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

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## Chapter 5

### The Process of Articulating an Own ‘Voice’

My filmmaking practice has always wandered around themes related to migration and travel and many of my films have involved physical displacement. The documentary *Una nave per tornare* (A ship home) encloses the element of travel within the title. The short documentary *Ocho Venado y Seis Mono* recounts an ancient Mixtec story in which the main character is most of the time on a quest. In the documentary *El Rebozo de mi Madre* I travel back to my mother’s home town and in the short film *Alma y Esperanza*, a young girl travels from an unspecified city in the US to a small rural village in Mexico. My thesis film for the Netherlands Film Academy was the result of a journey to Sicily. Nevertheless, the idea for the documentary originated somewhere else. After reading Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de Sable* (1985), I decided I wanted to make a film about traditional storytellers. So when I encountered a storytelling tradition in Sicily I decided to make a documentary about this subject.

What had fascinated me in the book of Ben Jelloun was how he mixed different styles and stories and how he played with the element of ‘reality’ and fiction within the narrative. *L’Enfant de Sable* employs a so-called *mise-en-abyme*: it is a story within a story in yet a different story. The first story starts with a traditional storyteller telling a tale on a Moroccan marketplace. His tale is about a woman who was brought up as a man. However, when the marketplace is bulldozed to make place for a mall, the storyteller is said to die from heartache. The audience who listened to his tale gets scattered, but four people decide to continue telling each other the continuation of the story for it to have a proper ending. While one of the first audience members continues with the story and constructs a grotesque ending, another claims to have met the woman in the story and have had a love affair with her. Yet a different audience member claims to be the woman in the story herself. I initially wanted to reproduce the aspect of multi-vocal storytelling and the shifts between different perspectives and sustained truths to the film by combining documentary and fictional elements. Yet, while developing the film, the original idea transformed into something else and the final film turned out to be above all a portrait of *puparo* Cuticchio.

In the film, Cuticchio elaborates on his own journey as a storyteller while taking the audience on the journey of Ulysses through a puppet play. Until today one of my favourite moments of Cuticchio’s play and of the film is Ulysses’ encounter with Nausicaä. This scene also provided the film with its present title. Cuticchio himself plays the shipwrecked Ulysses,

while a puppet's head represents Nausicaä. It is noteworthy that Cuticchio's staging presents the storyteller as a wandering traveller. The practice of storytelling is indeed in many ways related to travelling. After Ulysses explains his ordeal, Nausicaä tells him not to worry as the king of this country is very fond of strangers and if Ulysses wants to go home, he will provide him with a ship to do so. The scene thus encapsulates the idea of travel and return, a theme that, as Naficy has noted, is also often present in Accented Cinema:

Every journey entails a return, or the thought of a return. Therefore, home and travel, placement and displacement are always already intertwined. Return occupies a primary place in the minds of exiles and a disproportionate amount of space in their films, for it is the dream of a glorious homecoming that structures exile.

(Naficy 2006: 229)

Naficy elaborates on how journeys and border crossings are important themes for Accented Filmmakers and distinguishes different kinds of journeys. According to Naficy, the motivation for and direction of the journey can be read in symbolic terms:

The direction of the journey has profound empirical and symbolic values that shape not only the travel, but also the traveller. This is because significant journeys tend to be meliorative and redemptive experiences. (Naficy 2001: 223)

He elaborates on how the physical journeying is often connected to the emotional journey and therefore to the transformation of the characters:

Depending on their motivation, journeys may take the form of exploration, pilgrimage, escape, emigration, or return – the latter three more precisely qualify as exilic and diasporic journeys. However, journeys are rarely simple or homogenous. Most often, they are composite and evolutionary. Exploration, for example, may involve quest, wandering, search, homelessness, or even conquest and colonization. Once initiated, journeys often change character: begun as an escape, for example, a journey may become one of exile, emigration, exploration, or return.

(Naficy 2001: 222)

It comes therefore as no surprise that much of my work, just as that of many other Accented filmmakers, revolves around travelling. According to Naficy, the motivation and sense of the journey tends to shift during the film. Narrative films always include some kind of character transformation. Most Accented films thus incorporate some form of journeying which parallels or mirrors the character's transformation. However, the transformative experience is not limited to the characters of the story. Anzaldúa notes that stories have the capacity to transform both the storyteller and its audience. Anzaldúa also refers throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera* to different Indigenous elements, such as shamanism and *nahuales* with regard to the transformative aspect of stories and storytelling. She writes for example:

In the ethno-poetics and performance of the shaman, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. The religious, social and aesthetic purposes of art were all intertwined. Before the conquest, poets gathered to play music, dance, sing and read poetry in open air places around the *Xochicuauhtl, el Árbol Florido, Tree-in-Flower*. The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is a *nahual*, a shaman. (Anzaldúa 1987: 88)

As Anzaldúa notes, storytelling transports both the storyteller and the audience to a different realm, transforming them both. In other words, filmmaking as a form of storytelling is a transformative journey for both the audience and the filmmaker. As discussed in chapter two, narrative films present the audience with characters that undergo an emotional journey of transformation of some kind. The audience will participate to a certain extent in this process of transformation through the mechanisms of identification with the characters. Narrative cinema therefore always entails forms of identification and affect, and the audience participates to a lesser or greater extent in the transformative emotional journeys of the characters. As Naficy notes, many Accented films visualize the emotional journey of the character through a physical journey in the film. In this final chapter I want to explore the theme of travel in my work, filmmaking as a journey in itself and its transformative aspects for audience and filmmaker. I will first look at the theme of journey, travel and transformation within my own work in relation to the work of other Indigenous filmmakers. For this purpose, I will analyse the short films *Música para después de dormir* (Nicolás Rojas 2013), *La Carta* (Ángeles Cruz 2015) and *Alma y Esperanza*. I will explore how the journey

of filmmaking has transformed me and my approach to film along the way and consider how finding one's 'Voice' as a filmmaker is also a form of journeying.

### *Cinematic Journeys, Homecomings and Displacements*

In continuation I want to explore the aspect of travel and return in the short films *Música para después de dormir*, *La Carta* and *Alma y Esperanza*. It is an interesting coincidence that all these short films are our second fictional works as directors. *Música para después de dormir* is a short film about the return of the body of a migrant to his native village. In this film, Fidencio and his wife receive the news that their son has died and that the body will be returned to the village. Gradually it becomes clear that the son has migrated and did not return to the village in many years. Fidencio decides to gather the members of his old music band in order to receive his son's corpse. When the coffin arrives, the son comes out of the coffin and starts dancing with his parents and all the villagers. It is then clear that the story was not taking place on earth but in a kind of afterworld. The son has only been reunited with his village and relatives in death. The film has different characteristics mentioned by Naficy. It is, for example, telling that the title of Rojas's film encapsulates the idea of dreaming. In Spanish the title of the film alludes to the state of dreaming through the word 'dormir' (sleeping), while the English translation of the title is *Music for the Ultimate Dream*. The dream appears to refer to the illusionary world in which the son arrives and which turns out to be inhabited by all the villagers in the film. This reading is reinforced by the dreamlike visualization of the landscape.

Rojas captures the place with beautiful cinematography and most of the shots in the film are either tracking or crane shots. The aesthetic thus creates a dreamy atmosphere. The son therefore returns to a non-existent idealized place. The return at the same time encapsulates the idea of leaving and of memory. When Fidencio receives the news of the death of his son, he goes out to look for the former musicians of his band. In the same way that children in films tend to incorporate a sense of pastness and futurity, people of old age are often an explicit reference to the past and memory. The reunion of the old band members is therefore in itself a journey into the past, a so-called trip down memory lane. Rojas's short film indeed might be understood as a comment on Rushdie's notion that "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". Rojas appears to contend that indeed it is impossible to return to lost

origins, and that the past is only accessible in dreams and memories. The film thus expresses the desire of a grand homecoming, but simultaneously formulates the awareness that it is impossible to return to the condition that was left behind by the migrant, as both the migrant and the hometown have inevitably changed. The place that was left behind is now a place of the past only accessible as an imaginary homeland. Once again it is inevitable to hear and see Rojas inscribe himself in his filmic work. It is apparent that the short film *Música para después de dormir* is a comment on the process of filmmaking. For Rojas, as for many Accented filmmakers, film itself is the locus of homecoming, as it is through the illusory capacity of cinema that the lost home of the Indigenous migrant can be emulated.<sup>143</sup>

Cruz's second short film *La Carta* also presents a homecoming journey. In this short film Lupe, a young woman, returns to her hometown in the Mixtec area. Just as for her first short film, Cruz shot *La Carta* in her home village San Miguel el Grande. Similarly to Rojas film, the homecoming is represented through aesthetic elements that provide a dreamlike atmosphere. For example, the arrival of Lupe is filmed through a flutter of light sparks.<sup>144</sup> Also the element of memory and pastness is present throughout the film. When Lupe arrives, a former school companion recognizes and greets her, saying: "Look, it's still the same time as when you left" referring to the village clock, which has been eternally standing still. The village clock seems to hint at the perception of Indigenous Peoples living in the confinement of a past time.<sup>145</sup> A different example of the prevalence of memory and pastness in *La Carta* can be found in the art direction. The bus, with which Lupe arrives, is a model that is no longer in use in the region and as such it is a reference to past memories.

Lupe's return is all but glorious or grand. When she arrives at her parent's home, they ask her if she has been cured of the illness that sent her away in the first place. It becomes clear through the dialogue that Lupe is not ill but lesbian and that her parents do not accept her as such. When Lupe's father understands that Lupe has not changed in this respect, he announces he no longer has a daughter. Lupe leaves devastated and stops to vomit in a maize field. Lupe needs to externalize the rejection by her parents through the vomit. Lupe then visits her former school friend Rosalía. Gradually it becomes clear that there is a specific attraction between the women, an attraction Rosalía is not ready to admit. The attraction is shown through the use of wandering camera movements between the women. The

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<sup>143</sup> Naficy observes about the films of Lithuanian filmmaker Jonas Mekas: "His homeland is Lithuania, but his home is elsewhere, and it is not a place; it is Western high culture and art (poetry, alternative cinema, and film criticism)".(Naficy 2006: 230 )

<sup>144</sup> An effect created through the use of small mirrors which diffuse the light source.

<sup>145</sup> Fabian analyses in *Time and the Other*, how Anthropology and ethnography construct their objects as confined to a different and past time.

cinematography of *La Carta* in this respect bears a certain similarity with *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar Wai 2000) as it expresses the attraction and lingering sensuality between two characters. After one night together, Lupe returns to Mexico City. In the first instance Rosalía tells Lupe that she cannot continue the relationship, but when Lupe's bus is about to leave, Rosalía arrives with a suitcase. As the girls leave together, a close up of the village clock shows that time is still standing still. The journey in *La Carta* is thus twofold. On the one hand, there is the 'homecoming' journey of Lupe, on the other there is Rosalía's departure towards a different life. Where Rojas's film seems to be a comment on the impossibility of returning, Cruz film seems to address the difficulties of staying. Both films share an aesthetic that presents an idealized landscape of the hometown, or what Gabriel characterizes as the 'remembrance phase' in Third Cinema in *Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films*.

*Alma y Esperanza* is a 17-minute short fiction film about a girl in the United States who loses her mother and travels to her grandmother in a rural Indigenous community. The story is about the grief of both, who have never met before. On a different level the film also expresses the hope that both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Mexico might find a way to relate to each other. Alma is the name of the girl and means 'soul' in Spanish. Esperanza is the name of the grandmother and means 'hope' in Spanish. As both the girl and the grandmother have no common language, the film is almost without dialogue and is told visually. The film was shot with non-actors in an Indigenous community. In the visuals there is a stark contrast between the urban environment of the girl and the rural landscape where the grandmother lives. The idea for the story arose during a visit to my in-laws in a small Indigenous community in Oaxaca. I remember the sight of my daughter, wearing a pink dress and a straw hat, walking through the rocky landscape, looking like a tourist. This surreal image of a foreign girl in the mountainous landscape of Oaxaca was the first instance of inspiration for the short. I decided at that moment I wanted to make a short film with both my daughter and my mother-in-law. I was interested in the contrast between the rural landscape and environment and an urban character that would be completely out of place. The relationship between my daughter Dzauí and my mother-in-law Esperanza was in fact a perfect metaphor for the disruption and distance created by the migratory experience: their worlds could not be further apart, yet there somehow existed intimacy and a true connection between them. Their relationship somehow summarized the fragmentation and contradictions I had been feeling throughout my youth as a migrant.

The first idea for the film was the story of a tourist girl who gets lost in an Indigenous village when her parents stop the car to look at a map. The film would explore the encounter between the lost girl and an old woman in the village. While I was working on the script and development of the short film, we were also applying for the residence permit of my Mexican partner in the Netherlands. While trying to meet all the necessary requirements, I started to worry more and more about the consequences of the Dutch immigration policies on my family life. What if my partner would not qualify for a residence permit, would that mean our son would not be able to see his father? And if something ever happened to me, would that mean our son would be left parentless? Or would he be sent to Mexico? Reading different stories about undocumented children or children of undocumented parents in the Netherlands and the ways in which the immigration office has dealt with similar cases, I started to get outright nightmares. The fears and uncertainties I was experiencing in this period influenced the script of the short film *Alma y Esperanza*. The story of the tourist girl consequently changed into the story of a migrant girl who loses her mother and is sent to live with her grandmother in Mexico. This change in the script was the direct consequence of my need to express the fear and anguish provoked by the Dutch immigration policies at that time. So on different levels, the script for the short film *Alma y Esperanza* is strongly rooted in personal experience. This does not mean the film is autobiographical. For example, I have not experienced the loss nor the journey made by Alma in the film.

The films of Cruz and Rojas are equally connected to their personal experiences without being autobiographical. Rojas has mentioned many times that he has family members who migrated from the community and never returned. The element of an impossible return features prominently in his work. This theme is also present in his documentary plan *El Abuelo* (unfinished), where the body of a migrant is returned to be buried in his community by the family and it is present in his feature film script *Welcome To San Juan* (in script phase) where the ghost of a migrant returns to his home village only to discover the village has disappeared. While the theme is not present in his first film *Snuu Viko*, it is striking that also this film features the death of one of the characters. In other words, Rojas's work, as that of many Accented filmmakers, revolves around the impossibility of return and holding on to traditions. This theme is obviously, as Naficy observes with respect to Accented Cinema, strongly rooted in Rojas's experience with respect to his own migration, but also regarding the rapid changes in his Indigenous community. Cruz's work concentrates on the experience of women within Indigenous communities. *La Tiricia* addresses the problem of family violence and abuse, while *La Carta* presents a painful coming out story. While the films are

not an autobiographical account, they do reflect Cruz's heightened sensibility towards female and queer experiences.

My work in this sense is the result of my particular affinity with displacement and fragmentation because of living in two countries and because of the great distance between myself and dear family members. These personal experiences make me more attentive to stories about displacement, distance and fragmentation. In this sense the creative process leading to my work shares many similarities with the writing process described by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands*:

Writing produces anxiety. Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer – a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless, floating state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen.  
(Anzaldúa 1987: 94)

It is interesting how Anzaldúa connects the writing process to her personal identity and sees how these overlap and interact. In a similar way, my own creative process is tight to the personal experience of living as a migrant. From the start, *Alma y Esperanza* was intended as a short film about distance, fragmentation but also closeness experienced as a migrant with respect to family ties and human interaction. The relationship between my daughter Dzaui and my mother-in-law Esperanza, contained and expressed simultaneously the distance and connection between the two worlds I had been living in as a child. The film was therefore strongly grounded in my own personal experiences as a migrant and the motivation to make the film was the need to express the contradictions between the urban environment I was living in, and the rural world that was part of my youth. In retrospect, this was also the driving motivation behind *El Rebozo de mi Madre*. Personal experience is what drove me to set the film in a particular context and to find a certain narrative to express personal emotions, such as fear, anguish and the contradictions of living as a migrant. My own identification with other migrants passing through similar experiences led to this particular film. In this sense, the film indeed emerged from the personal, or as my documentary teacher Michael Rabiger would phrase it, “from one of my greater problems in life”. Anzaldúa connects the writing process to the personal:

To write, to be a writer, I have to trust and believe in myself as a speaker, as a voice for the images. I have to believe that I can communicate with images and words and that I can do it well. A lack of belief in my creative self is a lack of belief in my total self and vice versa- I cannot separate my writing from any part of my life. It is all one. When I write it feels like I am carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart- A Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. It is learning to live with *la Coatlicue* that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else.  
(Anzaldúa 1987: 95)

Anzaldúa notes that while the personal gives rise to the writing process, the writing process also is an embodied experience which changes her as a person. Filmmaking for me has the same potentiality, of on the one hand expressing personal preoccupations, experiences and desires, and on the other generating growth, change and transformation.

#### *The Journey of a Film from Script to Edit*

From the description of the filmmaking process of my different films, from *Una nave per tornare* to *Alma y Esperanza*, it becomes clear that this process is always a journey in itself. Film plans transform and shift, sometimes quite drastically, during their development, shoot and edit. The creative process of *Alma y Esperanza* was very similar to that of a documentary and many of the creative choices were improvised or found on the spot. As Dzaui still did not read English, and Armando's mother cannot read at all, we did not really use the script for the shooting. Instead of staging the script we improvised the scenes in the script in an almost documentary approach. I decided early on that I wanted to film in Armando's village, particularly in his parent's home, a small house with a dirt floor and no commodities. I wanted to film on this location because the house brought back memories of my own youth and of my grandmother's kitchen. Due to the limited production budget, there was no real crew and I shot everything myself, while Armando operated the sound equipment. I told Dzaui and Esperanza what the film was about, what their relation was in the film (grandmother and granddaughter) and the kind of scenes that I wanted to film. The shoot was further complicated because of extremely bad weather conditions (hurricanes) and shortage

of time, as Dzaui was going to school in Oaxaca city, a three hour drive from the village. We therefore focused on the most essential scenes and decided we could film the rest of the story in the Netherlands. Back in the Netherlands I continued working with a documentary approach and improvised the remaining scenes with Dzaui. We thought of images in which the girl would be clearly alone and in grief. Together we came up with a couple of scenes, which we shot in a documentary manner. The final story was constructed in the editing, much like in a documentary process.

From the beginning it was clear that the story had to be told without much dialogue: Dzaui and Esperanza did not speak the same language. This forced me to think about the story primarily in visual terms. I tried to search for imagery that would convey the feeling of loss and the loneliness of the girl. Most of the images were improvised with this feeling of loss and loneliness in mind. I spent an afternoon with Dzaui, wandering through the streets of The Hague, in order to orchestrate little moments and scenes that would represent Alma's grief. I had planned a couple of possible scenes, such as Alma looking at a construction ground. I thought the chaos and emptiness of a construction ground could be a metaphor for Alma's feeling of loss and abandonment. While walking through the streets of The Hague we saw a poster of a massive hamburger. This image struck me as exemplary of urban consumerism and I decided to film Dzaui sitting in front of it listening to music on some electronic device. I tried to underline the feeling of loneliness by using, for example, a wide angle lens to create a feeling of distance and isolation.

In the filming style I tried to create a sense of identification with Alma, through close-ups and over-shoulder shots. I had decided Alma was the protagonist of this story and both in the script as later on in the editing I started out with an image of Alma. In the original script the first scene consisted of an image of Alma lying on her bed. During the improvisations with Dzaui I had filmed an image of Alma writing the word 'Mum' on the stained window of the shower. In the editing this image became the first image of the story. As I was revising the material, I felt that this image expressed the whole drama of the story. Alma's writing of the word 'Mum' on the stained window could be understood as a longing and desire for her mother. The image also captured the sense of isolation and loneliness of the girl. The stained window also provoked a fuzzy image which implied an aspect of uncertainty, thus hinting at the unresolved future of the girl. I included a point-of-view shot of Alma looking at water slipping through her hand as I intended this image to function as a metaphor for life slipping through one's fingers. The ephemeral aspect and the fragility of life are themes that have also been present in my previous work. The images of Alma lying on her bed were included in the

film, after this improvised image of Alma writing on the stained window. Although the final edit of the film differed in many ways from the script, the general sense of the story remained the same. The journey of Alma in the film is one of less hostility, than in, for example, *The Girl* or *La jaula de oro*. The film instead starts with distance between the characters, and Alma gradually develops a connection and a feeling of closeness towards her grandmother. The film closes with the embrace between the girl and her grandmother. The narrative therefore follows the conventions of mainstream drama, in the sense that it provides a feeling of closure and the main character makes an emotional journey in which she undergoes dramatic change. Alma's feeling of loss at the beginning of the film evolves into a feeling of connection towards the end of the film.

Alongside the narrative structure of a film and the visual language, an important element in establishing a feeling of identification in the audience is the performance of the actors. In *Alma y Esperanza* I was working with non-professional actors, as I did previously for *El Último Consejo*. Many directors have worked on films with non-professional actors. In Mexico Carlos Reygadas, Amat Escalante and Diego Quemada-Díez and Matias Meyer have often worked with non-professional actors. This practice was common in the Italian neo-realism and director Roberto Rossellini comments the following on working with non-professional actors:

When you work with nonprofessional actors, each one has his own technique, so I don't want to say that my technique is the only one, but I can tell what mine is. When I make the choice and want someone to play a role, I have the patience to be with him for lunch or dinner so I can discover what kind of work he is suited for. I discover what kind of gestures he does mainly, and when I do the scene, I do the scene thinking of it. So when we rehearse, I give him the suggestion to do himself. (Sherman 1987: 82)

In short he suggests that when working with non-professional actors, one technique is to give them directions to act as themselves. A similar comment is made by director John Cassavetes, as he states:

I have the confidence that I can take anybody and have them give a good performance, because I don't think there's anything to acting except expressing, being able to converse. The mistakes that you make in your own life, in your own

personality, are assets to the film. So if you can just convince somebody not to clean themselves up, and not to be someone that they're not and just be what they are in given circumstances, that is all that acting is to me. (Sherman 1987: 81)

This idea of asking a performer to be him or herself within the circumstances of the set, whether a professional actor or not, is a crucial element in different acting and directing techniques. In her book *Directing Actors* (1999), Weston gives different techniques to create convincing performances. Convincing here refers to a performance that supports the audience's identification with the character and promotes the suspension of disbelief.<sup>146</sup> Mainstream fictional cinema is largely built on this convention, which requires that for the duration of the film the audience will believe in the veracity of the world the film is creating. Mainstream cinema takes great efforts in not disrupting the investment of the audience in the imaginary world created by the film and the veracity of the film's world is carefully crafted through the narrative structure of the script, the visual language of the film and the performance of the actors.<sup>147</sup> Weston promotes a style of acting which she calls "being in the moment".<sup>148</sup> This concept departs from the idea that actors should have truthful reactions to real (emotional) events. An example of how this concept plays out can be found in the performance of Marina Abramovic during the exhibition 'The Artist is Present' at the MOMA in New York in 2010.<sup>149</sup> In the documentary *Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present* (Matthew Akers 2012) the meaning of 'being in the moment' becomes very clear, when during a performance Marina Abramovic unexpectedly encounters Ulay. Abramovic and Ulay were involved in a relationship when they were young and had parted ways more than twenty years ago. Abramovic's reaction to Ulay's presence is a wonderful example of what Weston means when she discusses a truthful (not performed or staged) reaction to a real emotional event, in this case the unexpected reencounter between Abramovic and Ulay.

When casting my own daughter and my mother-in-law for *Alma y Esperanza*, I was indeed thinking of people who would somehow be themselves in the circumstances of the script. I needed to cast a girl who would be foreign to the Mixtec village, but simultaneously hold a connection to it through family ties and I needed to cast an elder woman who would

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<sup>146</sup> Christopher Vogler elaborates on the suspension of disbelief in *The Writer's Journey* (2007).

<sup>147</sup> Other less mainstream styles, such as experimental cinema, try to make the audience reflect on this process, by breaking the established rules.

<sup>148</sup> Both in Theatre as in Cinema there are different schools of acting, such as Meisner, Stella Adler, and the method acting promoted by Stanislavski.

<sup>149</sup> More information can be found at the webpage of the Museum of Modern Art: <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/marinaabramovic/>

have the experience of children who migrated from the village and who might have never met some of her grandchildren. As Dzaui and Esperanza indeed had these connections and experiences I was confident that they could reflect themselves in the circumstances of the story. In the direction of Dzaui and Esperanza, I tried to establish such truthful reactions to real (emotional) events. Creating the distance between the characters was not so difficult as both indeed were unable to communicate with each other and did not know each other that well. The reaction of shock and sorrow during Esperanza's telephone call, and Alma's sorrow and release at the end were more complicated scenes. In order to create a truthful reaction of shock and sorrow, I asked Armando to talk to his mother Esperanza about a particular painful event in his youth. Armando had told me that when he was a small boy, his elder sister migrated to Mexico City. His family was not aware that she had crossed all the way to the United States and was not able to communicate with them. During several years his mother did not hear a word from his sister. In 1985 a strong earthquake hit Mexico City and caused the death of approximately ten thousand people. Armando's mother started to fear that her daughter had been among the casualties and spent entire days grieving. While filming, Armando started to describe his own memories of that period to his mother while standing at the other side of the telephone booth. His mother was not expecting this and reacted truthfully to the recollection of the memory. Even though her daughter is alive and in good health and contact has been re-established many years ago, Armando's description of his memories made her recall her own pain and produced a real reaction of sorrow and tears. The identification of Esperanza with the character she was representing is what in turn enables the identification of an audience with the story.

### *Script Development and Directing Scenes*

While working on this research project I participated in different film workshops and training programs. The Babylon Film Lab concentrated on script development, while the Director's program of the Binger Film Institute was specifically aimed at developing directing skills. Both workshops depart from a mainstream approach. The script advisors of the Babylon and Binger Filmlab are also working for and supporting films from the mainstream industry. Tutors such as Judith Weston, Mark Travis, Ken Dancyger, and Gyula Gazdag are well

known in the Hollywood realm.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, the development programs concentrate on film auteurs as they require applicants to have already developed an own ‘Voice’.<sup>151</sup> Part of the Binger lab was dedicated to exploring an own visual language, another part was dedicated to directing actors and editing. The workshops on directing actors were imparted by Judith Weston and Mark Travis. At the end of the Binger program we were required to film and edit two scenes from our respective scripts as a directing exercise. I was participating in the workshop with the film *Dios No Estaba Ahí* and I was therefore working with two scenes from this script. Examining the rehearsal process and the shooting of these two scenes can give more insights regarding the role of identification not only in the story, but also in the process of filmmaking.

During the Binger workshops we practiced different rehearsal and directing techniques by staging the scene with professional Dutch actors. The other participants in the group, and the workshop tutor, would then comment on the effect the directions had on the performance of the actors. We worked with a combination of different techniques such as giving the actor a specific goal for a scene, or action verbs.<sup>152</sup> To explore the deeper layers of the characters, Weston asked us to talk to the actors about how the scene was connected to our own personal experiences. The task given to us was very similar to Rabiger’s assignment to write down our three greatest problems in life and investigate how documentary making was connected to that.<sup>153</sup> The assignment also resembled the questions asked by Christina Lazaridi (Princeton University) during the Cine Qua Non Script Writing Lab, where she urged us to explore why we wanted to tell a particular story and to understand how the story was connected to our own life experiences.<sup>154</sup> The reason behind this was that in order for the actors to identify with the characters, they had to understand the drive of the director.

I had chosen to stage a scene with the characters Victoria and her daughter Lupita. In the script Victoria is a single mother and her daughter Lupita recently found out she is having

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<sup>150</sup> Judith Weston wrote the well-known handbook *Directing Actors* (1996) and directors such as Alejandro González Iñárritu followed her course in Los Ángeles. Gyula Gazdag teaches scriptwriting at UCLA, and Mark Travis is author of the book *The Director’s Journey* (1999).

<sup>151</sup> Filmlabs such as Sundance, Babylon, Cine Qua Non and Binger are aimed at emerging filmmakers with a strong own ‘Voice’ and who know what stories they want to tell and why.

<sup>152</sup> These techniques are also described in *Directing Actors* (1999) by Weston. Action verbs have an effect on someone else, for example: to seduce, to scold, to belittle, to charm, etc. These verbs can be given to actors as an assignment in a particular scene. As these actions are real actions they are bound to provoke a real reaction in the acting partner and produce the effect of ‘being in the moment’. A goal refers to an instruction given to the actor to provoke a specific reaction in the acting partner, such as: make her / him smile, make him/ her leave the room, etc.

<sup>153</sup> In 1998 I assisted the VISIONS II workshop organized by CILECT for documentary students across Europe. One of our advisors was Michael Rabiger from Chicago University.

<sup>154</sup> I participated with Armando Bautista in the Cine Qua Non Lab in 2011 with the script *Where The Sky Rests*.

an affair. When Lupita comes home she is upset and mother and daughter have a discussion. Later in the script Lupita will run away from home with the idea of leaving to Mexico City. The scene is set in the context of an Indigenous village in Mexico. As preparation for the scene I chose to bring different photographs of my mother's hometown more than 20 years ago. I started out by showing the photographs to the Dutch actresses and telling them about my mother's hometown Chalcatongo.<sup>155</sup> I told them my mother had left her own village at the age of seventeen to make a life in Mexico City. I also told them about a cousin who left the village for the United States in order to escape from a marriage filled with domestic violence. My cousin left her two year old son behind with her parents, and until today she has not come back to the village. Her son, who is now 21 years old, has never seen her in person. I also told them that Armando, my partner and the principal writer of the script, left his village at the age of ten to go to school in Mexico City and after that he did not see his parents for six years. In this context, the conflict between mother and daughter and the mother's fear of her daughter leaving for Mexico City acquires other dimensions. The discussion between Victoria and Lupita is very different to a regular mother-daughter discussion in a regular Dutch family. Relationships between children and parents are different in a place with extreme poverty, malnutrition, domestic violence and multiple issues derived out of the pressure to survive on a daily basis. For both Dutch actresses, this setting and context was extremely foreign and thus difficult to access. Nevertheless, their performance in the scene changed drastically after our conversation. They tried to relate and to find experiences that would somehow touch upon the ones I was sharing with them.

At the end of the workshop I filmed the scene with Mexican actresses Ángeles Cruz and Alhely Bautista. Ángeles comes from the village San Miguel in the Mixtec area, a neighbouring village of Chalcatongo. When discussing the scene between mother and daughter, the conversation developed quite differently than during the Binger rehearsals. I did not need to show her pictures of my mother's village, as Ángeles had her own recollections and memories of the place. Instead, we talked about how our villages had changed in the course of time and tried to find events and places that we had in common in our childhood memories. When I told Ángeles that my mother had left her village at the age of seventeen to work as a household servant in the city, Ángeles had similar stories in her direct family circle. While during the Binger rehearsals I had to extensively describe the cultural and social

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<sup>155</sup> For this exercise The Binger invited professional Dutch actors to rehearse a scene with participants. Among the actors were Waldemar Torenstra, Dragan Bakema and Daniel Boissevain. For this scene I had the pleasure to work with actresses Hannah Hoekstra and Dagmar Slagmolen.

context in which the story was taking place, Ángeles was completely familiar with this context. Accessing similar experiences was therefore much easier for her. The performance of Ángeles was consequently very different to that of the Dutch actresses and made much more sense as it was embedded in the fabric of the story and the context of the place.

The second scene I filmed at the Binger lab is one in which Tino, the main character, visits Victoria to prove his masculinity. In the script Tino has had a fight with his friend Alarii and is left with feelings he does not understand. He decides to ask Victoria to sleep with him in order to prove to himself that 'he is a real man'. In the script the people of the village gossip that Victoria is a prostitute, although this is not the case. Victoria's need for intimacy leads her to accept Tino's advances, but the encounter between Tino and Victoria turns out differently to how Tino expected. Both in the writing of the script and in the staging of the scene and in discussing the visuals I was searching for ways to express the need for intimacy in both characters and the connection they establish towards the end of the scene. The actor playing Tino for the scene is Tenoch Huerta. We had talked extensively about both racism and homophobia in Mexico and our personal experiences with racism and exclusion. Eventually, we rehearsed the scenes several times in which we tried to construct greater distance at the beginning of the scene and develop towards a feeling of intimacy. At the end of the rehearsal Tenoch observed that he felt as if he had just met his best friend for life. That would be indeed the feeling Tino should have at the end of the scene. Through the physical contact between them, the characters had developed a certain bond. Both Tenoch and Ángeles had more access to the world of the characters in the script than the Dutch actors I had been rehearsing and staging the scene with, because of the simple reason that they had personal experiences similar to, and embodied knowledge of, the world portrayed in the script. Owing to being foreign to the world of the script the Dutch actors needed much more information to be able to understand and identify with the characters. Ángeles and Tenoch therefore had more resources to draw from when playing the scene. The embodied experience of an actor thus plays an important role in the process of identification with a character. An aspect of performing a role is the ability to find ways to identify with the character and obviously this is easier if one has lived through similar experiences as the ones portrayed by the film. Certainly the physical appearance of Tenoch and Ángeles also contributed to the realism of their performance. Nevertheless, even with a great performance, the Dutch actors would have looked out of place in these scenes because of their physical appearance. In my work, the reason to cast Ángeles Cruz, Tenoch Huerta, and non-professional actors such as Ubaldo López was not only motivated by reasons of realism, however. As mentioned in

chapter one, the presence of people with an Indigenous appearance is limited in Mexican media. To begin with, there are only a limited amount of stories with Indigenous characters and quite often Indigenous characters were, and sometimes still are, performed by non-Indigenous actors with non-Indigenous features.<sup>156</sup> In my work I have made the choice to cast as much as possible performers, both professional and non-professional, with Indigenous features for Indigenous characters. The reason for this was mainly political and ideological. Shohat and Stam explore the political and ideological aspects of casting extensively in a chapter of *Unthinking Eurocentrism - Multiculturalism and the Media* (1994) and with my work I have wanted to contribute to a greater presence and visibility of Indigenous Peoples in the media in Mexico. One of the exceptions to this idea is my casting of Dzauí Jansen as Alma in *Alma y Esperanza*. The casting of Dzauí was mainly motivated by pragmatic reasons. I needed to cast a girl who would belong to an urban setting, but have strong ties to an Indigenous community. I also needed to cast a girl whom I could film both in the Indigenous village as well as in the Netherlands or the United States without requiring arranging the travel of parents or other supervision. While I questioned myself for a long time on my casting decision regarding *Alma y Esperanza*, I think the presence of Dzauí in the film adds another layer of meaning to the story. Being my daughter and growing up surrounded by Indigenous family members, Dzauí's presence in the film questions and disrupts preconceived purist notions of Indigenous Identity.<sup>157</sup>

The transformative aspect of film is therefore present throughout the whole filmmaking process. While an audience identifies with characters who undergo a process of transformation when watching a film, actors and crew participate in a process of identification and transformation in order to tell the story. The film itself changes, shifts and transforms from the script phase to the shooting phase and to the final edit, under the influence of different creative participants, such as the director, actors, directors of photography, sound designers and editors who all contribute their own particular vision. In the process of making a film, the cast and crew members identify with (certain aspects of) the story. Being able to access the personal experiences of the director, permits the actors to identify with the story and to develop their performances. Important questions in the process of making a film are therefore: Why do I want to make this film? How am I connected to this

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<sup>156</sup> An example is the film *Tizoc* (Ismael Rodríguez 1957) in which non-Indigenous actor Pedro Infante performs the role of an Indigenous character in brown-face. Also actors such as Dolores Heredia, Adriana Barraza and Damian Alcazar have been made to look darker to represent a particular social class within Mexican cinema. As elaborated in previous chapters, there exists within the Mexican society a certain relation between race, class and ethnicity which is in turn reflected in the media.

<sup>157</sup> This aspect reminds of the Australian Aboriginal film *Beneath Clouds* (Ivan Sen 2002).

story? Indigenous filmmakers, like other Accented filmmakers, will probably choose stories that reflect and express the conflicting worlds in which they live, explore the problems common to Indigenous communities, or address the different forms of violence and exclusion to which Indigenous Peoples are subjected. These experiences are present in the life of most Indigenous filmmakers and they are therefore likely to draw material from these experiences to tell their stories.

### *Future Roads and Unexpected Journeys*

The theme of journey and travel in my work is strongly related to my own wandering experience, but also the process of filmmaking is in retrospect a journey in itself. Each film tends to shift and transform during the creative process, but also the filmmaker somehow travels from one film to the next. Certainly a filmmaker has different experiences and possibly also different knowledge and skills before and after the making of a particular film. When I first heard Rabiger's recommendation to explore how our film plans were connected to our three greatest problems in life, I considered this an absurd exercise and it took me many films to understand the purpose and meaning of this assignment. Reflecting on the common themes and threads in my work, I can now clearly see the value of exploring personal dilemmas in relation to film plans. Film Director Claude Sautet observes in this respect:

Seeing your films again, you also discover all the things that they have in common, all the things that you systematically put into them without being aware of it... The sets change, the characters too, but the same underlying themes return. (Tirard 2002: 34)

Looking back at my work, I can see my filmmaking has changed in different ways. For example, I have made a clear movement from documentary to fiction. Coming from documentary, when starting out on fiction projects I resorted to documentary techniques such as shooting on location and working with non-professional actors. In this sense, my own work developed an aesthetic more akin to Third Cinema and Independent Cinema. The subject matter of most of my work revolves around migration and around the contrast between urban and rural environments. A certain kind of nostalgia is present in several of my

films.<sup>158</sup> Most of my work since the film academy has been set in Mexico. However, my latest work, *Bouleversement* (2015) is a short film set in the Netherlands. At first sight this film seems very different to my previous work, but at the same time there is a clear continuation of particular elements and themes.

The aspect of travelling remains clearly present in *Bouleversement* as it is a short film about wandering and the main character spends most of the short film walking around, wanting to travel to Paris. Nevertheless, the setting is clearly different, as the short film is explicitly set in an urban environment, unlike most of my work. Partly as a consequence of this different setting, the aesthetics of this film is also quite different to that of my previous work. Whereas in *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, *Alma y Esperanza*, and *El Último Consejo* the images were defined by the mountains of the Mixtec region and the clear blue sky, the images of *Bouleversement* are clearly outlined by the geometric lines of urban space and buildings. In the filming of *Bouleversement* I explicitly tried to emphasize geometric lines in the composition of the images. A different element that is present throughout most of the visual language of the film, is camera movement, whereas most of my previous films are characterized by the absence of camera movement. There are manifold reasons for this adjustment. Again, the different filming style was to a certain extent motivated by the change of environment. Whereas the lack of motion was somehow related to the pace of rural life, the stir of city life seemed to require more camera activity. A very different and less profound reason was that in between my previous work and *Bouleversement* I actually acquired the necessary skills and also gear to adequately perform certain camera movements. As in previously for *El Rebozo de mi Madre* and *Alma y Esperanza*, I was doing the camerawork myself for *Bouleversement*.

All my intentions to perform camera movements in the shooting of *El Rebozo de mi Madre* disappeared miserably in the editing room, leaving me convinced that I should never embark on this endeavour again. But since filming and editing *El Rebozo de mi Madre* many things have changed. It should be noted that this was the first film for which I employed the camera myself, whilst in the film academy I had always worked with a director of photography. At that time I had therefore only limited knowledge and hardly any experience handling a camera. It is therefore hardly surprising that my first camera movements turned out to be useless in the editing stage. *Alma y Esperanza* was the first film for which I employed the camera while using a DSLR camera. While I had worked on commissioned

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<sup>158</sup> *Una nave per tornare* and *El Rebozo de mi Madre*

videos after shooting *El Rebozo*, I had always worked with a prosumer camcorder (the Canon XL1). Shooting on a DSLR was quite different due to the size of the camera, the absence of a viewfinder, the possibility to change lenses, and much more. In a way, shooting for *Alma y Esperanza* was akin to handling a camera for the first time. Having learned from my experience with my failed camera movements in the cutting room of *El Rebozo de mi Madre*, I opted for a more cautious approach from the beginning and shot most of the film from a tripod, avoiding camera movements as much as possible. An unforeseen technical inconvenience during the shoot of *Alma y Esperanza* was the narrow depth of field of the camera lens. Because I liked the visual texture, I had opted for a 1.4 USM/50 mm lens, which had as a consequence that only a very limited part of the shot was in focus. I had many issues trying to focus and in the end several unintended out of focus shots had to be used in the final edit of the film.

Since *Alma y Esperanza* I have shot many other documentaries and commissioned videos on the DSLR. I also worked with different directors of photography who shot on a DSLR: *El Último Consejo* was shot by cinematographer Sergei Saldivar Tanaka, the Binger scene with Tenoch and Ángeles by cinematographer Guido van Gennepe, and the second Binger rehearsal scene by cinematographer Ignacio Miranda. Observing the work of professional cinematographers gave me more insight as to how to use the camera. For example, Miranda decided to use a slider for the entire scene thus reinforcing the conflict and tension between the characters in the scene. Additionally, during the Binger Film Lab I edited both scenes myself, under the guidance of editor Molly Malene Stensgaard. This experience provided me with a more direct and thus greater understanding of what kind of shots are crucial in the edit. Thus, when I started shooting *Bouleversement* I had developed many more camera skills than when I shot *Alma y Esperanza*, I had acquired a different and certainly greater understanding of how to plan and execute certain shots, and I felt much more confident in handling the camera. One of the factors that is responsible for the difference in camera style between *Alma y Esperanza* and *Bouleversement* is hence an increased proficiency in the handling of the camera, something that could only be acquired through practice, time and experience.

While it is evident that acting is an embodied practice, it should be noted that the other aspects of filmmaking, and thus also directing, are embodied activities which are dependent on skill, but also on physical and emotional abilities and health. Film director and associate professor David Irving dedicates a special chapter to ‘Health’ in his *Fundamentals*

of *Film Directing* (2010). He observes about the embodied aspects of filmmaking the following:

A fit director controls the pace better, commands with more authority, and communicates with clarity. The entire focus of the project is funnelled through the director, and the results will reflect that. (Irving 2010: 85)

Irving elaborates on his argument that good physical health influences the psychology of filmmaking and contends that this last aspect is crucial when directing a film. He states:

Just as important as physical health is emotional health. A positive frame of mind is necessary to direct a film. Depression and cloudy thinking go hand in glove with fatigue, poor diet, and lack of sleep. Even so the most debilitating factor may be fear. Fear of failing, fear of not making the pages, fear of not being in control. Directors arriving on set to hear the director of photography ask: “What’s the first shot?” often dart to the toilet to throw up. Fear is natural. Vomit if you must, but muster the courage to perform the task at hand. (ibid. 84)

Irving points to different embodied and physical aspects of filmmaking, such as fatigue but also emotions, such as fear. Of course confidence also increases with practice and fear diminishes accordingly. My decision to operate the camera on *Bouleversement* was thus also the result of increased confidence acquired through practice.

Throughout working on this research project I discovered that as a filmmaker I had been above all concerned with the narrative structure of a story and much less involved with the visual aesthetic of a work. Therefore, in *Bouleversement* I wanted to explicitly experiment more with visual artfulness. Of course, the most important aspect to influence the aesthetic of *Bouleversement* remained the story. Just as all my other films, the story of *Bouleversement* had its own journey. The idea for the film arose with an image I had shot accidentally at an Amsterdam fair. In order to practice with the camera I had shot some images of the Christmas fair and unexpectedly captured a flock of birds. Since filming this shot I thought of ways to construct a story around the image. The movement of the Ferris wheel in this image incited me to think of a story in which the character was undergoing emotional turmoil and this led me to think of adolescence. An increased awareness of the need to tell stories close to my own personal experiences reinforced the idea of constructing a story centered on the identity

crisis provoked by adolescence. As the story explores this aspect of identity crisis, I decided to include imagery such as window reflections, glass and blurred or unfocused shots. The notion that in adolescence identity is under constant change and motion required a camera style that would accentuate this. The movement of the Ferris wheel was, furthermore, the source of inspiration for the title and for the presence of movement in the camera style. I tried to maintain the camera as much as possible in movement and resorted to a slider, but also to a DSLR stabilizer. However, *Bouleversement* is not only a shift in style or approach, many elements of my previous work are still present. I continued to work with untrained actors on existing locations and improvised many of the scenes based on an initial script that was adapted along the shoot and edit. This approach in the Mexican context in a way continued Third Cinema propositions which were strongly linked to communitarian filmmaking practices; however, in a European context they shared more similarities with film currents such as the French Nouvelle Vague or Italian Neorealism. Being aware of this I decided to film in black and white to somehow reference these film currents. It is also no coincidence that the girl in the film wants to go to Paris. For this same reason I tried to avoid explicit markers of time, such as smartphones. But a different reason for opting to make the film in black and white is because I considered adolescence to be a time of extremes – black and white photography would allow for shots with more contrast.

### *Conclusions*

When looking back at the different works that comprise the corpus of this thesis, I can see many shifts, but also a persistence of style and themes. A noticeable transition is, for example, my increased awareness of gender. Whereas *Una nave per tornare* focuses on a male protagonist and would not in any way pass the Bechdel test, *Alma y Esperanza*, *Bouleversement*, *Where the Sky Rests* and *Tiempo de Lluvia* all have a female protagonist.<sup>159</sup> Another discernible development is my growing interest in family relations, specifically in the tensions between parents and children. This theme is already present in *Una nave per tornare*, wherein Cuticchio recounts the clash between him and his father, while simultaneously continuing his father's legacy, but it is not an explicit theme of the film. In *Alma y Esperanza*, *Bouleversement*, *Where the Sky Rests* and *Tiempo de Lluvia* the tensions

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<sup>159</sup> This informal test to screen films on sexism is based on a 1985 cartoon by Alison Bechdel. In the cartoon a character states that she only watches films in which there are at least two women who have a conversation about something else than a man. The film festival Bluestocking Film Series only presents films that 'pass' this test. *Alma y Esperanza* screened at the Bluestocking Film Series in 2015.

and conflicts between family members are the explicit focus of the story. This is also the result of attending different labs and workshops which led to a more profound consciousness of how our personal experiences as filmmakers shape the filmmaking process. I came to realize and understand the necessity of laying bare and exposing oneself in the process of filmmaking in order to access the story.

Filmmaking is hence a journey in itself; both the process from script to finished edit, as well as the trajectory of the filmmaker during the making of a film and from one film to the next, are transformative processes comparable to travelling distances. Filmmaking as a form of storytelling is, as Anzaldúa notes, a transformative experience or a nomadic activity. Filmmaking, like writing or drawing can be seen as an embodied activity with different kinds of bodily effects, while simultaneously the result of embodied endeavour, such as acting, camera operation and directing. Many film directors acknowledge the importance of being open to an intuitive approach to decision making, while on the set. For example Sydney Pollack describes this stage as follows:

It's important not to intellectualize the filmmaking process too much. And particularly not during the actual shooting. I might think a lot about the film before I make it, and certainly after, but I try not to think too much when I'm actually on the set. The way I work is that I try to determine as early as possible what the theme of the movie is, what the central idea is being expressed through the story. Once I know that, once I figured out a unifying principle, then any decision I make on the set will be influenced by that and will therefore fall into a certain logic. And to me, the success of a film depends on whether or not the choices you make on the set, as a director, remain true to the original idea. (Tirard 2002: 16)

During the shoot of a film, directors, cast and crew need to be 'in the moment' which is a state of heightened sensory perception. Weston, Travis and Lenore de Koven all stress the importance of 'being in the moment' both for actors and directors to reach a convincing performance. This state of 'being in the moment', as noted by Weston in *Directing Actors* (1996) and by Travis in the *Director's Key* (1999), consists of intuitive reactions to true emotional events. A very simple example of this mechanism can be distinguished in the short film *Bouleversement*. In the scene between the girl and the youngster I used the first take. The actor, Jelte Ramos, was obviously nervous for this first take and smiles nervously at the beginning of his shot. Nevertheless, he does not look at the camera, nor does he stop his

performance, but instead uses the energy to produce a flirtatious scene. In this same scene in one of the takes an unexpected train approached; instead of cutting the scene, we continued shooting, thus incorporating the train's arrival in the scene.

Also the development of the director during the filmmaking process as well as in between films can be understood as a journey or nomadic movement; this surely also applies to other filmmaking aspects, such as acting or cinematography. In the filmmaker's journey films are realms that are inhabited momentarily by the cast and crew and the characters of the story and as such constitute temporary homes. In the construction of these provisional spaces a filmmaker invests previous knowledge, skills and personal experiences which needs to be shared with the participating cast and crew in order to access the motivation and drive for this particular story. If I look back at my own development as a filmmaker since finishing the film academy I can clearly distinguish recurring themes and subjects, such as the contrast between rural and urban environments, the preoccupation with holding on to traditions and a pervasive sense of nostalgia. At the same time, I can discern a movement towards fiction and towards more personal stories focusing on family fragmentation and conflict, and an increased presence of female characters. The script of *Tiempo de Lluvia* has a female protagonist and centres on the fragmentation of family relations due to migration. It also assigns a central role to parenthood and the painful relation between parents and children, but also between siblings. The film is strongly rooted in both the writer's experiences as a migrant as well as my own, but also on our own relationships. For the writing of this script we tried to explore and express the more painful moments of our personal histories, just like Lazaridi, Weston and Rabiger have all encouraged. *Tiempo de Lluvia* mixes even in the incipient script phase elements of documentary with fiction, a mode of production I have come to feel very comfortable with. The script is multilingual in the sense that it is Spanish and Mixtec spoken, reflecting the present day cultural context of the region. Although the film has specific protagonists, the story is also firmly embedded in a Mixtec community and presents issues and concerns of present day Indigenous Peoples in Mexico, such as migration, fragmented families, labour exploitation in the cities and the imminent loss of language and traditions. The script and preparation for this film are a consistent expression of a distinct and particular voice that is both personal as well as rooted in the Mixtec cultural context.

This particular 'Voice' could only be attained through the process of making all the different films in the presented portfolio. 'Voice' cannot precede the making of the different films, as it is through the practice of filmmaking that a particular voice is articulated. 'Voice' is hence the outcome of the active practice of filmmaking in combination with personal

experience and reflection on one's own learning curve and can therefore only be distinguished in retrospect when there exists a collection of work. Nonetheless, the filmmaker's voice is never a finished, fixed or unitary entity, as it is always subject to change and development and on an endless journey wherein the filmmaker keeps configuring temporary, imaginary homes in the creation of cinematic texts. Braidotti observes in her introduction to *Nomadic Subjects* that identity is a retrospective notion. She compares identity to a cartography of the places where we have once travelled:

The nomad's identity is a map of where s/he has already been; s/he can always reconstruct it a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant *cogito* supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for a moveable diversity, the nomad's identity is an inventory of traces. (Braidotti 1994: 14)

A filmmaker's 'Voice' can be seen in a very similar way, as it is an expression of the filmmaker's cinematic identity. In that sense, the authorial voice is also a retrospective notion. Voice is not laid down in advance or the result of previously fixed ideas; instead voice is a collection of threads that link the different works of a filmmaker together. These threads remain in continuous motion, and 'Voice' is thus in constant development. It is the expression of lived experiences in films. It is in retrospect that one can distinguish recurring themes and preoccupations in different films and that one can see a relation between them. It is in retrospect that one is able to recognize the driving fears and desires, the visions of life and humanity that have shaped a body of film works.