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## **Finding one's own voice as an indigenous filmmaker**

Jansen, I.E.E.

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**Author:** Jansen Itandehui E.E.

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## Chapter 4

### Community, Family Narratives and the Inscription of the Author

From the analysis of *Snuu Viko*, *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* and *El Rebozo de mi Madre* emerges a strong presence of community bonds and family relations. Indeed, both Ginsburg (1991) and Knopf (2008) consider community and family to be recurrent elements in Indigenous Cinema. In *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* my own family was above all involved in the production of the film. My mother wrote the voice-over for the film and my family in the village provided much of the infrastructure for the production of the film. In addition to this, several relatives appear in the film. The narrative structure of *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* is strongly embedded in the specific symbolic universe and oral tradition of the Mixtec people, as it presents the story of a historical character as written down in Mixtec pictorial manuscripts. The film, therefore, recounts an aspect of the shared memory and history of the Mixtec people, but is simultaneously a contemporary adaptation and continuation of Mixtec storytelling traditions.<sup>99</sup> *Snuu Viko* and *El Rebozo de mi Madre* had a similar production mode in which family and the community provided the infrastructure for the film but simultaneously acquired a strong presence in the construction of the narrative. The films have an artisanal mode of production, which Naficy (2006) considers typical of much Accented Cinema and at the same time family and community constitute the central themes and solidify the narrative structure of these films. Moreover, the relationship between different generations is central to this kind of cinema. In this chapter, I will analyse how the presence of different generations and generational bonds can be understood, both in my own work as well as in the work of different Indigenous filmmakers. I will first reflect on Indigenous characters as a motif in mainstream film. I will proceed with an analysis of different films by non-Indigenous filmmakers that address Indigenous issues, and then I conclude with an analysis of different films by Indigenous authors.

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<sup>99</sup> Something similar occurs with *Journey of a Mixteco* by artist and illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh. In this work the story of a Mixtec migrant is told through images similar to pre-colonial Mixtec pictorial writing. The combination of a contemporary story and an ancient pre-colonial medium produces a sense of cultural continuity, creating a strong link between past and present, between history, memory and autobiography.

The image of the (elder) ‘wise Indian’ is a specific figure in ‘Western’ imagery about Indigenous Peoples, and can be found in literature, cinema, photography and a variety of other representations.<sup>100</sup> A well-known example is the wise elder Ten Bear in the film *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner 1990), played by Native American activist and singer-songwriter Floyd Westerman.<sup>101</sup> This film has been extensively critiqued for its principal focus on the non-Indigenous character John Dunbar, while the Sioux community served above all as a tool for the character development of the protagonist.<sup>102</sup> Also, the Disney film *Pocahontas* (Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg 1995) features a wise Native American grandmother, all be it in the disguise of a tree. In the Netherlands an example of this motif can be found in the children’s film *De Indiaan* (Ineke Houtman 2009). In this film, an adopted Peruvian boy is struggling with his identity and in his quest gets help from a wise Indian from Peru. Another Dutch example is the ‘Indian shaman’ character in the television series *2012, Het jaar nul* (Jan Albert de Weerd and Ingeborg Wieten 2009) in which a group of youngsters are entangled in a mystery quest. In all these narratives, Indigenous characters play the role of providing non-Indigenous characters with wisdom, solace or spiritual strength. Vogler refers to this figure as one of the possible helpers of the hero in mainstream film narratives as the Shaman.<sup>103</sup>

Quite often the presence of elder Indigenous characters in Mexican films can be read as a metaphorical reference to the Indigenous distant past as being part of national identity. For example, in *Japón* (Carlos Reygadas 2003) and *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón 2001) elder female characters are presented as symbols of Mexico’s Indigenous heritage. Much has been written about how *Y tu mamá también* can be read as a reflection on Mexico’s national identity. Cultural studies scholar Marina Diaz López provides an elaborate reading of the film in terms of gender and national identity, and explores extensively the implications of the names of the characters in her paper ‘Dónde Están los Hombres? Crisis de la masculinidad Mexicana en Y tu mamá también’ (2008). The main characters of the film have names of national heroes and allegorically represent the clash between the lower middle class

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<sup>100</sup> See for example *Hollywood’s Indians* (Rollins and O’Connor 1998) or *Fantasies of the Master Race* (Churchill 1998).

<sup>101</sup> Floyd Westerman was an important Native American rights activist and played in numerous films and tv shows, quite often in the role of medicine man, chief or wise elder.

<sup>102</sup> Both Churchill (1998) and Verstraten (1999) elaborate on this topic.

<sup>103</sup> Vogler (2007) mentions the hero can be aided by a spiritual guide which can take different forms and is often a wise elder figure. Vogler refers to this figure as the ‘Shaman’ although he does not attribute him or her to a specific cultural realm.

and the high upper class of Mexico. The last names of the boys explicitly refer to important characters of Mexican history. Zapata is Mexico's hero of the revolution and can therefore be aligned with the peasants and working class, while Iturbide installed a monarchy after Mexico's independence and can therefore be aligned with Mexico's elite. Luisa's last name, Cortés, is an explicit reference to Mexico's colonial past, as Hernán Cortés was the principal *conquistador* of Mexico. The Spanish love interest of the boys can therefore be read as an explicit reference to Mexico's colonial past and as a continuing but impossible desire for Spain and Europe. The imagery of Mexico as a primarily 'Western'/white nation is prevalent in Mexico's visual culture. An interesting example is the representation of the main character in the film *Tizoc* (Ismael Rodríguez 1957). In *Tizoc*, Mexico's famous actor Pedro Infante, plays Tizoc 'the last Indigenous prince of the Totonacas' (this is all, of course, historically inaccurate). Throughout the film Indigenous characters are played by non-Indigenous actors in Brown Face. In the film, Tizoc is in love with a 'white girl' María, played by María Félix. At a certain moment Tizoc imagines himself dancing with María. In this phantasy, which is presented through a point-of-view shot, Tizoc has rid himself of all his Indigenous attributes, such as skin colour and thick hair, and has turned into the perfect white Mexican gentleman as exemplified by Pedro Infante himself. The representation of racial tensions and a desire for Europe and 'whiteness' have long been present in Mexico's film history.

In the films *Japón* and *Y tu mamá también* the Indigenous elders are marginal characters. The elder woman in *Japón* hardly has any dialogue, while the elder woman in *Y tu mamá también* does not speak at all.<sup>104</sup> The function of both characters in these films is to provide the non-Indigenous main characters with solace, and therefore they do not really have any individual agency or desire. Both characters thus conform to Vogler's description of a spiritual guide or Shaman figure within the narrative. In *Japón*, the elder woman dies in an accident after the main character has left. It seems the Indigenous roots are destined to disappear. In *Y tu mamá también*, the elder woman only makes a very short appearance in which she gives the female lead a charm. In both films, the elder characters are tropes of a forgotten and distant connection with the Indigenous roots of the Mexican nation and their presence is built on the stereotypical imagery of the female shaman.<sup>105</sup> It is therefore hardly coincidental that the main character in *Japón* had been considering a suicide, while Luisa in *Y tu mamá también* had already been diagnosed with terminal cancer when the travelling trio encounters the Indigenous elder woman. The Indigenous women in both films thus clearly

<sup>104</sup> Similarly in *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre 1998) the phrase is used: "Indians are stoic".

<sup>105</sup> Quite similarly to the grandmother-tree figure in the film *Pocahontas*.

perform the role of providing some form of solace or spiritual guidance to characters that are in a liminal space between life and death.<sup>106</sup> In both films, the Indigenous world is furthermore associated with something that is coming to an end. The films, therefore, share the nostalgic idea of *Dances with Wolves* that the Indian is something of the past, or soon to vanish.<sup>107</sup> While stylistically and in terms of content *Japón* and *Y tu mamá también* are very different films, and also have a very different narrative structure and aesthetic compared to, for example, *Dances with Wolves*, *Pocahontas* and *De Indiaan*, all these films employ the same motif of the ‘wise Indian’ as a helper and even spiritual guide to the protagonist. Except for *Pocahontas*, all these films have in common the fact that they centre around a non-Indigenous protagonist. The narrative function of the ‘Indigenous wise elder’ is thus very similar in the different films, although the films are incomparable in many other aspects.

At first sight, the short film *Snuu Viko* appears to present a similar motif with the death of the grandmother. Nevertheless, the narrative function of the elder Indigenous grandmother in *Snuu Viko* is very different. While *Japón* and *Y tu mamá también* pivot around non-Indigenous protagonists, *Snuu Viko* on the contrary presents the Mixtec boy Emilio as a main character. *Snuu Viko* presents the Indigenous elder in a very different context and the narrative function of this figure is also very distinct. First of all, *Snuu Viko* deals explicitly with an issue that is of vital importance to many Indigenous communities, namely the survival of language. This already sets up a very different narrative in comparison to the previously mentioned films. The grandmother figure in *Snuu Viko* represents traditional values within an Indigenous community, instead of ‘solace’ for a non-Indigenous protagonist. The passing away of the grandmother in *Snuu Viko* can surely be read as a metaphor for the eminent loss of the Mixtec language and cultural values. Nevertheless, Emilio’s commitment to only speak Mixtec can also be read as an insistence on cultural continuation against all odds. The autobiographical inscription of the author in Rojas’s text, furthermore allows for a different reading, as he continues to make films in Mixtec.<sup>108</sup> *Snuu Viko* thus does not present an idea of a vanishing past, but rather a condition of structural and cultural violence (Galtung 1969) in which cultural survival and continuity are threatened but nonetheless existent. *Snuu Viko* in this sense addresses an issue which many Indigenous communities confront and

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<sup>106</sup> Inspired by Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the folktale* (1928), Vogler (2007) distinguishes eight different archetypes in narrative film that perform a specific narrative function within a film. One of the archetypes he distinguishes is that of the spiritual guide or ‘Shaman’.

<sup>107</sup> For an elaborate discussion on how the other is often framed in a “different time” and associated with the past, see Fabian (1983).

which is strongly related to processes of globalization, migration and modernization. The approach of the film is thus, in Naficy's terms, oppositional with respect to the discursive practices described by Fabian in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983) as it grounds the Indigenous community firmly in the present with its present-day problems.<sup>109</sup> The modernization of Indigenous communities might improve the quality of life, providing greater access to medical care and education, but at the same time modernization and globalization may also lead to the erosion of a traditional way of life, and often do not provide lasting sustainable alternatives for the communities. Film itself as a modern medium is paradoxical in this respect. On the one hand, it can provide a tool to document traditions, spoken language, on the other, film also participates in the process of transformation through the globalization of traditional communities (Ginsburg 1998). As Naficy (2006) points out, the tensions provoked by the intersection of cultures and of living between pre-modern, modern, and post-modern realities, lead Accented filmmakers to explore these tensions and contradictions in their work. It stands to reason that their films address the changing attitudes towards the transformation of traditions brought about by modernization and globalization. Many films employ a conflict between generations as a narrative device to address these issues, as explored below.

### *Generational Conflicts and the Rift between Tradition and Modernity*

The films *Himalaya* (Eric Valli 1999), *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro 2002), *Birdwatchers* (Marco Bechis 2008), and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (Zacharias Kunuk 2006) foreground an apparent conflict between tradition and modernity, but they are set in the present. *Himalaya* is a film by Eric Valli and was filmed in Nepal with inhabitants of the region. The film has a strong ethnographic focus, in the sense that it documents a particular way of life and religious traditions. The *making-of* shows that the film requested participants and extras to dress in traditional regalia, which was no longer in use in the Dolpo, as people were wearing jeans in their ordinary life. The *making-of* also portrays how the inhabitants of the Dolpo have largely replaced the Yaks with motorized vehicles as means of transport. Nevertheless, the feature

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<sup>109</sup> Massive migration to urban centres is leading to the fragmentation of Indigenous communities and has as an effect that Indigenous languages are no longer spoken and increasingly face threats of extinction. The INALI (National Institute for Indigenous Languages in Mexico) considers that at least 107 of the 364 Indigenous linguistic variants in Mexico are in high or very high danger of extinction in the near future (Embriz Osorio and Zamora Alarcón 2012).

film presents a culture more isolated from modernization and globalization. The story of *Himalaya* focuses on the rivalry between an elder leader with the name of Tingle and a young man named Karma. The two men have different opinions as to how to lead the caravan of yaks that transports their salt to the market. While Tingle wants to hold on to traditions such as depending on the outcome of an oracle for what is the best day for departure, Karma prefers to trust his own, individual perception of the weather and decides to leave as soon as possible without awaiting the outcome of the oracle. The resolution of the film brings both men together. Neither standpoint necessarily excludes the other, and a collaboration between the two perspectives is not only possible, but even desirable for the wellbeing of the community. While the film foregrounds the generational conflict between two individuals, it also stresses the need for both standpoints for the prosperity and wellbeing of the community.

*Whale Rider* is a film by Niki Caro based on a short story with the same title by Māori writer Witi Ihimaera. The film tells the story of a young girl named Pai. Her grandfather Koro is the leader of his people and expects his firstborn grandson to be the next leader. Yet when Pai is born, her twin brother and her mother die during labour. Pai tries very hard to fulfil the role of the firstborn grandson Koro would have desired, but cannot live up to this as she is a girl. Koro starts a school for boys to teach them the old ways of the Māori but Pai is not allowed to join, as she is not a boy. However, Pai observes the classes from a distance, and she trains in secret. When a large colony of whales washes up on the shores, Pai and the entire community go out to rescue the whales, even though she is not supposed to participate. The film thus explores the conflict between the traditional views of Koro with regard to gender roles on the one hand, and the interest of Pai in her ancestors and culture on the other. The film resolves this conflict in the end and shows that the sense of community, solidarity and collaboration are far more important than leadership. The grandfather understands that tradition can only survive if it opens itself up to the youth and thus to change. *Whale Rider* consequently presents change and gender inclusion as a vital necessity for cultural continuity.

*Birdwatchers* (Marco Bechis 2008) is a film set in Brazil and is about a Guaraní community which starts living next to a highroad with the idea to recover some of their former lands, now being used for industrial agriculture. The community is led by Nadio, who challenges the right of the landowners to take away their lands.<sup>110</sup> Nadio is a single parent to an adolescent son. Eventually father and son clash over their different choices. The biggest

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<sup>110</sup> In the film Nadio is a Guaraní activist who is murdered by landowners who want to crush the Guaraní movement. Nadio was performed by Ambrósio Vilhava, a Guaraní activist in real life. Vilhava was murdered in December 2013 under unclear circumstances, after years of receiving multiple death threats in relation to his role as an activist, resulting in a tragic intersection of fiction and reality.



clash between Nadio and his son occurs when his son decides to work for a few weeks on a sugar plantation. After the work assignment, the young man decides to spend his money on a pair of sneakers, instead of bringing the money back to the community. Nadio sees this as a betrayal of his cause and as giving in to the oppressive system of the landowners. Nadio therefore bans his son from the community. An important character in the film is an elder medicine man, who tells Nadio he should be less hard on his son. While he is from an older generation, the medicine man is presented as a mediator between father and son.

Nevertheless, this comes too late for Nadio's son, as he commits suicide after the clash with his father. Nadio himself is eventually killed by the gunmen of the landowners. This film presents the generational conflict between tradition and modernization as embedded in more complex power structures. The appropriation of Guaraní lands by Brazilian landowners for large-scale agriculture, has made it impossible for the Guaraní to continue living in traditional ways. On the other hand, the marginalization of the Guaraní from modern urban development has forced them into cheap labour. A dignified life seems impossible for the Guaraní under these circumstances. Father and son thus both become victims of a system of exclusion, which can be understood as a form of both systemic and cultural violence.

The preoccupation with generational conflicts related to traditional viewpoints and modern perspectives are present in different Indigenous films around the globe. *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (Zacharias Kunuk 2006) is set in Arctic Canada in 1922 and explores the encounter between an Inuit Shaman and European explorers. The film is based on the journals from the 1920s of ethnographer Knud Rasmussen. The film highlights the encounter between the Inuit people and the new settlers and shows how the Inuit culture begins to change through contact between them. The film evokes a sense of a way of life that has ended. The film is Inuktitut spoken and consequently the explorers communicate in flawed Inuktitut. This can be interpreted as a cinematic comment on mainstream representations of 'the other'. While Indigenous Peoples and 'the other' in general, are represented in mainstream cinema as speaking 'flawed English' (Shohat and Stam 1994), it becomes clear through this little reversal of roles that from an Indigenous perspective the settler could also be considered an 'other'. As such, this little scene questions existing constructions and hierarchies of self and other.<sup>111</sup> The main character of the film is a shaman who is confronted with the choice of either continuing to live in his own way, or adapting to the changing

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<sup>111</sup> A similar instance occurs in *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, when my parents tell in an interview how they first met, my father acknowledges to have been completely out of place in the village, thus destabilizing prevalent self and other dichotomies.

environment around him in which increasingly more Inuit communities convert to Christianity. His opinion clashes severely with that of his daughter who also possesses shamanic powers. She prefers to abnegate the gift of shamanism in order to convert to Christianity as this would guarantee a certain degree of physical survival. Most European traders are Christians and will only trade with other Christians. Converting to Christianity, therefore, would facilitate the supply of food. As famine starts to affect the family of the shaman he eventually also decides to convert to Christianity. The conversion takes place in the form of a ritual in which the different family members eat a part of the walrus, which is considered taboo by Inuit culture. In participating in this ritual the shaman renounces his shamanistic powers and his 'spiritual companions'. It turns out that many of what seemed family members in previous scenes are in fact spiritual companions presented as human characters. During the ritual of conversion to Christianity these characters leave the shaman and the community crying and in great sorrow. The scene visualizes the pain connected to the loss of Inuit traditions and religious beliefs in a changing world. This sense of pain and alienation, caused by the rejection of the Inuit culture, permeates the film. While the film appears to be about 'the loss' of culture, the film is not only a form of documentation, but also a form of contemporary cultural continuity through its very own use of Inuit language and symbolism. The relationship between the shaman and his daughter therefore not only stands for a generational conflict, but also for the continuity of a shared cultural memory that is passed on from one generation to the other. Even though the traditions are changing, the memory of shared experience connects one generation to the other. The painful process of converting to Christianity is part of Inuit history and cultural memory.

The difference between generations serves to convey the contrasts and tensions of present day issues in Indigenous communities. While in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, the changes of traditions and religious beliefs are presented as a violent event provoked by the outside world and marked by loss, in *Himalaya* the changes are generated organically from within the community and are presented as an expansion rather than as a threat of existing traditions. The films show how different generations negotiate their different approaches to changing times and environment. While changes in cultural values and traditions can, on the one hand be perceived as threats, they can also be seen as an addition to and expansion of the existing cultural norms or even as a necessity for cultural continuity. The different films explore these tensions while presenting at the same time a sense of connection between different generations. In *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, *Whale Rider*, and *Himalaya*, for example, the elder generations in the end accept the younger generation's

changing attitudes towards tradition, change thus being an element of Indigenous cultures and cultural memory. Contrary to the stereotypical and marginal representations of Indigeneity, which rework the prevailing notion that Indigenous Peoples are confined to the past, the above mentioned films provide a more complex perspective on Indigeneity with respect to time and the changing of traditions.<sup>112</sup> While traditional anthropological approaches tend to present a search for ‘pristine’ origins or an Indigenous culture ‘untouched’ by modernization, the films analysed here instead explore the tensions and contradictions but also connections incited by changing traditions. The films present generational conflicts and cultural transformations as inevitable consequences of the changing times and environment and offer different, conflicting perspectives and attitudes towards these changes.

### *The Community as an Ethical Posture*

The motif of the ‘wise elder’ has also been present throughout my own cinematic work. In *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono*, I included different images of an elder Mixtec woman sitting next to the fire.<sup>113</sup> *El Rebozo de mi Madre* includes several interviews with elder people in the village. The last interview in the film, concerning the passing of time and the meaning of life, was taken with Don Isauro who was then 81 years old. The short film *El Último Consejo* contrasts a council of elder men with a council of younger men. The different generations indeed represent different world views and traditions. The council of elders represents traditional communitarian values, while the council of young men represents a more individualistic and capitalist view of the world. In this sense, the short film *El Último Consejo* explicitly deals with community values. The story was inspired by a true event, but was fictionalized.<sup>114</sup> As Indigenous filmmakers, the writer Armando Bautista García and I

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<sup>112</sup> As noted earlier, Fabian has argued that Anthropology often constructs and ultimately ‘others’ its subjects as confined to a specific (past) time (1983).

<sup>113</sup> The elder woman was my grandmother. Her onscreen presence coincided with the voice off mentioning the goddess Nine Grass who was guiding the destiny of the main character.

<sup>114</sup> This short film was conceived as my first fictional work, and surged from a need to explore particular aesthetic concerns and aspects of production regarding the feature film *Dios no estaba ahí*. *El Último Consejo* was written by Bautista García who is also the writer of *Dios no estaba ahí*. The short film was originally intended as a casting and location exercise. When searching for a story that would allow us to have similar characters and locations as in the feature film, Bautista García remembered an event from his childhood. During the traditional ceremony for the change of authorities in his community, the council of elders used to count all the money from the village treasury in public in order to assure the transparency of power. He recalled that on one particular occasion the money was stolen shortly after the ceremony. This event was the starting point for the story of *El Último Consejo*.

wanted to express our own frustrations concerning common political conflicts in our communities, and more in general, our annoyance with political corruption in Mexico.

The production process of *El Último Consejo* involved strong community participation. The Mixtec community of writer Bautista García provided the staffs of authority for the film and several other props as well as transportation.<sup>115</sup> The Mixtec community of Quilitongo, where we filmed, participated as extras and provided the space for storing equipment, as well as props and assistance during the shoot. From the beginning, we intended to work with a combination of professional and non-professional actors, as we wanted the elder men to speak Mixtec. While discussing the first drafts of the script I immediately had someone in mind for the role of the leader of the elders. I have known Ubaldo López García since my childhood and I knew him as a Mixtec scholar who had also been part of the traditional authority in his community on several occasions. He has also done extensive research on Mixtec ritual speech acts (López García 2007). As López García had experienced being in a traditional council himself and possessed excellent knowledge of Mixtec ritual speech acts, he seemed perfect for the role of leader of the council of elders. But the presence of López García in the short film can also be seen as an inter-textual reference to his work and as such attaches the film to a community of Mixtec scholars, writers and artists interested in the preservation of language and cultural values.<sup>116</sup>

Originally, I wanted to cast professional actors for the council of young men. But we did not succeed in finding professional actors who were available in the shooting period that we had in mind. Or the available actors did not fit the description of young men living in an Indigenous village. The only professional actor who participated in the short film is therefore Roberto Mares, who acts as the leader of the young council. While not originally intended in this way, the cast thus ended up consisting primarily of relatives and friends, as is common in artisanal and interstitial productions (Naficy 2006). All the extras in the short film were people from the village. Taking into account that most of the participants had no experience with acting at all, directing the scenes had much in common with documentary filmmaking. I tried to give everyone small actions within the scene that would help them to feel at ease and less self-conscious. Even the scene in which the two young men get into a fight was filmed in a very ‘documentary’ approach. As Juan Camiro is a teacher of Taekwondo in real life, and

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<sup>115</sup> These “staffs” are for ceremonial use only and are not supposed to be taken up by non-authorities, nor should they be taken out of the village.

<sup>116</sup> During the production of the short film it turned out that Rojas, the assistant director, was familiar with the work of López García and had wanted to interview him for his own film *Snuu Viko*. Also, actor Ezequiel Marín had read different papers by López García and proceeded to invite him to give a seminar in his village.

Ezequiel Marín is a professional wrestler, they choreographed a fight together, without my intervention. The Director of Photography and I watched their choreography and decided where to place the camera accordingly. This documentary approach and working with non-professional actors has been a common practice in Third Cinema and, for example, in the work of Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés.<sup>117</sup> The main reason to work with non-professional actors was motivated by the desire to work with Indigenous performers and, as I mentioned in previous chapters, in Mexico there are hardly any professional Indigenous actors due to structural social and economic marginalization. The intention to give certain onscreen visibility to Indigenous faces thus resulted in the approach of working with non-professional actors and with the community.

To me the story was about a conflict between tradition and modernity. For this reason, the elders spoke Mixtec, while the youngsters spoke in Spanish. Also the title song for the short film is in Mixtec. The song is taken from a ritual speech act registered by López García and addresses the values that the people expect from their authorities. We tried to continue the conflict between ‘old’ and ‘new’ and between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ as much as possible. The location was chosen for the lack of urban elements in the scenery. Although we could not get the traditional clothing we intended to use, we tried to give the elders certain traditional attributes, such as the straw hats and the woven blanket. The general production approach of the short film was akin to making a documentary. We had no budget for Art Direction, so the actors and the extras came in their own clothes. Also, props were all borrowed from the local community. The short film was shot with mostly existing light, except for the night scene, which was lit with simple light bulbs. The aesthetic look of the film was therefore also prevalingly documentary or in fact very similar to certain aspects of Third Cinema aesthetics. With regard to the camera style, we wanted to mark a difference between the elders and the youngsters. Serguei Saldívar, the Director of Photography, and myself had figured that it would be interesting to film the elders always using a tripod, and at the same time film the youngsters with handheld camera. We thought the steady and static camera would in a way represent the traditional values of the elders, while the handheld camera movements would represent the wish for change from the youngsters. As there was a hurricane in Mexico, we lost a day and a half of shooting time, due to excessive rainfall. Consequently, we had to severely economize the shooting time. The Director of Photography and I decided to film everything handheld in order to speed up the process of production. Although we had to adapt the original plans, in retrospective the decision to shoot the whole film handheld reinforced its particular documentary aesthetics.

*El Último Consejo* is above all a story about the clash between modern capitalism and traditional values in an Indigenous village. In the short film, a council of elders transfers the

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<sup>117</sup> *Teoría y práctica de un cine junto al pueblo* (Sanjinés 1979).

power to a new council of young men. As part of the ceremony they count all the money in the village treasury. The young men throw a big village feast upon receiving their new responsibilities. During this party the different members of the new council get into a fight over how to spend the village money. The following day the money from the village treasury has disappeared. The communitarian values are represented by a council of elders, while the individual interests are represented by the incoming council consisting of five young men. One of the elders gives a speech in which he stresses the importance of looking after the wellbeing of the community. In contrast with this speech, the young man who receives the staff of authority from him stresses in his own speech the importance of money for progress and modernization. The first action of the new council consists of throwing a big party for the village. The next morning they find the village treasury is empty. While the young men suspect the thief must have been a vendor from outside the village, the audience sees how the former council of elders distributes the money among each other and then throws it on a fire. The values and interests of the community are thus contrasted against the wants and interests of individual politicians. For this reason, the short film does not have a very clear protagonist. It is not a story centered on a single main character, instead it is a story that presents conflicting worldviews and attitudes towards power and money. The ceremonial change of authorities in *El Último Consejo* represents the organizational structures of an Indigenous community. In the dialogues the community and its wellbeing are continuously present. As the elders address the incoming council, they tell them to watch over the wellbeing of the whole community. When a foreigner arriving in the village asks a local lady what is going on, she answers that it is the change of authorities and that they are counting all of the community money. When the money has disappeared, the leader of the new council agonizes: “What will we tell the community?”. The wellbeing of the community and community values are thus a central element of the film. The story foregrounds a form of communitarian ethics and addresses the conflict between an individualistic and capitalist worldview on the one hand, and a communitarian perspective based on solidarity on the other. The story tries to provoke the question: what is the value of money if it is only used for personal interest and gain?

### *Community and Inter-generational Trauma*

While the presence of different generations can explore and represent the dynamics of cultural change it can also function as a link to a shared, often violent and traumatic, past.

There are different social and mental health studies exploring how the process of colonization provoked a trauma, which is passed from one generation to another.<sup>118</sup> Both the violent encounters during the process of (de)colonization, as well as the being subjected to forms of structural violence since, provoke different kinds of trauma among Indigenous Peoples which are then passed on from one generation to another. Here I want to explore how this inter-generational trauma is explored in relation to gender and gender violence in the films *La Tiricia o de Cómo Curar la Tristeza* (Ángeles Cruz 2012) and *La Teta Asustada* (Claudia Llosa 2009).

Ángeles Cruz is a Mixtec actress who appeared among others in *La Hija del Puma* (Åsa Faringer, 1994) and *El Violín* (Francisco Vargas 2000).<sup>119</sup> *La Tiricia* is her debut as film director. The short film has won many national and international awards.<sup>120</sup> Like *Snuu Viko* and *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, *La Tiricia* made use of family and communitarian infrastructure for production and is what Naficy calls an artisanal film. Cruz filmed in her home village, San Miguel el Grande in the Mixtec highlands.<sup>121</sup> Many of Cruz's relatives participated in the production of the film, either as actors or crew-members. The film obtained production funding from IMCINE (the National Mexican Film Institute) and was filmed with a professional photographer, art director and some professional actors. The production was thus a mix of artisanal modes of production with more mainstream production modes. Cruz has mentioned that almost the whole village participated in the production of the short film. The town's megaphone was used to announce the beginning of the shoot and to ask the whole town to not turn on radios or use electrical saws during the shooting period. The village also housed and fed the professional crew of the film.

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<sup>118</sup> On the subject of Intergenerational Trauma in the context of Indigenous People in North America see for example Duran, Duran and Brave Heart (1998), and Struthers and Lowe (2003). These studies are in the field of clinical psychology and address present day social issues among Native Peoples in the United States, such as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, suicide rates, and mental health.

<sup>119</sup> *La Hija del Puma* (Åsa Faringer and Ulf Hultberg 1994) is a Swedish film about the genocide of the Maya people in Guatemala. Ángeles Cruz plays Aschlop, a 17 year old girl who witnesses the massacre in her village and has to flee to Mexico. Aschlop decides to go back to Guatemala in search of her missing brother. The film is based on the book by the same title (*Pumans Dotter*, 1986) by Monica Zak, a Swedish writer and journalist. Zak wrote the book in the period of the genocide of the Maya people by the Guatemalan regime. On 10 May 2013, former dictator of Guatemala Efraín Ríos Montt was sentenced to eighty years of prison in Guatemala for the genocide of the Maya people (but released in a matter of days). Rigoberta Menchú Tum describes the genocide against the Maya people during the regime of Ríos Montt in her autobiography. She received the Nobel-prize for Peace in 1992 for her advocacy for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. *El Violín* on the other hand is a film that deals with the violent repression of Indigenous Peoples by the military in recent years. While most people will read the film as a reference to the repression of the Maya people in Acteal (South of Mexico), the film is not set in a specific place or time, thus presenting an image of perpetual violent repression against the rural and Indigenous communities on the continent. *El Violín* shares the aesthetic and ideological messages of Third Cinema and can be seen as a present-day continuation of that movement.

<sup>120</sup> Among others the awards Mexican Ariel, La Palmita, and La Diosa de Plata 2013.

<sup>121</sup> San Miguel el Grande is a neighboring village of Chalcatongo, my mother's hometown.

*La Tiricia* is a film about sexual abuse within different generations of one family in an Indigenous community.<sup>122</sup> In this sense, the short film has several similarities with the film *Madeinusa* (2006) by Peruvian filmmaker Claudia Llosa. Nevertheless, an important difference between *La Tiricia* and *Madeinusa* is that *La Tiricia* presents incest and sexual abuse as social issues that need to be addressed within Indigenous communities, while *Madeinusa* employs incest as an element to construct Indigenous communities as a distant, alien and monstrous Other. The feature film *Madeinusa* is the directorial debut of Claudia Llosa and is also the debut of Magaly Solier as an actress.<sup>123</sup> The film starts out with the journey of Salvador, a geologist who comes from Lima, and is travelling to a remote village in the Andes.<sup>124</sup> The isolation of the village in relation to the rest of the world is stressed several times at the beginning of the film. In this remote village lives the young teenager Madeinusa with her father and sister. The beginning of the film establishes that the most important annual festivity of the village is soon to take place. During this festivity, one of the virgin girls of the village will represent the Virgin Mary.<sup>125</sup> The festivity lasts three days and during this time, the Saints of the church will be blindfolded and ‘not see’, which opens up the road to all possible sins. In the absence of the fear for God everything is allowed. It is clear that Madeinusa’s father has been eagerly awaiting this moment, as it is his wish to deflower his own daughter. The desire of the father, who is also the town mayor, to sleep with his daughter is not a secret in the town. Throughout the film it becomes clear that all the villagers are aware of what is going on and condone it as part of the celebrations. One elderly lady, who is in charge of dressing Madeinusa for the festivities, at a certain point laments that Madeinusa has given herself to another man, as Madeinusa’s father had been waiting so long for this special moment. The film thus presents incest as a culturally accepted and even promoted practice in Andean cultures. For the general public, however, incest, like cannibalism, is considered a major deviance. Although such things exist, most societies do

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<sup>122</sup> Studies show that in the United States over 80% of Native American women have encountered some form of sexual abuse at least once during their life-time. Bohn (2003) links this excessive pattern of abuse to substance abuse, mental health issues, and high suicide rates in Native American communities and relates many of these issues to historical trauma.

<sup>123</sup> Magaly Solier was born in Ayacucho, the Andean part of Peru and speaks Quechua.

<sup>124</sup> The actor who plays the role of Salvador is Carlos J. de la Torre. He was born in the Dominican Republic from a Peruvian mother and Spanish father. Carlos also played a Spanish character in the TV film *Columbus*, *The Lost Voyage* (Anna Thomson 2007). His appearance and accent within the film *Madeinusa* position him as an outsider to the Indigenous community. His position as an outsider is further emphasized because the people from the town all call him *el extranjero* (the foreigner).

<sup>125</sup> This invented feast is clearly inspired by different religious festivities in Central and South America wherein different members of the community represent different Biblical characters during village processions.



not consider incest or cannibalism culturally and socially acceptable practices.<sup>126</sup> A culture that practices either incest or cannibalism is therefore perceived as monstrous. It should be noted that incest is not a culturally accepted practice in Andean cultures, although it may exist as a social problem.

Through its representation of incest as a cultural practice, the film constructs an image of the Andean population as over-sexualized, violent and without moral values. These elements fit into biased constructions of Otherness.<sup>127</sup> It is important to take into account that the Andean population in Peru has been othered since the process of colonization and is generally presented in the Peruvian national discourse as backwards, barbarian and primitive.<sup>128</sup> Taking into account the context of discrimination, exclusion and exploitation of the Andean population in Peru, the film participates in a discourse that justifies systemic violence as described by Galtung (1969). Although the film has visual and artistic merits and has been positively received at international festivals, it is important to address the aspect of ‘othering’ present in the film. This aspect makes itself predominantly present through the narrative structure, but also the art direction and acting contribute to this general representation of the Andean population as exotic and barbarian.<sup>129</sup> Shohat and Stam clearly explain in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* that the representational aspect of cinema can have social effects and consequences for marginalized and underrepresented groups. They argue that:

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<sup>126</sup> In her paper ‘A Contemporary Andean Type: The Representation of the Indigenous World in Claudia Llosa’s films’ (2013) cultural studies scholar Maria Chiara D’Argenio explores how excessive violence and sexual deviancy are employed to represent otherness within Llosa’s films.

<sup>127</sup> Philosopher Raymond Corbey analyses in *Wildheid en beschaving* (1989) how constructions of otherness are generally based on different cultural norms regarding food, clothing and violence. Particularly in the Americas there is a long history of such hostile stereotypes and cultural misconceptions being constructed to inferiorize Indigenous Peoples (as cannibalistic, irrational and satanic) and so legitimize the European conquest and colonization (cf. Mason 1990). In *Fantasies of the Master Race* (1998) Churchill analyses the ways in which Native Americans have been represented in film and how many of these representations are constructions of otherness, presenting deviant cultural norms with respect to sexuality and violence. Churchill also argues that most films made about Native Americans have a narrative structure in which the protagonist is a non-Native, to inform and express the perspective and viewpoint of the audience. Although Madeinusa is the protagonist of the film, the narrative structure does employ the character of Salvador as an outsider to give the audience the outsider’s point of view.

<sup>128</sup> See for example the literary analysis of Adriana Churampi in ‘Los otros en Ushanan Jampi y El Campeón de la Muerte de Enrique López Albújar’ (2012). For an analysis of the lack of inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the sphere of politics see the study by Maria-Therese Gutafsson: ‘Inclusión o cooptación de comunidades indígenas en la política local. Reflexiones desde los Andes peruanos’ (2008). The organization CLACPI (Latin American Coordinating Council for Indigenous Film and Media) has recently issued a statement against the stereotypical representations on television and in films, predominantly against the popular figure ‘Jacinta’. The arguments against such forms of representation are that the effect of othering contributes to the marginalization, discrimination and exclusion of Indigenous women in Peru. See for example the discussion at <http://clacpi.org/observatorio/?p=4241>

<sup>129</sup> In Peru many critics in fact objected to this representation.

No deconstructionist fervor should induce us to surrender the right to find certain films sociologically false or ideologically pernicious, to see *Birth of a Nation* (1915), for example, as an ‘objectively’ racist film. That films are only representations does not prevent them from having real effects in the world; racist films can mobilize the Ku Klux Klan, or prepare the ground for retrograde social policy. Recognizing the inevitability and inescapability of representation does not mean, as Stuart Hall has put it, that “nothing is at stake”. (Shohat and Stam 1994: 178)

*Birth of a Nation* is widely considered a masterpiece of its time, as it was a highly innovative work, using for the first time many elements of the cinematic idiom that are considered mainstream today, such as the close-up and the shot and counter-shot. Nevertheless, as Shohat and Stam point out, the aesthetic qualities of the film do not change its pernicious ideological message. The aesthetic and artistic qualities of a film do not necessarily influence the discourse of a film, nor should they be construed as a compensation for, or justification of the ideological message.

The representation of the Andean population in the film *Madeinusa* is stereotypical and negative in different respects. To begin with, the name of the girl ‘Made in the USA’ is of course an example of the lack of knowledge and infantilized character of the girl’s parents. Who would seriously give such a name to a child? The implication that the Indigenous population is ‘backward’ and not knowledgeable of the modern world is explicitly played out when Madeinusa looks into the shirt of Salvador and tells him that they are meant to be together, as her name is written in the back of his shirt. This stereotype of Indigenous ‘backwardness’ is, as mentioned before, overtly present within dominant society. The Andean population has also regularly been depicted as extremely violent or over-sexualized. The film represents the Andean culture as permissive towards incest. This representation is in line with previously existing stereotypes. An additional questionable element in the film is the presence of the outsider and his perspective within the narrative structure of this film. Salvador in Spanish means the saviour and his name in a way implies the white saviour complex.<sup>130</sup> The audience of the film is not a direct viewer of the incest, but is indirectly present at the moment through the focalization of a male outsider. In this scene the audience is presented with the perspective of Salvador, as he passes by Madeinusa’s house and

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<sup>130</sup> Film scholar Matthew Hughey writes extensively on this subject in his book *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption* (2014). According to Hughey white saviour narrative is a cinematic trope in which a white person rescues people of colour from their plight.

accidentally catches what is going on inside. As a viewer we relate to the outsider's disgust and abject reaction. The point-of-view and perception of the Spanish character accentuates the Otherness and monstrosity of the Andean community and culture.

*La Tiricia* treats the problem in a radically different way. While incest in *Madeinusa* is presented as an Andean cultural practice, in *La Tiricia* it is presented as a family problem. The narrative structure of *Madeinusa* relies heavily on the outsider's perspective – an external male gaze – to witness the abuse; instead, in *La Tiricia* the women recount their experiences of abuse in a desire to heal each other. While one film relies on the male gaze to convey the abuse, the other foregrounds female voices. The narrative structure of *La Tiricia*, makes it very clear that the incest is not an exception nor an isolated case, but a widespread problem within the community. Yet it is not a culturally promoted practice, but rather a social problem. Child abuse is an existing problem in many Indigenous communities, and finds its origins in poor schooling, widespread alcohol abuse and poverty.<sup>131</sup> Addressing this problem is therefore important and urgent. Contrary to the narrative of the film *Madeinusa*, which presents incest as a cultural practice propagated by the community, *La Tiricia* presents it as an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. The short film starts out with a village festivity, with music and alcohol. In this sense both *Madeinusa* and *La Tiricia* foreground a community organized around religious and festive events and embed the characters clearly in a community. Nevertheless, the embedding of the sexual abuse in both films is drastically different. While *Madeinusa* clearly foregrounds the abuse as an integral part of the community festivities, in *La Tiricia* the abuse belongs to specific characters that are part of a larger community.

At the beginning of *La Tiricia*, Lucía sees how her drunken husband lifts up their small daughter. As her husband swings the girl around, Lucía hurries to take her from him. She leaves the festivities with the girl and on their way home she has a flashback of herself as a young girl hiding from her older brother. It is evident that her older brother fondled or abused Lucía as a child. In this flashback, it is also clear that Lucía's mother did not intervene because she did not (want to) see the abuse. Through the continuation of the story the audience understands why Lucía's mother preferred not to see the abuse. The next day Lucía is sitting at the breakfast table with her mother and daughter, feeling 'tiricienta', which means having an illness of the heart or having pain in the soul. The title of *La Tiricia o de Cómo Curar la Tristeza* explicitly refers to the process of healing as *de cómo curar la tristeza*

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<sup>131</sup> See Bohn (2003).

literally means ‘about the ways to heal sorrow’. Healing in this context should not be taken as a ‘magical’ solution through which all problems disappear. It indicates instead the possibility of the character to change and to find strength through a traditional *limpia* (cleansing ritual).<sup>132</sup> Psychologist Suzanne L. Stewart conducted a study on the incorporation of traditional healing methods in mental health services to Indigenous People from Canada. In the introduction to the study, she states that:

Indigenous cultural understandings of mental health and healing are distinctly different from understandings that have prevailed in most North American mental health provider settings, including counseling contexts. (Stewart 2013: 2)

She furthermore explains how the lack of incorporation of traditional healing methods in contemporary medicine perpetuates a form of colonization and observes:

These differences in paradigmatic perspectives can form a barrier to effective health promoting services for Native peoples who seek mental health support from formally trained counsellors, including those who may be trained in cross-cultural and multicultural approaches. Further, Duran (2006) suggests that counselling Indigenous individuals from a non-Indigenous perspective (i.e. Western perspective) is a form of continued oppression and colonization, as it does not legitimize the Indigenous worldview of mental health and healing. Health promotion within Indigenous communities, in the current context of decolonization, could instead accept an Indigenous view of health that was not judged or valued by non-Indigenous views. (ibid.)

The presence of Indigenous healing practices in *La Tiricia* can be read in this light and understood as having a ‘decolonizing effect’ (Knopf 2008). The representation of traditional healing methods as a way to overcome or deal with sexual abuse is thus in line with present-day attempts in decolonizing Western (mental) health perspectives and approaches. Within the film, Lucía gains agency through her participation and performance of a ritual. Gilbert has noted, in an elaboration of Butler’s theories on the performing of gender (Butler

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<sup>132</sup> In accordance with Mesoamerican worldview a *limpia* is a traditional cleansing with plants or flowers, often performed for illnesses of the soul such as stress and fear produced by a traumatic event. It plays a central role in Mixtec medicine, particularly when mental, religious or psychological factors are involved.

1990), that Indigeneity is performed through self-fashioning acts and the embodied processes of enactment (Gilbert 2013). Participation in and performance of ritual are thus elements through which Indigeneity is enacted. Gilbert cites Alfred and Cornthassel with respect to the enactment of Indigeneity observing that “being Indigenous means thinking, speaking and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one’s Indigeneity” (Alfred and Cornthassel 2005). Throughout *La Tiricia* the filmmaker ‘speaks’ about an important issue in present day Indigenous communities, while presenting a decolonizing perspective. It is therefore possible to read Ángeles Cruz’s short film as a conscious intention to speak as an Indigenous filmmaker.

The sadness of Lucía is very similar to the ‘emptiness’ of soul suffered by Fausta in *La Teta Asustada*, Claudia Llosa’s second feature film. Both *La Tiricia* and *La Teta Asustada* deal with inter-generational trauma and the need to find healing. Both films have female protagonists and focus on the emotional scars provoked by sexual abuse. The main character of *La Teta Asustada*, Fausta, is ill in a spiritual as well as physical sense. The film begins with Fausta’s mother singing in Quechua. Her sorrowful song details how her husband was killed and she was raped while she was pregnant of Fausta.<sup>133</sup> Fausta answers with a song in Quechua while she tends to her aging mother. The entire film is partly Quechua, partly Spanish spoken. As the film continues, the viewer understands through different events and comments, that Fausta has an ailment provoked by the rape of her mother known as ‘La Teta Asustada’. The family believes that as Fausta was nursed by her traumatized mother, she ingested the fear and sorrow of her mother through her mother’s milk. Therefore, it is thought that Fausta goes through life joyless and fearful, without a soul. When her mother dies, Fausta is forced to undertake action to be able to arrange for a burial in her hometown, as Fausta and her mother have been living in the suburbs of Lima. To earn some money Fausta goes to work for a wealthy Peruvian lady, Mrs. Aida, as a house-maid. The relationship between Fausta and Mrs. Aida is exemplary of the exclusion, discrimination and exploitation faced by Indigenous People in urban centres.<sup>134</sup> When Fausta arrives at the house she is

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<sup>133</sup> The film makes clear that Fausta was born during the time that Peru was suffering from a violent conflict between the terrorist movement Sendero Luminoso and the state military authorities. The Truth Commission in Peru established that 75 % of the victims of the armed conflict were Quechua speaking peasants. While the Truth Commission attributed 66 % of the murders to Sendero Luminoso it attributed most of the rapes to military members and state officials. The majority of the women who suffered sexual violence during the conflict were also Quechua women. The violence hit the Andean region of Ayacucho particularly hard. The film does not make explicit whether Fausta’s mother was raped by the military or by Sendero Luminoso and as such does not align Fausta’s family with a particular camp. The film instead presents Fausta and her family as victims of the violence.

<sup>134</sup> See, for example, the Project 97 *Empleadas Domésticas* by Peruvian artist Daniela Ortiz. The project presents 97 pictures, all collected from facebook. In all the pictures, a house maid in uniform is present in either

thoroughly inspected by Fina, the other household-help. Fina examines Fausta's teeth, hands and ears to see if they are clean enough. She also cautions Fausta that Mrs. Aida can be easily put off if she does not watch her personal hygiene and takes a bath every day and that the use of a uniform and deodorant is obligatory. Fausta is supposed to stay in the kitchen unless Mrs. Aida requires her presence. The film thus presents the distance between and the prejudices existing among economically privileged Peruvians towards the Indigenous population.<sup>135</sup> The scene presents the Indigenous body as exposed to inspection and judgment by a 'dominant master' and recalls the treatment of Indigenous and African bodies during slavery, as well as the approach by early anthropologists to the body of the colonized.<sup>136</sup> The same scene calls to mind an event described in the novel *Caramelo* by Chicana author Sandra Cisneros. In the novel, the main character Celaya describes her childhood love for the daughter of one of the servants in her grandmother's house in Mexico City. But Celaya's cousins insisted that the Indigenous girl was dirty as she did not wear any undergarments. Celaya describes how the children thought of a way to verify if the servant girl did indeed not use underwear.<sup>137</sup> Like the novel, the scene in which Fausta is inspected, demonstrates how Indigenous bodies have been constructed as 'Other' through a colonial discourse which continues to shape perceptions, stereotypes and judgments in the present.

In the film, Fausta suffers from both an emotional or spiritual malady as well as from a physical health problem. Both problems are interrelated. It gradually becomes clear that Fausta has chosen to introduce a potato in her vagina as a form of protection against possible rape. When she was still living in the village she heard that a neighbour had done so to prevent herself from being raped. It is clear that Fausta has incorporated the rape of her mother Perpetua as a traumatic event in her own life. Fausta is consequently fearful of men and in a broader sense of life in general. Fausta avoids all physical contact with men, and does not dare to walk alone. She always walks close to the walls. When Perpetua dies at the beginning of *La Teta Asustada*, Fausta faints and is taken to a medical clinic. Here the doctor

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the background or margins of the image. The project thus questions the normativity and invisibility of domestic workers within Peruvian society.

<sup>135</sup> In Mexico different cases of public figures speaking dismissively about (Indigenous) domestic servants have recently provoked discussions on internet.

<sup>136</sup> E.g. by the notorious measuring of skulls, still realized in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>137</sup> In Colonial discourse the body, sex and sexuality of the colonized were often employed to construct otherness. An example of how the private parts of an individual were embedded in the colonial discourse is the fate of Saartje Baartman. Performance artist Gómez Peña mocks the obsession with the private parts of the 'Other' the performance *The Couple in the Cage*. This performance alludes to the public display of 'other races' as was common in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. As part of the performance Gómez Peña offers the audience to display his own private parts for five dollar. But when Gómez Peña lifts his skirt, there is nothing there to see, thus alluding to the impossibility of representation.

explains to her uncle that they have discovered a potato in Fausta's uterus. The subsequent discussion between Fausta's uncle and the doctor expresses a profound disconnect between traditional beliefs and medical science. This hostility between traditional medicine and Western medical science is present as a motif in many other films about Indigenous communities. For example, in the film *Altiplano* there is a conflict between traditional medical practices and modern medicine practices. In my own film *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, the characters express their gratitude for having access to modern medicine facilities. In *Snuu Viko*, the lack of access to modern medicine facilities ends up being fatal for the grandmother. Jorge Sanjinés's film *Blood of the Condor* (1969) is about forced sterilization. In Mexico, recent cases of medical neglect and misconduct towards the Indigenous populations are abundant and criticized in the press.<sup>138</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that the relationship with modern medical practice is a topic of tensions and conflicting viewpoints. As mentioned previously, the inclusion and acceptance of Indigenous knowledge regarding (mental) health is part of a decolonizing practice with respect to contemporary medicine and health institutions.

Fausta finds herself forced to travel alone and confront her fears. She finds support with the gardener of the wealthy mansion, a man who also speaks Quechua. Throughout the film, Fausta learns to be less afraid and becomes stronger, she thus finds 'her soul'. It is noticeable that in the film Fausta's emotional growth is strongly connected to her voice and speech. Throughout the film, Fausta's condition of having an 'empty soul' and excessive fear, is expressed through an inability to speak, or when she speaks she does so in an extremely quiet voice. When she is alone Fausta conjures her fears and anxiety through singing. A particularly interesting scene in this sense occurs when Mrs. Aida, the wealthy owner of the house where Fausta is employed as a maid, calls Fausta to help her with hanging some photographs on the wall. As Fausta enters the room she sees the photographs of different Peruvian military officials. Mrs. Aida hands Fausta her drilling machine to hold it while she arranges a picture. Fausta sees herself reflected in the glass frame of the pictures. As she is holding the drilling machine, in the reflection Fausta resembles a guerrilla fighter. The image thus imbues the picture of the military official with the presence of armed resistance. As such, the image captures opposing forces within the Peruvian national context:

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<sup>138</sup> The Mexican weekly opinion magazine *Proceso* dedicated an article to a recent event in Oaxaca where an Indigenous woman gave birth outside a hospital, because the medical staff refused to offer her assistance. The event gained attention after a picture and video of the event were spread through social media. The analysis of the magazine makes clear that the hospital staff refused assistance because of racism and bias: <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=354510>

that of a Quechua woman coming from the Andean country side and belonging to the suburban class in Lima, and that of a white, male, military elite whose family belongs to Lima's wealthy urban upper class. As Fausta looks at the pictures of the military officials and her own reflection, she gets nauseous, is unable to speak and her nose starts bleeding. Fausta's loss of voice in this scene can be read as a traumatic reaction, but also as a reference to the silencing of Indigenous voices through the colonial legacy and contemporary (state) violence.

Fausta runs from the scene and in order to comfort herself, she sings a song in Quechua and Spanish about the gift of singing. The song recalls her mother's tale about how humans obtained the gift of music. Mrs. Aida, who is a professional musician working on a piano piece for an official recital, is fascinated by the song and asks Fausta to teach her the song. Fausta is unable to do so, as the song came spontaneously to her and is not a learned song. In other words, Fausta composed the song and is unable to repeat the performance on command. Eventually Mrs. Aida tells Fausta she will give her a pearl from her necklace for every time Fausta sings the song for her, and Fausta agrees. Through this exchange, Mrs. Aida converts the song into a piece to be played on the piano. The day of the recital, Mrs. Aida is applauded and greatly congratulated on her piece. Fausta watches the performance backstage from afar. On their way home, in the car, Mrs. Aida discusses the performance with her son. When Fausta mentions that people liked their song, Mrs. Aida throws Fausta out of the car for her impertinence. Fausta has to walk back home without receiving her rightful payment. Fausta was manipulated by Mrs. Aida into an unjust and unequal exchange in which she was robbed of her identity and of her most valuable asset. After receiving all the credit for work that was to a large extent the merit of Fausta, Mrs. Aida scolds her and rejects her. This narrative element in the film can be seen as a metaphor for the colonial encounter in the Americas and the continuing exploitation of Indigenous Peoples. A similar metaphor for the colonial encounter can be found in the film *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre 1998). In a specific scene the Indigenous protagonists Victor and Thomas come back to the bus in which they are traveling and find their seats taken by two cowboys. The cowboys refuse to move and send the boys to the back of the bus with the remark: "these are our seats now and there's nothing you can do about it." Indigenous Peoples throughout the American continent and their natural resources are exploited for the gain of Western oriented governments pursuing personal gains and profits. In *La Teta Asustada* Fausta is robbed of her voice in a way that is representative of how Indigenous Peoples are blatantly absent from most discourses regarding the future of Latin American countries and their national resources. Fausta's songs



are a way to counter discursive and systemic violence and can be read as a form of resistance through the presence of her 'Voice'.

Like Fausta's ailment in *La Teta Asustada*, in *La Tiricia*, the sadness (*tiricia*) is an intergenerational problem, passed on from mother to daughter. This becomes apparent in a scene in which Lucía sits at the table with her daughter and mother. All three are sad. None of them wants to eat. When Lucía's mother asks her what is going on, Lucía answers that she feels sick, she is cold and she does not want to eat. Her mother understands that Lucía is 'tiricienta' and that she must have inherited it from her. Lucía asks her mother how she got 'la tiricia' and her mother answers she inherited it in turn from her own mother. In a flashback we see how Lucía's mother was abused as a child by an uncle while her mother (Ita) chose to not see it. The audience understands that both Lucía and her mother have been victims of sexual abuse as a child. Furthermore, in both cases their mothers were unwillingly complicit. As Lucía understands her pain is part of a deeper family dynamics, she decides to end the circle of sadness for the wellbeing of her own daughter. Being submerged in her own pain, she will unwillingly pass on the 'tiricia' to her daughter. Tiricia can be understood as a sadness, which will produce a weakness similar to the absence of an own soul in *La Teta Asustada*. Lucía's sorrow will eventually affect her daughter. Similarly to what happens in the narrative of *La Teta Asustada* the trauma in *La Tiricia* is thus treated as having an intergenerational effect. While both in *La Teta Asustada* and in *La Tiricia* the pain and sorrow is passed on by the mother and grandmother, in both films also the strength comes from the elder generations. The mothers are not only the source of pain, but also the passage to healing for future generations. To end the circle of sorrow, Lucía takes her daughter to the river to perform the '*limpia*'. Lucía and her daughter throw a crown of white flowers into the river to throw off their pain and sadness. In the short film the husband of Lucía brings her grandmother to the river as well, so that the four generations of women can heal together. Since this is the end of the film, it is obvious that the idea of 'healing' is crucial to the film. *Healing and Mental Health for Native Americans: Speaking in Red* (Nebelkopf and Phillips 2004) addresses the need for a combination of traditional healing methods and modern medicine with respect to substance abuse and other mental health issues as the consequence of colonial trauma among Native Americans. The volume furthermore focuses on the importance of healing within family and community.

Lucía in this short film loses her fear and finds a way to forgive her mother and to trust her husband. The film thus presents the traditional *limpia* (cleansing ritual) as a practice to heal from sorrow and to come to terms with traumatic events. Although *La Tiricia* presents

a family story of intergenerational trauma and sorrow, it can be seen in the wider context as a comment on the need to heal from poverty, abuse and colonial trauma within Indigenous Communities. In *La Teta Asustada* it becomes clear that while modern medicine is needed to cure Fausta from her physical complaints, she needs to ‘heal’ as a person from the trauma provoked by the violence the country and her family have suffered. In *La Tiricia*, Lucía resorts to traditional healing practices to cure her soul. It is noteworthy that her mother, husband and grandmother join her, turning it into a family event. In a way, the end also calls to mind the ending of *La Teta Asustada*, when Fausta runs to the sea to wash off her sorrows. The films seem to state that there can be a healing power in one’s relation to the environment. These different films thus propose and present traditional values and religious beliefs as a path to ‘healing’ as a community and to find strength as a person.

When *La Tiricia* was screened within the community where it was produced, it opened up discussion and the need to talk as a community about how these problems and issues might be addressed and prevented. It made people open up about their own painful experiences with abuse and thus opened a way to search for healing. In this sense, *La Tiricia* empowers the community at different levels. In a personal conversation, Ángeles Cruz, the director of the film, told me that the need to make *La Tiricia* arose from a conversation with a relative who confided she had been abused as a child. The film was a way to address and process this information. The film, like Nicolás Rojas’s *Snuu Viko*, thus connects different communities both within and outside the film. The films are directed to Indigenous communities and aim to open up dialogues and an exchange of ideas regarding present-day issues that affect those communities. This may be the biggest difference between *La Tiricia* and *Madeinusa*. The community in *Madeinusa* is imaginary and the film is clearly not directed to an Indigenous audience with the purpose to promote dialogue and discussion, but rather to a film festival audience with the purpose to provoke amazement and shock. The films thus address very different audiences with different purposes. It can be noted that the different films by Indigenous filmmakers discussed here, are also always directed towards Indigenous audiences, addressing present day Indigenous issues. For example, *Snuu Viko* addresses the loss of language in a context of marginalization and exclusion, *La Tiricia* addresses the need to heal the scars caused by child abuse. Both issues are matters that deeply affect Indigenous communities throughout the continent and that have not received much attention by governments. While the aforementioned films do not belong to the genre of activist or educational videos, they can serve similar purposes in educating and engaging communities on the issues in question. These films are, therefore, not only communitarian in

their modes of production or subject matter, but also in their address and effect.

*Who are we, where do we come from and where are we going?*

Community structures, family ties and generational bonds can also be present in cinematic works as a way to convey a shared history and memory and thus a specific identity. *El Rebozo de mi Madre* is a film that revolves around generational ties. The title of the film explicitly foregrounds a mother-child relationship. A *rebozo* is a long scarf worn by women in Mexico, but also used to carry children and can therefore be seen as a metaphor referring to the umbilical cord. The narrative composition of *El Rebozo de mi Madre* is constructed around my own relationship to my mother and by extension to her native village. The film weaves together different stories that end up connecting one generation to the other. At various moments in the film, the different generations of my family – my grandmother, my mother, myself and my daughter – are interacting or sitting together in the frame. All the interviews in *El Rebozo de mi Madre* at a certain point touch upon family relations, but invest these with questions about how the village was in the past and what the villagers expect or want for the future, thus constructing a narrative which entails both change and continuity in time. In the final interview, Don Isauro, one of the participants, wonders about what the future might bring. He ponders on his finite existence, as he asks whether we will know of his death having travelled so far. He then concludes with a philosophical reflection about how we only have a breath of time on this earth and when we leave this place we pass on our struggles of existence to our children. The final reflection of Don Isauro foregrounds once more the link between different generations. This aspect is stressed by the fact that during his interview Don Isauro is framed together with his granddaughter. The girl meanders around the chair next to him, while he talks about life and the passing of time. In this film, time and temporality are intrinsically connected to the bond between generations. This bond is not necessarily one of harmony but is also marked by tensions and changes. A telling example is the conversation my mother and grandmother have about schooling. While they are sitting on a bench in front of grandmother's house, they recall how my mother went to school. My grandmother tells in Mixtec how her former husband did not want their daughters to go to school, as girls did not need an education because later on they would "just have babies", but my grandmother thought school was important and sent the girls anyway. She herself had never gone to school and therefore did not speak Spanish either. The scene therefore

highlights the contrasts, differences and conflicting worldviews between the generations, while at the same time accentuating the bond between the women.

*El Rebozo de mi Madre* has a circular narrative, as it begins and ends with similar images. The film ends with the image of a one-year old toddler (my daughter) trying to walk up a small sand hill. The film starts out with a montage of black and white photographs picturing myself as a small child. The last picture in this montage is one of my mother, myself as a four year old and my brother as a baby, sitting in the front cabin of a truck. The voice-over of the film explains that when I was still an infant, my family decided to migrate to the Netherlands.<sup>139</sup> The film continues with video images in the ‘cinematic present’ in which I travel by bus to my mother’s village in the company of my own small child;<sup>140</sup> the same child that tries to climb a sand hill at the end of the film. The narrative of the film thus introduces a sense of pastness through my own childhood pictures, while the presence of a small child appears to imply a sense of futurity. The figure of a child in itself encapsulates a sense of pastness, presentness and futurity, as this figure can, on the one hand evoke childhood memories of both filmmaker and viewer, while simultaneously announcing an unforeseeable and unknowable future.

Film Theorist Karen Lury (2010) explores the different functions of the figure of the child in films addressing an adult audience. Her study conveys among others how children in narratives of war, are on the one hand witnesses who are not yet able to judge the events taking place, but on the other, function as a figure that intertwines history and memory. Film theorist Vicky Lebeau analyses in *Childhood and Cinema* (2008) the interrelation between early cinema and images of childhood and connects the onscreen presence of children to film’s ability to compress time:

In this instance, the promise of the cinematograph – its movement, its animation – is *oneself as a child*, captured in the form of a moving image to be revisited, and passed on. ‘It will be possible,’ runs one striking claim, ‘for the octogenarian of 1990 to see

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<sup>139</sup> Film theorist and art historian Kaya Silverman states in *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988) that the ‘disembodied male voice’ is almost an institution in documentary, while female voices are excluded from positions of discursive power in classical film. The turn to documentary and the choice for a disembodied female voice (that of my own, also the author of the text) was a specific strategy to regain a form of discursive female presence within the filmic text.

<sup>140</sup> Scholar in Gender Studies Kathleen Rowe Karlyn analyses the mother’s voices and daughter’s voices in the film *Antonia* (Marleen Gorris 1995) and their investment in female subjectivity (Karlyn 2011). In *El Rebozo de mi Madre* my grandmother, mother and daughter are present throughout the film, in the film *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* my grandmother appears in the film while my mother’s voice provides the voice over of the film, and in *Alma y Esperanza* my daughter plays the role of Alma. The mother-daughter motif is thus not only present within the filmic text of *El Rebozo de mi Madre* but continues outside the text, throughout my work.

himself laughing or crying in his cradle, taking the first tottering steps of his life.’ The uncanny effect of this image, its doubling and compression of moments in time, depends on that ready equation between the moving image and life, its capacity to support the possibility of seeing oneself young and old *at the same time*. Nearing the end of his life, an eighty-year-old man gazes back at himself laughing, crying, walking (as a fond, and now dead, mother might have done?). In this sense, part of the novelty of the cinematograph is its capacity to bring the end of a man’s life into renewed and mobile contact with its beginning: the infant self, the child self, such an elusive, and yet such a passionate, object of investigation throughout the modern period. (Lebeau 2008: 9)

Film theorist Bruce Bennet on the other hand analyses the role of children and their relations to robots in science fiction films and observes that an important element of the child figure in these films is their being in a process of becoming. He observes in this respect:

What is at stake in child/robot narratives is a struggle/desire for agency insofar as child and robot are in the process of acquiring agency through various rites of passage. (Bennett, Furstenau and Mackenzie 2008: 171)

According to Naficy childhood, temporality and memory are also strongly linked in migrant or diasporic narratives and *Accented Cinema*.<sup>141</sup> For example, Salman Rushdie explicitly connects childhood memories and the loss of access to the past with the experience of migration in *Imaginary Homelands*:

It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. (Rushdie 1981)

The presence of my own childhood pictures as well as the child travelling with me to a country I left in a time when I was a child myself, situates the film in the realm of childhood memory and evokes Rushdie’s notion of the past as being a country we have left behind. The trip towards my mother’s village can therefore be equated as a journey into the past.

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<sup>141</sup> In *An Accented Cinema*, Naficy argues that home and home coming journeys are important themes in Migrant and Diasporic Cinema. Film theorist Daniela Berghahn explores the relation between childhood memory and ‘Heimat’ in her examination of the films of Fatih Akin (Berghahn 2006).

Nevertheless, the figure of the young child at the same time elicits the idea of an unknown and not yet accessible future. The film thus sets up a circular narrative, which connects past and future and which resonates in the ending of the film. The bus trip with my own child in the beginning of the film is moreover reminiscent of a scene in the Native American film *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre 1998).

A particular scene in the film *Smoke Signals* produces a ‘narrative loop’ or maybe even a kind of *mise-en-abyme*. Throughout the film, past and present are edited together by a hard cut, as if they were interchangeable, or even happening at the same time. For example, in a particular scene Victor remembers a quarrel he had as a kid with Thomas. The child Victor walks back home after this fight holding a basketball in his hand. When he enters the house he throws the ball towards his mother. His mother catches the ball, looks at him and asks him how his day has been. We expect to see the child, but instead an adolescent Victor answers in the counter-shot. This kind of shift between past and present occur constantly within the film. Victor remembers (through this same kind of alternations between past and present) on several occasions in the film, each time in a slightly different and more complete manner, how his father left his family. During the bus trip with Thomas, Victor remembers his father stepping into his pick-up truck. He feels his father will not be coming back and starts running after the truck, unable to catch up. The next shot appears to be a point of view of the father who is looking at him running behind the truck. Nevertheless, the following counter-shot is that of an adolescent Victor looking through the window of the bus, which implies he is watching himself as a child running behind his father, while the child is actually chasing a grown up version of himself: Victor the child chasing Victor the adolescent who is watching Victor the child, thus creating a kind of *mise-en-abyme* in which past, present and future are all collapsed. Victor is simultaneously travelling through past, future and present and turns out to be framed in a perpetual hunting of the self. At the same time, this editing device positions Victor in his father’s place, thus creating a mirror or unconscious coupling between his father and himself. This scene can in a way be read as a conscious reflection and questioning of identity. As the audience participates in the point of view of Victor, the *mise-en-abyme* ultimately invites the audience on a journey through memory and future, asking: “Who are we, where do we come from and where are we going?”<sup>142</sup> This cinematic

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<sup>142</sup> The phrasing of this question is indeed intended as an explicit reference to Gauguin’s work. I saw the painting when I was still a film student at an exhibition and it made a lasting impression. Like the scene in *Smoke Signals*, the painting creates a dynamic between past and present, between memory and the unknown as it depicts a sleeping infant on one side and an elder woman at the other. This coupling between the infant and old age is repeated in the scene of *El Rebozo de mi Madre* where Don Isauro is framed together with his

rendering is very similar to the meandering thoughts of Don Isauro towards the end of *El Rebozo de mi Madre*. Similarly to the narrative of *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, which is a circular structure evolving around mother-daughter relations, the fictional narrative in *Snuu Viko* is constructed around the relationship of Emilio to his grandmother. It is the relation with his grandmother that makes him decide not to speak Spanish anymore, as she implores him to speak only Mixtec. Nevertheless, Emilio's refusal to speak Spanish in the end precipitates the grandmother's death. Both in *Snuu Viko* as in *El Rebozo de mi Madre* the presence of different generations highlights the passing of time and the transformation of traditions and of a cultural landscape. The coupling or mirroring of children and elders in both films functions as a reflection on the passing of time and poses existential questions with regard to memory, identity and becoming.

In the film *Me parezco tanto a tí* (Luna Maran 2009), a group of young women is paired with their elder relatives. The young women and the elder women reflect on different aspects of life, such as education, marriage and their personal dreams. The interviews in the film are in this sense very similar to the conversations in *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, but have a clear gender focus. While in *El Rebozo de mi Madre* I am explicitly present and somehow part of the community represented, Luna Maran appears absent from her text. Nevertheless, in *Me parezco tanto a tí* the filmmaker is implicitly present through the title and the conversation with her peers. It is clear that the interviews touch upon issues that are important to a young woman and thus connect not only the younger generation to the older, but also the filmmaker to the different participating women in the documentary. Both films have titles that explicitly tie the author of the films to the filmic text and the other participants in the film. *El Rebozo de mi Madre* as a title asserts the relation between the filmmaker, the film and a mother figure. Indeed, the title expresses my relation to the village. It is through the mother-daughter relation that I am somehow connected to this place.

*Me parezco tanto a tí*, which means 'I am so similar to you', introduces again an authorial voice and relates the author to a general 'you' which could refer to either the audience of the film, or the different participants in the film, but it could also refer to the mirroring between the elder women and younger women within the filmic text. The conversations with other villagers in both films seem to be a way for the filmmaker to insert herself into the tissue of their communities. The authors of both films seem to inscribe themselves within this network of relations, thus inserting themselves in the communities

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granddaughter and throughout the film as it implicitly explores the mother-daughter relationship between myself and my mother on the one hand, and my daughter on the other.

they are representing. The films can therefore be seen as a speech act, or a conscious performance of identity. Gilbert proposes that performance is crucial to the understanding of indigeneity (Gilbert 2013). One could say that both Maran and I are employing the production of film as a way to perform our Indigenous identity by inserting us through film into our respective communities.

### *Conclusions*

Just like many other Indigenous filmmakers, I have often resorted to artisanal modes of production involving family members and community structures for the realization of my films. The films *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono*, *El Rebozo de mi Madre* and *El Último Consejo* are embedded in a Mixtec community. Community festivities, such as All Saints and Easter Celebrations are markers of time in the narrative structure of the film. Also, elements of community organization and community life aid in constructing a narrative structure. For example, the village market and the church gatherings serve to link different characters together. Community and family are indeed important themes of Indigenous Cinema. The presence of community, family ties and different generations can have different interrelated functions. On the one hand, the presence of different generations in the films can be a way of addressing the contrasts between more traditional and more globalized and modernized perspectives within Indigenous communities today. In this case, the relationship between the generations can express cultural tensions but at the same time provide a notion of cultural continuity through change and transformation. Community and community values in Indigenous Cinema can, moreover, propose ethical standpoints as an alternative to more individualistic and capitalist views of the world. But the coupling or mirroring of grandparents, parents and offspring also allows for a reflection on memory, time and the passing of time, thus inviting a reflection on identity.

Through the analysis of different films, such as *La Tiricia*, *Snuu Viko*, *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* and *El Último Consejo*, it becomes clear that both as a production strategy and a narrative device, the communitarian and artisanal approach is important in the making of Indigenous Cinema. Due to limited resources, many Indigenous filmmakers work on video and recur to an aesthetics that blends fiction and documentary elements. At the same time, this mode of production embeds the films in the community and turns the films into a communitarian expression. Community structures, such as festivities, ceremony and ritual can, furthermore, be an important element in the narrative structure of the film. Indigenous



filmmakers inscribe themselves in the text through the visible bonds with their respective communities. Their films not only portray their communities but also strengthen the relations and bonds with those same communities, as the films articulate and present a Voice that is rooted within those Indigenous communities. It can therefore be said that Indigenous filmmakers through their films “consciously think, speak and act with the conscious intent of regenerating their identity” (Alfred and Corntassel 2005: 597).