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Finding one's own voice as an indigenous filmmaker

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Chapter 3

Indigenous Cinema and Matters of Language, Voice and Speech

Why Language, Voice and Speech Matter

In *The Critical Practice of Film*, Kydd presents questions and issues that can be explored through both the analysis of films and the practice of filmmaking. She proposes to study these aspects by alternating between the analysis of existing films, and the exploration of particular filmic aspects such as the effect of lighting, camera angles or dramatic structure through practical filmmaking assignments. In this research, I opt for a similar approach through which I alternate between the analysis of existing films and the exploration of particular narrative and aesthetic strategies through the practice of filmmaking. I explore aesthetics and narrative strategies of Indigenous Cinema, through the analysis of existing films as well as through the exploration of these strategies in the process of making films myself. My approach consists of analysing alternative representations of Indigenous Peoples in different films and of engaging in the production of alternative representations through filmmaking. In his book, Naficy explicitly examines the production process as being part of the Accented Style and explains that:

By their mode of production, accented filmmakers define and transform both themselves and the accented cinema. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, to be oppositional it is not enough that accented filmmakers have oppositional politics. They must also act oppositionally by engaging in alternative practices that have an “organizing function” – a function whose usefulness extends beyond politics and propaganda (1978, 233). Hallmark of this organizing function, [...] are the interstitial and collective production modes and the integrated film practices that entail the accented filmmakers’ horizontal and vertical involvement in all aspects and phases of their works. Their oppositionality is further enhanced by their films’ textual politics, characterized by the accented style. By means of these organizational and textual counterpractices, the filmmakers are transformed from displaced subjects into active agents of their own emplacement. (Naficy 2001:100)

It is clear that Naficy envisions Accented Cinema as a consequence of the combination and interrelation of the production mode, the situatedness of the filmmaker, the content of the

films and their aesthetic style. In this sense Naficy's perspective resembles the stance of Solanas and Getino who argued that not only the content but also the production mode of Third Cinema had to be revolutionary. The process of production which shapes the films is as much an integral part of Accented Cinema as the film itself and the filmmakers producing it. Naficy elucidates that the practice of film in itself constitutes an emplacement of the filmmaker and that thus the post-colonial practice of Accented Cinema lies as much in the content, that is the text of the film, as in the production of the films in question, that is to say in the practice of filmmaking. In my analysis of the films and the artistic process I reflect upon the production process, and on alternative production strategies which may have an 'oppositional' effect in the realm of Indigenous Cinema.

In the case of Indigenous Peoples language is of particular importance as many Indigenous languages are threatened with extinction due to years of assimilation policies, and by the process of globalization and migration. In this chapter I will therefore address how language, speech and voice provide alternative aesthetics and narrative structures for Indigenous Cinema. In *An Accented Cinema*, Naficy observes that many accented filmmakers come from societies with oral traditions:

Although all of the accented filmmakers are postliterate, many have their origin in societies that maintain side by side with print and electronic literacy a residual oral culture that influences the stories they tell and the manner in which they tell them. Residual orality impacts their film's formal, stylistic, and thematic systems, giving them a different accent. (Naficy 2001: 121)

The situation described by Naficy also applies to a large extent to Indigenous filmmakers. Indigenous Peoples continue to have a living oral tradition alongside the literacy of the dominant societies in which they are immersed as well, as well as the growing electronic literacy stimulated by globalization and digitalization. Naficy adds that it is not only the residual orality that provides the particular accent, but in fact the co-existence of the different forms of orality and literacy. He states:

The accent comes not just from these sources of residual orality but also from the coexistence of orality and literacy, colonialism and post-colonialism, nationalism and postnationalism, communism and postcommunism, and pre-modernism, modernism and postmodernism. Therefore, the prefix "post" implies "impurity" and "living in

tension” with conflicting forces and emergent formations, rather than a clean break with them. (ibid.)

The tensions invoked by Naficy are very similar to the tensions and conflicting cultural realms addressed by Ginsburg in her essay on ‘Indigenous Media’ (1991). While Indigenous filmmakers have not necessarily migrated between Third and First World countries, they have often migrated between rural and urban environments within their own countries. Often, Indigenous filmmakers live in countries that have undergone a process of decolonization, such as for example Mexico, Peru or Kenya, but as Indigenous Peoples they continue to live in a context of internal colonialism. While many Indigenous filmmakers belong to developing countries with an agenda of modernization, Indigenous communities tend to nurture pre-modern traditions such as oral storytelling, traditional healing and spiritual experience. Owing to globalization and migration Indigenous filmmakers are often transnational and Indigenous at the same time. For example, Gilbert analyses how a false opposition has been constructed between the cosmopolitan and Indigeneity in her essay ‘Indigeneity and Performance’ (2013). Indigenous Filmmakers thus operate in a similar web of tensions and contradictions, as described by Naficy with regard to Accented filmmakers. While each Indigenous filmmaker has their own and specific cinematic accent, that derives from his or her own cultural and linguistic realm, the accent is, as Naficy observes, also consequence of the tensions provoked by the interaction and coexistence of all these different elements.

In *Decolonizing the Lens of Power* (2008), Knopf studies the strategies of self-representation and decolonization in different Indigenous films in North America. She extensively discusses different aspects of language in film, such as the choice Indigenous filmmakers face with regard to the language of the story. Knopf explains that some filmmakers, like literary authors, decide to film in English and employ specific linguistic tools to appropriate the language and adapt it to distance it from colonial discourse. But there are also filmmakers who prefer to film in an Indigenous language. While Knopf attributes a greater decolonizing effect to filming in an Indigenous language, she also points out that this possibly narrows the possible audience of a film and its possibilities to obtain distribution. Also certain pragmatic and production aspects may be involved in the choice for a certain language, such as finding professional actors. Knopf furthermore analyses the different ways in which oral traditions are reflected in Indigenous Cinema and elaborates on the complex relation between oral storytelling and film and video. While the choice to film in an Indigenous language provides, as Knopf notes, ‘a greater decolonizing effect’, it indeed also

creates certain practical problems, which require solutions from both a creative and production perspective. However, one should be careful not to uncritically attribute an ‘emancipating’ or ‘decolonizing’ function to filming in an Indigenous language. For example, the film *Apocalypto* was entirely shot in a Maya language and nevertheless lacks a liberating or decolonizing function. While the presence of a Maya language in *Apocalypto* above all served to provide a sense of historical accuracy and authenticity, it also helped to obfuscate the highly colonialist discourse and ideology conveyed by this film. The stereotypical representation of the Maya people as violent ‘barbarians’ in the film *Apocalypto* undoes any of the ‘decolonizing effects’ the presence of the Maya language might have had. Instead, the presence of the Maya language in this film serves to present the stereotyped image of the Maya people as an ‘authentic’ one.

The following example might serve to illustrate some of the complexity surrounding the choice of a specific language for a film, both in terms of representation and production. On a certain occasion I was asked to function as a cultural advisor for a Mexican/Dutch film concerning an Indigenous language. The Dutch producer had read a newspaper article about an Indigenous language in Mexico that was on the verge of extinction. Owing to a grudge, the last remaining speakers of Ayapaneco, two grumpy old men, refused to talk to each other making documentation of the language impossible.⁸⁶ The producer thought this was a great premise for a feature film and wanted a script written on this basis. Our first conversation consisted in discussing his ideas for the film. He proposed the story could be about a North-American or European linguist trying to make the old men speak in order to recover some mythical treasure. The idea of having once more the story of an Indigenous village told by an outsider made me feel quite disappointed. I subsequently proposed to him that it might be interesting to just focus on the grudge of the men and to try to unravel the human drama behind it. I tried to convince him to make a film from within the Indigenous community and to forget about the linguist. The producer reacted bluntly: “But nobody will watch such a film!” I tried to object that there existed nice, internationally distributed films, which focused on the story of a small community, such as the film *Himalaya*. To my great disappointment, he responded there existed no real audiences for this type of story. We needed the North American linguist in order to be able to cast a well-known North-American actor, so that the film would sell, so that the film could actually be made.

⁸⁶ Zoque is spoken in southwest Mexico in Oaxaca and Tabasco, Ayapaneco is a specific variant of Zoque which is now presumably spoken by only two persons. This has however been contradicted by different scholars of Zoque which consider the story to be manufactured and overblown in order to garner attention for the delicate situation of Indigenous languages in Mexico.

I consequently asked the producer in what Indigenous language he wanted to make the film and he answered that we could easily make up a fantasy language. For the producer the language in extinction had no importance or value at all, as he was above all interested in the commercial potential of the story. To him it was a funny story about an absurd and hardly believable situation. But to me the story of those two last speakers of Ayapaneco was an opportunity to address the complexity of cultural identity and the social context of Indigenous People in Mexico. In this light, the proposal to make a movie about a disappearing Indigenous language spoken in a fantasy tongue, with non-Indigenous actors, and a North American linguist as a main character, seemed rather offensive. If Ayapaneco is disappearing, it is not because the only two remaining speakers refuse to speak to each other; it is because nobody else speaks it anymore due to a long history of educational neglect, assimilation politics, marginalization and discrimination. Indigenous languages in Mexico disappear because people migrate either to the cities or to the United States leaving deserted villages behind and because of the structural discrimination of Indigenous Peoples and their culture. In addition, there is a total absence of interest towards Indigenous languages, cultures and history within the Mexican educational system, thus creating the perfect condition in which the vanishing of local languages, practices and traditions can take place. The media that present and promote universal consumer culture contribute to the vanishing of local cultures, which have minimal presence within mainstream media. While film might be employed as an instrument to document, appreciate and stimulate the particular traditions and values of a local culture, the flood of Hollywood cinema that inundates Third World markets, is largely responsible for the vanishing of local storytelling traditions. Films spoken in Indigenous languages in Mexico are rare. There are a few radio programs in Indigenous languages and some didactic material. This is in part due to the lack of Indigenous authors, but it is also very much the consequence of a market that needs to reach a broad audience and therefore is hardly interested in works that focus on local issues. It seems rather paradoxical that in order to address issues concerning the effect of globalization on local communities through film, it is necessary to address a global audience and consequently to gloss over the problems at the heart of the matter.

In one of the many conversations we had regarding the project, the scriptwriter asked the producer why he had chosen Mexico for his film; after all, languages disappeared in many more locations. The producer answered: “for no particular reason. It might be anywhere. It is a human story. But the colour and flavour of the Mexican landscape seem interesting to me”. While certainly not all producers have this attitude, I dare to argue that a

certain preference for recognizable ‘universal’ stories with a particular *couleur locale* are what most international producers and funding organizations are looking for when they participate in an independent transnational film production. Yet, through this example, recognizable appears to actually mean, recognizable for a ‘Western’ audience, and ‘universal’ in this case seems to stand for ‘marketable on a global scale’. When the Dutch producer proposed to have a North American linguist hunting for some treasure in Mexico for which he had to make two old men talk to each other, he was placing the film within a context of international commercial cinema. The North American linguist would enable a ‘Western’ audience to identify effortlessly with the main character. Besides he was aiming at the possibility of casting a known actor, which would make the film more ‘interesting’ for European funding institutions or North American investors. The producer’s affirmation that the particular language which was under threat of extinction was irrelevant, while at the same time it was the heart and the inciting event of the story, was the consequence of viewing the story from a ‘Western’ perspective for a ‘Western’ audience. Such an approach would lead to a film that had little or no relation to the tragedy of dying languages in Mexico, where the context producing its extinction is one of cultural and systemic violence.

The diverging standpoints between the producer and myself resided in our different perspectives of the world the script intended to portray. While the producer had only known and ingested the Indigenous setting of Mexico through its representation on television, books and travel guides, I had experienced this particular Indigenous world physically. My awareness of infant mortality, analphabetism, malnutrition in Indigenous villages is not a statistical kind of knowledge, but the consequence of interaction and conversations with close relatives, and people I care for on a personal level. Consequently, my feelings for, and identification, with the characters to be portrayed in the Ayapan project, were radically different to the identification felt by the producer. I tended to view the old men as I viewed friends or close relatives, while they constituted a distant ‘other’ for the producer. In short, while for the perspective of an outsider, the language spoken in the film might indeed be irrelevant, for an insider like myself, it would be impossible to make up a ‘fantasy’ Indigenous language. The pre-existing misrepresentations of Indigenous Peoples in films and literature had already shaped the perceptions of the writer and producer of the film and consequently permeated the creative process. Simultaneously, the desire to make ‘local’ stories accessible for a ‘global’ audience required an adaptation to a more general taste, and to a widely known and accepted film language and thus to pre-existing schemes and stereotypes. Proposing a different ‘more decolonizing’ approach proved, therefore, useless.

Through the analysis of the film *Snuu Viko (El Lugar de las Nubes y Unas Palabras Perdidas)* by Nicolás Rojas and an analysis of my own films *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* and *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, I will in continuation explore possible alternative strategies and more ‘decolonizing’ approaches with respect to language, voice and speech.

Matters of Speech in Snuu Viko

Snuu Viko (El Lugar de las Nubes y Unas Palabras Perdidas) is a short film by the Mixtec filmmaker Nicolás Rojas. The title of the film highlights the multilingual aspect of the film, as the film is both Mixtec and Spanish spoken. The title also alludes to the limits or impossibility of speech, as *Unas Palabras Perdidas* means ‘a few lost words’. The meaning of this mysterious title becomes clear throughout the film, which tells the story of a young boy who is struggling with his (linguistic) identity. The protagonist of the film is Emilio, a schoolboy who is told by his grandmother he should only speak Mixtec, while he learns at school that he should only speak Spanish. As the story unfolds, the film shows the painful consequences of these conflicting stances. The film *Snuu Viko* combines both fictional and documentary elements. The main narrative of the film is intercut with documentary interviews with respect to the discrimination of the Mixtec language at schools and in Mexican institutions. These documentary interviews link the film to the current social reality of the region. The interviewed participants are social activists, linguists, anthropologists and ordinary people who tell their own experiences. The film thus introduces different voices, which share their experiences, thoughts and opinions on the subject. Through this device the film also embeds the story in a larger Mixtec community. The fictional story in the film shows us one day in the life of Emilio. The grandmother of the boy tells him that he should honour his mother tongue and only speak Mixtec, and that she will be very sad if he ever speaks Spanish again. In the afternoon Emilio is reprimanded at school for speaking his mother tongue. The teacher insists that Emilio answers why he was speaking Mixtec. But Emilio is true to the promise he made to his grandmother and refuses to answer. Because of this Emilio is reprimanded and has to clean the school after class.⁸⁷ Emilio does so without

⁸⁷ Although Mexican legislation officially recognizes the multilingual character of the country, and in official discourse promotes Indigenous languages, in many rural communities children are fined or reprimanded by their teachers for speaking their mother tongue. The INALI (National Institute for Indigenous Languages) attends complaints regarding the prohibition or discrimination against Indigenous languages. Nevertheless people in rural communities are not always aware and informed about this legislation.

speaking. However, Emilio's silence seems natural and adequate to the teachers. The film seems to state that Emilio's decision to remain silent is an act of defiance and resistance, but is interpreted by dominant society as simply another example of a voiceless Indigenous subject. Within the Mexican educational system, Emilio does not have his own voice and he is not supposed to talk, instead he should obey and remain silent. The film thus shows the spectator the institutional bias and repression of Indigenous languages and culture. When Emilio arrives at home later that day, he finds his grandmother is very ill. Emilio's mother sends him to fetch a doctor. Emilio walks for some miles towards a dirt road and waits around for a ride. The long waiting of Emilio and the obvious distance towards a village or city with medical care, stresses the isolation and marginalization of Indigenous communities. When finally a car stops, Emilio is unable to ask for a ride as he is still keeping his promise of speaking only in Mixtec. The driver and co-driver of the car only speak Spanish and do not understand Emilio's needs. Instead, they start talking about the political party they are representing and give him a party campaign talk, which means nothing to the young boy. The film here has a cynical undertone, clearly implying that Mexican politicians are unable and unwilling to understand the needs of Indigenous people and only serve their own interests. Emilio never finds a doctor and when he returns home, his grandmother has passed away.

In the film, the grandmother figure functions as a reference for tradition and 'the old ways'.⁸⁸ The film expresses the preoccupation that Indigenous traditions and language are dying. Indeed, UNESCO has published a study that states that with current developments most Indigenous languages in the south of Mexico will disappear within this century. The film underlines how bias, repression and marginalization are the main reasons for the vanishing of Indigenous culture and language. Yet the film also shows that a dogmatic stance, which rejects a multilingual and multi-cultural reality, will only contribute to the vanishing of the language. The tone of the film seems pessimistic with respect to the future of Indigenous languages and cultures, but in itself it constitutes an assertion of Mixtec language and culture. The film gives voice and visibility to a problem that involves and concerns the Mixtec community. Although the film addresses the impossibility of having a voice and being heard, the film in itself can be understood as a strong statement regarding being voiceless and having a voice. The 'Voice' of Indigenous filmmaker Nicolás Rojas is clearly present in his work in both an authorial and a political sense.

⁸⁸ In his poem *Babylon is Falling Down*, Native American poet and activist John Trudell speaks about the younger generations trying to hold on to traditions. The poem at a certain moment says: "You say you want to learn the old ways, when all you must do is remember". The poem expresses the cultural split and alienation to which the Indigenous youth is exposed.

The story of Emilio illustrates the subaltern condition of Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous children. The different state institutions in the film that could support and help the boy are consistently unable and unwilling to listen to him. The film makes it evident that even if the boy would speak Spanish with his teacher or the drivers of the car they would be unwilling to really listen. The different institutions, both the educational system and the politicians, have their own interests and agenda, and demonstrate little willingness to listen to and support the boy. The film furthermore shows the marginal conditions in which the contemporary Indigenous population lives, isolated and marginalized from basic infrastructure, such as medical care. Although the fictional story of the film shows the impossibility to speak or rather to be understood as a subaltern, the documentary interviews include a multiplicity of voices which can be heard and understood by the film's audience. As such, it provides a space in which people can share their experiences and express their thoughts. The film thus accomplishes what the different state institutions are unable to do; it provides a space wherein the problems of a contemporary Mixtec community can be articulated and expressed. While Emilio is unable to speak up, Rojas, the director, manages to express himself through film in a distinct Mixtec voice.⁸⁹ As Rojas is bilingual himself and has faced linguistic discrimination in his own experience, the film has an autobiographical tone. Through the presence of his own grandmother and of his community, Rojas inscribes himself further in the film. Rojas thus embeds his bonds with his community and with the Mixtec People in the fabric of the film.

Voice and Orality in Ocho Venado y Seis Mono

The documentary *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* was commissioned by the Secretary of Tourism of the State of Oaxaca. The request was to make a film about an ancient Mixtec warrior, Ocho Venado (Eight Deer), to promote the Mixtec region as a place for tourism. Originally, I was supposed to participate only as a scriptwriter. At first I decided to follow the conventions of an educational and informational film. The first version of the script thus contained an explanatory voice-over, many interviews with experts and visits to particular historical places. Part of my agreement with the producer of the film was that in exchange for the script I could assist the director of the film during the shoot. But when I arrived in Mexico things

⁸⁹ The short film won the award for best Indigenous film at the Morelia International Film Festival 2008. Since then Nicolás Rojas Sanchez has continued making films. His recent short film *Música para después de dormir* won the award for Best Short Film at the San Diego Latin American Film Festival as well as the Mexican Academy Award (Ariel) for Best Short Film.

turned out completely different. On the one hand, the intended director of the film did not feel like making a commissioned work and instead wanted to use the resources for a more artistic personal project. The producer, on the other hand, had already pitched and promised the idea of a film about the life of this ancient Mixtec warrior to different funding institutions. In order to solve this issue the producer asked me if I could direct the documentary about the ancient warrior myself in order to make both projects: the personal and artistic project of the intended director on the one hand, and the documentary about the life of Ocho Venado on the other hand. As most of the resources were going to be spent on the artistic documentary, which was going to be shot on 35 mm film, the remaining budget for *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* was next to nothing. The producer arranged for transport, a video camera and camera operator from the local television channel and some Betacam tapes. These new production conditions basically turned *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* into an independent low/no budget film and meant that the script had to be radically adjusted to meet this new production scheme. Most of the creative decisions in the making of *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* were consequently driven by production restrictions. We had to find alternative ways to tell the story with the limited time and means at hand. The idea arose to connect images of the ancient pictorial manuscript with modern day images of the region. While this decision was the consequence of considerations with regard to production, it had great consequences for the form and content of the film.

A reaction that I have often received when screening the film is: “the film made me feel Mixtec for a moment”. What triggers this reaction is probably the choice of the language spoken in the film and the choice for the narrator. Due to the changing production scheme I had to radically rethink the script for the film, but I did not have the time to write a new script. Instead, I decided to work with a general concept. The published commentary on the manuscript included a text which was a narration of the story in Mixtec.⁹⁰ This text was written by my mother, Aurora Pérez and her text was included in the film. Instead of making an educational documentary, I tried to tell the story of warrior Ocho Venado, through the combination of the Mixtec narration of the story and images from the manuscript intercut with images of the Mixtec region. The images chosen from the ancient manuscript were filmed first. Consequently, film images were chosen to be intercut with these images of the manuscripts. When I started thinking about the narrator for the voice-over, it seemed obvious

⁹⁰ Anders, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (1992).

to ask my mother to read her own text. While this choice appeared obvious to me, it had specific implications for the film.

To begin with, without giving it much thought I had chosen a female narrator. After deciding my mother would do the voice-over, it was an obvious choice to start the film with the image of a *curandera* (traditional female healer) lighting the fire for the *temazcal* (traditional steambath). Although a general audience will probably not be aware of the implied meanings, both a Mixtec audience and an audience of ethnographers will probably understand the presence of the *curandera* in symbolic terms. In Mixtec oral traditions, but also in Mesoamerican tradition, an older woman is the keeper of the *temazcal*. There are many different tales about the grandmother of the *temazcal*. The *curandera* is a person with extraordinary powers and healing qualities. The combination of a female voice-over with the image of a *curandera* lighting the *temazcal* was intended to produce the feeling that the female voice narrating the story might be the voice of a *curandera*, or a female wise elder. Because of the way the film starts, it frames the story in the context of oral tradition, in which a wise elder shares knowledge with future generations. The insertion of the story in the realm of oral tradition and the blending together of ancient pictorial manuscripts with modern day images of the Mixtec area and Mixtec people created a sense of continuity between the past and the present. This story telling device connected the story of Ocho Venado to the region and its present inhabitants. If I had followed the general conventions for educational documentaries the story would instead have been presented as something from a distant and exotic past.

My mother's voice-over was intended to be in Mixtec with Spanish and English subtitles.⁹¹ It was precisely the choice for a Mixtec spoken voice-over that included the viewer in the realm of Mixtec culture. Nevertheless, the producer of the film preferred to have the film narrated by a Spanish voice-over. Her argument was that in Mexico people are not used to reading subtitles. In the end I convinced the producer to make a Mixtec version for an international audience and thus the film exists in two versions, a Mixtec version with English subtitles and a Spanish voice-over version. The audience response to the Mixtec version on the one hand, and to the Spanish version on the other, has shown that the Spanish

⁹¹ Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva made his film *Hopiit* exclusively for a Hopi audience, therefore the film has no subtitles and is only Hopi spoken. This assertion of the own language is a way of claiming a subject position and turning outsiders into temporal 'others'. In short, this strategy inverts and therefore questions dominant self and other relations, aiming at deconstructing the normativity of this relation. Later films of Masayesva were subtitled to English. In the article 'Seeing with a Native Eye' (1994), Sands and Lewis analyse the work of Masayesva and observe that for later films he has chosen to make a version with English subtitles, expanding his audience to people who do not know Hopi culture.

spoken version does not generate the same sensation of being part of a Mixtec world. Even though the voice is also of a female narrator, the Spanish voice-over does not appear to belong to the *curandera* in the beginning of the film. For this reason the Spanish voice-over does not have the same effect of positioning the story within the context of oral tradition, nor does it allude to the wisdom of elders. Instead, the voice is that of an unknown and distant narrator providing a history class. The difference between the otherwise identical versions makes it very clear that the choice of language and voice can deeply influence the tone and meaning of a film.

Throughout the film, I tried to use elements of Mixtec symbolism without specifically explaining those elements. For example, the scene when Ocho Venado meets the warriors who have died in combat, I combined images of the ancient pictorial manuscript with images of trees. In the pictorial manuscript these warriors are represented as people holding white banners. I decided to intercut this image from the pictorial manuscript with images of trees in the Mixtec landscape. I knew that in many pre-colonial but also present day popular beliefs the deceased are considered to continue on living as trees. Another Mixtec pictorial manuscript narrates the origin of the Mixtec people and depicts how the first Mixtec rulers were born out of a sacred tree. This background information is not shown in the film. Yet the combination of the ancient images of fallen warriors with the present day images of trees in the landscape does provoke an awareness of the past surrounding us through the landscape. The combination of these images on the one hand introduces Mixtec concepts to the film, but at the same time allows for a philosophical reading that is not uniquely Mixtec and is far more related to my interest in the movement of life and the ephemeral aspect of our existence. In this manner, the entire film is filled with a symbolic subtext that connects it strongly to Mixtec culture, history and story-telling traditions. In retrospect, the search for a personal voice started out when making this film. The desire to connect past and present and an interest in the ephemeral have continued throughout my work.

Multivocality and Dialogic Mode in El Rebozo de mi Madre (My Mother's Rebozo)

The project *El Rebozo de mi Madre* originated in the third year of Film Academy in Amsterdam, while living in Mexico City to work on the documentary film *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono*. During this period, the idea surged to make a documentary film about 'household servants' (maids) in Mexico City. This idea had a strong personal motivation. My own

mother had left her home village at the age of seventeen to work in Mexico City as a servant. Her stories about this part of her life had made me very aware of social injustice, exploitation and oppressive structures, but had also been a source of pain. Ever since starting making films, I had felt a strong need to express how the social injustice and the existence of servitude in Mexico had scarred my own family. At the time, it was quite challenging for me to find an adequate form for the documentary. It was difficult to find the right film language for all these thoughts and feelings. My idea was to make a film which showed the humanity hidden behind the social construction of ‘the maid’. I felt that maids in Mexico City were hardly ever seen as individuals and were instead treated as anonymous figures without a face. But there were all kinds of practical impediments: How would I get access to domestic workers, without involving the employers? Was it possible to film without the employers’ consent? What consequences would such a documentary have for the people who participated in the film? While researching the idea and trying to figure out possible solutions, somehow all my journeys returned to my mother’s hometown Chalcatongo. It made sense to start the film at the place where my mother had left. I recorded a couple of staged scenes of my mother leaving her village in which my cousins were the actors. The very first script for the film had the title *Caminos de la Vida* and was basically a *collage* of both fiction and documentary, including elements of my own experiences in Mexico, but also my mother’s story, and many interviews with all kinds of people that had left their village to work in Mexico City. The script was largely based on conversations and experiences I had during that period in Mexico. Upon returning to the Netherlands I presented the script to my former documentary teacher and producer of the film, Rolf Orthel. He found several things interesting, but felt the script lacked a narrative structure or binding element. He consequently suggested introducing a main character, preferably myself, in search of something, or to find a unity of location and advised me to have a look at the narrative structure of *Metaal en melancholie* (Heddy Honigmann 1994) which is constructed around the director’s personal search for a former friend in the streets of Lima.

Coincidentally, in this period I happened to watch the Malian/Mauritanian/French film *La vie sur terre* (Abderrahmane Sissako 1998). The film begins with the filmmaker wandering in a French supermarket looking for butter. As the filmmaker drowns in the excess of brands and products offered by the supermarket, he decides to travel back to his own hometown in Mali. The rest of the film shows how life in the village Sokolo goes on peacefully, without drama or conflict, on the verge of the new millennium. The narrative structure of this film is based around themes and is structured more around places than

around particular events. Although the film is almost entirely set in the village of Sokolo, the film builds a stark contrast between the modern urban world in which the filmmaker is living and the rural setting from which he comes. Whilst viewing the film in a theatre in the city of Rotterdam I became increasingly aware of the contrasts and contradictions evoked by the film. Suddenly I realized that this was precisely the feeling I wanted to convey with my own work. The contradictions of living between such different worlds were the driving force behind my desire to make a film.

Inspired by Sissako's film, I decided to make a film about my mother's village and to start the film with my own trip towards the village. The plan for the film was to interview several characters in the village about their life stories and thus make a portrait of the place through its inhabitants. From the start, it was clear that a scientific documentary approach which was going to tell an audience 'the truth' about Mixtec culture and traditions through the use of a voice-over was not an option. It was explicitly not my intention to make a documentary according to the norms and structures used by scientific or ethnographic films. Also a Direct Cinema approach in which the camera invisibly records 'what's going on' was excluded.⁹² This approach, in my opinion, would largely deny agency to its participants, as they would not interact with the camera, but would be 'shot' from a distance. I wanted to avoid in any case a film that was going to show a generalizing and homogenizing perspective on 'Mixtec identity'. Anthropologists Kathleen Sands and Allison Sekaquaptewa Lewis write in *Seeing with a Native Eye* about the difference between an ethnographic film and an Indigenous film:

Artistic interpretation of cultural events and images was violently threatened by European invaders who, unable to comprehend the intensely connotative forms used by tribal people, "saw it as their duty to take over the task of documentation" (Bataille, p. 122) of Native cultures. The result: Indian cultures interpreted by and for non-Indian audiences. In popular film, the results have been grotesquely misinterpreted and harmful; images of savages haunt the mythscape of the American psyche. In

⁹² Direct Cinema refers to a documentary approach that surged in the 1960 with the availability of light weight film cameras. Direct Cinema wants to record life as it unfolds before the lens and capture it as truthfully and objectively as possible. Direct Cinema rejects the use of voice-over and interviews and instead proposes a fly-on-the-wall approach where the camera tries to register from an objective stance what is going on. Both filmmakers and scholars have critiqued the implied 'objectivity' or 'neutrality' of this approach, as all camera standpoints and editing moments are always subjective choices by the filmmaker. Furthermore framing, what is inside or outside the frame, and what is and what is not shown are obviously also choices and standpoints. *Theorizing Documentary* (1993), edited by Michael Renov, gives an overview of the different ways in which different documentary 'schools' have constructed a truth claim.

documentary film, the results have ranged from simplistic to sensitive, but inevitably, even documentary films with their claims to objectivity have been ethnocentric, encoding tribal cultures in the language, images and values of Euro-American culture. The subordination of aesthetic to scientific goals in filmmaking is just one example of the imposition of Anglo cultural norms by even the most sensitized ethnographic filmmakers. (Sands and Lewis 1990)

To me it was very important to give the participants agency in the documentary film and therefore chose a form in which interviews play a key role. As language is a crucial aspect of representational strategies, I decided to conduct the interviews as much as possible in the Mixtec language. First of all, this choice was an assertion of an Indigenous language that has been institutionally denied and discriminated against, but it also placed the participants in a more privileged subject position, as they were able to speak more fluently in their own language while the filmmaker, not being fluent in Mixtec at all, was greatly dependent on participants, interviewer and translator. The project started out as an independent film, and was made outside the mainstream cinema production without any financial means. Like many independent transnational filmmakers, I resorted to an artisanal mode of production, covering many of the production aspects myself, and involving family members in other aspects.⁹³ While the main reason for this approach was to limit expenses, it had the effect that it greatly facilitated communication within the community. Again my mother was the interviewer and translator in *El Rebozo de mi Madre*. The film thus not only portrays the village, but also my relation to the village, the inhabitants and my mother. Like the strategy employed by Rojas for his film *Snuu Viko*, I inscribed myself in the film through my own presence and that of many family members. Through the relationships with the other participants in the film I express my connection and bonds to the village of my mother. A bond that is captured by the image of the *rebozo* present in the title.

The film was structured around childhood memories of the village and the ways in which the village changed in relation to those memories. Around 1995, the road to

⁹³ In *An Accented Cinema* (2001), Naficy explains that due to a lack of institutional support and because of limited financing possibilities, many independent transnational filmmakers recur to an artisanal or interstitial mode of production. An artisanal mode of production being a form of production in which the filmmaker covers most of the aspects of film production him or herself, or recurs to family and friends to cover these aspects. An interstitial mode of production refers to the fact that most of these independent transnational films are made with support outside of the mainstream film funding institutions and often have a distribution outside of mainstream film distribution circuits. This way of operating leads in itself to a particular aesthetic quality in the works by independent transnational filmmakers, often resembling documentary film and often with a minimalist and realist approach.

Chalcatongo was finally paved. Ever since, changes followed one after another at great speed. In my childhood we had to travel by truck from Mexico City to the village. Now, there is a bus-line going directly to Mexico City, and even a shuttle service to Tijuana (Mexico's northern frontier), and the wooden houses have almost all been replaced by cinder block buildings. There are gasoline stations, restaurants and internet cafes. Many villagers migrate either to Mexico City or to the United States. For several reasons – one, being the pollution in Mexico City – just as many return to the village with money, new ideas and a different lifestyle. As time passes, the elder people die, and more and more of the things I remembered from my childhood seem to vanish into oblivion. The film thus documents a fragment of the process of modernization in the village and a way of life that is rapidly changing. As the idea developed to make a film about the village of Chalcatongo and the changes it was undergoing, I started examining my own standpoints towards the village and ongoing changes. As a migrant, I have developed a particular relationship to this town in which I am both insider and outsider at the same time. Being far away, the 'homeland' can easily become an imaginary place of mythical dimension. But, after all, one of the main reasons for people to migrate is the lack of jobs, the lack of water, the lack of schools, hospitals, and other daily necessities in the so beloved place of origin. Within the documentary I wanted to grasp and treasure some of the beauty of a way of life that is slowly disappearing, without judging the irrevocable process of modernization. In order to help the audience to clarify the perspective and position of the film director, who was both insider and outsider at the same time, I included myself within the film. The film incorporates several voice-overs of my own in which I comment on my relation to the village. Through this narrative device the audience obtains some insight into the position that I was filming from.

Before starting with the film I did not write a new script. Instead I made a list of persons and topics for the interviews in the form of general questions. In deciding whom to interview, I searched for a variety of characters, trying to include as much as possible diversity in age, gender and labour activities. The film had to feel like a conversation between me and the inhabitants of the village. Therefore, in the interviews I did not ask for specific information but rather for personal experiences and life stories. The general questions for participants were: "How has the village changed since your childhood? Did you go to school? How did you meet your significant other? When did you know you wanted to marry him/her? What work do you do? How did you start out with this work? How do you see the future? What knowledge or experience would you like to pass on to the younger generations?" The stories told by the participants are consequently personal stories to which audiences can relate

on a personal level. In the cinematography, particular attention was given to the framing of participants, filming as much as possible on, or right under, the eye-line, to encourage identification among the audience and to create the feeling of an informal, interpersonal conversation. In addition to the interviews, I tried to film small spontaneous conversations between participants, by waiting around the houses of the participants until there occurred an interesting moment to film. In this way, the conversations between my mother and my grandmother were filmed, but also those that took place between the barber and his friend. The presence of these conversations stresses the dialogic mode of the film. Also, the personal voice-over spoken by myself and the recurring presence of the interviewer's voice (sometimes my mother's, sometimes my own) contributes to this dialogic mode. At particular moments, the participants explicitly address my mother or myself. For example, in one interview, one of the participants says to the camera: "You went so far away, and when my time comes, you won't even know." This specific address invokes the world outside the film and evokes the presence of the filmmakers outside the frame.

The film is constructed as a dialogue with different inhabitants of the village and the filmmakers are explicitly part of that village. Also, in this film the stories in a particular symbolic Mixtec universe were embedded. The first voice-over of the film invokes the plumed serpent and therefore refers to the religious and mythical realm of the Mixtec people, while the images set the film in the landscape of the region. Just as in *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono*, the film is permeated with a symbolic subtext that is rooted in Mixtec traditions and culture. For example, one of the participants gets married during the film. The ceremony is filmed, but its symbolic meaning, structure or function is not highlighted within the film; instead the wedding is embedded in a love story. In one interview, Adelina explains how she met her husband and how they fell in love. Whether one identifies the images as a ritual of matrimony depends to a large extent on one's knowledge of Mixtec culture, privileging in this sense insiders over outsiders. References to Mixtec rituals, stories and religious or philosophical beliefs are not, or rarely, explained in the film, instead they are a natural part of the symbolic landscape of the film. In this sense, the almost trivial conversation the participants have about their *nahuales* ('animal companions' or *alter egos* in nature) opens up a field of shared experience among insiders, leaving outsiders to wonder: what is *nahualismo*? Viewers will relate, or not, to this subtext depending on their perspective and standpoint.⁹⁴ This strategy is similar to the one used by Hopi filmmaker Masayesva, who

⁹⁴ Feminist standpoint theory parts from the idea that knowledge and the production of knowledge are socially positioned. Scholars doing in academic research should therefore be aware of their social positioning and

does not translate the Hopi texts in his film *Itam Hakiim Hopiit*. Masayesva thus positions the film as primarily directed to an audience of insiders.

The narrative composition of *El Rebozo de mi Madre* was to a certain extent an exercise in constructing an alternative ‘Mixtec’ poetics. Instead of one main hero, the film foregrounds a community, as Mixtec culture tends to be more communitarian than individualistic.⁹⁵ Much use is made of symbols that have a special importance within Mixtec culture, like several forms of maize and related elements (such as the making of tortillas or ploughing). Drawing on stories of the participants themselves, but also on ancient Mixtec pictorial texts (codices), the film tries to embed the characters and their stories in a particular natural environment. In the structuring of the film, several religious festivities were used as markers of time. The film begins with the celebration of All Saints and ends with Carnival. The symbolic and social meaning of this will be certainly clear for insiders. All Saints is connected to death or rather to ancestors, while Carnival is much more connected to new life and new beginnings. At the same time, on the interview level the film was structured by themes, starting out with the theme of ‘education’ and finishing with the theme of ‘old age’. These contradictory movements between youth, old age, death and new life, construct a cyclical movement that disrupts the apparent chronological order of time. While the film sets out with ‘my own personal journey’ towards an imaginary homeland, the outcome of this journey becomes of little importance upon arriving in the village. The principal ‘I’ character that launches the film almost disappears from the stage, and the stories of different villagers get a central role, creating a family and community based narrative. The journey of the ‘I’ could be read as a movement towards a community. The ‘I’ character in the film is more a narrative device than a real protagonist. As no other clear ‘protagonist’ can be distinguished, the question arises: Whose film is this? The question seems to point towards the village. Family life and cross-generational relations were highlighted by filming the interviews in pairs, either of married couples, but also of mothers and daughters, or different friends. The film foregrounds a multi-vocal and communitarian experience above the individual story of a

question the standpoint from which they are doing research. Cinema Vérité has a similar argument with regard to documentary filmmaking. Arguing that all films are always the result of subjective perceptions and choices, the practitioners of Cinema Vérité choose to include their own person in their films as to clarify the filmmaker's starting point and personal view on things. The Cinema Vérité approach tends to have the filmmaker's characters in the film (mostly searching for something), and includes for example the filmmaker's considerations to conduct particular interviews. Quite often the process of production is an integral part of the film. Viewers get to see the camera and sound equipment on screen, and quite often discussions at the editing table form part of the final film.

⁹⁵ Sands and Lewis observe that Indigenous films tend to favour family and community above an individual protagonist.

single protagonist. The film is thus like a woven blanket of multiple stories giving us a glimpse of life in a particular place.⁹⁶ This narrative choice coincides with the preoccupations and aesthetic choices of other Indigenous filmmakers, such as Masayesva. In their analysis of Masayesva's work, Sands and Lewis notice a continuous presence of community life and family presence (1990).

The second voice-over of the film is my own, spoken in Dutch and referring to my family history and our departure from Mexico to Holland, while the images are childhood pictures of my family in Mexico. This second voice-over introduces the multi-linguistic aspect of the film, which is spoken in Mixtec, Spanish and Dutch, and at the same time presents the film as a family narrative. The old pictures and the accompanying voice over introduce my own family, but also create general associations to childhood memories, migration and the feeling of nostalgia. The film thus starts out with my mother's Mixtec voice-over, and continues with my own Dutch voice-over, causing a cultural disruption between generations but at the same time establishing a relationship of continuity between these generations. After the title the film shows my journey towards the town of Chalcatongo. While the motif of the journey encourages the identification of an 'outsider audience' travelling towards the village, my memories in voice-over position me as an 'insider' to the village and stimulate the identification of community members and migrants. Thus, the film on several instances tries to explore and balance the existing tensions between insiders and outsiders, between migrants, villagers and visitors. One such visitor was my own father, who in an interview in the film comments on the first time he visited Chalcatongo (in Spanish by the way): "So here I was, suffering from the cold, not being able to eat the food, and telling everybody I was not a Gringo. So that was a little strange." While the interview clearly positions my father as an outsider, the imagery and his ability to speak Mixtec and Spanish might also position him as an insider. This shows us that the boundaries between insiders and outsiders are not fixed nor rigid, but rather fluid and subject to change. Instead of creating an exotic universe in which the Mixtec people in the village are different and consequently 'othered', in the Mixtec context it is clear that my father becomes the exotic other who has trouble fitting in. This small interview fragment consequently questions our preconceived ideas about otherness and cultural norms.

⁹⁶ Anthropologist Tim Ingold comments on the relation between time and space: "In other words, when we say that life is not just one story, but a host of different stories, we are asserting the possibility that these multiple stories can run alongside one another. Space establishes this possibility. If time is the guarantor of life, space is the guarantor that heterogeneous lives proceed concurrently." (Ingold 2011: 141)

On a different level, I tried to subtly point out the construction of the cinematic text. The film makes use of formal aspects belonging to the fictional genre, like the shot-reverse-shot, the use of fast and slow motions, dramatizing music, and the staging of scenes. Through the use of these aesthetic elements, which are more common in fiction films, the viewer is invited to question how particular scenes were shot. For example, at the beginning of the film is a scene of a bus travelling to the village of Chalcatongo. This scene is shot both inside and outside the bus. As one can obviously not be simultaneously both inside and outside the bus, the way in which the scene is constructed provokes questions regarding the veracity or documentary character of the scene and triggers thoughts on the complexity of filmmaking. The viewer will probably ask him or herself: How was this scene shot? Is it staged? Were there two film crews? For this scene I used specific strategies that are common in fiction film production. The scene was partially staged and shot on two different days. The fragments shot inside of the bus are documentary material in the sense that they were shot on a day in which I really made a trip from Tlaxiaco, a nearby town, to Chalcatongo. The bus was a regular bus and passengers were regular passengers. But obviously the part in which I was sleeping was staged.⁹⁷ The fragments that were shot outside were also completely staged. We hired an empty bus with driver that would stop along the way so that we could film the bus driving through the landscape. It would have been impossible to film the bus trip from the outside if using a true documentary approach. To film the trip simultaneously outside the bus, while I was making the trip, would have required an extra camera crew, which would travel along the way. This was not only a financial consideration but also a practical one; the small road from Tlaxiaco to Chalcatongo would not really allow such an approach.

This kind of staging is actually quite common in documentary films. It is a kind of staging that does not alter the content of the film, but that is needed to shoot material that cannot be filmed in any other way. The outside shots of the landscape in this scene actually allow the viewer to experience some of the amazement that I feel whenever travelling through this region. It also provides some sense of time and distance to the trip, which would otherwise be absent from the film. It is a form of staging that most documentary makers consider acceptable, and even necessary at times, in order to communicate the truth or reality of moments and events that cannot or can just barely be filmed using a Direct Cinema approach. The staging of this scene is quite apparent within the film and in fact not only serves to express some of the emotive elements of the trip, but also to confront the viewer

⁹⁷ At the Binger Documentary Lab (2005), documentary editor Stan Neumann commented on this fragment: “This is obviously staged...the director never sleeps on the set!”

with the construction of the cinematic text. Viewers often enjoy being seduced to believe the transparency of a film. Fiction films are largely based on ‘the suspension of disbelief’ of the viewer, while documentary films are dependent on the veracity and ‘truth claim’ of the image.⁹⁸ In *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, I enjoyed fusing a documentary approach with a bit of a fictional approach, thus creating some tension and doubt regarding the documentary character of the film. By clearly establishing a documentary approach throughout the film, the audience tends to accept fragments of staging and fictionalization as documentary images. On the other hand, the presence of fictionalization also provokes some doubts on the ‘truth claim’ of the documentary images. This strategy is not self-reflexive but has a similar effect in the sense that it makes the viewer more aware of the filmmaking process without truly revealing the process of production. This strategy is different from self-reflexive approaches in Cinema Vérité. The strategy does not consist of references to the production process, such as including the presence of the microphone or the camera in the image. The strategy is also not really a revelation or explanation of the production process, instead the strategy is a combination of elements from different genres and different film currents, that in their combination invite the viewer to reflect on the genre of the film and indirectly also on the process of production.

An example of this mixing of fictional and documentary elements is the sequence of the cake and the cab. This is a sequence in the film in which a three-store wedding cake has to be delivered by cab, an old Volkswagen beetle, to a nearby village. The cake barely appears to fit into the cab, and the small Volkswagen beetle has to drive extremely slowly over the dirt road. Also this scene is a mix of fiction and documentary. The scene is completely staged, but happened in reality on a different occasion. One day, my mother and I attended a traditional wedding in a nearby village. My mother was the godmother of the bride, and was therefore in charge of buying the wedding cake. As the small town where the wedding took place did not have a bakery store, my mother ordered the cake in her own village (a thirty minute drive from the place). She asked a relative to deliver the cake on the day of the wedding. But the relative was indisposed and sent a taxi instead, a small Volkswagen beetle, which barely managed to deliver the cake. It took the taxi a three-hour drive to reach the village with the cake, and everybody was concerned about the delay. When we saw the exhausted and nervous taxi driver arrive at the venue we all laughed about the incident. I wanted the story to feature in the film, but of course I did not carry a video

⁹⁸ Houwen refers to both mechanisms as the Realism Effect and explains extensively how both mechanisms work in her PhD thesis (2014).

camera. I therefore decided to stage the scene, as I could not film the original event. When I decided to film the scene, it turned out the original taxi driver had migrated to the U.S. so I had to stage the scene with a cousin, who is not a taxi driver in real life. The original cake had been a two-store wedding cake of hundred servings. For the film, I ordered a three-store wedding cake of three hundred servings. The result is that the cake in the film is outrageously big and does not seem to fit into the cab. The cake actually did not fit and the shots of the taxi driving through the landscape were taken of a taxi without the cake in it. Summarizing, for these scenes I used fictional conventions that construct a suspension of disbelief, even when the scene appears improbable or impossible. The presence of this element within the documentary prompts the audience to question the ‘reality’ of the documentary but also creates a very particular absurd or surrealist environment. As Naficy observes about the Accented filmmakers’ context, in which different cultural elements are mixed up and pre-modern aspects coincide with modern and post-modern aspects, life in an Indigenous village may indeed feel somewhat absurd or surreal. This strategy of mixing fictional conventions in a documentary film, expresses the tensions present between different aspects: geographic locations, different cultural realms and perspectives, my memories and present, family and community ties. This negotiation Naficy finds characteristic of Accented Cinema.

A particular cinematographic device in the film is the use of fast motion for images of moving clouds. These images of moving clouds are the very first images of the film combined with a Mixtec poetic text. This text makes a clear connection between the Mixtec perception of an ethnic and cultural identity (People of the Rain) and the clouds. At the same time, the fast moving and continuously changing clouds can also be read as references to movement and the passing of time. Peter Verstraten analysed the presence of these cloud images in his chapter for the book *Mixtec Writing and Society* (Jansen and van Broekhoven 2008). He considers this aesthetic element through the framework of the *théorie du nuage* and interprets the recurring presence of clouds in my film as a reference to the impossibility of representation. References to change and movement are present throughout the film. Images of tin roofs, laundry, and leaves blowing in the wind are recurrent elements. The closing sequence of the film very specifically points out this element when one of the characters states: “We only have a breath of time on this earth, and then we pass it on as an inheritance to our children.” The closing images of children, on a bicycle, with a car wheel, and with a hoop, resonate with the words of the old man as the circular movements of the wheels echo the cyclical movement of the earth. This imagery thus emphasizes the perception of life as something ephemeral, subject to continuous change. The ending of a film is

considered to be the place where a filmmaker can and should most clearly express his/her views on life. It is striking that both in *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono*, and also in *El Rebozo de mi Madre* and in my graduation film *Una nave per tornare*, I chose to end with imagery that refers to the passing of time, the cycles of life and the binding threads between generations. In all these three films the images at the end refer to the ephemeral aspect and the fragility of life.

Conclusions

Through the analysis of these different films it becomes clear that language in many respects is of great importance to Indigenous Cinema. The presence of an Indigenous language in a film can certainly have a decolonizing and oppositional aspect. Since most Indigenous languages are discriminated against and marginalized, film can offer a space of expression. Nevertheless, the presence of an Indigenous language, or an Indigenous language as subject matter alone, is not a guarantee of an oppositional or emancipatory stance. Language is one of the many elements in a film and it depends on its interaction with narrative, theme, etc., as to whether the film takes an oppositional and decolonizing stance. For example, although *Apocalypto* is entirely spoken in a Maya language, the representation of the Maya people and culture and the chosen narrative make it a retrograde and biased film towards Indigenous Peoples. On the other hand, although *Snuu Viko* is largely Spanish spoken, its subject matter, narrative structure and aesthetic choices make it an important film for the Mixtec community and the film in itself constitutes a speech act, a particular Mixtec voice. The choice of language in a film can, as the example of *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* demonstrates, deeply influence the possible meanings of a film. In the same way, the voice of a narrator (male, female, young or old) can attribute certain meanings to a filmic text. Language and voice are embedded in symbolic systems, oral traditions and history, and thus can connect or embed a film in this oral tradition. As Loomba observes in *Post/ Colonialism*, questions to be asked in the analysis and the filmmaking process are: Who speaks? To whom? About what? In what language? A reflection on these issues is of outmost importance for Indigenous filmmakers. Yet, because of the realities in which Indigenous filmmakers work and live, and the experiences that they have, most will probably be quite aware of these issues and questions. Unlike the Dutch producer who wanted to make a feature film about the Ayapan case in a fantasy tongue, Mixtec filmmaker Nicolás Rojas chose to film in Spanish and Mixtec, exposing the painful conflicts and issues of his own childhood. In the filmmaking process he

involved his own family, among others his own grandmother. Starting from personal experience and presenting a personal point of view, the film *Snuu Viko* articulates a statement about current issues in Mixtec communities.