner, he falls into the trap of generalising indigenous aesthetics hugely and putting various diverse practices under the same category.

What is so pervading about audiovisual media that they get so easily adopted by traditional cultures? Leuthold argues that 'aesthetic systems are focal points for intercultural communication on a global scale; members of varied cultures negotiate differing value structures through aesthetic expression.'[277] Moreover, video as a medium is often chosen by indigenous communicators because of the intercultural universality of an image, which is believed to secure understanding despite cultural differences, and the distribution beyond local communities is often considered as paramount:

> Media technologies increasingly transmit the knowledge used in cross-cultural aesthetic appreciation. They cannot substitute for the direct experience, but they expose audiences to a wider range of aesthetic practices than direct experience […]. Many people's sole knowledge of the aesthetic traditions of non-Western cultures derives from film and video […]. Exotic, frequently stereotyped images in more widely distributed fiction films also shape public perception of other cultures.[278]

[273] Leuthold, 1998: X.
[274] Leuthold, 1998: 2.
[275] Leuthold, 1998: 1.
[276] Leuthold, 1998: 2.
[277] Leuthold, 1998: 8.
[278] Leuthold, 1998: 11.

This takes us back to the issues of representing the ‘Other’ and leads us to the question of the extent to which aesthetic systems can function as a form of communication between two different cultures. As discussed above, the attempts to represent the ‘Other’ are susceptible to reductionist stereotyping which tend to fix certain meanings in the minds of future audiences.[279] Leuthold implies that indigenous self-representations involve a shift in authority.[280] As he further adds:

> The very idea of ‘self-representation’ as a personal and political concept challenges traditional notions of the self, where the self is thought of in terms of ‘subjectivity’ or in the religious context of ‘soul’. Western culture tends to separate the self into private and public dimensions, and this separation shows up in assumptions about art.[281]

In considering indigenous representations we also need to keep in mind the cultural differences manifested, among others, in Western assumptions about how art represents collective identities, but also the fact that art as a form of representation has political consequences. Analysing indigenous music videos from Bolivia, Henry Stobart ponders on the validity of the existence of individual artists in the European contexts, whereas ‘indigenous people are expected to submit creativity to the community.’[282] This opens a question of heritage and intellectual property. Stobart notices that indigenous video makers ‘present themselves as “social communicators” rather than producers or authors,’ and their productions are positioned in the middle between entertainment and cultural representation.[283] However, it is noteworthy that ‘Bolivians who play music in communities, […] may not necessarily consider themselves musicians because they fail to fit rubrics of “author” or “composer” as dictated by Western-framed copyright

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[279] Leuthold, 1998: 25.
[280] Leuthold, 1998: 32.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Stobart, 2011: 223.
[283] Ibid.

law.'[284] As we will see in the further chapters, the Zhigoneshi filmmakers also encountered the questions of intellectual property to be problematic.

The next section takes us to a deeper understanding of the aims of indigenous filmmaking. When the creators of indigenous video call themselves 'communicators', Western assumptions about art become even less applicable.

2.4.2. Filmmaker, communicator, and leader

Many indigenous communicators underline the importance of passing a message which can reach beyond their culture as the ultimate goal of their audiovisual activity. Even if the communication might sometimes be prioritised above the aesthetic beauty, many indigenous filmmakers will strive for the highest aesthetic standards, understanding that this is what often captures Western audiences' attention. Faye Ginsburg suggests that indigenous media challenge not only traditional culture but also ethnographic films.[285] She argues that 'indigenous and minority people have been using a variety of media, including film and video, as new vehicles for internal and external communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cultural domination.'[286] In this sense, we should see these media productions as means of communication, rather than artistic work. Ginsburg mentions cultural mediations occurring through film and video, where quotations and interviews are used as 'data' which then intend to 'locate indigenous media at the intersection of a number of discourses', being positioned differently by

[284] Bigenho and Stobart, 2014: 23.
[285] Ginsburg, 1991: 92-112.
[286] Ginsburg, 1991: 92.

'those practicing it and by those in the dominant culture with some interest in it.'[287] She proposes that:

> when other forms are no longer effective, indigenous media offer a possible means - social, cultural, and political - for reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption. The capabilities of media to transcend boundaries of time, space and even language are being used effectively to mediate, literally, historically produced social ruptures and to help construct identities that link past and present in ways appropriate to contemporary conditions.[288]

However, what makes filmmaking 'indigenous'? Today, the level of film language proficiency within certain indigenous communicators has progressed significantly to satisfy contemporary visual needs. Being exotic film objects for many years, many indigenous groups started to recognise the importance of acts of self-representation and communication with intercultural ambitions, together with the control over the production and distribution.[289] Creating an opposition to the commodified use of the images of indigenous communities created by non-indigenous filmmakers and ethnographers might be among the most significant reasons behind the emergence of indigenous media. However, this liberation does not come without a price, claims Ginsburg, as it 'threatens to be a final assault on culture, language, imagery, relationship between generations, and respect for traditional knowledge.'[290] This is due to the fact of adopting a new lifestyle (of a filmmaker-communicator), which in some cases might be fundamentally alien to the traditional values and habits of particular indigenous communities. This, however, should not be generalised, considering the diversity among various indigenous groups. Paradoxically, in many cases, in order to preserve these traditional lifestyles, communities must assume these audiovisual duties: not only

[287] Ginsburg, 1991: 94.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ginsburg, 1991: 96.
[290] Ibid.

to preserve the traditional knowledge and oppose potential threats but also to include their voice into the intercultural debate about the place of indigenous traditions in the contemporary world. As a result, the task to auto-represent indigenous cultures for external audiences places the creators of these productions in a slightly uncomfortable situation in between two worlds. In his article 'Living Traditions: A Manifesto for Critical Indigenity', Bernard Perley, an anthropologist and a member of the Tobique First Nation of New Brunswick, Canada, shares his experiences of the difficulties of being on the border of two cultures: one as an academic and researcher, and the other as the member of an indigenous community. Very often, such a position would incite violent conflicts of interests resulting in suspicious attitudes from both sides.[291] A similar situation is discussed by Michael Cepek[292], who tells the story of Borman, son of American parents. Borman was born and raised in the Cofán community and became an influential Cofán leader.[293] Cepek investigates the meaning of being indigenous in the Cofán community, and the complexities of an external reception of a white indigenous leader. This fluid identity means that non-indigenous Borman is a fully accepted member of Cofán community, while some original members of the same collective can be excused from it if they break the community rules (for example of non-aggression). However, the real complexity represented by Borman is not his ethnic origin, but the fact that in order to represent and help the community he is forced to abandon his Cofán lifestyle, which makes him less Cofán as a result. Cepek claims that 'in what might appear as a paradox, Cofán people define themselves in opposition to their representatives, who engage and embody the threats and promises of encompassing otherness.'[294] The atypical uniqueness of Borman paradoxically makes

[291] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 32-53.

[292] Cepek, M: 'A White Face for the Cofán Nation? Randy Borman and the Ambivalence of Indigeneity'.

[293] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014.

[294] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 103.

him an ‘authentic’ Cofán representative, which points to the relations between indigeneity, ethnographical difference, and political representation. Significantly, in the face of Borman’s criticism by some Western academics, Cepek makes it clear that his focus is on Cofán’s perspectives. Within the Cofán community, Borman’s identity as a Cofán is rarely questioned. The most thought-provoking conclusion is that ‘Most Cofán do not desire or strive to become a gringo chief. Nonetheless, they realise that Borman’s work is essential for their future.’[295] The significance of this example is noteworthy, considering the borderline position of most of the communicators and indigenous activists. They might become accused of abandoning their traditional lifestyles to undertake their tasks, which makes their role almost tragically ambivalent. A similar pattern can be observed on the example of some indigenous musicians from Bolivia as analysed by Stobart. Only having permanently migrated from their communities to cities they managed to create influential sounds and images of indigeneity.[296] It is no different in the case of Villafaña who had to abandon his rural lifestyle in order to protect it by means of his filmmaking.

2.4.3. Indigeneity as a performance

We often observe among indigenous cultures an effort to document some traditional values and elements of the community’s lifestyles in their work of self-representation. This could serve to introduce their culture to an external viewer, underline the traditional characteristics, and identify the differences and similarities with the non-indigenous world. How much of these indigenous values need to be performed in order

[295] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 104.
[296] Stobart, 2011: 211.

to be recognised by the non-indigenous 'Other'? Laura Graham and Glenn Penny suggest that such self-reflexive tendency becames apparent in the second half of the twentieth century: 'individuals and groups across the globe fashion themselves as Indigenous through performance and performative acts in intercultural spaces.'[297] Graham and Penny suggest that performing indigeneity can be motivated by the 'desires for recognition, self-determination, and cultural sovereignty.'[298] We may conclude that this performative aspect is what characterises a contemporary indigenous life and that it puts emphasis on agency, reflexivity, and self-conscious practice.[299] Graham and Penny also point to the fact that indigenous peoples might have multiple reasons to display their difference, among others, to demonstrate the uniqueness of their knowledge or the beauty of their culture, or to protect it, as well as to manage their cultural patrimony.[300] Nevertheless, in most cases, they 'do not control the means and forms of their representation to larger publics.'[301] As we will see in the following chapters, the politics of distribution play a massive role in the process of dissemination and popularisation of these productions. In some circumstances, they can have a slowing effect on the ambitious attempts of the indigenous communities to have their voice heard, as even the best productions cannot have much impact if they do not reach a large enough audience. Finally, the act of creating self-conscious performances of indigeneity, according to Graham and Penny, allows to change a positivist perception of the indigenous culture into definitions based on self-identifications.[302] Therefore, although performativity in itself can be both oppressive and liberating, it represents a significant attempt to break through the cultural barriers of domination. Another contribution I want to bring to this

[297] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 1.
[298] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 2.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 7.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 8.

discussion, which addresses the complexity of performing indigeneity, is described by Dorothy Hodgson on the example of the Maasai culture and their presence at the UN meetings. In her ‘Culture Claims; Being Maasai at the United Nations’, Hodgson analyses how indigenous delegates in ‘full regalia’ often became more interesting as a visual spectacle than any political statements they present.[303] This instance creates a paradoxical situation where the ‘performance’ (here: the traditional visual aspects) of the indigenous life overtakes and, as a result, banalises the message behind it.

All the discussed complexities of the process of representation, including the performative aspect of it, bring us back to the already familiar question: who has the right to display the indigenous culture, and for whom? This concern was expressed by Les Malezr, an Australian Aborigine, as an accusation of the Australian government to use Aboriginal images to ‘brand’ Australia for tourism, at the same time failing to support indigenous rights.[304] Returning to Hodgson’s main argument, we can deduct that by participating in UN presentations which ‘draw on and reproduce familiar tropes and images of Indigenous people as colourful, spiritual, “authentic”, and artistic’,[305] the indigenous activists effectively respond both to indigenous values and to external expectations. In some cases, the communities end up fulfilling ideas and expectations of those who pay for the ‘performance’. This may also lead to collaborations between the indigenous communities and Western filmmakers. As Ruby suggests:

> Cooperatively produced and subject-generated films are significant because they represent an approach to documentary and ethnographic films dissimilar to the dominant practice […]; they offer the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means of imagining the world.[306]

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[303] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 73.
[304] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 71-72.
[305] Graham and Penny (Eds), 2014: 62.
[306] Ruby, 2000: 196.

With this in mind, we shall now look at various strategies applied in the task of self-representation.

2.4.4. Self-representation strategies

The idea of collectiveness is integrally embedded in many traditional cultures, and it is no different in the case of the communities of Sierra Nevada. Collective identity is traditionally created and fostered during (collective) activities, which engage the entire community. Leuthold suggests the following reasons behind representing collectiveness in indigenous aesthetics: a nation-building goal for native artists; a struggle for sovereignty by liberation from oppression; and reassessment of the past.[307] It also aims to question ethnical stereotypes. Leuthold argues that, in many aspects, traditional art has a different focus than Western aesthetics, one of them being 'not selling out' as it 'would invite corrupting influences into the community.'[308] He also argues against claims opposed to using nationhood as a basis of aesthetic representation:

> the best contemporary art responds to an international cosmopolitanism - both aesthetic and social in nature - that cannot be contained by the interests of any single nation or tribe (…). Allegiance to a nation or tribe serves to prevent the fullest development of indigenous art as art.[309]

He reinforces his argument claiming that today most artists are of mixed identities: ethnic, religious, educational, or economic.[310] As a consequence, combining cross-cultural symbols can serve to convey a universal message where native global stands against war, violence, and pollution, and might take over the tribal priorities in the

[307] Leuthold, 1998: 34.
[308] Leuthold, 1998: 35.
[309] Leuthold, 1998: 36.
[310] Ibid.

filmmaking.[311] However, I would argue that this is not always the case, especially when communities have suffered extensive persecution. In some cases, as with the Arhuacos, this persecution took the form of historical attempts to destabilise the indigenous values and lifestyles, and also a form of intellectual violence by means of creating a harmful visual representation of the community by non-indigenous filmmakers. In their works of self-representation, the Arhuacos skilfully merge these universal values (protection of nature) with the particularity of their own historical case.

However, the reception of these productions is nonetheless determined by the internationalisation of the film industry and culture which are ruled by 'international patterns of consumption'. Leuthold suggests that:

> through economic pressures, indigenous art and culture become part of the global marketplace, and it transforms the indigenous art into a touristic or commercial product. The survival of many of the indigenous films depends on mainstream art world's recognition and patronage.[312]

Additionally, 'non-native art worlds and institutions' become their primary audiences. Acculturation might result in indigenous art being more linked to contemporary art worlds than to the life of native communities.[313] This only reflects the complexity of the role of indigenous communicators who balance fidelity to indigenous world with satisfying the expectations of Western film audiences. However, applying Western expectations to indigenous art might contribute to the confusion around its function, as the concepts of art in many traditional cultures are often connected with its functionality, remaining community-orientated, with little or no pressure towards innovation. Whilst we might recognise some aesthetic qualities in native objects and consider them art, for 'them' they might not fulfil this function. Leuthold suggests

[311] Leuthold, 1998: 37.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Leuthold, 1998: 39-40.

Westerners' inability to comprehend indigenous views of the world, often sacred and mystical and expressed in rituals. It seems to be incompatible with the Western materialistic and rationalistic thought.[314] Such situation often results in undermining indigenous expression as an appendage to 'mainstream' (read Euro-American) developments on art.[315] Moreover, applying Western concepts to the description of indigenous forms of expression might be seen as a form of intellectual imperialism.[316] This could result in harmful comparisons with the application of biased criteria. Finally, we should not forget that labelling artworks (or films) as 'indigenous' often contributes to their exclusion from the mainstream.[317]

Considering that artistic ambitions among many of the indigenous communities tend to be of secondary importance, we can identify different reasons behind the impulse of indigenous self-representation. In her far-reaching book 'Reclaiming Culture. Indigenous People and Self-Representation', Joy Hendry discusses questions of cultural exchange and personal identity. On many occasions, indigenous people actively engage in organising performances displaying their indigenous traits and values to the non-indigenous world. Hendry coins the term 'cultural "reclamation"' to describe 'international links among and between indigenous peoples and outsiders interests in indigenous peoples.'[318] She claims that the 'reclamation of cultural forms by First Peoples who feel they were robbed of their identity and dignity is happening to a greater or lesser degree in all former colonies and some other configurations.'[319] She poses the question of how these tendencies of people reviving their cultural diversity spread globally, despite predictions of convergence, suggesting that this might be part of the

[314] Leuthold, 1998: 56.
[315] Leuthold, 1998: 58.
[316] Leuthold, 1998: 52.
[317] As I demonstrate in Chapter 4.
[318] Hendry, 2005: 179.
[319] Hendry, 2005: 180.

global communications trend.[320] She also argues that what fuels mutual interest is precisely cultural difference, claiming that if indigenous people are willing to 'share their cultural treasures with the outside world, in their way and at their investigation, it can be to the benefit of both parties.'[321] The message for us would be the reassurance that indigenous peoples are not only alive but in fact getting stronger. This is precisely how my Arhuaco collaborators wanted to be seen. Hendry argues against the idea that cultural diversity is prone to disappearance. This is thanks to the creative reclamation of their heritage by proposing shared views and also '*shared* ideas about how to rebuild their confidence and reclaim their threatened identities.'[322] A revealing observation is that:

> People whose ancestors have been made to suffer in the past have at least three choices in the way they react to the descendants of their aggressors. They can try to become part of the society of their aggressors, they can seek to take revenge, or they can try to heal the rifts.[323]

Indigenous filmmaking proposes yet another option, I argue, which is an alternative vision of their status quo. Another reason for the indigenous presence in the intercultural dialogue is precisely the possibility of participating in this dialogue. Joanna Hearne[324] claims that there is a mutual influence of indigenous and non-indigenous cinema. She argues that the power of visual media helped indigenous people to take part in intercultural discussion about their visibility. Gilbert and Gleghorn[325] reiterate the argument that the majority of indigenous self-representations is produced for primarily non-indigenous audiences, often becoming a commodity and spectacle. However, in analysing this exchange, it is essential to remember that 'what is a commodity for one

320 Ibid.
321 Hendry, 2005: 196.
322 Hendry, 2005: 200.
323 Hendry, 2005: 201.
324 In 'Native Recognition; Indigenous Cinema and the Western'.
325 In 'Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas'.

person might be a heritage to another.'[326] Of course, this might raise a concern of some indigenous communities, but perhaps this is the price they have to pay to participate in this intercultural dialogue. Michelle Raheja[327] asks how indigenous films can impact the world, and how they can harm or help the perception of the Native peoples. She poses the question: 'Native directors have been producing documentary and fiction films with indigenous content since the silent era yet have the lived experiences of these peoples improved as a result?'[328] However, we should not assume that improving lives of its subjects is the effect of filmmaking, indigenous or not. Raheja questions the responsibility of self-representations and the effectiveness of accomplishing this task: 'is it possible for their films to change public opinion?'[329] Referring to Nichols' idea of cinema as a vehicle of domination, Raheja claims that documentary films attempt to educate their audience and compel them to perform a 'specific action'.[330] Nevertheless, I argue, the reception of these films is rarely an invitation to action. Most of the time, they remain an anthropological curiosity, providing intellectual satisfaction to Western audiences who take pleasure in recognising the initiatives of indigenous filmmakers.

2.4.5. Multicultural image and its dissemination

Despite some generic statements describing indigenous self-representation techniques, we cannot forget that indigenous cultures remain very diverse and it is impossible to unify the conclusions about all indigenous filmmaking. Schiwy

[326] Gilbert and Gleghorn, 2014: 6.

[327] In the article 'Will making movies do the sheep any good? The afterlife of Native American images'.

[328] Gilbert and Gleghorn, 2014: 26.

[329] Gilbert and Gleghorn, 2014: 27.

[330] Ibid.

describes the way native people in Latin America use audiovisual technology to revive indigenous cultures:

> They see film as a means of challenging Western representations of Indians and as counteracting the colonisation of the soul, that is, the self-denigrating effects that colonialism and its aftermath have had on the perceptions and self-perceptions of indigenous communities.[331]

The emergence of indigenous filmmaking is emblematic of the need for more multicultural visual representations. Traditionally 'films have contributed on a global scale to the construction of racial otherness,'[332] and this is what the new video practices are trying to undo. Rather than being a self-centred archiving practice, indigenous filmmaking plays an increasingly important role in intercultural communication, reaching out to foreign audiences. Schiwy suggests that from around the 1980s multicultural images became a marketable commodity.[333] Young filmmakers no longer conceive themselves as imbued with revolutionary consciousness; the enthusiasm characteristic of anti-colonial and revolutionary filmmaking in the 1960s has given way to a different kind of global consciousness.'[334] However, inevitably, any potential success of cinema depends on its profitability, and, in most cases, indigenous productions are very unlikely to yield a significant financial gain. As a result, they are doomed to remain low-budget, and, consequently, with a relatively low distribution range. Schiwy suggests that contemporary digital indigenous videos tend to use conventional documentary formats and examples of Hollywood-inspired cinematic genres, but unlike the commercial filmmakers, 'indigenous communicators are not primarily producing for the general market, and their film production is not guided by the principle of profit maximisation.'[335] This is fundamentally different from any

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[331] Schiwy, 2013: 648.
[332] Schiwy, 2013: 649.
[333] Schiwy, 2013: 654.
[334] Schiwy, 2013: 655.
[335] Schiwy, 2013: 656.

commercial filmmaking which is always profit orientated. Indigenous filmmaking seems to be focused on a different task: 'Indigenous videos document and enact cultural traditions of transmitting social memory as they seek to turn subalternised knowledge into sustainable knowledge,' claims Schiwy.[336] This could be understood as a way of translating the traditional values into a language understandable by Western audiences, using film medium. Any financial gains seem to be of secondary importance.

MacDougall suggests that indigenous media are perceived by anthropologists 'within two different frames of reference: first, as an evolving cultural form like many others, and second, but more importantly, as a self-conscious expression of political and cultural identity, directed in part at countering representations by others.'[337] As a result of this intercultural flux and increasing presence of indigenous productions in mass media 'their work is both a product of and commentary on contesting cultural identities.'[338] MacDougall argues that by taking more control over visual media, indigenous communities might be able to affect and shape the traditional anthropological way they are being depicted.[339] However, Schiwy reminds us that contexts of distribution are not innocent, for:

> […] reception can be controlled or at least influenced favourably through the viewing context. That is, screening an indigenous video in a peasant village accompanied by a facilitator who guides a discussion afterwards creates a different result from showing the same film in a university classroom, which again, is different from a commercial or television release without organised discussion.[340]

Schiwy recognises that indigenous filmmaking has been largely ignored by film critics and that these productions are usually seen as belonging to anthropology,[341] which is

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[336] Schiwy, 2013: 658.
[337] MacDougall, 2006: 218.
[338] MacDougall, 2006: 218.
[339] MacDougall, 2006: 219.
[340] Schiwy, 2013: 659.
[341] Schiwy, 2013: 662.

not always the case. Also, new technologies had a significant impact on documentary filmmaking, ethnographic film, and indigenous filmmaking. Analysing this phenomenon, Ginsburg underlines that the image of indigenous peoples embracing technology is 'inconsistent' with the dominant image of 'traditional' indians.[342] She reflects on the consequences of new circulatory regimes introduced by digital technologies. As discussed, much of the indigenous media is focused on opposing the various stereotypes about traditional communities, including, among others, the one claiming that they should not have access to certain forms of modernity.[343] This brings the question of whose information and/or knowledge is valued in the visual economy. Ginsburg warns us against the 'commodification of their knowledge under Western systems of intellectual property.'[344] Moreover, the inequality of access to technologies makes the concept of the 'digital age' quite problematic when it concerns modes of cultural production.'[345] Ginsburg suggests that the McLuhanesque global village remains in a deeply utopian stage, simply because of this unequal distribution of access to what it needs to become real. The exclusion from access to modern technologies means isolation and marginalisation, and the concept of 'indigenous communities' should not be homogenised. The situation of native communities around the globe is so diverse (as is their access to technologies) that any generalisations in this subject are risky and ambiguous. The emergence and increasing dissemination of indigenous media raise important questions about the politics and circulation of knowledge, but also about access to and the understanding of media technologies.[346] Despite all the challenges, Leuthold insists that 'Native media are a product of cultural and aesthetic continuities

[342] Mirzoeff, 2013: 605.
[343] Ibid: 606.
[344] Mirzoeff, 2013: 606.
[345] Ibid: 607.
[346] Ibid: 616.

within native cultures rather than solely a reflection of Western media traditions.'[347] Indigenous cultures increasingly offer their own version of how and why they want to be represented. This is not to say that their vision is right or wrong, but it is crucial to acknowledge their agency. It resonates with Ruby's argument that 'Ethnographic film should be grounded in the assumption that culture is created, maintained, and modified through social acts of communication.'[348] Both indigenous and non-indigenous filmmaking should be seen as practices contributing to this communication.

In summary, the role of visual representations in contemporary cognitive practices is impossible to overestimate. It affects social structures and allows us to communicate on various levels. Concepts from across many disciplines contribute towards understanding the implications of representing the 'Other' and the interpretation of them remains equally complex and culturally dependent. 'Even the simplest visual images are interpreted differently in different cultures,'[349] reminds Monaco. We could speculate whether by using visual technologies indigenous communities are turning into a society of the spectacle. Indigenous movements, including filmmaking, are often understood as ways to 'complete a process of decolonisation.'[350] This is due to the fact that various forms of representation can affect reality by shaping the perception of cultures and social processes. I conclude this chapter with Schiwy's words that 'Indigenous media are a means of political self-representation and communication that reflect internal discussions about the effects of mainstream media on indigenous societies.'[351] And this is precisely what I observed during my fieldwork with the Arhuacos, where internal discussions about the

[347] Leuthold, 1998: 12.
[348] Ruby, 2000: 242.
[349] Monaco, 2009: 171.
[350] Schiwy, 2009: 9.
[351] Schiwy, 2009: 20.

importance of communication were very present. Schiwy reiterates the idea that 'film and video have reproduced the gaze of Empire, reinforcing ideas about indigenous peoples as inhabiting a primitive, pre-technological world first offered with the narrative conquest.'[352] However, indigenous media increasingly challenge this view on screen. Their goal is the 'intercultural dialogue' which 'implies a conversation among equals that has partially been realised but remains restricted.'[353] Finally, it is important to acknowledge that both the documentary form, its construction, as well as all the economic elements surrounding this process such as funding, marketing and promotion are real challenges which only add to the complexity of the processes of representing indigenous cultures and histories.[354]

The following chapter examines methods applied in the practical part of this research, which further contribute to contextualise the question of representing the 'Other'.

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[352] Schiwy, 2009: 13.
[353] Schiwy, 2009: 17.
[354] Gilbert and Gleghorn, 2014: 298.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Having presented the overview of the main theoretical concepts contextualising my research, I now move onto the analysis of the methods employed in my investigation. While Chapter 2 introduced many issues concerned around visual methodologies, this Chapter concentrates on the empirical aspects of a practice-based research, identifying the steps essential to conducting my project. Firstly, I analyse various elements of visual methodologies and their implications. More specifically, I examine the nature of projects where the image-making process is at the very core of interest, both to the researcher and her subjects. As multi-layered, interdisciplinary qualitative research, it requires a set of various samplings, as well as different types of research materials and data collection tools. The research strategy is divided into various stages, and the way data is generated in each stage varies. This is followed by the analysis of a direct life experience (using the example of travelling) contrasted to visual storytelling mediated by a camera. Next, I discuss the consequences of having an artistic background and bringing these skills to the research fieldwork. I also elaborate on the questions related to audiencing, and finally, I consider the ethical issues related to fieldwork.

3.1. Contemporary reflections on visual methodologies

3.1.1. The importance of the 'how'

In the introduction to 'Working Images', Sarah Pink points to the increasing emphasis on the process of representation in contemporary thought, as well as on its relation to research and the reflexivity of the image.[355] The visual methodology used for ethnographic research is gaining more attention, and 'how' increasingly becomes as important as 'what'. Pink recognises the year 2000 as a breaking point, with the emergence of many publications and websites dedicated to the subject. All that, accompanied by a rapid development of technologies and their greatly increased accessibility, resulted in a significant growth of research work based on visual methodologies, but also in the emergence of artistic work inspired by ethnographic methods. However, we should not ignore the fact that the availability of visual technologies is geographically and culturally dependent and not evenly distributed. It is true that, for many people, the emergence of digital technologies provided a relatively cheap and easy way of producing visual media, something which was previously only accessible to professionals. Not only did the costs of producing images drop dramatically, but also the training became more accessible. However, the capacity to take photos or record videos does not equal to the ability to produce a visual work of good quality. Nevertheless, by promoting cross-cultural audiovisual literacy, audiovisual media may also significantly contribute towards communication and inter-cultural dialogue, especially in the face of the scarceness of other platforms to exercise this task.

[355] Pink, 2004: 3.

During the RAI[356] Anthropology and Photography conference which took place at the British Museum in 2014, the reflection on the way in which image constitutes meaning took centre stage. The preoccupation with the power of interpretation as well as the concerns about judgmental preconceptions and stereotyped representations were placed at the very centre of the discussions. A thought-provoking debate was inspired by the presentation by Adam Dzidowski, at the 'Photography as a Research Method' panel. In his paper, Dzidowski, coming from a technical background, argued that nowadays ethnographic research is often undertaken by researchers fundamentally lacking skills in operating visual language. He proposed a comparison between a verbal and visual literacy. Everyone would agree, he argued, that any research text which is poorly written, lacking style, or full of glaring grammatical errors, would not be accepted as a serious text. Dzidowski insisted that this is what happens with visual methodologies, that is, we easily accept visual research work which is poorly made, poorly lit, and which is an example of bad and unskilful use of visual technologies. The contra-arguments were focused on the fact that technical skills are not the essence of visual methodologies. An enthusiastic discussion emerged inspired by this presentation, with some researchers arguing that by indicating the supremacy of the aesthetics we are missing the point of visual research methods, unnecessarily pushing it towards art. Others suggested that technical skills are not to be ignored if we want to treat the outcome of such projects seriously. Generally speaking, visual literacy skills were given a noticeable importance by contemporary researchers for whom various visual methodologies are the essential tool to conduct their research. This battle between aesthetics and research goals could get even more complex when the visual materials are produced by subject-participants who might lack technical preparation for the task. Another significant discussion was inspired by two speakers from the 'Appropriating

[356] Royal Anthropological Institute.

Photography: Global Technologies and Local Politics of Self-Representation' panel at the same conference. One of them was Emily Smith, who worked with a group of teenagers from an East-German village. In her participatory research, the teenagers were given cameras and asked to produce some visual materials. Unprepared for such a task, they created images of themselves, which formed a base for several exhibitions curated by Smith. The focus of the exhibition was not on the artistic qualities of the photographs but rather the visual narration of cross-generational, post-unification situation in the Eastern German province. The fundamental element was what the teenagers found interesting and important to photograph, rather than how well they did this. An even more telling example was given by Oliver Pattenden. He undertook his research with young people of South Africa, as part of two fieldwork trips to the country.[357] In his presentation, Pattenden disclosed some insightful details about his methodology. Firstly, in the process of revising the images taken by his participants as a response to the task he gave them, he realised that instead of photographing what was interesting to them, their attempt was to please him by capturing images which they thought he had wished to receive from them. Secondly, he revealed that his filing system for the received images contained a folder called 'Rejected'. There, with certain disappointment, he placed many of the images he received from his participants. When he revisited the folder after hearing the explanations from the authors of the images, he understood the real value of the 'rejected' photographs, and he made them the primary images for his research. One example was of a badly focused and poorly framed image of a lonely tree, photographed by one of the teenagers. Initially, Pattenden found the image outstandingly unattractive, and immediately rejected it. Later on, the author of that photograph, a boy whose parents left him when he was very young, explained that when

[357] The title of his paper was: 'Young South Africans, disposable cameras, and "My Future": Ethical valuations and photographic research'.

passing by this tree he heard the sounds of local birds that had built a nest and started a family there. For the boy, it symbolised the stability and support of the family, which he lacked since a very young age. Therefore, the image of the tree, however poorly taken, contained a highly symbolic meaning of a great value for him. Accompanied by a text with the explanation, the image made it to the 'Important' folder on Pattenden's computer. The background information and the context completely shifted the value of the image. This brings to the discussion the role of the text accompanying research photographs: should we expect an image to speak for itself, or should we allow the text to add more context and shape the reading of the photographs? The voices at the RAI conference were very divided, depending on the profile of the researchers. Some, like Marcel Reyes-Cortez who presented the exquisite results of his ethnographic work on social visibility in the cemeteries of Mexico City, insisted on the importance of the interconnections between images and accompanying texts. He argued that the photographs are to be seen in the context of the entire work. Others, like myself, argued for a much more cautious and critical approach in the contemporary context where the fragmentation of the reception processes cannot guarantee the consistency of the accompanying text or pre-programmed contexts.

3.1.2. 'Skilled vision' versus 'attention blindness'

An audiovisual representation is always a translation of something very complex into a relatively limiting regime of the language of audio and visuals, which for this purpose is also significantly restricted in time. In other words, such representation can be compared to an attempt to evoke a complex multi-sensory experience with a tool which significantly condenses it. On the other hand, we may see this 'translation' as a way to

highlight the most relevant elements of depicted reality, leaving behind the 'insignificant boredom'. However, it is important to acknowledge that a representation is never produced just to mimic reality, and it is always selective according to the purposes of the production. Additionally, any prior knowledge at the reception end cannot be guaranteed, which means that additional techniques must be deployed which could enable audiences to understand the message of the final product (which can be either accepted or contested). This is often achieved using simplifications, stereotyping, and by referring to more generalised, common knowledge which promises to be more accessible and known to the audiences. Often, background information related to the subject portrayed in a film, or a specific context of how the film was made possible and how it came into life is crucial to comprehend the message conveyed in the plot. As discussed in Chapter 2, filming one element of reality and not the other, and opting for different ways of representing reality significantly affects the image and its interpretation created in the audiences' mind.

Writing about videos and ethnographic knowledge, Cristina Grasseni introduces the term 'skilled vision', which results from training and focused attention. Grasseni suggests that a video camera becomes a catalyst of attention for those who use a camera for ethnographic purposes. She proposes a thought-provoking way of thinking about how filming may help the researcher to think about 'how ways of seeing are framed by practices.'[358] She also points to the importance of the 'skill of vision through the very act of representation',[359] underlying how the very fact of looking through the camera lens changes the way of looking at things. Grasseni concludes that 'shooting for a film directs one's attention to objects, facts and events in a particular way and order.'[360] So this 'expert's look' equipped with a camera can be a tool to undertake a specific

[358] Grasseni, 2009: 17.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Grasseni, 2009: 17.

visualising practice which is rarely unmediated. However, I argue, looking at familiar places for too long results in what I call 'attention blindness'. We can observe it by thinking about our own house, street or a workplace, a space which we see on a regular basis. Having got accustomed to it, the details are not noticed any more, as we mechanically navigate the space without paying much attention. In contrast, anyone who arrives at a place for the first time may become very attentive at first, registering all the details in their abundance and enjoying the 'freshness' of the first look. Similarly, when we travel and get our 'skilled view' outside of our original contexts, we tend to become significantly more attentive, 'opening' our senses to perceive more and with more intensity. We may easily notice all the differences between what is familiar and what is not. This makes us more sensitive to what we see, hear and feel, noticing things which might normally skip our attention. However, the abundance of new visual stimuli can also become overwhelming, which could result in difficulties to register what we see.

Using this introduction as an inspiration for my reflection about visual methodologies, I now move onto developing the key points relating to my research. My primary interest focuses on image-making and the implications of using visual methodologies in very particular contexts, rather than on the anthropological values of working with the Arhuaco community. Some researchers suggest that the 'interdisciplinary uses of ethnography might be superficial and serve to validate the author/artist's own vision rather than the people represented.'[361] I argue that the interdisciplinary use of visual methodologies can have more far-reaching ambitions, such as a focus on the practical implications of the auto-reflexive possibilities related to audiovisual methods, or the possibility to engage in a more interactive form of

[361] Afonso, 2004: 3.

collaborative work with the subjects, resulting in opening the possibility of intercultural dialogue.

3.2. Direct experience versus photography storytelling

3.2.1. Being ‘on the other side’

David MacDougall suggests that the way we perceive a place is a combination of a perception of a preconfigured space (a preconception), and our interpretations of it, which are culturally and experientially determined. He also claims that despite the relatively limited ‘experiential range’ of films (which also exclude smell or touch), they do offer us some insight into the reality of the protagonists. Taking these two ideas as a starting point, I reflect on the implications of using visual media, especially in the context of practice-based research, by exploring questions of visual documentation, its limitations, and promises. Familiarity with the unknown might inspire various interpretations of the encountered reality, which might also differ depending on the level of engagement with the situation.

Being a photographer, researcher, and keen traveller at the same time often puts me in a difficult situation. Seeing an appealing scene, my immediate instinct prompts me to grab my camera and start shooting. Often, I realise that such attitude makes my experience of the reality unfolding in front of my eyes poorer. Even the widest camera lens considerably limits one’s scope. By focusing my attention on the camera’s viewfinder, I put myself on ‘the other side’, like the future spectators of my images. By doing this, I deprive myself of the direct, fresh and instant encounter with the situation I choose to document. Is it possible to create an engaging series of photographs, and at the same time fully experience the situation? Or is it always a compromise? And can a photograph also affect other senses, for example, tactile memory (like cold, touch, pain, pleasure), sounds, smell; things that we often remember as the crucial elements of being in a particular place?

The main subject of this section are photographs which do not exist. This idea first occurred to me years ago, during my visit to Thailand. I was a nineteen-year-old film direction student, and for the very first time in my life I went to Asia. In fact, it was my first travel outside of Europe. I loaded myself with cameras, lenses, video camera and microphones, hoping not only to document the travel in a photo reportage but also to shoot an exciting video travelogue. It was a very exciting task to me. My first impression of Thailand was truly overwhelming. The abundance of intense colours and forms, smells and noises was impressive. However, the most unforgettable recollection I have from this travel is a very intense humidity which did not let me breathe properly for the first two days. I was hit by a wall of hot and humid air as soon as I stepped out of the plane and, for the first minutes, I thought I was going to suffocate. I got used to it soon afterwards, but this sensation will always stay in the repertoire of my Thai memories. For the first couple of days, I did not leave my equipment for a second, seeing everything through the camera lens. Sometimes, I would find myself in a tricky situation, having to decide if I wanted to film or to take a photo of what was going on in front of me. By the time I took a photo, it was already too late to record a video, as the situation was gone. Things got even more complicated if the situation required a change of lens or a tripod. One day I visited a market located on little boats, where the sounds and smells were so intense that I could not even decide which way to look, as there was so much going on around me. And this was the moment when I said: ‘Enough!’ I realised that by trying so desperately to capture some visual representations of this place I actually stopped participating in this beautiful reality. I could not enjoy seeing what I could see, and feel the atmosphere of the place, because I was constantly trying to put myself on the other side of the lens. Then I started to analyse it. And I came up with my idea of ‘translation’.

3.2.2. Direct travel experience and 'translation'

How do we experience a situation of travel, a visit to a new place? We do it by using our five senses: we see what is around us, we hear the sounds, we smell, we can taste (if we decide to eat or drink something) and we feel through our skin: if we touch, if we feel the heat or the cold, or the humidity, or tiredness, or the breeze, or the sunshine. I repeat after Bravo that 'the senses (e.g., seing hearing, touching) with which human subjects observe and organise their perceptions are an integral part of knowledge.'[362] When I travel, what I remember most is what I feel on my skin. I lie on the beach on a sunny day, squeezing warm sand in my hands, feeling the sunshine on my face, and a slight breeze on my skin. This is the memory I want to 'freeze', to capture and re-use once I am back in a cold, rainy London's morning, waiting for a train on my way to work. These elements are combined into complex interrelationships. We might think about a five-day long trek in a jungle with breath-taking views, incredible sounds of nature, heat and humidity and extreme physical effort, combined with sets of emotions, for example the excitement of getting to know a new place, fear of snakes and other dangerous animals, joy of sharing the experience with our companions, or memories of a family member or a friend who usually enjoys similar experiences. The variations are endless. Also, it all combines into dynamic sequences, as these experiences are happening over a period of time, with fluctuating conditions, and constantly changing impression and interpretation of what is going on around us.

Whenever we use visual technologies to capture a travel experience, we 'translate' this experience into a different language, and it is always a huge simplification, despite all the efforts. Moreover, we might feel the need to share this unique travel experience with those who cannot participate in the direct experience with

[362] Bravo, 2010: 446.

us. And there are numbers of ways to do this. Some people would call their friends and speak a lot about their adventures; they could also write a book. The benefit of using words would be the possibility to describe all the aspects of the trip: the adventures themselves, what we could see, how we felt, what we thought of. If we decide to take photographs, we concentrate purely on what is visible, and in fact, only a tiny selection of it. In the case of the video, we are adding sound and sequencing the situation. However, it is still limited by a rectangular frame, and edited to a very restricted selection. In our minds, an image might be associated with a sensation of heat and pleasure we experienced lying on the sand, but for a viewer who was not there, the photo will be nothing more than a pretty image, a combination of colours and light which will entertain their eyes. Having thought about it, especially after visiting so many beautiful places, I felt completely impotent about my ability to share this experience with others. The abundance of impressions one gets when travelling cannot be simply reduced to a photo. This is not to depreciate the value of images, as they can perfectly fulfil the function of a representation, as long as we do not expect them to substitute for the direct experience. Moreover, there must be a reason why people want to 'see things with their own eyes'. It does not mean just seeing; it means experiencing with all the senses. Bella Dicks noticed that by holding a camera to our eye, we 'ostensibly remove ourselves from our surroundings' in an attempt to capture what she labels the 'true essence' of the 'authentic' scene.[363]

However, 'translations' can be understood much more widely than just in terms of audiovisual media. Boast, Bravo and Srinivasan point to the disproportion between real-life objects and the ones created for the purpose of display. They use an example of an Inuit hunter carving a soapstone model of a kayak for a museum. Not only does the model tend to be much smaller and with disproportionate elements (in order to highlight

[363] Dicks, 2004: xi.

them), but also the museum curator is most likely deprived of the experience of paddling with the hunter in a real kayak and being exposed to their oral traditions. This, according to the authors, 'typifies the inherent tension between the richly situated life of objects in their communities and place of origin, and the loss of narrative and thick descriptions when transporting them to distant collections.'[364] I argue that a comparable process happens in the case of images, which become merely 'objects' made for display. Here, we can observe a similar transition from a rich situation into fragmented representation taken out of the original context, often for the purpose of presentation at distant destinations.

3.2.3. The non-existing photographs

As a result of my Thai experience, I started to collect a growing number of non-existing photographs. They consisted of situations of amazement, so often experienced when travelling, but left without any attempt from my side to rush for any physical 'translation'; situations which I might speak about to give some justice to the complexity of the experience. I could describe not only what I saw, but also how I felt; if it was a pleasant experience or not, or what the most intense sensation was. They were potential photographs which were never taken. On some occasions, taking a photo might be simply impossible for various reasons, even with all the intention to do so. To elaborate on the idea of non-existing photographs, and, as a consequence, the importance of the choice of what gets captured and what does not, I will use an example from my field trip to Colombia in September-October 2012. I was climbing the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on my way to the *Ciudad Perdida*, Lost City from the extinct

[364] Boast, *et al.,* 2007: 7.

Tayrona culture, where I was due to interview some Kogui who live in the mountains. During that stay, there were many situations when I wanted to photograph, but I did not. Sometimes, because I was too slow to reach for my camera; sometimes, because I was too amazed seeing what I was seeing, which paralysed me from doing anything else; other times, because I was too intimidated to take a picture. Sometimes it was a question of protecting my camera in extreme weather conditions. On some occasions, it was a combination of all those reasons. An example: I climbed the mountain, sweating more than I could ever imagine I would, feeling exhausted, and wondering why my backpack weighed more and more with every step I took. The same morning two people got bitten by a scorpion, and an elderly Kogui man I interviewed warned me about the number of snakes in the area. I entered a trance-like state during the walk, not feeling much more but the monotonous rhythm of my steps: left, right, left, right, surrounded by a tropical rainforest. Suddenly, I was thrown out of my meditative state by an unexpected scene: a Kogui family, a couple and two kids, all dressed in white and barefoot, cheerfully ran down the hill to energetic rhythms of *bachata*,[365] flowing from a radio which the father of the family carried on his shoulder. I stopped in amazement to watch that. The bachata and the barefoot jog were so surreal that I did not even reach for my camera. My direct experience of this situation consisted of the heat, humidity, tiredness, a heavy weight of my backpack, big holes in my shoes, fear of snakes and scorpions, sounds of the forest, and suddenly: the unexpected music, the beauty of these people, the surprise of seeing them running barefoot while I was afraid of every step I made. How could I have possibly taken a picture without spoiling this situation? I could not just get the camera and shoot, as they were on the same tiny path as I was. That would have been quite rude. If I asked for their permission, they would need to stop and put the music down, which would again ruin the scene. Even if I somehow managed to capture a video of

[365] A style of music originating in the Dominican Republic.

this situation, it would not be so pronounced and meaningful for someone who has not experienced five days of an exhaustive trek in that incredible environment. Two days later, at the foot of the last hill on the way to the Lost City, I was hiking across a narrow path in a dense forest. About ten years before my visit, there was a famous case of kidnapped tourists in the Lost City, and as a result, the Colombian government placed soldiers there, to make it safer. As before, I was in a trance from long hours of walk, heat, pain, humidity, and suddenly I heard a strange animal's noise further down the path. I continued walking, and soon afterwards I saw a group of young soldiers, and a pig tied to a tree, desperately trying to free itself. I stopped in amazement, and I asked the soldiers why they had a pig in the middle of the forest. 'We have to eat', one of them said. Again, even if taken, this would be a picture which does not speak for itself. It needs the anecdote to be fully understood and appreciated. The consequences of pushing the non-existing images into existence might be destructive for the image, as in the case of the Kogui family and the transistor radio in the jungle: had I taken this photograph, the situation would have gone; there would be nothing to photograph.

3.2.4. The 'camera effect'

Thinking about representing others we should not forget the effect which working with the camera has on the participants. Many people get intimidated having a camera pointed at them, and it might affect their behaviour; for some, the camera might inspire an extrovert behaviour and an increased openness to talk. During my work with the Yanesha community in Peruvian Amazon in January 2012, I managed to film some interviews with them. I quickly realised that what they told me when I was behind the camera often sounded like a rehearsed statement rather than a spontaneous

conversation. When we discussed the same matters without the camera, the conversation seemed much more natural and relaxed. However, the lack of familiarity with cameras among indigenous communities should not be taken for granted. As I learnt during my final fieldwork with the Arhuacos and the charismatic Amado Villafaña, many of my participants appeared to be well experienced with video work and public speaking in front of the cameras.

But the camera effect also influences the audiences. Let us take another example of an image of a little boy from the Yanesha community, from the corpus of work I produced in January 2012 (Figure 3). What could be the documentary value of the portrait of the young Yanesha boy? How much can we learn about this boy and his cultural background from this image, and how can we reflect on the role of the medium in the process or creating this representation? Would describing the moment I met him in words be more accomplished than simply snapping an image of the boy? What would be the benefit of recording an audio interview with him instead? It brings us to the wider question of choosing the appropriate methodology for the research. There are no set rules about it. It is an individual decision and responsibility of the researcher to choose the best way to develop their work to address their research questions. And, inevitably, by using different types of tools to approach the studied subject, one not only massively influences the content he or she produces but also heavily determines the

outcome. Effectively, we pursue a different set of research questions by choosing a different methodology.

Figure 3. Young Yanesha Boy. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2012.

The context of the presentation and background of the spectators are key issues in understanding the camera effect for the audiences. In May 2013, I had the opportunity to exhibit my fieldwork photography and video related to the project with the Yanesha People in Peruvian Amazon in a gallery space (Peltz Room, Birkbeck, University of London), accompanied by a discussion. The aim of the show was to present the documentation of a project which investigated how the Yanesha community applied performative strategies to attract external visitors for commercial purposes, while complying with Western lifestyles on a daily basis. I invited a photographer and photojournalist, Julio Etchart, to join me for the conversation. One of the exhibited images was of another young Yanesha boy (Figure 4). At the Q&A session following the conversation, I was asked why the boy portrayed in the photograph is crying.

Despite my explanations and reassurance that they boy was just photographed in a moment when he curiously observed my camera work, and that he was certainly not crying, my answer was not accepted. Contemporary media so consistently provide us with powerful images of sad, unhappy children, and as a result any image of a thoughtful indigenous child immediately triggers a resemblance to this category in the spectator's mind, in spite of the lack of any evidence. The viewer was convinced that he could see a tear on the boy's face when there is clearly nothing but the play of light and shadow.

Figure 4. Young Yanesha Boy 2. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2012.

After the event, I spoke with the person who asked about the tear, but he was still unwilling to accept my explanation, and he remained absolutely convinced that the boy was sad and crying. It amazed me how strongly the stereotypes predetermine our reception of the images. It is particularly true for subjects who rarely go beyond the stereotypical view. How often would a portrait of a Yanesha boy appear for the public

gaze? The assumption that the child was crying, created as a result of the vast number of stereotypical images, turned out to be stronger and more convincing that the reality confronted by the author of the photograph. The context of the presentation is similar to the editing process in film. What is seen before and after each frame significantly determines its meaning. If the image of the boy was presented at the conference dedicated to poverty in a Peruvian community in the Amazon, nobody would doubt that it represents a hungry child. And it is not necessarily to criticise this, but to highlight the risks of oversimplification through stereotyping and culturally acquired preconceptions.

Once a picture of a Kogui person is taken and placed in a new context (for example an art exhibition in Europe), this one image, if seen in isolation, is understood as encapsulating the entire life of this particular person, and, by extension, the entire community. As a result, in the eyes of European audiences, it becomes the basis for all sorts of assumptions and conclusions about the Kogui community as a whole. Therefore, the sense of responsibility of the photographer in the fieldwork, or a documentary filmmaker working with indigenous communities, should not be taken lightly. As suggested, any image, regardless of the reasons why it was taken, might circulate in unpredicted contexts, and purely aesthetic values might overtake the meaning. Taking a portrait of somebody in their tender or angry moment makes the 'description of person's character'. As a result, the very moment of pressing the shutter button might determine the way future generations think about a person, or an entire community and culture. A portrait of an agitated man at a demonstration will forever label that person as a fierce activist. A portrait of a Native American with an angry face will seal a stereotype of a ferocious Indians. In the face of that, the use of photography and film for research purposes needs to take into account these pitfalls.

In summary, any travel experience, especially if it involves a cultural encounter, is a complex process which involves all the senses and is loaded with an emotional

layer. Any attempt to share it with people who did not participate in that experience risks a huge simplification in the process of 'translation' into an available medium. Even with the best attempts, any translation meets many limitations. One cannot photograph everything; there will always be many situations which escape the attention, and all the 'translations' will be subjective (the selection of the frame, a point of view, choosing the 'right moment'), even with the best attempts to avoid partiality. As a result, many 'translations' will be unreadable without background information. I use the word 'unreadable' in the sense of the failure of conveying the intended interpretation. In general terms, the task of creating a satisfactory translation of the richness of travel experience in any known medium is always prone to at least partial failure. It might well serve as a memory preserved in the image, but it can never replace the complexity of all senses of the direct experience. Photography and video only fix a moment, not the entire complexity of the situation. We cannot expect any film to capture the reality-as-it-is (nor it is the purpose of films). I borrow Nichols' words: 'How do film and video makers, and viewers, make meaning from indexical signs that continue to display traces of what they refer to while remaining clearly distinct from this referential realm?'[366] After all, he adds, 'Sometimes bodily experience exceeds intellectual understanding.'[367] However, there is no point in making films if their aim is to be mere replicas of what one has witnessed; they must be both less (selective for a purpose) and more (providing an analysis, expressing an attitude). Finally, no matter what preparations one might undertake, there is no doubt that 'Despite the parallels between seeing and image-making, looking with and without a camera can never be the same.'[368]

[366] Nichols, B, 1995: xi.
[367] Nichols, B, 1995: 76.
[368] MacDougall, 2006: 3.

3.3. A photographer in the field or my aesthetic contribution

3.3.1. A conflict of interest

However, translating a real-life experience into an image could be even more complex. Being both an artist and a researcher often creates a conflict of interest. My art photography is quite abstract, and it complies purely with the aesthetics and conceptual requirements of the artwork I produce. I usually start all my artistic projects by developing the conceptual basis, brainstorming the idea, often negotiating it with my model, and then exploring the ways of 'translating' it into photography. However, the final product, the selection of the images I choose to exhibit, always follows the idea of the 'image which looks the best'. This makes the aesthetic pleasure based on my personal taste the most deciding qualifier. What happens when art, in my case, photography and video, becomes a tool for academic research? The workflow is similar: the concept comes first, followed by a thorough analysis of the undertaken methodology, a collection of the visual materials, and finally selection of the images/montage of the video, followed by the analysis and the explanation of the whole process. However, one has to remember that art and research have fundamentally different priorities, and the images taken for purely artistic reasons and the ones serving specific research purposes, will, in most cases, look quite different. They will also be produced for different reasons and presented in significantly dissimilar contexts.

There are many great examples of recent anthropological work which could be placed on the border between art and social science. A three-day conference 'Fieldworks: Dialogues between Art and Anthropology' organised in 2003 at the Tate Modern became a very useful platform for the discussion on this subject. One particularly captivating example of work placed on the intersection of art and

anthropology presented at the conference was 'The Smell of Fear' made in 2006 by Sissel Tolaas. Trained both in chemistry and art, Tolaas distilled the sweat emanated by fifteen adult men, victims of violence, in a moment of fear. She then incorporated these distillations into a gloss, white emulsion, which she used to paint the walls of a contemporary gallery space.

Although I do not consider my research to lie on the border of these categories, my artistic background forces me to reflect of the interrelation between art and research. In the attempt to define the differences between art photography and video, and the same media used for research purposes, it is worth noticing that, in most cases, the rationale, the way of producing images, and the purpose of the artistic images are very different from what is required from research photography. My art photography is usually a visual exploration of a concept which interests me in one way or another. The way of having the images done usually results from a long process of experiments, both in the sense of looking for new techniques, but also in the way of interpreting the idea the project is based on. Many times, my first attempts result in failure and I have to seek other ways of interpreting the concept. In such process, I am usually not constrained by time, so I can afford to rethink the idea and retake the photos. During the stage of selecting the images, I keep in mind the context of the final presentation, which is usually an exhibition. I considered the profile and size of the exhibition, the type of the venue, the continuity with my previous shows and, simply, the aesthetic value of the work. With some projects (like the installation 'Closer' or my recent project 'H-Air'), I started with a very unrefined idea, which took a series of experiments to find out what I was looking for in the project.[369] I remember a similar way of working with some of my

[369] In this artwork, wet hair became the metaphor of how the same thing takes a completely new form in a changed situation; and body parts which we look at on everyday basis (lips, eyebrows or hands) photographed from a very close distance and blown up to a huge size on a projector become virtually unrecognisable, challenging our perception of the most common things and objects.

documentary projects: I started from a very general idea, sometimes a protagonist of the film, at times a place, sometimes just an anecdote I overheard. Following that, the film subject would become more concrete and more defined in the scouting process, and finally in the lengthy process of shooting the film would get a final shape. The final touch is gained in the editing process. With this kind of artistic projects, I have all the freedom to fail, in the sense of not getting the answer I am looking for. I can shift the idea or the methodology, following a completely new thread I discover during the process. I have all the freedom to do whatever I am pleased within the project, and I can become most tuned to my instinct, following nothing more than my intuition in exploring the subject. I am not constrained by time, funding,[370] rationale, deadlines, or supervision. It is a near-ideal situation to produce something which is entirely mine, not compromised by any external requirements.[371]

When working in the research field, I am in a less privileged, or, to be more precise, more specifically defined and restricted situation, in comparison with working on my artistic studio experiments. In the field, I can only plan the general concepts of what needs to be done, as any documentary work inevitably involves a significant number of unpredicted situations and surprises. It requires a constant ability to adapt to the ever-changing situation, and the capacity to learn on the fly and take the right decisions without hesitation. During the fieldwork, the moment of taking photographs is determined by the subject, whilst for my art images I usually work in the studio with (often patient) models, retaking the images over and over again, until I am satisfied. In a fieldwork situation, the priority shifts from the aesthetics towards the informative. Also,

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[370] Almost all my art projects are self-funded, or, I should say, not funded at all. I do them with virtually no budget, using my studio, relying on my friends who are models, and my postproduction suite.

[371] Another discussion could be made around the value of some restraints put on the artistic creation as a factor which increases creative productivity and helps achieve more concrete results or high valued products, but this goes beyond the scope of my investigation at this point.

the final output and the context of presenting the images are completely different, as the purpose is so distinct. What I need to demonstrate with such work is not my artistic taste and skills, but the ability to undertake a coherent, reasonable analysis, using chosen methodology to answer my research questions and to prove the proposed thesis. I cannot follow the temptation of the aesthetic inspiration, since I need to be much more structured with my work, and significantly more disciplined. There is less space for improvisation and experimenting. Whereas with art projects I never really know what the outcome will be until I have finished them, with my fieldwork my aims and objectives need to be more defined, yet still remaining open and receptive to the research development. As a consequence, with my art projects I can sometimes spend weeks and months exploring ideas which might lead me nowhere, whereas with the research work I need to give myself a deadline and draw a clear line between the preparation process, the time I use to gather the information, the time for the actual filming and writing, and finally post production and analysis.

However, it is not easy to separate the aesthetic from the intellectual pursuit altogether. As described in the introduction, the Arhuacos are one of the most traditional communities in Colombia, living in small, picturesque villages on the slopes of Sierra Nevada, wearing traditional, white clothes and beautiful, long, dark hair. Taking pictures of these people was a pleasure from an artistic point of view, and a very rewarding work. Tired, wrinkled hands holding *poporo*,[372] or a young indigenous boy with a gun traversing the river, and other scenes from the indigenous lives are something every photographer dreams about (see Figures 5-10). I was amazed by a

[372] Made of hollowed fruit of *cucurbita* (squash or gourd) plant and a stick, poporo is the most important attribute and companion for every Kogui and Arhuaco man. Inside the gourd, they keep lime in the form of powdered seashells, which is carried to the mouth by putting a licked stick inside the squash first, and then to the mouth, which should always be full of coca leaves. A mixture of lime and saliva, which with time deposits on the poporo entrance in the form of a thick ring, represents men's wisdom and is used to meditate.

strong light and shadows, incredible details, and the possibility to frame this reality into a photograph.

But what is the value of this kind of images from a research viewpoint? Are they not just reiterating the images of the 'isolated' community, underlying the obvious differences between 'us' and 'them'? The question gets even more complex when the research topic is precisely about 'visual representation' and its consequences. I deliberately made the medium the central point of my research interest, as much of the existing audiovisual work made with indigenous communities keeps the presence of the camera almost 'invisible'. Such productions often concentrate on the most attractive aspects of the depicted cultures, that is, dance, rituals, artefacts, normally amplifying the differences between the subjects and the culture of the filmmaker. The point of view of the person filming is contrasted to the difference of those ones being filmed. It is often a story and narration of 'I' discovering 'them'; the story of the differences between the two. The potentially unifying aspect of the camera remains unnoticed or ignored.

Figure 5. The Old and the Young. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2015/2016.

Figure 6. Young Kogui traversing the river. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2012.

Figure 7. The Arhuaco assembly, Nabusímake. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2015/2016.

Figure 8. Young Kogui boys walking; Kankawarwa. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2012.

Figure 9. The Mamo Arhuaco. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2012.

Figure 10. Sabanas Crespos, the Arhuaco settlement. Photo by Agata Lulkowska, 2012.

3.3.2. Documentary filmmaking in research

Keeping in mind all the concerns presented above, I aim in this section to reflect on the benefits of using visual media in research. If I was to limit myself to purely theoretical approach to indigenous cinema in the Sierra, my research would have taken a very different trajectory. Investigating the role of the medium by actively participating in the filmmaking process and documenting it proved to be very insightful. On many occasions, it is more relevant to show certain aspects of the researched subject (especially when it concerns behaviours like directing indigenous team, or visual aspects like the indigenous villages), rather than writing about it at length. When the medium itself becomes the focus of the investigation, written words are the supporting material to the image, not the other way round. Nichols suggests that 'A good documentary stimulates discussion about its subject, not itself',[373] adding that 'Documentaries offer pleasure and appeal while their own structure remains virtually invisible, their own rhetorical strategies and stylistic choices largely unnoticed'.[374] My practical input to this research stands almost in a stark opposition to the strategy proposed by Nichols. The auto-reflection on the filming process is crucial to understanding the significance of indigenous filmmaking in the Sierra. As discussed above, a camera as a tool inspires a different, more selective way of seeing reality, which might inspire a more insightful view. As MacDougall suggests, 'filmmaking should be a process of exploration rather than a way of stating what you already know'.[375] I extend his observation to the level of discovering the camera effect as much as the reality itself. What he defines as the main principle of documentary filmmaking seems very close to my fieldwork aims:

[373] Nichols: 1991: x.
[374] Ibid.
[375] MacDougall, 1998: ix.

> For me the commitment to documentary has always been a commitment to the possibilities of discovery and testimony - that is, to the proposition that ways can be found to document experiences actually happening to people that have never before given public expression. The documentary filmmaker's art is to find those experiences and analyse them in such a way as to make them accessible to an audience, and in doing so to propose some theory about their significance.[376]

MacDougall distinguishes two main tendencies in the role of the camera: one which uses the camera as an 'objective' supplementary documentation, and the other one which uses it as an active 'thought process'.[377] In practice, these two tendencies cannot be completely separated. 'To look with a camera is to see with some purpose and leave a trace of that process in the resulting images',[378] he claims. Finally, it is important to underline that no matter how important the content and the form of the documentary are, the self-awareness of the filmic medium cannot be ignored. I follow MacDougall's claim that 'Photographic images are inherently reflexive, in that they refer back to the photographer at the moment of their creation, at the moment of an encounter'.[379]

Every time I am granted the permission to point my camera at someone in the Sierra, I stubbornly keep asking why they might be interested in a Polish researcher from a British university, with background in film direction, making a documentary about them. 'How would you benefit from me filming you?', I ask. I am acutely aware of how the potential production might influence the subject, both in a good and a bad way. Visual images tend to be more easily consumed than a written text. In the case of the documentation of relatively isolated communities, the audiovisual work conducted in their territories might provoke a flow of tourism to the areas, which might not necessarily be something the researcher wants to initiate and provoke by their work. Making a film and presenting it to the public is a continuous process of encoding and

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[376] MacDougall, 1998: 225.
[377] MacDougall, 2006: 240-242.
[378] MacDougall, 2006: 242.
[379] MacDougall, 2006: 3.

decoding, with many elements contributing to this process: the private experiences of the filmmaker and the subjects, and past experiences and expectations of every 'consumer' of the film. Effectively, the whole process is composed of various stages of negotiations between the subject, the filmmaker, the audience, and the context of each of these stages, that is, preparation, production, presentation, reception. The influence of the context of dissemination is impossible to overestimate and should not be ignored. I can think of many scenarios where a video or photography produced for research purposes could be attractive both for an academic audience and art amateurs, but depending on where it is displayed, the significance of the work would shift.[380] Most images are brought into existence with particular audiences in mind. However, the hybridity or art and art institutions these days significantly blur the boundaries of what could be defined as art. As a result, much ethnographic work might be welcome at art centres and exhibitions, and many abstract art projects will be of great ethnographic value. The hybrid collaborations between these two fields can result in very enriching dialogues. There is a lot art can learn from social sciences and vice versa, if only the aims are clear and we remain open to creativity and experimentations. The creativity and boldness of the artist, accompanied by the methodical and scrupulous approach of the researcher can lead to some magnificent projects of great value.

[380] As I demonstrate on the examples of various films festivals in Chapter 4.1.

3.4. Reception of ethnographic films and reversed audiencing

3.4.1. The subject becomes audience

Jay Ruby suggests that the reception of ethnographic films is very complex since 'proper exploration requires a thorough examination of many undertheorized and unspoken assumptions'.[381] To understand the complexity of Arhuaco filmmaking it is crucial to analyse not only the way Europeans represent them, but also the way the Arhuacos interpret these European representations. Often, European versions of the Arhuaco world is not what the Arhuacos identify themselves with, and precisely this lack of compatibility prompts the need of auto-representation among the inhabitants of the Sierra. What I call a reversed audiencing is the situation when the subject of an audiovisual representation aimed for external audiences becomes an active agent in reception processes of the audiovisual work describing them. Such practice is usually full of significant consequences and deserves further scrutiny.

A few inter-related questions arise: what would an ideal reception study concerning the Arhuaco community watching the external representations of the Arhuaco community look like? Is it justified to apply the same methods commonly used in general reception studies on Western audiences? How often do films depicting indigenous communities consider their subjects to be the main part of their audiences? If they do not, for whom are such productions created and why? A notable fact is that increased audiovisual activity among the indigenous communities compensates, to some degree, for the scarcity of written documents on the Arhuacos. The cultures of the Sierra Nevada rely on their oral traditions, and the existing writing comes from non-indigenous sources. In Western contexts, it is almost impossible for the protagonist of a

[381] Ruby, 2000: 181.

documentary to remain unaware of the reception of the image. As a consequence, they are presented with a whole range of possibilities to respond to the reception of the film, that is, following the reviews on the TV, press, magazines and online, social media recommendations, and direct feedback from the screenings. Moreover, if the film gains more recognition, it normally enjoys a moment of increased interest, and it provokes some discussion in the media. Such a situation does not occur in the Arhuaco environment, or at least not at that scale. The work of indigenous communicators promises a change to this situation. Not only do they bring the films to their communities, but they also provide their own version of the representation of their culture. However, it is important to keep in mind that any representation is always somebody's interpretation of a subject, and depending whose interpretation that is, it is likely to differ significantly. Therefore, I am not attempting to glorify the indigenous vision over the European one, but to point out the differences and some specificities of each of these visions. Effectively, the final product of both indigenous and European authors is just another voice in the dialogue about the situation in the Sierra. Perhaps the Europeans can speak louder due to bigger budgets and more effective and far-reaching distribution. However, none of the sides is necessarily right or wrong, and we cannot assume a supremacy of internal/subjective point of view over the external/objective. In essence, every visual representation of someone is effectively a negotiation between the author's vision, the extent to which the subject wishes to reveal himself or herself, and the exploration of the possibilities and limitations of the medium. What adds value to a film is the possibility of an open dialogue between all of these aspects, rather than an imposition of one over the other. When the Arhuacos deeply disagree with the vision of their culture proposed by external filmmakers, this dialogue becomes ruptured. At the same time, by strictly limiting the external visions of their culture and solely accepting their own, they risk making their filmmaking overly hegemonic.

The meaning-making resulting from watching an audiovisual production is a complex process and it depends on many elements. As suggested, 'different audiences will interpret the same visual images in very different ways'.[382] The same film about the communities of the Sierra might be perceived by European audiences not only as acceptable but also enriching, while for the Arhuacos or the Kogui it becomes a prime example of image abuse and false representation. The 'difference' between audiences might refer to different genders, geographies, historical moments, cultures or sexualities. Rose suggests quite a lengthy list of questions which might be useful when thinking about audiencing. For example, who the original audience is; the circulation of the image; its original display; the sequencing; additional contextualising techniques (text), viewing conventions; structure of the audiences, and the engagement of the audience, etc.[383] All these aspects significantly influence the reception process. In summary, one of the main characteristics of reversed audiencing is the fact that it shifts focus from the assumed audiences to alternative ones, keeping in mind that interpretation techniques are culturally determined. Often, the categories of interpretation used by Western researchers and audiences prove inadequate when applied to indigenous cultures. Western audiences, no matter how broad and imprecise this definition can be, tend to be accustomed to the prevailing ubiquitousness of visual representations in their contemporary lives. This cannot be said about the community I researched, which, in its vast majority, lives a traditional lifestyle without access to electricity and media. This realisation could dramatically shift the meaning of such visual representations.

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[382] Rose, 2012: 32.
[383] Rose, 2012: 347-348.

3.4.2. Unfixed meaning and techniques of interpretation

Shaun Moores proposes participant observation with an extended period in the field as a way to gain understanding of the culture from the 'native point of view'.[384] The impossible task of capturing somebody's else's subjectivity lies behind such attempts. He admits that 'ultimately (…) this desire of complete knowledge of "the other" is an unattainable fantasy'.[385] Regardless of how successful one is in achieving this task, translating it into a comprehensive film is equally challenging. Even if that is successful, the audience reception can never be controlled, as it is culturally informed and could never be fixed. Moore goes even deeper in his scepticism, and, following Clifford (1986) and Atkinson (1990), claims that 'ethnographic discourses are necessarily "partial truths" and the cultures they purport to describe are always to some extent the product of the researcher's imagination'.[386] Additionally, in the case of audiovisual work, images seem to be more prone to shifting interpretations than words. MacDougall underlines the recurring concern about the visual elements of anthropology, their potential openness to too many meanings and interpretations. As he states, 'A significant contrast between the written and the visual in anthropology may, therefore, lie not in their very great ontological differences, not even in their very different ways of constructing meaning, but in their *control* of meaning'.[387] Suggesting that anthropology 'makes sense' through elimination, MacDougall claims:

> In a sense, *translation* is always to anthropology's advantage, for it channels data through the keyhole of language, producing a condensation of meaning and leaving most of the data behind. Photography, film (and now video) construct meanings, as it were, on the other side of the keyhole, for photographic images, however heavily coded in diverse ways, also contain analogues (rather than translations) of vision.[388]

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[384] Moores, 1995: 3.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Moores, 1995: 4.
[387] MacDougall, 1998: 68.
[388] MacDougall, 1998: 68.

However, MacDougall also suggests a problematic 'redundancy' of elements in visual anthropology (i.e. film) which might be unintended and prone to open and uncontrolled interpretation and therefore challenging the meaning of the whole piece.[389] I argue that this is a rather fortunate quality of an image, which is potentially less restrictive in its attempt to fix the meaning, although the editing process and context of a presentation significantly interfere with this attribute. But although the way in which the audience interprets a film can be controlled by selection, framing, and contextualization, 'images seem to have a life of their own, and people are capable of responding to them in a wide variety of ways'.[390]

As indicated on many occasions in this thesis, the context of display has a significant influence on the reception processes. As Rose suggests, 'Images appear and reappear in all sorts of places, and those places, with their particular ways of spectating, mediate the visual effects of those images'.[391] This indicates that the way we see things is historically, geographically, culturally and socially specific.[392] Also, the style of the audiovisual product is not unimportant for the audiences. Lucien Taylor argues that watching long shots of observatory documentaries requires more action and is more demanding from the audience than listening to filmmaker's voiceover with their defined point of view.[393] It is almost as if the work which would otherwise be done by the filmmaker in the form of the commentary would have to have been formed in the mind of the viewer, dependent on the viewer's background and previous experiences. As MacDougall points out, a film 'may be remembered for no more than a half dozen

[389] MacDougall, 1998: 69.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Rose, 2012: 31.
[392] Rose, 2012: 16.
[393] MacDougall, 1998: 5.

scenes out of a hundred, and those scenes may be different for every half dozen people who see it'.[394] He explains that for a filmmaker the film is a reduction of all the footage and experience into a small selection of shots. However, for a spectator it is the opposite: the film opens onto a wider experience, stimulating one's owns imagination.[395] He juxtaposes a filmmaker's and a spectator's experience as follows: remembering - imagination; recognition - discovery; foreknowledge and loss - curiosity.[396] MacDougall further argues that after an extensive period of editing, a filmmaker might find meeting his or her subjects rather unsettling. He suggests that they might seem less real to the filmmaker than the film itself.[397] The subject as the element of the film lives his or her life almost in separation from its real-life reference. He or she is gazed at (and judged) twice: first, by the filmmaker, and then, by the audience. In addition, they are two fundamentally different kinds of gaze: the first one is loaded with additional background information, while the second is potentially more unbiased, or, paradoxically, stained with heavy stereotyping, due to the audiences' lack of the background information available to the filmmaker. 'Much of the film experience has little to do with what one sees: it is what is constructed in the mind and body of the viewer',[398] claims MacDougall, adding that 'Our "reading" of a film, and our feelings about it, are at every moment the result of how we experience the complex fields this orchestration creates - largely depend upon who we are and what we bring to the film'.[399] In contrast, the reversed audiencing, where the subject becomes the viewer, poses a question about the returned gaze. One can no longer assume the exclusion (or

[394] MacDougall, 1998: 27.
[395] Ibid: 27-28.
[396] Ibid: 28.
[397] MacDougall, 1998: 35.
[398] MacDougall, 1998: 71.
[399] MacDougall, 1998: 98.

marginalisation) of the (indigenous) subjects in the reception processes, as part of their identity as communicators has been built on breaking that exclusion.

3.5. Ethical issues

3.5.1. The main principles of ethical research

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of ethics when working with any target group, and it is no different in the case of indigenous communities. In this section I concentrate on key points which must be taken into consideration, whilst keeping in mind that the ethical requirements might vary from culture to culture. This notion of applying certain rules defined by one culture to the work undertaken in another culture remains inherently problematic, raising the question of the appropriateness of such practice. The explanation of the purpose and the intended use of the research could be potentially quite abstract for some indigenous communities to whom the concept of academic conferences, journals and film festivals might be meaningless. This pose concerns about the plausibility of such a task. I always strive to be as explicit as possible in my explanations by asking my participants about their reasons to agree to be filmed by an outsider. I also enquire how they feel about the fact that what I record will be presented to external audiences. Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that the participants have a chance to watch films made about them.

Referring to the guidelines of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Rose defines six key principles which need to be considered to ensure that ethical requirements are satisfied. They prompt researchers to maintain integrity, quality and transparency, especially in clarifying the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research; they underline that the participants need to be informed of any potential risks; the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants must be respected when needed; all research must be done on a voluntary basis, free from any coercion and avoiding any harm to the participants; and finally, the independence of research

should be promoted, avoiding any conflict of interest or partiality.[400] Among the mentioned list of potential issues related to the use the visual images in research, Rose identifies the three most valid concerns: the anonymity of the participants, consent (who agrees to what on the research process), and copyright (who owns the images being worked with and thus controls what can be done with them). As it turned out during my fieldwork with the Arhuacos, the ownership of images is of crucial importance for them. This is due to the multiple cases of unfortunate misinterpretations of their culture and the wide circulation of these images beyond their control. As a result, they developed a plan of protection and a tight control of who is allowed to film in the Sierra and for what purpose. Anonymity did not pose a big concern for the participants of my research. To the contrary, the main social actor of my investigation wanted to make sure that his views were clearly associated with his name. This complied with his role as an indigenous voice of the Sierra for the region and beyond. I had to keep in mind that I was collaborating with a community with a very strict social order, so I had to ensure not to put any of my participants in conflict with their community leaders. It is essential to keep in mind that the communities of the Sierra significantly differ from Western societies in their understanding of the role of the individual and the collective. Like most indigenous people, the Kogui and the Arhuacos are highly hierarchical collectives where the importance of the group often overshadows that of the individual. Therefore, being at odds with the official way of thinking of the collective might be seen as undesirable. It is essential to make sure that the implications of the consent giving are fully explained and understood. Simply asking for a signature, especially in the case of the community where most of the people cannot read and write (and where not everybody speaks Spanish), is of no purpose. It is crucial that all the possible efforts are made to ensure that participants fully understand the consequences of their

[400] Rose, 2012: 328-329.

collaboration. Luckily, my participants were fluent in Spanish and fully accustomed with the conventions of consent-giving for filming purposes. It is worth emphasising that consents for artistic and research projects differ significantly. When I work with models on my 'artistic' projects, I always ask them to sign a consent form, and I usually explain to them what kind of exhibition I am planning to present the work at. But that is all; by signing the consent, professional models know that they are 'selling' their image and that they leave the control over the future exhibition in the hands of the photographer. However, the convention of art practices significantly reduces ethical problems (of course, provided that the use of the images is not abused in any way), and the artist becomes relatively free to reproduce and present their work the way they wish. It is true that, in many cases, social research might touch on some very personal aspects of participants' lives, but so can a regular documentary (which, again, might qualify as 'art'). My conclusion is that in any visual work which includes people, regardless if it is done for artistic or research purposes, it is essential to ensure that no participant might feel in any way harmed or abused. If there is anything they do not feel particularly comfortable about, under no circumstances should they be encouraged to take part and there should be no ambiguity about it.

3.5.2. The complexity of consent-giving and distribution

From the legal point of view, the situation of consent-giving is not entirely clear. Rose gives an example of the UK and the USA where everybody is allowed to take photos in public spaces (and even if it was not allowed, it would be virtually impossible to control that). So, 'legally (…), consent from people pictured in public places is not required'.[401]

[401] Rose, 2012: 333.

However, this depends on the definition of public space. In the Kogui and Arhuaco philosophy, everything around them is a public space. However, this cannot be easily translated into Western laws, and vice-versa. There is also a question if every single person in the picture needs to be asked for the consent. In the case of working with a child under the age of 16 in the UK, his or her consent must be accompanied by another one from the child's parent or legal guardian. Another complication, rightly pointed out by Rose, is that on many occasions a research project significantly changes in the process of its development, and eventually, results in something different from what was planned and scrupulously described on the consent form.[402] How can this be addressed in ensuring the ethical accuracy of the initial agreement between the researcher and the participant? Another issue concerns including the information about future audiences of the images: explaining the context of presentation is one thing, but can the research assume the positive reception of the audiences? Also, keeping in mind the potential online circulation of the images, it becomes practically impossible to control who watches the visuals, how, and in which context.[403] On many occasions, the consent might need to be renegotiated during the process of research fieldwork, and even after that. To illustrate the complexities of consent, Rose gives an example of Maya Goded who took a set of photographs in the Mexican villages in Guerrero in the 1990s and became a famous and recognised photographer after publishing them. Years later, the photographs were taken to the villagers by another researcher who found out that not only the people could hardly recognise themselves on the images, but they found them rather degrading.[404] The example of Maya Goded brings us back to the question of distribution. The ethics of dissemination practices of depictions of the less privileged in their access to visual media is not an easy one. Sturken and Cartwright mention the

[402] Rose, 2012: 334.
[403] Rose, 2012: 334-335.
[404] Ibid.

example of Dorothea Lange and her famous photograph 'Migrant Mother' (1936), depicting a victim of California migration of the 1930s. Years later, the woman portrayed in the photograph was found to be still living in relative poverty in California, not having benefited in the slightest from the distribution of the image and the historical importance of it.[405] Even if the role of images is not to improve the lives of their subjects, it is not a moral choice to make one's name at the expense of the portrayed.

3.5.3. Intrusion and exclusion

The filmmaker intrudes, intentionally or not, into the life of those filmed. Nichols notices that the very act of observing someone for filming purposes might become over-voyeuristic and might feel slightly uncomfortable 'if a pleasure in looking seems to take priority over the chance to acknowledge and interact with the one seen.'[406] He asks: 'Does the filmmaker seek out others to represent because they possess qualities that may fascinate viewers for the wrong reasons?'[407] He also raises the question of responsibility towards the participants:

> Since the observational filmmaker adopts a peculiar mode of presence 'on the scene' in which he or she appears to be invisible and non-participatory, the question also arises of when the filmmaker has a responsibility to intervene? What if something happens that may jeopardise or injure one of the social actors?[408]

Another important aspect of this discussion is the exclusion of many subjects from participating in the international circle of distribution of the images, film festivals, events, or exhibitions. This access is granted only to very narrow elite participants,

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[405] Sturken and Cartwright, 2009.
[406] Nichols, 2010: 174.
[407] Nichols, 2010: 175.
[408] Nichols, 2010: 175.

making many others unable to contribute to the critical discussion about their representations. In that sense, one might argue, they are unlikely to be directly affected by the films made about them. However, what gets affected is the way in which the audiences shape their opinions and interpretations about the depicted communities. The subjects' lack of participation impoverishes the discussion, reducing it to what can be read from the visual material, and depriving it of a valuable exchange of the subjects' points of view and opinions for the discussion. On some occasions, the filmmakers are available for the audiences as the authority explaining the portrayed reality. However, this authority can be abused at times.

A heated discussion about the abuse of the filmmaker's authority was inspired by a Polish film by Marcin Koszałka 'Takiego pieknego syna urodzilam' (I gave birth to such a beautiful son), 1999. The director filmed his parents arguing fiercely on many occasions, and he filmed them completely against their will, sometimes hiding or escaping from their anger caused by the presence of the camera. Some argued that it was an honest and deep piece of documentary filmmaking depicting the 'real life' of the family, while for others the abuse of power by Koszałka was problematic. Many documentary films depict the misery and tragedies of others. Filmmakers often venture to poor and/or warfare-affected areas to make successful images which they use to build their names and fortunes. Poverty and conflicts are 'attractive' for filmmakers, but the films hardly ever do anything to change the situation. With some exceptions, they are produced to inform us and to 'entertain'. At best, they stimulate us to have intellectual conversations about the problems 'Others' have.

This chapter concentrated on various practical aspects which need to be taken into consideration for the collaborative film work with indigenous subjects, mainly related to ethical image-making for various outcomes and the reception mechanisms. This has not only pointed us to some essential elements of filmmaking which are often

taken for granted in analysing visual work but has also sensitised us to the complexities of visual representation processes in general. The chapters that follow provide a wider contextualisation for the main case study.

Chapter 4

The global flow of ethnographic film culture

In the previous chapters I introduced the communities of the Sierra, I located my research within specific theoretical contexts, and I elaborated on the practicalities of methods and ethical issues. The next step which is essential to contextualise indigenous filmmaking in the Sierra is to understand the current flow of contemporary ethnographic film in more global contexts. In order to gain an in-depth preparation to conduct the analysis of my case study, I have attended a number of film festivals of very different profiles between 2012 and 2014. I also selected a list of case studies particularly concerned with representations of the 'Other'. By selecting key examples of different profiles and genres as case studies, I prepared the ground for the analysis of the Zhigoneshi productions.

Over the last few decades, there has been a dramatic change in the circulation of visual media. Rapid technological advancement and the emergence of new platforms constantly create new contexts and new ways of 'consuming' audiovisual media, which significantly shape our reception practices. Depending on the context and venue (or a platform) of the presentation, the choice of what is watched, the linearity of the process, the interactivity related to the experience, and the interpretation vary significantly. However, any over-optimistic statements about the progression and advancement in media and easy access to technologies also need to be seen in context: although this might be true for most of the Western metropolises, there are still vast areas where people are denied basic access to technology, let alone the most recent advancements. Keeping this in mind becomes especially relevant in investigations concerning relatively isolated communities. Paradoxically, the globalisation of communication technologies has increased the division between the rich and the poor, or those who

have power to control and access the media and those who do not. The constantly increasing emergence of visual media produced by non-professionals and independent artists therefore requires understanding of the whole picture of the global flow of visual culture. Many productions are, by definition, designed to reach global markets and global audiences (like the BBC or the films presented at acclaimed international film festivals), but many others are deprived of this privilege despite the ambition to reach wider audiences. Increasingly, the Internet becomes one of the most significant access points for visual media dissemination, making geographic distances less relevant, but access to technology crucial.

Two inter-related issues permeate my investigation: the context of the reception and the implication of leaving the subject depicted in the audiovisual works without access to this work, beyond the reach of the audience, and without much control over the distribution. This has an enormous influence on shaping the reception of these works. We can argue that we still lack a satisfactory platform for an intercultural discussion about ethnographic film culture and its global implications. One of the rare occasions for such discussions might be film festivals focused on ethnographic film, but we do have to consider the limitations of the type of the audiences which might venture to participate in such events. The following sections look at various film festivals case studies in order to provide a further contextualisation around the politics of representing the 'Other'.

4.1. Festivals: image as a commodity

4.1.1. Indigenous festivals

This section focuses on four examples of festivals concerned with indigenous issues, namely: The Indigenous Film Festival in Bogotá, EcoCentrix, Native Spirit and Daupará. This comprehensive variety of different festivals includes: an international one located in various Latin American countries; an academic one, based in London and looking at global performance aspects of indigenous art; another semi-academic one, with interest in global indigenous filmmaking; and finally, a Colombian festival also concerned with various aspects of indigenous filmmaking.

4.1.1.1. The Indigenous Film Festival in Bogotá

The Indigenous Film Festival of Bogotá (XI Festival Internacional de Cine y Video de los Pueblos Indígenas) first took place in Mexico in 1985. The following editions were held in Brazil (1987), Venezuela (1989), Peru (1992), Bolivia (1996), Guatemala (1999), Chile (2004), Mexico (2006), Bolivia (2008), and Ecuador (2010). The XI edition, the first one to be hosted in Colombia, was coordinated by the *Organización Indígena de Colombia* (Indigenous Organisation of Colombia) and took place in Bogotá (23-30 September 2012) and Medellín (3-6 October 2012). The 'indigenous' nature of the festival does not mean that the festival was devoted only to productions made by indigenous communities. In January 2012, I visited the Indigenous Organisation of Colombia to enquiry about the festival. At that time, I had just finished a short video with the Yanesha community of the Peruvian Amazon, and I was interested to see if I

could potentially submit my own work for the festival. I received warm encouragement to submit my film and was invited to collaborate with the organisers.

How can we define this festival? On its website, the organisers explain the objectives of the event:

> afirmar el pleno reconocimiento social, político y cultural de los pueblos indígenas; resaltar el valor de la imagen y la comunicación para celebrar un mundo plural en el que los pueblos indígenas construyamos un mejor futuro y también fortalecer los lazos que unen a las y los comunicadores indígenas y no indígenas de todo el mundo luchando por un mundo más justo y por el pleno reconocimiento del derecho de los pueblos indígenas a la autodeterminación.[409]

Probably the most important element of this manifesto is its emphasis upon collaboration between 'communicators' from both indigenous and non-indigenous backgrounds. In the statement following the introduction, the organisers underline two key objectives of the event, that is, to make more visible the threat of extinction faced by indigenous communities and the violation of sacred places, and the festival being a space for the analysis of the humanitarian crisis faced by indigenous communities. More specifically, they identify the need to strengthen processes of communication available to indigenous communities in Colombia, and, in the international context, to promote audiovisual production in order to spread awareness of indigenous rights. The festival consists not only of films but also talks, workshops, performance of rituals, various cultural activities, photographic exhibitions and, most importantly, it is a pretext for representatives of many indigenous communities to meet.[410] It becomes clear that the presentation of films is just one of many elements of a more complex social event,

[409] To affirm the social, political, and cultural recognition of indigenous communities, to highlight the value of the image and its ability to celebrate the diversity of the world in which indigenous and non-indigenous communities fight for justice and full recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples and their self-determination; http://www.onic.org.co/comunicados-internacionales/1813-13-festival-internacional-de-cine-y-video-de-los-pueblos-indigenas-ficmayab-se-presenta-en-el-foro-permanente-de-naciones-unidas-para-cuestiones-indigenas-2017, accessed on 3 March 2015.

[410] Ibid; accessed on 3 March 2015.

which aims to increase indigenous awareness, rather than provide a platform for a purely artistic (film) event. The festival seems reminiscent of an activist manifestation in the form of a conference rather than a panorama of indigenous artistic achievements. This has two important implications. Firstly, the profile of the audiences coming to see the event is also hugely determined by this goal (and the festival profile). Secondly, the aesthetic value, the storytelling, and filmic skills of presented films tend to be of secondary importance to the message they attempt to communicate. Consequently, it is difficult to find a spectator who comes to this particular festival purely out of interest in cinema. The majority of the audience consists of representatives of various indigenous groups, students, and documentary filmmakers and activists. Whilst indigenous issues are much more popular in countries such as Colombia than they are in Europe, they are still far from mainstream. The festival is primarily designed for the indigenous communities themselves and has very limited promotion beyond that circle. As a result, it is unlikely to draw the attention of ordinary cinema-goers or even regular festivals attendees.

I concentrate on the part of the festival which took place in Bogotá. What was presented in Medellín a few days later was just a repetition of most of the activities which took place earlier in the capital. The festival was initiated by a discussion panel at the Luis Ángel Arango Library auditorium, concentrated on the question of the 'Lenguaje Audiovisual Indígena' (indigenous audiovisual language) with a panel entitled 'La imagen de los Pueblos Originarios en el Cine y la Construcción de Identidad y Sociedad' (the image of the indigenous communities in the cinema and the construction of the identity and society). The festival hosted various talks, many of which concentrated on the Afro-Colombian genocide, land issues, and indigenous resistance. A similar set of topics was among the main concerns of the screened films,

among others ‘No hay dolor ajeno’ (The pain is ours) by Marta Rodriquez.[411] Other films (both documentaries and fiction) focused, among others, on the following subjects: cultural resistance (‘Nabusímake: Memorias de una independencia’, Colombia, by Amado Villafaña); documentation of local rituals and traditional forms of living (‘Kotkuphi’, Brasil, by Isael Maxakali); an attempt to start a new life in a city and resistance to remaining faithful to one’s identity (‘La pequeña semilla en el asfalto’, México, by Iván Gutiérrez and Javier Núñez); historical debates about indigenous identity and ancestral life (‘Crónicas de la gran serpiente’, Argentina, by Darío Arcella); violence and other crimes (‘Dos justicias: los retos de la coordinación’, Guatemala, by Carlos Yuri Flores); social and environmental conflicts caused by modern land developments (‘El oso Miyoi’, Venezuela, by Edgar A. Vivas); surviving with the traditional lifestyle (‘Esencia Ancestral’, Guatemala, by Raúl Urizar), and territorial conflicts and forced displacement (‘La ciudad y la selva: Video sobre los indígenas desplazados residentes en la ciudad de Villavicencio’, Colombia, by Fernando Santacruz Howard).[412] In addition, some films focused upon questions of nature, access to water supplies, traditional healing, female resistance, and human rights. Most of the films related to more than one topic.

The festival’s rich variety of content and the engaged approach of the audiences can testify to the event’s success. Much of the discussion which emerged after the projections and talks was not only inspiring but also conveyed a sense of optimism about the state of indigenous filmmaking on Latin American soil. The only opportunity for improvement could be the scope of reach and inclusion of more varied audiences. This celebration of indigenous cultures was mostly attended by academics, artists, and

[411] Already introduced briefly in Chapter 4. Her work and influence is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.1.

[412] http://cineyvideo-indigena.onic.org.co/index.php option=com_content&view=article&id=63&Itemid=81, accessed on 3 March 2015.

students, mostly form within Colombia. Most Western ‘non-indigenous others’, unless specifically interested in the subject, remained blissfully unaware of the existence of the festival and its scrupulously crafted indigenous message. I will only state the obvious by saying that it is still far behind the impact of, for example, the Berlin Film Festival, where people from all over the world travel just to see the movies. It would be unwise to ignore the significance of the context of presentation (and by implication, target audiences). Interestingly enough, the outputs of some of the indigenous filmmakers (like Villafaña) have become increasingly popular globally, albeit within specific circles. With the help of his consultants and his own proactive attitude and prolific video-making, he has become increasingly known in international indigenous circles. However, it seems that certain types of films belong to certain kinds of festivals and it is not easy to transgress these limitations.

4.1.1.2. EcoCentrix

The number of festivals and events concerned with the indigenous subject is growing. A recent initiative was ‘EcoCentrix, Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Acts, International Exhibition of Indigenous Art and Performance,’ which took place in London, 25 October – 10 November 2013. Led by Professor Helen Gilbert from Royal Holloway, University of London, and part of a broader project on contemporary indigeneity funded by the European Research Council, the event’s main concern was ecology in relation to indigenous art and performance.[413] Clearly a well-planned academic event, the festival took place in a touristic part of London attracting a number of casual visitors, as well as

[413] http://www.indigeneity.net/ecocentrix/about_us/index.html, accessed on 9 March 2015.

those specifically interested in the subject. The website tempted its potential public with the following description: 'EcoCentrix is a free exhibition for visitors of all ages.'[414] The festival consisted of a series of live performances, workshops and talks, a programme of film screenings, educational events for schools, an art exhibition, and an international conference for registered delegates. There was also an interactive mobile application designed to enrich the visitors' experience and to encourage them to participate by providing guidance and additional information about the exhibition. The festival was thoroughly advertised, a DVD presenting a showcase of the content was published, and beautifully-designed fine quality prints (postcards, leaflets, brochures, catalogues) promoted the event. A letter of thanks received by each volunteer assisting with the event states that over 3,000 people in London attended the festival.[415] It was a successful celebration of indigenous creativity and diversity from around the globe, carefully planned, with enough resources behind it to make it marketable, sleek, and successful.

EcoCentrix is an example of an academic and curatorial project which presents the positive face of indigenous cultures to the wider public. Unlike the previous festival I have analysed, here the focus was on showcasing global cultural diversity, mainly through performance (which was an excellent choice, considering that performance is an integral part of many indigenous cultures, and at the same time an attractive form of spectacle for Western audiences).[416] It was also designed to be easily digested by a regular passer-by, with a welcoming venue, easily accessible to anyone who happened to take a stroll by the river and wanted to have a rest by enjoying a bit of art and culture. As a result, the festival inspired an atmosphere of optimism about first nations from

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[414] http://www.indigeneity.net/ecocentrix/about_us/index.html, accessed on 9 March 2015.

[415] I used this opportunity to work as a volunteer as well.

[416] However, we might also argue that there could be a danger of creating parallels to 19th century displays of exotic cultures.

around the world. We should not forget that metropolises such as London have an extensive web of promotion for various art events across the capital, and the majority of people living there or visiting London have good access to the Internet and to those tools which inform and encourage visits to events such as EcoCentrix. Therefore, unlike the Indigenous Film Festival in Bogotá, this one had the potential to welcome people who did not plan their visit on purpose, but who could easily enjoy the event. Months afterwards, the EcoCentrix website was still available online,[417] providing information and access to social media promoting the event. The diverse content of the festival (workshops, photography, performance, installation art), and the global reach of the definition of 'indigenous' made it far more appealing to a wider audience. Of course, in such cases, the selection of curated artists and artworks raises questions of fairness and inclusion/exclusion criteria, but this should not undervalue the expertise of the curators and organisers.[418]

4.1.1.3. Native Spirit

The next festival I wish to highlight is also based in London, and at first might seem similar to EcoCentrix. The 8th Native Spirit Film Festival took place between 30 Oct and 1 November 2014 at London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). From the official description, we learn the following:

> Native Spirit Foundation is a non-profit, charitable organisation, which promotes the knowledge and preservation of Indigenous Cultures and

[417] http://www.indigeneity.net/ecocentrix/index.html

[418] Charlotte Gleghorn, one of the festival's film associates, specializes in Latin American indigenous filmmaking and aesthetics. I will be referring to her work when analysing Colombian indigenous filmmaking.

supports education in Indigenous communities.' The organisation 'promotes education and the protection of the rights of Indigenous peoples.[419]

Founded by a Mapuche artist and filmmaker, Freddy Treuquil, Native Spirit consists of not only a film festival, but also social and educational projects supporting local native schools across the region.[420] 'Throughout the year, Native Spirit holds special events, fundraisers and workshops generating a permanent platform in Europe for a dialogue between the indigenous world and modern societies', declare the organisers.[421] Terms and conditions for film submissions state that this is a non-commercial and non-competitive festival, and that 'Films will be chosen on the basis that the values presented align with that of Native Spirit Foundation's work'.[422] Again, this suggests that ideas take priority over artistic and aesthetic values. The organisers underline the charitable and non-commercial character of the festival, stating that the submissions are open to 'indigenous and non-indigenous filmmakers of all ages, origins and cultures.'[423] The heads of the festival collaborate closely with Survival International, one of the biggest international human rights organisations, and some guests and films were sent directly by that organisation.[424] A glance at the website gives an overall idea of the profile of the event. There is a short video with 'native' music, featuring people dressed in traditional clothes dancing. Whilst I believe that preserving indigenous cultures is extremely important, and this festival is among the most well-intentioned, I would argue that such imagery could sometimes be damaging to the communities by constantly reaffirming the stereotype of those in need of help, lacking education, and somehow

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[419] http://www.nativespiritfoundation.org, accessed on 20 October 2014.

[420] Central and South America, among others: Wayuu in Venezuela, Mayas in Guatemala, Aymara in Bolivia, and Mapuche in Argentina and Chile.

[421] Ibid, accessed on 10 March 2015.

[422] http://www.nativespiritfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/NSF2015-TC.pdf, accessed on 10 March 2015.

[423] Ibid.

[424] Among others, Nixiwaka Yawanawá, a young man of Yawanawá tribe, with barely 600 still alive, from Acre, western Brazilian Amazon.

"inferior" by not being able to participate in a Western lifestyle.[425] It appears that presenting and displaying these external aspects of indigeneity require to be accompanied by some form of contextualisation and explanation for the non-indigenous audiences. Otherwise, it risks becoming yet another re-confirmation of well-established stereotypes. The website also provides a platform for similar events and news which might be interesting to anyone concerned with first nations' problems, that is, talks, other exhibitions, and workshops which do not form part of the Native Spirit Festival but which share the same ideas and goals.

Similarly to the festivals mentioned before, Native Spirit showcases not only films, but a small selection of performances, dances, and music. The 2014 programme began with an Andean music performance, 'exploring the themes of mother moon, sacred coca leaves and offerings to the earth'.[426] The programme include documentaries from Peru ('Chawaytiri: Caravan of Memory', by Jose Barreiro PhD, Taino, 2013); Australia ('Crocodile Dreaming', by Darlene Johnson, 2007); Congo ('Forest of the Dancing Spirits', by Linda Vastrik, 2012); Indonesia ('Rangsa ni Tonun: Sacred Batak Weaving', by Sandra Niessen, 2014); Japan ('Ainu: Pathways to memory', by Marcos P. Centeno Martín, 2014); and many others. The edition of this festival also featured Alan Ereira's 'Aluna'.[427]

The topics of films presented at Native Spirit were similar to what was showcased at the indigenous festival in Colombia: land issues ('Defensora'); traditional lifestyle and its struggles ('El Regalo de la Pachamama', 'Chawaytiri: Caravan of Memory'); spiritual beliefs ('Ndima: Mapping our future', 'Rangsa ni tonne: Sacred Batak Weaving', 'Forest of the Dancing Spirits'); human rights and legislation ('King's Seal'), and cultural preservation versus marginalisation ('Ainu: Pathways to memory').

[425] Which often is not even what they wish for.
[426] http://www.nativespiritfoundation.org/?page_id=2, accessed on 10 March 2015.
[427] Analysed in Chapter 4.2.1.

Although the venue, promotion, and content were more modest than at EcoCentrix, most of the times the festival was very well attended. Even if Native Spirit only reach those who are already interested in the subject and who want to make an effort to attend the event, it was very successful judging by the response of the public. By holding the festival in London in a semi-academic environment, it is likely to address specifically European audiences and potentially First Nations immigrants. It is hard to imagine a Kogui family travelling to SOAS from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta just to enrich their understanding of indigenous filmmaking. Nevertheless, I consider the Festival to be a promising platform which can potentially enable interdisciplinary dialogue between different traditions and cultures.

4.1.1.4. Daupará

The last festival from the indigenous category which I analyse is Daupará: Muestra de Cine y Video Indígena en Colombia (Showcase of the Indigenous Film and Video of Colombia). The festival's director, Pablo Mora Calderón,[428] is actively involved in indigenous filmmaking in Colombia, collaborating with Zhigoneshi, the collective of filmmakers from the four indigenous nations of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The Festival was initiated in 2009 with over 50 national and international titles and it continues annually. Daupará's website states its aim, which similarly to that of the Indigenous Film Festival, invokes the recognition and strengthening of the indigenous communities of Colombia. At the time of writing, the last edition of Daupará took place between 14 and 17 November 2013 in Bogotá. 35 indigenous communities from Colombia and 18 international communities submitted films to the Festival. Talks and

[428] Introduced in more detail both in Chapter 6 and in the practical part of my research.

workshops formed an important part of it. Unlike the other indigenous film festivals, I studied, this one had a separate section of Indigenous Fiction (Muestra Especial Ficción Indígena). There was also a panorama of indigenous animation. 14 films were presented in the fiction panel, usually shorts between 5 and 34 minutes, from countries such as Canada, Nepal, Brazil, Ecuador, the United States and Colombia. One short (which won the award for best fiction), 'Raiz del Conocimiento' (Roots of Knowledge), was produced in the Nasa community (also known as Páez Peoples, from the Cauca Department in the south-west of Colombia) in 2009-2010, by the Colectivo Cineminga,[429] supported by the Colombian Ministry of Culture. The film tells the story of the indigenous leader of the village, using both documentary and fiction techniques to present a non-linear way of understanding history in the Nasa communities. One of the films presented at the official selection was 'Mi Tierra (Mu Drua)', translated as 'My Land', by a young filmmaker, Mileidy Orozco Domicó. Orozco has become something of a celebrity of indigenous filmmaking, receiving awards at several international festivals.[430] The 21-minute long film produced in 2011 presents the director herself, a young girl from the Embera community. We learn about the killing of her grandfather when she was five, followed by her forced displacement to the city of Medellin. The film touches on issues of tradition, nature, identity, family, collective memory, and love. At nineteen years' old, Orozco made this film as part of her university work (University of Antioquia). In a video interview published in 2012, she admitted that the camera, and the audiovisual media, gave her the opportunity to build the bridge between her indigenous community and the outer world.[431]

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[429] 'Minga' meaning a voluntarily communal work.

[430] Among others, AtlantiDOC (Best Short Documentary) in Uruguay, 2012; Lakino (Latin American Film Festival in Berlin) in Germany, 2012; Festival Internacional de Cine y Video de los Pueblos Indígenas (Best debut film) in Colombia, 2012; Festival Itinerante de Cine de Derechos Humanos de Chile in Chile, 2012, Festival de Cine Internacional de Murcia in Spain, 2012, and FICCI, Festival Internacional de Cine Cartagena de Indias (New Talent Award) in Colombia, 2012.

[431] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o5SK00s8IA, accessed on 20 October 2014.

The animation and fiction sections of Daupará go beyond the traditional format of indigenous festivals, giving space for narrative storytelling and artistic ambitions. This shifts the profile of the Festival slightly towards the artistic side, without losing the social message. In my exchanges with Mora during my fieldwork, I learnt about his ambition to free the films made by the indigenous communities from the purely 'indigenous' label by allowing them to participate in a wider film exchange. Daupará is a good example of such efforts. Supported by many local organisations, starting with the Colombian Ministry of Culture, the National Library of Colombia (Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia), universities, city council, anthropology institutes, and various film organisations, it offers a refreshing view on the indigenous filmmaking.[432]

4.1.2. Ethnographic Festival

The International Festival of Ethnographic Film is an academic event organised since 1985 by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and hosted biennially by various universities across the UK. The 13th edition took place on 13–16 June 2013 in Edinburgh at the National Museum of Scotland and STAR – the Consortium of Anthropology Departments of the Universities of Edinburgh, Aberdeen and St. Andrews. The festival aims, as stated on the website, clearly define the audience of the festival: scholars, media professionals, and the public.[433] One of the intentions of the festival is to explore 'new trends and their influence upon one another and on visual

[432] http://www.daupara.org/index.php/extensions, accessed on 10 March 2015.
[433] http://raifilmfest.org.uk/film/festival/2013/festival/aims, accessed on 4 October 2014.

anthropology.'[434] This aim is supported by the creation of the 'New Observations' section of the festival: a series of visual anthropology events. The program also included discussion panels and workshops, and Q&As with selected filmmakers after screenings of their films. The audience of the festival was composed almost exclusively of academic staff and anthropology students, and documentary (ethnographic) filmmakers.[435] Some of the titles which did not make it to the main screenings were provided for the festival participants on a DVD at the library of the University of Edinburgh. Among them was Alan Ereira's 'Aluna' (a follow-up to his 'Till the end of the World').[436] The next section looks at a thought-provoking topic which was present at the analysed edition of the Festival: the invasive nature of the filming practices, and image as a commodity.

4.1.2.1. Invasive photography, or whose story is that?

'Yanomami: From Machetes to Mobile Phones' (2012, Cliff Orloff and Olga Shalgin) tells the story of the chief of the indigenous Yanomami village in Venezuela, who left his people under the pretext that he was ill and needed to be hospitalised in the nearby city. When found by the filmmakers a decade later, he abruptly demanded to be paid if the crew wanted to film him. When the filmmakers made the original documentary in the same place ten years earlier, the chief was still living with his people. At that time, he was happily contributing to the creation of the film. It is no longer 'losing the soul' which causes indigenous animosity towards cameras; what they fear today is not getting

[434] Ibid.

[435] For many visual anthropology students, the festival was an opportunity to present their university coursework in the form of films.

[436] Analysed in Chapter 4.2.1.

paid for being photographed, suggests the film.[437] The awareness that being a film subject can bring financial gains has changed the conditions of many ethnographic productions. The commodity of 'indigenous photography/film' changes its location and becomes increasingly controlled by the social actors themselves. In another scene of the same film we see the filmmakers presenting the villagers with photographs they have taken on their previous visit. One woman bursts into tears, as it is the first time she sees her son who had died some years before.[438] No visual representation can claim to be innocent in its attempt to 'represent the lives of Others'. It can cause strong emotional impact and directly affect people's lives.

However, the most memorable commentary on visual representation which was showcased at the festival was Joshua Oppenheimer's 'The Act of killing'.[439] The film refers to the genocide in Indonesia in 1965 when thousands of people were tortured and exterminated as part of the 'anti-communist' action of the government. Until today, those responsible for these atrocities are perceived in Indonesia as national heroes. In preparation for his film, Oppenheimer interviewed some of the perpetrators and eventually selected the most infamous one, Anwar, as the main protagonist for his film. The killers, including Anwar were still proud of their actions, and keen to talk about the past. Oppenheimer's idea was to make the killers re-enact their deeds from over fifty years before. The result is visually beautiful, amusing at times, but extremely hard to watch. The most uncomfortable realisation from watching 'The Act of killing' is that we start to feel some sympathy for the protagonists. This is a very uneasy feeling. Firstly, because we are constantly being reminded that they killed and tortured thousands of

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[437] Of course, this is not new. It happened very early on when Europeans started to use their cameras to record indigenous peoples.

[438] It is not difficult to imagine a similar scene in any other context: a mother who becomes very emotional while looking at the photograph of a child she has lost. One does not have to live on the edge of civilisation, unaccustomed to images in everyday life, to be emotionally touched by a photograph.

[439] The film was also presented at the Berlinale Film Festival the same year.

people; secondly, because they do not seem to feel any remorse about it. At the same time, they are not the typical 'bad guys': they are kind, well-mannered, very supportive of each other, loving fathers and husbands. They do not look for trouble, their behaviour is gentle, and only the terrible, almost surrealist stories they recount remind us about their gruesome past. Towards the end of the film, the process of representation (representation on the second level, in the form of film in the film) becomes increasingly problematised. Having murdered so many people, Anwar finds it challenging and progressively impossible to repeat the scene of the interrogation and murder. He admits how he suddenly felt his dignity being totally destroyed (in the moment when he played the victim). For the purpose of the video they make, Anwar and his fellow ex-killers constantly switch perspectives by changing the roles, playing in turns perpetrators and victims. After his moment of breakdown, Anwar quickly composes himself and tells the crew he is ready to try again. However, he fails again, not being able to stand the emotional pressure of his memories. Herman, his fellow ex-killer, offers him water and consolation, concerned by seeing his friend so visibly distressed and shaken. What is particularly striking in this scene is that the procedure of torture and killing was Anwar's daily routine, and in his long lasting 'career' he would have many occasions to reflect on the act of killing. However, it is only the act of representing, the very process of re-enacting the situation for the purpose of film, that for the very first time takes him out of his role, and clearly shakes his emotions.

Following the festival, the film was distributed in art picture houses, gaining significant attention in circles unrelated to anthropology. It won 64 awards at various festivals, and it was nominated for many others. Oppenheimer has not discovered any hidden truths about the story of the Indonesian gangsters. All he did was to make a performance of that, which lifted the story to another level. We can also consider this film in psycho-sociological and artistic experiment categories. The director made the

protagonists wear costumes and makeup, and he created visually stunning scenes with dream-like, hallucinatory effects which strongly contrasted with the senseless brutality of the plot. Oppenheimer's film attests for the power and the importance of visual representation, which can sometimes become even stronger than the reality.

The analysed edition of the RAI festival proved how diversely defined ethnographic film can be today. Most examples focused on the role of image-making and its power to influence and affect people. It also reflected on how image-making can influence the subjects themselves once they become aware of the commodity value of films.

4.1.3. Artistic festivals

4.1.3.1. The Berlinale

Moving on from the ethnographic and indigenous contexts, I now discuss the presence of some ethnographic films at one of the most influential film festivals of an entirely different profile from those already analysed in the previous parts of this chapter. The Berlin International Film Festival, also known as Berlinale, is among one of the most acclaimed and influential art film festivals in the world, next to Cannes or Venice. It has been running for over 60 years, showing about 400 films from different categories. Founded in 1951 in West Berlin, it unquestionably remains one of the most important film events to this day. A diverse group of attendees to the Berlinale includes filmmakers, young talents, art amateurs, professionals, international critics, and a significant number of cinephiles and the general film public, venturing to Berlin from all over the world. The profile of this festival is focussed mostly on international and

European premieres. There are various sections of the festival dedicated to different types of film.[440] For the first time, the year 2013 welcomed a new section to the festival called 'NATIVe – A Journey into Indigenous Cinema' - a preview of indigenous feature films, documentaries and shorts from around the world. The regional focus of the first year's NATIVe section was centred around Australia, New Zealand/Oceania, Canada and the United States. The 2015 edition of NATIVe was focused on Latin America, with nineteen films from around the continent.[441] Notably, no Colombian film was included. The Berlinale website states: 'With NATIVe, the Berlinale aims to show its appreciation of Indigenous cinematic heritage and demonstrate its relevance beyond tribe and nation'.[442] At the analysed 2013 edition, there was a significant disproportion between the attendance of the regular screenings from the main sections of the festival (which were sold out in advance) and the NATIVe one (which often did not fill up). Also, the venues for the NATIVe screenings were often pushed to more remote parts of Berlin.

A noteworthy Colombian production was presented at the Generation section in 2013: 'La Eterna Noche de las Doce Lunas' (The Eternal Night of the Twelve Moons) by Priscilla Padilla. It was the only Colombian title presented that year, and one of the very few Latin American ones. This full-length, visually-beautiful production tells the story of the initiation celebrations of Pili, a young Wayuu girl,[443] entering her puberty period. When Pili turns twelve, she voluntarily goes into a year-long period of seclusion, which in Wayuu tradition transforms girls into mature women, highly valued by their community. It is the time when she gets her first menstruation, and for twelve

[440] These include, among others: Competition, Panorama (independent and art house), German films, short films, Forum (avant-garde and experimental), Special Gala, Retrospective, Homage, Classics, and many special presentations.

[441]https://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2015/02_programm_2015/02_programm_2015.html; accessed on 25 April 2015.

[442]http://www.berlinale.de/en/das_festival/sektionen_sonderveranstaltungen/native/index.html; accessed on 25 April 2015.

[443] Wayuu is an indigenous group from the Guajira region in Northern Colombia.

months she is hidden from the world in a little hut, with very limited contact with the outside world.[444] Her main activity during this long year is weaving, which gives her some comfort and eases her isolation. Towards the end of the seclusion period, an old man approaches Pili's grandmother, offering a valuable necklace as a price to 'buy' Pili as a wife for one of his nephews. The grandmother thanks him for his interest, but very unambiguously rejects the offer, explaining that her granddaughter is too young for that. Just after the old man leaves, she enters Pili's hut and tells her about his visit. She asks the girl: 'Do you want such future for yourself? All the Wayuu man tells you is to prepare them the hammock and give them food. Is that what you want for your future?' Having finished her seclusion period, Pili finally leaves the hut and presents the fruit of her weaving skills to family and friends. While she showcases her colourful hammocks and rugs, her friends enthusiastically keep taking photos of a visibly changed Pili, using their mobile phones and cameras.

At the Q&A after the screening, young Pili was asked if she liked it or not that a film was made about her experience and her culture. She was visibly intimidated by the scale of the event, and her shy answer did not allow a proper judgement on her real opinion about the whole experience. The film offers a refreshing commentary on indigenous traditions, documenting them and questioning at the same time. It is notable that the person who initiates the change is the grandmother, providing both guidance on how to follow the traditional ways of life and inspiration to challenge them. Also, it is noteworthy that being such an intimate ceremony, seclusion was not only filmed, but also presented at the European festival, with the young Pili personally attending and answering questions. My reflection after the festival was that creating a separate 'indigenous' section was not necessarily of benefit for the films presented within it.

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[444] Mainly her grandmother and very few women are allowed inside; Pili never leaves the hut during the seclusion period.

Despite best intentions, applying the 'native' label potentially marginalised the reception. Moreover, as the example of Padilla's film attests, more mainstream sections of the festival could accommodate 'indigenous' filmmaking very well. However, the participation of 'indigenous' films at the Berlinale could be seen as a question of reputation and it is certainly a big achievement for 'The Eternal Night of the Twelve Moons' to be presented at an event of such importance. The contrast with the festivals discussed above is blatant: 'More than 300,000 sold tickets, almost 20,000 professional visitors from 124 countries, including around 3,700 journalists: art, glamour, parties and business are all inseparably linked at the Berlinale.'[445] In the face of that, even the presence in the festival's catalogue might potentially contribute towards the inclusion of indigenous cinema into a wider film world.

In the last few sections I provided an overview of various types of film festivals which are potential venues for projecting films concerned with indigenous communities. Each festival attracts different audiences and, as a consequence, influences the expectations set for the films. In the following parts of this chapter I further extend the framework of reference for the visual representations of the 'Other' by examining specific titles that were created for 'foreign' audiences (foreign to the filmed subjects). The selection of case studies looks at different filming practices related either directly to filming the communities from Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, or other minority groups. The films I examine in this section fall into a category of TV films, a fake documentary by a Colombian art filmmaker, an art installation, a mainstream film with well-known stars, and finally a surprising indigenous-themed box office hit.

[445] https://www.berlinale.de/en/das_festival/festivalprofil/profil_der_berlinale/index.html; accessed on 25 April 2015.

4.2. Film case studies

Similarly to the festivals section, the selection of my case studies is far from exhaustive, but to illustrate the widespread presence of the reflections on representing the 'Other' in film I deliberately chose some of the most telling examples from different genres. Despite being made in different countries, depicting different subjects, and being produced with different audiences in mind, all the films analysed in this section contribute towards the understanding of the complexity of depicting the 'Other'. They also reflect on the process of representation, often exposing certain forms of abuse within this practice.

4.2.1. Alan Ereira, the Kogui messenger

Alain Ereira has worked for the BBC since 1965, becoming an established documentary filmmaker before embarking on a filmic journey with the indigenous peoples of Colombia. He made his name as an author of various TV documentaries,[446] mainly on historical topics, but today he is probably mostly associated with 'The Heart of the World: Elder Brother's Warning,' a film he made on the slopes of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta with the Kogui in 1990. He later described his experiences in the book which took its title from the film, *The Heart of the World*. The book was republished two years later under a new title, *The Elder Brothers*, and again in 2009 as *The Elder Brother's Warning*.

'The Heart of the World: Elder Brother's Warning' is a full-length film, with carefully prepared narration, symphonic musical score, and a significant budget,

[446] http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1445359/, accessed on 28 April 2015.

including the use of helicopters. Ereira himself narrates the story, underlying all the difficulties and glories of his trip to the Sierra. Introducing the Kogui, he announces: ‘This is their first message for centuries.’ He works at convincing us about the exclusivity of this encounter throughout the film. Helicopter-shot scenes present the Lost City, granting us an unusual and rare view of this archaeological site, tightly hidden in a dense jungle. A piece of triumphant music accompanies the director’s statement:

> Here, there are still towns without the wheel, farmers without the plough, educators without the written word, priests who have the power of the government. To learn how the Tayrona organised the heart of the world, we would have to go to the Kogui. Everyone said this was impossible.

The first moment when the Kogui representatives appear in the film is perfectly staged and shot from the filmmaker’s point of view. As Ereira ascends the mountain, we see a group of the Mamos awaiting him, explaining elements of Kogui cosmology, and offering a rather hostile and increasingly angering (judging by the English voiceover) reminder that Younger Brother should keep away from the Older Brother. ‘That is me, Alan Ereira,’ the filmmaker introduces himself. Emotional music accompanies the moment when he and his crew are allowed through the gate into Kogui territory. Ereira appears in front of the camera in a bright, perfectly-ironed shirt and a hat, announcing the big moment: ‘We are now entering the last functioning civilisation of pre-Colombian America’.[447] A pompous music underlines the importance of the moment. Already in the village, we witness a meeting in a men-only hut. Ereira explains how sacred these meetings are, triumphantly announcing his invitation to participate. A group of Kogui, tightly squeezed on the floor, mention the message which they want to pass onto the ‘Younger Brother’. The film is presented as the essential tool which can

[447] All quotes are taken from the ‘The Heart of the World: Elder Brother’s Warning’ film.

make passing this message possible. The message warns us about the 'Great Mother' being 'cut to pieces' by the Younger Brother and how this might lead to the end of the world. Apocalyptic visions of the eternal darkness and the end of the world emerge from the angered voice of an actor who interprets the translations of the Mamo's speech. 'Are we really to believe them?' asks Ereira, suggesting his attempts to remain objective. He is quick to reassure us: 'The Mamos are convinced that they have to make this film.' Ereira's cameraman often uses sophisticated compositions to catch the visual beauty of the place and its people. In some scenes, the Kogui seem to be completely unaware of the presence of the camera, sitting with their backs towards us, immersed in their daily tasks and meditations. In other scenes, we are being addressed directly either by some of the Kogui men or by Ereira himself. The camera work creates an engaging experience and encourages us to continue watching. What seems unsettling is the attempt to persuade us that thanks to the filmmaker we are gaining this exceptional and exclusive access to the community; an access which would otherwise be denied by the community and seen as breaching their appeal to be 'left in peace'. The film ends up with the words: 'We want the Younger Brother to know that he cannot come here again. He cannot come back. […] We do not want him to coming back here and interfering with us. […] Right, that is it.'[448]

Having read the original edition of Ereira's book (which was before my first visit to the Sierra), I questioned my entire research project. He warns us: '[The Kogui] want only silence. They need very little from us, except to be left in peace'.[449] This statement clearly suggests that embarking onto a journey to investigate the Kogui life would be a very bad idea, doomed to an ultimate failure. I felt almost like I was about to commit a grave sacrilege, breaking some unwritten rules, crossing the line which should

[448] 1:24 minutes into the film.
[449] Ereira, A, 1990: p.226.

never be crossed. To my big surprise, the Kogui I met during my initial fieldwork[450] turned out to be not only friendly and open, but far from the fierce society of misanthropes pictured in Ereira's warning. The more I explored the communities of the Sierra, the more suspicious I became of the way they were portrayed by 'the BBC,' as the Kogui called Ereira during their collaboration. Moreover, they are not as isolated as the author of 'The Elder Brother's Warning' wanted us to believe. There are numbers of Kogui villages scattered around the slopes of the Sierra, and some of them are on the way leading to the Lost City.[451] The Kogui living there not only speak Spanish, but they are also not afraid to talk to the people passing through.

In 2012, when Ereira was at the final stage of making 'Aluna', I got in touch with him, hoping to get involved in the production or even the post-production of the documentary. The film is claimed to be made entirely by the indigenous crew formed by the Kogui Mamos, with the collaboration and support of the British director. My polite request was rejected. I was left with an impression that ever since his first film with the Kogui, Ereira wanted to be seen as the only Westerner with an exclusive access to the community. As I realised during my subsequent fieldwork, the Kogui and the Arhuacos were particularly unsatisfied with Ereira's filming practice. According to them, the way Ereira represented them is damaging, inconsistent with their system of values, and far away from how they see themselves.[452] 'Aluna' was produced almost 20 years after 'The Heart of the World.' It was Ereira's 'second attempt' to pass the message to the Younger Brother. The style of the film is similar to its prequel: it contains beautiful shots of the Kogui villages, emotional music, and Ereira's off-screen narration about the

[450] In September - October 2012.

[451] Which is where I conducted the preparatory stage of my research.

[452] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiwtopHCQPg; accessed on 4 May 2015, Pablo Mora talked about the community dissatisfaction with Ereira's work; starting around 4:50 minutes into the video interview.

tribe that ‘does not welcome strangers’. There is even the same bridge which featured Ereira triumphantly entering the forbidden Kogui community twenty years earlier. ‘The Mamos said they want to work with me because the world is sick and dying, and we have to understand that,’ he explains.[453] Ereira used the footage from his previous film to introduce himself again, and to show us how the technology and quality of filming progressed during that time. Although we hear similar warnings from the Kogui, we are probably looking at the following generation to that depicted in the original film. ‘We must renew this message to our English brother so that he will explain it to the world,’ one of them announces. Ereira notices that since his last visit the Kogui learnt how to use a camera.

The main plot of ‘Aluna’ focusses around the travel to London with the aim to pick up a golden thread which then needs to be taken back to Colombia to mark the sacred places. We witness the Mamos having their passports issued (with fingerprints serving as signatures), going through the security control at the airport, barefoot, and somehow intimidated. Once in England, Ereira and the Mamos go to collect the 400-kilometre-long golden thread which they plan to use for their project. There is an almost comical scene where the thread-maker explains to the Mamos the machinery he used to make their thread. Speaking no word in English, the Kogui certainly understand nothing of it, but does it not make it a truly engaging cinema? On return to the Sierra, they start to reconnect the material world to ‘Aluna’ by placing the golden thread between the sacred points of the Black Line. In one scene, Ereira asked the Mamo: ‘So, Jacinto, what is the plan for today’s filming? What do you want to do?’, as if suggesting that he, the Mamo, was in charge of the filming. Ironically, the scene is clearly staged, which suggests that Ereira had it perfectly scheduled to have this question included in the final cut of the film. He challenged the Mamos to be more explicit about their message,

[453] Quote from the film off-screen commentary by Alan Ereira.

because 'so far he has not seen any proof that the world is dying'. Mamo Jacinto replied that, in that case, they will have to consult the water because this is something they have to show in action, the fact that they have a real connection with nature. Having done their water-consultation, one of the Mamos asked Ereira: 'The Mother, through the water, is asking: are you going to help me or just take pictures? Do you think we say these words for the sake of talking?' In the last scene of the film the Mamos reassured us that there was still some hope. Meanwhile, Ereira got into the river and took a ritual bath. He commented: 'I thought this was the Mamos' journey and I would film what happened to them. But, in fact, they were taking me on a journey. They see a possibility of hope if we listen.' As the Mamos undressed and got into the water, Ereira burst in jovial laughter and took off his shirt and trousers.

How can we evaluate Alan Ereira's mission to be a Kogui spokesman, and the plausibility of his film's ambition to save the planet? It is likely that many people who might be interested in watching 'Aluna' are already sensitive to ecological problems. At the same time, the audiences are equally likely not to have much influence on the decision-making in this field. That was, in fact, one of the questions from the audience at the film's premiere: what one, as an individual, feeling so powerless in the world ruled by multinational companies, can do to stop that destruction?[454] The response was first translated into Spanish to a Spanish-speaking Kogui who then translated it to a Mamo. The answer was an advice to understand the message and to reflect on it. Is it that simple? Alternatively, has anything got lost in translation? What is the audience of such film likely to do, intrigued by the filmic experience? Is it to buy Alain Ereira's book, which he brings to the projections? Meanwhile, the Kogui are likely to remain yet just another beautiful curiosity from the 'end of the world.' The official website of 'Aluna' describes the film as follows:

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[454] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkppglKa3_g; accessed on 3 May 2015.

> ALUNA is made by and with the Kogui, a genuine lost civilisation hidden on an isolated triangular pyramid mountain in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta […]. In 1990 they emerged to work with Alan Ereira, making a 90-minute film for BBC1 in which they dramatically warned of our need to change course. Then they withdrew again.[455]

Yet again we are reminded of the Kogui's isolation and Ereira's exclusive access they agreed to grant him. In the Guardian online article 'What Colombia's Kogui people can teach us about the environment',[456] published in 2013, Jini Reddy presents the Kogui as 'culturally intact' and 'highly attuned to nature.' We read: 'In 1990, in a celebrated BBC documentary, the Kogui made contact with the outside world.' However, what is this 'outside world'? How can we determine the boundaries? 'Aluna' had its world premiere at Sheffield Doc Fest 2012, with Alex Rogers, a Professor of Conservation Biology at Oxford University, chairing the Q&A session at the end of the film.[457] The projection was accompanied by two Kogui men. This creates an intriguing duality of their position: they are those who 'should not be approached,' according to Ereira, and who want to be 'left in peace' and protect the planet, but instead they fly to the UK to participate in the promotion of Ereira's film. The website for 'Aluna - the movie' discusses the question of distribution: 'Why release through film festivals and cinemas when you could just get it out there online right away?' The response states:

> We intend to release in all media. It is almost impossible to achieve effective cinema presence after an online release, and we want cinema for its impact in generating national press articles about the Kogui and their message as well as reaching a part of the audience that may not view online. So we go to cinema first, but TV and online release will surely follow.[458]

[455] http://www.alunathemovie.com/about/, accessed on 12-1-2014.

[456] Reddy, J: What Colombia's Kogi people can teach us about the environment, The Guardian, 29 October 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/colombia-kogi-environment-destruction, accessed on 18/1/2014.

[457] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkppglKa3_g; accessed on 3 May 2015.

[458] http://www.alunathemovie.com/your-questions/, accessed on 12-1-2014.

However, if the Kogui message is the whole reason behind making the film, surely, the bigger the reach of the film, the better. I can testify that for months after the film was first released I struggled to find a way to watch it. It was only presented on few niche festivals which I could never attend. Until now, it is only available via online purchase/rental. Also, although advertised as 'made entirely by the Kogui', 'Aluna' has been produced and directed by Alan Ereira, with Paulo Pérez as director of photography, Andrew Philip as editor, with a proper post-production team, catering, drivers, and a number of additional cameramen, a legal adviser, a film finance consultant and a publicity representative.[459] So, is it really about the message, or perhaps the filmmaker is skilfully using the 'message' to boost his marketing and distribution? What is most worrying is that the communities of the Sierra profoundly disagree with the way Ereira portrays them.[460] This might suggest that either there is no unity in their approach, or some elements which do not fit the film were simply ignored. However, even Ereira admits that he is not an anthropologist. He is a very skilled filmmaker who found an immensely rewarding subject and a strategy for how to make eye-catching movies.

4.2.2. Jago Cooper and 'The last kingdoms of South America'

The following case study is a production addressed to slightly wider and more general audiences. The BBC4 series, 'The last Kingdoms of South America,' was produced and directed by Martin Kemp and presented and narrated by Jago Cooper. The third out of four parts of the series entitled 'Lands of Gold,' focusses on Colombia and its once two major indigenous communities: Muiscas and Taironas (or Tayronas). Made into an hour-

[459] All the information is from the film's credits.

[460] As discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

long TV documentary format, and first broadcasted in January 2013, the episode is very informative and audience-friendly. The BBC website advertised the series as follows:

> Through the mountains and jungles of Colombia, archaeologist Dr Jago Cooper goes in search of the truth behind one of the greatest stories ever told - the legend of El Dorado. […] Dr Cooper reveals forgotten peoples who valued gold in a way the Western world still struggles to understand, travelling to an astonishing lost city and meeting the last survivors of an ancient civilisation.[461]

The film is categorised by the BBC as factual, in the Arts, Culture and the Media section. And it provides exactly what it promises, that is, an accessible and comprehensive introduction to Colombia's indigenous past, backed up by reliable names behind the production, with a hint of adventure. Showed during popular TV hours (and online, soon after), the film benefits from an atmospheric musical score, slick editing, and engaging commentary (i.e. 'South America is the perfect place to keep secrets' - this opening statement of the film sets the atmosphere). Due to the scope of the material covered, the depth of our encounter with the Kogui in this series cannot possibly go too far. However, packed with historical facts, the 'Lands of Gold' provides an overview of the context of the emergence of the Kogui culture. The narration in the first person leads us through different places in Colombia, investigating various aspects of the importance of gold for Muiscas and Tayronas.

In January 2014, I interviewed Jago Cooper about the practicalities of his project. I was particularly interested in his collaboration with the Kogui. Cooper made it very clear that having the BBC behind him made the production of the film much easier and smoother, explaining that the film was organised by the local 'fixers' and through official channels including the Colombian embassy and the *Casa Indígena*. The plot was carefully pre-planned, and the entire shooting took about thirty-six hours, with the team and the interpreters arriving by helicopters. Asked about any obstacles or

[461] http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01qbz9k, accessed on 10 January 2014.

challenges in the filming process, Cooper admitted that having a 'positive message' as a subject of his film,[462] representing a respected institution, and being backed by the embassy and indigenous organisations proved to be a successful recipe for the collaboration with the community. Scenes were not rehearsed but having learnt about the Kogui cosmology and philosophy and having organised the filming via the 'fixers', Cooper knew what answers he expected to hear from them. His attitude was friendly and helpful, and he was willing to share his practical advices, should I wish to proceed with my filming in the Sierra. Additionally, I got in touch with the director of the series, Martin Kemp. He also underlined the importance of getting in touch with the local 'fixers' in Colombia before embarking on the filming process. Asked about the reception of his film in Colombia, he replied: 'I did ask that a copy of the DVD be made available to the Kogui, but so far I have not had any feedback. The Colombian Embassy and various academic institutions in Colombia plus all our interviewees have seen the film and were happy with it. I do not think it has yet been seen on Colombian TV, but hopefully, it will be shown there at some point'.[463] The films made this way are, no doubt, very accomplished in terms of the story, narration, the technical and artistic side, as well as the research preparation. However, going through the same 'fixers' could result in an impoverished variety of responses from the subjects. As I disclose in Chapter 6, my initial experience with the communities of the Sierra was very different. I was my own one-person-team, I did not have any media institution backing up my work, there was very little funding involved, and I did not rely on any fixers to prepare the ground for my interviews. I did not have the embassy organising the army's helicopters to get to the Ciudad Perdida. All the generations of the Kogui people I met on my way were very friendly and I never experienced any of them refusing to be

[462] Namely, the gold productions and its significance.
[463] Email correspondence on 13December 2013.

filmed or questioning my credibility. I never had any of them warning me that they need to obtain a permission from a Mamo or refusing to speak to me because I am a woman.

Possibly, for the majority of the general European public the familiarity with the Kogui starts with the first images of Kemp's and Cooper's film. This was, precisely, their aim: to introduce communities which are practically unknown for anyone beyond the specialists or the local people.[464] Whereas the productions made by indigenous communities do not tend to circulate beyond the narrow circle of film festivals, films like the 'Lands of Gold' are presented mostly via TV and Internet channels (BBC iPlayer, and, less officially, YouTube). In his interview with Peter Moore for the Wonderlust-Travel Magazine, Cooper is compared to the 'real life Indiana Jones'.[465] Similarly to Ereira's film, this production also places a white, non-indigenous outsider, the narrator, at the main focal point of the film, in a way replicating an imperialistic representation of the 'Other'. He, the narrator, becomes a 'hero,' the 'discoverer' who gives us (the unexperienced and the detached from that reality) a rare access to the distant and 'undiscovered' secrets of the ancient civilisations. We, the audience, identify with the adventurer, without whom the 'discovery' would not have been possible. Nevertheless, there is an enormous difference between these two productions. While Copper presents a skilful, concise overview of the history of gold in Colombia, partially introducing the indigenous communities related to that history, Ereira embarks on a mission of being the only link between 'us' and 'them,' placing us in a somehow uncomfortable, voyeuristic position of watching the forbidden.

[464] The other three parts of the series focus, respectively, on the Chachapoya people of Peru (Episode 1: People of the Clouds), on pre-Incan civilisation of Tiwanaku in Bolivia (Episode 2: The Stone at the Centre), and on Chimor - kingdom of Chimú culture of northern Peru (Episode 4: Kingdom of the Desert).

[465] http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/articles/interviews/dr-jago-cooper-lost-kingdoms-of-south-america?page=all, accessed on 10 January 2014.

4.2.3. Luis Ospina: 'Agarrando Pueblo'

'Agarrando Pueblo' (Vampires of poverty, 1978) by Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo, is one of the most striking filmic critiques of the unbalanced power relations between filmmakers and film subjects in Colombia. In this provocative short film, Ospina and Mayolo criticise 'pornomiseria,' which was the prevailing theme in Colombian cinema during the 1970s. Many films of that period tended to explore (and exploit) the extreme poverty and misery of the lower social strata. 'Vampires of Poverty' exposes the pattern where poverty, violence or civil conflicts attract filmmakers or photographers who want to document these problems for the consumption and enjoyment of Western audiences, thirsty for strong, powerful images of human misery.[466] These kinds of images sell, and they sell well. Therefore, one's poverty becomes a money-making machine in the process of documenting it.

Ospina is one of the most prominent and influential Colombian filmmakers of his time. Together with Carlos Mayolo and Andres Caicedo, he formed 'Grupo de Cali,' portraying the city of Cali for many decades. Although Ospina lives in Bogotá now, he remains the director of the Cali film festival,[467] and he is still a very active filmmaker. The importance of his work has recently been re-discovered by international audiences. Among others, he had a big retrospective at Tate Modern in 2014 as part of the 10th Discovering Latin America Film Festival,[468] as well as retrospectives in Madrid,[469]

[466] This exploitation can be compared with the strategy denounced by Renzo Martens in his 'Enjoy the Poverty' analysed in the following section of this chapter.

[467] http://www.festivaldecinecali.gov.co/festival/comité-directivo.html; accessed on 26 April 2015.

[468] http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/eventseries/luis-ospina-and-grupo-de-cali; accessed on 26 April 2015.

[469] http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/luis-ospina-agente-triple, accessed on 26 April 2015.

Paris,[470] and Mexico.[471] He is the author of many short films, documentaries (including 'false documentaries'), and several full-length films.[472] 'Vampires of poverty' is considered one of the most outstanding films in Colombian cinematography. The film was made as a part of a wingspan of a bigger project called 'El corazón de cine' (The heart of the cinema), which is an allusion to the text by Vladimir Mayakovsky.[473] The project was designed to investigate the meaning of cinema on the ontological level, and the influence of consumer society and political cinema.[474] Using the form of a fake documentary, Ospina's film shows a supposedly German TV crew making a film about the misery of the streets of Cali. According to the author, this film is the first fake documentary (a genre Ospina will embrace in his further work) in the whole Latin America. The first scenes show the crew approaching a beggar, a barefoot woman, a street performer, and a few homeless children swimming in a fountain. Some of them get visibly distressed and angry with the crew, which becomes slightly uncomfortable to watch. Filmmakers travel through the city by car, exchanging particularly cynical comments about the footage they want to record. In one scene, they state: 'We need crazy people, beggars, street kids. What other kinds of poverty are there? Let's see […] Let's get some whores now.'[475] They find a shack in a terrible condition and they hire actors to play a scene depicting a day of an exceptionally poor family who, supposedly, lives there. The actors are being explained what is expected of them, what they have to say, and what their jobs and names are for the purpose of the shooting. They are asked to represent an extreme face of poverty in the scene. During the shooting, an unexpected

[470] http://www.espanol.rfi.fr/cultura/20130619-luis-ospina-un-tigre-de-papel-en-paris; accessed on 26 April 2015.

[471]http://www.proimagenescolombia.com/secciones/pantalla_colombia/breves_plantilla.php?id_noticia=6009; accessed on 26 April 2015.

[472] http://www.luisospina.com.

[473] http://www.luisospina.com/archivo/grupo-de-cali/agarrando-pueblo/, accessed on 26 July 2014.

[474] Ibid.

[475] Quote from the dialogue of the film.

interruption occurs: a mad-looking man interferes with the crew and starts chasing them with a machete, disrupting the filming. After a while, when they try to calm him down with an attempt of a bribe, he exposes his nudity and tries to stick the banknotes into his buttocks. The scene looks extremely realistic and threatening, and the film crew appears visibly disturbed. Only later on, when we see Ospina and Mayolo sat next to the actor who interpreted the mad man, discussing with him the outcome of the scene, we realise that it was all staged. On the visual level, there is an aesthetic distinction for the 'film in the film': the supposed-to-be documentary the crew is filming for a German TV (and the film they make is entitled 'Future for Whom?') is shown in colour, whereas the 'documentation of the filming process' is in black and white.

In the context of such socially-engaged filmmaking, it is worth mentioning that Mayolo, unlike Ospina, was a member of the Communist Party. In the text Ospina and Mayolo wrote about the film,[476] they invite us to reflect on the relation between the filmmaker and the filmed, keeping in mind the damaging objectification of the subject and the deformations of the reality caused by images. What is particularly significant in this movie is the attention to the reaction of those who are being filmed. Ospina uses a morally difficult provocation to expose what he criticises. The falsification of reality in order to reveal a hidden layer is not an easy task, but the result Ospina and Mayolo managed to achieve is worth noticing.

It appears that not much has changed since 'The Vampires of Poverty' criticised its contemporary filmmakers. In one of his interviews, Ospina said that the films were made to provoke the public.[477] He also explained the concept behind the making of 'Agarrando Pueblo' in detail:

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[476] http://www.luisospina.com/archivo/grupo-de-cali/agarrando-pueblo/; accessed on 26 July 2014.

[477] http://www.luisospina.com/sobre-su-obra/entrevistas/luis-ospina-su-concepción-del-cine-y-sus-obras-vistas-por-él-mismo-y-por-otros-por-cuadernos-de-ci/; accessed on 26 April 2015.

> Se nos ha dicho que la película no hace uso del cine como arma revolucionaria. Pero lo que muestra 'Agarrando Pueblo' es que justamente, el cine es un arma, un instrumento en manos de manipuladores, ya sean de izquierda o de derecha. Mayolo y yo hicimos una película sobre lo que conocemos: sobre el cine, sus formas y lo que significa develarlas y ponerlas en entredicho. En ella se mezclan técnicas y métodos del documental y el happening; por consiguiente, la realidad que se capta es la del mismo hecho de filmar, la de una forma de hacerlo a lo que respondimos reaccionando, tomando partido ante una situación concreta que compromete a una concepción del cine y de su propio valor social.[478]

A paternalistic approach, demagogy and manipulations are often applied when filming the indigenous or the poor, with the aim to create successful and 'attractive' films to Western audiences. The moral and ethical consequences of such practices tend to be diminished or ignored, hidden behind the 'discovery' of the filming processes, and the satisfaction of gaining applause and fame. In her review of 'Vampires of Poverty,' Ana María López writes that in the 1969s and 1970s, Latin American documentaries were traditionally associated with taking an active political attitude, making such filming process significantly more ideological than anywhere else.[479] Moreover, even if Ospina underlines that the filmmaking in that time was significantly more political than nowadays,[480] López points out that the authors of 'Vampires of Poverty' did not try to be actively political in their attempt to speak about the reality of the time. Ospina's view is that the times were political, so by necessity, all the work made there was somehow political. He has used provocation techniques since his early filmic experiments. In the

[478] We were told that the film is not being used as a revolutionary weapon. However, what 'Agarrando Pueblo' clearly shows, is exactly that: a film is a weapon, a tool in the hands of manipulators, whether they are from the left or right. Mayolo and I made a film about what we know: about the cinema, its forms, and the meaning of unveiling these forms and putting them into question. We mixed the techniques and methods of documentary and happening; therefore, what the process manages to capture is the reality of the very fact of filming, the way of doing that, to which we responded reacting, taking sides, with a particular situation that involves a concept of cinema and its own social value; http://www.luisospina.com/sobre-su-obra/entrevistas/luis-ospina-su-concepción-del-cine-y-sus-obras-vistas-por-él-mismo-y-por-otros-por-cuadernos-de-ci/; accessed on 26 April 2015.

[479] http://www.elojoquepiensa.net/elojoquepiensa/index.php/articulos/135, accessed on 14 December 2014.

[480] 28th November 2014, Q&A at Tate Modern after projection of the films of Grupo de Cali, as part of the 10th Discovering Latin American Film Festival.

interview quoted by López, he explained that when the theoretical criticism proved not to be enough, he and Mayolo decided to take action and produce an active filmic critique. But initially ‘Vampires of poverty’ was not received too well. Like many thought-provoking films and arts, its significance became apparent only with time. It remains a significant example of how the ethical code of practice of any filmmaker could easily be compromised in the search for ‘strong’ and ‘attractive’ images.

4.2.4. Renzo Martens: 'Enjoy the poverty’

Released in 2008, ‘Episode III - Enjoy the poverty’ provides a refreshing, if controversial, reflection on practices of visual representations, the way they get created, the ownership of images, and the way they circulate. Renzo Martens, the director, spent two years in the Republic of Congo. He documented the role of poverty and the civil war as the sources of income for those who get to register it, while the main actors of this poverty remain excluded from the benefits they generate by the fact of being ‘attractive’ subjects for the foreign filmmakers and photographers. According to the statistics presented in the film, poverty generates much more income than gold, diamonds and cocoa, that is, all the main Congo’s resources taken together. Martens informally interviews one of the international journalists, who admits earning $50 per picture. In an embarrassingly cruel impromptu interview, an Italian photographer explains that the images he takes are his, simply because he snaps them. ‘So, the people on the pictures own nothing?’ asks Martens. ‘No, because I took the pictures’, responds the reporter, ‘I am the photographer, the owner of the pictures’. ‘But they organised everything that is in the picture’, insists Martens, ‘You just came and made the picture.’ However, the ‘author of the images’ has it all clear: ‘What do you mean organised? It is

me, I choose the one that I think is a good picture, and that makes that picture mine.' Martens takes it as an inspiration to create a provocative 'emancipation program' for a group of local photographers running portrait studio in Kanyabayonga in eastern Congo. They own a rudimentary photography shop, a wooden shed full of old faded negatives, providing photography services for birthdays, weddings, and other celebrations. Old, faded prints of men in traditional Congolese clothes, clumsily pinned to the rotten cardboard advertises their services. The owner admits that they charge 75 cents per photograph. Martens illustrates how miserably inadequate this price is when contrasted with what is being paid for the images of war: $1 per month for the parties' photos (for 20 images, after the costs), or $1000 for 'raped women, corpses and malnourished children.' The photographers remain puzzled and shyly admit that they do not know how to go about selling the images. They ask the director to guide them. The first bitter lesson starts when they arrive in a tent of a poor mother with a child whose husband died in a conflict with the rebels. 'Widow of war with a child,' Martens formulates the caption, while the woman is given a small payment for posing for the photograph. As soon as it happens, another woman, mother-of-many, emerges from her tent with a desperation in her eyes, dramatically asking for help for her starving children. One of the photographers gets visibly distressed and reacts with anger: 'We did not come here to help people. We just came here to register their problems,' he says. Lesson number two takes them to the local hospital. A doctor automatically undresses the most malnourished child whose eyes are feverishly fixed on a non-existing point, without noticing flashes and lenses pointed out at his swollen-bellied body. Martens asks the doctor if he undressed the children for the foreign photographers. The doctor answers without hesitation: yes. Martens continues his mentoring: 'You must choose the worst cases. These are the photos that you can sell.' This experience has its sad end when they meet a representative of Médecins Sans Frontières to try to organise their press passes.

Martens enquires: ‘Can these men have press passes so they can make money from their images?’ The instant rejection is reinforced by the accusation of being completely immoral. When asked about the international photographers, the Médecins Sans Frontières representative explains that, in their case, it is for communication purposes, so it falls under a category beyond moral dilemmas. He abruptly ends the meeting saying that the images Martens and his friends brought are just not good enough. Leaving, Martens explains to the photographers that it will probably not work, as they cannot take good photos, have no Internet access, and no chances to get the press cards. The men leave completely disillusioned and morally betrayed. They look fooled, probably feeling used by Martens. For a moment, they thought they found hope to improve their existence by exploring (and exploiting) the misery of their countrymen and women, stricken by hunger, war and severe poverty. But suddenly this hope got brutally taken away from them and replaced with regret, disenchantment, and bitter disappointment.

Martens uses provocation throughout the movie. The title of the film is an excellent example of that. Big, heavy boxes carried for him by the local man turn out to hide a huge neon stating: ‘Please, enjoy the poverty.’ He assembles the neon sign to encourage provincial celebrations. ‘Why did you come?’, the locals ask him. ‘To tell you that you better enjoy poverty rather than fight it and be unhappy.’ ‘Will you project the film here?’, they enquire. ‘The film will be shown in Europe, not here,’ responds Martens, with cruel certainty, leaving no place for illusion. ‘Experiencing your suffering makes you a better person,’ he adds. Finally, he illuminates the gathered crowd: ‘You are not merely people in need of aid. You are also people that aid the rest of the world.’ He lightens the neon. People applaud. Dances begin. Powered by a generator, neon flashes in the darkness. ‘The children are enjoying it,’ someone notices. Martens creates an impression of being naive, sometimes blunt, to the point of losing good manners. He

seems to choose such approach as a way to earn the trust of the people he films and to get from them what he needs for his film. On one occasion, he appears to break out of this role (or perhaps it is also perfectly planned and staged?): as he washes his face in the river, he bursts: 'It is not easy, even with best intentions to help people benefit from their talents, from their own resources. Filmed from the land, the flashing neon loaded on a boat floats back into the darkness of the river. Some letters on the neon are missing. Even the poverty is not complete. Imperfection, loss, and absence complement it. The film ends.

Martens classifies his film as 'art' and not as a documentary film. This classification somehow complicates the reception of this production, and Martens' status as a provocateur. In a way, similarly to all previous case studies analysed in this chapter, Martens is the main character of his film: another Western filmmaker conducting an experiment to inspire the economic emancipation of the people from yet another conflict zone. Moreover, this experiment proves to be a skilful recipe for a successful film, which leads to Martens' recognition as an artist and creates some interest around his person. A sad (and perhaps not fully intended) paradox of this and other similar films is that they fall into the same trap as the practices they criticise so fiercely. In the Guardian article by Stuart Jeffries from 2014, Martens admits the film's failure: 'However critical it is of labour conditions in Congo, in the end, it only improved labour conditions in Berlin's Mitte and in New York's Lower East Side. Because that is where people see it, talk about it, write pieces about it - whether for or against does not really matter.'[481] In the same article we read:

> If he was useless at helping Africans, Martens was brilliant at helping himself. He left Africa after two years with a film that was seen and discussed by Western aid workers, NGO functionaries, academics, artists and critics. In 2013 he became a Yale World Fellow; in 2014 he was

[481] http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/16/renzo-martens-gentrify-the-jungle-congo-chocolate-art; accessed on 27 June 2015.

> shortlisted for the £40,000 Artes Mundi Prize, the UK's most lucrative art competition.[482]

Martens suggests: 'My job is to highlight the codes by which we live, including, in this case, what is watched by whom and for which agenda.'[483] In another article, 'The Atrocity Exhibition' published in Mute Magazine in 2009, John Douglas Millar writes:

> Episode III is fundamentally an investigation of various modes of representation: representation by the media, representation of the artist, and issues around the autonomy of the work of art. Martens has placed himself within the context of European art history by making himself the mediator within the artwork […]. Episode III functions similarly to confront the viewer with her involvement in the narrative. To view images of pain and suffering is an ethically complex decision, as it is to write about them. One is always fundamentally complicit.[484]

This reminds us of many similar accusations towards various artists, among other Sebastião Salgado, who was criticised of 'beautifying' the human misery in his work. The same article accuses Martens of trying to justify his provocations by labelling his film as art: 'It seems the artist has an almost pathological commitment to the artwork, to the degree that he will ruin lives and court disappointment to elucidate a cynical logic of engagement and make a point about the impotence of engagement'.[485] In another interview in 2009, Martens explained that he sees his film as a voice in the discussion of the engagement of the spectator, focusing on the 'power relations between the viewer and the viewed. Strategies such as satire, re-enactment, appropriation place the film within this history of art. This is why it is art'.[486] He adds:

> The film is a performance of the discourses of the white man (Renzo Martens) taking responsibility for everything we in the West are and do. I reproduce as a performance the dominant discourse of what happens when the West, in the form of journalists, NGOs, MSF, go into countries like the

[482] Ibid.
[483] Ibid.
[484] Ibid.
[485] Ibid.
[486]http://www.renzomartens.com/assets/files/articles/5/Art_Slant_January_2009.pdf; accessed on 28June 2015.

> Congo and exploit poverty as a way of perpetuating their own dominance. They perpetuate this dominance, thus the poverty of the Africans, through the sale of images.[487]

What Marten exposes in his film is the culture where watching an image automatically relieves the spectator from any obligation to act. Producing an image for the sake of information becomes a task in itself, making us 'just the viewers' without any power to intervene in the reality we passively watch unravelling on the screen. Martens reminds us that what generates the demand for all these morally dubious images is precisely the viewer's guilty pleasure of watching the atrocities of war. In a later interview in 2010, Martens comments: 'Art can scrutinise oil companies in Africa, while not taking into account that we all collectively fly to shows and biennials to see these pieces on jets fuelled by the exact same oil companies'.[488] Finally, in the 7th Berlin Biennale Catalogue, Martens admitted that he gradually embraces a very objective fact that this film does not make a living in Africa any better: 'I try not to give the viewers an opportunity to feel that they have made the world a better place by simply looking at art,' he says.[489] He admits that art is part of the system of exploitation, recognising that potentially his film did not bring any change other than creating a commodity in a form of a film for sale: 'We used their energy to make art, which is a form of exploitation for sure. So, if you do not expose this process, you are obscuring the structure of inequality, violence, and the relation between exploitation, capital, money, and art…'.[490] This 90-minute-long film becomes a form of self-criticism of the medium, pointing to the fact that images of poverty became a commodity and an enormous money-making machine. Using the pretext of 'helping' the impoverished, Western media agencies or NGOs often

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[487] http://www.renzomartens.com/assets/files/articles/5/Art_Slant_January_2009.pdf; accessed on 28June 2015.

[488] Enjoy Poverty: Disclosing the Political Impasse of Contemporary Art
Niels Van Tomme, Artpapers, and also http://renzomartens.com/articles; accessed on 28 June 2015.

[489] http://renzomartens.com/articles, accessed on 28 June 2015.

[490] Ibid.

make money simply by creating and circulating documentation of these problems. In the process, people who are the subject of the images are usually left without any help, most of the time not benefiting in any way from the fact that the world might have taken notice of their problems. These images become widely discussed and analysed in artistic and academic circles, often leading to a significant recognition of those who produce them. The 'authors' are being praised for their courage and aesthetic fluency. The hypocrisy of this mechanism seems unavoidable. Reflecting on media exploitation, Martens acknowledges that by making the problem visible, he and his own practices do not automatically become free of a danger of following in the footsteps of the same types of practices. He is clear about the fact that having done his film he, and other filmmakers, go back to their comfortable lives. He further explains that his film critiques the status quo by 'duplicating what might be bad: 'The critique of the film is not so much in the action that the guy Renzo undertakes in the film, the critique of the film is the film as a whole, it is the duplication, it is the copy in a way of existing power relationships'.[491]

'Enjoy the Poverty' remains one of the most thought-provoking accusations of contemporary documentary practices and abuses of representing the 'Other'. Martens' confession that he might be simply repeating the procedures he criticises (and that what really gets affected as the result of his film is the intellectual discussion in Western art hubs where the film is either praised or criticised) could be applied to many other documentaries throughout the history. I partially relate to his concerns, when I criticise the Western depiction of the communities of the Sierra while being yet another Western filmmaker pointing my camera to the same communities. Even if my approach is fundamentally different and I take all the measures to ensure I do not do anything that would damage my participants, could I guarantee any kind of positive impact of my

[491] http://africasacountry.com/2010/07/poverty-for-sale/; accessed on 28 June 2015.

project on the situation in the Sierra? Will it prevent future misrepresentations by external filmmakers? The likelihood is that it might contribute to the understanding of the politics of representation in the region, but the future of filmmaking (and filmic collaborations) in the Sierra is in the hands of the local people. If they remain proactive as they are now, they have a chance to prevent any unfortunate filmic attempts and shape their presence in films and media. Meanwhile, let us enjoy their representations.

4.2.5. 'Even the Rain' or more mainstream view

'Even the Rain' directed by Spanish director Icíar Bollaín Pérez-Mínguez, tells the story of Sebastian, a Mexican director (interpreted by Gael García Bernal), who travels to Bolivia and, despite many obstacles, attempts to finish a film depicting Christopher Columbus' conquest. 'Even the Rain' is significantly more mainstream in comparison with the other films I analyse in this chapter, but it provides a fitting contribution to my discussion. Firstly, because of the figure of the main actor, Gael García Bernal, well-known for his social issues involvement across Latin America; secondly because it uses a pretext of a historical re-enactment in order to discuss the question of the representation of the indigenous peoples. Garcia Bernal's social involvement starts at the time of his childhood. He was involved in collaborative work with Amnesty International (with the documentary series 'Los Invisibles'), he is the creator of the Ambulante (an organisation promoting documentary filmmaking), and he is known for expressing his political opinions. This gives the film an interesting layer of interpretation, suggesting Bernal's genuine interest in the ethics of depicting indigenous communities, in this case. Although the movie has a slightly simplified view conforming to the nature of a commercial fiction film, it makes some valid points about

the unequal power relations between indigenous and non-indigenous communities (and specifically in the context of the filming practices). In one of the opening scenes, the protagonists-filmmakers dispute the historical value of using the Quechua-speaking actors from Cochabamba, Bolivia (instead of the Tainos, who were met by the Columbus arriving on the Caribbean Coast) for the purpose of the film they are making. Costa, the executive producer, concludes: 'They are all the same'. This very cynical approach prevails, and the crew puts the film above the safety and interests of the actors (and above the historical value of the facts represented in their film). Breaching safety issues, they use the indigenous actors for on-set manual labour (i.e. to erect a large cross). This saved them lots of money but put the actors (unaware of their rights as film contributors) in risk of injuries. The conflict starts at the time of the casting, which is attended by an unexpectedly huge number of the local people. Costa immediately realises that they only need a fraction of the people who showed their interest in participating. The crew faces a difficult task to send the overwhelming majority of the volunteers away, without even giving them a chance to be seen. For the local people, the casting presents a very rare opportunity to make some additional, however small, money. One of the men from the queue, Daniel, vigorously protests against being sent away, getting into a fight when he is told to leave. Sebastian, the director, immediately realises the charisma of Daniel and decides to recruit him for the film, despite Costa's warning that he will only cause trouble. The shooting of Sebastian's film coincides with real events of the time, the 2000 Cochabamba protest, also known as Cochabamba Water War. These events become a background for Sebastian's filmmaking process, causing lots of disruption and endangering the shooting.[492] Daniel turns out to be the main figure involved in the demonstrations and riots, which results in his imprisonment.

[492] The protests by the local community were addressed against the privatisation of the water supplies, resulting in a public uprising, violence and clashes with the police; Olivera, O and Lewis, T, 2004.

This fact, unwillingly, involves the filmmakers in the conflict and jeopardises the production. The crew initially tries to bribe Daniel in the attempt to keep him away from the protests for the duration of the filming. However, when he ends up in prison, they intervene to in order to get him released for the time of the filming. With the situation getting increasingly dangerous, including Daniel's daughter getting injured, and most actors getting too afraid to stay in Bolivia to continue the shooting, Sebastian and Costa face increasingly morally dubious decisions. The cynical two-dollars a day honorarium for the actors seems shameful when compared with the crew's luscious dinners and their disrespectful attitude towards the local people.

'Even the Rain' was made in 2010, and it was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 2011. It also won best Ibero-American Film Award at Ariel Awards, Panorama Audience Award at Berlinale, Cinema Authors Circle Awards, Goya nominations, among others. Inevitably, it was criticised for hypocrisy, failing to acknowledge in the credits that all the extras featuring in the film were severely underpaid (like the film characters). However, its importance lies in exposing several important aspects related to depicting the indigenous: plot attractiveness taking over historical accuracy, lack of attention to historical detail, using indigenous subjects as the 'attractions', hypocritically small honorarium, or disregard for indigenous opinions. However exaggerated in this film, the above-mentioned traits point us to these risks. Being an award-winning fiction film with recognisable actors, 'Even the Rain' has more opportunity to reach wider audiences and bring attention to these issues than many of the other films discussed here.

4.2.6. ‘El Abrazo de la Serpiente’ or a commercial success

‘El Abrazo de la Serpiente’ (The Embrace of the Serpent; 2015), the first Colombian film to get the Academy Award nomination, is a notable example of a film with an indigenous topic which has achieved significant commercial success. This two-hour film tells the story of Karamakate, the last remaining survivor of his people, who lives alone deep in the Amazon. We meet him during two episodes of his life, both of them marked by an encounter with a white man appearing in Karamakate’s territory. Firstly, it is an anthropologist, visiting the Amazon in 1901; later, a botanist following in the anthropologist’s footsteps in the same place in 1940. Both travel to the Amazon in the quest for a sacred healing plant, yakruna. Although the plant is fictional, both characters are based on the actual explorers, the anthropologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg and ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes respectively, and the plot is loosely based on their diaries. The significant critical acclaim received by this film is a big achievement not only for the director, but it also pays homage to the presence of indigenous elements in Colombian cinema.[493] It is one of the few feature films with indigenous participants, and one of the few that skilfully makes indigenous culture its main subject, with all its complexities. ‘The Embrace of the Serpent’ reminds us of the traumatic episode of the Capuchins’ presence in the Amazon, and about the persecutions indigenous communities have suffered from the non-indigenous Colombians. It also tackles the ongoing ‘scientific invasion’ of foreigners who aim to possess the indigenous knowledge about sacred plants, regardless of the consequences. All the above-listed elements are what is usually typical in films made by the indigenous communities, especially the presence of a ‘greedy white man’ who wants to take advantage of their

[493] Cannes Film Festival, Academy Awards nomination, Sundance Film Festival, Costa Rica International Film Festival, and many others.

traditional knowledge and use it for his own benefit. The long-term consequences of colonialism and decolonisation are not so easily forgotten, as they still profoundly influence many lives, and this fact does not escape the filmmaker's attention. In the face of that, it is rather unprecedented that this film gains such a good reception and so much recognition amongst non-indigenous audiences. The director, Ciro Guerra, has included indigenous elements in his previous films. Pretty much all his earlier productions gained significant recognition, including many nominations and awards. His previous film 'Los Viajes del Viento' (The Wind Journeys; 2009) featured the Arhuacos, saving one of the characters from illness. They take the sick man to Nabusímake, their capital, which is one of the most picturesque places in the Sierra. Some short elements of dialogue between the Arhuacos, held in their local dialect, are left without translation (so even the audiences in Colombia can appreciate the melody of the language without getting to understand what is being said). However, it also creates a sense of distance between the subjects and the audience.

I recognise the contribution of films like 'The Embrace of the Serpent' to introduce indigenous elements into mainstream cinema, deepening the understanding of the problems concerning the communities. Being such a significant coproduction (mainly between Colombia, Argentina, and Venezuela, but also with some input from France, Belgium, Germany and United States), 'The Embrace of the Serpent' takes indigenous elements in filmmaking to a different level. It moves it from the niche festival curiosity towards a much more accessible place, without necessarily banalising the elements of indigenous culture, as it is often the case in commercial cinema. This might influence not only the future reception of similar films but also the attitude of the filmmakers (indigenous and non-indigenous), in terms of fighting for indigenous inclusion in the wider contemporary film landscape.

Films concerned with indigenous issues seem to be gaining more mainstream attention, and this is what can lead to their inclusion into the wider circulation of audiovisual work. I wish to suggest that it is necessary to acknowledge both the films made about indigenous people as well as the indigenous auto-representation practice, and ideally enable these two to engage in an intercultural dialogue about the negotiated subject. Films are no different to written testimonies in a sense that various points of view are needed in order to grasp the complexity of the described phenomena. Indigenous films might offer a deeper insight into some aspects of traditional living and their significance, whereas Western filmmakers might be more skilled in applying wider comparative approaches. By gradually blurring the boundaries of indigenous and ethnographic films, there is hope that a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the power of representation within indigenous contexts may emerge.

4.3. Summary or 'label' does matter

This chapter links and illustrates the theories introduced in the initial part of the thesis with practical case studies. By looking at this broad range of examples of representing practices (both on the level of filmmaking, and further distribution), we can recognise the complexity of factors contributing to how representing the 'Other' is mediated. To summarise this contextualisation, I would like to emphasise the key findings from the proposed case studies.

Having attended many film festivals in the past, and having put these selected ones under scrutiny, I have identified some key characteristics unique to the profile of each of them. For example, in the case of most of the films presented at the Ethnographic Film Festival, the story, or the 'message' seems to be the most important

element. Although the aesthetic side remains very imperfect at times, the films tend to be well received and praised. The 'ethnographic' value seems to be the primary criterion for success. This 'negligence' towards the technical side and the aesthetics most certainly could not be easily accepted at festivals like Berlinale, unless it is an actively experimental approach by some of the acclaimed filmmakers who can afford to do so without losing the trust and interest of their dedicated public. Certainly, the expectations are slightly different in each of these events, and the respective audiences are offered fundamentally distinct experiences. The profile of each festival (and the sections within it) provides a useful guideline for those who wish to participate (both as filmmakers and the audience). Using a rather crude analogy: even if my film is somehow funny, I might not want to include it in the comedy festival/section, because I do not want to be labelled as a 'comedy director'. In that sense, the profile of a festival really matters, and that is why I examined the selected ones in detail. It is clear that despite the convergence of audiovisual creations in the contemporary mediascape, the importance of categorisation has not diminished. Quite to the contrary, it might have become even more influential. Without these shortcut-methods of classifying films, one might get easily lost in the surfeit of the available titles (even on such a small scale like within a single film festival). This explains the widespread application of various tags, labels and categorisation techniques in contemporary film classification practices. Also, the way the indigenous 'Other' is represented in film often serves to make the cinema more 'attractive'. However, this tendency is often taken under scrutiny in the attempt to break through the division between 'us' and 'them' and instead the focus shifts onto the encounter between different cultures and its consequences. Finally, many of the analysed films focus on the very process of visual representation, signalling the potential abuses of power relations between the filmmakers and their subjects. The example of 'The Act of Killing' reinforced some of the ways that the power of creating

visual representation could be even stronger than the real-life experience. This links us to the analysis of the indigenous auto-representation practice in the Sierra, where the influence of the image is taken very seriously. Before getting to that, I introduce the pioneers of the indigenous filmmaking in Colombian.

Chapter 5

Contextualising indigenous filmmaking in Colombia

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, a documentary, especially when focussing on the ethnographic spectacle, is a complex structure to analyse. Looking more specifically at films made by, or about, indigenous communities, we face the question of the politics of visual representation. What drives them, and what challenges do they pose? Representing others is clearly not the same kind of task as representing oneself. The question of the power relations involved in these processes needs to be considered, as well as the context of distribution, the reason behind the creation of the film, and many other elements of the process of filming and creating representations, as highlighted in the previous chapters.

Among the various indigenous cultures in Colombia,[494] we can distinguish two main centres of indigenous filmmaking, that is, one in Cauca and the other in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. In 2015 IDARTES (Instituto Distrital de las Artes, the District Art Institute, a government art institution in Bogotá) funded research which formed the basis of the publication 'Poéticas de la resistencia, El video indígena en Colombia' (Resistance politics, Indigenous filmmaking in Colombia). In the introduction, the Director of IDARTES, Santiago Trujillo Escobar, states not only the importance of indigenous cinema as part of the audiovisual heritage of Colombia, but also the significant political role of many of these videos, which form part of movements questioning the dynamics of contemporary economic, political, and social models.[495] In his investigation and practical work, Pablo Mora has attempted to integrate these

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[494] According to different statistics there are currently 87 of them in the country, speaking all together 68 indigenous languages; here: Mendoza, *et al.,* 1995.

[495] Mora, 2015: 7.

productions into a wider film landscape, without necessarily isolating them under the 'indigenous' label.[496] The evolution of indigenous cinema in Colombia seems to follow the path from discovery and exoticisation by outsiders to indigenous auto-representation. Also, it gradually becomes more accessible to wider audiences. In his introduction to the book, Mora recalls his experience on the jury of the Anaconda Awards (Premio Anaconda, 2012), where his task was to evaluate the selected films under four criteria: technical (photography, sound, montage); narrative (topic, thoroughness of the investigation, script, and structure); aesthetic (innovation, and creativity), and conceptual (contribution towards the strengthening of the identity, if it reflects communities' right of freedom and auto representation, if it promotes respect and dignity, denounces any violation of the rights, contributes towards the fight for the better organisation, and some others). During my fieldwork, it became obvious that none of these aspects were abandoned in the productions made in the Sierra, where attention to detail is absolutely key. But Mora suggests that the 'indigenous' label stigmatises these films by placing them in a niche where they remain beyond the attention of big national distributors (who are mainly interested in commercial titles while the 'indigenous' label does not usually promise commercial success). Writing and speaking about indigenous filmmaking in Colombia, Mora repeatedly refers to Roland Barthes' notion of photography as evidence of what is lost.[497] Many indigenous productions can be seen in such a way, he suggests. The unsatisfactory feeling of not being able to experience what we see on the screen, for we were not there, brings with it some form of nostalgia. I argue that this is what might make the representations very powerful and influential at times, making them symbolise the inaccessible dream. This is particularly visible in documentaries describing cultures that are seen as traditional by

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[496] Introduced as a director of Daupará in Chapter 4.
[497] Mora, 2015.

non-indigenous audiences. They often represent the lost, idyllic past and a forgotten utopia of perfect harmony with nature. Mora suggests that indigenous productions not only ‘pierce’ our aesthetic reflection, but also generate political, or even moral concern, and that is clearly the aim of the authors.[498]

In the following sections of this chapter I look at various aspects of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia. Firstly, I introduce the founding fathers and some important institutions, following that I analyse the Zhigoneshi Collective and their work, which is directly related to my fieldwork.

[498] Ibid.

5.1. Pioneers, historical background, and institutional support

5.1.1. Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva

In order to understand the significance and role of contemporary indigenous filmmaking in Colombia, it is important to analyse the work of the pioneers who, many decades ago, started the ground-breaking movement of creating audiovisual interest around indigenous communities and their problems. One of the most significant names to mention is Marta Rodriguez. Born in 1933 in Bogotá, she is among the most noteworthy non-indigenous filmmakers in Colombia who spent decades portraying indigenous communities and their struggles. Her travel to Paris in 1953 led her to discover film movements characterised by a naturalistic documentary style, an often improvised and politicised approach to cinema.[499] On her return to Colombia, she collaborated with Camilo Torres, doing fieldwork in a vulnerable neighbourhood in Bogotá, which influenced her decision to change her faculty from sociology to anthropology. As a result, she returned to Paris in 1961 to study film and ethnology. There, she met Jean Rouch, whom she now considers her master, and was influenced but the style of cinéma vérité, at the same time deepening her interest in third world cinema. She returned to Colombia in 1965 to finish her anthropological studies. During this time, she met Jorge Silva, and together they made their first film, 'Chircales' (Brick Workers, 1972), an angry denouncement of social exploitation. The film went into production in 1966 using participatory observation techniques. The first version was 90 minutes long, and it was first shown in Venezuela in 1968 where it had a significant impact.[500] But the turning point in Rodriguez' and Silva's careers occurred when they became aware of the torture

[499] http://www.martarodriguez.org/martarodriguez.org/Biografia.html, accessed on 17 March 2016.

[500] Ibid.

and persecution of the indigenous Guahibo community in Planas. As a result, they made 'Planas, testimonio de un etnocidio' (Planas, testimony of an ethnocide, 1971). The film received an award at the Cartagena Film Festival and increasingly successful titles followed. The awards their films received enabled the filmmakers to buy their own equipment. Mora suggests that 'Planas: testimonio de un etnocidio' marks a turning point in breaking from the dominant discourse of representing the 'Other' in film. Rodriguez and Silva then began to turn their interest to indigenous issues of the Cauca region. They produced 'La Voz de los Sobrevivientes' (The voice of the Survivors, 1980), which was about the assassinated indigenous leaders from the region, and 'Nuestra Voz de Tierra Memoria y Futuro' (Our voice of the Earth, Memory, and the Future, 1982), the fruit of seven years' work with the communities of Coconuco. From that moment onwards, they began to collaborate with these communities by consulting with them on the structure of films and the editing process and returned to the community to present the film.[501] 'Nacer de Nuevo' (To be born again) and 'Amor, Mujeres y Flores' (Love, Woman, and Flowers) were finished by Rodriguez alone, owing to Silva's death in 1987. During that period, Rodriguez began to use new video technology to support the oppressed, especially indigenous peoples. One of her initiatives was to provide video workshops for the communities, and to teach them how to use the equipment. By doing so, Rodriguez participated in the development of similar movements developing at the time in Mexico, Bolivia, and Brazil.[502] She also collaborated with Bolivian director Iván Sanjinés, and in 1992 they produced 'Memoria Viva' (Live Memory) commemorating the massacre of indigenous communities from

[501] In 2003 Mora himself, together with Lavinia Fiori, made on of his most famous titles as a collaborative project with the Yukuna community: 'Crónica de un baile de muñeco', where all the stages of the production (investigation, script, production and the editing) were consulted with the Yukuna community.

[502] www.martarodriguez.org/martarodriguez.org/Biografia.html, accessed on 17 March 2016.

the Cauca region in 1991. Many of the video workshops were sponsored by UNESCO, which helped finalise a publication 'A Nuevas Tecnologías, Nuevas Identidades' (To New Technologies, New Identities).[503] Rodriguez then began to work with her son, Lucas Silva. Together they made 'Amapola, la flor maldita' (Poppy, the damned flower, 1998), 'Los hijos del trueno' (The Sons of Thunder, 1999), and 'La Hoja Sagrada' (The Sacred Leaf, 2002), still concentrating on the indigenous communities in Cauca. Rodriguez' collaboration with Fernando Restrepo resulted in the production of 'Nunca Más' (Never Again, 2001), 'Una Casa Sola se Vence' (An Empty House Falls, 2004), and 'Soraya, Amor no es Olvido' (Soraya, love is not an oblivion, 2006), all focusing upon the issue of violence and the displacement of afro-Colombian communities. Finally, her 2011 production, 'Testigos de un Etnocidio, memorias de resistencia' (Witnesses of ethnocide, memories of resistance, 2011) was an ultimate evidence of the struggle of the indigenous communities of Colombia. Rodriguez is now head of the Fundación Cine Documental, which concentrates on giving testimony of human rights abuses in Colombia, mainly in relation to indigenous and afro-Colombian citizens, women, and rural communities. The work of the organisation is oriented towards the international distribution of the films, but also towards the internal support of similar productions in Colombia.[504]

This short introduction to Rodriguez' work testifies to her significance for the development of indigenous cinema in Colombia and beyond. Not only has she documented the ongoing problems haunting the communities, but she has also actively influenced the advent of trends towards auto-representation, encouraging indigenous participation in the dialogue. Whilst she has concentrated mainly on the Cauca region, her influence goes significantly beyond. The worldwide critical acclaim and recognition

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[503] Ibid.

[504]http://www.martarodriguez.org/martarodriguez.org/Fundacion_Cine_Documental.html.

which her films receive has also shaped the reception of indigenous filmmaking in the region. Many years on, Rodriguez' influence can be felt in the work of indigenous filmmakers such as those from Zhigoneshi Collective.

5.1.2. Institutionalisation

The emergence of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia, however, has not happened in a vacuum, and some institutional support was needed. Recent investigations by Charlotte Gleghorn explore questions related to indigenous video and social justice in the region. The article 'Reconciliation en minga' suggests almost therapeutic qualities of the collective video-making practices among the communities: 'reconciliation' is understood here as the restoration of friendly relations, while 'minga' refers to traditional communal work. Gleghorn suggests that indigenous video in Colombia should be considered as an 'oppositional sphere of cultural production'. As such, it 'intervenes in the debates [about historical memory and social justice], creating and disseminating productions that express broader discourse of reconciliation than that articulated in the state's version of transitional justice'.[505] These videos tend to focus upon truth and memory, and they are presented mainly at community screenings, online, and at selected festivals (along with rituals, ceremonies, workshops and panel discussions).[506] Gleghorn argues that, whilst defining indigenous film and video is quite problematic, it nevertheless reflects the idea of the 'development of Indigenous self-representation in diverse contexts' and could be described as a 'dynamic and evolving social practice, intersected by circuits of community, (limited) state, and international

[505] Gleghorn, 2013: 2.
[506] Ibid: 2.

state and NGO patronage, [a] wide ranging collection of political interests and aesthetic styles'.[507] Most importantly, from the point of view of this thesis, Gleghorn affirms that making these videos is 'rarely viewed as an art form separated from other arenas of life and political struggle'.[508] Inspired by the initiatives of Rodriquez and Silva, the early indigenous adoption of audiovisual media began in the Cauca region with the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC) in 1971, and was followed by the development of a dedicated communications department in 1986.[509] The 1990s marked the appearance of another organisation supporting the movement, Fundación Sol y Tierra, which emerged following the peace agreement between the government and the Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL), an indigenous guerrilla organisation set up as a defence force. In 1999 the Escuela de Comunicación del Norte del Cauca was established. The aim of the school was to provide 'training in producing radio, video, photography and press materials for the communication teams of local authorities until 2002'.[510] All this demonstrates the mission to professionalize indigenous auto-representation initiatives in Colombia. There is usually no mention of any artistic rationale for learning and producing these audiovisual materials, and as the name of the school suggests, its main focus is centred around communication. The umbrella organisation for indigenous film and video in Latin America is, until this day, the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Cine y Communicación de Pueblos Indígenos - CLAPCI (Latin American Council of Cinema and Communication of Indigenous Peoples), established in 1985 in Mexico City, with Marta Rodriguez among its founders. The emergence of CLAPCI was supported by 'anthropologists, ethnographic filmmakers, and Indigenous activists across the region'.[511] Gleghorn notices a tangible

[507] Gleghorn, 2013: 3.
[508] Ibid:3.
[509] Gleghorn, 2013: 3-4.
[510] Ibid: 4.
[511] Ibid: 4.

transition from filmed indigenous subjects to indigenous authors and increasing collaborations with mestizo filmmakers. At the same time, she states that 'the separation between the directors of the video, the protagonists […] and the spectator is dissolved as everyone is being encouraged to participate in change'.[512] The following stage of the institutionalisation of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia came with the creation of the Tejido de Comunicación para la Verdad y la Vida (Communication Web for Truth and Life), a dedicated media division of the Associación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca - ACIN (Association of Indigenous Councils of the Northern Cauca). The communication strategy of this organisation includes radio, Internet, press, and video. As with many other indigenous initiatives, their funding sources are very limited: community activities and assembly collections, DVD sales, very sporadic external funding sources (from state and international organisations), and various donations. The video work is performed 'in a joint way in a form of group decision-making.'[513] The topics of the videos as presented on the Tejido's website include: mobilisation and resistance in the area; denouncements of violence, and the documentation of regional meetings and assemblies.[514] Another institution coordinating video in Colombia is Cineminga, operating in Tierradentro. It is not my aim to go into details about these productions, but to acknowledge the existence of professionalisation networks of indigenous filmmaking in this region of Colombia, and to underline the political and social profile of these videos. As Gleghorn argues:

> These productions at once articulate pointed critiques towards the government, armed actors, free trade policies or multinational corporations, and frame these denunciations within a vision of reconciliation between all sectors of society that challenges the state's disregard for human rights under the doctrine of 'Democratic Security'.[515]

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[512] Ibid: 10.
[513] Ibid.
[514] http://www.nasaacin.org/multimedia-2013/videos-2013/video/maestra-de-maestros.
[515] Gleghorn, 2013: 7-8.

As a result, audiovisual media are better designed to communicate indigenous issues because they 'largely bypass literacy requirements'.[516] It is suggested that these videos make a significant contribution to the process of peace-building, and the 'images of singing, dancing, and playing […] further enhance the hopefulness of the video, demonstrating vitality at the heart of these communities despite harsh circumstances'.[517] The Internet has become a very important factor in the process of collecting, presenting, and sharing indigenous filmmaking. However, it requires a more detailed investigation in relation to its structures and influences. Other significant forms of dissemination for these videos include film festivals, as we saw in Chapter 4. As discussed above, some festivals are well established, others are relatively new, and they provide platforms not only to present the films, but also for the 'video activists' to meet with authors of similar productions.

Having contextualised the work of the pioneers and the institutions coordinating indigenous filmmaking in Colombia, the next section introduces the work of the main indigenous authors from the Sierra.

5.2. Collective Zhigoneshi and indigenous collaborations

Amado Villafaña Chaparro from the Arhuaco community is certainly one of the most pro-active contemporary figures of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia. He is the founding father and Director of Zhigoneshi, Centro de Comunicación Indígena (the Centre of Indigenous Communication) based in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. The Zhigineshi's website describes the collective's aims as follows:

[516] Ibid.
[517] Ibid:10.

> El Centro de Comunicaciones Zhigoneshi, está dirigido y dispuesto a enseñar, aprender y sobre todo conservar los lenguajes, cultura e identidad en todos los sentidos generados desde las mismas comunidades hacia todo el mundo en armonía con las nuevas tecnologías, aplicadas a la comunicación en especial el trabajo audiovisual y desde ahora en la implementación del uso de sistemas, páginas web y todo lo relacionado con la Internet.[518]

The organisation unites all four groups inhabiting the Sierra: Wiwa, Kogui, Arhuaco, and Kankuamo, with Pablo Mora as the non-indigenous adviser to the collective. *Zhigoneshi* is a Kogui word which could be translated as 'mutual help'.[519] However, the meaning is much wider than that, and it refers to the situation where the Mamos can help the non-indigenous to become conscious that what they do with their surroundings is harmful to nature, and nature should be respected and protected.[520] The word *Zhigoneshi* is also used to describe mutual communication. Communication is presented as the main goal of the collective. In the video interview 'La experiencia Zhigoneshi' Villafaña explains the reasons behind his filmmaking: when he got into problems with the guerrillas in Valledupar (a city south-east of the Sierra), and finally when he became displaced to Santa Marta, he came up with the idea of the importance of telling the story about the difficulties of the Sierra. Making a film seemed to be the most efficient (and far-reaching) way of doing so. With some help from NGOs and other organisations, step-by-step he secured the resources to purchase cameras and start the first productions.[521] A beautifully designed set of DVDs, simply called 'Zhigoneshi', was published in 2013, showcasing the fruit of their audiovisual work. The DVD includes,

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[518] The aims of Centre of Communication Zhigoneshi are to teach, learn, and above all to preserve the languages, culture and identity according to the meanings generated within the communities and then going worldwide, in the harmony with new technologies applied in the communication, and especially the audiovisual work, and the implementation of webpages and everything relating to the Internet; http://www.corazondelmundo.co; accessed on 23 September 2015.

[519] http://www.corazondelmundo.co/?q=node/52; accessed on 1 October 2015.

[520] Ibid.

[521] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM-vziWD3oA; accessed on 26 September 2015.

among others: Nabusímake: Memorias de una independiencia, 2010, (Nabusímake: Memories of Independence); Resistencia en la Línea Negra, 2011, (Resistance on the Dark Line); and finally Sey Arimaku: La otra oscuridad, 2012, (Sey Arimaku: The Other Darkness).[522] During my fieldwork in 2015, a new documentary, 'Naboba, visión ancestral del agua del pueblo Arhuaco' (Naboba, Ancestral vision of water of the Arhuaco peoples) was released (which did not form part of the original DVD collection). All the films are subtitled in Spanish, English and French.[523] During numerous conversations I held with Villafaña and Pablo Mora, they explained to me the development of their work. With the first films, the collective was strongly dependent on external help with editing, sound, and cameras. This evolved towards a significantly more autonomous way of working, where the only external support became Mora's editing. Below, I analyse the content of this DVD set, in order to understand indigenous filmmaking practices in the Sierra.

5.2.1. The Zhigoneshi DVD set or a 'view from within'

The first film made by the Zhigoneshi, 'Yuavika sia,' is barely eighteen minutes long, and, according to the description on the DVD set, it presents 'a comprehensive view of indigenous thought and the concept of territory in the Aracataca River Basin.' Made in 2007, this first attempt at auto-representation was still produced with significant help

[522] The full list of films included in the DVD set includes: 'Yuawika sia: En el río del entendimiento', 2007, (Yuawika sia: On the River of Understanding); 'Yetsikin: Guardianes del agua, 2007, (Yetsikin: The Water Guardians); Palabras Mayores I, 2009, (Words of Wisdom I); Palabras Mayores II, 2009, (Words of Wisdom II); Yosokowi, 2010, (Yosokowi); Nabusímake: Memorias de una independiencia, 2010, (Nabusímake: Memories of Independence); Resistencia en la Línea Negra, 2011, (Resistance on the Dark Line); and finally Sey Arimaku: La otra oscuridad, 2012, (Sey Arimaku: The Other Darkness).

[523] If Spanish comes as a surprise, it is only to remind us that most of these videos were made in the traditional languages of the Sierra (Kogui, Arhuaco, and Wiwa), with some elements in Spanish (especially in the case of the most recent titles).

from an external crew. However, we can already see some elements of the style which would persist throughout the series: a significant use of archival materials, black and white elements, and long monologues from the Mamos. The main topic of this first film concentrates on the lack of understanding between 'us' and 'them' (or, in cultural terms, the lack of understanding between the 'Younger Brother' who thinks about development, and the 'Older Brother' who worries about conservation and balance between humans and nature). The significance of this first video lies in directing the attention to issues which concern both the producers (the indigenous communities of the Sierra), and the audiences (the non-indigenous communities from beyond the Sierra, and beyond Colombia), rather than just introducing a slightly forgotten culture.

The next film, 'Yetsikin: Water Guardians,' made in the same year 2007, and a little over twenty minutes long, still reminds me of what I would call a 'typical' indigenous production. It is an alarming call for attention to ecological changes, this time in the case of the upper Aracataca river basin. For the indigenous Sierra, the consciousness of the importance of water is fundamental. A disappearance of courting insects which we witness in the film becomes much more than an ecological or botanical problem: it has an enormous symbolic meaning. The authors attempt to convey this preoccupation in their film. This early video also introduces some elements of auto-reflexivity, which will become an increasing central subject in further productions. The reflections on the challenging implications of adapting to audiovisual technologies (not only in technical terms, but also ethical and cultural, especially when filming Arhuaco's sacred places) would become a significant element of Zhigoneshi productions.

Produced two years later (in 2009), 'Palabras Mayores I' and 'Palabras Mayores II' (Words of Wisdom I and II) were made with the support of Tele Caribe (and distributed by the same TV channel). At that moment, it was an unprecedented move for

a TV company to finance a piece of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia. Mora and Villafaña explained to me that for them 'Palabras Mayores' was a compromise needed to gain funds for the film they consider their most important one: 'Resistencia el la Linea Negra' (made in 2011). Both parts of 'Words of Wisdom' consist of five chapters, each one about seven minutes long, concentrating on a specific question. The first part provides answers to the following questions: 'Why is the coca plant threatened?'; 'Why is our land sacred?'; 'What are our spiritual payments?'; 'Who threatens the water?', and 'Why is there global warming?' The second part consists of: 'Why is the snow melting?'; 'How is a Mamo trained?'; 'What are our views on violence?'; 'Who is the Younger Brother?', and finally 'How did we make "Words of Wisdom"?' The catalogue accompanying the DVD set reads:

> Revelations from the Heart of the World. A team of Arhuaco, Wiwa and Kogui film-makers journeys from the seashore below to the snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia to transmit the warnings issued by their spiritual leaders. The Mamos speak to the world….

The main message behind these series is the fundamental lack of understanding of indigenous cultures by the Western world, for example the fact that coca leaves are being so dramatically misused by 'us', who should not use them at all. The same applies to the abuse 'we' cause to nature, without the proper understanding of the consequences. A Mamo explains that indigenous cultures respect us and do not take our things, but we fail to respect them in the same way. Perhaps the most significant element of the series is its last episode, disclosing the behind-the-scenes of video-making. It reveals the ongoing interest in reflecting on the significance of the filming process for the indigenous communities, and its importance both for the community adopting the new media, and the audiences.

'Yokosowi', made a year later (2010), is another short (a little over fifteen minutes), which concentrates on music: in October 2010, the Centre for Ethnomusicology at Columbia University in New York invited an Arhuaco Mamo from

the Sierra to the international conference 'Music and Ethnicity in the Americas.' Unable to go, the Mamo's words and actions concerning sacred music were recorded and sent to the meeting. By doing so, the community started to use filmmaking for yet another purpose. It began to function as a more immediate form of communication with another culture. This title is the last one which I would see as a 'typical' indigenous film made by Zhigoneshi. From the following production onwards, the auto-reflection and the awareness of the representational processes and their consequences go significantly deeper.

Made in 2010, 'Nabusímake, Memories of Independence' is a thirty-five-minute long quest for recognition of the historical trauma imposed onto the Arhuaco community in the twentieth century. Narrated by Villafaña and featuring himself and his family, it starts with a re-enactment of the arrival of the Capuchins to the Sierra in 1914. This arrival resulted in a series of persecutions against the Arhuaco culture and their way of living, including a prohibition on the use of their native language and traditional clothes, introducing a mandatory shaving of their long hair, and other forms of oppression. Villafaña personally narrates the story, exploring archival photographs, and embarking with his children onto a journey of discovery of their past. As a part of this journey, they visit many places where they look for answers which could help them to understand their history. Among others, they venture to Patrimonio Fílmico Colombiano in Bogotá (Colombian Filmic Patrimony) to watch an archival film by Vidal Antonio Rozo, 'El Valle de los Arhuacos' (The Valley of the Arhuacos), made in 1964. The film presents the Arhuacos as the incarnation of the worse qualities. 'This is all lie,' Villafaña tells his children, 'this film was made to show to the outside world.' The community was represented as a group of alcoholics, and the Mamos were accused of having a pact with the devil. Everything in this film was shown exactly the opposite as it was in reality, claims Villafaña, and as the result of being shown to the 'whites' the relations

with them significantly worsen in the 1970s. In the following scenes of 'Nabusímake,' we see Villafaña in conversation with Marta Rodriguez, analysing some archival materials.[524] We also witness Villafaña and his family visiting the Capuchins monastery, where they talk with an anthropologist and documentary filmmaker, Yesid Campos, discussing false accusations aimed at Mamos at the time. But finally, the Arhuaco resistance succeeded, and the Capuchins left a few decades later. Villafaña underlines the importance of remembering these incidents, and the urgency to pass this knowledge onto future generations. The film has an impressively mature approach to the subject, with a very clear plot and narration, supported by archival materials and techniques like re-enactments. 'Nabusímake' is a captivating story produced in a fully developed film language.

From my numerous conversations with Villafaña and Mora, I got a clear impression that the subsequent film, 'Resistance on the Dark Line,' is the one they consider to be their most significant achievement. In many ways, this production stands for the very essence of what they aim to achieve as Zhigoneshi. It is the first full-length film (eighty-four minutes), and the longest of the set so far. Finished in 2011, it shows the powerful resistance of the four communities against the threats which endanger their ancestral territory. The camera witnesses some dramatic events and actions of the elders, and the process of filming itself becomes a significant part of the plot. The film starts with Villafaña recalling how he was threatened by the ELN guerrillas. The advice given to him by a Mamo was clearly against responding with violence: the only plausible thing to do is to spread the message to the 'Younger Brother' to make him understand the indigenous way of thinking, in the hope of mutual understanding and respect. This traumatic episode of Villafaña's life triggered all his subsequent film adventures. He

[524] Which only reinforces the fact that the two centres of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia, however separate, do not exist in complete isolation from each other.

confesses that he had seen television and films and that he understands the way 'Younger Brother' thinks. He admits that he initially thought that making a film would take him a month, when in fact, it took five years. Such a long time was needed because they had to adopt a new technology and learn film language from scratch. We witness the indigenous film crew preparing for the 'baptism' of the equipment, which is considered the most important element of the process, and the moment when the creation of the film actually starts. Such an approach only confirms the high importance the community attaches to bridging the cultural gap between their ancestral values and the technology belonging to the 'outside world,' in their attempt to secure intercultural understanding. We are also reminded about the importance of the (spiritual) participation of the Mamos in the filming process, as they increasingly get concerned about their sacred places gradually losing meaning. It is made very clear that the main reason to make this film is to protect sites all over the Sierra, and that there is no fancy artistic ambition in the act of filmmaking. The presence of 'behind the scenes' shots proves that documenting the filming process is increasingly significant to Zhigoneshi's productions. It demonstrates the preoccupation of adapting to the new situation and the importance to reflect on this issue. We follow the filmmakers and the community leaders to various sacred places across the Sierra, as they sadly contemplate the destruction of nature caused by the white man. One of the elders fears that the end of the world is approaching. While his people engage in traditional music and dance, Villafaña explains the tremendous responsibility of making this documentary. They make this enormous effort to adopt a completely new form of expression in order to speak for themselves, instead of being talked about. We witness Villafaña leading the rest of the team: with his glasses on, map in front of him, he is clearly in charge. The team heads to another sacred place, the Moro Island. They need to ask for permission of the Navy to reach it, and they can only get there accompanied by soldiers: 'These sacred

sites belong to us spiritually, but physically they are no longer ours', explains Villafaña with a hint of bitterness, which he struggles to hide. Reflecting on the filmmaking process, Villafaña admits:

> In the beginning, it was a difficult work to spread and share this way of thinking. It used to be that taking a photograph of a sacred site was like exposing mother's nakedness and making her visible. Taking a photo of a Mamo weakens his knowledge and robs him part of his spirit.

However, the Mamos are aware of the situation, and that is why they stand in front of the cameras now, he reassures. At the attempt to visit the following sacred place, Jukulwa, they are met with significant resistance from the workers of the company constructing a road there. The determination on both sides heats up and rises to a conflict. It leads to physical violence, which does not escape the camera's attention. This great inconvenience of the lack of access to Jukulwa contrasts greatly with the crew's arrival to Kogui territory, where the filmmakers are welcomed by the elders with an enthusiastic invitation to continue their filming process: 'This is the way we get recognition these days. No one believes our words.' Here, the camera is seen as a tool for making what they do more visible for future audiences. The next point for the indigenous crew is the Lost City, where, encouraged by Villafaña, a tourist guide explains the importance of the place. Villafaña gets to interview the tourists visiting the place, asking them for the reason of their visit to the Lost City (as he does it, we see some tourists taking photos of Villafaña, probably impressed by his 'traditional' looks). One of the visitors responds that for him it is almost like a fantasy to be able to see 'Indians living like they lived thousands of years ago.' The Mamos view is clear: their spiritual sites should be free of tourism. A soldier stationed at the Lost City prohibits Villafaña's team from filming there. Villafaña asks for the reason, explaining that it is their territory. At the same time, he quickly instructs his cameraman: 'Film what he is saying.' We learn about the conflict with the guerrillas and the destruction of the sacred sites by the military. José Manuel Vacuna, a Kogui Mamo, says: 'When the guerrillas

came, we were scared and we thought they were going to kill us. […] If I could speak Spanish I would tell them the evil they are doing. But all I can do is just watch.' 'I feel sad and cry,' he adds, 'It is all I think about.' We also see Villafaña and his people visiting the Gold Museum in Bogotá. They manifest their disapproval of the 'imprisonment' of their gods in there. Juanita Sáenz, the museum curator, expressed her sadness at such a vision, but also defends the actions of the museum, explaining that by preserving the artefacts they protect them from people who would otherwise attempt to sell those objects on the black market. In response, Villafaña declares a serious wish to recuperate some of these objects which, in the indigenous understanding, are essential for balancing the natural world. The film is full of self-reflexive episodes. In one scene, in Nabusímake, Villafaña guides his interlocutor, Manuel Chaparro: 'Relax. Do not pay any attention to the camera. Pretend we are alone.' Recalling the tragic history of Nabusímake, Villafaña underlines that the Arhuacos were always very respectful and that they never expected the 'Younger Brother' to follow their laws. But the sad reality is, he claims, that the 'Younger Brother' always thinks that what the indigenous people believe is wrong, and the only right thing is what he, the 'Younger Brother,' proposes. One of the most noteworthy scenes, often quoted in other Zhigoneshi films, is the re-enactment of the meeting with the Capuchins. This 'film in the film' is accompanied by voiceover commentaries from the director, giving instructions to the actors: 'camera, action!' Villafaña and Rafael Gil Mojíca (the cameraman responsible for most of the Zhigoneshi films) recall the disappearance and killing of their family members, resulting in their forced displacement. We also see a visit to a Kankuamo TV station, where we learn about a documentary about an explosion which happened in the village. The conflict of the Kankuamo people with FARC and the paramilitaries dates back to the 1970s, but it was intensified in the mid-1980s, resulting in over 300 killings of the Kankuamos, kidnapping, threats, harassments, and displacements of entire families.

One of the final scenes of ‘Resistencia’ shows the visit to one of the ancestral sites, with the police blocking the entrance, trying to prevent the indigenous men from entering. They do not give up, and after a while they manage to get in to collect seashells and make offerings. The film ends with the reassurance that they will survive despite all the difficulties and that their spirituality will not be destroyed. The final scene contains Villafaña’s reflection on what making this documentary had meant for him. In this very accomplished production, the Zhigoneshi are not only very clear about the message that they want to convey in their film, but they also clearly have mastered how to produce it. They are also fully aware of the consequences of reaching beyond their culture (i.e. concerns about taking photographs of sacred places). The traumatic past and equally dramatic present form the basis for a captivating story. The authors do not forget that filmmaking is a new language for them, so they continuously reflect on the process (probably instinctively knowing that that is something which many Western audiences might be interested in). Given the complexity of the subject and the skilful use of the film language, this title is definitively one of the most significant made by the collective so far, addressing many concerns and success stories of the community.

If ‘Resistance’ left me truly impressed, the next film, ‘Sey Arimaku: The Other Darkness’, nearly turned my whole research upside down. The catalogue reads:

> In this documentary essay, a kind of travel journey revisited, two worlds meet and share a mutual obsession with visual representations of reality. A series of memories of moments experienced by two filmmakers (Amado Villafaña, Arhuaco director of ‘Resistance on the Dark Line’, and Pablo Mora, director of ‘Sey Arimaku: The Other Darkness’), become a vehicle for inter-ethnic dialogue on Western and indigenous perspectives on images, power and death.

This nearly an hour-long film is directed by Mora, and it captivates with its levels of self-awareness and auto-reflexivity. It a story about a friendship of two filmmakers from entirely different backgrounds, and their role in the collaboration which united not only them, but two different worlds. Villafaña and Mora provide an off-line audio

commentary on some archival materials documenting their collaborative work over the years, starting from the very early moments where neither of them was sure of their roles. Mora reflects on his uncertainty about his tasks at the beginning of the work; Villafaña, about his clumsiness with the equipment in front of the professional. There is much humour in their comments, and one can sense that the journey they made together, perhaps difficult at first, led them not only to the production of a significant body of work, but also to a real friendship. Villafaña, who was one of the main characters in most of the Zhigoneshi films, is not afraid to be criticised and allows a healthy degree of distance to himself. One of the most fascinating moments in the film presents the indigenous team arriving in Bogotá and visiting the Javieriana University where they are invited to use a sophisticated computer lab, Sala Matrix. On their arrival, there is a non-indigenous crew filming the Arhuacos going to the university, then Sylvestre, an indigenous cameraman, filming the non-indigenous team filming the Arhuacos, and then there is Mora filming Sylvestre filming the team filming the Arhuacos. This extraordinary exchange of so many glances of the camera cannot escape Mora's attention, who comments on the meta-levels of gazes. In the Sala Matrix, they are given a chance to explore the technology and learn. The Kogui team use their *poporos* and then get back to the computers, notices Mora. Saúl Gil, a Wiwa director, comments that 'Younger Brother' always bases his judgements on images. Therefore, he sees it as a matter of great importance to learn how to make these images. He acknowledges that although traditionally their elders have never made any use of that, the mother of all the image is in the mountains. Contributing to this conversation, Sylvestre Gil, a Kogui director, explains that some things are like shadows: you cannot see them well, but they are very real, almost like photography. Villafaña adds that the material world is always accompanied by a spiritual one and suggests that this might be represented as a world of shadows. This leads Mora to conclude that the world of shadows is the world of

knowledge. In this incredible dialogue between two very different cultural traditions, suddenly things seem to be perfectly compatible. The discussion moves onto questions of who represents whom, and what right one has to film someone else. However, it is worth noticing that in some of the Zhigoneshi's films Villafaña and his team often record the 'whites' without their consent. To my surprise, the film also includes scenes of an encounter with Alan Ereira and some comments on his films. Villafaña presents his view that Ereira's films did not represent the Sierra well: 'When he (Ereira) came to the Sierra initially, the Mamos agreed for him to make the film and enter the magic world that was going to be revealed, but the situation was different then.' Villafaña underlines: 'We do not think that white people can express how we feel because the Mamos are not going to reveal everything they have to say to a person who is not indigenous.' Together with Mora, he analyses a scene of the arrival of Alain Ereira to the Sierra (a fragment from Ereira's 'The Heart of the World' film). They notice that in his film Ereira presents himself almost as a 'hero entering a world which is nearly impossible to enter.' Villafaña does not seem to be very happy about it: 'Why must someone come from the outside to take pictures or make a documentary, and then travel the world talking about us as if we were something from the past? We need to represent ourselves, speak for ourselves!' The film also contains archive materials from Mora and Villafaña's meeting with Ereira when he returned twenty years later to make 'Aluna.' In his offline commentary, Mora criticises Ereira for being an arrogant, self-confident man who just wants to sign the papers and have his work done, unwilling to negotiate anything. Villafaña agrees that Ereira's attitude was selfish and disrespectful. Villafaña also shares his memories of being captured and tortured. As we learn, he got wrongly accused of kidnapping a person, and the torture was the army's way to get the information out of him. The trauma it has caused to him only reaffirmed Villafaña's decision to engage in filmmaking in order to tell his story. Reflecting on the images of a

Mamo captured in one of their past films, when the Mamo was still alive, Mora refers to Barthes' reflections on photography and death. They also discuss the fact that the emotions which one attaches to a photo belong only to that person and cannot be shared with others. In that sense, the images which meant so much to Villafaña might mean something completely different (or nothing) to Mora, causing a different set of emotions. Having watched this film I came to the conclusion that all the questions I wanted to ask the communities from the Sierra Nevada not only were already answered, but they were answered in the form of the film. The level of self-consciousness of the filmmakers felt unprecedented and indeed unseen in any of the indigenous films made in the Sierra so far.

5.2.2. 'A'I: Guardianes de la Selva' or indigenous collaborations

'A'I: Guardians of the Jungle' directed by Mora offers an insightful view on indigenous collaborations. In this film, we watch Villafaña visiting a Cofán leader in the Zábalo region of Ecuador with the aim to collaborate with him on the production of a film. The subject they want to focus on is the conservation of nature, and other similarities between these two very distinct and yet so kindred communities. Villafaña takes the lead asking the type of questions which would normally be asked by an anthropologist: he enquires about the significance of the paint and facial decorations in the Cofán culture, the name of the Cofán leaders, etc. The taita (the Cofán leader) agrees to collaborate, and Villafaña and his team embark on the journey. The film does not shy away from presenting the Arhuaco leader with a camera and his assistants with microphones as we witness the filming process. Similarly to the titles analysed before, here, auto-reflexivity is fully intended to be a significant part of the film. Villafaña also

explains some elements of the Arhuaco culture, for example, the significance of their hats (brains of the mountains), and the role of Mamos. The Cofán leader explains the significance of their sacred plant, *yagé*, and admits with regret that the new generations are no longer interested in continuing the *yagé* tradition. We learn about the power of the plant, and that for a Cofán person being in a jungle is like being at home. The second part of the film shifts its attention towards the dangers and threats faced by indigenous communities nowadays. For the Cofán community, it is the oil companies and mines, putting their lands in danger. For the Arhuacos, it is the wound from the colonial past, and the more contemporary ecological menaces. Villafaña repeatedly states that they do not want to be 'colonised' and his attitude clearly shows their proactive attitude. In order to protect the indigenous lands, rights, and nature, Villafaña visits various offices and talks with numbers of officials. We witness the convergence of tradition and technology in the scene of GPS' location of *yagé* in the jungle. Contemporary technologies, and both indigenous and non-indigenous people supporting the cause contribute towards the mission of the 'Guardians of the Jungle' which is the protection of cultures and territories. The final scene is the farewell between Villafaña and the taita, reunited in a common goal of conservation, protection, and maintaining the balance between man and nature.

The significance of this title lies in its innovative use of the indigenous subject taking on the traditional role of an 'anthropologist' and maker of an ethnographic film. Here, Villafaña not only takes on the responsibilities of the one who 'discovers,' but also the one who 'documents' using audiovisual media. The juxtaposition of two indigenous leaders from different parts of Colombia might not seem as strong as the contrast between the European filmmakers and the cultures of the Sierra, but it seems that such approach could be significant in breaking with the stereotypical roles of the indigenous subject or indigenous filmmaker. The Arhucao man with the camera in his

hand venturing to another indigenous community to tell the story about their similarities and differences takes the significance of the indigenous filmmaking to yet another level.

5.2.3. Two points of view, two different messages

The main questions which should be asked in conclusion of this chapter are: who has the right to represent whom, for what reason, using what kind of language, and in which contexts? Also, as pointed both by Mora and Gleghorn, it is essential to keep in mind that many Western categories are often not applicable to and not compatible with indigenous filmmaking in Colombia.[525] A wider understanding of the intercultural dimension of the production, circulation and reception of these videos is crucial to gain a fuller image of these films. Another reason why we should refrain from applying Western categories to indigenous filmmaking is to avoid perpetuating the hierarchy of power relations which puts the Western criteria as superior. Mora suggests the following characteristics of indigenous filmmaking: denouncements and fight for rights, related to proper ancestral roots which we (the non-indigenous) have lost; they contain representations of 'what is good for life'; practices are more important than representations, and this should be taken into consideration when criticising the aesthetics side; these films are not designed to shine at festivals, but to transform life in the villages; the methods of productions are very different from the Western professionals; it is a collective work, coming from the community and serving the community; looking for their own language means being independent, autonomous, and de-colonised; even if sometimes perceived as 'boring', these films can and should educate the rest of the society. Furthermore, indigenous cinema is not a separate genre,

[525] Mora, 2015: 41-42.

and it should be seen within categories of equality and inclusion. The appropriation of tools, cameras and computers, might be seen as problematic (as it endangers the 'traditional' lifestyles). Mora also debates whether indigenous video could be sustainable, or if it inevitably contributes to the 'technological rubbish'. The suggestion is that the audiovisual language should be linked to cosmology and the vision of the communities and that it should avoid copying western patterns.[526]

What distinguishes the Zhigoneshi's productions from other indigenous filmmaking practices is that they are specifically made for the external public. Mora underlines that this process was not an easy one, as initially the technologies were not well-regarded by traditional communities. They compared taking photos of the landscape in the Sierra to showing 'naked pictures of a mother' because for them Sierra is their mother.[527] Only after making a spiritual payment, the Mamos accepted the work.[528] Another difficult task of many films was to 'squeeze' the message into limited time,[529] instead of letting it flow and finish naturally (which during assemblies can last many hours). Other challenges were about how to accommodate the body, and how to look into the camera, imagining the spectator (or the one who threatens this world). Writing about indigenous audiences, Rosaura Villanueva asks: who are these audiences of the alternative screenings?[530] The possible options for these screenings include: intercultural dialogue with academia, socialisation of development programmes, tribunal courts (using the images as evidence), festivals of film and videos (ethnographic, anthropological, environmental, and related to human rights). So the audience (either external or internal) is considered at the time of the production, but it is

[526] Mora, 2015: 43-45.
[527] Mora, 2015: 78.
[528] Mora, 2015:79.
[529] Which could be challenging not only for the indigenous filmmakers.
[530] Mora, 2015: 193.

important to mention that videos made for the external public are also screened internally in the communities.[531] Another example is the TV: 'Palabras Mayores' was made for the 'external' public and presented in TeleCaribe, as well as screened in commercial cinemas, Cinemark, before the main film screenings.[532] However, despite this success, most indigenous productions do not reach wider audiences nor major film festivals, concludes Villanueva. She suggests that the reason behind this is either because of the poor technical aspect of these films, or simply because they do not satisfy the requirements of the commercial public. 'Nabusímake, historias de la resistencia' was also shown in Señal Colombia (a Colombian TV channel), but the rest of similar productions usually do not get this opportunity. She adds: 'Los communicators indígenas se han visto en la necesidad de resignificar el uso de la imagen que se hace de ellos, así como de crear contenidos propios e inherir en la formulación de las políticas publicas en comunicación por parte de los Estados.'[533] She suggests that, usually, the community decides on the shape of the video, before they consider it finished.[534] One aspect of the collectivity of the production process means that all members of the production team should be able to do everything. This is a defence strategy to mitigate against the loss of crew members. Also, decisions about the content are taken collectively by the community.

This section demonstrates that the indigenous communities of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, supported by Mora, are incredibly active in maintaining control over their image as it is represented in films (both in the sense of content and intellectual property). Not only have they institutionalised the organisations responsible for

[531] Mora, 2015: 194-195.

[532] Ibid: 196.

[533] The indigenous communicators realised the need to change the meaning of the use of the image which others make of them, but also to create their own content, and be part of the formulation of public policies on communication by the States; in: Mora, 2015: 197.

[534] Ibid: 201.

communication, but they also actively work towards reducing the number of external misrepresentations, at the same time refining the ways of telling their story. The reasons behind the indigenous filmmaking in the Sierra and the complex issue of distribution were initially signalled in the films themselves, but I gained a significantly deeper understanding of them during my final fieldwork. Watching the Zgigoneshi films, it becomes clear that they represent the communication of a strong, active community, making significant attempts to promote the resistance and protection of nature. The bittersweet history of Nabusímake, the Arhuacos capital, is just an example of this resistance documented in the film. As a result, the robust and prolific audiovisual auto-representations among the four indigenous nations of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta cannot be ignored. Chapters 4 and 5 clearly proved that there is a strong division and difference between the films made by non-indigenous and indigenous filmmakers in the Sierra. The indigenous productions should not be seen as purely artistic expressions or even the simple documentation of the community's life. Instead, they serve a bigger task of negotiating the questions of sovereignty, cultural politics, and sustainable economic development. Crucially, they form part of the strategies of defence of the communities of the Sierra.

In the interview conducted in 2014 by Valentina López Mape after 'La Resistencia en Linea Negra' won the first award at the 1st Panorama of Colombian Cinema (5-11 June 2014, Paris), Villafaña says: 'If we do not take the cameras and document what happens for ourselves, there will be people coming from outside and doing it for us. And despite their best intentions, their interpretations are not faithful to what we believe in'.[535] Therefore, he concludes, it becomes their responsibility to represent themselves in audiovisual form. Using the cameras, and inspiring this dialogue, they demand a recognition of who they are. Asked about the target audience

[535] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEoY5AcN46Q; accessed on 9 March 2015.

for these films, Villafaña very clearly underlines that the images are designed to be a message to the 'outside world'. Talking about the non-indigenous filming in the Sierra he comments unambiguously: 'We cannot go on by ourselves. We need to be in alliance with the "Younger Brother", but everyone needs to know their place'.[536] Villafaña complains about the many investigations and filming initiatives where indigenous communities have been excluded from the ownership of the process. As a director of his documentaries, he recognises the huge responsibility of creating a 'representation,' claiming that the protection of the lands and nature is always the main subject of his films. He describes his love and addiction to his camera comparing it to his second *poporo*. Throughout this and other interviews, Villafaña reiterates that although he is captivated by the process of filmmaking and he enjoys it very much, it is his responsibility, rather than artistic need.

In an interview for ATL Innovación, Mora admits how quickly the filmmakers from the Sierra adapted to the language of the newly-adopted medium. The only potential challenge they encountered was the editing process.[537] He underlines that these videos are one of the very few opportunities to see the Mamos' views unmediated, the way they are. According to him, among the main reasons why they started making their representations was precisely because they could not identify themselves with the way they were represented in the films made about them by others (specifically, the work made by Alan Ereira). In another interview, Mora acknowledges that although there has been a silent (for a relative lack of widespread awareness of that) revolution in indigenous filmmaking during the last decades, distribution remains limited to specific circles of audiences. Although he recognises that by participating in the festivals (or

[536] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEoY5AcN46Q, minute 7:35; accessed on 9 March 2015.

[537] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiwtopHCQPg; accessed on 10 March 2015.

sometimes TV), gradually, these productions are gaining a wider reach.[538] The possibility to reach these wider audiences (even if we talk about Colombian non-indigenous reach in local radio or TV stations) is seen by the communities as a way to speak about their problems. Mora underlines Villafaña's view that such initiatives are inspired by the need to raise social awareness.

An important point Villafaña makes in one of his interviews is about the importance of intercultural understanding. An example he gives is that without knowing if certain animals are sacred, one might unintentionally commit the sacrilege of eating them. 'I always say that as a team of indigenous filmmakers, we are not artists, but visual secretaries of the Mamos,' he admits.[539] In this interview,[540] he says that they have about 300-400 hours of footage recorded. Of course, by now the number will be much higher. He claims to think about it as a visual archive, which in the context of this oral culture is very meaningful. Finally, he concludes that the filmmaking also signifies that the community is not from the past, but that they are very much alive and can take care and responsibility of creating the vision of their own culture.[541]

What becomes evident when comparing indigenous auto-representations with the films made in the Sierra by European, non-indigenous filmmakers (to use Ereira's films as an example), is that they serve to tell a fundamentally different story. European filmmakers tend to aim for a description of the communities, so culturally different from themselves, and to provide some insight into the life of the 'Other' often presented in an aesthetically pleasing way, enriched with a catchy soundtrack and other 'beautifying techniques.' The films made by the communities are principally designed to pass a

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[538] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYjmQTqAxAY; accessed on 10 March 2015.

[539] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM-vziWD3oA; accessed on 26 September 2015.

[540] Published on 31 October 2012.

[541] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM-vziWD3oA; accessed on 26 September 2015.

message, rather than 'discover' or 'reveal' their culture. It might be a testimony of what happens to them or a way to communicate effectively with non-indigenous audiences. Of course, they also introduce some significant elements of the community and their culture, but it is always in order to say something else, something beyond. As underlined by Villafaña, the elders will not tell everything they have to say to non-indigenous filmmakers, so these films can never get the depth of the ones made from within the community. In a culture with strictly oral traditions and a strong hierarchy, where the film medium is relatively new, one will receive a very different story depending on who is behind the camera. This is something I did not forget when I got to do my own research video about the whole experience. However, as suggested in the previous chapter, in order to understand the complexity of the situation in the Sierra it is probably useful to analyse both 'sides one the (audiovisual) conflict' and also their reaction to each other's work. So far it seems that indigenous filmmaking is not fully acknowledged by European authors, who only see their own 'collaborations' as the example of the 'indigenous voice.' On the other hand, the indigenous filmmakers get extremely protective about the rights to film in the Sierra, proposing that only their view is, and possibly can be, 'right.' We should appreciate both sides in their achievements as well as opportunities and challenges, hoping for this intercultural dialogue to continue.

Chapter 6

Fieldwork case study

Very often the aim of a documentary about a remote, relatively isolated culture focusses upon the attempt to describe the 'unknown' elements of the 'Other' (whether another culture, or the 'Others' within the researcher's/filmmaker's society). This is usually justified as an attempt to improve or deepen the understanding of common human circumstances, and the similarities and the differences between the curious 'us' (usually those who produce and consume these works in written or visual form) and 'them' (those who allow us to write about 'them' or film 'them', sometimes collaborating in the process). Also, in many cases, the producers and the audiences of the final products of such work tend to be more advanced technologically, hailing from more sophisticated academic backgrounds and having varying interests in such documentation when compared to the subjects portrayed in these films. This attempt to understand and 'document' the 'Other' then tends to be oriented towards satisfying some sort of epistemological interest, and this can be accompanied by a degree of satisfaction in finding communities in which traditional values seem to remain intact, or at least preserved to some degree, and still visibly present. Unlike the situation described above, most indigenous filmmaking is produced almost exclusively for intercultural communication purposes and is very often directed towards non-indigenous communities. There is little or no place for artistic expression or scientific 'discovery,' and the rationale behind the filmmaking aims to support causes such as land protection, visualising guerrilla violence in indigenous territories, conservation of nature, or some other problems concerning the community. In many interviews I undertook in the process of collecting the material for my video, it became clear that, if not for such reasons, these productions would have become redundant for their authors; in fact, they

would have never been made or even conceived. As an artistic discipline, filmmaking is not something which interested my research subjects. However, they were acutely aware of the requirements of Western audiences and the need for technically perfect and aesthetically pleasing images. Sometimes I had the impression that they sought to make their films as perfect as they could in order to prove that they have mastered their craft to a high degree. However, in the case of the communities upon which I focus in this research, the lack of artistic ambition does not compromise the quality of their work in the slightest.

Whilst reception processes are culturally determined, this rarely comes under scrutiny. Ethnographic work is usually focused on how Western cultures view the 'Other', rarely investigating how indigenous peoples see Western representations of their cultures. Also, unfortunately, often filmmakers do not care enough about the reception of their films among their subjects. The principal aim of my fieldwork was to investigate how the indigenous communities of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta perceive existing 'external' interpretations of their culture, what is their response, and what alternative means of communication they propose. Considering the expectations that documentary filmmaking might offer a certain degree of objectivity, it becomes quite problematic if treated without caution and awareness of the fact that any visual representation is a culturally specific interpretation, as is its reception. Eurocentric standards of understanding the 'Other' may not be (and in most cases are not) equal to indigenous understandings of European filmmaking practices. This fact cannot be ignored, especially in the case of indigenous cultures whose cosmologies are often incompatible with Western thought, as they are based on fundamentally different principles and, consequently, the role of image and communication, among other issues, might be different.

The practical part of my research constitutes an hour-long video documentation of the filming processes of Villafaña and his collaborators. It explores the following elements of their work: production; the politics of representation; dissemination; beginnings, and perspectives for the future. In the process of documenting their work, I managed to capture many aspects of personality and opinions of my subjects. This level of insight would not be possible if the research was conducted only in written form, and not accompanied by the video. The video is not designed to be distributed or presented in isolation, but rather as a supplement and commentary to the films made by my subjects. This is especially significant given the ethical background of my research, where one of my main criticisms concerns European filmmakers abusing the right to film in the Sierra. Therefore, I am aware of the implications of my video's distribution and context of presentation, being careful about where I screen it and to whom.

To conclude this introduction, I would like to once again emphasise that the aim of my investigation is not of an ethnographic nature. Rather, my interests lie in exploring the role of film and photography as a medium of representation in a very specific cultural context, and the function they play in the processes of intercultural communication and representation practices and politics. In the past, inequality of access to photographic and filmic means of representation among filmmakers and subjects made this process more complex and problematic. But this changed significantly when indigenous communities took cameras into their own hands, assuming new roles and responsibilities. Below I analyse the process and the outcome of my fieldwork in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. I also introduce the main concepts which characterise indigenous filmmaking practices in the region. Finally, I explain what drives and determines these productions, and how the politics of auto-representation and control of the ownership of an image are being shaped as a response to non-indigenous filming in the Sierra.

6.1. Preparation

6.1.1. Phase One or the initial visit

Phase One of my fieldwork, undertaken in September and October 2012, constituted my initial trip to Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, specifically Ciudad Perdida (and a number of Kogui settlements in the vicinity). The aim was to familiarise myself with the region and the communities, undertake initial interviews, and take the first set of photographs and short videos. At this stage, I became familiar with the practicalities of working with the Kogui community, as it is the community most commonly covered in European documentaries made in the region.[542] I also became aware of some technical and logistical difficulties related to access to the communities. For example, the Kogui I interviewed in this first stage of my work live in the vicinity of the Ciudad Perdida (also known as Lost City Tayuna), which is normally reached with a tourist guide. This means travelling with a group, for a very limited period of time (usually five days in total), which is significantly limiting for research purposes. The trip is planned and organised in such a way as to enable the group to reach the next base after a day of trekking, and the group can spend only a limited time with the indigenous communities. The communities do not live directly at the stations where tourists spend the night, so although the possibility of an encounter is high, it can never be guaranteed. Due to the tight itinerary, it is impossible to stay at each base for more than a night. By necessity, the research work was undertaken after hours of exhausting trek, leaving few occasions to spend quality time with the indigenous communities. There was no electricity to charge batteries or a laptop, so it was essential to reduce the use of batteries to the

[542] The reason why the Kogui are almost the only community from the Sierra appearing in foreign productions became clear in the course of my investigation.

minimum. This also means that there was no opportunity to watch the footage straightaway in order to determine if anything needed to be re-recorded. Batteries were saved to do the transfer of the video and photos to the computer, and to perform two backups. Whilst spare batteries and backup hard-drives took up almost the entire space of my luggage, even these had to be limited to reasonable amounts, owing to the fact that I had to carry all the luggage in harsh conditions, and for extended periods of time. Owing to very severe heat humidity, the equipment was exposed to the risk of damage, which had to be prevented at all costs.

Becoming familiar with these restrictions during the preparatory phase of my fieldwork enabled me to undertake more thorough preparations for the main part of this work. Probably the most important realisation was that, in order to conduct insightful investigations, it was absolutely necessary to get proper access to the communities, without severe time restrictions. Another practicality which was crucial to my research was to secure the consent forms, making sure that the consequences of my work were fully understood by the participants.[543] I also wanted to ensure that as far as possible I got honest, unprejudiced reactions and responses from my participants.[544] This search for unbiased authenticity became crucial during the stage of selecting participants for my research. Fortunately, identifying the most influential people who shape filmmaking in the Sierra proved to be easy, and, despite my worries, they were willing to collaborate. Before I introduce the process of approaching them, I shall explain how I got to that stage. The reason why the Kogui (out of four communities living in the Sierra) were selected for the first stage of the fieldwork, was due to the fact that most European films from the Sierra feature this particular community. Apart from fragments

[543] It turned out that my participants were even better prepared for this, making me sign a lengthy document stating all the restrictions and conditions of the usage of the visual materials we were collaboratively creating.

[544] Although, as I learned, some schematic responses and repetitions from my participants became unavoidable in their attempts to make sure that the most important part of their message was stated clearly and reiterated many times.

of videos scattered on various websites, there was virtually no contemporary Western work describing the Arhuacos, Wiwa, or the Kankuamos. Initially, it was not clear why this community, which is not the most numerous one of the four, was significantly more exposed in films. Only during the second stage of the fieldwork I realised that the Arhuacos and the Wiwa actively oppose Western representations of their cultures, allowing very little non-indigenous filmmaking to take place (unless they are made in collaboration with the communities of the Sierra). And the Kankuamos have nearly lost their cultural identity and traditions, so they are not so 'interesting' to external filmmakers.[545] This makes the Kogui the only 'attractive' community from the region, and the only one still willing to be filmed by non-indigenous 'Others.' Understanding this enriched my awareness of the complexity of the situation in the Sierra. In further stages of my research I also understood the historical reasons why the Arhuacos so fiercely oppose non-indigenous filmmaking in the region. This was the result of the severe abuse of their representation in the past, among others in films such as 'El Valle de los Arhuacos', directed by Vidal Antonio Rozo in 1964, in which they are shown as demoralised drunkards who have a pact with the devil. Unfortunately, these practices of misinterpretation occur to this day, albeit often in another form in which the indigenous nations are idealised, and their contemporary problems are continually ignored. This situation can be equally harmful. These reasons explain both the absence of Arhuacos in films made by contemporary Western filmmakers and is also one of their reasons to commence their own filmmaking practices.

[545] For example, because they do not wear traditional clothes or do not follow the traditional lifestyle.

6.1.2. Phase Two or the Sierra begins to unravel

The second stage of the fieldwork was undertaken between 20 September and 18 December 2015. My semi-official ways of gaining permission to collaborate with the community (by contacting the people who work with the communities and who could put me in touch with them) failed, and I tried to avoid using the help of the 'fixer' suggested by Jago Cooper and Martin Kemp. I knew that if I did that I would end up having a much poorer version of the existing films, and this would not serve my research.[546] Before going to Colombia, I became aware of the presence of some indigenous productions among the Arhuaco community of the Sierra, and I came across an interview given by Pablo Mora in which he criticises the misrepresentations of the communities from the Sierra by European directors. As indicated on numerous occasions, the role Mora plays in contemporary indigenous filmmaking in Colombia cannot be overestimated. As one of the founding fathers and active members of the Collective Zhigoneshi, till this day he remains a mentor to Villafaña. He is also responsible for crossing the boundaries between indigenous and non-indigenous documentaries, promoting distribution of indigenous films in cinemas and television, and negotiating the practicalities of indigenous communication between the communities and national television. We met as soon as I arrived in Bogotá, before proceeding to the Sierra. Mora was extremely helpful and enthusiastic about my research, and he unexpectedly took the initiative of coming to our meeting with Amado Villafaña.[547] I was aware that in the light of past experiences with European filmmakers, the Arhuaco director might be rather strict in opposing yet another non-indigenous

[546] At that stage I was still thinking about working with the Kogui, as I was still unaware of the reasons behind the filmic invisibility of the Arhuacos, Wiwa and the Kankuamos.

[547] Introduced in Chapter 5.

initiative of filming in the Sierra, especially since his prohibitions are quite notorious.[548] But at the same time, I hoped that he would understand that this is precisely what I criticise in my research, even if I do so by filming in the Sierra to investigate this issue. Initial talks resulted in Villafaña's invitation for me to see the entire body of Zhigoneshi's work before progressing with any assumptions about filmmaking in the region. On arrival in Santa Marta, I got in touch with the *Casa Indígena* where I obtained a copy of the DVD set issued by Colectivo Zhigonesi discussed above.[549] As I mentioned, I was most impressed with its content. Especially the last title, 'Sey Arimaku', looked like the quintessence of my doctorate. Therefore, I thought, there was no need to repeat the whole process by creating yet another film of me documenting the work of Mora documenting the work of Villafaña documenting the wisdom of the Mamos. This rather unexpected beginning to my fieldwork made me re-think all my expectations and strategies.

Fortunately, my stay in Colombia coincided with a big project Villafaña and his team began almost at the time of my arrival and finished just before I left. The project consisted of a series of visits to several indigenous villages in the Sierra, with the aim to discuss various aspects of communication between the four indigenous communities inhabiting the region and the non-indigenous world. These visits were also an opportunity to present some of Villafaña's films to his people. The villages I visited with Villafaña and his team were: 16-18 October 2015: Kankawarwa (Arhuaco village); 24-25 October: Dumingueka (Kogui village); 31 October-2 November: Gun Arúwun/Sabana Crespo (Arhuaco village), and 15 November and 20-23 November: Nabusímake (Arhuaco village). In addition, I collaborated on the production of their new film, 'Memorias Historicas' (Historical Memory), which also coincided with the

[548] Who at that time started his new initiative (on top of being the Director of Zhigoneshi), an Arhuaco-only Centre of Communications Yokosowi.

[549] Analysed in detail in Chapter 5.

time of my stay in the Sierra. Finally, I assisted them with video editing, strategies for filing systems and web presence, and the setup of a new office where they were hoping to accommodate postproduction. As a result, I spent most of my time with them, which gave me additional insight into the way they work. They never made me feel uncomfortable or an intruder, and they were very kind and sympathetic to my presence and my research. In December, the team was joined by Mora who participated in the making of 'Memorias Historicas.' He also advanced a project in which he was gathering and analysing films and photographs made in the Sierra by various filmmakers and anthropologists over several decades. Additionally, Mora played the key role in leading the discussions between the Arhuaco community and national TV, centred around representation of indigenous people in the national (and private) TV channels.

6.1.3. The collaboration or who is Amado Villafaña?

The collaboration with Arhuaco filmmakers which followed this initial introduction and meeting with Mora and Villafaña was quite an experience. In the process of my work with Villafaña and his crew, I was given an unusual opportunity to participate in the process of their work in the most direct way, and to observe not only the filming processes but also the logistics, postproduction, and their proactive communication work in the villages. Hours spent with Villafaña and his collaborators, translating and subtitling the interviews with the Mamos and elders,[550] gave me a unique opportunity to learn about the complexities of the politics of representations in the Sierra. Finally, at the end of our filmic collaboration, I was fortunate enough to discuss the outcome with

[550] Which were far away from literal translations; instead they consisted of translating complex indigenous concepts expressed in the native languages into Spanish phrases, which could be understood by people who are not familiar with the Arhuaco philosophy and culture.

Villafaña, his team, and Mora. Effectively, during my fieldwork I became an integral part of Villafaña's team. The fact of travelling with them made my access to indigenous villages much easier.[551] During the visits to the villages, I was fulfilling a double role as a photographer/videographer. Firstly, as a provider of support images for the film which Villafaña was making at the time.[552] And secondly, gathering materials for my own research, documenting Villafaña's work as a director. This combination of tasks was in itself an extremely useful exercise, even if the subject of the meetings I was documenting was not directly related to the subject of my thesis. When looking at the footage, Villafaña would make a comment about the technical side of the images. This demonstrated that he had absolutely mastered the understanding of aperture and camera speed to perfection, while maintaining his accomplished sense of composition. He did not accept anything which could potentially be better than it was, and the word 'imperfection' was not in his vocabulary. He was acutely aware of the need to be fully adaptable to the light conditions, and flexible with the situation unravelling in front of his eyes. Such attention to detail was impressive, considering that for most of his life Villafaña had had no interest in film or photography.

Amado Villafaña Chaparro was born in 1956 in the Sierra, in Donachuy, by the village of Gun Arúwun,[553] where he has spent most of his life. His mother did not speak Spanish and was a devoted Catholic (as a result of the Capuchins presence in the region), and his father was a Mamo who embraced the idea to learn Spanish with the aim to empower the community and protect them from unfair treatment when dealing with the mestizos. Villafaña became a school teacher at the Arwamuke community, a

[551] Most of these places do not even appear on Google maps, they are very remote, difficult to access and closed from free entrance, so one cannot simply get there without laborious permissions and preparations.

[552] For that I was mostly asked to document the interviews with the Mamos or the meetings.

[553] Today better known as Sabana Crespo.

secretary of the *Autoridades Indígenas Tradicionales de la Sierra Nevada* (Arhuaco traditional authorities), tax consultant for Mesa Directiva de la Confederación Indígena Tayrona, and a translator between the Mamas and the non-indigenous world.[554] Villafaña's quiet rural life was interrupted when he was threatened by the ELN guerrillas and was forced to relocate to the city. He first moved to Santa Marta, then to Valledupar. Unsure of how to deal with violence and displacement, he asked for a Mamo's advice, and this is how he arrived at the idea of making his first film. The role of Pablo Mora in this process is fundamental. Mora, an academic and filmmaker himself, became the link between this emerging idea of indigenous resistance with film as a main tool, and the practicalities of it, such as fundraising, training, distributions, etc. The first step into understanding the world of images was by getting trained by Steven Ferry, a National Geographic photographer. The collaboration, which lasted between 2006 and 2009, took form of various workshops, culminating in the multimedia exhibition 'TAYRONA: Territory, Culture and Climate Change', which consisted of: 36 photographs by Stephen Ferry and Amado Villafaña/Zhigoneshi; wall text by spiritual authorities; graphics illustrating the effects of global warming on the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta; film screenings of documentaries produced by the Zhigoneshi Communications Center ('Nabusimake: Memories of Independence'; 'Words of the Elders', and also 'Ranchería : From Sacred Land to Mega-Project' directed by Ferry); and finally presentations by Villafaña, a Mamo, and Ferry, followed by Q & A.[555]

Another stage in Villafaña's formation was provided by the Javieriana University in Bogotá, which allowed him to make the use of their equipment in the *Sala Matrix,* their multimedia centre, and get familiar with the technology. The event is thus

[554] Vallejo, 2009: 2.

[555] http://stephenferry.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TayronaBrochure.pdf; accessed on 13 March 2018.

described by Maryluz Vallejo, a professor from the Communication Department of Javieriana University (who was leading the event together with other professors, including Pablo Mora):

> At the matrix technology room —a possibility offered by the Program of Journalism of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana— the native Amerindians of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia, went through a 'conversion' and digital convergence experience to create and develop their own independent media. With Mother Nature's due permission, they started a process of incorporating new technologies vis-à-vis the production of journalistic and audiovisual material in their languages supported by their traditional wisdom.[556]

Following that, he participated in a series of audiovisual training with the financial help from the US embassy. Finally, again thanks to Mora and Vallejo, Fundación Avina, a Latin American philanthropic foundation, secured the resources to establish the Centre of Communications Zhignoneshi, which consists of the representatives of all four indigenous nations from the Sierra and is led by Villafaña till this day.[557] The Zhigoneshi officially started functioning in 2007. Since then, Villafaña's work continued, and he gained significant national and international recognition both for his photography and documentary filmmaking. Today, he is seen as an ambassador of Arhuaco culture, and a respected member of Colombian society. Villafaña is the

[556] Vallejo, 2009: 1.

[557] The trajectory is described by Mariluz Vallejo: '[…] gracias a un proyecto financiado por la embajada estadounidense, [Villafaña] participó en dos talleres de capacitación audiovisual. El proyecto facilitó la apropiación tecnológica de equipos de grabación y edición de video. El proceso venía languideciendo cuando, a instancia mía, se vinculó hace dos años la Fundación Avina, que aportó recursos económicos y asesoría para reorientar y fortalecer el entonces bautizado Centro de Comunicaciones Zhigoneshi, de la Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona, y que Amado dirige en la actualidad. Al proceso se han sumado nuevos aliados, como la Comunidad Europea y el laboratorio de periodismo Matrix, de la Universidad Javeriana.':

Thanks to a project funded by the US embassy, [Villafaña] participated in two audiovisual training workshops. The project facilitated the technological appropriation of video recording and editing equipment. The process slowed down when, two years ago, at my request, he started collaborating with the Avina Foundation, which provided economic resources and advice to redirect and strengthen the then-baptized Zhigoneshi Communications Center of the Gonawindúa Tayrona Organization, which Amado currently directs. The process has been strengthened by new allies, such as the European Community and the journalism laboratory Matrix, of the Javeriana University

Vallejo, 2009: 3

embodiment of an extraordinary transformation from a simple agricultural life, to a charismatic promotor of indigenous values at an international level. Villafaña's skilful approach to filmmaking cannot be taken for granted, and it is astonishing to hear that if not for the violence, he would have never reached for a camera. He claims that artistic fulfilment is not something which has ever motivated his work. I spoke to Villafaña about his films on numerous occasions, and he always repeated that all he learnt was from experience. It is rare to see such attention to detail and dedication, and such an uncompromising commitment to perfectionism. He knows exactly what he wants, and he can clearly communicate this to his team, leaving no space for chance and accident. He is also well aware of how a cinematographically attractive image should look. I witnessed many examples of his professionalism, where he would abandon sleep or food rather than miss the opportunity to take a good shot. During all my stay in Colombia, Villafaña remained fully focused, sometimes starting his days as early as 3am to ensure he arrived in the specific place in the Sierra on time for an assembly. His aims remain clear and he is prolific in disseminating his thought not only via his films and presence in international festivals, but also by giving numerous talks and interviews. In one of his statements he explains the final goal of his activities:

> La meta es muy directa: La visibilización tiene que amarrar aliados para que estén con nosotros para la protección de la sierra y la cultura. Yo creo que el producto va cumpliendo su propósito, lento, pero ahí va. Es importante que estemos posicionados en todos los festivales, a nivel nacional e internacional, porque es la manera de visibilizar lo que está pasando en la sierra y cómo somos, y el propósito siempre es amarrar aliados. Sin embargo, la circulación la queremos hacer en espacios cerrados y no tan públicos. Ya cuando todo el mundo tiene acceso a ella, no todo el mundo es respetuoso, lo bajan, lo cortan, cogen imágenes, van a hacer videos a otro lado, entonces lo evitamos. De pronto bajo otras circunstancias incluso sería lo mejor, pero nosotros todavía no estamos preparados. Requiere de una explicación a las autoridades tradicionales en el territorio. Requiere de

muchísima responsabilidad.[558]

This introduction highlights Villafaña's trajectory and transformation from a farmer to a director. His determination and patience in pursuing his goals made him extremely efficient in achieving them, and in fulfilling his mission of spreading the voice of the Sierra Nevada. The following sections discuss specific topics addressed by Villafaña and his team during the course of their visits to indigenous settlements in the Sierra, and also directly in their films.

[558] The goal is very clear: the visibility must bring together allies to be with us for the protection of the Sierra and its culture. I believe that the project is fulfilling its purpose, slowly, but there it goes. It is important that we are present in all festivals, nationally and internationally, because this is the way to make visible what is happening in the Sierra and how we are, and the purpose is always to gain more allies. However, we want to disseminate and circulate our wok in more closed spaces, not as much in public ones. When everyone has access to it, not everyone is respectful, they cut it, take images, go to make videos elsewhere, so we need to avoid it. Suddenly, under other circumstances, it would even be the best, but we are not ready yet. It requires an explanation to the traditional authorities in the territory. It requires a lot of responsibility.

Villafaña, 2013: 142 (http://www.rchav.cl/2013_21_b09_villafana.html#6)

6.1.4. Indigenous appropriations and controversies

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the historical events which had a significant impact on the contemporary Arhuacos was the presence of the Capuchin mission established in Nabusímake. That painful episode was not only an attempt to eradicate Arhuaco culture, but it also had more long-term consequences for those who survived and resisted. The area of Nabusímake was visited and photographed on two occasions by a Swiss ethnographer Gustaf Bolinder. His first visit occurred in 1914 - 1915, and this is when he took a photograph of an indigenous girl tied to a pole, among others. On his second visit, five years later (1920-1921), he photographed a scene with one of the missionaries and an indigenous man having his hair forcibly cut. Catalina Muñoz suggests that 'Bolinder took the pictures as ethnographic material that sought to capture the culture of what he perceived as an exotic tribe.'[559] In his notes taken during that visit, Bolinder expressed his nostalgia about the culture which he predicted was about to disappear. Seeing a big difference between what he observed between his two visits (short hair of the children, uniforms, plots of lands, prayers),[560] he lamented that the culture he was observing was soon to be seen only in films or in museum displays. Years later, all 42 photographs he took during his visits were recovered from European archives by the anthropologist Yesid Campos and his study group, Associación del Trabajo Interdisciplinario, and delivered to the indigenous authorities in the Sierra. They are now kept in an album called 'Fotografías de Nabusímake en 1915 (Gustaf Bolinder)', created and by an elder, Manuel Chaparro, in Nabusímake.[561] As analysed in Chapter 5.2.1, for the purpose of his film 'Nabusímake, memorias de una independencia', Villafaña not only used the images as an illustration of the persecutions imposed on the

[559] Muñoz, 2017: 376.
[560] Muñoz, 2017: 386.
[561] Muñoz, 2017: 377.

Arhuacos by the Capuchins, but he also used present-day actors to re-enact the images. He also introduced new elements in his reenactments (like the figure of the apostolic vicar, who was not in the original photo):

> In Villafaña's documentary, the scenes captured in four separate photographs are brought together into a single moment in time: the children exercising, the tied Arhuaco man, the hair-cutting scene, and the tied girl. The photographs are re-signified in an interesting exercise of cutting and pasting instants from the past. In the process, the photographs lose their initial ethnographic interest and become supplies in the task of constructing memory.[562]

The controversy arises when we realise, as Muñoz reveals in her article, that the first image was in fact taken before the Capuchins settled in Nabusímake, and the original Bolinder's caption for that image mentions that the tied girl was punished for a theft.[563] This suggests that the girl was disciplines by the traditional Arhuaco communities, and not the Capuchins. However, Villafaña's interpretation of the image is not necessarily a manipulation, as the way the images are kept together in the same album today might suggest that they indeed were taken during the same time. As such, this re-contextualisation of the meaning might be based on Villafaña's assumptions.[564] The story of Bolinder's images is interpreted in a similar way not only by Villfaña. In 'Camino en Espiral: Yo'Sa Ingunu', Natalia Giraldo Jaramillo adds the following caption when reproducing the image of the Arhuaco girl tied to the pole: 'Niño amarrado por los misioneros Capuchinos. Imágenes que muestran los vejámenes físicos realizados por los Capuchinos a indígenas Iku.'[565] This only reinforces the possibility that the mis-interpretation of the images by Villafaña might not be necessarily intentional.

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[562] Muñoz, 2017: 390.
[563] Muñoz, 2017: 381.
[564] Muñoz, 2017: 382.
[565] Child tied up by the Capuchin missionaries. Images which show the physical humiliations carried out by the Capuchins on indigenous Arhuacos; Jaramillo, 2014: 125.

Muñoz points to the plurality of potential interpretations of the images which might be used in two different contexts: indigenous and non-indigenous ones.[566] The initial one was as Bolider's ethnographic document. Muñoz proposes that:

> Today, some Arhuaco use them for different ends. They have recently incorporated them into narratives about their past, mobilised to strengthen their cultural identity and legitimise claims to autonomy. As such, the uses of these photographs can be interpreted as part of a wider Arhuaco effort to produce counter narratives of self-determination.[567]

This points to the role of photography in the construction of memory and 'the process through which the pictures become vehicles in the production of narratives about the past.'[568] We should keep in mind that the circulation of these images within the Arhuaco society is not very wide, and traditionally the memories about the past were shared orally,[569] being hardly ever reproduced. However, Villafaña contests the dominant external narratives and tension because this production of indigenous narratives is achieved using what is considered to be foreign technologies: photography and video. He subverts power reactions by 'claiming the ownership of history-telling for the Arhuaco, who are now telling the world the history of their suffering under the mission.'[570] Muñoz claims that by doing so, Villafaña 'contests Western historical narratives- by producing local one - while inventively partaking in Western storytelling technologies.'[571]

According to my conversations with Villafaña and Mora, the film 'Nabusímake' was seen as controversial by some of Moreover, 'Villafaña has also been criticised by members of the community for seeking fame through his work, which he displays more internationally than at home.'[572] Also, throughout his filmmaking practice he

[566] Muñoz, 2017: 375.
[567] Muñoz, 2017: 376.
[568] Muñoz, 2017: 382.
[569] Muñoz, 2017: 377.
[570] Muñoz, 2017: 390.
[571] Muñoz, 2017: 390.
[572] Muñoz, 2017: 391.

transitioned from making the initial films in the Arhuaco language to the more frequent use of Spanish, probably keeping his international audience in mind. But I agree with Murillo when she notices that:

> Solo aquel que domine la lengua nacional puede aspirar a convertirse en un líder cuya esfera de influencia vaya mucho mas allá de su propio pueblo, de su propio sector, de su propia localidad. Esta situación lingüística ha facilitado a algunos grupos el acceso a recursos del Estado y entidades internacionales que han posibilitado la formación de clases sociales claramente diferenciadas en la comunidad.[573]

His re-appropriation of these images serves the purpose of 'strengthening cultural identity':[574] 'He wants to produce Arhuaco narratives of their collective stories, that in denouncing foreign abuse portray the community as strong and resilient', where the images tell the story of 'empowered indigenous resistance.'[575] Muñoz concludes that:

> Arhuacos are not merely passive subjects of the imperial gaze; they can stand both sides of these photographs, also observing, interpreting and reusing the tools of colonisation in their struggle for resistance, self-representation and self-government. […] An indigenous media-maker re-signifies anthropological photographs from the early twentieth century, but his contemporary use is not entirely detached from a colonial history of which he is a part of.[576]

Muñoz conducted her observations while travelling to Nabusímake in 2011 and 2012 as part of a group of professors who 'offered two certification programs to some Arhuacos teachers and leaders.'[577] I agree with her conclusion that 'These contemporary Arhuaco uses emphasise indigeneity and authenticity in an era of multiculturalism. The authenticity that Bolinder sought to capture is now emphasised by the Arhuaco for different purposes and under new circumstances.'[578] Also, 'the production and

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[573] Only those who master the national language can aspire to become a leader whose sphere of influence goes far beyond your own people, your own sector, your own location. This linguistic situation has made it easier for some groups to access resources from the state and international entities, which enabled the formation of social classes clearly differentiated in the community; Murillo, 2001: 145

[574] Muñoz, 2017: 387.

[575] Muñoz, 2017: 387.

[576] Muñoz, 2017: 377.

[577] Muñoz, 2017:392.

[578] Muñoz, 2017: 387.

dissemination of indigenous narratives about the past that denounce outside intervention in their culture and territory' can be seen as a form of a resistance.[579] Villafaña really understood the potential of using new media 'for the defence and conservation of the land, languages, culture and identity of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra.'[580]

It has to be appreciated that Villafaña put an incredible effort to transform himself from a quiet indigenous countryman who never ever dreams of making movies to an international ambassador of indigenous filmmaking. But, after all, 'antes de empezar, no hay nada',[581] as the Arhuaco say. I conclude this section with Schelgelberger's words:

> Es de admirar cómo los Arhuacos en contra de la prognosis de Gustavo Bolinder han sobrevivido con su cultura hasta hoy. No los hemos encontrado cerrados, como se los describe, cerrados sino interesados y - con el tiempo que se necesita para familiarizarse un poco - también acogedores. Lo que sí es verdad: saben resistir sin ser violentos. Esa actitud admirable debe tener su fundamento en la religión cuya ley es la de mantener el equilibrio.[582]

[579] Muñoz, 2017: 388.

[580] Muñoz, 2017: 388.

[581] Before starting, there is nothing; Rosario Ferro, 2012: 13.

[582] It is to be admired how the Arhuacos, contrary the prognosis of Gustavo Bolinder, have survived with their culture until today. We have not found them closed, as they are described, but interested and - with the time it takes to become a little familiar - also welcoming. What is true is that they know how to resist without being violent. This admirable attitude must have its foundation in the religion whose law is to maintain balance.

Schlegelberger, 1995: 64.

6.2. The politics of audiovisual representation in the Sierra

6.2.1. The right to represent and the ownership of the image

In the course of visits to the villages, I was able to deepen my understanding of indigenous communication in the Sierra and the communities' need for auto-representation. Villafaña and his team developed strategies to gain control of images, music, and knowledge, which they considered to be the collective property of the community rather than of the individuals who make them. As in many countries around the world, in Colombia there is no legislation which allows to register collective ownership of audiovisual work, protecting the intellectual ownership of images produced by the indigenous collectives. They had to be registered instead as the property of the individuals involved in the process, that is, the director, cameraman, and producer. The filmmakers from the Sierra also criticise the exclusion of the other three nations inhabiting the region in European films. They see it as a disregard to the collective nature of indigenous filmmaking. This inspires the question of what right one has to represent the 'Other.' According to Villafaña, this right seems to be taken for granted by certain European filmmakers, who tend to neglect the point of view of their participants. Reactions to this, reinforced by the violence affecting the lives of the indigenous communities of the Sierra, have been the main incentive which pushed them to learn the film language and the technical side of using cameras. This has resulted in creating a response in the form of sophisticated audiovisual messages. This underlines the fact that the politics of representation and its consequences are culturally specific. This completely different understanding of the ownership of the image is also related to the fact that indigenous filmmakers (or 'communicators', as they sometimes like to call themselves) and European filmmakers seem to produce their audiovisual work for

fundamentally different reasons. For the Arhuacos or the Wiwa, the main goal is to communicate certain preoccupations to the non-indigenous world in the most effective way (and today video appears to be one of them, if not the main one). These preoccupations are shared by the whole community, not only the person who stands behind the camera. Therefore, the whole community is the owner of these works, and it is in their interest to make sure these films achieve what they aim for. For European filmmakers, it is often an individual's ambition to create a 'good film' about an 'interesting subject' in order to please either festival audiences, enrich their artistic output, or gain recognition as a researcher or anthropologist. It is not to disregard these reasons as dubious or bad, but they are fundamentally different from those of the indigenous authors. One of the most important messages addressed not only during the meetings and assemblies but also in the filming process with Villafaña and his team has to do with indigenous communication and its efficiency. The question of intellectual ownership is not only about defining who has the control over the creation of the images, but it has a huge impact on shaping who will be able to watch the final product and under what circumstances. If the film is produced and owned by a TV company, it is likely to be distributed through TV channels and reach regular TV audiences. If it is owned by the community itself (or by the director and producer from the community in the absence of the legal possibility of collective ownership), the community has much more control over its distribution. But the disadvantage, as indicated in Chapter 4, is that they might not be powerful enough to reach the audiences beyond niche festivals and academic contexts. Hence the intellectual property of the images, so fiercely defended by figures such as Villafaña, comes with a price. After all, the Arhuacos wish to be seen as passing an important message to the outside world, not as yet another ethnographic curiosity 'discovered' by Western filmmakers. Perhaps the most important point here is about the artistic independence of films over which the community has a

full control, as opposed to the compromises which inevitably happen when external money and direction is involved. Undoubtedly, every author filming in the Sierra will have his or her own vision of what the film is to look like, so if communities feel misrepresented, as in the Arhuaco's case, this independence of artistic self-representation is a priority.

6.2.2. Discussing communication

These 'misrepresentations', however, are not always intentional, nor even conscious. The urge to look for the most pronounced differences between cultures seems to be inspired by a need to understand one's own identity. And the perception of the 'Other' is always informed by the background and previous experiences (direct or mediated) of the one who observes. In order to understand someone, it is essential to observe their actions from the 'outside' and to compare them with another set of behaviours which serve as a reference point. This sometimes needs to be generalised in order to be understood. At the same time, this act of distancing oneself from the subject creates a gap which can by filled by culturally (and personally) determined pre-assumptions, which potentially distort the interpretation. So, inevitably, it is impossible to rid oneself of one's own baggage of experiences and knowledge, and this can be both helpful (in the sense of deepening the cognitive insight into the subject), and confusing (as it distracts attention from fresh, unbiased judgement). According to Nichols, 'The separation of Us from Them is inscribed into the very institution of anthropology and into the structure of most ethnographic film. They occupy a time and space which "we" must recreate, stage, or represent'.[583] As a consequence, portraying 'Others' ultimately

[583] Nichols, B, 1995: 67.

becomes a mirror in which we reflect our own ideas, questions, insecurities, and doubts. By representing what we see in the 'Other,' we re-affirm who we are, as such re-affirmation becomes the reference point which marks the similarities with and differences from the 'Other'. Following the same principle, filmmakers working with remote communities tend to seek similarities and differences vis-à-vis their own cultures, which helps them to understand their own identity. And perhaps that explains, to some degree, the 'conflict of interest' of these two points of view.

On 28 October 2015, Villafaña was approached by a young researcher from Señal Colombia, a national TV channel, who wished to investigate the possibility of making an episode of a programme 'Quienes somos?' (Who are we?) with the Arhuacos. At that time, I was participating in almost all Zhigoneshi's meetings, and I got invited to participate in this meeting. We met at a café, and the researcher, Maria Angela, explained the idea to Villafaña. She told us that they wished to show different Colombians from various parts of the country, including some indigenous communities. She was confident to get a rapid and positive answer, as she apparently did with all the other communities she approached. To her surprise, her proposal was met with a firm opposition from Villafaña who explained that the Arhuacos and the Zhigoneshi aim precisely to avoid any external filming unless it is fully controlled and owned by the community. When the researcher said that all they might need was two minutes of a Mamo talking about traditions, or an Arhuaco woman weaving, Villafaña's reluctance became even acuter. He explained that, for the Arhuacos, a Mamo's knowledge is not that of an individual person, but a collective wisdom which belongs to the entire community, just as weaving has a deep significance for the community and cannot be seen as just the making of artisanal objects. This wisdom, he claimed, cannot be so easily given away and made to seem banal. He advised Maria Angela to meet him again the following morning, so that he could present her with the forms containing the

conditions which would allow Señal Colombia to make their episode with the Arhuacos. One of these conditions was a full control over the editing process. He also insisted that the image would need to remain an intellectual property of the Arhuacos, not Señal Colombia. This was not an isolated event where I witnessed Villafaña placing the value of the ownership of the image over the easy satisfaction of appearing on television. The firmness of his negotiation was impressive, and it left no illusion about what his priorities were. However, although it might be seen as a way of protecting the wisdom of the Sierra, such fierce prohibition of external filming might potentially lead to equally biased internal views. Nevertheless, this should be seen in the historical context which provoked such a protective approach from Villafaña's side.

As mentioned above, my visits to the indigenous villages coincided with internal, and to certain degree, external, conversations about communication held between the communities inhabiting the Sierra and non-indigenous representatives from beyond the region. In addition, some of the meetings (mainly that held in Dumingueka, a Kogui settlement, and Nabusímake) happened in the presence of several representatives of the ANTV (National Television Authority).[584] This underlines the weight and the importance of communication with the non-indigenous world. It is also a sign of the involvement and initiative of the Arhuaco community in reaching towards non-indigenous audiences. All the meetings were conducted in the traditional way in which the communities run their regular assemblies, that is, in a big room with a palm roof, full of plastic chairs or wooden benches, with everyone wearing traditional clothing and performing traditional tasks (women weaving, and men using their *poporos*). Like many other bigger indigenous villages in the Sierra which obtained support from the government, Dumkingueka has two major sections: a traditional one by the river with traditional Kogui huts surrounded by coca bushes where the families

[584] Autoridad Nacional de Televisión.

live, and a more modern one with brick buildings serving as a school and assembly place for gatherings. When participating in the meetings, I became aware of many culturally specific details which shaped the way they were conducted. At the beginning of the meeting, the ANTV representative, a man in his 30s from Bogotá, invited the men to sit closer to the projector so that they could see better the content of the presentation. This invitation was quickly corrected by the local authority who explained that they need to sit closer to the edge of the floor (a concrete floor with a palm roof), so that they can spit onto the ground. Every adult man from the Sierra greeted one another by exchanging a handful of coca leaves which they keep in the traditional *mochilas*,[585] and they chew the leaves. After a while, they spit the remaining pulp onto the grass. Because the meeting was held between three parties, that is, the inhabitants of Dumingueka (Kogui village), Villafaña (Arhuaco), and the young representative of the ANTV, it was primarily conducted in Spanish (with a few exceptions when the Kogui leader would address his people in their native language to elaborate some thoughts or to explain something in more detail). In my experience, the indigenous leaders not only speak passionately, but also at length. These tireless speakers talk for hours without a break, with some participants listening carefully, others falling asleep and waking up, children playing, and women caring for babies or making *mochilas*. I have witnessed meetings which started around 5:00 pm and lasted almost till 4:00 am. They only finished when the men felt that they had reached an agreement and understanding over the discussed subject.

Among the most important points arising during the meeting in Dumingueka was the already familiar question of the ownership of images. Other discussed topics included the presence of indigenous communities in the national media, discussion of an indigenous broadcasting station, and other elements of communication such as YouTube

[585] Traditional bags woven by the women in the community.

or social media. As Villafaña explained to me, the biggest challenge of the ownership of images in the Sierra is to reassure that it is regulated and treated with equal importance among all the communities. Therefore, it is both internal (within the community) and external (often juridical) work. At one of the meetings in Nabusímake, several examples of the abuse and manipulation of images from the Sierra were presented, one of them being a compromising video showing the Kogui Mamos dancing *champeta*.[586] This video was secretly filmed and published on YouTube,[587] with potentially very damaging effect on the community. As the common knowledge about the Kogui is not that extensive, for many people such an unfortunate YouTube video might be the only source of information about the community. In many interviews which Villafaña recorded for his film, it was stressed that questions of communication among the peoples of the Sierra are to do with the spiritual connection to the earth, and all the elements of nature (birds, stones, plants). The presence of new technologies or TV aerials were fiercely opposed by the community as they were perceived to be completely redundant for their culture and used solely with the aim to achieve the intercultural understanding with the Younger Brother. The 'real' communication for the members of the traditional communities of the Sierra take the form of assemblies, where everybody is physically present, listens, and contributes to the discussions and decision-making personally, without the mediation of any technology. So, in the eyes of the community, ancestral communication and Western communication have very little in common.

At the same time, it is impressive to see such major engagement with the issue of image control and communication among these traditional communities, who themselves, have very limited access to contemporary media. To clarify, the traditional

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[586] A traditional folk dance from the Atlantic coast of Colombia.

[587] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Urx_B4e94NQ; accessed on 25 October 2015.

assemblies are attended both by people who live in the villages, and by those who live in the cities and are actively involved in the activities of institutions such as *Casa Indígena* and other indigenous collectives and organisations. This means that these two groups have very different access to media and new technologies. One has virtually no access at all, whilst the other benefits from what we might call a 'regular' (or even above average) access, often actively reaching for video, radio, television, festivals, and social media to promote their community's wellbeing. With this in mind, their awareness of the power of image and representation in the contemporary world seems truly impressive, and only confirms how effective at banishing inequality communication within the community is. Despite all the reassurances and encouragements from Villafaña's side, while participating in the meetings and listening to their passionate talk, I felt slightly uncomfortable documenting the meetings, as I obviously represented exactly what they and I criticise so fiercely, that is, a non-indigenous photographer/filmmaker taking images of the community.

Another significant point discussed during the meetings was the question of how contemporary modes of communication fit into the life of traditional cultures. During my lengthy conversations with Villafaña, he made it very clear that for him and his people the whole idea of communication is about reaching non-indigenous audiences. The four nations of the Sierra, he claimed, do not need television, mobile phones, or any other audiovisual devices. They are only of importance purely for the purpose of passing certain messages onto non-indigenous audiences, for whom it might be easier to receive them if they arrive in such form. In this sense, indigenous communicators make an effort to adopt practices which are fundamentally alien to their cultures in order to make themselves understood. The reasons for this effort are, among others, informing non-indigenous people about who they are, what they think, and how they wish to be represented, but also to make them aware of the destructive actions which endanger the

planet we share. Villafaña and his people were very aware that if they do not take the responsibility to auto-represent themselves, others will and, as he claims, they will not do it well. But the communities of the Sierra also proved to be aware of all the implications of using audiovisual media to communicate. For example, the fact that access to any media (for example, a TV channel which they could use for distribution of the indigenous TV) involves a fee was not welcomed. Having to pay any fees would require securing a source of income and not being self-sustained any more, and this would fundamentally change the traditional way of life they are trying to protect. At the same time they agreed that access to modes of auto-representation and proper understanding of how to use them was essential, requiring financial assistance from the government. At the end of the meetings, a list of participants was circulated among those who attended. The majority of the signatures were left in the form of fingerprints. Interestingly, some attendees made notes during the talks. This again re-affirms how unified the indigenous voice is in the matter of communication, despite so many divisions within the community.

The final meeting, held in Nabusímake at the end of November, was a culmination of all the previous assemblies. Pablo Mora introduced questions raised at the preparatory meeting held between the main indigenous institutions of Colombia (Confederación Indígena Tayrona, Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia AICO, Organización Indígena de las Amazons OPIAT, and Organización Indígena de Colombia ONIC), concerning the formulation of a national plan for television which would serve local indigenous purposes. The main issues raised at the meeting discussed the way to understand indigenous communication in relation to a non-indigenous one, and possibilities of building a bridge between these two. One of the concerns was the threat which occidental communication might pose for the traditional one. Another question which was raised enquired whether Western communication can somehow help and

strengthen the traditional, ancestral one. They also pondered whether the indigenous communities of the Sierra wish to have control of the entire system of production and the content of the potential television. It was immediately clarified that, although the need for television is not for the sake of immediate community benefits, that is not to say that they do not need the broadcasting space. They do, to communicate the message to the Younger Brother. The discussion continued by defining the exact shape of what they needed. Rather than a separate indigenous channel with the responsibility of producing 24-hours of content, it would be just a shorter space in the national (and potentially private) channels. This option was more promising to secure inclusion in the wider communication process, rather than in the isolated indigenous one. The following question was if they wished to hire someone to produce the content for this potential fringe of broadcasting space, or do they rather have a centre of production themselves. The community acknowledged that if they wanted to do it themselves, they needed equipment, people, and training. Finally, Mora asked what type of content they wish to produce: fiction, telenovelas, contests with the Arhuaco subjects, or just programmes with the messages of the Mamos. The response arrived immediately, pointing to the importance of maintaining the seriousness of the community.

6.2.3. Dissemination and culturally determined pre-assumptions

Each assembly I attended during my stay in the Sierra culminated in a screening of one of the films of the Zhigoneshi collective, and sometimes other productions. The aim was to show these films in most of the villages to make sure that the entire indigenous population of the Sierra is aware of their existence. The screenings for the communities were fascinating events. As there is no electricity in the villages, we first needed to set

up a power generator. The videos were usually projected onto a piece of sheet or other white fabric hang on the wall. I expected to witness bored faces of people unaccustomed to the lengthy projections, probably falling asleep.[588] To my surprise, they were totally engaged in the experience. After one of the screenings, a Kogui man approached Villafaña telling him how much he had enjoyed the film, and that he learnt a lot from the screening. I could not hide my amazement at his reaction. I realised how arrogant my assumption that they would react otherwise was, only because they had no access to Western entertainment forms such as films. As soon as the film finished, the audience asked for another one. They did not require a break. The same thing happened on my visit to the following village, Gun Arúwun, where the screening was very well attended. The audience watched four films in a row with a great attention, something I have not witnessed at any screening I have ever attended in a regular cinema. Furthermore, Villafaña had a number of invitations to present his film at more accessible (for the non-indigenous audiences) venues such as the University of Santa Marta, Daupará festival in Bogotá, and many others.

As it became clear in the course of my filming process with Villafaña's team, the biggest and most important aspect of their activity is assuring the right and execution of successful auto-representation. This attitude, as we have seen, is a direct response to the lack of identification with the way the communities have traditionally been represented by non-indigenous authors. This leads us to two conclusions. Firstly, it implies that these two points of view (indigenous and non-indigenous) serve two completely different purposes. Secondly, it might be evidence of a major failure of understanding between the two cultures. But even by being so proactive in responding to this failure of understanding, and by responding with their own practice of audiovisual auto-

[588] Especially in the Kogui villages, because the films were made in Arhuaco, which is very different from the Kogui language, so they had to rely on Spanish subtitles.

representation, it still does not guarantee achieving their goal. No matter how good their films might be, we cannot forget that most of the time they reach fundamentally different audiences than the films they attempt to respond to, and, as discussed, the scope of reach and the contexts of presentation of a film can heavily determine its reception and reading. Furthermore, videos made by indigenous communities are still seen as niche, unable to compete with mainstream films or even documentaries due to their significantly more limited distribution. Therefore, Mora's efforts to include the presence of these films both on television and in commercial cinemas is of huge significance. Despite Colombian's society interest in indigenous matters, the common knowledge about indigenous communities is usually very superficial. It is also a different kind of interest from the one originating in Europe. European film festivals and projections of Colombian indigenous films still tend to present them as something 'exotic.' On Colombian soil, 'indigeneity' refers to national identity. Whilst Arhuaco culture is not fully understood by the rest of Colombia, it is still part of the cultural heritage of the country, and that is how these films are seen. The films by Zhigoneshi were indeed very well received both during the screening in the indigenous villages of the Sierra and at the festivals and academic institutions in Colombia. And each audience would have their own interpretation of the Arhuaco culture.

6.2.4. Being part of the indigenous team

In addition to the experience of filming, attending screenings, and the extensive talks about indigenous communication and auto-representation, being part of the regular life of an indigenous community was an unforgettable experience. First of all, being part of Villafaña's team and travelling with them was a bonus in itself. The area where I

undertook my research belongs to the indigenous communities. Some of the terrain is guarded, most is very isolated, and one cannot simply enter there. It requires an extensive amount of time and effort to get permissions from indigenous organisations and authorities to gain access. Belonging to their team made my access worry-free. I had my hammock located where they were, I was given food when they were eating, and I filmed them, with nobody asking questions. Most of the times the team consisted of: Villafaña himself, Angel Villafaña (his son and assistant), Dilia Villafaña (his daughter and assistant), and Jean-Carlos (his cameraman). On some occasions we were also joined by Mora, Pricilla Alvarado (Mora's collaborator), and Benjamin Gutiérrez (sound assistant). We also worked with a number of Arhuaco, Wiwa and Kogui collaborators in the *Casa Indígena* who helped with the translations, sound, and other tasks. During all my stay, I never felt discriminated because of my gender or ethnicity, and I was never treated as a stranger. By being part of Villafaña's team and with his full support, I was automatically granted a very privileged position, one I would not have anticipated. This made my research much more straightforward and in-depth, as I was constantly in direct contact with my subjects. Also, being assimilated in Villafaña's team, I was seen less as a stranger by the inhabitants of the villages who did not oppose being filmed by me. This spared me many strange looks and suspicious attitudes. Spending days among the Arhuacos, participating in their meetings, eating their food, and bathing in the same rivers also gave me a little more insight into daily life in the villages. Despite the differences between various places we visited, they had a lot in common. Almost without exception, everyone wore traditional clothing. They cooked and ate collectively, and their diet was composed of meat, potatoes, yuca, plantain, and rice, in all combinations (through breakfast, lunch, and dinner). Occasionally, corn and cheese were added to a meal. They only consume what they grow, which makes them fully self-sufficient. They drink corn tea and water with cane sugar. On some occasions

women would serve coffee (which also grows on the Arhuaco's territories). The sense of community was extremely pronounced in almost every activity in the villages. Even the clothing, as Villafaña explained, belongs to the community (like the intellectual property of his work). Most of the villages have no or very limited access to electricity (we would use a fuel-powered generator for the projector and the laptops used in the presentations), and the same applies to water. They rely upon the river which provides clean water from the mountains. They speak their own language almost exclusively. Some adults also spoke Spanish, which they would never speak between themselves. The villages seem very peaceful. At the same time, it is far from being tedious as everybody is fully engaged in communal activities. No doubt, there are differences between those who permanently live in the villages and those who participate in the meetings as visitors (like Villafaña). On my visit to Kankawarwa, one of the girls whom I taught the principles of photography, asked me about the distance to Bogotá. When I explained to her that I lived in another country, she seemed completely puzzled and perplexed by my response, as if the concept of 'another country' was beyond what she could imagine. This is in such sharp contrast to Villafaña's case, who became some sort of indigenous filmmaking star. This indicates some degree of heterogeneity within the Arhuaco community.

At the final stage of my stay, I edited an hour-long draft of my video. The film, which is the fruit of my collaboration with the Arhuacos (and the practical part of this thesis) contains 6 chapters: Production; Auto-representation or the ownership of the image; Dissemination; Beginnings or his is not an art; Indigenous Communication or the bigger picture; Recognition and perspectives for the future. Apart from my very short voice-over introduction (where I talk about resetting my expectations on arrival to Colombia) it is entirely led by the registered events. Half way through my stay I shared the first draft with Villafaña who offered his feedback. Incidentally, my understanding

did not significantly differ from the one of Villafaña. I used the final visits to the villages as the opportunity to record missing footage to make sure my video could both satisfy my research needs and get approval from my subjects.

6.3. Further reflections

6.3.1. On feedback

Having finished the draft of my documentary to a satisfactory level, on 7 December 2015 I invited Villafaña's team to watch it, in order to get some constructive feedback. I knew I could rely upon them for a candid opinion for at least three good reasons. Firstly, they make films themselves, and they make them well, so they know how to discern a decent story from a bad one. Secondly, it was in their own interest to make sure I did not misrepresent their culture, a mistake that many other non-indigenous filmmakers committed, willingly or not. And lastly, I knew that they were not afraid to be honest. The screening was accompanied by the extended family of my Arhuaco collaborators. Bearing the above considerations in mind, it was a pleasant surprise to see and hear how much they liked the video. They appreciated the humour which attempted to portray them as they really are. It also made the film lighter, despite the fact that it touches on many very serious issues, that is, violence, torture, displacement, and death. Even the younger generation, whom I expected to get easily bored with the documentary form, did not become distracted, and reassured me that they remained captivated throughout the video. After the screening, we had a fascinating conversation about the content of the video. We discussed questions of communication and, in the context of the intercultural aspect of it, the importance of dissemination of the message beyond the Sierra, beyond Colombia, and beyond Latin America. They stressed the importance of raising the awareness of their culture in places where non-indigenous representations of the Sierra are shown without being given the proper context. This context is essential to comprehend the reality of these communities, and the reasons behind their own filmmaking. One of the recurring comments from my collaborators was that the

messages of their elders, the Mamos, is not something which could be told to a white director. Firstly, the Mamos simply do not share things they say to their people with anyone who does not belong to the community. Secondly, even if they did, their wisdom would not be understood, despite all good intentions. This is not only due to the language barrier (during my stay I managed to learn basic *iku* - the Arhuaco language), but also because understanding these messages requires deep understanding of the Arhuaco culture. When indigenous filmmakers interpret the messages of their Mamos, they try to do it in the most faithful and comprehensible way, hoping that these messages can bridge the cultural gap between indigenous authors and non-indigenous audiences.

I gave myself enough time between presenting the final product to those involved, and the time of my departure from Colombia (in case I needed to record more footage, or even completely re-assess the project). I was almost disappointed to see that this was not needed. Of course, there are many technical elements which could have been more refined, but considering that I was my own team, with no professional sound equipment, no assistant, and no idea of how events were to develop, I am overall satisfied with the result. In addition, since there was no way of replicating any of the situations which I documented, I had to be alert and ready all the time, to make sure I did not miss a moment. The last piece of feedback I was given concluded with a statement that by doing my research, and by potentially presenting this video to European audiences, I would be doing a great service to the cultures of the Sierra, who have been working hard to protect themselves against harmful misinterpretation of their identities. By pointing out that there is another, internal point of view, and by presenting how strong and determined this voice is, one opens a space for a debate about the politics of representation and, indeed, ethical questions related to audiovisual productions portraying the 'Other.' However, I am fully aware that this promise might

not be fulfilled, as my video has an even poorer dissemination scope than the films made by Zhigoneshi, and it is made purely for academic purposes.

6.3.2. On fieldwork

To conclude, the outcome of my fieldwork went significantly beyond what I initially expected, knowing the community's reluctance towards external filmmaking activities in their territories. I was given an exceptional access to key figures involved in the creation of auto-representations and to the indigenous villages where they work, and I was allowed to document their filming processes. In addition, the time of my fieldwork coincided with a project they were conducting themselves, which focused upon the question of indigenous communication. This gave me an additional insight into the way they manage issues of collective intellectual property and cultural heritage, which is consistently endangered by European filmmakers. As a result, I managed not only to extensively observe the filming process of the Zhigoneshi Collective, but also to have a truly unique experience of living, however briefly, in the villages, and participating in the community's daily activities. This resulted in a much deeper understanding of the way they function, which enabled me to appreciate better their attitude towards filmmaking and its implications. Also, being part of Villafaña's team and gaining their trust and friendship was of enormous help, providing me with the most direct access to their work.

The most significant outcome of my time spent with the Arhuaco filmmakers was to comprehend the reasons behind their interest in the use of audiovisual media. The significance of auto-representation processes is enormously relevant for their sense of identity, equal to the importance of intellectual ownership of the images, and the

widely discussed concept of indigenous communication. It also directed my attention to the importance of distribution in relation to the reach of the produced films. Inevitably, some of the goals of the Zhigoneshi filmmakers require some sort of compromise. For example, if they wish to secure intellectual ownership of the images taken in the Sierra in opposition to bigger producers or television companies, this inescapably reduces their chance of reaching wider audiences, as they would ideally aim to. It is important to recognise not only the efforts of people such as Villafaña, but also their skills in adapting the initially alien technologies to a level of proficiency which can compete with any professional production. This enables them to speak out for their community, opposing the patronising traditions which allow non-indigenous authors to treat them as an attractive excuse to make a 'discovery' and boost their careers. Supported by Mora, the Zhigoneshi Collective has achieved an exceptional level of self-awareness which they display in the films they have made. This can only remind non-indigenous audiences how a fresh approach is needed when looking at such filmmaking, and how important it is not to succumb to culturally determined pre-assumptions when watching films made by indigenous authors. In my extensive talks with Mora it became clear that the condition and the role of indigenous filmmaking in Colombia is evolving significantly. Mora's input into contesting the label 'indigenous filmmaking' versus 'mainstream filmmaking' and his enormous efforts to make these films more visible to the regular public is very promising, and I see it as a herald of change in the classification and reception of films made by traditional communities. A charismatic figure as Villafaña, supported by such a dedicated mentor as Mora, triggered a sea change in the indigenous filmmaking practice in the Sierra. It is still to be seen if the tradition will continue with the future generation, or if it evolves into new goals.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

7.0.1. Indigenous voice holding strong

Throughout this thesis, I have introduced a wide range of interdisciplinary theories, arguments, and case studies which contribute to understanding the position of contemporary indigenous filmmaking in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. I related it to a wider distribution and presentation strategies of what is labelled as ethnographic film, or film representing the 'Other.' My findings are informed by extensive fieldwork undertaken with the Arhuaco filmmakers in the Sierra. In my video, which is the accompanying element of this thesis, I documented the filmmaking and communication processes of the Zhignoneshi/Yokosowi collectives, both directed and led by Amado Villafaña from the Arhuaco community. During the filmmaking process, I have witnessed the application of various strategies to oppose Western attempts to describe the cultures of the Sierra, which were seen by the communities as failed or even harmful. As a response to them, the Zhigoneshi Collective proposes its own indigenous voice in this discussion, a voice which can increasingly reach beyond cultural divisions. Extensive case studies contextualised my work, providing background for the analysis of the role of images in depicting the 'Other' and a continuously uneven division between those who hold the cameras and those who are merely their subjects.

Describing cultures and representing the 'Other' has always been the unfulfilled ambition of countless ethnographers and filmmakers who strived to achieve this complex aim. However, the un-fulfilment of this task derives from the naive assumption that photography and film can register objective truths about reality, as well as from

somehow paternalistic assumptions that Western technologies and methodologies are fully applicable and capable to describe the complexity of ‘primitive’ cultures. Moreover, for many decades, ethnographic film served the purpose to ‘preserve the knowledge’ about the ‘disappearing cultures.’ Following the development of cheap video technologies, indigenous filmmaking developed in many parts of the world. Although these filmmaking activities have a lot in common across the globe, they remain as diverse as the cultures and communities which produce them. This movement, by necessity, started with the Western initiative of providing training, equipment and funding to indigenous communities. Often, these films are made in collaboration with non-indigenous crews, especially the post-production and distribution. Distribution and the wider dissemination of indigenous films remain the most challenging aspect of this phenomena, which is of significant consequences as it determines the type of audience which can access this work. In the contemporary audiovisual landscape, the abundance of audiovisual work requires a complex classification in order to determine its belonging to a particular genre or style. This need to classify can ‘undo’ the complex work of a filmmaker, indigenous or not, and the efforts to break with the stereotypes in an attempt to tell an honest and open-minded story. Some contemporary initiatives, like the one by Pablo Mora, of freeing indigenous filmmaking from the ethnographic niche accessible only for a narrow circle of professionals and aficionados, is both noteworthy and highly valuable. Despite the fact that most of the indigenous authors concentrate mainly on the communicative aspects of their films, this is not always fully clear for the audiences who tend to apply Western criteria for the reception of these titles. This might result in a problematic lack of understanding. On the other hand, sometimes the power of film can be overestimated. After all, when presented along with dozens of other filmic achievements from around the globe, these films might merely contribute to the spectacle effect and a temporary

viewing pleasure of cosmopolitan audiences. Nevertheless, the boundaries of the genres get increasingly blurry and hard to define, which promises some hope for a more open-minded approach. In her article 'The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Aboriginal Media on Ethnographic Film,' Faye Ginsburg advocates 'developing a framework that will allow us to think of the different but related projects of ethnographic film and indigenous media to each other'.[589] She claims, quite provocatively, that 'the presence of indigenous media production […] has demonstrated the irrelevance of ethnographic filmmaking'.[590] As noted in the example of my case studies, we often praise the traditional values represented by indigenous communities, lamenting whenever they are prone to disappearance. At the same time, tradition in the West has often been identified with backwardness, lack of open-mindedness, and even lack of tolerance. It is questionable to pontificate about the 'purity' of indigenous cultures or otherwise from the comfortable position of Western critics, pampered with the latest technological gadgets and easy access to various forms knowledge. The demand for the indigenous communities to remain 'pure' and untouched by the 'civilised life' is successfully contested by people like Villafaña, who campaigns for the intellectual independence of his people, and their ability to decide for themselves about the way in which they want to engage with the available visual technologies. Such aspirations for self-representation, reinforced by the fight for the wider inclusion of these productions (together with contesting the 'indigenous' label), offers a hope for a more open dialogue and intercultural understanding.

[589] Ginsburg, 1995: 65.
[590] Ginsburg, 1995: 68.

7.0.2. The Golden Era of Arhuaco filmmaking

The contemporary situation differs significantly from the grim picture of the past decades, as painted above. Many indigenous communities have become increasingly aware of the damage caused by external film productions invading their lives. The indigenous communicators found a way to adopt audiovisual technologies and employ them to serve their goals. At the same time, they managed to preserve their preferred lifestyles and promote indigenous values. Most importantly, the productions made by indigenous filmmakers slowly make their way to reach more general audiences, mostly through film festivals of different profiles, but also through various academic events and initiatives. This not only helps reduce exclusions based on the niche label of 'indigenous media' but also allow an open intercultural dialogue which has traditionally been missing.

The situation of indigenous filmmaking in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is in its pivotal moment. With the charisma, ambitious plans, and leadership of Amado Villafaña, audiovisual activities in the region have never been more prolific, and the quality has never been better. Villafaña's vision goes beyond the simple creation of 'nice images'. His ambition is to repair the harm done by films which misinterpreted the community in the past decades, but also to demonstrate that it is not impossible to use these (initially) alien technologies to strengthen indigenous values and make the community more alive, evolving with time but without losing what is relevant for the preservation of the Arhuaco culture. With his work, Villafaña is building the fundaments of a truly intercultural communication. This reminds me of Ginsburg idea that 'central to multiculturalism is the notion of *mutual and reciprocal relativisation*, the idea that the diverse cultures placed in play should come to perceive the limitations of their own

social and cultural perspective'.[591] One of the two strongest points advocated by Villafaña and his organisation was the control of the ownership of the images taken in the Sierra Nevada, and also the shift from filming made by Europeans towards fully professional indigenous filmmaking in the Sierra. However, by allowing people like me to witness this process, he demonstrates the understanding of the healthy balance which is required to maintain this control, which cannot be appreciated if it is not properly understood by the external world. In order to achieve this, some help from that external world is clearly needed. Villafaña is also very active in promoting Arhuaco values to the non-indigenous world, which are deeply embedded in the Arhuaco cosmology and mostly relate to the protection of the planet. His far-reaching plans include, among others, an educational element in the non-indigenous educational system.

It is hard to predict the future of filmmaking in the Sierra after Villafaña retires. Already a 60-years old man at the time of my research, he is the main engine of filmmaking initiatives in the region. Nevertheless, he is acutely aware that he will not be able to continue his activities forever. His close collaborators include his son, Ángel, and his daughter, Dilia, but it is hard to predict if they will be able to continue his work without his leadership and charisma. This will determine if the 'golden era' of Arhuaco filmmaking will be an ongoing trend or just a forgotten episode. In this sense, it might be identical to Western standards where it is a particular individual, rather than a collective or a nation, who excels in the task of creating and fighting for the presence in the audiovisual arena. However, Villafaña's determination and the interest of the younger generations which I witnessed during my fieldwork give grounds for optimism. Also, Mora's tireless support contribute to the fact that the voice of the Sierra remains strong.

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[591] Ginsburg, 1995: 64.

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Appendices

Collective Zhigoneshi members

Amado Villafaña Chaparro, Director.

Margarita Villafaña, Administrator.

Pablo Mora Calderón, Adviser.

Roberto Mojica Gil (Wiwa), Cameraman.

Benjamín Gutiérrez Villafaña (Arhuaco), Sound.

Saúl Gil Nakoguí (Wiwa), and Silvestre Gil Sarabata (Kogui), Indigenous filmmakers (comunicadores indígenas).

Other films mentioned:

Chawaytiri: Caravan of Memory. Directed by Jose Barreiro PhD (Taino), 2013, Peru.

Crocodile Dreaming. Directed by Darlene Johnson, 2007; Australia.

Bundjalung: A Surfing Paradise. Directed by Carlos Portella, 2014; Australia.

Forest of the Dancing Spirits. Directed by Linda Vastrik, 2012); Congo.

Rangsa ni Tonun: Sacred Batak Weaving. Directed by Sandra Niessen, 2014; Indonesia.

Ainu: Pathways to memory. Directed by Marcos P. Centeno Martín, 2014; Japan.

Defensora. Directed by Rachel Schmidt, 2013, Guatemala.

El Regalo de la Pachamama. Directed by Toshifumi Matsushita, 2008, Bolivia.

Films presented at the Indigenous Film Festival in Bogotá

Silvestre Pantaleón. Directed by Roberto Olivares and Jonathan Aminth, México.

Zunga: la industria cultural del tinto. Directed by Emiro Méndez Flórez, Colombia.

Kotkuphi. Directed by Isael Maxakali, Brasil.

Huarpes, en su propia voz. Directed by Laura Piastrellini, Argentina.

Iisa Wece (Raíz del conocimiento). Directed by Cineminga, Colombia.

Som Tximna Yukunang/ Gravando Som (Som Tximna Yukunang/ Grabando Sonidos). Directed by Karané Ikpeng and Kamatxi Ikpeng y Mari Corrêa, Brasil.

La pequeña semilla en el asfalto. Directed by Iván Gutiérrez and Javier Núñez, México.

Cuando sea grande. Directed by Karine Blanc, Michel Tavare, and Jayro Bustamante, France and Guatemala.

La historia de Mercedes, la historia de muchas mujeres. Directed by Lucia Sauma and Fernando Lupo, Bolivia.

Crónicas de la gran serpiente. Directed by Darío Arcella, Argentina.

La palabra maya. Directed by Melissa Gunasena, México.

A fuerza de dignidad. No director listed, Bolivia.

Dos justicias: los retos de la coordinación. Directed by Carlos Yuri Flores, Guatemala.

Ejerciendo la Plurinacionalidad. Directed by Mario Bustos-Ecuarunari, Ecuador.

Primero... que hablen ellas. Directed by Sabinee Sinigui, David Sierra Márquez and Juan Carlos Jamioy Juagibioy, Colombia.

À Margem do Xingu. Directed by Enrique Rodríguez Fernández, Spain.

El oro o la vida: Recolonización y resistencia en Centro América. Directed by Álvaro Revenga, Guatemala.

Juurala tu ejirawaalat(La raíz de la resistencia). Directed by Jorge Montiel, Venezuela.

El oso Miyoi. Directed by Edgar A. Vivas, Venezuela.

Guaye (mujer bonita). Directed by Nicolas Ipmao, Zaida Cabrera, Bolivia.

Esencia Ancestral. Directed by Raúl Urizar, Guatemala.

Historia de Lucha del Pueblo Pijao del Sur del Tolima – El camino del Hombre Rojo. Directed by Luz Yamile Ramírez Ortiz, Colombia.

Desterro Guaraní (El Destierro Guaraní). Directed by Ariel Ortega, Patricia Ferreira y Ernesto Carvalho and Vincent Carelli, Brasil.

Desalojos en el valle del Polochic. Directed by Eriberto Gualinga, Mariano Machain and David Whitbourn, Guatemala.

Los Descendientes del Jaguar. Directed by Eriberto Gualinga, Mariano Machain and David Whitbourn, Ecuador – Costa Rica.

La ciudad y la selva: Video sobre los indígenas desplazados residentes en la ciudad de Villavicencio, Colombia. Directed by Fernando Santacruz Howard, Colombia.