

Dismantling the Colonial Matrix of Power:

Is indigenous media / community-based film-making the end of ethnographic film ?

The western civilization historically has been claiming that it is the authentic actualization of humankind's potential. A perception perpetuated with the beginning of colonialism at the turn of 15th century, where the binary opposition between "Westerner vs (non-western) Other" was concretely established. This process was drastically accelerated with the coming of the so called "Modernity" and the "disenchantment of the world". Anthropology as a discipline was formed during this second phase of western expansion and evolved side by side to colonial practices developing a relationship of mutual reinforcement. Since the 1970's -and the apparent fall of colonial rule-, it has been anthropology's mission to break off this past and to re-establish itself as a discipline of understating and affection.

As Mingolo(2018) stresses, modernity constitutes a complex multiple of narratives as well as materialities which establish the western identity and praxis, interconnected with colonial practice, hence the concept of the "matrix". The concept of modernity is essentially related to the period of "Enlightenment" and the ideals of "progress" and "advancement", thus dismissing the legitimacy of religious power and using "rational thought" as a guiding force towards the inevitable actualization of the human potential. But how can this narrative keep intact when facing the Other (non-western, gendered, classed, ect.)? As the Frankfurt School (Adorno, T, 1983) systematically presented, this notion and promise of rationality and progress is capable of generating new oppression, and segregation with more precision and methodicality (with the Holocaust being the most atrocious example).

Can anthropology escape its colonial past of objectification and exotification of its subjects? The films "*New York, just another city*" (Lopes, A., & Brandao, J., 2019) and "*Horror in the Andes*" (Dietrich, M.-C., & Lawrence, A., 2019), are attempts that point to that direction. The former follows Patrícia Ferreira Pará Yxapy, an indigenous Brazilian filmmaker from Kunhã Piru village, who is invited to present and debate her work at *Margaret Mead Film Festival*, held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Through the duration of the film we witness Patrícia's thoughts and interactions on/with one of the "cradles" of western civilization. Her film was made in collaboration with *Video nas Aldeias (Video in the Villages)* the longest running indigenous-media project in the world (Henley, P., 2020). "Horror in the Andes" acts as a behind the scenes documentary of "*La maldición del Inca*" [*The Curse of the Inca*], an ethno-fiction horror film that unfolds over unresolved issues and troubling memories of the indigenous community of Ayacucho in Peru (Dietrich, M.-C., 2020). Via this film we get a glimpse of the

creative adventure and challenges of making an independent and self-funded film that is by no means profitable, but as one of the filmmakers expresses: “*When I go to the villages and I say, ‘this is my film’, they treat me with respect*” (Ccorahua, 2016 in Dietrich, M.-C., 2020).

Both films are incorporating a form of what we might call “*passive*” indigenous-media, in the sense that they do not use this method to tell their story but at the same time they present the media created by indigenous people. But if the subjects themselves can communicate their story, doesn't that make ethnographic film-making (from an outsider's perspective) obsolete? If the subjects can speak from themselves what is the need of an anthropologist? These questions bring us back to the concerns about western modernity and the omnipresence of coloniality. My take on why “*Anthropology Should Never Be Fully Decolonized*” (Pels, P., 2018), is that anthropology should embrace its distance from its subjects of research and turn it into a conscious political praxis as well as an analytical tool. On the one hand it should actively engage in providing space for the marginalized and oppressed voices to speak for themselves (e.g. *Video nas Aldeias*) and on the other hand use this unbreachable distance productively to expand and develop its analytical and theoretical constructs that enable us to wonder about the multiplicity of human existence and interaction.

Provocation for in class discussion :

“*As Mokuka, one of the leading contributors to the Kayapo Video Project, famously asked during a visit to a film festival that we organised in Manchester in 1992, does the fact that he is holding a camera mean that he is no longer a Kayapo?*” - (Henley, P., 2020)

Works Cited

Literature

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Further reading

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- Video nas Aldeias website presentation :
<http://www.videonasaldeias.org.br/2009/vna.php?p=1>
- Ateliers Varan, What are we about? - <https://www.ateliersvaran.com/en/article/what-are-we-about>

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I, Andreas Kleanthous, declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work. I have not plagiarized any ideas or text from any other source. I have cited all sources that I have used, either directly or indirectly