

Postcolonial Directions in Education

Volume 8 Issue 2, 2019

SPECIAL ISSUE:
'THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF
FILM AND FILM FESTIVALS' (A TWO-PART SPECIAL ISSUE)
Guest edited by Sonia Medel and Andre' Elias Mazawi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF FILM AND FILM FESTIVALS
(A TWO-PART SPECIAL ISSUE)
SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION
Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi

"TALKING IN/TALKING OUT":
INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, FILMMAKING, AND THE DECOLONIZING POETICS OF VISUAL
SOVEREIGNTY
A CONVERSATION WITH DR. DOROTHY CHRISTIAN
Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi

ARTICLES

LOCATING SOVEREIGNTY IN THE AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC-POLITICAL POETICS OF DAILY
EXISTENCE IN TWO AMAZONIAN FILMS
Sarah Shamash

THE DECOLONIAL EMPATHY OF TWO MAYA DOCUMENTARIES SHOWN AT THE XIII CLACPI
FILM FESTIVAL – FICMAYAB'
Claudia A. Arteaga

COMMENTARY

LA MUERTE EN EL CINE . . . EL CINE EN LA MUERTE
Jhonny Hendrix

OBITUARY

IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN
Boaventura de Sousa Santos

REVIEWS

THE GOOD UNIVERSITY
Peter Mayo

LAS MIRADAS MÚLTIPLES: EL CINE REGIONAL PERUANO
Maria Cecilia Saba

THE PALESTINIAN IDEA
Lucy El-Sherif

PALESTINIAN CINEMA IN THE DAYS OF REVOLUTION.
Suher Zaher-Mazawi



Postcolonial Directions in Education

Focus and Scope

Postcolonial Directions in Education is a peer reviewed open access journal produced twice a year. It is a scholarly journal intended to foster further understanding, advancement and reshaping of the field of postcolonial education. We welcome articles that contribute to advancing the field. As indicated in the Editorial for the inaugural issue, the purview of this journal is broad enough to encompass a variety of disciplinary approaches, including but not confined to the following: sociological, anthropological, historical and social psychological approaches. The areas embraced include anti-racist education, decolonizing education, critical multiculturalism, critical racism theory, direct colonial experiences in education and their legacies for present day educational structures and practice, educational experiences reflecting the culture and 'imagination' of empire, the impact of neoliberalism/globalisation/structural adjustment programmes on education, colonial curricula and subaltern alternatives, education and liberation movements, challenging hegemonic languages, the promotion of local literacies and linguistic diversity, neo-colonial education and identity construction, colonialism and the construction of patriarchy, canon and canonicity, Indigenous knowledges, supranational bodies and their educational frameworks, north-south and east-west relations in education, the politics of representation, unlearning colonial stereotypes, internal colonialism and education, cultural hybridity and learning in postcolonial contexts, education and the politics of dislocation, biographies / autobiographies reflecting the above themes, deconstruction of colonial narratives of civilization within educational contexts. Once again, the field cannot be exhausted.

Peer Review Process

Papers submitted to *Postcolonial Directions in Education* are examined by at least two reviewers for originality and timeliness in the context of related research. Reviews generally are completed in 30-60 days, with publication in the next available issue.

Open Access Policy

This journal provides immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.

ISSN: 2304-5388



Editors

Anne Hickling Hudson, Queensland University of Technology

Peter Mayo, University of Malta

Milosh Raykov, University of Malta

Editorial Board

Carmel Borg, University of Malta

George Sefa Dei, OISE/University of Toronto

Gloria Lauri Lucente, University of Malta

Daniel Schugurensky, Arizona State University

Saviour Zammit, University of Malta

Editorial Advisory Board

Ali A Abdi, University of British Columbia

Nahla Abdo, Carleton University

Vanessa Andreotti, University of British Columbia

Nina Asher, Teachers' College, Columbia University

Asoke Bhattacharya, Jadavpur University, Calcutta

Rosanna Cima, Università degli Studi di Verona

Jim Cummins, OISE/University of Toronto

Antonia Darder, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles.

Iain Michael Chambers, Università degli Studi Orientale, Naples

Stephanie (Daza) Curley, Manchester Metropolitan University

Mohammed Ezroua, Université Mohammed V, Rabat

Christine N. Fox, University of Wollongong

Ratna Ghosh, McGill University, Montreal

Henry Giroux, McMaster University

Catherine A. Odora Hoppers, University of South Africa

Didacus Jules, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States

Dip Kapoor, University of Alberta

Sunethra Karunaratne, University of Peradeniya

Donaldo Macedo, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Ibrahim A. Makkawi, Birzeit University

André Elias Mazawi, University of British Columbia

Peter McLaren, Chapman University, California

Lynn Mario T. Menezes De Souza, University of São Paulo

Nur Masalha, SOAS, University of London

Mauro Pala, Università di Cagliari

Helen Phtiaka, University of Cyprus

Vandana Shiva, Navdanya/ Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology

Concetta Sirna, Università degli Studi, Messina

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, University of Waikato

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Columbia University

Shirley R. Steinberg, University of Calgary

Ngugi Wa Thiong 'O, University of California, Irvine

Leon Paul Tikly, University of Bristol

Rinaldo Wayne Walcott, OISE/University of Toronto

John Willinsky, Stanford University, California

Handel Wright, University of British Columbia

Joseph Zanoni, University of Illinois at Chicago

Davide Zoletto, Università degli Studi di Udine

POSTCOLONIAL DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION
Volume 8 Issue 2, 2019

SPECIAL ISSUE

**'THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF FILM
AND FILM FESTIVALS' (A TWO-PART SPECIAL ISSUE)**

Guest edited by Sonia Medel and Andre' Elias Mazawi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

1. THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF FILM AND
FILM FESTIVALS (A TWO-PART SPECIAL ISSUE)
SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION
Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi **148-154**
2. "TALKING IN/TALKING OUT": INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE,
FILMMAKING, AND THE DECOLONIZING POETICS OF VISUAL
SOVEREIGNTY. A CONVERSATION WITH DR. DOROTHY CHRISTIAN
Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi **155-184**

Articles

3. LOCATING SOVEREIGNTY IN THE AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC POLITICAL
POETICS OF DAILY EXISTENCE IN TWO AMAZONIAN FILMS
Sarah Shamash **185-206**
4. THE DECOLONIAL EMPATHY OF TWO MAYA DOCUMENTARIES
SHOWN AT THE XIII CLACPI FILM FESTIVAL – FICMAYAB'
Claudia A. Arteaga **207-232**

Commentary

5. LA MUERTE EN EL CINE . . . EL CINE EN LA MUERTE
Jhonny Hendrix **233-238**

OBITUARY

6. IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN
Boaventura de Sousa Santos **239-240**

REVIEWS

7. THE GOOD UNIVERSITY
Peter Mayo **241-244**
8. LAS MIRADAS MÚLTIPLES: EL CINE REGIONAL PERUANO
Maria Cecilia Saba **245-255**
9. THE PALESTINIAN IDEA
Lucy El-Sherif **256-266**
10. PALESTINIAN CINEMA IN THE DAYS OF REVOLUTION.
Suher Zaher-Mazawi **267-278**

INTRODUCTION

THE (DE)COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF FILM AND FILM FESTIVALS (A Two-Part Special Issue)

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi

University of British Columbia

This two-part Special Issue of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* (PDE) focuses on The (De)Colonial Pedagogical Possibilities of Film and Film Festivals. Before embarking on presenting the Special Issue, we would like to acknowledge that our work at the University of British Columbia has unfolded on the unceded, ancestral, continuously occupied lands of the Coast Salish Musqueam, and we are thankful for this privilege.

The idea of the Special Issue was born out of personal and collective frustrations with limited contemporary scholarship on film and film festivals in terms of their decolonizing practices and modes of representation (Bâ & Higbee, 2012; Dowell, 2013; Raheja, 2016). Although there is an increasing scholarship on film theory and analysis, little has been published on film festivals as sites of learning, and particularly adult learning via cinematic engagement, with notable exceptions (Córdova, 2015; Medel Borja, 2017; Roy, 2016; Valck, Kredell, & Loist, 2016). Of particular importance to this two-part Special Issue is the complex role films play in representing the relationships between diversity, modernity, and coloniality, from the perspective of practitioners, especially racialized, Indigenous, women and other marginalized-minoritized peoples within the film industry. The various contributions in this two-part Special Issue examine the multifaceted relationalities between these elements. On the one hand, one could argue, along Jacques

Rancière's (2009) broad lines of argumentation, that films and film festivals—qua theatrical performances—represent and sustain the normative-hegemonic and oppressive trends of coloniality through an intricate semiosis of audio-visual stimuli which disrupt the viewer's knowledge from its implications for action. On the other hand, it could be argued with equal fervour, as does Kathryn Lehman (2016), that films and film festivals represent the convoluted relationships between diversity, modernity and coloniality, prompting the decolonization of cinema itself, and of socio-political individual and collective (un)learning.

In framing the present Special Issue, we attribute the lack of published materials by practitioners, not to their lack of decolonial understandings of film and film festivals, but to the reproductive power of the academic knowledge generation institutions and particularly to the latter's dismissal of non-traditional scholarly work. In this regard, we thank the Editors of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* for providing us, and all contributors, with a decolonial and open-access home. The Special Issue thus brings together a range of differentially located experiences engaging with cinema production, cinema studies, visual anthropology, curation, and film festival coordination. This two-part Special Issue seeks to contribute to current debates in the fields of education, film, and cultural studies, and their intersections. It holds an explicit commitment to the inclusion of practitioner's perspectives—those directly involved with creating opportunities for cinematic engagement—in formal classroom spaces, behind a camera, or in theatres and public viewing events as part of a festival. The questions contributors explore include:

1. How can films be approached, as both audiovisual art and as a historically situated narrative, often with colonial underpinnings and contemporary expressions? What are the dominant discourses being sustained by film and cinematic encounters and what are their pedagogic and educational implications for learning, broadly defined?
2. What counts as 'mainstream' and what counts as 'peripheral' cinema and whose perspectives—and forms of learning—do these distinctions uphold?

What forms of resistance do distinctions between various cinematic (plat)forms allow and what are their implications for learning, unlearning, and emancipation?

3. How is the decolonial potential of cinema experienced by differentially located filmmakers and what encounters are made possible through film and film festivals? What do filmmakers' experiences have to contribute to approaches to a transformative adult learning and education?
4. What sites of practice can cinematic visual media use as part of decolonial pedagogical efforts and how?
5. How can critiques of aesthetics, ethics, and technology (visual, audio), inter and intrapersonal dynamics, and funding practices associated with filmmaking deconstruct or challenge colonial relations and coloniality in view of opening up possibilities for subject formation, political action and holistic ways of learning to live well together?

When we first set out to organize for this Special Issue, we made a call through our diverse local and international film networks for submissions. We received great interest, and highly unique submission proposals—interviews, creative autoethnographic pieces, reflections, and programming statements, to name but some. With the support and suggestion of PDE's Editors, we realized that a two-part Special Issue can better bring together the perspectives of practitioners of diverse academic and professional backgrounds. That said, all contributors are considered cinema scholars in their own right. They are actively involved with local and global arts and culture spaces and initiatives and consider pedagogical engagement as part and parcel of their work. The first part of the Special Issue, published here, in PDE issue 8(2), focuses on the ontological, axiological and (de)colonial possibilities of film and film festivals as experienced by filmmakers, curators, and researchers. Contributors highlight the need to think educational engagement in ways that transcend textual narratives and the politics of the text as the sole forms of knowledge and

learning. They suggest that decolonizing representation entails fostering the capacity of both filmmakers and viewers to move in spaces of meanings, and in relation to audiovisual stimuli, in ways that “decolonize the lens of power” (Knopf, 2008) by interrogating the very tools of filmmaking, their deployment, the epistemic and ontological synergies they create, and the semiosis they uphold towards the articulation of inclusive and transformative forms of literacy.

We commence this first part of the Special Issue with a conversation between Guest Editors and Indigenous Director-Producer Dorothy Christian. The exchange highlights the centrality of filmmaking as a space and site of “survivance”, a term coined by Anishinaabe critic Gerald Vizenor (2008) for Indigenous filmmakers. The exchange also raises crucial questions regarding the epistemic and ontological foundations of filmmaking for Indigenous communities and peoples and the extent to which films can serve as educational “scenes of address” (Ellsworth, 1997), both in terms of amplifying Indigenous voices, and in terms of articulating spaces of pedagogic praxis that affirm Indigenous knowledge and the reclaiming of land and practices. Christian’s experiences and relationships—with her own people and communities, with Indigenous colleagues, as well as with the mainstream (Western-Eurocentric) film industry—clearly show that such a struggle, and its cinematic articulations, are far from given or obvious.

They rather require a constant questioning of the modes of representation of Indigeneity prevalent in the film industry and the articulation of new aesthetics that question the coloniality of power in which the film industry is still deeply immersed. For Christian, the question of aesthetics in film making and production is therefore primarily a political question, one that references the very power of Indigenous filmmaking to (re)claim positions and positionalities that would shift the colonizing force of cinematic representations towards new horizons of possibility and being. Over that backdrop, Christian’s work signals not just a contestation or resistance from the base. That would be too narrow a view. Rather, her location and cinematic contributions—as an Indigenous filmmaker and Associate Director of Indigenous Initiatives at the Centre for Educational Excellence at Simon Fraser University—signal a recognition that Indigenous knowledge has finally registered as an educational

framework that is integral to a transformative and sustainable education and for cultural production.

Two articles follow the conversation. The first is by Sarah Shamash and the second by Claudia Arteaga. Both invite us to explore concepts of time, sense-feeling and relations through decolonial film analysis. Shamash draws us into two Brazilian Video in the Villages (*Vídeo nas aldeias*) films to re-politicize the quotidian and prompt consideration of sovereignty. She emphasizes how the camera becomes an embodiment of an inter-connected and inter-dependent entity and more so, a way of collective engagement; and illustrates how pluriversal futurities cradling past and present are imagined. Arteaga also beckons us into a flow between the personal and collective. Her paper 'care'fully engages with care as agency and as individually and communally expressed by the Maya people. In doing so, Shamash shows that colonial pain can be considered, not as 'deficiency', but as collectively *trabajado* (worked) into a space of resistance. Through a first person account, we learn how the films and the film festival within which they are screened, contribute to the possibility of a decolonial attitude, one of decolonial empathy, through which the public can join in solidarity, and perhaps even complicity, with the fight against neocoloniality.

Acclaimed Colombian Director-Producer, Jhonny Hendrix, pushes further. He invites us to learn not only about him and his art, but also about the self. His intimate autobiographical statement reveals his learnings about love and death through his personal engagement with the making of his film *Candelaria* and the film's protagonists. Doing so, he teaches us about the immense cost of learning through the attempt to immortalize the self and narratives through cinema; a cost that the director and all related to the real and fictional entities share.

This first part of the two-part Special Issue is complemented by several book reviews that enrich a decolonial consideration of the pedagogical possibilities of film and film festivals in contexts neglected by mainstream or Western and European media studies. Lucy El-Sherif's and Suher Zaher-Mazawi's book reviews allow us to consider the critical roles played by cinema and film production within the context of the Palestinian struggle for emancipation and self-determination. Their book

reviews highlight the growing awareness to the ways in which political struggles and cinematic representation not only feed into each other, but further create spaces of engagement and of identity building that frame and consolidate resilience and commitment to wider questions of social and political justice. The two-volume book review essay by Maria Cecilia Saba illustrates the inequities within the Peruvian film industry and the lack of value-recognition of regional cinema. Her essay not only constructively teases apart the research-rich content, but also reveals the importance of context-informed reviewers, that are able to contribute raw and authentic analysis of local film industry dynamics and State politics raised by authors.

We invite you to stay tuned for the second part, to appear in PDE issue 9(1), 2020. It will focus on the considerable challenges film practitioners face in their search for transformative cinematic horizons of possibility. Particular attention will be granted to the work of actors, curators, festival coordinators and teachers, especially those grappling with intersectional barriers within the film industry.

We extend deep gratitude to all those who formed a part of this effort to bring this Special Issue to publication. We acknowledge the support and hospitality offered by the PDE Editors and the Editorial Board. We are also grateful to Dana Claxton, Luciana Martins, Jules Arita Koostachin, Sam Rocha, Cecilia Caloca Michel, Alberto Pacheco Benites and Emilio Legonía Córdova, who generously accepted the task of reviewing the contributions for 8(2). Not least, a very special thank you goes to our manuscript Copy Editor, Kealin McCabe, for her dedicated, and exemplary engagement with the publishing requirements, and for her indefatigable attention and care. Without everyone's support and encouragement, this two-part Special Issue would not have been possible. Thank you, everyone!

References

- Bâ, S. M., Higbee, W. (2012). *De-westernizing film studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Córdova, A. (2015). *Nomadic/Sporadic: The pathways of circulation of Indigenous video in Latin America*. Dissertation.
- Dowell, K. L. (2013). *Sovereign screens: Aboriginal media on the Canadian West Coast*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching Positions: Difference, pedagogy, and the Power of Address*. New York & London: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Knopf, K. (2008). *Decolonizing the Lens of Power: Indigenous Films in North America*. Amsterdam & New York: Editions Radopi B.V.
- Lehman, K. (2016). "Unlearning colonial and nation-state history in documentary film by and about Indigenous peoples", *alter/nativas*, 6:1-27.
- Medel Borja, S. (2017). Book review of *Documentary film festivals: Transformative learning, community building, and solidarity* by Carole Roy. Halifax: The Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education.
- Raheja, M. H. (2010). *Reservation reelism: Redfacing, visual sovereignty, and representations of Native Americans in film*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press
- Rancière; J. (2009). *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso.
- Roy, C. (2016). *Documentary film festivals: Transformative learning, community building & solidarity*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Valck, M. D., Kredell, B., Loist, S. (2016). *Film festivals: History, theory, method, practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Vizenor, G. R. (2008). *Survivance: Narratives of Native presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

**“TALKING IN/TALKING OUT”:
INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, FILMMAKING, AND THE
DECOLONIZING POETICS OF VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY**

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. DOROTHY CHRISTIAN

Sonia Medel and André Elias Mazawi

*Office of the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival (VLAFF),
Woodward’s Building, Vancouver, BC,
the early afternoon of June 7, 2019.*

Positioning and introduction

Sonia Medel: I want to begin by welcoming you, Dorothy, and thank you for joining us for this conversation that will form part of the *Postcolonial Directions in Education* Special Issue on film and film festivals. I also want to acknowledge that we are engaging in this conversation, here, in the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival (VLAFF) office, in the Woodward’s building, in Vancouver, on unceded Coast Salish, Tseil-wautlth, Musqueam and Squamish lands.

This is very much a contested building and land, a reality that forms part of our ongoing dialogue behind the need for a Special Issue on the (de)colonial potential of film and film festivals. I would like to hand over the floor to you, Dorothy, by asking “Who is Dr. Dorothy Christian and why were you interested in joining us today?”

Dorothy Christian: As this interview is planned for publication in a postcolonial journal, I need to take issue with that particular term – “postcolonial”. For many Indigenous critical thinkers this term skews our relationship. Many of us believe this is a neo-colonial time that we live in, rather than a post-colonial one. I’m sure you’ve read many Indigenous writers who ask: what is this “post-colonial thing”? Colonial time is not over yet, it still is happening.

When you ask who I am, I am certainly more than the title, Dr. Christian. On a personal level, I am a mother, sister, an aunty, a great aunty, and a friend. I have over 65 nieces and nephews and great nieces and nephews. I am actually going home for vacation time, starting June 17th. My niece, Emily, is graduating and I'm making a huge deal of her because of the difficulty that our kids have in even getting to grade 12.

On an academic level, I have been involved in academia since the late 1980s when I started my undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto. Back then, I was comparing Indigenous thought with Western thought. I almost quit in the first semester because I had put myself into sociology and I found that I was locking horns with the professor at every turn. I asked an Elder to come for dinner one night, at Christmas time. He listened to me for about two hours. Then, he finally told me an Ojibway prophecy, which I won't tell in detail here. The bottom line was that the people from across the waters would either come with the face of brotherhood or the face of death. He said we know what face they came with. He asked me, "So, why are you trying to talk to people who don't have any eyes or any ears?" His words made me sit back and think about that. He also talked to me about who I should be working with. He said that I had put myself into this institution and that 80 to 90 percent of what you're learning there is "nonsense". He said, "Don't work with people that you're going to be fighting with all the time". I therefore shifted my attention to the teaching assistants who were working with the professors. I recognized that they were the new scholars and the new thinkers. They were more open and carried a different thinking. After my undergraduate studies, I took a hiatus. I started working professionally for a number of years in film and television production, for eight television seasons. I was out in the big world. After my undergraduate degree I served as the Chair of the Ontario Film Review Board. I got to see thousands of films and how Indigenous peoples, and communities of colour, were treated on and in film. I then moved from Toronto back home to my home territories I come from Secwépemc and Syilx territories, the interior plateau regions of what is now known as British Columbia (BC). I was still freelancing for Vision TV, a national broadcaster, and for other production companies. I ended up moving to Vancouver (Coast Salish territories) because the interior of British Columbia is very depressed economically

and it is really hard to get jobs there in the film and television industry. Vancouver is the industry's hub. I started working with the Indigenous Media Arts Group and taught an entry-level production course at the Native Education Centre. Meanwhile, I was thinking about my experiences out in the field, what I had seen, and what I had experienced. Working for Vision TV, I traveled to Indigenous communities all throughout Turtle Island (Indigenous reference to North America) and into Mexico. I got to see how people wanted their stories to be treated. I had to uphold cultural protocols to be able to deliver their stories to the national screen culture in Canada.

On Film Production and “Cultural Congruency”

SM: Thank you for bringing to the fore the issue of continuing to address what is so often an institutional and societal insistence on referring to the colonial as a “post”. What led you to graduate studies?

DC: A number of factors guided me towards enrolling in graduate studies. In my teaching at the Native Education Centre, I had students from different age groups. I noticed that when they were putting their aesthetics together they were mixing and matching visuals from West Coast and the Prairie with those of communities from other regions. It left me unsettled. I was not quite sure what it was that was bothering me. In my own practice, intuitively, I made sure that, first of all, I respected the people who I was representing. I made sure that I got the images that were what I now call “culturally congruent” to them, as a people and as a nation. That propelled me into graduate studies. Yet, in Vancouver, I had also programmed Indigenous film festivals at the Indigenous Media Arts Group. In one programming meeting, we were looking at all these films from different Indigenous producers from across the land. A programming team member, an Indigenous person, said that the film pacing was “too slow. It just needs to be faster”. I looked at her and said, “But that’s the rhythm of the land, that’s what the producer is trying to show”.

What I’ve observed over years is that many productions from Indigenous people include the land and landscapes. This is part of what I call “cultural congruency”, and how I intuitively approach it. For instance, when I worked with the hereditary women chiefs of Gitxsan and Wetsu’weten, following the 1997

Delga'muukw decision of the Supreme Court of Canada on Aboriginal Title (Persky, 1998), the mainstream media was talking mainly to male chiefs. I wanted to hear what the women had to say. I did an extensive preproduction—an important aspect of a “culturally congruent” Indigenous film production. I took much more time in relationship building by sending them copies of one of my productions so they could consider my approach. I talked to them about what are appropriate gifts to bring; what do I need to be mindful of when I am on their land and territories. I also asked about significant landmarks. When I was preparing my shoot-plan I made sure to include various things they had mentioned and which were important to them as a nation. I asked the women chiefs to record a song that I used as background sound. They understood what I was doing; there was no question about that.

Hence, what I mean by “cultural congruency” includes the time needed to build that relationship, before you even get there with the camera. When you do arrive with the camera crew, the people are already on board. They are not afraid of the camera, or shy of the camera. They know what story we want to bring out. When I talk about “cultural congruency” what I mean is that the interconnections between us as humans and the lands, plants, waters and all the other seen and unseen beings are reflected in the visuals and sounds that come from within that culture, that nation. They weave together a beautiful story of who they are as a people. Nowadays, people are very visually sophisticated in choosing the aesthetics of their visual representations. Indigenous people are clear about how they want to be represented. We live in a very visual culture, screens surround us at every turn. Our audiences are very savvy these days. We can't assume that they don't know.

Another example pertains to a four-part mini series on “gangs”. I went to Arizona (USA) and did two short segments with Mexican youth who are affiliated with so-called “gangs” in Phoenix (Arizona). I also went to Winnipeg (Manitoba) and did two segments with them. I had heard about these young men in Phoenix through my network. Having attended ceremonies in Mexico, I was told about these young men: they were leaving “gang” life because of their involvement in the Sun Dance. I was determined to find them and know who they are. I had heard they were signing “peace treaties” with each other to stop

the killing. I eventually found these young men and women who were identified as Hispanic or Mexican “gangs”. You can imagine, with the kind of media coverage that they usually get, they were very wary of who’s going to come in and talk to them. So it took me a long time to build a relationship and to build trust. When I arrived, they knew that I was not going to be exploiting the violence, talking about the killings, or about prostitution, or about things that most mainstream media talk about. I wanted to humanize them. I met them amongst their families. I met their Mothers and their children. I met the women who were also in the so-called “gang” life, their wives, and their girlfriends. We really looked at it from a human perspective. I asked, why was it important for them to make “peace treaties” amongst themselves as so-called “gangs”.

It took a long time and it was very complicated. But it was worth it. These young men that I interviewed were incredibly intelligent, with an in-depth political analysis of their own situation, of why they were where they were. They grew up being ashamed of their Indigenous identity. When they moved to the United States they were taught to try and be American rather than acknowledge where they came from. Their parents had distanced them from their Indigenous roots. Through this reclaiming of identity—the “peace treaties” – these young people were going back to Mexico and finding the villages that their parents and grandparents came from. They were finding out what the names of their tribes were and the people they came from.

Indigenous aesthetics, the Sacred, and visual sovereignty

SM: What you have shared is much more than an introduction! Thank you for that. Returning to what you said about the problematic of thinking-working through a “post-colonial” lens, we want this publication to highlight the frustrations around film production and how they interface with Indigeneity, film and festival programming. In my programming work as part of VLAFF, we are in the thick of resisting and trying to learn from each other, community leaders, and trailblazing Indigenous and Afro directors and producers, about how it is that we’re still stuck with norms of time like film pacing, and issues you just brought up, and how this all translates in the industry. My colleague Sarah Shamash and I often wonder why we are looking at film production and programming through the lens

of speed rate or fitting it into anything. I cannot even imagine how it was for you to pull and navigate so many institutional, industry and community spaces simultaneously. With all you have been involved in, what meanings does the visual industry have for you, particularly in relation to the concept of “visual sovereignty”? How do you position it in relation to the concept of “cultural congruency”?

DC: There are a number of people who have been involved in the conversation around visual sovereignty. I see “cultural congruency” as an aspect of “visual sovereignty” because it’s a very complicated term. “Visual sovereignty” goes back to one of the people with whom I have spoken during my PhD research, Hopi filmmaker and photographer Victor Masayesva, Jr. (born 1951). He has been engaged in visual representations since 1965 and has played an influential role in Native American multimedia production in the United States (Romero, 2010). I will be doing a retrospective of his work at the *imagineNative* Film & Media Arts Festival in Toronto October 2019.

The term visual sovereignty and Indigenous aesthetics go hand-in-hand with cultural congruency, I believe. Masayesva says that Indigenous aesthetics begin in the sacred (Padget, 2013). It took me two years of relationship building with him. In his clan, he is known as Water Coyote, wary of anybody. Finally, he started talking to me because I had to challenge him. If you look at his work and you go right back to his original film, *Hopiit* (1981), he strictly uses the Hopi language, without any explanation and without subtitles.

Now, fast forward to the 19th *imagineNATIVE* Film + Media Arts Festival in Toronto in 2018. I was invited to curate a program there. I went to see as many of the Global Indigenous films as I could. I was so happy and my heart was dancing! There were so many Indigenous films that were done in Indigenous languages, without apology and without explaining how they were situated in colonialism. Finally! I thought to myself, people are catching up with what Victor Masayesva was talking about almost 40 years ago. Indigenous filmmakers are now producing stories, and creating stories from within the culture. That was completely delightful to me even though I may not have understood some things because they are obviously made for their peoples’ eyes and ears. As an Indigenous person, I could

understand the premise of the story; however, when they have English subtitles I understand the story from their culture. This is one place where you can tie all aspects of Indigenous visual storytelling together, that is the aesthetics they chose and how they braid the sounds, visuals and other nuances to maintain the cultural congruency of visual sovereignty. This all relates to our Indigenous worldviews and how we connect to our lands with all of our senses.

I spent time with Victor Masayesva, Jr. in his village of Hotevilla, on Third Mesa in northeastern Arizona where the Hopi reservation is located. He is a practitioner of his culture in that he carries spiritual responsibilities in his Clan. He does not like to discuss the responsibilities he carries for his family. Victor identifies himself as a farmer, first and foremost, as that's what his father taught him. Masayesva said that, throughout his life, his father had never engaged in the capitalist system. His main focus was to plant corn because that's the mainstay of their culture. All of the cycles relate to that. The planting cycles are complex because you have to consider the moon, the sun, and the cycles of the earth. These cycles determine when the rituals and ceremonies occur. When Masayesva talks about "visual sovereignty", it is through those eyes and through in-depth and inward looking eyes that he, as a Hopi, understands.

Indigenous knowledge and production practices

André Elias Mazawi: Two aspects appear to underpin your approach to "visual sovereignty". The first consists in not letting the colonial gaze capture or dismiss that internal voice you are talking about. Hence, the importance of looking at things "from within", that is, treating film as an epistemic space through which people and communities can come to know ourselves, others, history, time. The second aspect seems to be related to a pedagogical (or educational) engagement and commitment. The way you narrated your experiences and engagement with the Phoenix-based group of young people gives some idea about this pedagogical concern. Could you elaborate on these two elements?

DC: About epistemology and pedagogical concerns, it has to go right back to our Indigenous systems of Knowledge(s). Before I started my PhD I met Lee Maracle, a good friend of mine, and a prolific First Nations writer and contributor to Canadian

postcolonial critique¹. I said to her that I'm really sick and tired of colonialism. We waste so much time talking about this all the time. She said she knew what I meant. We can have fatigue around it but we can never not acknowledge that it has happened. I agreed with her and we had a great conversation about it.

This stance of mine, I believe, became more solidified when I was writing my PhD. I was adamant to write my dissertation from an Indigenous perspective, placing it within an Indigenous research paradigm, and I privileged Indigenous Knowledge(s). I also engaged critical non-Indigenous thinkers in my theory analysis. I had to look at other points of view. In my choosing to do it that way, I had 14 knowledge keepers from across the country, from many different nations as well as 14, what I call "visual storytellers", from many different nations (Christian, 2017, pp. 177-180). They were multigenerational. I had someone in every decade: the youngest being in their 20s, just graduating from film school, the eldest was Alanis Obomsawin².

At the source of all my questions was the central question of how their culture informs their production practice, because I was exploring whether or not my experiences in the field was similar to their experiences. When I worked for the national broadcaster for eight television seasons I knew that I was doing things differently than my peers. I knew that I took way longer to get ready than everybody else did. I also knew that when I got there (to the community) with the camera crew, the people trusted me. I have worked with camera crews that were amazed at how the people shared such intimate knowledge about their cultures. They trusted me; they trusted my approach; they trust me with their story.

When you're in production you're moving so fast that you don't have time to do the intellectual deconstruction of concepts. So I've intuitively followed what I knew was right. If I

1 On Lee Maracle's life and work, refer to <<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/lee-maracle>>.

2 Born in 1932, Alanis Obomsawin is "one of the most acclaimed Indigenous directors in the world". Her cinematographic work is drawn "from performance and storytelling". Refer to <<https://www.nfb.ca/directors/alanis-obomsawin/>>.

couldn't speak to an elder of that community, to present them with tobacco or a gift, I would quietly go and find a spot away from everything and put tobacco on the land and introduce myself, explain where I come from, what nation I come from. I explained, on a spiritual level, that my intention is not to harm anyone, that my intention is to carry out the story that the people want me to take out.

I used to tell my colleagues in Toronto, you can't fly into Indian country and stick a microphone in someone's face and expect them to spill their story to you. They don't know who you are. You haven't made the time to get to know them. I remember this one instance with a Toronto colleague who called me in a desperate moment. I had done a visual essay of the Kamloops Powwow in my home territory and had beautiful visuals, with so many colours. He asked me if he could use some of those visuals for the production he was doing right then because he wasn't able to collect any of those kind of visuals when he was working with Indigenous peoples in Thunder Bay³. I just said, "I'm sorry I can't do that, because when I went and sought permission to do this filming my people were very specific that those visuals were being given to me as a Secwépemc nation member. They trusted me with what I was going to do with this story and that only I could use these visuals, no one else"⁴. I had to explain to him that the visuals from out here, in the West, are not necessarily culturally congruent with visuals in Northern Ontario and that he needs to find out what are the cultural things up there that represent them visually.

AEM: These are aspects that non-Indigenous producers don't necessarily take into account when they shoot a film. Could you share with us an example of a scene, from your own work where these elements have come to bear on your work and films?

DC: One of the short productions I did that I really treasure in one I made for Vision TV, it was called, "*Grandmother Story*". I was very fortunate because to a certain degree I had creative freedom in creating the visual stories I produced for Vision TV.

³ Thunder Bay is a city located in the northwestern part of the Province of Ontario, Canada.

⁴ On Indigenous stories and their underpinnings, refer to Ignace (2008, 2017).

In this particular instance it was recreating a dreamscape. A woman that I know, who was a student at the time in Penticton, BC, crossed my path one day. She said, "I dreamt about you. You will have to come over for tea". She is, a Mohawk poet, and writer. As she was describing the dream to me all these visuals got dumped into my head and I just walked around with that for two or three months before I worked up the courage to ask her if I could visually recreate her dream. For many Indigenous peoples our dreamscapes are precious and they're not shared outside of your family or your immediate people. I was pushing the boundaries in many ways. I asked her if it was okay to recreate her dream in video. She gave me her permission and we did the shoot.

In the meantime, she left Penticton to do her master's in Colorado. When I finished the video, I sent her a copy. I didn't hear from her and I was so afraid. I thought, "Oh, my God, she hates it!". I thought I had maybe crossed some boundary. Months later, she faxed me a letter. I cried when I read it. She said that she was so touched with the sensitivity with which I recreated her dream. She said that she would never have given it to anyone else because she's really a shy person and she doesn't like to be on camera. But she allowed me to recreate her dream because she trusted me. She talked about how her grandmother influences her in her writing. She said that there was this old house at Six Nations in Ontario where she envisioned her grandmother visiting her in this old house. Luckily, there was this really old log house on the Penticton reserve. I was able to get permission from the owner and we filmed in that house. That's one instance in which I had to be really mindful and really careful. Even though she is not of my nation, I was able to recreate her dream with her vision.

"Talking in/Talking out" and the politics of solidarity

SM: Having seen so many Indigenous films from around the world at the *imagineNATIVE* Film + Media Arts Festival in Toronto, how do you feel about the global Indigenous film movement and about the possibilities for solidarity within it? Are there, maybe, aspects that leave you uncomfortable? I am asking that as someone who is navigating all of this. On the one hand, we see such beautiful moments of learning coming from Indigenous youth. On the other hand, I am also seeing a lot of us make mistakes along the way, mistakes in alliance

and relationship building. What possibilities are you seeing for solidarity among Indigenous Peoples in the film industry given the very unstable territory we're navigating in terms of how to honour traditions and build relationships?

DC: The work of Barry Barclay had an immense influence on my writing.⁵ He was the first Indigenous filmmaker who spoke about the Indigenous “gaze”. He didn't use that term, but that's what I came to call what he was talking about. He was the first one to talk about what would it look like if the Indigenous people had a camera on the shore when the colonizers were coming in on their ships, and the Indigenous camera was looking at the colonizers. That's the Indigenous gaze in my mind.

Barclay talked about the seduction the film industry exercises on our young people because the Māori filmmakers are huge leaders in Indigenous filmmaking. He was the first Indigenous filmmaker from Aotearoa (New Zealand) to have his work recognized at the Cannes Film Festival, in 1987, with his film *Ngati*, I really respect him and another pioneering Māori filmmaker Merata Mita, who was a contemporary of Barry Barclay. We just saw a film about her, *Merata: How Mum Decolonized the Screen*, screened at the Doxa Documentary Film Festival. I think it goes back to Barclay's reference to the “seduction” the industry is having on young Indigenous people. If people are not grounded in who they are, they tend to make shortcuts because they don't understand the cultural knowledge and they don't take the time to learn. We live in a very exciting time, because so many of us have mastered the technology. But, going back to Barclay again, we as Indigenous people have to use and adapt those tools to suit our needs rather than have those tools dictate the kinds of films we make. So, when you're talking about these kinds of conflicts that arise, I think it's because people do not understand their own knowledge. They are much more assimilated and entrenched in Euro-Western

⁵ Barry Barclay (1944-2008) was a filmmaker and writer of Maori and European descent. His book, *Our Own Image* (1990), discusses Indigenous-to-Indigenous “talking in” visual story telling practices (Christian, 2017, p. 24). See also, Murray (2008) and Columpar (2010) about Barclay's role in coining the term “Fourth Cinema” to signify “any visual storytelling/filmmaking that has Indigenous peoples in the key creative roles, thus being the creative intelligence behind the film” (Christian, 2017, p. 125, fn 55).

thinking, which is diametrically opposed to their own cultural values. Some people adopt a superiority attitude, just because they are successful in the mainstream film industry. It's not uncommon for Indigenous people to master the technology really quickly. Our people are ingenious. For instance, in my Syilx nation, a man I knew, and who was like a brother to me, designed a computer that could identify me by name! This certainly defies any stereotypes of savages, without intellect. I do know that Indigenous peoples have a multi-dimensional way of being. We can accomplish a high level of functioning in many different realms, if we chose to do so. For many of us, we are honouring the gifts that we carry. You can't suppress those gifts. You're given those things for a reason and I believe we have a responsibility to exercise those gifts. My friend/brother, who is no longer with us, was exercising his brilliance in quantum physics and in his knowledge of computer science when he created that talking computer.

SM: How do you feel about rapid distribution platforms, like Netflix⁶, which are not only distributing films, getting them out quickly, but also producing films, sometimes directly with directors? How do you feel this is going to change the ability of Indigenous directors to promote visual sovereignty, given that Netflix and other platforms are out there?

DC: For so long, Indigenous filmmakers couldn't distribute their work. They had no platforms. Maria Campbell talked about that the other day at her keynote address at Congress⁷. People

6 During the development of this conversation, Netflix signed and announced partnerships with *imagineNATIVE* Film, the Indigenous Screen Office, and Wapikoni Mobile with a focus on supporting Indigenous producers', screenwriters' and directors' labs, mentorships, and promotion. Refer to <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/netflix-indigenous-groups-partnership-1.5172017>>

7 Maria Campbell (1940-), a Saskatchewan-based Métis Elder, author and filmmaker. One of her first films, *Edmonton's Unwanted Women* (1968), builds on her 1963 initiative "to establish a halfway house in Edmonton for women who were destitute or experiencing other personal crises". According to the Virtual Métis Museum, "Maria Campbell's first professionally produced play, *Flight*, was the first all Aboriginal theatre production in modern Canada. Weaving modern dance, storytelling and drama together with traditional Aboriginal art practices, this early work set a stylistic tone that her most recent productions continue to explore". Refer to <<http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/11900>>.

ask you, “Where can we see your films”? They’re still in the old format. Way back, when Maria was working (she is 80, now), she got someone to digitize her old films. But she said, “We didn’t have ways to distribute our films”. I think that is up to the creative teams that are producing and directing Indigenous films, whether or not they distribute through Netflix, or other formats. For me it is great that I can go on to Netflix and find Indigenous films and to see that Indigenous filmmakers are actually making some money from their work. I don’t see any problem with that. I think it is part of the adapting. They got the story made, and the story is the most important for me. Everything is about the story and getting it out there.

Film genres and fitting circles into squares

SM: Hmm. I often wonder though, is this development of platforms and ‘wide’ or ‘easy’ access to content, creating a sense of production and consumption entitlement?

DC: To answer your question, I would like to further address the epistemological and pedagogical concerns we referred to earlier. I really believe that contemporary film production is a form of knowledge production for our world. So many Indigenous communities are using this form to preserve knowledge; it is not for public distribution, it is only for their internal use.

There are some really touchy points around intellectual property rights and Indigenous knowledge(s) because our communities have had knowledge extracted from our peoples for hundreds of years – much of it without informed consent. Researchers came into our communities and took our stories and copyrighted that information in their own names to earn their scholarly degrees. This means our communities are very careful about how research is done in our communities in these times. Our stories, which have been reduced to myths and not recognized for the critical cultural knowledge they hold. Our stories hold our laws that were given to our respective peoples. These stories provide guidance regarding how we are to interrelate with all the other beings on the land. Our stories inform our epistemological and pedagogical processes, our ways of knowing within our systems of knowledge.

These concerns also apply to film production because gathering visual stories is also a form of research thus have

a very strong pedagogical aspects. The conundrum is that many of the films that are being created now are coming from within Indigenous culture, without apology and without an explanation, regarding how they're located within colonialism. In that sense, most of our stories are teaching stories. This is an extraordinary development for our visual storytelling. Notwithstanding, this raises questions regarding how we, as filmmakers/visual storytellers, are protecting our cultural stories by respecting the epistemology of whatever culture is making that film. For instance, take the film *The Edge of the Knife*, directed by Gwaii Edenshaw and Helen Haig-Brown⁸. The core of this film absolutely comes from within the culture. It's done in the language; on the Haida landscape and completely infused with intimate interactions between the people, giving the audience the rhythm of the Haida culture. So, that story is a teaching story. Last year, at the *imagineNATIVE* Film and Media Arts Festival, we were picked up from the airport and I was riding in the same vehicle as Gwaii. The driver or someone referred to the film as a "horror film". I could feel and see the uneasiness of Gwaii, the Haida director. I jumped in and said, "It is not a horror film! It is a story from the culture. It is a teaching story". I think that, in all the film festivals, because we're consistently trying to fit our circles into square boxes and we're expected to think in their terms of Euro-Western "genres" and this skews the understanding of our visual stories. I keep asking this question, "What would we call these stories? What genres would we create from our perspectives? And, would we even call them "genres"?"

SM: How can we rethink the film festival space? I really love what *imagineNATIVE* is doing, but there is always room for improvement for all festivals, especially when striving to properly include works by peoples of other nations, communities, and cultures, than those of staff and board. How can we rethink the role that is taken up by the "cultural advisor", in festivals, production and academic spaces, a position which is

⁸ *Edge of the Knife* (2018), in the Haida language as *SGaawaay K'uuna*, is a 2018 drama film, the first using various dialects of the Haida language. Co-directed by Gwaii Edenshaw and Helen Haig-Brown, it is set in 19th-century land of the Haida Gwaii People, off the northern Pacific coast of today's Canada. It re-enacts a Haida story of a traumatized and stranded man transformed to *Gaagixiid*, the wildman. Refer to <<https://youtu.be/DnbOw5Nuq2U>>.

sometimes also be referred to as the “First Nations Advisor” or the “Indigenous Programming Direction Advisor”? Or, should we just move away from that entirely?

DC: This question brings up some of the complex relationships in terms of accountabilities because the funding bodies have conditions that have to be met by the creative team. It always matters where the money comes from. I think it calls for having producers who can be the bridge between funders and the creative people on the team. That is, creating a space where we, as Indigenous visual storytellers, are able to answer funders but still create within our own cultural context. I think that “cultural advisers” can be a problematic “appointment”. The industry will always find people who represent their interests. I have seen this over the years because in Indigenous country around the world you have a whole spectrum of thinkers. You are always going to have the one that’s assimilated and thinks it’s okay to be part of the State, who doesn’t understand the “visual sovereignty”, or the sovereignty of the people in terms of maintaining a spiritual relationship to the land, which leads to ensuring a continuance of life on the planet.

AEM: You pointed out that Indigenous film production is about knowledge production, seated firmly within Indigenous languages and traditions. On this point, I’m reminded of Martin Heidegger’s observation that language is “the house of life”. In that sense, the work of Indigenous filmmakers operates at the borderlands of culture, politics, history, and identity. It is located within reclaimed cultures, in relation to self and other, and in transgression of the colonial and colonizing frames of reference imposed by modernity and its contemporary articulations. Hence, Indigenous film production is not just about language revitalization and knowledge production. It is about (re)building, in a meaningful way, that “house of life” that one can inhabit, dwell in, live in, and in which one can find a meaning and a sense of purpose. Such a journey also speaks to the role films can play, under certain conditions, in decolonizing our modernity-saturated epistemic frameworks. Since Robert Flaherty’s “silent documentary”, *Nanook of the North* (1922), in

which he purported to “salvage” or record the Inuit way of life⁹. *Nanook* was a project driven by what I would call “a colonizing externality”. In contrast, the work of contemporary Indigenous film production can be conceived of as “project of internality”, associated with the (re)building of the “house of life”, from within, “without apology or explanation”, as you said.

DC: Yes. Such a project is absolutely centred in the language. In my dissertation, I developed a localized Indigenous Secwépemc-Syilx place-based/land-based theory, which is fundamentally located in concepts from the language(s). Visually, it is represented by a DNA spiral, which is often referred to as the building block of life. The two sides of the spiral represent two concepts from the Secwépemc and Syilx philosophies. First is the “reciprocal accountability” principle from the Secwépemc (Christian, 2017, p. 109). Then, the outer strand is the Syilx regenerative principles (Armstrong, 2009). These outer strands are linked by two Secwépemc concepts from the language, which are “*k’weltktnews*” (interrelatedness) and “*knucwestsut.s*” (personal responsibility) (Michel, 2012).

Stated differently, first, as individuals, we have a “personal responsibility”, to be a healthy individual so that we may contribute to the collective of our families, communities and Nations in a healthy way so that life is perpetuated on the planet. Secondly, there’s also reciprocal accountability, where you are not just accountable to yourself but you are also accountable to your family, your community and your Nation. As an Indigenous filmmaker, these principles underpin whom I had to be accountable to in writing my dissertation. There were layers of protocols that I had to attend to, and pay attention to, not just with the Nations I was working with, and who agreed to share their stories with me, but also within my own Nation. I had to go and explain to the Elders and leadership what I was doing; what the work entailed.

AEM: Do you see that as underpinning the very actions and practices through which you built that “house of life”? Filmmakers are, in a way, the “builders” of that house. What I like about

⁹ *Nanook of the North* is a 1922 “silent documentary” on Inuit life, directed by Robert J. Flaherty, with elements of staged drama (Mackenzie, 2015; Barnouw, 1993, pp. 33-51). A fully restored version is available on YouTube <<https://youtu.be/m4kOIZMqso0>>.

that, and perhaps you can speak to it in some way, is that your approach offers a strong response to those who misunderstand the underpinnings of Indigenous filmmaking. For instance, some insinuate that they understand what happened under colonialism, the dispossession, the racism, and the genocide that were part of it. But, they keep asking whether it is possible to go back to a past that has been disrupted. I like your response: It is not so much about finding some kind of “lost paradise”. Rather, Indigenous filmmaking is about reclaiming meanings and fulfillments *in* the present day, as part of reconnecting to that past while, at the same time, being creative and innovative in responding to present concerns of Indigenous peoples. This is, I think, how I understand the “accountability” you have been talking about as part of confronting the temporal consequences of colonialism. This articulation generates lots of insights into the role of Indigenous filmmakers, about their being in this world, of this world, and about them being “house builders” in a way that generates self-fulfillment, this sovereignty we have been talking about.

DC: Yes. So many people want our Indigenous cultures to be frozen in time because it pleases some kind of romantic notion for them, rather than looking at us as live beings today. My position is that our cultures are alive. We’re constantly moving. It is organic. We’re putting together things to maintain those foundational principles that contribute to building life and extending life on the lands that we are born on and for which we carry responsibilities.

AEM: I really appreciate that point, because Indigeneity cannot be reduced to a curatorial activity, whether within the frame of a museum, gallery, or some exhibition space, or as part of filmmaking. Rather, Indigenous filmmaking captures life in all its complexities, openness, unpredictability, challenges, innovations, traditions and, most importantly, aspirations. The ways you refer to your work—in writing, filmmaking, and art—speak strongly to that.

Indigenous filmmaking as travelling in entangled worlds

SM: Our conversation is really highlighting for me how entrenched the mainstream film industry is within the neocolonial—it really has been the neoliberal mainstream and it is this industry that struggles with accountability, consent,

respect, equity—imposing patriarchal, and many other, colonial norms, especially in relation to Indigenous, Afro or people of colour anything and women. It struggles with ‘no’. But perhaps this is also because it is unfamiliar and disconnected from the forms of accountability you are referring to, Dorothy. In your doctoral dissertation you talk about “Fourth World” cinema and that it is more like a Fourth World justice¹⁰. It is a way of life that has not been stuck in the past. Neither does it exist in parallel to the past, nor is it future-obsessed. Rather it is intersecting through past and present in ways that connect with what both of you are talking about. In a time when many of us are grappling with standing firm with our ‘NOs’, this gives me hope. Your dissertation very much goes into this. Everything that has been the making of this “Fourth World” cinema, and how right now it keeps shifting and evolving, like a dance of survival, resistance and creation, it is so rich. It is another way for all of us to be, in the creative industries and, more generally, with our relationships.

This special issue will most likely reach (or so we hope) those active in the area of film studies, as well as other students within and outside of academia striving towards being among the industry’s future generations. How do you feel about “film studies”, if we are going to rethink the field of filmmaking?

DC: Note that I did not do either one of my degrees in film studies. I did that purposefully. My experience of that particular field is that it is very white. It assumes superiority towards filmmakers who are people of colour. The field is based in a white supremacist ideology like many Euro-Western disciplines that avoid the uncomfortable conversation when that is challenged. I am just being blunt here. Those in the field are very cliquish in terms of what they think makes a film or the criteria that they feel make films acceptable to them. This is also one of the

¹⁰ The term, “Fourth World” cinema comes from Barry Barclay’s work, building on Secwépemc leader George Manuel. In my PhD dissertation, I put the two understandings together to speak of “Fourth World Cinema”. Columpar (2010) explains that Barclay considered it in contradistinction to all forms of “invader cinema” (by First, Second, and Third worlds directors/producers). In that sense “Indigenous cinema” represents a “phenomenon” that comes from within Indigenous cultures and societies.

reasons why I did my graduate studies because I was reading in the film discourse about how, we, as Indigenous people, did not have a production practice. And I was like, Oh yeah!? I'm going to show you that we do!

That backdrop has been a large motivator for me. I mean there are some people who give me hope, like Corinn Columpar, from the University of Toronto¹¹. She wrote a book, *Unsettling Sights* (2010). I was so pleased when I read it. Columpar clearly understands the land relationship. She understands the Fourth World and its cinema. Being involved in the film industry and in academia, as I am now, as Associate Director of Indigenous Initiatives at BC's Simon Fraser University, I have to deal with the Indigenous systems of knowledge meeting Euro-Western knowledge on a daily basis as part of my job. My title represents a huge umbrella. It is still about Indigenous Knowledge, its pedagogical and epistemological aspects, and how they can be used in classrooms. It's also about how we change curriculum to inform those classrooms. This is a very heavy administrative position in terms of paperwork. I keep myself involved in film because I have to stay in touch with the creative aspects to maintain a balance in my life.

AEM: Have you had instances or experiences of pushbacks, of challenges posed to collaboration, of misunderstandings, or even opposition to the kinds of insights you have brought to bear on your work?

DC: [With humour [laughter]. I can think of one instance when I was appointed Chair of the Ontario Film Review Board. I had served as a board member during my undergraduate studies

11 Corinn Columpar is Associate Professor and Director of the Cinema Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Her work focuses on "filmmaking practices and textual politics of various counter-cinematic traditions (especially feminist, Aboriginal, and 'independent') as well as, more generally, film theory, embodiment and representation, and collaborative practice". Her *Unsettling Sights: The Fourth World on Film* (2010) is "a monograph that examines the construction of Aboriginality in contemporary cinema from Canada, the US, New Zealand, and Australia". Her co-edited volume (with Sophie Mayer), *There She Goes: Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond* (2009), is an anthology dedicated to the flows and exchanges that characterize feminist cultural production. For more details, refer to <<http://www.cinema.utoronto.ca/faculty-columpar.html>>.

before being asked to be chair for a couple of years. On my very first day on the job, an elder white man came into my office. His energy was just very weird and he said to me, “You know, the only reason you got this job is because you’re an Indian” [laughter]. I remember looking at him and my internal voice asking, “how should I deal with this”? I said to him, “Oh really? Have you read my CV? Do you know where I’ve worked, in what corporations?” Then, I very graciously stood up and said, “I have a meeting in two minutes; can you please leave”. I did not have a meeting. I just wanted him out of my office. I had to work with him for over the two years as Chair. He was also one of the people who kept talking about “*our* Aboriginals” and “*our* Natives”. One day, I finally said to him, “We do not belong to you; we do not belong to anybody. We belong to ourselves. We are the bosses of ourselves”. He stopped saying that.

A second example, regarding challenges facing collaboration, concerns my interaction with two white men filmmakers, quite established in the industry. They wanted me to come on board and serve as a co-director with them, working with Indigenous people up north. It was around a very sensitive subject matter, namely sexual abuse. After several encounters and communication exchanges I recognized that it’s *their* story. They need to tell or explain what they are going through in terms of their politically correct idea in order to not be seen as telling an Indigenous story without consultation. I said to them that I could not co-direct with them. I would gladly help them along their process and they could ask me questions as they go along. But, I strongly saw that it was *their* story and that the people trusted them. So, maybe they needed to talk about relationship building and what it was like for them, as two white men, trying to do this Indigenous story and the things they encountered. I said that would be a really useful film for people to learn from, if they did that. I was not prepared to serve as the “Indigenous” director so they could access funding; nor was I prepared to legitimize their story with my name and reputation.

AEM: I think your story that resonates with the ending of Juan Carlos Valdivia’s 2013 film, *Yvy Marae* (known in English as *Land Without Evil*), which VLAFF programmed in 2014 as part of its 12th edition. The film retraces the experiences of a Spanish filmmaker who travelled to Bolivia to shoot a documentary on the Guarani People. Accompanied with a crew, and with full

equipment, they travelled in a Jeep reminiscent of an “explorer” in a colonial expedition. The interesting thing is that, in one of the last scenes, that Jeep—the driving technological force carrying everyone and everything into Indigenous land—ends up in a bush, completely dismantled—that is, mechanically deconstructed – by members of this Indigenous people. The film ends with the camera undertaking a close-up of an Indigenous girl, sitting on the dismantled Jeep, capturing her eyes, through which the story ends. This scene provides a vivid reminder of the need to always interrogate the ethical practices of those who stand behind the camera. Flipping the camera around, in an act of “doubling”, as in Valdivia’s film, helps interrogate those ethical practices associated with the manipulation of the camera. Garnet Butchart (2013) refers to the “camera as sign” in discussing the ethics of concealment in documentaries and in films, more generally. In that sense, eyes set borders to the camera, borders I may not want to transgress because I do not see myself part of someone else’s story. I can go with you so far. But, you would have to take the remainder of that journey on your own terms. I appreciated that kind of nuance that you’re bringing into your experiences, Dorothy, because your experiences show that when we talk about collaboration, especially between Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers, it is not something to be taken for granted. The eyes, or the camera lenses we use, extend beyond the technology, into the mind and the cultural forms of representations it carries.

Visual decolonizing pedagogies

AEM: Could you speak to your engagement with Indigenous filmmakers, artists, and writers? To what extent have their works found their way into your own work?

DC: Barry Barclay is a major inspiration, right at the outset. His book, *Our Own Image* (1990), was difficult to find. When I first read that book, I was jumping up and down because I was so excited that Barclay had put into words so many of the things that I had experienced in the field. I thought, “Oh, good! I’m not by myself”. Equally, the impact Alanis Obomsawin had on us, across the country, and indeed around the world, is un-measurable. I call her the Grand Dame of Indigenous film production. When she spoke to me as part of my doctoral work, she was 83 at the time and working on five films. She just doesn’t stop. I mean here she is, I believe she’s 87 now, and

she's working on two productions, I heard. When she made *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), I was there at Oka when she was behind the lines collecting footage of the experiences of the Warriors, Clan mothers and Faith Keepers who were surrounded by the Canadian military. She was being brave and fierce in staying with the people behind the lines, even though the government had ordered all the journalists out¹². I was behind closed doors, doing communications, reaching out to people all around the world because Canada had mainly closed us out in terms of the media¹³.

There are so many Indigenous people who have influenced me and affected me. I was learning from them around the cultural appropriation issue in the 1980s. I was living in Toronto then and working on my undergraduate degree. They used to come and stay at my house—Lee Maracle and Jeannette Armstrong¹⁴—because nobody could afford hotel rooms. They used to sleep on my couch, or on the floor, and we'd have incredibly deep discussions about many things. I spent time with Maria Campbell during that time too. There have been some really important opportunities for me to work alongside these women. It was an incredible learning opportunity because I was taken away from my culture. I was in white foster homes when I was a

12 *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* is a 1993 much acclaimed documentary directed film by Alanis Obomsawin. It chronicles the 1990 land dispute that took place in Quebec and which involves the Mohawk people and the town of Oka. The documentary won 18 Canadian and international awards, among which the Distinguished Documentary Achievement Award from the International Documentary Association.

13 My people, the Sewepemc and Sylix Nations of the interior of BC did a Peace Run starting in BC and they ran across the country to deliver a medicine bundle to the Mohawks. Of course we did not include that information in the press releases because it would have become an object of curiosity, rather than understanding the spiritual intent. The Elders and Spiritual people charged me with managing the front-line communications, writing press releases and VISION TV was the only Canadian media outlet that “heard” our message of Peace – the majority of media outlets were promoting a sensationalized, glamourized version of the events while they criminalized some of the men and women behind the lines.

14 Jeannette Armstrong (born 1948) is a member of the Sylix Okanagan nation in British Columbia. She is a prolific writer, artist and activist. For more details on her work and accomplishments refer to <<https://bcbooklook.com/2016/02/02/103-jeannette-armstrong/>>.

kid. I was apprehended when I was 13 but luckily I had the first few years of my life with my grandparents who raised me. The time that I had with these women was a part of my reconnecting to my people and my culture.

AEM: In many ways, Barry Greenwald's *The Experimental Eskimos* (2009), a documentary (partially based on archival materials), chronicles "social engineering" experiments undertaken in the 1960s on the part of the Canadian government in Ottawa. These experiments sought the assimilation of Inuit communities by forcefully removing Inuit children of "outstanding ability" from their families and communities and assigning them to foster urban white middle class families, thus disrupting northern Indigenous family ties and destroying Indigenous culture. The documentary makes particularly visible the vicissitudes associated with the emergence and organisation of Indigenous activists and leaders, and the struggles they had to continually endure over the backdrop of traumatising Canadian federal policies of dispossession¹⁵. Policy makers and politicians were adamant regarding the implementation of such experimental policies. One Ottawa official observed in one of his letters that, "We must follow through with the natural consequences of that program," though the "consequences" were already fully understood at the time. The struggles of Indigenous activists and community elders and members, as was the case during the Oka crisis of 1990 in Quebec, share a similar pattern to the one you shared with us here.

DC: Inuit people, and their struggles, have had a huge influence on representation of story in this country. I do not think that they get the attention that they deserve for that. When I was speaking with Zacharias Kunuk, he explained to me that it was his community of Igloodik who voted not to have film programming from the south parachuted into their communities during the

15 For details on this documentary, refer to <<http://www.whitepinepictures.com/experimental-eskimos/?v=3e8d115eb4b3>>. Regarding the involvement of the Canadian State, as well as religious congregations, in forced assimilation and social engineering experiments (including residential schools), refer to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, at <<http://www.trc.ca/>>.

early 1970s¹⁶. They voted against because there was nothing in these films that represented them. They were all in English, of course, and the Inuktitut language wasn't there. To me, it is no accident that an Inuit was at the helm of making sure that Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) got the licence. Abraham Tagalik worked tirelessly with Indigenous groups in the south to achieve this amazing feat¹⁷. It is also no surprise that Zacharias was the first Indigenous from Canada to get his film, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (ᐱᑕᐱ ᓴᓴᐱᑦ, 2001), screened at the Cannes Film Festival in France. The film was awarded the *Caméra d'Or*, the first Canadian film to achieve that honour. *Atanarjuat* was one of the community's stories and it was from within the culture. I had to go and see that film three times to understand it! I have a tremendous amount of respect for Zacharias for doing that, because he created this film for his people and they were involved in every aspect of the production. He chose aesthetics (landscapes, sounds, and images) that are congruent to his culture and language.

AEM: What you say, Dorothy, brings me to think about the challenges met by Indigenous films, and you referred to that earlier. Normally, in Western cinema production one would make distinctions between different “genres” of films, say a documentary film, a fiction or narrative film. Would you think that these distinctions hold in relation to Indigenous films? Should there be different kind of distinctions with regard to Indigenous films?

16 Zacharias Kunuk (1957-) is an Inuk director and producer, best known for his film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), the first Canadian film to be spoken entirely in the Inuktitut language. On Kunuk's life and work, refer to <<http://www.isuma.tv/members/zacharias-kunuk>>. Igloodik is an Inuit community in Foxe Basin, Qikiqtaaluk Region, Territory of Nunavut, northern Canada. It is worth noting that Zacharias Kunuk and his collective in the north distribute Indigenous stories internationally. Refer to: <<https://rdvcanada.ca/en/creating-with-canada/find-creative-partners/companies/isuma-distribution-international/>>.

17 Abraham Tagalik was APTN's first chairperson. He envisioned APTN as contributing to “intercultural understanding and community building” (Tahmahkera, 2014, p. 148). He currently describes himself as “an announcer operator” at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation North, in Iqaluit, Nunavut. Refer to this video interview with Tagalik <<https://vimeo.com/63942888>>.

SM: I want to push that to the following question: Is the industry now ready to grasp that story is knowledge? I'm connecting this question to the release of a new book, co-edited by Jo-ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo (2019), with a foreword by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, and to which you contributed a chapter. This groundbreaking book emphasizes the centrality of stories in the construction and transmission of Indigenous knowledge. Do you feel the industry is getting that Indigenous stories represent knowledge?

DC: Well, I think they are grappling with it, but they do not fully understand it. Maybe this is where film festivals can begin to explore this problematic. I have tried to talk about this with some filmmakers. They are not interested in this intellectual conversation. They just want to make their visual stories. So, I think it is up to us, as scholars, who are involved in the intellectual discourse to start challenging that and finding ways to explore what are the genres from an Indigenous perspective. That said, I feel that *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* and *Edge of the Knife* are teaching stories. I do not know how the two visual stories I talked about, *Grandmother Story*, and the "visual essay" on horses—would be categorized from our Indigenous worldviews. Many of our works get slotted into "experimental" because mainstream film programmers don't understand the work.

I have one independent film that I did, just before I started graduate school, entitled "*A spiritual land claim*". It is a story of the decolonizing of the self. It was my journey back to my land and back to my people. It is not just my story; it is the story of many dispossessed Indigenous peoples. I did it with very little narrative. I was experimenting with the concept of sound because Indigenous people treat sound very differently than other peoples, I believe. Sound is also an evocative tool for all kinds of things. You can be in a room with many Indigenous people and there can be complete silence on the auditory level. But, energy-wise there are things going on. That is what I was trying to get at; what is not not being said. Equally, Indigenous people treat time differently, and can relate to different time spaces (past, present and future) at the same time. In that film, this is what I was exploring. Here, too, I was pushing the boundaries by bringing together traditional and contemporary

songs to defy the frozen in time of our cultures. I brought in traditional values with contemporary values because I was showing that, even in this day and age, my people still hunt; my people still picked berries, doing all the things that are associated with hunter and gatherer people and we still co-exist with the land while, at the same time listening to contemporary sounds of the cello, the fiddle, and songs created by Indigenous people of this time.

Regarding documentary films, I read a book by Bill Nichols (1991), *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, when preparing a keynote for the University of Victoria (BC). I entitled my talk precisely “Whose Reality Is it Anyway?”. Indigenous documentaries and the way we have been doing film, I’ve been watching how filmmakers have been changing the form because it’s like Creative Nonfiction. They fictionalize aspects of real life or they recreate experiences from their lives that they can’t necessarily “film” in a real-life situation.

AEM: It seems to me that maintaining genre labels—and not interrogating their epistemic and ontological assumptions—is a form of colonisation. Questioning these labels and interrogating them is therefore very important to build a distinctive and meaningful house, if we are to take the works of Indigenous filmmakers seriously and on their own terms.

SM: Thank you, Dorothy, you have touched me in two ways, especially the film programmer side of me. Firstly, I feel more empowered. People look at the programme and they are asking, “What film genre is this?” Can you not just call it an “Indigenous creative work” or perhaps “documentary”? Then, we go back and try to fit a film into this or another box, even though we realize what a disservice to the work and creator that is. In the past two years we have started work concertedly to move away from that, with some of my close friends and colleagues, who are either Indigenous or very connected and committed to Indigenous teachings and communities, doing a lot of (un) learning. But, it is hard! We are really learning that right now. You could not have said it any clearer.

Secondly, you also spoke to the importance of capturing what is not being said, and that is something that comes across

in *A Spiritual Land Claim*. It really moved me when I first saw it. It does not include a lot of narration, you did not need to say a lot. Visuals and sound do not need to be communicating at once. We also do not need to hear nor see everything. I feel that those attached to the production, curatorial and consumption norms of the mainstream industry are still looking for everything to be said, to get something tangible out of it, through sound or script lines. The mainstream industry is just beginning to tune in to this Indigenous knowledge, which is in relation to film, technical expertise that has always been present in Indigenous visual media works.

I think that there is so much power, and so much to get out of paying attention to what is not said. Elders, teachers, and mentors have all been teaching me this; something that we can return to within the film industry. That itself is a really important reminder and lesson.

DC: Yes, it is, Sonia. I want to go back to the comments on policies. Canada is attempting to address things through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and calls to action. There are some Canadians who want us to just get over it, that is, forget the history of how their government policies have oppressed and destroyed our peoples and our cultures. My brother takes a strong stance towards this attitude when he calls the policies that have been put in place to manage Indigenous peoples in Canada as a “legislated genocide”. It makes me think about my time in white foster homes and the destruction of the generations before me who were forced to attend residential schools. I am so grateful that my grandparents did not go to Residential School and they were the ones that raised me during the first few years of my life. It also solidifies for me how it is so important for us to keep making these stories from within the culture and from our own perspectives because it is about perpetuating life on the ancestral lands that we live on. Most importantly, it is about countering the colonial narratives that continue to perpetuate the stereotypes.

For young filmmakers, who are just beginning, I remember this student asking me when I was invited to deliver a guest lecture at SFU, at Harbour Centre, in Vancouver. She asked me, at the end of my lecture, how was I so high functioning given all the things that I have lived through! I chuckled to myself,

thinking of all the images that must have gone through her mind, of all of the stereotypes, and how I defy those stereotypes just by being who I am, and by just being able to do the things that I do. To young people who are starting, I would say that what got me through was going back and reclaiming my culture. Pay respects to your ancestors. Learn what it is that your culture is trying to teach you. When you get to that point you can see through that lens. It is done piecemeal; I did it over a number of years; it is not as if you go into one class, and you sit and learn. Rather, I have had many teachers over the years, elders, and mentors whom you get to know along the way. I have put myself into experiential learning situations, which means going and participating in the culture, actually going and being on the land with the people. It does not happen instantly.

SM: That is true, we are looking and reaching out for that one methodology class which teaches students, in one term, how to reflect and decolonize themselves to be able to do a dissertation; or for that trending decolonial collective that will ‘enlighten us’ employing a bunch of jargon yet denying the logocentric power it wields; or, that one acclaimed film study course that teaches future documentarians how to look inside themselves and capture their emotions quickly to make an award winning film. Bringing it back to time, the importance of valuing time and dedicating time to such learning is humbling. This is totally the opposite of what the industries are (academic and film), which is a lot of speed, rapid production and publication, ego, and glitz and glam.

On this note, I would like to share my and our collective thanks to you, Dorothy, for really bringing your voice, your knowledge, your communities, your power, to this special issue project. Thank you for joining us, and for taking the time to share your experiences with us.

DC: Thank you for having me. It has been great.

References

- Apak Angilirq, P., Cohn, N., Kunuk, Z., and Wong, G. (2001). *Atanarjuat: The fast runner* (ᐱᑕᐱᑦᑦᑕᑦ), Canada: Isuma Igloodik Productions.
- Archibald, J., Lee-Morgan, J., and De Santolo, J. (2019). *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology*. London: Zed Press.
- Armstrong, J.C. (2009). *Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and Tmix^wcentrism*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany): University of Greifswald,
- Barclay, B. (1990). *Our own image*. Auckland, NZ: Longman Paul.
- Butchart, G.C. (2013). Camera as sign: on the ethics of unconcealment in documentary film and video. *Social Semiotics*, 23(5), 675-690.
- Barnouw, E. (1993). *Documentary: A history of the non-fiction film* (Second revised edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Christian, D. (2017). Gathering knowledge: Indigenous methodologies of land/place-based visual storytelling/filmmaking and visual sovereignty. Ph.D. Dissertation. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia. Retrieved from: <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0343529>
- Christian, D. (2010). *A "Cinema of Sovereignty": Working in the cultural interface to create a model for fourth world film pre-production and aesthetics*. M.A. Thesis. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University. Retrieved from: summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/11842/etd6042_DChristian.pdf.
- Columpar, C. (2009). *There she goes: Feminist filmmaking and beyond*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Columpar, C. (2010). *Unsettling sights: The fourth world on film*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Haig-Brown, H. and Edenshaw, G. (2018). *SGaawaay K'uuna - Edge of the knife*. Canada: Niijang Xyaalas Productions.
- Ignace, M. and Ignace, R.E. (2017). *Yeri7 Stsqeýs-kucw: Secwépehc people, land, and laws*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens' University Press.

- Ignace, R.E. (2008). *Our oral histories are our iron posts: Secwépemc stories and historical consciousness*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University. Retrieved from: <http://shuswapnation.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Ron-Ignace-PhD-Thesis.pdf>
- MacKenzie, S. (2015). The creative treatment of alterity: Nanook as the North. In S. MacKenzie and A. Westerstahl Stenport (Eds.). *Films on ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Michel, K.A. (2012). *Trickster's path to language transformation: Stories of Secwépemc immersion from Chief Atahm School*. PhD Dissertation. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia. Retrieved from: <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0105178> .
- Murray, S. (2008). *Images of dignity: Barry Barclay and fourth cinema*. Wellington, Aotearoa (New Zealand): Huia Publishers.
- Nichols, B. (1991). *Representing reality: Issues and concepts in documentary*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Padget, M. (2013). Hopi film, the Indigenous aesthetic and environmental justice: Victor Masayesva Jr.'s Paatuwaqatsi – Water, land and life. *Journal of American Studies*, 47(2), 363-384.
- Persky, S. (1998). *Delgamuukw: The Supreme Court of Canada decision on Aboriginal title*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.
- Raymont, P. & Greenwald, B. (2009). *The experimental Eskimos*. Canada: White Pine Productions
- Romero, C. (2010). The politics of the camera: visual storytelling and sovereignty in Victor Masayesva's Itam Hakim, Hopiit. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 22(1), 49-75.
- Tahmahkera, D. (2014). *Tribal television: Viewing Native Peoples in sitcoms*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Winstanley, C. and Heperi, M. (2018). *Merata: How Mum decolonised the screen*. New Zealand: Netflix.

**LOCATING SOVEREIGNTY IN THE
AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC-POLITICAL
POETICS OF DAILY EXISTENCE IN TWO
AMAZONIAN FILMS**

Sarah Shamash

University of British Columbia, Canada

ABSTRACT The theme of daily life is a common one in the Brazilian *Video in the Villages* (VÍdeo nas aldeias) filmic archive. I analyze the diversity of cinematic treatments of and approaches to the theme of daily life in an Indigenous village by comparing, contrasting, and examining how two films construct, embody, and experience communal life through culturally specific methods of inquiry. In particular, I explore concepts of time, the senses, creativity, and the relations between the individual and the collectivity as all of the above are cinematically rendered in the intimacy, the performance, and the ritual of daily life. Specifically, I look at how these two VNA productions, *Shomôtsi* (2001) and *Kiarāsā Tō Sáty, The Agouti's Peanut* (2005), re-politicize the everyday through sovereign practices. I discuss these cinematic works as they relate to imperfect media (Salazar & Cordova, 2008), decolonial pedagogies, and the “cosmological embeddedness of the everyday” (Overing & Passes, 2000, p. 298).

SUMÁRIO O tema da vida cotidiana é comum no arquivo cinematográfico da organização de Vídeo nas Aldeias. Analiso a diversidade de tratamentos cinematográficos e abordagens sobre o tema da vida cotidiana em uma aldeia indígena, comparando, contrastando e examinando como dois filmes elaboram, incorporam e vivem a vida comunitária através de métodos de investigação culturalmente específicos. Em particular, exploro conceitos de tempo, sentidos, criatividade e as relações entre o indivíduo e a coletividade, uma vez que todos os itens acima são apresentados cinematicamente na intimidade, no desempenho e no ritual da vida cotidiana. Especificamente, eu investigo como essas duas produções da VNA, *Shomôtsi* (2001) e *Kiarāsā Tō Sáty, O amendoim da cutia* (2005), re-politizam o cotidiano por meio de práticas soberanas. Discuto esses trabalhos cinematográficos relacionados à mídia imperfeita (Salazar e Cordova 2008), às

pedagogias descoloniais e à “inserção cosmológica do cotidiano” (Overing 298).

Keywords Video in the Villages, Brazil, Indigenous, Sovereignty, Decolonial, Film

Introduction

“Cinema here is a shared experience of affirmation of language, rituals, food – in other words, a celebration of the everyday life of each village”¹.

The theme of daily life in the village is a common one in the Brazilian *Video in the Villages* (*Vídeo nas aldeias* or VNA henceforth) filmic archive. VNA is a non-governmental organization that has operated over the last three decades. Founded by Vincent Carelli in 1986, it then became a film school for Indigenous filmmakers through workshops carried out in Indigenous villages. Today, VNA houses one of Latin America’s most critical archives of approximately one hundred films on and by over forty Indigenous nations across Brazil. Mari Corrêa, who joined VNA’s team in 1998 and who co-directed VNA with Vincent Carelli until 2009, articulates the idea of “filming nothing” (2004) as part of a cinematic approach in the video workshops. In this paper, I analyze the diversity of cinematic treatments of and approaches to the theme of daily life in an Indigenous village by comparing, contrasting, and examining how two VNA produced films construct, embody, and experience everyday communal life through culturally specific methods of inquiry. In particular, I explore concepts of time, the senses, creativity, and the relations between the individual and the collectivity as all of the above are cinematically rendered in the intimacy and the ritual of daily life. I argue that cinema, as an interdisciplinary form and subject of study, can re-imagine life projects by re-politicizing daily life as an anti-colonial practice.

Specifically, I look at two Amazonian films: *Shomōtsi* (2001) and *Kiarāsā Tō Sâty, The Agouti’s Peanut* (2005) as they relate to social philosophies of “living well” (*sumac kawsay*² or *buen*

1 Andréa França cited in Corrêa et al. p. 30

2 This Aymara term has been discussed as a decolonial paradigm that implies culturally specific ways of living in community and in harmony with humans and nature.

vivir). Further, I explore how the auto-ethnographic as a method of inquiry in the Asháninka film *Shomōtsi* is experienced as a transformative process with fertile decolonial potential for both filmmaker and audience alike. In the Panará film, *Kiarāsā Tō Sâty, The Agouti's Peanut*, I apply a multi-sensory approach to a reading of the film as a means to deconstruct colonial hierarchies of knowledge while engaging Panará specific cosmologies. Having chosen these cinematic works for their meditation on daily life, their geographical location within the Amazon, and their production period between 2001-2005, I also discuss them as they relate to imperfect media (Salazar & Cordova, 2008), and the “cosmological embeddedness of the everyday” (Overing, 2000, p. 298). In this way, these works articulate a micropolitics that repoliticizes daily life from an Indigenous centric position. One of the aims of this paper is to examine cinema’s pedagogical potential through a cinematic lens that engages an anticolonial framework from a global south location.

As a feminist, mixed-race person, with Middle Eastern ancestry as well with family in and cultural affinities with Brazil, I have a stake in advocating for the recognition of a plurivocal cinematic voice within the academy, one that includes a critical Indigenous presence as part of dismantling intersectional oppressions. I came to my investigation on Brazilian Indigenous cinema through my interest in and past research on Third cinema in Latin America and its legacy as a decolonial project. As a film studies scholar, instructor, film programmer, and as a practicing media artist and filmmaker, I apply experiential and practical knowledge across these intellectual and educational spheres in order to create space for intercultural discussion and exchange. In line with Karen L. Potts and Leslie Brown’s discussion (2015), I apply anti-oppressive research methods, where instead of trying to prove a singular truth, “we [I] look for meaning, for understanding, for insights that can enable resistance and change” (p. 20). My intention is thus to dialogue with the cinematic texts herein, to reflect on the different ways of knowing, of being in, and of seeing the world from a decolonial framework.

***Shomōtsi* (2001)**

Shomōtsi starts with an establishing wide shot of an Asháninka village at dawn. We hear the sounds of life in an Amazonian Indigenous village awakening: birds chirping, roosters crowing,

and dogs barking. An edited montage shows us medium wide shots and close-ups of animals; then, we cut to a long shot of our protagonist, an older man in his late 50s or 60s, as he walks, the hand-held camera following him. He collects chopped wood to make a fire. A voice-over tells us: “Shomōtsi is the name of a hummingbird which is small and red and lives in our forest. Shomōtsi is also a name of a character who you will meet in this movie.” We follow Shomōtsi in his morning perambulations. The narrator and filmmaker, Wewito Piāko, explains to the viewer in the voice-over that he chose Shomōtsi because he lives near his house in the Asháninka village called Apiwtxa. Wewito goes on to say³, “I’m going to show you how he lives day by day in this film.” Wewito’s voice-over in *Shomōtsi* doesn’t mark him as an outsider or as a purportedly objective, all-knowing narrator.

Although Wewito is looking at his world, even objectifying it from the standpoint of a filmmaker, the material effect of his voice combined with the intimacy of his camera’s gaze, brings him into Shomōtsi’s social sphere and positions Wewito as another character in the film. In this context, Wewito explains his privileged relationship with Shomōtsi as a neighbor in his village and as a teacher about “our culture” (quoted in Carelli et al, 2011, p. 208). We never actually see Wewito; yet our entire cinematic experience is shaped by his distinctive point of view and embodied through his camera movements. In short, we go where he chooses for us to go; we see what he chooses for us to see, and we hear his voice telling us what he wants us to know about Shomōtsi and his world. As a result of this subjective camera, questions often arise and are left unanswered or open ended in a more self-reflexive and distinctively authorial tone. These choices of what to exclude from a general public’s eyes are hinted at further on in the film, a point which I will return to later. Arguably, his audience is largely non-Asháninka and non-Indigenous; we are aware of his subjectivity both individually and collectively within his community and what he is choosing to show and tell us about Shomōtsi, himself, and his community. This more individualized point of view shapes *Shomōtsi* as a film in a way that is distinct from the collective nature of many of the co-authored films in VNA’s filmography.

³ I often use first names to designate some of the Indigenous filmmakers at VNA to avoid confusion as some use their tribe’s name as a last name or share a last name with other community members and filmmakers also quoted in the text.

The process of filming *Shomōtsi*, of observing and discovering everyday life as extraordinary, becomes a critical space for Wewito to reflect on his position within his culture and community, while deciding what to convey through film and video to an outside public. In one of the film's early scenes, we see Shomōtsi in his house, a separate unit isolated from any other visible dwellings. Like many Asháninka communities, people are often grouped in isolated households in nuclear family units with varying degrees of distance from other community members (Killick, 2009, p. 703). We see Shomōtsi paint his face with a red paste. Rather than any ethnographic or anthropological explanation, we are immersed in this world through the camera of a fellow Asháninka neighbour and friend. The sound is all diegetic; we hear the rich, textured universe of the Amazon - sounds of the river, birds, bugs and animals, in stereo depth and detail. It's important to note that Apiwtxa, as an Asháninka village and as a site, has come to represent Asháninka sovereignty through "resistance" and "sustainability" (Isaac quoted in Carelli et al, 2011, p. 80)⁴. Thus, the presence and dominance of the soundscape become a sonic signpost situating us in a physical landscape, sonically highlighting the importance of place as part of the filmmaker's subjective and collective positionality.

It's not until the next day, when we see a close-up of Shomōtsi painting his face again with even more precision than the first day, that Wewito's voice over explains to his non-Asháninka audience, "We paint ourselves with annatto dye every morning, so we can go to work or to a celebration." Through Wewito's self-reflexive camera, we observe, as he does, the beautifying of the everyday through this ritual gesture of face painting. In many VNA films, we witness how the autoethnographic becomes a method of inquiry as well as a means to activate and perform sovereign, spiritual, cultural, and political positions through film. Although *Shomōtsi* follows another character in Apiwtxa, autoethnographic performance is relevant to the cinematic space that Wewito embodies through camera movement and

⁴ José Pimenta's article in *Revista de Antropologia*, "Indigenismo e ambientalismo na Amazônia ocidental: a propósito dos Asháninka do rio Amônia" provides more in depth discussion about the context and history of extractive industries (logging in particular) in the region of the river Amônia and the Asháninka's politics of resistance and sustainability.

voice-over narration. There is often little explanation of what is being filmed; the fourth wall of the observational camera is often broken when, for example, Shomōtsi directly addresses Wewito and asks, “Aren’t you going to use your machete?” We hear the filmmaker answer “no.” “Let me borrow it,” answers Shomōtsi. Our awareness of the corporeal relationship of camera to filmed subject is ever present in this film; this type of interaction between camera person and filmed subject emphasizes the physical, complicit, and kindred intimacy, as opposed to separation, of filmmaker and filmed subject. Wewito’s reflections are apt here: “Filming, following a particular person or a family, is just like doing research. You become closer to the person, learning more and more about his or her life, discovering stories you had never known before” (quoted in Carelli et al, 2011, p. 208). This testimony demonstrates the transformative process of documentary filmmaking; moreover, it also articulates the responsibility and ownership of self-representation through anti-oppressive research methods.

Significantly, as the Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, when an Indigenous person becomes the researcher and not merely the researched, “the activity of research is transformed” (1999, p. 93). In this sense, Wewito’s research engagement is a way of framing individual self and collective identity; thus, his method of inquiry is autoethnographic. Autoethnographies have been defined as “self-narrative[s] that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Spry, 2001, p.710). In the context of *Shomōtsi* and of much of VNA’s archive, the autoethnographic goes beyond the social and becomes a way of reclaiming contested geopolitical-historical-cultural narratives while performing evolving Indigenous identities. *Shomōtsi* as one component of VNA’s archive, is part of a larger shared process of constructing culturally and politically distinct methods of inquiry (Whitinui, 2014)⁵ within the cinematic space, often blurring lines between documentary, fiction, political film, essay film, ethnography, and autoethnography.

⁵ Paul Whitinui’s article, “Indigenous Autoethnography: Exploring, Engaging, and Experiencing ‘Self as a Native Method of Inquiry’” (2014) was particularly useful in framing VNA’s work as a distinctly “Native Method of Inquiry” as defined by Whitinui.

Through Wewito's camera eye, we witness the specificity of Asháninka cultural emphasis on self-reliance and voluntary relations based on amity and friendship, rather than on kinship. Contrary to much of the literature on Amazonian sociality and conviviality (see Overing & Passes, 2000). Killick (2009) argues that Asháninka cultural values place emphasis on formalized personal friendships in everyday life. The filmmaking process in *Shomōtsi* thus becomes a testament to an evolving friendship between filmmaker and filmed subject, while consciously or unconsciously revealing distinct Asháninka cultural and social formations as well as Wewito's personal/political subjectivity.

As Córdova and Salazar (2008) contend, "at the center of a poetics of Indigenous media, we locate socially embedded self-representation, or the active process of making culture visible" (p. 40). An example of "making culture visible" is when Shomōtsi paints his face for the second time and is preparing for the weekend festivity. We see him adorn himself with a traditional, feather-laden woven hat, and with beaded necklaces. Wewito explains how, in a not so distant past, the beads were only used for personal use in celebrations and in the beautifying of daily life; in contrast, now they are also sold to make money to "buy the things they need." Notably, Shomōtsi's digital watch stands out in contrast to the rest of his traditional outfit as a reminder of the current times Wewito and Shomōtsi inhabit – one where beadwork is no longer exclusively made for personal and ceremonial use.

While most members are dressed in traditional garb consisting of long and loose fitting dark brown or cream and brown striped patterned robes with V-neck holes for the neck and longer sleeves for the arms, we see one of Shomōtsi's fellow flute players with a blue baseball cap that reads "Jesus" in large letters. Through Wewito's camera, the "Jesus" cap stands out as a contemporary reminder of Brazil's growing Evangelism; in addition, it further evokes the Asháninka's long and difficult history with missionaries, dating back to Franciscan missions in eighteenth century colonial Peru⁶. The festivities continue until the beer is gone, and the participants are more inebriated

6 Hanne Veber's discussion of "Asháninka Messianism" (2003) provides a historical perspective on Franciscan missions, rebellions and Asháninka cosmology.

than sober. In this informal and often drunken fraternizing, Shomōtsi asks his brother-in-law about going to the city.

At the end of the day of weekend festivities and socializing, the camera fades out; next a fade in to the dawn of a new day brings a new direction to the film. In terms of structure, roughly the first half of the film takes place in the village; the second half of the film not only represents a change of location and setting from Apiwtxa to the nearest town, but the entire tone and narrative of the film shift drastically. Wewito's voice-over explains that Shomōtsi is going to the city to get his monthly pension. Besides the voice-over narration, the canoe ride down the river on route to the city is the first time we hear non-diegetic sound. Traditional Asháninka music, marked by flutes and a percussive rhythm over the image of a young Asháninka boy at the helm of the canoe, marks the transition from village to town. In an interview, Wewito discusses his response to this unexpected turn of events, "It's one thing to film in the village, another entirely to film in the town where the tensions are high because of our history..." (quoted in Carelli et al, 2011, p. 208). Looking at the film's overall arc, Wewito's positionality behind the lens is fluid and dynamic as he responds to his character's actions and movements through time and space; his camera's eye is always ranging between his subjectivity as a fellow Asháninka, his responsibility in representing his community, the exploratory and self-reflexive lens of auto-ethnography, and the objectifying of a filmic subject as worthy of research and observation.

Once their boat lands on the banks of the closest town, Shomōtsi changes out of his traditional clothes into a T shirt and pants. Wewito's voice-over tells us that the airplane which brings in the money has not yet arrived. We cut to Shomōtsi who explains that all there is left to do is to wait even though he and his Asháninka companions are stranded without any money to buy food. We see Shomōtsi and others from the village go the beach to set up camp while they wait. Wewito's ease of filming in the village has altered through this spatial displacement: his positionality as Asháninka is reinforced and defended through a voice-over that says, "We, the Ashéninka people are used to sleeping on the river bank, it is part of our customs. We make a hut and camp out, just like they are doing here." The implication seems to be that Wewito is perhaps countering a negative view

of Asháninka that some in the town may have. Isaac, Wewito's brother, elaborates how, "when we're in the town, they look down on us: 'Ah, this Asháninka stinks, these old clothes'" (quoted in Carelli et al, 2011, p. 209). The ensuing scenes of the encampment on the riverbank make visible a complex clash of values and ideas between Indigenous (Asháninka) / and non-Indigenous (Brazilians). Some dependency on government money is part of the equation, as that is the reason Shomōtsi and his companions are there, waiting, just as we are (as viewers), to see if his pension will arrive.

After three days of waiting Shomōtsi finally receives his pension of three hundred and two reals. He then goes to some of the local shops to buy cloth; what we don't see is him spending his money on alcohol. Yet, we do see him drunk with his bag of cloth and a depleted wallet. Wewito explains how this moment in the film was particularly difficult and that he thought about giving up (quoted in Carelli et al, 2011, p. 208). We feel the tension of Wewito's struggles with the ethics of representation and the community he is responsible to and engaged with. Certainly, VNA's filmography as a whole develops a filmic language of affirmation, experimentation, and research through a diversity of narrative and filmic approaches which reflect the nuanced to distinct cosmologies, aesthetics, and practices of each group, community, and individual filmmakers. The Asháninka's idea of living well is distinct from the Panará people's idea of living well; the latter emphasize reciprocity, kinship, and physically closer communal social organization within their villages. In contrast, for the Asháninka, living peacefully and well "one must not live with others" (Killick, 2009, p. 706). And, indeed, this physical separation in village organization and spatialization, as well as the tendency for Asháninka's human relationships to be based on affinity rather than on kinship, informs Wewito's cinematic dynamic and approach in a distinct way from his Amazonian neighbours'.

Although Wewito demonstrates a unique cinematic voice in VNA's filmography, the film's dialogic tone can be understood as being in conversation with several implied audiences - his Asháninka community, a larger local and global Indigenous community, a local and global non-Indigenous community, not to mention VNA's workshop coordinators (Mari and Vincent) and editor (Mari). Notably, the film generated community

discussions on issues of ageing and pensions, as well as on the community's relations with the municipality (Marechal Thaumaturgo), and on questions of trade and money (Isaac Piāko quoted in Carelli et al, 2011, 209). This extension of the film's screen politics into actualizing better relationships of respect and reciprocity between the Asháninka and their non-Indigenous neighbours is a prime example of how VNA's work has significant repercussions on and off screen⁷. Importantly, the distribution of Indigenous films within Indigenous communities has also promoted solidarity and deeper cultural understanding between Brazilian Indigenous groups.

The film ends with shots of Shomōtsi and his companions returning on the motorized canoe back to Apiwtxa. We hear Wewito's voice-over, "our film comes to an end here, but life goes on. We are happy to get out of the city and go back to the village." For the second time, we hear non-diegetic sound of an Asháninka song (titled *Nowashiritani* translated to "My Memories" in English), recorded in the Apiwtxa community in 2000.

Kiarāsā Tō Sâty, The Agouti's Peanut (2005)

The theme of daily life in the Panará village of Nasepotiti is concurrent with *Shomōtsi*, yet *Kiarāsā Tō Sâty, The Agouti's Peanut's* opening and closing are bookended by the arrival and departure of a single engine airplane, first bringing the Panará teacher, one of the film's protagonists, to his village, and then taking him back to Brasilia. We do see the break of dawn and the darkening of day to mark the passage of time in the village; nevertheless, the image of the plane imposes another construct of time, space, and technology within this Panará village. The airplane can be seen as the time, space, and technology of the

⁷ As a result of community discussions generated from the film, Isaac Piāko explains how he brought the Asháninka films to the "Marechal Thaumaturgo Education Secretary" (209). Copies of the films were then distributed to local schools within the district. Piāko relates how this process of making films and using them in educational contexts has resulted in positive change in the local non-Indigenous community in terms of achieving better understanding and gaining more respect.

Hipe or white world⁸; the image of the plane arriving and departing harks back to the Panará's first contact with Brazilian society. Thus, the image of the plane suggests the encroachment of the white world; it evinces the Panará teachers, and the Panará people's relation with and identity within his/their territory and a larger nation state. The plane becomes a metonym for a here and there, an us and other, a center and periphery; or as the Asháninka filmmaker, Isaac Piãko puts it, "us here and you there" (2006, p.17). The first time the Panará saw an airplane fly over their village was in 1967; they called the plane *pakyã'akriti* or "phony shooting star" ("Panará: History of Contact", 2004, para. 1). Inside the plane was one of the infamous Villas Bôas brothers⁹, Cláudio, who was on mission to locate and pacify the Panará "before contact was made with the whites in the Peixoto de Azevedo River area" ("Panará: History of Contact" 2004, para. 1). This "phony shooting star," entered the Panará universe in 1967 and changed the course of their lives forever. The opening image of the plane arriving in Nasepotiti in 2005, which alludes to first contact, can be seen as a self-reflexive and often subtle meditation on the violent history of contact with the white world and the present-day integration of non-Indigenous elements (including the use of video technology) into Panará society.

The camera follows the Panará teacher as he exits the plane in his city clothes and explains that he was in Brasília "studying our language and Portuguese" and "translating the healthcare pamphlet." We see him walk to a house and lie in a hammock. The audio upon his entrance to the house shifts: we hear traditional singing voices, the rhythmic sound of feet

8 Elizabeth Ewart discusses the meaning of the word *Hipe* in the Panará language in her article, "Images of Time in Panará Village." The word has shifted over the course of history and contact with non-Indigenous people. Ewart claims, "This category of *hipe* has now come to signify white or non-Indigenous people" (2008, 262).

9 The Villas Bôas brothers, Orlando, Claudio, and Leonardo, are known for their 25 years of work for the Indigenous cause in Brazil; they believed that Brazil's Indigenous people should not be acculturated nor civilized and isolated from the western world which culminated in the Xingu National Park. The legal protection of the Xingu National Park is the first protected Indigenous area in all South America and became a prototype for other reserves all over the continent (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Villas-B%C3%B4as_brothers).

pattering on the earth. In this transition from the plane, to the village, to his house, we enter another time signaled through the sense of sound. We enter the time of the village, the time of dancing bodies, the time of ritual through the sound of music and dancing feet on the earth. The music fades into a background sound; we hear the Panará teacher discuss some of the differences in the city where money is needed for everything as opposed to the village where “we eat with friends, we don’t have to pay for anything.” A cut to a wide, low-angle shot in the village’s central plaza connects us to the film’s location as we see the red earth; we see the Panará community, with traditional body paint, and adornments, and few to no clothes (as is their custom), dancing and singing in row formation.

As the film unfolds, so too do the spatial, social, corporeal, spiritual, and practical relations of daily village life in Nasepotiti. The above are explored and expanded upon through the camera’s relationship to its filmed subjects, namely the film’s focus on three main characters who are never actually named: a village teacher, a village shaman, and a village chief. The village has multiple functions in the film; it is the film’s setting but, it is also a subject and character worthy of cinematic study as it expresses the interdependent and interrelated relationship between filmmakers and land, and between the film’s characters and their environment. The village is a universe explored both literally and virtually in this film and as throughline in VNA’s filmography.

One of the ways the film articulates the Panará’s relationship to land is through the tale of how the agouti gave the peanut to the Panará, giving the film its title. In my analysis, I discuss the importance of senses, visible and invisible, heard and not heard, as expressed in this Panará film and as an approach to understanding VNA’s archive as reflective of cosmologies that are multi-sensory and embedded in cinematic language. The self-reflexive nature of many VNA films, coupled with a multi-sensory engagement with Indigenous cosmologies, calls into question the constructed relationships and power dynamics of who is looking and who is being looked at, who is speaking and who is being spoken to, who is listening and who is being heard, who is filming and who is being filmed. I also explore how the senses are engaged through powerful relationships to land and I further examine how daily life is repoliticized in this

autonomous non-market economy that practices a sustainable model for the Liberation of Mother Earth.¹⁰ Echoed in many corners of the planet and articulated by the Brazilian Indigenous leader, Casé Angatu Xukuru Tupinambá in an interview when asked about the importance of land and territory he says,

...territory is sacred. We are not owners of the land, we are the land... Because we are the land, we have a right to be on earth and the right to protect what we call sacred, nature, she nourishes us and we nurture her... It is a struggle for a natural right (Casé Angatu Xukuru Tupinambá quoted in Machado, 2019)¹¹.

In the opening scenes of *Kiarāsā Tō Sāty, the Agouti's Peanut* (2005), as we are introduced to our three characters, a naked older woman, one of the village shamans, emerges from her bed behind a white sheet at dawn, naked except for the black markings covering her body, visually signifying to a Panará audience something an *Hipe* (uninitiated non-Panará) cannot know through sight. The body markings are in effect a form of dress and part of a Panará semiotic code, a point I return to later. As the shaman pulls on a dress, she remarks, “I was dreaming that I was stepping on a cobra, stepping and walking on the back of the snake.” References to the invisible, the unseen, to the dream world, to the spirit world, to other senses beyond sight are a recurring motif throughout the film.

The history of cinema, dominated by Hollywood, is based on a culture of visuality, of pleasures for the eyes, and as an art of entertainment; in essence, western knowledge and perception privileges sight and seeing as truth. This is also the case of textual knowledge, decipherable through the eyes, which is seen

10 Since 2014, the communities that make up the Association of Indigenous Councils in the northern Cauca in Colombia have declared themselves in the process of *la liberación de la madre tierra* (liberating Mother Earth), “a ritual act of reclaiming ancestral lands that are being developed” (<http://witnessforpeace.org/mother-earths-liberation-the-end-of-the-armed-conflict-and-peace-building/>). I use this term here to underline this Indigenous resurgence of land reclamation and territorial rights to land across Abya Yala, as well as a spiritual and eco-justice respect for land as sacred in opposition to an extractive and profit based logic of land ownership.

11 Author’s translation from the Portuguese.

as holding more value and weight over oral cultures and ways of knowing which are transmitted through unseen senses such as sound and memory. The film's emphasis on the other senses (dream, sound, spatial order, body paint, etc), becomes a conduit for an unlearning of colonial hierarchies of knowledge and western scientific discourse that privileges vision. *The Agouti's Peanut* continually alludes to other senses and experiences that we cannot necessarily know through sight: the village's daily life offers us a glimpse into this Panará community's spiritual, ceremonial, domestic, and social universe. Ewart (2003) explains that the spatialization of the village, which is revealed to us throughout the course of the film adds another layer of understanding about each character's role within the village sphere. In the film's opening dance sequence, we see that the village is circular, "consisting of thirteen residential houses and a single open sided central house" (Ewart, 2003, p. 263). Panará society is organized into four clans in which descent is passed down in a matrilineal descent system and which are spatialized in the village's architecture according to clan and sun rise and setting points. As such, each clan has a fixed location in the village circle, which is relevant to our understanding of the importance of Panará cosmology and its relationship to space and family within the village.

Following Merleau-Ponty and John Berger, "reciprocal vision implicates a social relationship in the way that uni-directional vision does not" (Ewart, 2008, p. 508). In this way, when viewing VNA's cinematic texts, emphasizing a multi-sensory approach to film analysis is coherent with the significance of the various senses within the societies represented as well as within Indigenous cosmologies. Ewart posits, "I argue that the social significance of the senses is as much bound up with an understanding of sociality — that is, the context within which discourse occurs — as it is bound up with sensory experience itself" (2008, p. 507). One of the ideas explored here is how these cinematic texts allow the discussed Indigenous groups to look back at and talk back to us, as other.

In this sense, VNA's archive, imbued with sovereign corporeal potential, activates a reciprocal way of seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard. Marygold Walsh-Dilley's theorizing of reciprocity in the Andean context is apt in the context of Amazonian societies when she says, "Reciprocity

institutions in rural Andean villages operate with and through a multidimensional set of reasonings, creating a moral–symbolic economy that is reproduced socially through embodied and embedded practices” (2017, p. 517). Reciprocity appears as a leitmotiv throughout VNA’s filmography as both an abstract concept and concrete practice: it is pictured through the practice of mediations between humans and other than humans (nature and the spirit world); reciprocity is embedded in filmmaking methods that enact and promote community well-being; it functions as a more nuanced way of experiencing the films. Arguably, the films themselves demand more active viewership rather than mere consumption. Here, the cinematic experience can thus invite a reciprocal exchange of gazes, of sensory, intellectual, and emotional engagement that invite decolonial imaginary shifts in everyday life.

In *The Agouti’s Peanut*, the everyday is punctuated with displays of cultural activity (from hunting, fishing, gardening, and weaving, to collecting medicine in the forest, to community efforts of peanut harvest, to children’s education) often with a humorous and/or spiritual dimension. These daily activities are not pictured or heard in a stereophonic, nor are they seen in high definition grade but rather are captured through an imperfect, often hand held, experiential camera that is an integral and integrated part of community and environment. Considering access to resources, contexts of production, and tools of representation, the emphasis is not on traditional cinematic texts or high production values; instead, the filmmakers are following a cultural logic and defining the cinematic space as a process for constructing cultural, spiritual, social, and political identity and relationships of reciprocity. The village as a microcosm of interconnected and interdependent systems enacts a dynamically reproduced practice of reciprocal exchange that ultimately strengthens social solidarity, autonomy, and sustainability in a non-market economy.

We move through the daily activities of the three characters, we see the sun setting on a group of young male soccer player, bare chested with their soccer shorts, dancing a traditional dance after the game. We then cut to an elder singing in the black of night, then to low-angle medium wide shots of bodies of traditionally adorned singers and dancers with feathers and beaded finery, annatto dye on their faces, and black body paint

on their bodies. This transition to night signifies the passage of time and the transformation of village space-time. We are brought back to the spatio-temporal reality of ritual as evoked in the film's first dance sequence. The dancing, painted bodies at night in close row formation, tightly pressed together, front to back, with dominant red and black colour palletes, create striking performative images of a collective corporality that is part of a visual language for sensual, spiritual and ancestral identities. We cut to shots of community members painting their bodies, to close-ups of a hand rubbing the annatto red dye on a rock. The chief explains that the use of annatto red dye on the ears is for the agouti who also has red ears; the dancing and singing are for the agouti in preparation for the peanut harvest the following day.

These nocturnal images of the elaborated and artfully painted dancing bodies and decorated skin in black and red dyes and markings can be seen as an elaborate code and expressions of values within Panará society. In this context, according to Turner, the Panará who are the descendants of the Mebêngôkre,

black is associated with the idea of transformation between society and unsocialised nature. ... the term for black applies to a spatial or temporal zone of transition between the social world and the world of natural or infra-social forces that is closed off from society proper and lies beyond its borders (2012, p. 493).

He goes on to say that, "Red, by contrast, is associated with notions of vitality, energy and intensification. It is applied to the peripheral points of the body that come directly into contact with the outside world (the hands and feet, and the face with its sensory organs, "especially the eyes") (p. 493). The dyed red ears in honour of the agouti emphasize the sense of hearing, of remembering, and also of knowing the wisdom of the agouti; as the chief exclaims, "we don't forget what she taught us." Thus, the contrasting black and red body paint becomes an intensification of honoring and accessing the agouti's powers in ancestral and present day Panará mythology while reminding us the importance of being able and open to learn from the sentient world surrounding us. The corporeal canvas of the red

and black colour palette as rendered in a distinctly shamanic cinematic syntax of codified visuality and orality, also speaks to the idiomatic binary of known and unknown, seen and unseen, heard and unheard. The human body becomes a surface for an encoded representational sovereignty of Panará cosmology.

Davi Kopenawa (2013), an Amazonian Yanomami Shaman, eloquently explains:

A very long time ago, when the forest was still young, our ancestors - who were humans with animal names - metamorphosed into game. ... The human agoutis became agoutis. So it is ancestors turned other that we hunt and eat today. On the other hand, the images that we bring down and make dance as *xapiri*¹² are their form of ghosts (p. 61).

Kopenawa and Albert (2013) articulate how the agouti is multiple entities: she is the ancestors who metamorphosed into animals, she is a physical being, an animal which is hunted today, and she is a spirit which lives on forever. For the Panará and throughout the film, the co-existence of material being and immaterial (spiritual) being is part of a cinematic treatment which engages multi-senses and shamanic belief systems. As Ewart observes, “the perceptual senses of hearing and seeing can be understood to be symbolic operators within the Panará lived world” (2008, p. 519). In this way, *The Agouti’s Peanut* uses audio-visual technologies to show and tell us a story while simultaneously commenting on the deceptive nature of appearances in a highly transformational world that Amazonian Amerindian people belong to in their everyday lives.

The multi-narratives of this non-fiction film, moving between the three community members, moving between the narrative of the agouti, told through multiple viewpoints, techniques, and generations, serve two primary functions throughout the film. Firstly, we see the daily activities of life in Nasepotiti from multiple viewpoints; secondly, the filmmakers’ editing choices between this trifecta of characters is used to reinforce Panará sovereignty in a post-contact world. Each cut

12 Xapiri is the sacred word the Yanomami people of Brazil and Venezuela use for ‘spirit.’

builds on the film's overarching themes of Panará cosmology and sovereignty as shown through contemporary daily life. We see villagers return with full baskets of peanuts from their harvest; next, the sky darkens on another day in Nasepotiti, and we cut to the shaman preparing her medicine.

Night again is depicted as a time of ritual, spirits, healing, and shamanism. Several healers work on the inert body of a sick, younger woman. After much pipe smoking and entering trance like states, the female shaman collapses to the ground. Finally, the younger woman awakes, and the shaman reveals a small bone in the palm of her hand as she discloses, "the spirits put this inside you. This is the bone of an animal. The spirit of the peccary put this sickness in you and it hurt your whole body." She continues to explain to the group of community members gathered around the young woman: "It's everybody's fault. You don't share the food with everyone. You all complain a lot. This is what caused her harm. This is why the spirit came." The shaman is able to heal the young woman while also warning how this individual's illness is inter-connected with and inter-dependent on the community's collective health. The act of complaining and not sharing, or the unseen and unheard here are associated with anti-social behaviors that go against cooperative practices. Here the violation of the shared moral order of reciprocal exchange is dramatized in the above scene as it alludes to ever threatening negative impacts of capitalist logic and influence in the community. Just as Walsh-Dilley (2017) argues that "reciprocity contributes to the production of Andean communities" (p. 521) as part of a dynamic process that responds to shifting spatial-temporal contexts and global forces, so too is the practice of reciprocity a marker for the production of community in Nasepotiti and across the network of Indigenous villages in Brazil.

Conclusion

The poetics of daily life in the above films are located in everyday creativity, in a daily practice of sociality, reciprocity, and sovereignty, in individual and collective processes of self-representation within the cultural logic of each context of production. *Shomotsi* and *Kiarāsā Tō Sāty*, *The Agouti's Peanut* can be seen as individual and collective autoethnographies that explore daily life and notions of living well as revealed in each village's social organizations, cosmo-politics, and

spatio-temporal universes. Daily existence in the above films elaborates distinct cinematic idioms while both films articulate cosmological visions as part of their everyday life. Certainly, both films meditate on the inter-connections and inter-dependency between self and community, including animals, the sentient environment, and a greater cosmic order that is embodied and practiced in daily existence. A theory of being, and a politics of co-existence with and within the cosmos is thus expressed through a filmed and filmic repertoire of daily practices. Relevant to this discussion is Silvera Rivera Cusicanqui's affirmation that thought must be produced from the everyday.¹³ Through a filmed meditation on the everyday, I have argued that these films resist patriarchal, capitalist modernity by visualizing age old and ever adapting Indigenous epistemes that propose eco-autonomous non-market paradigms of community and well-being. These alternative responses to imposed Eurocentric "progress" are neither anachronistic, static, nor frozen in time, but rather imagine culturally strong futurities for Indigenous presence and therefore a pluriverse free of patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist oppression.

The filmed villages, like the filmed protagonists, are sovereign bodies inasmuch as the body is a vessel for experiencing an immersive and sensorial conception of the cosmos. The embodiment of the camera is part of an inter-connected and interdependent entity within the social-eco-geographical sphere of each village, affirming a sovereign corporeality. These two films as part of VNA's archive can thus be conceptualized into the Zapatista political and poetic dictum, "a world where many worlds fit." My discussion of these two films and their methods of inquiry manifest anti-colonial pedagogies that transcend mere cinematic discourse through a lived and embodied practice of the everyday. To echo Cusicanqui (2010), one of the lessons here is that decolonization must not only be a discourse but an affirmative practice based in the everyday.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the filmmakers and their films, who inspired this research and transformed my imagination. I am honour-bound to the Video in the Villages team, especially Vincent

¹³ Silvia Riveira Cusicanqui is a feminist, Bolivian, sociologist of Aymara descent. See the interview by Kattalin Barber "Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui" (2019) for more.

Carelli who gave me full access to this critical archive. I am thankful to Sonia Medel and André Mazawi for the opportunity and invitation to submit this article.

References

- Carelli, V. et al. (2011). Vídeo nas aldeias 25 anos: 1986-2011. Organized by: Ana Carvalho Ziller Araújo, Olinda, PE: Vídeo nas aldeias.
- Córdova, A. (2011). Rooted aesthetics: Approaches to Latin American Indigenous media. *Comunicación y Medios, Estudios sobre Cine in America Latina*, 24, 81-107.
- Corrêa, Mari, et al., editors. (2004). *Mostra Vídeo nas Aldeias: Um olhar indígena (Video in the Villages Exhibition: Through Indian Eyes)*. Vídeo nas Aldeias.
- Cusicanqui, S.R. (2010). *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón. 19-52.
- Ewart, E. (2003). Lines and circles: Images of time in a Panará village. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9(2), 261-279.
- Ewart, E. (2008). Seeing, hearing and speaking: Morality and sense among the Panará in Central Brazil. *Ethnos*, 73(4), 505-522
- Kopenawa, D., and Albert, B. (2013). *The falling sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Killick, E. (2009). Ashêninka amity: A study of social relations in an Amazonian society. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15(4) Pages 701-718.
- Machado, R. (2019). 'Nós Não Somos Donos Da Terra, Nós Somos a Terra'. *Entrevista Especial Com Casé Angatu Xukuru Tupinambá*. IHU, Instituto Humano Unisinos. Retrieved from <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/582140-nos-nao-somos-donos-da-terra-nos-somos-a-terra-entrevista-especial-com-case-angatu-xukuru>
- Overing, J. and Passes, A. (2000). *The anthropology of love and anger: the aesthetics of conviviality in Native Amazonia*. New York: Routledge.
- Povos Indígenas No Brasil*, Instituto Socioambiental (2018). Panará: 'History of Contact'. Retrieved from <https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Povo:Panar%C3%A1>

- Piäko, I. (2006). You see the world of the other and you look at your own. In *Video in the Villages Exhibition: Through Indian Eyes*. Brasilia: Banco do Brasil.
- Pimenta, J. (2007). Indigenismo e ambientalismo na Amazônia ocidental: a propósito dos Ashaninka do rio Amônia. *Revista De Antropologia*, 50(2), 633-681.
- Potts, K.L. and Brown, L. (2015). Becoming an anti-oppressive researcher. In S. Strega and L. Brown (Eds.). *Research as resistance: Revisiting critical, Indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press. 17-42.
- Salazar, J.F. & Córdova, A. (2008). Imperfect media and the poetics of Indigenous video in Latin America. In P. Wilson and M. Stuart (Eds.). *Global Indigenous media: Cultures, poetics and politics*. Durham: Duke University Press. 39-57.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. St Martin's Press.
- Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 706-732.
- Turner, T. (2012). The social skin. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2(2), 486-504.
- Veber, H. (2003). Asháninka messianism: The production of a "black hole" in western Amazonian ethnography. *Current Anthropology*, 44(2), 183-211.
- Walsh-Dilley, M. (2017). Theorizing reciprocity: Andean cooperation and the reproduction of community in highland Bolivia. *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 22(3), 514-535.
- Whitinui, P. (2014). Indigenous autoethnography: Exploring, engaging, and experiencing "self" as a Native method of inquiry. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(4), 456-487.
- Witness for Peace. (2019). Mother earth's liberation: The end of the armed conflict, and peace-building. Retrieved from <http://witnessforpeace.org/mother-earths-liberation-the-end-of-the-armed-conflict-and-peace-building/>

Filmography

Kiarāsã Yõ Sãty, The Agouti's Peanut. Directed by Paturi Panará, Komoi Panará, Vídeo nas aldeias, 2005.

Shomõtsi. Directed by Wewito Piyãko, Vídeo nas aldeias, 2001.

The Rainy Season. Directed by Wewito Piyãko and Isaac Pinhanta, Vídeo nas aldeias, 2000.

We struggle but we eat fruit. Directed by Wewito Piyãko and Isaac Pinhanta, Vídeo nas aldeias, 2006.

**THE DECOLONIAL EMPATHY OF TWO MAYA
DOCUMENTARIES SHOWN AT THE XIII CLACPI FILM
FESTIVAL – FICMAYAB’**

Claudia A. Arteaga
Scripps College, California

ABSTRACT: In this article, I analyze two short documentaries *Kat at Kat'ex?* (2017) and *Sepur Zarco: la vida después de la sentencia* (2018), both directed by the Maya-K'iche-Kaqchikel media maker from Guatemala, Eduardo Say, and shown at the XIII CLACPI Film Festival-FicMayab'. Both movies feature Mayan witnesses to and survivors of the violence of the civil war in Guatemala. They share their stories of loss and pain with the diverse audiences convened by the festival. I argue that these movies, in referring to the past, constitute platforms in which these witnesses enact forms of reproduction of life through embodied social practices and acts of care that, in turn, portray them as agents of the reconstitution of their own present. I contend that these movies extend an invitation to the Western(ized) viewer to relate to the Maya testimonios of pain and realities, both within the films' frame and outside of it. I use the term "decolonial empathy" to refer to this invitation that considers the Maya peoples' self-determination in the face of state violence and its legacies.

SUMILLA: En este artículo, analizo dos cortos documentales: *Kat at Kat'ex?* (2017) and *Sepur Zarco: la vida después de la sentencia* (2017), ambos dirigidos por el comunicador Maya-K'iche-Kaqchikel de Guatemala, Eduardo Say, y presentados en el XIII Festival de Cine de CLACPI - FicMayab'. Estos documentales presentan testimoniante y sobrevivientes mayas de la guerra civil en Guatemala, quienes comparten historias de dolor y pérdida con la diversa audiencia del festival. Sostengo que estas películas, al referirse al pasado, recrean formas de reproducción de la vida a través de prácticas sociales corporalizadas y actos de cuidado, mostrando a estos personajes como agentes de reconstrucción de su propio presente. Estas acciones, llevadas a cabo por los personajes de estos filmes, cumplen con presentarlos como agentes de reconstitución de su presente. Considerando estos contextos, argumento que estas películas formulan una invitación a los espectadores occidentalizados para que se relacionen con los testimonios y realidades mayas formuladas

tanto desde dentro como fuera de pantalla. A esta invitación que considera esta autodeterminación frente a la violencia estatal y sus legados la denomino “empatía decolonial.”

Keywords: decolonial empathy, Maya documentary, FicMayab’, civil war, Guatemala, CLACPI

Introduction

The XIII Festival Internacional de Cine y Comunicación de los Pueblos Indígenas/Originarios (International Festival of Indigenous People’s Film and Communication), convened by the umbrella organization Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Cine y Comunicación de los Pueblos Indígenas (CLACPI; The Latin American Coordinator of Indigenous People’s Film and Communication), took place in October 2018 in Guatemala. This region is also known among Maya people as “Iximulew”¹. The Red Tz’ikin (or Tz’ikin Network), a collective of *mestizo* and Maya mediamakers, served as the local organizing committee. The committee named the festival ‘FicMayab’ following the decision of the CLACPI assembly that “established that the venues of the festivals should respond to Indigenous peoples and nationalities, and not to states” (Comité organizador, 2017). In this name “Fic’s” stands for Indigenous Film Festival (Festival Indígena de Cine, in Spanish),” while “Mayab” refers to the greater Maya territory which stretches from the region currently known as Nicaragua to the southeast of the region now called Mexico” (Comité organizador, 2017). The word “Mayab” in the name, constantly reiterated in the public addresses of Red Tz’ikin’s spokespersons, invited international and local attendees to relate to a sense of the territory that would go beyond national borders and the institutional control of public spaces, enabling political criticism against the current right-wing government of Guatemala. This sensing of the territory was fostered by the intersection of art and politics where forums on social issues, artistic interventions, and screenings of Maya films followed by Q&A sessions, focused on Maya perspectives, knowledge, and history. Accordingly, activist Andrea Ixchiú, a Maya-K’iche mediamaker and member of the Red Tz’ikin, made a call inviting international and local audiences to learn not only about the Maya history of oppression and resistance, but

1 *Iximulew* means “the land of corn” (Velásquez Nimatuj, 2014).

also about “how we, the Indigenous peoples of Guatemala, live” and have been living for long time. She stated, “we trust that art and culture can lead people to get to know the daily life of Maya peoples that they [non-Maya] don’t normally know or visit. We seek to broaden peoples’ minds, to break with stereotypes, and break with the cycle of violence” (October 2, 2018)².

This article engages with this invitation to experience, see, and listen to how Maya people live, an invitation given to a diverse audience in the context of FicMayab’. I analyze the political meanings of this invitation by examining two independent short documentaries that were shown at the festival. How do the cinematic portrayals in these documentaries speak to the long-term memory of struggle lived by the Native peoples of Iximulew? How do these films speak out against and beyond a historical misrepresentation of the “indigenous other” as a figure of unattainable citizenship and/or of humanity? In which ways do these films instead draw from Maya process-centered modes of living? How do these films then invite us to understand the grief, pain and losses that they speak to? What are the political and ethical implications of this invitation?

Kat at Kat’ex? (Where are they?) was released in 2017 and directed by Maya-K’iche-Kaqchikel Eduardo Say, and produced by the Maya-Ixil mediamaker Heidy Bacá.³ Both are members of the Colectivo Cine en la Calle (Cinema on Street Collective, CCC), and were also close collaborators of the organizing committee during the festival. *Sepur Zarco: La vida después de la sentencia* (Sepur Zarco: Life after the Sentence) was released that same year and also directed by Say. These films feature Maya subjects from Ixil and Q’eqchi’ communities, some of the Maya peoples most affected by the civil war. As portrayed in these movies, these characters are witnesses who share their stories about the disappearance of their relatives at the hands of the military. In addition, these movies denounce how the

2 Although the FicMayab’ convened indigenous films from many territories, including from Turtle Island for the first time in CLACPI film festivals, my study will delve into Maya films, and the connection between them and the territory of the Mayab’ where the festival took place.

3 There are 21 different Maya ethnicities in Guatemala, among which are Q’eqchi’, Kakchiquel, Mam, Ixil, K’iche, etc.

state has ignored their demands for economic and social justice. As a response to the damage and dismissal of their ways of living, the documentary genre of both films conjoins past and present, exposing the ongoing violence that affects Maya people along with the ways in which they make life persist. In so doing, these films put forward scenarios of communal reproduction of ways of living by which the witnesses/characters distribute their pain among society, articulating their criticism while they are shown in concrete, reciprocal daily activities of “communal reproduction.”

By “communal reproduction,” I follow the definition proposed by Maya K’iche sociologist, Gladys Tzul Tzul (2016) who characterizes it as non-capitalist quotidian forms of labor, such as preparing meals, educating children, organizing for and participating in the *k’ax k’ol* (the communal land work) and the festivities through which life is reproduced and celebrated. I contend that these audiovisual scenarios of interpersonal storytelling constitute an invitation to experience how Maya people live. I consider this invitation as a political, ethical, and emotional call made to the viewers to dismantle subjective and social patterns of coloniality ingrained in their society (Maldonado-Torres, 2016) and that affect the ways they see and listen the “indigenous other.” I use the term “decolonial empathy” to refer to this call, rather than a state of mind, by which viewers allow themselves to unsettle colonial structures and imaginaries through which their society has perceived Native peoples for so long. This colonial imaginary sees Maya people as less than humans, as folkloric subjects without rights, or, as “bodies without land, people without resources (...) without the capacity for autonomy and self-determination,” or as pertains to my argument here, as irredeemable victims that are so materially and psychologically impoverished that they are unable to give (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). When understood as a rejection of this colonial imaginary, the act of giving in the contexts of these films become a political action that resonates with other actions taken in the social sphere by Maya activists against the colonial/modern patterns of dehumanization that continuously affect them. This act of giving, then, more than a response, is an expression of a political order that does not align to a mainstream organization of power that determines who can speak and be heard on the basis of gendered and racial hierarchies that privilege the perspective of settler and mestizo

modern subjects. Instead, these Maya movies formulate a micro-politics via “everyday acts of resurgence” (Simpson, 2017, p. 236) that refer to the social, cultural, and ethical commitments of the Maya filmmakers and the characters-witnesses as they are the ones that have no part in the distribution of power (Rancière, 1999).

I follow on Freya Schiwy’s most recent work about activist media in Mexico (2019) in that I also consider the films I study here as activist films that are related to struggles for autonomy. This means that these films do the cultural work of self-defining and signifying cultural and political sovereignty itself (7-8), as other scholars in the field of indigenous media have argued (Cordova, 2014, p.123; Ginzburg, 1994).⁴ My work builds on Schiwy’s view by focusing on how the invitation of Maya mediamakers/ activists requires viewers to face uncomfortable feelings and discourses that come up in the process of dismantling entrenched colonial patterns and engaging in acts of radical solidarity. Following that line, I engage with the concept of “politics of grief” proposed by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017). With this term, Simpson refers to the mainstream political strategy of perpetuating structural injustice by focusing on the individual trauma rather than the “collective, community, or nation-based losses” (p. 239). I use Simpson’s take on Kanyen’kehà:ka (Mohawk) and the Nishnaaber peoples of Turtle Island to refer to the radical indigenous imaginaries and desires that are embedded in these Mayan films counteract these politics. I also utilise the work of feminist Sarah Ahmed to further challenge the divide between emotion and reason ingrained in the Westernized comprehension of “politics.” In examining the counteracting of the “politics of grief” enacted by the representations in these films, I hope to shed critical light on the “humanitarian compassion” that informs how we (mestizo and settler people) feel and express empathy. I also

4 For debates about the designation “indigenous media,” see Salazar and Córdoba’s article “Imperfect Media and the Poetics of Indigenous Video in Latin America” published in 2008 in *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics*, edited by P. Wilson and M. Stewart. See more recently Schiwy, Córdoba, Wood and Legrás’ book chapter “New Frameworks. Collaborative and Indigenous Media Activism” in *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema*, edited by M. D’Lugo, Ana M. López, L. Podalsky.

hope that this study contributes to a further exploration of the diversified forms of struggle through which Maya films, or other indigenous films made by other Native peoples of Abya Yala, put forward a set of conditions for how settler people and others benefitting from settler colonialism could relate to indigenous lives and their claims for justice. Following on the work of curator and critic Amalia Córdova (2014), and visual anthropologist Faye Ginsburg (1994), my study may also contribute to understanding how activist films construct emancipatory imaginaries in and through the social sphere in which their representations are embedded.

In the pages that follow, I situate these films in the historical context of the civil war in Guatemala and its aftermath to which these films respond. My analysis considers how the *mise en scène* in these films gives shape to a call for a decolonial empathy by concrete acts of listening and seeing that are refashioned according to Maya process-centered modes of living and claims for justice. Although my study mostly focuses on how filmic representation delivers this invitation, I return to the FicMayab' in the last part of the article to reflect on audiences' responses to the festival. Although most of the audience responses from which I quote in that final section don't pertain to the two documentaries previously analyzed, they do shed light on the impact that the films directed by Maya filmmakers and about Maya stories have made on a diverse public in Guatemala. This section allows me to reflect on how "decolonial empathy" involves the need for dismantling the assimilationist and dehumanizing educational system in Guatemala as both of these films and the FicMayab' center Maya pedagogies and an epistemology that challenges Westernized ways of producing knowledge and emotions about "indigenous others".

This article draws from my experience as a guest of the FicMayab', which I attended to present a documentary on behalf of a personal friend who could not travel to Guatemala. For the two weeks (from October 2-17) of the festival's duration, I was part of the local/international delegation of mediamakers, activists, and collaborators CLACPI and non-CLACPI affiliated, that traveled to Guatemala City, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, Cobán, and Chisec, where screenings, political forums, dance, music, theater, and ceremonies took place in plazas, parks, theaters, universities, public markets, and rural communities.

As I unexpectedly participated in other activities and events (panels and press interviews to promote the festival) upon the organizers' request, I took these opportunities to keep learning how to listen and respond actively in a space managed by Maya people themselves. My ongoing learning experience was enriched by these conversations, the artistic and spiritual activities, and the travels, all of which enabled me to notice and sense everywhere we went not the oppression, but the organizing, the communities, the joy, and the dignity of the peoples of Iximulew.

Making films featuring Maya witnesses in the aftermath of the civil war

The context that the movies address is the aftermath of the civil war that took place between 1960 and 1996 in Guatemala and pitted the state and paramilitary against guerrilla forces. Upon examining the toll of the war in 1999, the Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (CEH, Commission for Historical Clarification) concluded that 200,000 people were killed, 45,000 had been disappeared, and more than one million had been internally displaced or forced to migrate outside the country. The CEH (1999) also stated that 83% of all war crimes had been committed were against the Maya people, which constituted between 40-60% of the country's population. The Commission also established that the state had perpetrated 93% of those crimes, which included acts of genocide perpetrated within the counterinsurgent operations undertaken between 1981-1983⁵. The commission concluded that racism against the Maya people was the deeply rooted historical cause that had facilitated the genocidal acts committed by the military in order to exterminate what they considered to be an "internal enemy" (Rodríguez Maeso, 2010, p.43). According to the CEH (1999), this racist mindset is linked to a colonial imaginary that sees the Maya as an ancestral antagonist who, at any time, could come down from the mountains to take revenge against the white settlers and the ladinos for all the experiences and the damages inflicted upon them since colonial times.

5 Following international protocols, the CEH (1999) classified as "genocide" those acts that aim to destroy totally or partially a national, ethnic, or religious group through diverse tactics that are not limited to killings, as they include methods that inflict physical and mental damage, subjection to impossible living conditions, and crimes against humanity, including sexual violence.

The path for justice opened up in the past decade is a testament to the tireless work of Maya grassroots movements and human rights organizations who managed to bring to trial military leaders for some of the most infamous crimes committed during the internal conflict. During these trials, Maya-Ixil and Q'eqchi' women's testimonios provided the basis for "judicial truth" through which they accused state agents of having committed crimes against humanity in the form of enslavement and sexual violence (Velásquez Nimatuj, 2014). In this context, Eduardo Say and Heidy Bacá represent a generation of Maya youth who did not have a first-hand experience of the violence of the war. Nonetheless, through film, they have taken up the task to engage with their communities' claims for justice and with their struggles against longstanding structural violence that continue to pave the path for an endless war against their people across generations. Say and Bacá resort to the methods of low-budget independent filmmaking through the grassroots nature of their work. In centering Maya people's testimonios in their films, they build on actions taken on legal grounds to bring Maya voices and claims to public, non-institutionalized spaces.

***Kat at Kat'ex?* (2017)**

The documentary *Kat at Kat'ex?* (Where are they?) arose from an Ixil community's decision to have the CCC make films that addressed the memory of those who were disappeared in the war. The 2017 release *Kat at Kat'ex?* was directed by Say and produced by Bacá. The project received the support of the non-profit Asociación Dónde Están Los Niños (ADEN), whose name asks "Where Are the Children of Guatemala?" Through their work with ADEN, Say and Bacá met the characters for their movie, Pedro Marcos and Catarina Sambrano. Bacá (2019) explained that working with grassroots initiatives like ADEN is part of the process that the CCC had established when working with victims of the civil war.

Nebaj is the place in which these stories are located. Pedro is the father of a child that was disappeared by the military. Catarina is a daughter who was torn from her family, but who was able to reunite with her sister 35 years after the separation. In their mother tongue of Ixil, Pedro and Catarina each separately recount their stories to us. At the beginning of the film, we see Pedro leaving his house to begin his day's activities. We see him

walking through the town to a barber where he gets a haircut. At that moment, an inter title emerges on the screen stating that “around 45 thousand people disappeared as a result of the armed conflict in Guatemala. Among them, five thousand children” (Bacá, 2017, my translation)⁶.

After getting his haircut and coming back to his house, we see Pedro walking to his farm with a sack of feed for his cows. The image of Pedro walking through that space accompanies the story that we hear him recount in voiceover about how his family had to flee towards the mountains after the army entered the community. While on the screen we see a calm atmosphere characteristic of a farmworker’s activity in the field, Pedro’s voiceover tells us how the army took his wife, how the soldiers discovered the place where he was hiding with his son, and how his son agreed to be taken by the soldiers so they would not kill his father. At this point, the role of Pedro’s voiceover is to guide the viewer through the horrors of his past in what feels like a cross-rhythm to what the viewers are witnessing visually, the images of Pedro’s current life activities. Here, this apparent disconnection between the auditory and visual discourses corresponding to the past and present respectively begs the question of how to understand the dynamic between the voice and the image in which these discourses operate.

According to philosopher Jacques Rancière (2008), it is the power of the word, and not the predominance of the image, that organizes how we interpret the visible. It is therefore through the word that the process of interpreting what we see and how we see it operates upon the viewers. However, in Pedro’s story, the words about the past—i.e. the testimonio—coexist with other audio and visual elements that generate meanings, even though they are not articulated through spoken or recognizable words. These meanings operate through what we see on screen and supplement Pedro’s oral testimonio, without disregarding the character/witness’s authority over his account. The analysis of the following scene will clarify my point and delve into what meanings about the present, not only in the image, but also through noise provided by background music, adds to the comprehension of Pedro’s testimonio.

⁶ Both films have Spanish subtitles. All translations to English of selected quotes from these films are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

While Pedro's voiceover shares with the viewers his tireless search for his son, the camera shows him digging the land as part of the work of planting. Here, the interaction between past and present is expressed through Pedro's body and his labor. At this point Pedro becomes an embodied archive of his own narration, as the past events he narrates not only involve the disappeared body of the son, but also the performance of his living body as a father looking for his son. The work of interpretation, consisting in relating to the father's pain for the loss of the son, requires the viewers to acknowledge that a complete connection to what is being represented to them may not be fully achievable. The effect of the soundtrack towards the end of that scene of digging echoes this idea.

The soundtrack is a fragment of a 1971 composition by Guatemalan musician Joaquín Orellana called *Humanofonía* (Humanophony). The piece is made of soundbites of screams and sobs combined with ambient sounds and the sound of a marimba (Del Farra, 2005)⁷. According to Graciela Paraskevaídis (2008), Orellana's electro-acoustic composition is a testimonial work that represents the daily institutionalized violence experienced during the war. This piece is heard overlapping with Pedro's voiceover narration in the digging scene, and it progressively takes over the final seconds of the scene until we can only hear its disturbing screams and laments. The noises that capture our senses at this moment symbolize the exteriorization of the pain in a form that points to the limitations of language to effectively represent it. In this case, the sound-distorted laments and screams don't simply hand the pain over in a way that lends itself to the development of an easy, familiar feeling. Instead, these noises build an uncanny moment that creates a distance, which precludes the expected compassionate inclination that can lead spectators to develop a familiar and benevolent impulse as well as a feeling of accomplishment having that impulse.

It is with these disturbing sounds as background that Pedro stands up breathless after digging, and looks at the spectator with his shovel at hand. The moment indicates a completion of Pedro's task of opening his wound to the spectators so that, following Sarah Ahmed (2004), they can "learn how to hear

⁷ The marimba is a musical instrument of African origin played in Guatemala and other parts of Latin America.

what is impossible to hear” (p. 33). This means that such an impossible hearing only becomes possible if we respond to a pain that we cannot claim as our own. According to Ahmed (2004), “if I acted on her [the person in pain] behalf only insofar as I knew how she felt, then I would act only insofar as I would appropriate her pain as my pain, that is, appropriate that which I cannot feel” (p. 31). If empathy is the action taken under the assumption that we understand how the other feels and that, consequently, we are perfectly able to relieve that pain, the act of digging proposes a form of empathizing that shies away from the comfortable appropriation of the pain as a condition for some kind of action.

Furthermore, Pedro is not a self-commiserating victim that asks for help based on a deeply entrenched relationship with his past, a fetishization of his wound for others to connect to and act from. The movie shows a witness that has worked on his pain and that lives his present (as the depicted daily activities show) with a sense of justice from which his testimonio emerges. His standing breathless facing the camera can be seen as the expectation for a response from the viewer according to his position as an already empowered person. Accordingly, the viewer sees Pedro from a place of respect. The camera angle positions the viewer on a lower level than Pedro directing our gaze up to him from below. This dignifies Pedro as well as his activity as a rural worker/father. In considering his place of dignity and agency, the viewers can become fair recipients of his testimonio instead of being patronizing outsiders motivated by a dehumanizing “charity” that, in turn, fetishizes the wound.

Catarina is the other witness who tells her story in this documentary. Like Pedro’s story, here the narration techniques also connect the past and the present. However, unlike Pedro, Catarina was able to reunite with a family member, her sister. The film introduces us to Catarina’s story through close shots that shows details of her house. We see Catarina sitting in her house on a low stone close to the ground from the viewpoint of the moving camera that crosses her doorway at the same level at which she is sitting. We see her dressed in her *huipil* and her *corte*⁸, and surrounded by pots and kitchen tools.

⁸ Both *huipil* (blouse) and *corte* (skirt) are part of women’s traditional Maya dress.

Different from the field where Pedro stages his testimonio, here we have the intimate space of the house managed by a Maya woman, where cultural practices and caregiving are put on display through the relation between the mother (Catarina herself) and her daughter. While the images tell the story of this present, we hear Catarina's voiceover telling us how the soldiers took her from her community and burned her family's house down, and how a woman later found her and raised her. She goes on to talk about the disintegration of communal and domestic spaces, and the rupture of family relationships while, visually, we sense the opposite. Catarina's child appears in the foreground as Catarina is shown doing chores such as cleaning her house and threshing corn. Like the scene of Pedro digging the land, Catarina's engagement with the care of her house also represents how the witness works (or has worked) over her memory. While threshing the corn, Catarina tells us in voiceover how she learned about the death of her parents and how she reunited with her sister.

Known as the ancient food of the Maya people, corn symbolizes spirituality and cultural memory. As matter, it implies also the generation of meals and the reproduction of life through an embodied praxis. In that sense, in both stories, memory constitutes a knowledge that is expressed through concrete practices and materials such as the threshing and preparing of corn, rural labor, both Catarina's and Pedro's Maya clothing, and the Ixil language in which they speak to us. In turn, despite their losses, these embodied and audiovisual testimonios refer to how the characters are reconstituting their present life instead of showing them as witnesses through whose stories the viewer can simply assess the violence and destruction of the war. The film uses scenes of daily labor that ensure the persistence of life as a stage where the testimonios can unfold. This underscores the autonomy of the witnesses' bodies and discourses, which is also the base from which they stand up for their dear ones.

Unlike the camera's relative distance in the scene where Pedro works, the scene of Catarina threshing the corn is narrated with close-up and medium shot frames. Just as in the scene of Pedro digging, the medium shots of Catarina are filmed from a low angle looking up at her, suggesting her dignity and the dignity of her labor. The close-up shots situate the work

in the intimate space of the body and in the cultural practice centered on the corn that appears in the foreground. Instead of isolating Catarina and her individual actions, as the use of the close up may suggest, the voiceover through which Catarina shares her testimonio is coupled with the image of her engaged in the cultural and social practice of preparing the corn. In this way, the scene proposes an opening. Her words de-individualize her experience as she relates it to other cases like hers, like Pedro's story. She points out, "many people went through this. Sometimes we say that children and babies who disappeared, older people too, are already dead, but it may not be true, and they are alive . . . Now there is help to find them" (Bacá, 2017). Solidarity between the Maya characters develops through this sense of hope, as well as between Catarina and other Maya people off-screen who have also lost their relatives.

The last shots of Catarina's testimonio show the result of her labor and, materially, pose the testimonio as an experience of sharing. We see close-ups of the threshed corn in a big bucket while the credits run over the screen. As with the scene of digging, here the threshed corn operates as evidence of Catarina's labor of care made concrete by her testimonio towards others who also lost their families, and also of the act of love for her children and herself who will all benefit from the food. In both stories, the embodied labor of threshing the corn and digging the hole constitute bodily acts of care that supplements the act of narrating the past in voiceover. In conjoining the past of the violence with a reconstitution of present autonomy, the elements of this *mise en scène* poses, following Rancière, a redistribution of the sensible. According to Rancière (2004), the "distribution of the sensible" is a "system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (p. 12). The distribution of the sensible therefore implies an organization of power that defines, first, who can decide what is there to be shared and, second, in what ways individuals can gain access to that distribution according to the social roles assigned to them. It is according to this "distribution of the sensible" forged in the name of modern politics in Guatemala that Maya people's ways of being and living are marginalized and made invisible. It is according to this frame that Maya people are perceived as the governed ones, oppressed ones unable of self-

determination or as obstacles to development. Instead, this film posits a redistribution of the sensed experience that is in itself a Maya act of (re)constitution of the social order.

Furthermore, in putting these two characters side by side, their testimonios propose a distribution of the sensible based on Ixil women's and men's spheres of labor that are placed in contiguity. In that way, this movie structurally frames its narration according to the daily forms of organization of labor in Maya communities. These stories offered from the perspective of the Maya people are therefore not framed from external discourses that decodify economic and social inequalities such as class conflicts. Instead, the film aims to contextualize the Maya subjects from their own social and cultural frames, from which social and individual desires for transformation are expressed to incite action. In addressing non-Maya Westernized viewers, the task continues to be to elicit a reaction to these embodied acts of self-determination. By focusing on these acts, the testimonios demand a recognition of the Maya subjects as agents whose voice, desires, emotions, and criticism constitute ways of asserting life, countering the violence inflicted upon them and the distribution of the sensible that obscures these actions from being seen.

Sepur Zarco: La vida después de la sentencia (2017)

The next film features Sepur Zarco, another town that was ferociously affected by the violence of the war. Unlike *Kat at Kat'ex?*, Say was commissioned to make this film as part of a newspaper's investigative report. It was made with the consent of the women of Sepur Zarco who were seeking once again to make their situation visible to the public, after the media gave wide coverage to the trial in which by providing their testimonios, they won a court case against their perpetrators.

In 1982, the Guatemalan military forces built a camp in Sepur Zarco, located in the Izabal department, in compliance with the wealthy landowning families who wanted to maintain control of their lands in the face of the rural workers' struggle to become the legal owners of these lands. The rural workers employed at the haciendas were paid very little and because of this labor injustice, they claimed a right to the land on which they had been born, had built their houses, formed families, and had formulated their desires and aspirations (Velásquez

Nimatuj, 2016). According to Irma Velásquez Nimatuj (2016), landowners saw in the armed conflict the perfect justification for murdering families and preserving their ownership of the land. After the soldiers killed the men and burned their animals and their houses, they raped the Q'eqchi' women who had demanded to know where their disappeared husbands were. For a period of six years, these women were detained and subjected to slave labor and sexual slavery, and were also obligated to wash clothes and prepare food for their rapists.

This three-minute documentary addresses the aftermath of the 2016 trial that pitted fifteen Maya-Q'eqchi' women from the community of Sepur Zarco against two state agents who were responsible for the slavery and sexual violence perpetrated against them. The accused were found guilty and sentenced respectively to 240 and 120 years in prison. As part of the sentencing, the court ordered the state to comply with the following demands, formulated by the women themselves for their own reparation and to benefit their community of Sepur Zarco: 1) that a secondary school be built 2) that a healthcare facility be built where the women survivors could obtain treatment for the many physical ailments and mental health problems (which are often permanent) that ensued from the abuse, and 3) the resolution of the land disputes initiated by the Q'eqchi' women's husbands who were killed during the military occupation. This short documentary tells of how the demands of the Maya-Q'eqchi' women are still unmet.

The short film was launched online in 2017 as part of a journalistic investigation conducted by *Plaza Pública*, a trans-media news portal that advocates for social justice and the defense of human rights in Guatemala. That same year, the movie was screened in Guatemala City and Totonicapán during the FicMayab'. Compared to the previously analyzed film, *Sepur Zarco: La vida después de la sentencia* is a more of a free-style documentary in which we have the voiceover of two women from Sepur Zarco. Features such as the predominant use of detailed shots, some of which are out of focus, and the contrast between light and shadows that the director used to protect the identity of the witnesses, create an atmosphere that could be perceived as one of poverty and uncertainty. Yet, the discourse of the women of Sepur Zarco puts forward their desire to transform their situation, foreclosing the possibility that the spectators

might develop a voyeuristic perspective that naturalizes those initial perceptions.

At the beginning of the film, while one of the voiceovers says “we hoped they would give us what we asked for, what we had agreed on. But there is nothing” (Plaza Pública, 2017), the camera travels along a road that goes into the village. The reality that we visually appreciate in these first seconds is countered by the desires of women that speak of the changes they want to see. One of them says: “What we want now are agrarian solutions because I do not have anything . . . Of course I am in a community and there are lands. I do not have a husband and therefore I could not obtain land” (Plaza Pública, 2017). At another point the other voiceover states, “We want to see them [the concrete demands] fulfilled to be able to build a future for our children. We want our children to study. I want that for my children. That they study and have no need to leave, that’s what we asked the institution. They should listen to us, we have rights” (Plaza Pública, 2017).

What does it mean to approach the community of Sepur Zarco through the demands of women who had experienced the dispossession of their bodies and land? Feminist scholar María Lugones (2008) points to the need to look beyond the visible scars that attest to be the violent colonial domination exercised against indigenous bodies and their political orders. To that end, Lugones (2008) advocates for an understanding of the scope of the colonial/modern violence against these women by considering how that violence has wounded the indigenous organization of life. This understanding connects to the central aspect of the Maya women’s work for the reproduction of life, which situates their labor in the non-capitalist or non-remunerated realm of care, as Gladys Tzul Tzul (2016) contends. According to the report of anthropologist Rita Segato (Sentencia, 2016), that was cited in the trial, upon being subjected to domestic slavery, the Q’eqchi’ women lost access to their own bodies, their own care, and process of healing, as well as the labor, and the resources that they would have otherwise channeled to their children and community. The labor of care that the war meant to interrupt includes the reproduction of the family, the upbringing of the children, food preparation, house and resource management, and use of water sources, among other activities (Tzul Tzul, 2016).

As the violence imposed upon women damaged not only their individual bodies and minds, but also the communal body rooted in the reciprocal relation based on the role of men's and women's productive and reproductive labor, the film shows that, accordingly, the women's demands involve not only a claim for justice for themselves but also the desire to reconstitute life through land inheritance for their children. The women's demand for access to land should not be understood as a claim for rights as defined by capitalist logics of individualism and private ownership that would turn these women into small landowners (Tzul Tzul, 2016). Instead, the films give voice to a desire to make life sustainable as a community and, in that way, to accomplish the communal dream that had led the community to stand up to the landowners before the war.

Through these communal logics, the women denounce the inhumane conditions imposed by the Guatemalan state. The state's delay in responding to these demands is a form of biopolitics that consists in letting Maya people die in poverty, which reveals the hollowness of the state's "good" intention to recognize the 2016 sentence. The women's critique against the state, therefore, points to its incapacity to "listen" to them and, therefore, to recognize their rights ("They should listen to us, we have rights"). The women's statement points to the difference between the communal logics and the logic of the mainstream politics that picks its own interlocutors according to racial, gendered, epistemological, and linguistic hierarchies marginalizing Maya women from politics.

Regarding the state, another voiceover also points out "I hope that they concern themselves with what we ask them for, and that they take it into account. It was a written request and it was documented. Will they revise it? Will they feel our suffering? I do not believe they will. They live happily, not like us" (Plaza Pública, 2017). This comment defines the ability to listen as the capacity to "feel" the women's suffering. In the light of what I stated earlier regarding the non-appropriation of the pain, "to feel their suffering" constitutes an active reaction in the face of pain that does not depoliticize it. In other words, to feel their suffering means to respond with an action that is situated within the horizon of social and economic justice where the women's demands are located. "To feel their suffering" therefore consists in the ability of recognizing in that very suffering the

women's act of talking back/speaking out/calling out the state and the rich landowners. This comes from an overall attitude in which they express their desires of life and transformation.

In turn, this gesture would support a transformation of the colonial logics that measures the humanity and the "good judgement" of the other based on a paradigm of reason-civilization, which, according to Western Kantian and post-Kantian ethical traditions, detaches justice and reason from emotions. For Ahmed (2004), "such traditions . . . construct emotions as not only irrelevant to judgement and justice, but also as unreasonable, and as an obstacle to good judgement" (p. 195). It is according to these traditions, then, that the indigenous witnesses, like the women of Sepur Zarco, are positioned as pure or excessive emotional subjects who lack judgment or, if we also go to the extreme, as people without a soul or the capacity to feel. Either of these considerations locate the "indigenous other" outside the realm of reasoning, perceiving her/him as an unreliable person who is incapable of telling the truth.

The discourse of the women of Sepur Zarco deconstructs this opposition between reason and emotion. Like the previous film, this one also suggests a redistribution of the sensed according to a sense of community that is put forward by Maya women's political discourse and that is driven by pain and love. Just as in *Kat at Kat'ex?*, pain and love are a driving force in the political discourses of the Maya subjects in so far as these feelings contain within themselves—instead of being a less important precursor to—a criticism of the structural injustice that keeps the women and their community vulnerable (Coulthard, 2014, p. 22). By locating themselves in a position of moral authority, the women in the films enact their own "politics of grief" (Simpson, 2017, p. 239). In so doing, they inhabit the wishes, pain, care and love as ways of asserting life, repairing intimate social relations with their children, and they express their self-determination over their own bodies, their voices and land that the war had violated. By expressing these feelings (and the criticism voiced therein) the women re-appropriate the reproductive role that had once empowered them and acknowledge the violence that stripped—and continues to strip—that role away from them.

In showing that the subjects' pain does not function as a source or a raw material from which viewers can extract

and refine a critical consciousness that would substitute that pain, the movie mimics for the viewer the request the women of Sepur Zarco made to state: that they not separate the pain from the criticism of structural injustices and from the communal logics of life reproduction. In this way, as in the previous film, it requires that the viewer not fall into a paternalistic view that frames the indigenous victims as “the suffering other,” and that empathizes with them only from the position of “the helping self” that can only see their wounds and not the context that gave rise to them.

Towards a “decolonial empathy”

My purpose throughout the analysis of these films has been to delve into Ixchiu’s remark that the FicMayab’ provides an opportunity to showcase how Maya peoples live. In this article, I have argued that the witnesses’ works of memory and their commitment to the reproduction of life through acts of care and cultural practices, set the epistemological conditions from which viewers are invited to approach Maya people’s realities and demands for justice. In so doing, they are invited to enact a decolonial empathy based on the recognition of their voices and bodies calling out, speaking out, as they have always done, as well as shooting back (Ginsburg, 1994) through the artistic work of Maya youth. For these movies, the conditions for a decolonial empathy are set through a distribution of the sensed that centers on Maya authorship of film and testimonio and puts on display dynamics of distance and proximity that define what can be visible, told, and thought. *Kat at Kat’ex?* for example, embraces “noise” as a mechanism to stymie the viewers’ impulse to appropriate the witness’ pain. In “Sepur Zarco: la vida después de la sentencia,” in accordance with an ethical stance to not reveal the identity of the witnesses, Say’s camera does not let us see the full body of the subjects. To add to these examples, the translation from Q’eqchi and Ixil languages into Spanish captions offer us other moments of uncertainty where we have to wonder what the translation missed and what other meanings were added so that, we, Spanish speakers, can understand or, at least, have a degree of access to the discourse. Having said this, the translation and the above-mentioned moments coexist with the need of these films’ communities of origin that these stories reach wide audiences in order to raise awareness about the wrongs of the war.

As I mentioned earlier, *Kat at Kat'ex?* was made by the CCC to be shown in public spaces within Maya Ixil communities. With their work, the collective aims to generate community dialogues and contribute to general efforts in the quest for social justice. Admission to these public screenings are free, in opposition to the capitalist logics of commercial film circuits that center their programming on Hollywood blockbusters and profit from filmmaking. Upon Pedro's request, the film was screened on a tour outside the Ixil territory to audiences in non-Ixil rural and urban areas in the hopes of obtaining some information about his son. As part of this tour, the film was subtitled in Spanish and screened at the FicMayab' (H. Bacá, personal communication, January 24, 2019). In the case of *Sepur Zarco: La vida después de la sentencia*, Say accepted the commission of Plaza Pública due to his personal interest in contributing to the struggle of Sepur Zarco's women (E. Say, personal communication, February 4, 2019). As the trial ended some time ago, it was necessary to do a follow-up to see if things had changed. The film was made available online on the Plaza Pública web site and in accordance with the Q'eqchi women's desire to continue making their voices heard.

In keeping with the Maya mediamakers' commitment to disseminating the witnesses' stories and portraying the Maya subjects' fight for justice, the films also deliberately function as evidentiary tools in the service of legitimizing the witnesses' perspectives (Schiwy, 2009) and, in so doing, they counter the politics of oblivion about the war and the impunity of its perpetrators, most of whom are still in power. Instead of having an external, objective, omniscient voiceover that separates the narration from the subjects being filmed, as Schiwy (2009) has critically pointed out in regards to mainstream ethnographic film, these documentaries made by Maya people show the usual "objects" as "subjects" of a knowledge they deeply embody (p.145). For the Westernized viewers, this involvement challenges "detached" objectivity as a necessary and possible condition for the production of knowledge and action. Instead, they are invited to consider the embodied bonds of critique and affection that the Maya witnesses (and the filmmakers) invest in telling their witnesses' stories and in voicing through them, their demands that justice be made. At the same time, this does not mean that the images constitute an unmediated window to a fixed reality shown as such by the films' characters. The realities that these

movies portray are not definitive or conclusive. As they show their characters' hope for social change and justice, they house the bodies and political orders weaving the past in the present looking towards a desirable future (Simpson, 2017, p. 237).

Therefore, these films stage an exercise, or are expressions in and of themselves, of a lived self-determination, of an autonomous way of living and being that spectators must acknowledge so that their own act of receiving or learning, and consequently of experiencing radical empathy, can manifest. This, in turn, incites a decolonizing mode of relating to the realities of Maya people that refuses victimhood generated by modern political discourses of recognition (Simpson, 2017; Coulthard, 2014). This offering that seeks to construct a new political inter-subjectivity that resists material and more nuanced settler forms of appropriation and that enables action to emerge.

Final reflections: The Maya films and the FicMayab' as decolonial educational sites

In their circulation, these films function as educational tools that operate outside of institutional modes of knowledge production with their attendant principles of objectivity and academic expertise (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Seen in this way, the movies not only facilitate the circulation of historical memory, but also support the revitalization of modes of knowledge based on orality and intergenerational teachings enacted outside of literary and assimilatory institutional education. In telling these stories from particular perspectives, these cultural expressions (the films and the festival) thus mobilize broader tools to achieve justice than merely the increased circulation of memory. In a similar fashion, the FicMayab' constituted a pedagogical setting that showcased memory and knowledge based on Maya voices and epistemologies.

The FicMayab' was an autonomous event that resulted from the work of solidarity between artists, intellectuals, and film collectives (including foreign ones that were also members of CLACPI), cultural centers, grassroots organizations, and international Basque and Catalan foundations that have long provided CLACPI with financial and institutional support. The festival was organized without institutional support from the government, because of the organizing committee's commitment to siding with indigenous struggles and, therefore, to opposing the corruption, repression, and persecution that Guatemalan

state institutions continuously exercised against Maya peoples and activists. Because of this position, the legal formalization of the Red Tz'ikin as an NGO, a requisite for it to be eligible for the funding that CLACPI allocated for the festival, was denied to the Red on many occasions, as was access to some public spaces for screenings or activities.

This independent political position formulated in alignment with indigenous struggles was reflected in the curation of programming held in public spaces through dances, ceremonies, and political forums which redefined the social experience of cinema. In the political forum “Mujeres indígenas y territorialidad en Mesoamérica” (Indigenous Women and Territoriality in Mesoamerica) which I attended and that followed the opening of the festival, one of the participants, Lorena López Mejía, a distinguished Maya-K'iche thinker and activist, pointed orally to the many physical, symbolic, and spiritual geographies or territories that constitute the Maya world. These geographies include the body that carries the soul, the heart, the energies, the emotions, knowledge, history, and memory; the womb of the mother; the nuclear and the extended family in which Maya people receive the teachings of the grandparents; mother earth and mother nature; the native peoples themselves, like the Maya, who have historical and ancestral roots, and who have existed from the earliest human memory. The FicMayab', as an event and in its name, embraced and honored these multiple connections that inhabit and differentiate the Maya territory. López Mejía's explanation illustrates the sharing and the teachings of the Maya epistemology that permeated the many instances and across the different media featured in the festival. As the FicMayab' served as a public platform to assert Maya epistemology not only for non-Maya people, but also for the ones who were born in the culture but could not embrace it, it did so implying that these teachings and epistemology have a life of their own beyond the setting of the FicMayab' ⁹.

9 It should be noted that the FicMayab' was part of a broader ecosystem of grassroots initiatives occur on an ongoing basis in Guatemala and that involve art and communitarian, popular, and non-institutional modes of education. This ecosystem also includes legal strategies, mobilizations, and other forms of more visible collective action. In the light of this ecosystem, we can reframe the scope of the FicMayab' and similar initiatives as not limited by economic and time constraints, but as expressions of perseverance and grassroots activism despite numerous obstacles.

Some could argue that it is unrealistic to think that minds and hearts can be transformed by only watching movies or attending activist festivals like this one. This is why post-screening conversations with filmmakers in festivals, as happened in the FicMayab', are crucial to approach that task. According to Dina Iordanova (2012), these interactions can "go beyond the film and address the issues that film is concerned with, as well as . . . influence the thinking of the audience" (p. 16)¹⁰. In a talkback session after a set of screenings, Maya and Guatemalan *mestizo* students expressed publicly their appreciation for the films on Maya people and the space of dialogue offered by the FicMayab'. One viewer stated, "these presentations serve to repair the social fabric that has been damaged because of the historical marginalization indigenous people have suffered" (my translation). Another audience member argued that teachers in urban schools had inculcated into young people the superiority of white and urban people over non-white and people born in the countryside. The screenings enabled him to become aware of how the educational system limited his knowledge about the Maya peoples. Another young self-identified Maya man suggested that institutional educations had repressed his Maya identity. As result of this, he could not speak in his mother tongue. Despite losing that cultural connection, he became aware of the historical issues and injustices that the Maya people endure. He stated, "I hope that young people in this audience take away in their minds and their hearts something of what we have watched today, because I don't think we are the only rational people who think. I say this because even the stones can listen" (my translation).

As sites of decolonial education, these films and the festival contribute to the formation of a decolonial attitude, by which a large audience is able to take up the task of committing themselves to the unfinished process of questioning social and internalized colonial legacies, and to define a course of action accordingly. The analysis of the films and the festival not only invited participants to unlearn the dehumanizing ideologies of

10 Although Say did not participate in a post-screening conversation, Bacá did so in a panel along with other filmmakers and human rights activists. The panel's title was "Aporte del Cine Documental a la Memoria Histórica de los Pueblos Indígenas / Originarios" (Contribution of Documentary Cinema to the Historical Memory of Indigenous/Native Peoples).

institutional education, but they also presented Maya cultures and politics as conditions for that transformation. They therefore forge a path towards a decolonial education. As teaching tools, these films show the felt experience and material aspects of people's cultures and struggles. They address a persistent need within Western academia to keep centering indigenous voices, creative work and scholarship, and to keep expanding the discussion so that it encompasses not only the colonial/modern patterns of marginalization that still affect indigenous peoples, but also their own ways to reconstitute communities through diverse forms of struggles.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the mediamakers Eduardo Say and Heidy Bacá for sharing their films, time, and thoughts with me. I am grateful to the Red Tz'ikin, (especially Andrea Ixchiu) as well as its collaborators, for allowing me to share with and learn from them during my stay in Guatemala. I would also like to acknowledge the CLACPI members for their camaraderie and tireless labor in producing and disseminating indigenous films across the Abya Yala. An early version of this article was delivered during the "InDigital III Conference: The Americas" that took place on February of 2019 in Nashville, USA. A special thanks to Isis Sadek and John Freese, for their time and energy in reading previous versions of this article and for providing me with valuable feedback. This research was funded by the Scripps College Sabbatical Fellowship for AY 2018-2019.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bacá, H. (Producer), & Say, E. (Director). (2017). *Kat at Kat'ex?* [short documentary]. Guatemala: Colectivo Cine en la Calle. Guatemala.
- Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico – CEH. (1999). *Guatemala. Memoria del silencio*. Ciudad de Guatemala: UNOPS.
- Comité Organizador. (2017). *FicMayab'*. Retrieved from <https://ficmayab.org/en/ficmayab-en/convocation>
- Córdova, A. (2014). Reenact, reimagine: Performative Indigenous documentaries of Bolivia and Brazil. In V. Navarro and J.C. Rodríguez (Eds.). *New documentaries in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Coulthard, G. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Del Farra, R. (2005). Joaquín Orellana. *Humanofonía*, 1971. *La Fondation Daniel Langlois pour l'art, la science et la technologie*. Retrieved from <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=1670>
- Ginsburg, F. (1994). Embedded aesthetic: Creating a discursive space for Indigenous media. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 365-382.
- Lugones, M. (2008). Colonialidad y género. *Tabula Rasa*, 9, 73-101.
- Iordanova, D. (2012). Film festivals and dissent: Can film change the world? In D. Iordanova and L. Torchin (Eds.), *Film festival yearbook 4: Film festivals and activism*. St Andrews: University of St. Andrews.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality. *Caribbean Studies Association*. Retrieved from http://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres_Outline_Ten_Theses-10.23.16.pdf
- Paraskevaídis, G (2008). Algunas reflexiones sobre música y dictadura en América Latina. *Magma*. Retrieved from http://www.gp-magma.net/pdf/txt_e/sitio-MusyDicfinal2008.pdf
- Plaza Pública (Producer), and Say, E. (Director) (2017). *Sepur Zarco: la vida después de la sentencia* [short documentary]. Guatemala.
- Rancière, J. (1999). *Disagreement: Politics and philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rancière, J. (2004). *The Politics of aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible*. London, UK: Continuum.
- Rancière, J. (2008). El teatro de las imágenes. In G. Didi-Huberman, G. Pollock, J. Rancière, N. Schweizer, and A. Valdes (Eds). *Alfredo Jaar: Las políticas de las imágenes*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Metales Pesados.
- Rodríguez Maeso, S. (2010). Política del testimonio y reconocimiento en las comisiones de la verdad guatemalteca y peruana: en torno a la figura del “indio subversivo”. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 88, 22-55.

- Simpson, L.B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schiwy, F. (2009). *Indianizing film: Decolonization, the Andes, and the question of technology*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.
- Schiwy, F. (2019). *The Open Invitation. Activist Video, Mexico, and the Politics of the Affect*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press.
- Sentencia Caso Sepur Zarco, C-01076-2012-00021 Of. 2 (2016). Retrieved from: http://www.mujerestransformandoelmundo.org/sites/www.mujerestransformandoelmundo.org/files/descargas/sentencia_caso_sepur_zarco.pdf
- Tzul Tzul, G. (2016). *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena: mujeres y tramas de parentesco en Chuimeq'ena'*. Guatemala: SOCEE, Sociedad Comunitaria de Estudios Estratégicos; Tz'ikin, Centro de Investigación y Pluralismo Jurídico; Maya' Wuj Editorial.
- Velásquez Nimatuj, I. (2014). El genocidio frente a la historia y la memoria. *Plaza pública*. Retrieved from <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/el-genocidio-frente-la-historia-y-la-memoria>
- Velásquez Nimatuj, I. (2016). Peritaje cultural [audio]. Retrieved from <https://soundcloud.com/bea-gallardo-shaul/sets/dra-irma-alicia-vel-quez>

COMMENTARY

DEATH IN CINEMA, CINEMA IN DEATH

Jhonny Hendrix
Antorcha Films

ABSTRACT

Every director dies in bits with each film, with each plane, with each story. The excuse of becoming immortal in the cinema costs us life, costs us dreams, loves, tears and smiles. Death, the author and cinema go hand in hand in a romance where fiction is not distinguished from reality.

RESUMO Todo director muere de a pocos con cada película, con cada plano, con cada historia. La excusa de hacerse inmortal en el cine nos cuesta vida, nos cuesta sueños, amores, lágrimas y sonrisas. La muerte, el autor y el cine van de la mano en un romance donde no se distingue la ficción de la realidad.

ESPAÑOL (ORIGINAL VERSION)

“¿Cómo llamar a aquello que llega a existir a partir de una mezcla de esfuerzo, creatividad, emoción, trabajo en equipo, sentir y pensar? Llamémosle cine. Para mí, desde siempre, ha sido algo más emocional que técnico. Ahora bien, si habláramos de lo técnico, el cine equivale a una cantidad de fotogramas, captados por virtud de la luz, que luego son proyectados en movimiento mediante la misma.

Creo que la primera muerte que vi en esta vida fue en el cine; en esos días, cuando la muerte no era tan cotidiana como ahora (o por lo menos eso parecía en mi entorno), la vida misma cambió. Los sucesos ya no son los mismos, puedo decir que el cine es vida y sin el cine no existo.

Ahora bien, a diferencia de las lecturas de André Bazin¹, el cine no muere, porque es de las pocas artes que logran ser eternas. Éste logra tomar un instante de vida para el resto de nuestros días, en su luz, en su color y en su sombra.

Hablar de la muerte en el cine es paradójico. En mis dos últimas experiencias cinematográficas, la experimenté en carne propia y sigo teniéndola auestas, la muerte ha optado por permanecer en mi narrativa.

Al escribir *Candelaria* quise ser concreto en una idea que atrapé de los labios de una mujer mayor que, con su gracia y con gran nostalgia en sus ojos, logró narrarme su historia de amor, acontecida en la Habana, Cuba. Este relato venía enlodado con un deceso, la muerte de su único amor. Quise ser fiel a lo que escuché, por ello mantuve tal acontecimiento. Sin embargo, con la intuición de que el personaje de esta Dulcinea enamorada fuera la luz de la película, quise jugar con el público e invertir los hechos, dándole muerte así a mi querida musa.

Candelaria fue asesinada por su autor (por mí). En la historia fallece su esposo, en la película muere ella. Ese cambio habla del poder del autor y de la misma realidad. La historia de Candelaria (la verdadera), trajo un cúmulo de recuerdos, acarreó nostalgia, me llenó de envidia. Yo amaba, estaba lleno de eso mismo que ella sentía. Pero mi amor, una pareja, no fue tan dulce para mí y de allí mi obligación –y necesidad– infinita de olvidarla. Dicen que todo lo que se olvida muere. Así es como conocía la muerte, como olvido, como la ausencia de alguien. De modo que, eso que llamamos muerte, hasta rodar esta película, fue sólo una ficción.

Nunca entendí que mi necesidad de olvidar ese amor me enfrentaría directamente con la muerte. Si bien la sensación más cercana a ella viene de un hecho violento, de una enfermedad o de la vejez, pero hasta ese momento, la muerte nunca había sido cercana para mí.

Viajé a Cuba, seleccioné a mis actores por su carisma, por su presencia y la similitud entre su personalidad y el carácter

¹ Reconocido teórico y crítico de cine francés (18 de abril de 1918 - 11 de noviembre de 1958).

de cada personaje. Amé a Verónica (a quien seleccioné para interpretar a Candelaria); más tarde llegó a mi encuentro alguien que significó alegría en la tristeza: Jesús Terry, quien daría vida a Víctor Hugo. Con él aprendí a bailar tap, así como mucho del acento y del sabor cubano. Jesús se convirtió en la inspiración (en el cine, como en la vida, no se puede hablar de lo que no se conoce, y, hasta conocerlo, no pude hablar de la alegría del baile, del coqueteo, ni del amor entre amigos de diferentes edades). Jesús era alegre, audaz y galán, pero lo que más me enseñó fue cómo ser un mejor ser humano.

A sus ochenta y siete años, Jesús Terry era el hombre más feliz, al saber que haría su primer protagónico en cine. Faltando veinte días para el rodaje, después de un ensayo de la película (del que salí emocionado por su actuación, que me hizo llorar), él se sintió mal. Un dolor en el abdomen lo indispuso lo necesario para tener que consultar a un médico.

A la mañana siguiente Jesús no llegó a los ensayos. Al llamarlo, me comentó que permanecía en el hospital, y que no me preocupara, que él tenía el guion en mano y seguiría leyendo para llegar al rodaje.

Decidí visitarlo. El médico me dio la noticia que cambiaría nuestras vidas—a Jesús no darían de alta. Fueron los días más cercanos a la muerte hasta ese momento. Me quedé con Jesús los tres días siguientes (pues solo a mí me recibía con el pretexto de no perder su protagónico). Al tercer día fui a ver unas locaciones, pero regresé a la hora de almorzar. Regresé a recibir la noticia de que mi Víctor Hugo había muerto. La vida, como el cine, siempre tiene giros inesperados.

Entre los tres y cinco años de edad, perdí seres queridos, pero nunca fui consciente o los olvidé. Luego conocí la muerte en el cine, en alguna película que escondió su nombre en mis recovecos. Ahora, con Jesús postrado, la muerte me destrozó, me animó. Le quise competir. Escribí un poema a este actor de la risa larga, quería immortalizarlo, tal como se immortalizan los lugares u objetos que son patrimonio de la humanidad. Quise que existiera aún para la película y así fue.

Candelaria y Víctor Hugo son esa necesidad del autor de enmarcarse a sí mismo para la eternidad. Él es todas las

personas que admiro, más mis diálogos y mis anécdotas. Ella es lo que siempre soñé y mi única manera de amar en verdad a través del cine. Ella, la musa que no llegó o que yo mismo espanté.

La muerte en el cine no existe, es un pretexto. El cine también es el pretexto para encontrar la inmortalidad de la humanidad o para encontrarla en medio de la humanidad.

ENGLISH (TRANSLATION)

“How to call what comes into existence from a mixture of effort, creativity, emotion, teamwork, feeling and thinking? Let’s call it cinema. For me, it has always been something more emotional than technical. Now, if we talk about the technical, cinema is equivalent to a series of frames, captured by virtue of light, which through it, are projected in motion.

I think the first death I saw in this life was in the cinema; in those days, when death was not as everyday as now (or at least it seemed so in my surrounding), life itself changed. The events are no longer the same, I can say that cinema is life and without cinema I do not exist.

Now, unlike André Bazin’s readings, cinema does not die, because it is one of the few arts that manage to be eternal. It manages to take a moment of life for the rest of our days in its light, its color and its shadow.

Talking about death in the cinema is paradoxical. In my last two film experiences, I experienced it in my own flesh and I still have it in tow, death has chosen to remain in my narrative.

When writing *Candelaria* I wanted to be true to an idea that I caught from the lips of an older woman who, with her grace and with great nostalgia in her eyes, managed to tell me her love story, which unfolded in Havana, Cuba. This story was muddied with a death, the death of her only love. I wanted to be true to what I heard, so I included such an event. However, with the intuition that the character of this Dulcinea in love would be the light of the movie, I wanted to play with the public and reverse the facts, thus assigning death to my dear muse.

Candelaria was assassinated by its author (by me). In the story her husband dies, in the movie she dies. That change speaks of the author's power and of the very reality. The story of Candelaria (the real one), brought a cluster of memories, brought nostalgia, filled me with envy. I loved, was full of the same thing she felt. But my love, a couple, was not so sweet to me and hence my infinite obligation—and need—to forget her. They say that everything that is forgotten dies. This is how I knew death, as oblivion, as someone's absence. So, what we call death, until this movie was shot, was just a fiction.

I never understood that my need to forget that love would directly face me with death. Perhaps the closest sensation of death comes from a violent act, from an illness or from old age, but until that moment, it had never been close to me.

I traveled to Cuba, selected my actors for their charisma, for their presence and the similarity between their personality and that of each character. I loved Veronica (whom I selected to play Candelaria); later someone came to meet me who signified joy in sadness: Jesus Terry, who would give life to Victor Hugo. With him I learned to dance tap, as well as much of the Cuban accent and flavor. Jesus became the inspiration (in cinema, as in life, you cannot talk about what is not known, and, until meeting him, I could not talk about the joy of dancing, flirting, nor love between friends of different ages). Jesus was cheerful, bold and handsome, but what he taught me most was how to be a better human being.

At eighty-seven, Jesus Terry was the happiest man, knowing that he would be making his cinematic debut. With twenty days left before filming, after a rehearsal of the film (from which I left excited about his performance, which had made me cry), he felt ill. A pain in the abdomen indisposed him enough to have to consult a doctor.

The next morning Jesus did not arrive to rehearsals. Upon calling him, he told me that he remained the hospital, and not to worry, that he had the script in hand and would continue reading to make it to the shoot.

I decided to visit him. The doctor gave me the news that would change our lives—Jesus would not be discharged. Until

that moment, those were the days closest to death. I stayed with Jesus for the next three days (because he only accepted me as a visitor under the pretext of not losing him as protagonist). On the third day I went to see some locations but returned at lunchtime. I returned to receive the news that my Victor Hugo had died. Life like cinema, always has unexpected twists.

Between three and five years of age, I lost loved ones, but I was never aware or forgot them. Then I met death in the cinema, in some movie that hid its name in my recesses. Now, with Jesus prostrated, death shattered me, encouraged me. I wanted to compete with it. I wrote a poem to this actor of long laughter, I wanted to immortalize him, just as the places or objects that are a world heritage site are immortalized. I wanted him to still exist for the film and so it was.

Candelaria and Victor Hugo are that need of the author to frame themselves for eternity. He is all the people I admire, along with my dialogues and my anecdotes. She is what I always dreamed of and my only way to really love through cinema. She, the muse that didn't arrive or that I scared myself.

Death in cinema does not exist, it is a pretext. Cinema is also the pretext to find the immortality of humanity or to find it in the midst of humanity.

OBITUARY

IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN (1930-2019)

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

University of Coimbra

The death of Immanuel Wallerstein is an irreparable loss for the social sciences. He was unquestionably the most remarkable American sociologist of the twentieth century, and the one with greater international projection. His major accomplishment was to inspire successive generations of sociologists to discard the unit of analysis in which they had been trained (national societies) and rather focus on the world system (world economy and the sovereign state system). Following insights of Fernand Braudel, Wallerstein believed that the increasing dependencies and interdependencies within the world system turned it into an unit of analysis capable of generating better working hypotheses for the study of the national societies themselves. Such an analytical break was largely misunderstood in the USA. However, being a global intellectual who was familiar with the social sciences in various languages, Wallerstein was hardly affected. He consorted with almost all the leaders of the liberation movements against colonialism before and after the independences, and set up projects with social scientists of those countries to help build new scientific communities. Let us recall just one particular case: the Center for African Studies of the then recently founded Eduardo Mondlane University, whose director was Aquino de Bragança. Wallerstein was a sociologist fully committed to the fate of the world and, above all, to the fate of the more vulnerable populations, whose liberation, he believed, would be possible only in a post- capitalist, socialist society. That is why he was always there with us in the World Social Forum, from 2001 to 2016. The latter date was when we both were together for the last time.

His scientific stance made him question Western, Eurocentric thinking as a whole – one of our many affinities. It still moves me to remember, when we first met in Coimbra, the generous appraisal he made of a little book on epistemology I had just published: *Um discurso sobre as ciências* (1987). He immediately offered to have it published in *Review*, the prestigious journal of the Fernand Braudel Center, of which he was Director, at the New York University-Binghamton. Soon after, he chaired a large international project concerned with anti-Eurocentric epistemologies, funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation, and which he titled “To Open the Social Sciences”.

The relations of Immanuel Wallerstein with the Center for Social Studies (CES), of the School of Economics of the University of Coimbra, were wide and far reaching. One of our researchers and faculty, Carlos Fortuna, had already earned his doctorate at Binghamton under his supervision. During one of Wallerstein’s visits to CES we amply discussed the relevance of the concept of semiperiphery to characterize countries like Portugal. We realized that Portugal, like other countries in Europe, had features that distinguished them from other countries in other continents. Herein started our work to reformulate the theory of the semiperiphery in order to adapt it to our reality. The outcome was one of the most fruitful ways of analyzing Portuguese society. That is why we proposed that University of Coimbra take the honor of granting Immanuel Wallerstein an Honorary Degree in 2006.

The best way to honor Immanuel Wallerstein’s memory is to carry on with our work bearing in mind the enthusiasm, the professionalism, and the brilliant manner in which he managed to combine scientific objectivity and commitment to the damned of the earth – a stance he never failed to impress on us.

BOOK REVIEWS

Raewyn Connell, *The Good University. What universities actually do and why it's time for radical change*, Zed Books, London, 2019, ISBN (hb) 978-1-78699-541-4, (pb) 978-1-78699-540-7, (pdf.) 978-1-78699-542-1, (epub) 978-1-78699-543-8, (mobi) 978-1-78699-544-5, 233 pages

This is quite a good read – refreshing, inclusive and providing a plea, to those concerned with education as a public good, to regain control of the university system against its neo-liberalisation. As with Boaventura de Sousa Santos' volume, *Decolonising the University*, reviewed in the last issue of *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, this book is concerned with issues of demand for university education, radical action for change and subjugated sources of knowledge.

Connell is among a rare breed of academics who combine social activism and trade union engagement with great sociological insight and rigorous scholarship. She is without any doubt one of the leading contemporary sociologists around. She avoids an overriding Eurocentric concern about institutions. Author and promoter of Southern Theory, she scours a whole range of praxis in higher education. In fact, her book complements the one by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in many ways. I would like to think it complements my book on the subject produced last June (2019) and prepared for publication in 2017. I however leave judgement on my publication to others.

One of the most refreshing things about Connell's book is its international reach, drawing inspiration from several contexts, especially Global-Southern contexts, including Indigenous contexts. It has a strong cultural and political economy streak running through, captured in the masterly

chapter on the political economy of knowledge. This, as with Santos' book, sheds light on the economic purpose that changes in the University system serve.

As in textbook US-dominated development strategies, universities worldwide were steered, through a variety of means, towards western "metropolitan models". One includes the setting up of American universities, such as the American University of Rome or the American University of Cairo, and the work of foundations such as the Rockefeller, Carnegie and Ford Foundations. This is particularly true of universities in the 'developing' world. Before, many universities, in say Africa, were steered towards the models of their European colonial masters.

We all know the role played by say the Rhodes Scholarship, in the name of that most colonial of political figures that is Cecil Rhodes, in preparing a colonial academic and administrative elite in colonies and former colonies, including the USA itself, western in taste and culture, though not necessarily in blood, to serve neo-colonial interests. Despite the voices of movements such as that demanding 'Rhodes must fall', the allure of Oxford University is too strong even for those taking a postcolonial stance. Recently, Bill Gates has been involved. The foundation under his name has been focusing on Oxford's rival, Cambridge University.

Of course, many universities, like all-hegemonic institutions, for that matter, were bastions of radicalism, at least and alas for a short while in people's lives – the LSE in the 70s comes to mind. They have also produced counter-currents, politicians who fought for independence, not on the colonialists' own terms and who often paid with their life for this. Some left lasting decolonizing legacies, as was the case with Jamaican Rhodes scholar, Stuart Hall, who provided insights for more refreshing conceptions of knowledge, including decolonizing knowledge.

One of the great contributions made by this volume, and that of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, is to an international decolonizing sociology of knowledge. It draws on different conceptions of learning and different multi-ethnic knowledge traditions especially from the majority world. There is strong

recognition of southern knowledges alongside eastern and western ones. We read about shifting locations for a university which moves underground. Such was the Flying University experiment in Poland under Nazi occupation. In my view, it connects with images of the shifting sites for popular education in Latin American countries under siege by counter-revolutionaries. Examples are those of Nicaragua and the Contra War or the Civil War in El Salvador around the same time – adult educators and learners often killed by the marauders.

Latin American popular education projects the image of a kaleidoscope of Southern experiences in alternative, subaltern, Southern-social movement-oriented higher education. This book and others are rich in examples: the UNITIERRA in the Chiapas region of Mexico, the Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandez in Brazil with its strong connection with the MST –the landless peasant movement (needless to say, the ENFF was under attack by the interim government and is more so now under its Bolsonaro right wing successor), the Rabindranath Tagore-founded Visva Bahrati School/University in India, Al-Azhar University in Egypt, and may others, some captured in the three books I mentioned and also in a compendium on community-university relationships edited by the late Dave Watson.

There has been a number of commercial outlets in my country focusing on the granting of degrees in Management and ICT, gaining accreditation through the National Council for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). I wonder whether a free university, catering for social education as a public good, free of charge or charging a nominal fee, accessible to those employed and unemployed and drawing on a diversification of knowledge traditions (from North and South), would be the subject of a proposal to be put forward in future and given approval by this body.

The book ends with a look to the future, beyond the ‘dog eats dog’ culture of much of the present university scenario with its league tables favouring large western based universities and the culture that accommodates them. Needless to say it favours the western generated cultures of competition, individualisation, endowments by industrial moguls and foundations, military-industrial research concerns and ‘monocultural’ patterns of

research methodologies, output evaluation and dissemination strategies. The proposed university of the future would be, to the contrary, a university or pluriversity that responds not predominantly to military and industrial needs (see Henry Giroux' *University in Chains* on this), but to those of people also in a collective sense. In Mannheim's old 'sociology of knowledge' understanding, group knowledge would be highly regarded in this scenario. In the spirit of the book under review, where southern traditions play a great part, and subversivity of knowledge remains of great concern (once the staple [declared staple?] of forward looking universities), this book promotes the collective dimensions of knowledge, in the best Freirean and social movements tradition.

This would call for a major rethink of many of our universities; I say 'many' not 'all' as some, the non-mainstream ones, such as those mentioned earlier, have embarked on this since their very inception. The educationally and politically innovative and subversive 'call all in doubt'. The book argues for radical change of a kind diametrically opposed to the neoliberal and new managerial one brought about in recent history. Connell's book offers grist for the mill in this struggle.

Peter Mayo

University of Malta

Emilio Bustamante & Jaime Luna-Victoria. *Las miradas múltiples: El cine regional peruano. (Overlooked treasures. An introduction to Peruvian Regional Cinema)* (Vols. I and II). Lima: Universidad de Lima, Fondo Editorial, ISBN 9789972453939 (Vol. I), 2017, 492 pages and ISBN 9789972453946 (Vol. II) , 2017, 444 pages.

Las miradas múltiples: el cine regional peruano, volumes I and II, is the result of eight years of exhaustive research by Peruvian scholars, Emilio Bustamante and Jaime Luna-Victoria. The authors define “Peruvian regional cinema” as any film that is produced by local filmmakers in the regions outside of Metropolitan Lima and the Constitutional Province of Callao. Volume I situates regional cinema within the larger system that is the Peruvian film industry, and offers a comprehensive analysis of 100 representative works of cinema produced in sixteen regions of Peru. Volume II is a selection of in-depth interviews with thirty-two filmmakers from across the country. The publication includes 123 pages of supporting statistical data and images. The ambitious scope of this research makes it the most comprehensive publication on Peruvian regional cinema to date. The book’s greatest contribution is that it highlights the cultural contribution of hundreds of Peruvian filmmakers whose work has been systematically overlooked in the capital city. To redress this situation, the authors critically comment on the ways inefficient public policies have affected regional filmmakers and offer recommendations to improve this situation.

The book calls attention to a dynamic film movement that has been growing strong for the past twenty years in the provinces of Peru, but continues to be largely overlooked in the capital city. The authors emphasize the richness of the films’ counter-hegemonic narratives and aesthetics, pointing to their potential to decolonize Peruvian screens and magnify the voices of the filmmakers, bringing forward their experiences navigating the national film industry. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria point to the role of public institutions to call into question the adequacy of their current policies to effectively support the work of filmmakers from across the country.

I have been familiar with Bustamante and Luna-Victoria's study since I was a Communications student in Lima, where I attended many of the screenings organized by the authors to raise awareness of these little-known films. Bustamante's preliminary articles on Peruvian Andean films inspired me to focus my master's research on Andean horror films. Today, I approach *Las miradas multiples* as an independent media researcher, and as a programmer at the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival. My lived experience as a Peruvian and my interest in the decolonial potential of cinema, allow me to engage deeply with this book; however, I believe both the Peruvian and international public (especially students, filmmakers, scholars, programmers and policy makers) will find in these volumes an invitation to further explore the true diversity of Peruvian cinema and learn from its transformative potential.

The title of the book, *Las miradas multiples*, literally translates to "the multiple regards", alluding to the many perspectives and voices that are being raised through a nationwide movement that features narratives, aesthetics, cultural practices and landscapes that were previously missing from national screens. As a Peruvian, I find that the decolonial potential of these "multiple regards" becomes all the more relevant when considering that Peru's government, economy and elites are highly centralized in Lima, which draws a sharp division between Lima and the rest, and pushes other regions, especially the Andean and Amazonian, into peripheral sites of restricted agency.

This is manifest in the production and distribution of media, particularly film and television, as the only distribution channels with national reach are based in the Capital and program content that is mainly produced by and for the urban, middle class Limeñx consumer. This unidirectional distribution of images and narratives favours the construction of a hegemonic imaginary that replicates the experience and worldview of the more Westernized, urban cultures that inhabit Lima and the wealthier cities along the Coast, and often fails to include diverse, authentic content produced in other provinces of Peru by filmmakers of different backgrounds and heritage. This is especially problematic when considering that the Indigenous population in Peru represents an estimate of 26%

of the total population¹ (National Census, INEI, 2018), being the third country in Latin America with the largest Indigenous population (Cruz-Saco, 2018). Moreover, an estimate of 70% of the total Indigenous population lives in the Andean region of Peru. In this sense, the greatest contribution of Bustamante and Luna-Victoria's research is that it brings to light the efforts of many racialized filmmakers who are overcoming the barriers imposed by a centralized, neocolonial system, to tell stories that speak of their own culture and lived experience.

Bustamante and Luna-Victoria define "Peruvian regional cinema" as any film that is produced by local filmmakers and publicly screened in the regions outside of Metropolitan Lima and the Constitutional Province of Callao. For this study, the authors interviewed a total of eighty-five filmmakers from across the country and analysed over 200 films produced in sixteen regions of Peru, including short, medium and feature-length films. Additionally, the authors refer to an extensive interdisciplinary bibliography, which includes academic theses and publications, articles, reviews, reports and statistics from the fields of Anthropology, Film Studies, Peruvian Film Studies, Public Policy and Peruvian History, among others. The ambitious scope of this research makes *Las miradas multiples* the most comprehensive and detailed academic publication on the subject to date.

In volume I, the authors present their findings in a remarkably synthesized manner that is both straightforward, yet detailed. They situate regional cinema within the larger system that is the Peruvian film industry, and offer a comprehensive picture that allows the reader to gain a solid understanding of the movement as a whole. In volume II, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria offer a selection of thirty-two interviews with representative filmmakers, featuring important discussions

¹ The Census also shows that 60% of the population identifies as Mestizo, or mixed race, 5.9% identifies as White, 3.6% as Afro-descendants, 0.1% as Japanese-Peruvians, 0.1% as Chinese-Peruvians and 4% as Other or Unsure. While it is beyond the scope of this review to unpack the ethnocultural nuances and politics in Peruvian demographics, I thought this additional data could allow non-Peruvian readers to have an idea of how diverse the Peruvian population is. For a more comprehensive analysis of the Peruvian Mestizo, please refer to Marisol de la Cadena's book, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991* (Duke University Press, 2000).

on their artistic motivations, production methods, sources of funding and distribution strategies. One of the strengths of the book as a whole is the way the interviews, featured in volume II, expand on the key issues discussed in volume I, revealing the nuances of the complex venture that is film production and distribution outside of Lima.

Volume I is divided into three parts: 1) *A New Peruvian Cinema*; 2) *Cinema in the Regions*; and 3) *Film Listings, Synopsis and Comments*. In chapter one, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria introduce the reader to the Movement. The authors' analyze the historical context that enabled a continuous production of films in the regions and highlight the main differences in the modes of regional cinemas, pointing to the cultural heritage of the filmmakers, their socioeconomic backgrounds, the genres of films they produce and their production and distribution methods. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria also comment on the critical role the Ministry of Culture, local governments and public institutions play in supporting national film production and distribution, as well as the role of commercial exhibitors, festivals and film critics, in determining the reach these films may have outside of their local audiences. In chapter two, the authors dive into the particular history and contexts of film production in each of the sixteen regions studied, demonstrating that there is not a homogenous "Peruvian regional cinema", rather there are as many cinemas as there are regions in Peru. The third chapter offers a rich analysis of the 100 most representative films produced in the regions since 1996, including the technical information, synopsis and a review of each film.

Chapter one, *A New Peruvian Cinema*, lays the ground to better understand the decolonizing potential of regional cinema, as well as the very complex relations between regional filmmakers and their perspectives with regard to the future, including the level of involvement they expect from private and public institutions, including the Ministry of Culture. For this reason, I will comment on some of the most relevant considerations Bustamante and Luna-Victoria discuss in this first chapter.

Bustamante and Luna-Victoria date the beginning of regional cinema as 1996 with the commercial release of *Lagrimas*

de Fuego (Tears of Fire), a feature-length drama produced in Ayacucho by local filmmakers. It is important to note that this was not the first time in the history of Peruvian cinema that a film was produced and exhibited outside of Lima; however, *Lagrimas de Fuego* marks the beginning of a continuous, self-sustained production in the regions of Peru. Between 1996 and 2015, the authors have found 145 feature-length films produced in the regions, plus an estimate of 100 films of under-45 minutes duration, and note that the regions with the most production would be Ayacucho, Puno, Junin and Cajamarca, all located in the Andean region (Vol. I, p. 21).

The authors believe this sustained production in the regions is the result of two main factors. The first would be an economic/technological factor, namely the fact that consumer video cameras became more accessible in the mid-nineties, enabling a global surge in independent film production, as seen in Ecuador's *cine bajo tierra* (underground cinema), Nigeria and Ghana. As the authors explain, these consumer video cameras were first used in the Peruvian provinces to document social events and rituals (weddings, religious celebrations and carnivals), and later to produce fiction films. With regard to the aesthetic appreciation of these films, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria concur with anthropologist Raul Castro, who theorizes that the low definition aesthetics of the first feature films would have actually helped the audience assimilate these films, since this was a way of documentation and representation they were already familiar with (Vol. I, p. 29).

The second factor that would have allowed regional cinema to become popular is the medium's adaptability to traditionally oral cultures. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria argue that the Andean and Amazonian cultures may have found in audiovisual language an ideal vehicle of expression, more accessible than written language ever was. To support this, the authors reference the works of Jose Maria Arguedas (1953) and Pablo Landeo Munoz (2014) who suggest that traditional Andean storytelling relies on the live performance of the storyteller, who acts out different characters and situations through their bodies and inflexions in their voices. As an example, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria point to the *willakuy* (oral tales), where the storyteller summons animals and fantastical creatures, like

jarjachas, *umas* and *condenados*². Furthermore, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria call attention to the fact that Amazonian and Andean cultures have a rich visual arts tradition, as seen in their textiles, pottery, *tablas de Sarhua*³, and *retablos*⁴, many of which often incorporate narrative content. In this sense, the authors suggest that cinema's audiovisual language would not only be compatible with Andean and Amazonian traditional ways of storytelling, but cinema's capacity to record and reproduce content would allow traditionally oral cultures to actively participate in the narrative exchanges of the current digital age.

Drawing from their film analysis and the interviews, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria find that there are two main modes of regional cinema, and two distinct profiles of regional filmmakers. The first mode is generally produced by filmmakers of Indigenous heritage living in the urban centres of the Andean region, mainly in Ayacucho, Puno, Junin and Cajamarca (Vol. I, p. 31). The authors find that many of these filmmakers are self-taught and usually hold post-secondary degrees in other professions. These filmmakers focus their efforts on the production of feature-length genre films, mostly horror, fantasy and melodrama, as these are popular with their local audiences and make good box office revenue. The horror and fantasy films are usually adaptations of local legends and *willakuy*, and feature characters like the aforementioned *jarjachas*, *umas*, and *condenados* (Vol. I, p. 59). In the case of the melodramas, the stories often speak of the hardships experienced by people in their provinces, mainly extreme poverty, alcoholism, post-war trauma and violence (Vol. I, p. 65). According to the authors, the better part of these feature films are produced with microbudgets (under \$10,000 USD) and the filmmakers

² *Jarjachas*, *umas* and *condenados* are Andean mythical creatures. *Jarjachas* are incestuous couples condemned to turn into half-man-half-llama demons. *Umas* are witches whose heads detach from their bodies at night to fly over the villages. *Condenados* are restless souls condemned to stay on Earth.

³ A traditional artform from Sarhua, Ayacucho. Sarhua tablets depict religious, historical, or everyday events.

⁴ *Retablos* are a traditional artform from Ayacucho. These sophisticated art pieces in the form of portable boxes depict religious, historical, or everyday events.

oftentimes source the funds from their own savings and family loans, and depend on a volunteer cast and crew (Vol. I, p. 35)⁵. Because of this financial commitment, the films are conceived as an entrepreneurial project, and the filmmakers need to be very business-savvy and strategic to minimize loss. Therefore, the films are commercially released in their cities, often to great success, and then they tour the films extensively throughout their regions, screening them in theatres, schools, town halls, and public squares in the hope of recovering the investment and raising funds for future projects.

The second mode of regional cinema consists of documentaries, experimental and auteur films, the better part of which are shorts (Vol. I, p. 32). Bustamante and Luna-Victoria find that this mode of cinema is generally produced by filmmakers who come from middle-class urban families, often from the traditionally wealthier provinces of Peru, like Arequipa, Cusco, Trujillo and Chiclayo. Most of these filmmakers have studied media-related programs at post-secondary institutions in their hometowns, in Lima or abroad. The authors note that the short films are usually funded by the directors' savings, and the feature films are sometimes funded through sponsorships from private and public institutions, or by funding prizes awarded by the Ministry of Culture. The filmmakers do not always depend on a return on their investment, so the films are primarily intended for the national and international festival circuit, and after they've toured the festivals, the award-winning features may have commercial release in movie theatres (Vol. I, p. 53).

While Bustamante and Luna-Victoria underscore that regional films are very popular with their local audiences, they also highlight the fact that "Peruvian cinema" is still commonly understood as "films produced in Lima", pointing to the limited distribution regional films have on a national scale, specially

⁵ The exception would be the few projects that are awarded with funding prizes from the Ministry of Culture. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria have noted that between 2006 and 2015 only sixteen feature-length projects were awarded funding prizes by the Ministry of Culture. In those cases, the filmmakers would have budgets between S/.100,000 and S/.260,000 Peruvian Soles (equivalent to \$30,000 and \$80,000 USD). Winning the prize, however, comes with a set of technical requirements and deadlines that can be challenging for the directors to meet.

when compared to Limeño films, which are part of mainstream media. Drawing from their interviews with the filmmakers, the authors suggest this would be due to a lack of support from private and public institutions, as well as some discriminatory practices by key players based in Lima, such as programmers, film critics and policy makers. Bustamante has also noted that there continues to be a prejudice against regional cinema, particularly against the genre features produced in the Andes, often considered deficient or “folkloric” by the film institutions located in Lima, which would demonstrate the extent to which Peruvian screens continue to be colonized.

The authors show that both modes of regional cinema struggle to access formal distribution and exhibition channels that would otherwise allow them to reach audiences beyond their regions, such as movie theatre chains (multiplexes), national television, and film festivals (Vol. I, pp. 52, 97). I found myself particularly concerned when learning how difficult it is for regional films to get released in multiplexes⁶, especially when considering that these theatres are the best articulated distribution system in the country, with the widest reach at a national level. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria suggest this is due to the combination of a lack of interest on the part of the programmers and a lack of legislated policies designed to protect the local film market. The authors point to the case of Cineplanet (Peru’s largest movie theatre chain), and highlight the negative impact Cineplanet had on the local film industry when it opened multiplex theatres in Juliaca and Puno (Vol. I, p. 49). Bustamante and Luna-Victoria argue that, in the absence of screen quotas, or similar legislated policies, commercial movie theatres have no real incentive to screen local productions; therefore, instead of programming regional feature films, they favour international blockbusters and Limeño films, which they consider to be more profitable. Unable to access or compete against the multiplexes, local filmmakers in Puno and Juliaca have slowed their production. Thus, regional films not only have a weaker presence at a national level than international and Limeño films, but they are also more vulnerable to being marginalized in their own regions.

⁶ Bustamante and Luna-Victoria have counted only twelve regional feature films screened in movie theatre chains between 1996 and 2015.

As mentioned earlier, the authors take a critical stand regarding the adequacy of current public policies and the role of public institutions to effectively support regional filmmakers in the production and distribution of their work. In each interview, Bustamante and Luna-Victoria ask the filmmakers about their experience approaching their local governments for funding or in-kind support, whether they have applied to the funding grants awarded by the Ministry of Culture, if they feel the current policies meant to support film production are effective or not, and what would be the areas for improvement. Not surprisingly, many of the filmmakers regret that their local governments have shown little to no support regarding their requests for in-kind assistance for shooting or exhibiting their films. The filmmakers explain that many local authorities consider cinema solely a business venture and not an artistic/cultural practice, and refrain from investing public funds to support it.

Regarding the funding grants awarded by the Ministry of Culture, many filmmakers express mistrust in the deliberation process by authorities (some) based in Lima, and sometimes feel discriminated against. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria also point to many occasions when the funding prizes were declared null because the judges were not familiar with the specificities of regional cinema and found the proposals deficient in terms of screenwriting, visual treatment and budgeting (Vol. I, pp. 92-93).

When asked about the funding prizes awarded by the Ministry of Culture, and how to make its support more effective, filmmakers expressed different opinions. Most filmmakers believe the Ministry of Culture should invest in increasing the number of filmmaking and grant writing workshops held in the different regions so that filmmakers can improve their technical skills and better their chances of winning funding grants for their projects (Vol. I, p. 95). A second group of filmmakers believe there is no need for the Ministry to invest in filmmaking workshops because this should be a matter of self-improvement, pointing to the vast resources currently available online (YouTube, online courses, etc). Instead they call for an increase in the amount assigned for the post-production awards, so they can cover the production of DCP copies needed for distribution. A third group of filmmakers argues that the current structure of the funding

awards fails to consider the particular characteristics and circumstances of regional filmmaking and aims to assimilate regional cinema's modes of production and distribution to those employed by Limeño films (Vol. I, pp. 96-97). All filmmakers, however, agree that the government should implement more efficient policies that guarantee the access of regional films to a reliable distribution and exhibition system that allows them to reach larger audiences and benefit economically from the screenings (Vol. I, p. 97).

It is not surprising that filmmakers would feel the current government policies are insufficient to protect and promote film production at a national level. Other Latin American countries, with a similarly diverse demographic, like Bolivia and Ecuador, have been successful at implementing public policies aimed at protecting their national film industries and empowering indigenous communities to exercise their cultural citizenship through the production and circulation of audiovisual media. In the case of Bolivia, these policies include the creation of an autonomous agency dedicated to the promotion, financing and distribution of Bolivian cinema (with an emphasis on Indigenous cinema); screen quotas for national productions; and taxing exhibitors and distributors on the sales of foreign films (Cinema Law of Bolivia, No. 1134, Articles 9, 13, 17).

Bustamante and Luna-Victoria affirm that the Ministry of Culture has no specific strategy set in place to support the distribution and exhibition of regional films (Vol. I, p. 97), and propose some short-term and medium-term measures that can be put forward by the government, including: 1) to partially subsidize the rental cost of public venues for the screening of regional films; 2) to actively support the screening of regional films in commercial theatres through legislated policies aimed to protect the national film market; 3) to increase the financial support provided through post-production prizes so that filmmakers can afford DCP copies to submit to film festivals and movie theater chains; and 4) to invest in adequate marketing campaigns when regional films are programmed on national public television and pay filmmakers the corresponding screening fees (Vol. I, p. 97).

As a whole, *Las miradas multiples* paints a comprehensive picture of the history and current state of Peruvian regional

cinema. Bustamante and Luna-Victoria do a great job of showcasing the diversity of the narratives and aesthetics of the films, inviting reflections on the potential of Andean and Amazonian cinema to decolonize the screens by contesting narratives that distort indigenous or non-Western realities. At the same time, the authors call attention to the complex relationship regional filmmakers have with their local governments, the central government based in Lima, and with the different institutions in the larger system that is the national film industry. The authors denounce the inadequacy of current policies to effectively support filmmakers living and working outside of Lima and encourage the readers to consider media production and distribution as a cultural right, protected by the State and guaranteed through effective public policies. As a Peruvian and a media researcher, I believe that implementing some of the recommendations brought forward by the authors and the filmmakers can allow underrepresented and racialized groups to actively and safely participate in the construction of our national identity, enriching our collective imaginary of what it is to be Peruvian.

Maria Cecilia Saba

References

- Arguedas, J.M. (1953). *Cuentos Mágico-Realistas y Canciones De Fiestas Tradicionales; Folklore Del Valle Del Mantaro, Provincias De Jauja y Concepción*. Lima: Editora Médica Peruana.
- Landeo Muñoz, P. (2014). *Categorías andinas para una aproximación al willakuy. Umallanchikpi kaqkuna*. Lima: Asamblea Nacional de Rectores.
- Cruz-Saco, Amparo (2018). *Indigenous communities and social inclusion in Latin America - Prepared for the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Families and Inclusive Societies, New York Headquarters, May 15-16, 2018*. New York: United Nations
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (2018). *Resultados definitivos de los Censos Nacionales 2017: XII de Población, VII de Vivienda y III de Comunidades Indígenas*. Lima: INEI

Greg Burris. *The Palestinian idea: Film, media, and the radical imagination*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, ISBN: 978-1439916742, 2019, 298 pages.

This book explores the intersection of resistance, coloniality, and imagination in Palestine. Examining cinema as a site that articulates the cracks, fissures, and crevices of settler colonialism and its claim to universality, Burris' rich cinematic analysis investigates dominant and marginalized frames of reference. The purpose of the book is to explore alternative possibilities and readings of the Palestinian present that do not presume that the Zionist project has been completed, and how a decolonial Palestine already exists in the here and now, expressing a utopic dimension. In particular, Burris analyzes Palestinian imagination as portrayed in film based on an equity consciousness rather than as a response to oppression.

If we understand pedagogy as relational encounters that seek to alter a person's subjectivity (Gaztambide-Fernández & Arráiz Matute, 2013), then such an analysis unpacking cinema's desire to shape its audience's thinking helps us comprehend film and media as sites of (un)learning Palestine as a present, enacted reality. Work that highlights decolonial utopias in the present and resistance as emic consciousness rather than etic response to oppression is fresh on the Palestinian cinematic scholarship scene, and Burris analyses wide-ranging productions in his study. Thus, the book is innovative and timely in highlighting dominant discourses of oppression and resistance in Palestinian cinema, bringing to the fore new analytic frames and pedagogical imperatives from which to think about an under-examined point of departure: a present decolonial Palestine.

Burris begins by describing Ariel Sharon's flooding of Palestinian towns with powerful lights and his declared intention to invade the Palestinian imagination to realize Zionism's structures of power, a vivid opening context of how intimately Zionism attempts to control Palestinian life. The backbone of Burris' theoretical argument draws on both Jacques Ranciere's notion of equality as a precondition for inequality and inequality's need for violence because equality is the natural condition

of humans, as well as Cedric Robinson's theorizing on Black resistance as emerging not from white enslavement but from a Black consciousness of what it was like to be free. According to Burris's theoretical argument, Palestinian resistance is not a response to Zionism since it emerges from its own Palestinian consciousness of freedom, and an understanding of equality and the incredible violence necessary to sustain the inequality that makes the inequality untenable. Thus, Burris argues, we need to understand the long and remarkable history of Palestinian resistance not as fueled by Zionist repression.

Instead, it is a Palestinian consciousness of equality and freedom that fuels their resistance, an a priori consciousness responding to an oppressive context and the incredible Zionist force needed to sustain it. He demonstrates how such a difference in understanding resistance is not a hair-splitting triviality, but one that gives away power in understanding and representing Palestine in Zionist terms, disregarding the important daily ways in which people enact Palestine as a utopia and foreclosing a Palestinian future. To clarify, Burris describes a Palestinian utopia as something that does not require a complete annihilation of all that goes before, but a resetting of relationships brought about by a parallax shift. It is this seeing of similar relationships in different ways, these parallax shifts expressed in cinematic imagination, that is at the heart of the book's comparative study of discourses of Palestinian cinema.

Each of the films covered in the book is a creation of Palestinian directors, funded by producers of varying backgrounds. Detailed descriptions of the plots of these films give the reader a good idea of the similarities and differences in the films' conceptual underpinnings that give flesh to very different ideas of Palestinian presents and futures. Such a detailed theoretical approach towards cinema may seem frivolous in light of the daily struggle to survive in Palestine, and Burris confronts this head-on with a question that anyone thinking about Palestinian cinema cannot avoid: "Can the idea of a Palestinian cinema even be said to exist?" (p. 33). In response to this, Burris provides a much needed and nuanced cultural history of Palestinian cinema that illustrates how whom asks this question and who answers it can render almost identical questions and their answers with

diametrically opposed meanings. Burris does so by bringing statements that deny the existence of Palestinian cinema (as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Oscars, did in 2002) and Palestinian existence as a people (such as Golda Meir's infamous statement) together with statements by Palestinian filmmakers that no Palestinian cinema industry exists. While both of these camps appear to be similar denials, the Academy and Meir deny the Palestinian people a collective identity and the Palestinian filmmakers are denying a film-making industry.

Bringing these denials together and situating them from opposite ends of the Palestinian struggle—one that seeks to annihilate it, and one that emerges from it—highlights just how differing onto-epistemologies can render opposite meanings to statements that sound identical at face value. Here, Burris draws on anti-essentialist frameworks by Sigmund Freud, Judith Butler, and Edward Said, to debunk the essentialist basis of both Jews and Palestinians and destabilize identity for both groups. Burris brings together Meir's words denying Palestinian people's existence and Freud's thinking destabilizing Jewish identity:

Meir's words to a delegitimation of Palestinian claims—there is no ontological foundation to Palestinian identity, and therefore, for the Palestinian, *nothing is possible*. Freud's example, on the other hand, suggests something very different—there is no ontological foundation to Palestinian identity, and therefore, for the Palestinian, *nothing is impossible*. If the Zionist negation of Palestinian being aims to shut down possibilities, the affirmation of Palestinian nonexistence opens them up. If the first serves to denigrate indigenous cultures, customs, religions and languages of Palestine, the second seeks not to erase them from the history books but to dispute their ontological fixity. For the former, then, the Palestinian identity has no beginning, but for the latter, *it has no end* [italics in original] (p.47).

Thus, Jews and Palestinians for Burris are not different based on some irreconcilable essence, but instead on hierarchal power relations and attempts by one group to subjugate the other.

His cultural history gives these dense and rather abstract arguments flesh and illustrates the difficult material conditions of Palestinian cinema as an industry—with filmmakers, producers, audiences and importantly, funding. This Palestinian cinema industry that is struggling to exist does not negate that Palestinianness, as an openly creative identity, is robust. Such a comparative examination of statements of identity negation are important for several reasons. Firstly, because as Burris points out, arguments around identity often occur past each other in different registers, shown in how both the Academy Awards association and Palestinian filmmakers at face value seem to agree that there is no Palestinian cinema.

Such an analysis demonstrates how anti-identity and anti-identitarian arguments are frequently conflated to the Palestinian struggle's detriment, for example, as seen in the film *Leila Khaled: Hijacker* (2006). Second, his anti-identitarian argument is important because while it is relatively easy to see how an oppressed identity is not necessarily synonymous with a liberatory political identity, scholarship on revolutionary identity often misses that identity is not static. His work here is clear in describing, discerning and explaining how no fixed Palestinian essence is a way to free it from fossilized understandings of an irretrievable past and their accompanying debates that often end up being mired in anti-identity politics. Burris' work here convinces me of the need to have more research that repeatedly articulates an anti-essentialist approach.

Burris proceeds to build on anti-essentialist ideas of Palestine by demonstrating how the idea of Palestine can be understood as plastic through cinema. By plastic, Burris is drawing on Catherine Malabou's definition of plasticity as that which can receive and give form, but also explode form. In other words, plasticity helps us to understand that processes of subject formation can be shaped by power, such as Palestinian identity responding to the Nakba; processes of subject formation can create their own form, such as the Intifada shaping Palestinian identity; but also, processes of subject formation can reject all oppressive forms, an "explosive politics of disidentity" (p.58). In unpacking subject formation in Palestinian films through these three modes of plasticity, Burris unearths how expressions of Palestinian imagination rest on concepts that reiterate, reform or blast apart internalized Zionism. For Burris, the decolonial

potential of cinema comes from shining a light on the minutiae of everyday decolonial acts that reject both oppression and resistance to oppression on terms set by the colonizer, and instead, subjects create their terms of engaging with the world. This creating of subjects' own terms in engaging with the world is Palestine as a utopia already present, rather than a foreclosed erasure by Zionism. I was struck by Burris' capacity to unpack these very different conceptual underpinnings in each film, and his approach brings to the fore the decolonial potential of film.

Subsequent chapters broadly tackle the topic of time from the alternative perspective that a utopic Palestinian future is present in the here and now. Burris brings up a question Palestinian filmmakers must contend with, "Is this the time to be talking about Palestinian cinema" (p.83) given the occupation and its brutal realities? Burris bases his refutation of this argument on responses by Mais Darwazah, a filmmaker whom Burris credits with cinema that engages a Palestinian imagination in anti-identitarian ways. Darwazah's response to this very question at one of her film's Q & A sessions described how it is at times like these that Palestinian cinema becomes essential. Burris demonstrates how the audience member and the director conceive of time in different terms: the audience member conceives of time as Newtonian linear, while Darwazah conceives of it as "subjective, something we continuously construct and experience" (p.84). Burris explains these two conceptions of time, the colonial and the decolonial, by first unpacking three ways in which time is colonized.

First, Israel objectifies the Palestinians into fossilized objects; second, it literally steals time from Palestinians through endless checkpoints and barriers; and finally, Israel colonizes Palestinian time through the trauma and psychic impact of the Nakba, which he calls Nakba time, a time that is still ongoing, linear and Zionist. Burris then juxtaposes these understandings of time in documentaries with the decolonial treatment of time in Darwazah's film *My Love Awaits Me by the Sea*. Notable is his unearthing of ways in which imagination in documentaries draws upon colonial, Zionist concepts of time, in what Burris describes as internalized Zionism.

In contrast to this, he highlights how a film like *My Love* uses the sea as a metaphor for freedom and extends it to water

in general, illuminating how freedom exists all around in bodies of water people engage with every day. Such an analysis reveals ways of focusing on Palestinian Time, time not swallowed up by the settler colonial constructs of time, “another time hidden within the recesses of the hegemonic order” (p.99). Such a Palestinian idea, born of a decolonial Palestinian imagination, explodes and rejects options offered by colonialism and opens up new possibilities for subject formation by conceiving of time differently.

As a decolonial, diasporic and transnational researcher, I was greatly interested in the final chapter of the book that brings together Palestinian and Black resistance and solidarity and their histories, connections, and disjunctions. Particularly in this chapter, Burris’ history of Black-Zionist and Black-Palestinian support, as well as Palestinian appeals to Whiteness and Palestinian connections with Black Power, help explicate his earlier argument for an anti-identitarian politics. He prefaces racial debates circulating both in the Palestinian and Black communities with a critical analysis of the claims and assumptions guiding these debates. For example, before arguing that Black-Palestinian solidarity draws on the universality of Black struggle, Burris informs the readers of the dominant debates taking place with regards to Black solidarity, debates that are critical of the way that non-Black struggles appropriate Black consciousness and power for their own struggles. This chapter neither embezzles nor abandons Black scholarship, but instead, Burris thoroughly brings debates on appropriation to the fore, engaging them in conversation with each other and always with a focus on Black liberation. He draws on films once again to highlight how whiteness and Blackness are not essentialized identities but are political conditions, using George Lipsitz and Ghassan Hage’s work on whiteness, and Black liberation theologian James Cone’s articulation on Blackness. In underscoring whiteness and Blackness as political conditions, Burris illustrates that Israeli claims to whiteness and Palestinian claims to Blackness build not on essentialized understandings of Black and white, but rather whiteness as a subject position that appeals to and is invested in whiteness, and Blackness as a subject position that seeks to disrupt structures of domination.

Burris is especially careful to resist an oversimplification of debates on Black solidarity and appropriation, and draws

out how Afropessimism's claim to particularity does not occlude Blackness's engagement with other struggles, and he draws on Black revolutionaries like Malcolm X and Assata Shakur to specify how solidarity is to be understood. Rather than an equivocation of struggles, Burris reiterates their arguments that "Solidarity means transcending the plane of identities and engaging in the disruptive politics of equality" (p.149).

Throughout the book, I wondered about Burris' positionality, his reflexivity, and what brought him to this work, important discussions that are starkly absent. I was reminded of Denise Ferreira da Silva's discussion of the affectable Other and how the ethnographer researcher is able to affect but remains unaffected (da Silva, 2007). In the book, the Palestinian idea and its subjects are rendered affectable, while Burris remains opaque, his positionality absent. The absence of Burris' positionality and by extension, his relationship to this work, was not just an absence of an important part of research, but the impact of its lack extended (as positionality always does¹) into Burris' theorizing. For example, there were several phrases and instances that made me wince: "Existence is most decidedly *not* resistance" (p.52) and elsewhere, a description of how freedom fighters have internalized Zionist hierarchies.

To be sure, Burris is making the point that identity does not necessarily correspond to a political position, and qualifies such statements thoroughly. However, while I would not entirely disagree with them, they left a sour aftertaste and came across as overly academic, from a lived reality that appears to be a white male. These statements seemed to undermine not only the people whose daily reality of existence is in fact resistance and those who take up armed struggle, but his drawing on support of these statements from theorists such as feminist post-colonial scholar Chandra Mohanty seemed incongruous.

Another instance when positionality's absence is a problem is when Burris characterized some Palestinian refugees' frustration at films that do not center their suffering

¹ Linda Tuhawi Smith (2013) argues that to decolonize research, researchers must first decolonize the research relationship between them and the communities they research, see Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New York: Zed Books Ltd..

as an “obsession with oppression” (p.92), a primary frame of documentaries. Such characterizations rest on myriad Western academic privileges and there are times when scholars need to consider their citizenship, academic, class, race, gender and likely numerous other privileges before making such statements while complicit and with “their hands in cool water” as the Arabic saying goes. Note I am not arguing that these statements that I find problematic are not true or cannot be debated, but I do require that they be situated in an understanding of relationships, primarily, what is the researcher’s relationship to the research?

This question also leads to the next issue I had with the book, a wider problematic of Global North, Western white academics theorizing Global South, non-Western Others, even if their arguments are well-founded and true. As a feminist and critical race qualitative researcher who uses Turtle Island critical Indigenous and land-based onto-epistemologies in my work, I was disappointed by Burris’ lack of deep engagement with Palestinian theorists beyond Said² and his over-engagement with European thinkers. It is true that there is no limit with whom scholars can engage with to more deeply understand structures of domination in Palestine (and Burris is rightly careful to ensure that both Robinson and Ranciere have demonstrated pro-Palestinian stances). However, there is a noticeable lack of Palestinian scholarship with which Burris robustly engages his work, outside of the endnotes. The book overly relies on mainly European philosophers as the primary interlocutors through which we understand social, cultural, political, and historical processes of subject formation, but we must also recognize that this Euro-centric theorizing is not divorced from Euro-conceptions of truth, reality, modernity,

² Furthermore, Edward Said’s work has been developed and extended by several excellent theorists, for example, Abu El-Haj, N. (2005). Edward Said and the political present. *American Ethnologist*, 32(4), 538-555, and Yegenoglu, M. (1998). *Colonial fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

coloniality and how they construct the Human³. Knowledge production is not devoid of the dynamics of coloniality and modernity and relying heavily on theorists from the colonial center (largely French, no less) to think through problems affecting the periphery colonized Arabs is prosaic to the point of being an academic trope.

Burris' over-reliance on Western theorizing crowded out Palestinian and Global South ways of understanding resistance, more nuanced frameworks that allow for spaces of ambiguity⁴. Such understandings do not presume an invincible structure of domination, as well as engage non-European and non-white onto-epistemological worldviews. Engaging with Palestinian onto-epistemologies is not as difficult as it might seem. Literary works by Mourid Barghouti, Ghassan Kanafani, Radwa Ashour, and Taha Mohammed Ali have all been translated into English and all articulate what Burris admiringly describes as the "power of the everyday" in the Black Radical tradition. Burris tantalizingly gestures towards Palestinian theorists and concepts like Rosemary Sayigh's "village consciousness", illustrating that there are indeed onto-epistemologies of Palestine that are not wholly nihilistic, straight-laced militant, nor an eternal waiting for Godot, as Burris implies, but such references do not get more than a passing mention.

In this sense, the setup for Burris' argument that Palestine has not been imagined outside of complete oppression is a bit of a straw man. If we are to decenter colonial Zionism in a colonized Palestinian imagination as Burris argues, then maybe less attention to white colonial thought – which is constantly being revised as it fails to account for many things – would be in

3 The foundational work for understanding the link between modernity, coloniality and the Human is that of Sylvia Wynter, see Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The new centennial review*, 3(3), 257-337.

4 New and exciting scholarship unpacks resistance, persistence, and ambiguity in Middle Eastern societies on their own terms. For example, Siavesh Rokhni, for example, eschews a Marxian resistance/oppression binary and prefers to unpack ambiguity and persistence in how Iranian cultural producers negotiate structures of domination through persistence, Rokni, S. (2018). *Ambiguities in the Music industry in Iran*, Unpublished manuscript.

order. A focus on the ‘power of the everyday’, so different from grand and abstracted French philosophizing, would help shift a knowledge production dynamic from one where Palestinian, Black and knowledge from colonized populations is marginalized and subsumed to European thinkers.

I found that discussions of Gramscian ideas of hegemony, Foucauldian expositions of power and Ranciere’s thoughts on equality in inequality (discussions that take up much of chapter 5), and how they do not adequately explain what we see in Palestine, take up too much space, time and energy from the reader to no serious effect. In other words, so what? The focus on these theorists by Burris’ parallels his own argument: that the Palestinian radical imagination purposely ignores and circumvents the seeming hegemony of colonization. Surely academics can do no less. If theorizing Palestine is to avoid becoming academic fodder and be genuinely useful, a potentially more worthwhile starting point would be scholarship not so far removed from Palestinian worldviews, rather than Eurocentric scholarship that, as Burris illustrates, often falls short in some regard.

Notwithstanding, Burris’ book initiates a robust dialogue on radical imagination and the decolonial role of cinema in support of struggles of liberation in a field that has often been characterized by appeals to whiteness and war images. Particularly in chapter 6 on Palestinian and Black resistance, the book provides a model of inquiry that challenges colonial relations, foregrounding difficult questions of solidarity, appropriation, and political action. In doing so, Burris provides a comprehensive exploration of the pedagogical role that film and media can play in disrupting the political imagination that Israel and Sharon try to hegemonize. By unearthing processes of subject formation across a large corpus of Palestinian films, Burris’ is well positioned to deliver a compelling series of nuanced qualifications through which the Palestinian imagination expresses itself in cinematic encounters.

His findings critically highlight the conceptual challenges and pitfalls of dominant discourses sustained by film as important sites of (un)learning as he unpacks discourses even those who are engaged in the struggle for Palestine can sometimes get mired in. Further research might attempt to

flesh out and engage Sayigh's village consciousness and other emic onto-epistemologies, and examine the role that class plays in the radical imagination. This book is relevant to the scholarly and activist inquiries of undergraduate and graduate students and scholars engaged across the disciplines of media, visual anthropology, cinema studies, public pedagogy, cultural studies, Arab studies, and American studies. The findings are of interest to filmmakers, but also to educators, activists, and media influencers.

Lucy El-Sherif

References

- Gaztambide-Fernández, R. A., and Matute, A. A. (2013). Pushing against. In J. Burdick, J.A. Sandlin, and M.P. O'Malley (Eds.). *Problematizing public pedagogy* (pp. 52-64.) New York: Routledge.
- Silva, D. F. (2007). *Toward a global idea of race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books

Nadia Yaqub. *Palestinian cinema in the days of revolution*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, ISBN 978-1-4773-1596-5, 2018, 266 pages.

Nadia Yaqub's book provides rich insights into the emergence and development of Palestinian cinema. It highlights the role played by Palestinian films in supporting the Palestinian struggle for statehood. Yaqub, an expert in Arabic language and culture, and chair of the Department of Asian Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, provides a detailed account of films produced during the 1960s and 1970s, placing them in their historical context. She thus provides readers with background information on Palestinian politics, history, and culture at a pivotal juncture of the Palestinian struggle for emancipation and freedom.

Palestinian films have not remained disconnected for the larger debates on the role of cinema in promoting decolonization and national liberation in global South societies. Flooded with Western film, global South societies have "experienced a process of deculturation whereby their indigenous cultures were destroyed" (p. 123). For a third world cinema movement cinema became a means to express a particular national culture and political ideology. Similarly, film festivals became sites that contested imperial and neocolonial policies (p. 135). They allowed filmmakers from global South societies to connect with each other, share resources and expertise, collaborate on projects, and build circuits through which their films would be circulated and screened. The book's six chapters offer a methodical introduction into the journey of Palestinian filmmaking as part of this process.

Chapter One provides an account of Palestinian representation during the post-Nakba period between 1948 and 1968, both in photographic and filmic works, as well as in literature and plastic art works. Yaqub explains that this body of work was the main source that filmmakers working on Palestine and Palestinians used extensively. She notes that during this initial period "Palestinians had little control over the films and photographs in which they appeared or over the ideological frames in which their images were disseminated, even as they worked through their experiences with the 1948 war and its

aftermath in their own literature and artworks” (p. 6). During this period, films and photographs about Palestinians were produced mainly by foreign journalists, and later by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA) to appeal for donations and charitable contributions. As a result, Palestinians were represented in footages as living in tent camps, crowded around aid trucks, learning in open air-schools, being taken care of in orphanages, while children are clothed in rags, and suffering from inadequate medical resources (p.21). However, Palestinian writers and artists of the post Nakba period were trying to understand what happened to the residents of Palestine and what this dispossession meant psychologically, socially, and politically. Over time, they developed a specific Palestinian perspective that eventually became the basis for a national movement in art and literature. Yaqub discusses in detail some of the works of emerging artists and writers during the 1950s, such as the works of Samirah ‘Azzam and Ghassan Kanafani, which served as source materials for Palestinian films later on (pp. 28-29).

While the representation of Palestinians during the period 1948-1968 emerged over the backdrop of a humanitarian gaze, a shift in focus took place in Palestinian films produced in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. A movement for the “Palestinian-ization” of UNRWA produced films and photographs emerged (pp. 22-25), such as in the film *Aftermath* (1967), directed by Samir Hissen. In this film, Palestinians get a voice through interviews conducted with refugees. They share their experiences and perspectives in their spoken language, Arabic. In the following chapters Yaqub elaborates on the development of filmmaking about Palestine and the Palestinians within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), within the wider context of an emerging alternative Arab cinema movement that extended from Third Cinema to Third World Cinema, and beyond (p. 7).

In Chapter Two, Yaqub focuses more specifically on the emergence of PLO-sponsored cinema as a revolutionary project. She reviews the creation of specialized production platforms, starting with the 1968 creation of the Palestinian Film Unit (PFU), later renamed the Palestinian Cinema Institute (PCI), in Amman (Jordan), and the subsequent formation of the Palestinian Cinema Group (PCG) in 1972. Yaqub notes that

PFU films produced during the late 1960s and early 1970s consolidated a Palestinian approach to cinema concurrently with an emerging Palestinian revolutionary movement. Films sought “not just to reflect or mediate the movement, but also to play an integral transformative role, culturally and politically, within it” (pp.48-49). While these films were concerned with visibility and voice, the filmmakers supported the Palestinian revolution by creating and disseminating films grounded in local Palestinian experiences within their struggle, rather than on acts of propaganda. As Yaqub notes, filmmakers engaged “questions surrounding the relationship of truth to the circulation of photographic or filmic image, the relationships with near and distance audiences, and the representations of events and landscape, action, and states of being was always informed by that fundamental goal” (p. 51). The films of Mustafa Abu Ali, a founding member of the PFU, PCI’s first director, and a prominent filmmaker, focus on what it means to be committed to a collective struggle and the difficulty and necessity of that belonging for a filmmaker. Such questions were not addressed by non-Palestinian filmmakers who did work on Palestine and Palestinians till then (p. 52).

With the rise of alternative cinema in the early 1970s, especially in Latin America, a publicly funded alternative cinema movement emerged in the Arab world as well, with “Palestine” as a key theme. This body of work complements PLO-sponsored films. Yaqub explains that:

Palestine and the Palestinian revolution were not just a Palestinian issue to be addressed by or on behalf of Palestinians living under occupation or in exile. Rather, the revolution was widely understood as a key component of the project of decolonization in the Arab world; creating Palestinian films was one way to act on one’s ideological commitment to that project (p. 86).

Public sector cinema, which began in Syria in 1963, reached its peak in creating alternative cinema with the first International Festival for Young Filmmakers being held in Damascus in 1972 (p. 89). The Festival was considered a tool for the modernization and the strengthening of national culture by controlling the distribution of films to limit the ideological influence and

economic power of Hollywood and Egyptian commercial cinema. The festival had other goals, such as creating an educated film-viewing public through the active support of film clubs and cinematheques; educating filmmakers, either by funding their study abroad or by creating film schools at home; financing films that served national interests; and creating related national television industries (pp. 87-88). It seems to me, that filmmakers were walking along a tightrope, promoting new forms of cinema, grounded in local and regional contexts of politics, while maintaining the spirit of the Palestinian cause.

In Chapter Three, Yaqub introduces and discusses some of the short Palestinian documentaries, experimental and narrative works produced by the Syrian public sector cinema. She describes the contributions of these films to the creation of a vibrant, and socially and politically relevant cinema. In a passage worth citing, she notes:

Palestinian films produced within Syrian public sector cinema demonstrate the drive of young Arab filmmakers to create a vibrant, innovative, and socially and politically relevant cinema. Their works creatively engaged archival material (UNRWA images, news footage, and radio broadcasts). They experimented with both intimacy and ironic distance in their treatment of Palestinian themes. Connecting with recent history and contemporary recent Palestinian literature, these filmmakers collaborated extensively with young artists and musicians in their experimental works. They addressed a number of the pressing issues facing the Arab world at that time, including the role that local tradition and class consciousness should play in constructing modern Arab and Palestinian societies. In terms of film form, they made sophisticated use of elaborate sound tracks, camerawork, collage, and montage (p.116).

Yaqub analyses three documentary works in greater detail to illustrate her argument regarding the films produced by the Syrian public sector. The first is Kais al-Zubaidi's *Far from the Homeland* (1969), which was "the first nonfiction work that allies itself with the political position of the resistance movement and also the first that attempts to express a perspective from inside the camps" (p. 90). The two other works are *Testimony*

of *Palestinian Children during Wartime* (1972), and *We Are Fine* (1970), which:

are constructed of images and sound captured from the real world rather than acted for the camera. However, rhetorically, their aim is not to inform viewers. They don't trace a history of the conflict or offer statistics about the refugees and their living conditions. Rather, the films invite reflection and emotional investment in the Palestinian cause (p. 93).

The Syrian public cinema included the production of highly experimental films too. Yaqub analyzes three experimental films more particularly: *The Hand* (1971); *The Visit* (1970); and *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* (1972). She notes that the latter was "the most ambitious and complex experimental Palestinian film produced within the Syrian public sector cinema" (p. 97). *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* (1972), by the Lebanese filmmaker Christian Ghazi, is a non-narrative film structured visually and sonically by collage. It focuses on issues of "contradictions within Arab societies, the relationship of artists and intellectuals to revolution, and questions of speech and action (p. 97). As for films in the Narrative category, Yaqub analyses *The Dupes* (1972), a film based on Ghassan Kanafani's novel *Men in the Sun*, as well as *Kafr Kassem* (1974). These two films critique Arab politics, governments, and society, and "address themes of economic exploitation, political responsibility, and the failure of Arab masculine honor" (p. 106).

Syrian public sector productions on Palestine should be placed within and understood in relation to the wider geopolitics in which Syria was involved. This nexus meant that Syrian public sector filmmakers faced many uphill battles in completing and screening films that touched on Palestine and the Palestinians. Experiential films faced greater challenges in their form and narrativity because they had to appeal to wide audiences. This prevented filmmakers from producing quality political films. Furthermore, films offering an internal critique of Arab societies and political regimes were severely limited in terms of circulation. State censorship and changes in government agendas and administration exacerbated their predicament. In addition, limited funding affected the filmmakers' work and their living conditions (pp. 116-118).

In Chapter Four, Yaqub discusses the establishment of the third world cinema movement, its effects on the development of national cinemas in general, and the institutionalization and nourishment of Palestinian national cinema in particular. One of the most significant achievements was the establishment of the Palestinian film archives and the establishment of the PCI and its institutions, services, and professional journal. Furthermore, the establishment of circuits and film festivals allowed Palestinian productions to gain visibility and reach diverse audiences. It also helped filmmakers establish and consolidate solidarity networks, build professional networks with other filmmakers, and take part in collaborative projects with global South countries while exploring new techniques and genres. Palestinian films began to be programmed and regularly screened as part of international film festivals. Some filmmakers were recognized with awards for their work. Filmmakers who are not Palestinians were encouraged to deploy cinematic language that are most effective in addressing their native audiences (p. 144). Different types of Palestinian films were developed in this context and transnational collaborations were established. For instance, Kassem Hawal's award winning film, *Our Small Houses* (1974), evolved into a commentary on Israeli militarism and its effects on Palestinians and Israelis alike (pp. 144-146). Kai al-Zubaidi's *Home of Barbed Wire* (1980), a collaborative work with German cinematographers, focused on Israeli settlements and Palestinian experiences with the Israeli military occupation in the West Bank.

Ghalib Sha'th's *Land Day* (1978), a collaboration with a German film crew, narrated the events of March 30, 1976, which became known as Land Day, commemorated annually. The chapter also grants particular attention to Monica Maurer and Samir Nijm's documentary films, *Children of Palestine* (1978), *The Palestinian Red Crescent Society* (1979), and *Why?* (1982). These films record life in refugee camps in a full range of social services, and the support provided by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israeli infringements on children's rights in the occupied Palestinian territories (pp. 152-155).

Finally, a special section in this chapter discusses Kassam Hawal's feature-length fictional film *Return to Haifa* (1982) - which was adapted from Ghassan Kanafani's novel by the same name - and which inscribes itself within alternative

cinema in the Arab world (p. 158). It highlights how cinema can engage experiences of exile and dispossession. Almost all film participants, and Hawal too, donated of their time and labour to create the film. Shot in refugee camps in Lebanon, it saw the participation of camp residents, as well as those of nearby villages, actively participating in its creation. For many, this film re-enacted aspects of the 1948 Nakba and offered visual representation of Palestinians' experience of leaving their homeland (pp. 157-160).

During the siege and fall of Tall al-Za'tar refugee camp, during the Lebanese civil war in 1976, a new chapter of struggles and sacrifice in Palestinian history began. Films during the 1980s documented and commemorated these Palestinian struggles through survivors' testimonies, as no journalists or photographers were allowed into the camp during the siege. Instead, narratives of the siege first emerged in oral histories, local newspapers, published interviews with survivors, and from the telegrams sent between camp leaders and the Palestinian leadership (p.167). Images that symbolize the suffering or revolutionary spirit are now being used to commemorate known community members and offer an intimate connection to the events, activities, and places depicted in the images (p. 191).

Chapter Five examines in detail how memories of the revolution are being sustained and transmitted. The chapter focuses on the use of photographs, footage, and films created during the siege and fall of Tall al-Za'tar refugee camp. *Tall el Zaatar* (1977) and *Because Roots Will Not Die* (1977) were innovative in their cinematic focus, and more sensitive to women's perspectives within a revolutionary movement. According to Yaqub, "the importance of women's traditional work to the survival of camp residents became starkly clear" (p.169). The Tall al-Za'tar films will not necessarily improve the political or economic rights for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Notwithstanding, they do provide a bridge connecting Palestinian activists from different eras and walks of life. They are also treasured by survivors and descendants of the siege (p. 191).

Yaqub analyzes posts from two Facebook groups whose members survived Tall al-Za'tar's massacres. The posts show the vulnerability of a marginalized community subject to

repeated violence, while trying to keep the memory alive by naming individuals, events, and places. The posts also expose the physical/material vulnerability of the survivors' archives, both personal and institutional. Images posted on are not always of good quality, suggesting they were.

Nowadays, the younger generation of Palestinian filmmakers are distant from the rise of the Palestinian struggle and its revolutionary spirit. Most of them may not have been born when the PLO left Beirut in 1982. Those who lived in Israel were not exposed to works by PLO filmmakers as any PLO activity and/or engagement was prohibited in Israel. As Yaqub explains, the works of Palestinian filmmakers living within Israel have been largely divorced from wider Arab contexts and were not informed by the politics of PLO or by third world cinema. For the most part, films produced by Palestinian filmmakers in Israel are addressed to different audiences of human rights advocates as well as to audiences of independent cinema (pp. 197-198).

Finally, in Chapter Six, Yaqub discusses how emerging Palestinian filmmakers from the 1980s onward relate to the post-PLO films which began with Mohammad Malas's project *The Dream* (1987) (p. 195). Projects of the new era seek to understand and make sense of what it means to be Palestinian (p. 196). Later works focus on the afterlife of the revolution. Individual sacrifices are explored rather than collective belonging. Filmmakers question the violence associated with the Palestinian revolution of the 1960s and its effects on the people who were directly affected by that violence, such as children of martyrs and the revolution's surviving fighters, rather than holding on to the romance of revolution. In other narratives, Palestinians are being represented as the victims rather than agents. Such films question the effects of an association between violence and Palestinian visibility in their works. (pp. 202-209). A special section of this chapter is dedicated to the Palestinian archives and the attempts to rediscover and recover lost film archives (pp. 198-202). Artists, filmmakers, and others are starting to repurpose the use of older materials by manipulating, uncovering, extracting, or creating new understandings of older images (p. 202).

In this book, Yaqub introduces a body of cinematography that is rarely known outside the circles of "certain groups"

of Palestinians and their solidarity networks. The book consolidates a new body of literature on Palestinian cinema intended for English-speaking audiences. While positioning herself as an outsider, Nadia Yaqub offers original analyses of the films she discusses in her book. Yaqub is careful not to judge the films by their artistic qualities or by their political effectiveness. She shows a robust understanding of Palestinian history, revolution, and struggles through the analysis of films.

Personal reflections

Reading the book and reflecting on its contents, I could not help but think through the text under four different hats.

First, having lived in Israel, I was not familiar with the revolutionary spirit of the Palestinian struggle with the PLO. My parents and those close to me experienced the 1948 Nakba first hand. They witnessed the massacres, displacements, and the resulting fears and anxieties. I grew up hearing very little about the suffering that went on during the 1950s and 1960s, as people were trying to get over the trauma of 1948. In those days, the only connection of Palestinians in Israel with the Arab world was through the Friday night films screened on the Israeli Arabic television channel. The film of the week was always an Egyptian film, Hollywood style. I had never heard before about “Palestinian Films” and definitely not “PLO cinema” until later in my adult life. The films presented and discussed by Yaqub have indeed enriched my own knowledge of a range of media that have emerged over the backdrop of the Palestinian struggle. The book also provides assurance that, despite instabilities and political predicaments, Palestinian cinema is alive and thriving. It represents an important medium of resistance in confronting the Israeli occupation and in supporting the Palestinian struggle for freedom and emancipation. I experienced Yaqub’s *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* as an intensive adult learning crash course on Palestinian history and its representation. It also pushed me to think how filmmakers can contribute to preserve this history through artistic and audiovisual means. Not least, the book connected me emotionally, historically, and intellectually with other Palestinians, particularly women represented in films, who had experienced the Palestinian predicament from 1948 in its various forms.

Secondly, as an educator who worked as a teacher in the Arab education system in Israel for over 15 years, I find that Yaqub's book brings a much-needed critical perspective to the hegemonic pedagogical narratives prevalent in history and civic education taught in the Arab school system inside Israel. The films Yaqub discusses offer valuable resources that can help mitigate the effects of a much-sanitized state curriculum imposed on Palestinian schools in Israel. That said, I can imagine the great difficulties that would emerge in relation to allowing access to these films to Palestinians living inside Israel. Notwithstanding, the book can easily be used by educators and social activists in Palestinian society to decolonize the prevailing orientalist perspectives that shape the stereotypical representation of Palestinians on the screen. The book can also be used by film festival organizers to build community engagement with Palestinian issues and inform their programming.

Thirdly, as a professional archivist working in Canada, I am constantly thinking about what needs to be done for the long-term preservation of documentary and recorded history. The book sensitized me to the need of establishing a Palestinian Film Archives that would help understand how Palestinians have been actively involved in creating spaces for their authentic representation in public media. As an Archivist, I am way too familiar with the challenges of representation within an archival holding; what gets into the archives versus what gets ignored. Archives hold power in terms of allowing or disallowing the preservation of the memory of people. In that regard, I appreciated the contextual information provided by Yaqub in relation to the creation and development of the Palestinian Film Archives which started in Amman under PLO auspices. I also appreciated the difficulties that face various groups who collect, maintain, and preserve this amazing collection of Palestinian documentary heritage and the ongoing attempts to recover the film archives which, according to Rona Sela's documentary, *Looted and Hidden: Palestinian Archives in Israel* (2017), were captured by the Israeli military as the PLO was leaving Beirut in 1982.

Fourthly, as a Librarian, I'm always looking for authoritative resources that are informative, original, reliable, and well researched. I found Yaqub's *Palestinian Cinema in*

the Days of Revolution, a book that meets these requirements. The book addresses interdisciplinary topics that can be of benefit to researchers in various fields. The book's valuable resources further include a comprehensive back-of-book index, and a filmography that lists "all films made within Palestinian organizations or with support from a Palestinian organization between 1968 and 1982, the Palestinian films by solidarity filmmakers mentioned in chapter four, and all films mentioned in the book" (p. 220). The text is further supplemented with informative and explanatory notes that serve as a guide to readers – whether they are familiar with Palestinian history or not. While the list of films is organized by director, the book would have benefitted from a compilation of films by title.

On a final note, I cannot end my reflection without relating Nadia Yaqub's *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* to other works on Palestinian cinema. Specifically, the work of Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi (2008) *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma, and Memory*, and the work of Hamid Dabashi (2006), *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*; as well as recent work by Greg Burris (2019), *The Palestinian Idea: Film, Media, and the Radical Imagination*. These works provide a taste of a burgeoning literature on Palestinian cinema. In that sense, the four books, taken together, emerge as important building blocks of long overdue literature that considers Palestinians, not as terrorists and pathologized people, but as active agents in the articulation of their cinematic representation and reflections on their situated histories. Such an engagement opens up new vistas for political action and social transformation as Palestinians engage new modes of articulating their national struggle.

I highly recommend this book for libraries, especially research and public libraries, to include in their collections.

Suher Zaher-Mazawi,
professional educator, librarian, and archivist.

References

- Burris, G. (2019). *The Palestinian idea: Film, media, and the radical imagination*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press.
- Dabashi, H. (2006). *Dreams of a nation: On Palestinian cinema*. London & New York: Verso.
- Gertz, N, and Khleifi, G. (2008). *Palestinian cinema: Landscape, trauma and memory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sela, R. (2017). *Looted and hidden: Palestinian archives in Israel*. Documentary film. Israel.