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Documentary film, the Filmmaker and Representation
DLA Dissertation

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Abstract:

In this paper I study the narratives of otherness that have been an essential part of the historical evolution of documentary film: a dominant gaze in a hegemonically Eurocentric film industry. With a focus on cultural studies, film studies and postcolonial studies, I argue that it is possible to discern how documentary follows a pattern that validates and prolongs that same Eurocentrism through paternalistic, exoticizing and redemptive narratives of the other, the observed and filmed.

This has been discussed during the last decades since cinema has permeated culture, cinema reaches peoples and cultures massively. Based on the historical penetration and dominance of American cinema, with now a record concentration of 85% of the world cinema market (Hughey 2014: 19), it is fair to say that film history has to be studied in the frame of the American film industry and its periphery. This asymmetrical relationship, has given as a result the tendency that *one sole type of film production is regarded as universal and disseminated as such, while the others are only local expressions* (Paranaguá 2003: 9). Sociology, Cultural Studies, Political Sciences, Film Studies and Psychology among other disciplines have approached film discourse in the frame of this present hegemonic production to show that there is, if not a political agenda, a point of view that in many cases modifies, distorts or normalizes aspects of history and reality.

Being documentary filmmaking my field of practice, I want to discuss the aforementioned problematics in the documentary film realm with a focus on issues of representation, examining my personal work and other works that relate to it because of their place of origin and/or their role in the current production and distribution system. This paper is divided in five chapters in which I attempt to present in an inductive and comparative approach which are the elements that define and validate the issues of representation in documentary film. I do it from the perspective of a documentary filmmaker, but also, inevitably, as a Colombian filmmaker and cinema spectator, aware of issues of representation depicting me and Colombian people. In the words of Stuart Hall: *it is worth remembering that all discourse is 'placed', and the heart has its reasons* (1989: 69).

In the first chapter entitled “The Short History of Documentary Cinema” I present a case study on *Nanook of The North* (1922), whose director Robert Flaherty was named father of documentary filmmaking and father of ethnographic cinema, even when the truthfulness of the film and its depiction of the characters are being debated still today. This reveals how the established rules of documentary film practice are connected to issues of representation, then and as a result, now, when we see the validation of Flaherty's observation as the one being repeated in time: a white man that observes the others as exotic, primitive, backwards, etc. The second, third and fourth chapters are respectively entitled “Power”, “Truth” and “Redemption”, as three elements that are related to documentary film practices and consumption. In “Power” I make an analysis of power relations in documentary filmmaking since much of what we have seen in documentary films' history, was born out of the exploration of a distant land or distant community that an explorer filmed, which is what Robert Flaherty did. This type of observation was contended by cinema movements of the second half of the 20th century in Latin America, as a response to how Latin America was being represented by a hegemonic market with an Eurocentric vision: films about poverty. In “Truth” I analyze the evolution of ethnographic cinema in the frame of a constant presence of issues of representation. The ethnographer, as the explorer, creates a representation of the filmed that inevitably follows the preconceptions of the ethnographer's society and education. But ethnographic cinema as a genre, along with anthropology, has been able to express concern about these same issues of representation, creating a discussion around this problematic that has been virtually absent in traditional documentary filmmaking. In “Redemption”, I talk about the current approaches to issues to representation in cinema and how they are connected to cinema as an instrument for the spectator to be redeemed by being a foreign observer, this way the stories being told are tailored to fit this relationship between the spectator and the observed, which is the direct reflection and result of the redemption of the filmmaker when filming the other, ultimately prolonging a type of representation in which the observer, the white, the privileged, the explorer, is not only entitled to observe in othering forms, but also places himself/herself as superior.

Power, truth and redemption are critical elements in the study of documentary film practices, but they are also elements that are part of the conception and creation of documentary films, and can be critically viewed by filmmakers when filming, something that I will also include in all of the chapters. I will also examine my interpretations and conclusions in a last chapter entitled “The Living and the Dead”, in which I trace the theoretical and conceptual connections of this document

with the practical work made by me as both result and reflexion of this research: the documentary film *Los Vivos y Los Muertos*.

One of the pillars of this dissertation, treated in all the chapters in different aspects, is the argumentation about the unavoidable role of the filmmaker not only as an observer, but as creator and therefore documentary films being the result of the filmmaker's conception of the world, the filmmaker's point of view, which is not an innocent exercise of filmmaking when we can analyze the politics laying behind it, most evidently when the one observing observes another person, community or culture that is considered inferior. In *Los Vivos y Los Muertos* I film my own life and what happens in it as a way to debate otheristic approaches to filmmaking, following the events brought by the observation of my own drama: the search for my half brother. Through the film I intend to make a reflexion on issues of representation in documentary filmmaking by presenting a filmmaking method that connects with the arguments and concerns presented in this document.

Table of contents:

Introduction	6
Chapter 1. The Short History of Documentary Film	11
Chapter 2. Power	22
Chapter 3. Truth	40
Chapter 4. Redemption	61
Chapter 5. The Living and the Dead	77
References	87

Documentary film, the Filmmaker and Representation

Introduction

I don't remember exactly what time, but I went to the cinema to watch this documentary film early in the afternoon, at around 1 or 2 pm, in Bogota in 2012. It was a weekday, they were not playing it on Fridays or weekends. The film was played at such unpopular slots because, first of all, it was a documentary, second, it was a Colombian film, reasons why I wanted to watch it. But as I was about to find out, it was not a good film. It was one of those films whose release was more strongly connected to a marketing campaign rather than to its quality. The screening room had around 200 seats but there were only about 10 people including me.

The film's title was *Illegal.co* (2012) and it was about a very complicated topic: drug trafficking. Complicated because of two of reasons. The first one being that many films have been made about this, so many that they started to look like a copy of each other. But this film was supposed to be different because it is Colombian, I was curious about what I would encounter in this almost unexplored point of view in cinema. The second one, which is the offspring of the first one, is that being a Colombian film, it automatically carries the responsibility of having to approach this topic that should present criticism from a local point of view and satisfy the local audience, the one from the country that produces the drug but is also damaged by it. It can not be a film that replicates what other films on the same topic have said, mainly because of the way things have been said in those films. Colombians as a people feel stigmatized by media and film, it is so obvious that there is even a Wikipedia entry about it (Wikipedia contributors 2021).

The film was far from fulfilling those expectations. Its focus was the problems and failures of the war on drugs. It took us to airports where there were miscellaneous police controls, to poor farmers' coca fields being eradicated, to archive footage of Pablo Escobar, to American cigarettes commercials from the 50s and 60s, to interviews with Noam Chomsky and Walter Friedman (in which they say the same they have said in other interviews about the same topic) and to interviews

with (less important, apparently) Colombian researchers of the topic. In the last scene of the film they depict a possible future in which, apart from the fact that everybody is wearing silver-color onesies and 3D generated cars float on the streets, drugs might be legalized, or might not. That is the film's conclusive message.

In general the film was not well executed, the information and research did not go beyond the superficial and was quite uninteresting to watch since it did not have a cohesive narrative construction. But beyond all this, the real problem with the film lays deeper. Only by reading the description, it is very much likely that you feel you have already seen it if you have seen documentary films or reports on the drug business. The film is a repetition of formulas and contents that have been part of our visual realm for many years and in all possible formats: photography, tv-news, reportage, documentary film, fiction film, commercials, paintings and even soap-operas. The topic of the film has gone through such a long cycle that its treatment has been institutionalized. We might say that the film belongs to a specific genre, the drugs genre, and as in any genre it has to follow the genre's conventions.

These conventions in a documentary film are interviews with American sociologists and economists, archive footage of the American tobacco industry in the 50s and 60s, archive footage of Pablo Escobar, Colombian police control at airports, etc. All these elements belong to the imagery created mainly by American media when the topic started to be discussed journalistically. The question is, when were these elements incorporated by the Colombian journalist, documentarian or film producer as part of its own visual language in media? If something, the Colombian audiences agree on the fact that this type of depiction of the problematic and thus, that of the country, has been a negative and biased one.

On behalf of the filmmakers, it might have been the case that they wanted to use similar visual and narrative components in order to give a local explanation to the ones familiar with the foreign style, those who have seen these films, the audiences out of Colombia. But even if so, they did not assume this style as a conscious response, as a critical stance that comes from a clear understanding of their role, that of the ones who have been previously represented as the main character of the drug film.

Why is this important? Cinema is a young form of art. Right now and for almost as much as the

whole history of cinema, the USA cinema production took upon the role of the hegemonic actor, with as for right now a record concentration of 85% of the world cinema market, dominated by big six media conglomerates (Hughey 2014: 19). The great expansion of cinema as an American industry took place after the First World War by identifying a growing bourgeoisie as its proper audience (Burch 1979: 78), thus began the construction of narratives that had to appeal first American audiences and then the rest of the world. In its goal to grab the attention of the viewer, as cinema starts to tell history and stories about their culture and foreign cultures, an ever-going list of inaccuracies, concerns and misrepresentations keeps growing in both fiction and documentary films. Native Americans in Western films are still a topic of discussion, in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) African Americans (played by white actors in blackface) are sexually aggressive and the Ku Klux Klan is glorified, new terms as *Native Culture Exploitation film* and *Goona-goona epic* define films made abroad with exotic communities, during World War II *Mission to Moscow* (1943) depicted the Soviet Union as a trustworthy ally, but the opposite would happen for the following 50 years in countless films. Frank Capra uses a big arrange of racism and lies against the Japanese as a way to prepare American soldiers and citizens in *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945). The Vietnam War, the War on Drugs, the Gulf War, the Iraq War and the most recent War on Terrorism brought their share of films with stereotypes of those the USA is fighting. Even if it is not a war film, the same issues of paternalism, neocolonialism, white supremacism and others can also be traced in many cases.

This has been discussed thoroughly during the last decades because cinema has permeated culture, cinema reaches peoples and cultures massively. Based on the penetration of American cinema, it is fair to say that film history has to be studied in the frame of the dominant American film industry and its periphery. This asymmetrical relationship, has given as a result the tendency that *one sole type of film production is regarded as universal and disseminated as such, while the others are only local expressions* (Paranaguá 2003: 9)¹. Sociology, Cultural Studies, Political Sciences, Film Studies and Psychology among other disciplines have approached film discourse in the frame of this present hegemonic production to show that there is, if not a political agenda, a point of view that in many cases modifies, distorts or normalizes aspects of history and reality.

Being documentary filmmaking my field of practice, but also as documentary film festival

1 Translation made by me and also in all other quoted sources in Spanish unless specified otherwise.

programmer with some experience as a lecturer, I want to discuss the aforementioned problematics in the documentary film realm with a focus on issues of representation, examining my personal work and other works that relate to it because of their place of origin and/or their role in the current production and distribution system. Most of my work has been developed in Colombia, my country of origin, I have worked independently and for both Colombian and international networks, the latter principally American or in English language. As most of the academic studies in this field have been dedicated to fiction films, which is understandable since it is the main product of the cinema industry, I will include some examples as references to the development of issues of representation in the industry. It is possible to cross and compare the results applied to fiction onto documentary film since both fiction and documentary share the principles of cinema narrative, the historical, artistic and technological advances of cinema production, as well as the disproportionate concentration of production and distribution.

This paper is divided in five chapters in which I attempt to present in an inductive and comparative approach, which are the elements that define and validate the issues of representation in documentary film. I do it from the perspective of a documentary filmmaker, but also, inevitably, as a Colombian filmmaker and cinema spectator, aware of issues of representation depicting me and Colombian people. In the words of Stuart Hall: *it is worth remembering that all discourse is 'placed', and the heart has its reasons* (1989: 69).

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I started this introduction talking about *Illegal.co*, a Colombian documentary film that summarizes this first approach to define the frame of what this paper will talk about. But just like that film there are many others with the same characteristics and from many other countries, that we documentary filmmakers have made either purposefully or unconsciously, because of the mere fact that our films have to belong to an industry and to speak a common language. But a critical view of what we might be giving up, can make way to a different type of cinema practice that could be more coherent, one that does not have to go against what has been achieved in cinema history in terms of practice of the art, but one that can reconcile with hegemonic power and create both for it and for the rest of the cinema market.

1

The short history of documentary film

Even if it has been widely discussed, *Nanook of the North* (1922) as one of the founding examples of documentary cinema, presents a series of characteristics and controversies that are worth revisiting as elements that help summarize aspects I would like to cover in this document, due to the polysemy in analysis of the production and narrative elements of the film.

As an introduction to the issue and as a first central topic of discussion, it is possible to say that regarding the production methods of *Nanook of the North*, they are quite the reflection of one of the pillars of sociological discussion in the 20th century on geopolitics and neocolonialism: the north and the south². The expeditions to the poor south by the rich northern man. At the birth of cinema, documentary film as a genre did not exist. Reality on film was mainly composed by news reels and footage of expeditionaries around the world. Depiction of reality had changed forever with the invention of photography, so it is fairly natural that the constant exploration of the world, now more real than ever, would be combined with the storytelling cinema techniques that were in development, as *Nanook of the North* accomplished.

The northern man went to the south (actually, to the north pole in this case) and shot a film about the life of an Inuit Eskimo. A story embracing romanticism as a style, giving individual importance to the character and his relationship with nature, rather than being a geographical or ethnographic descriptive exploration. It was the first large-scale documentary film and both an artistic and financial success. It is indeed a beautifully constructed story and hence an artistic achievement that captures human action in nature delicately. It ultimately brings the spectator to humanity's past, to our origins as hunters-gatherers.

2 The concept of North and South refers to the sociological concept of “The Global South” that has evolved in sociology when approaching the cultural and development difference in geopolitical power relations. The concept has had an evolution that is summarized by Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell and can be accessed here: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1536504212436479>

The director of *Nanook of the North* was Robert Flaherty, who made other films with a similar treatment, his signature style. John Grierson, documentary filmmaker and theorist, also considered one of the pioneers of documentary cinema, wrote about the work of his close friend Flaherty in order to describe him:

He was in revolt against the synthetic dramas of Hollywood. He believed that the film camera was denying its destiny in shutting itself up inside the studios; that its destiny was to get about on the earth, and be the means of opening the end wall of the theater on the whole wide world. He added that he would find the truest film drama – that is to say, the drama truest to the film medium - not by imposing synthetic stories on fake or even real backgrounds, but by drawing real drama from real backgrounds. Thus his tale of the fight for food among Eskimos, and his tale of the tattoo as the test of manhood in the South Sea Islands. He added that the film was at its best when fronting the phenomena of nature; that there were no movements so fine in front of the camera as the movements and expressions that were spontaneous, or had been formed in affection for a craft, or worn smooth by tradition and ceremony. All this, of course, was very sensible and exercised an enormous influence on those of us who were thinking our way to the film of reality ([1946] 2013: 31).

But the controversies around the production of the film tell the story that Flaherty barely observed while filming, rather made the Eskimo represent a romanticized idea of an Eskimo's life. The main character's name in reality was not Nanook but Allakariallak. At the time Allakariallak and the people around him barely ever dressed in animal fur, they were not hunting with harpoons but with shotguns, monogamic life was not part of their customs³ and the Eskimo woman who played his wife, was actually Flaherty's sexual partner at the moment (*Nanook Revisited* 1990). Going even further, Flaherty and the woman had a son he never acknowledged (McGrath 2007, 52)

It is assumed by all of us that, since it is a documentary film, the events in it are real. That is the contract we sign with the film once we start watching it. But if we go further, now that we know that the director staged many of the elements presented in the film, why exactly this depiction of the

3 It is not stated in the film if Nanook has one or two wives, but we see him accompanied by two women and the rest of the family throughout the film. Although, during the first minutes of the film two close-up shots introduce Nanook and Nyla respectively. Nyla doesn't have a prominent role, hence the purpose of introducing her is to show them as a couple.

character and not a different one? Why the harpoons? Why the fur clothes? Why the monogamous life?

We can depart from the agreement that the moment a documentary film story is constructed, there will be a reduction of a reality, a plot that develops and the signature of an author. It is fair to say that no documentary film is “real” or a “true depiction of reality”. Along with the advance of documentary film as an art form and with the development of technology, the question has taken new forms and new approaches, but never disappears. In media studies, the debate on the matter takes us to reflect both on the construction on the film as well as on who is the speaker in relation to the spectator. Hito Steyerl summarizes this with and incorporation of Alain Badiou's concept of truth process: *The documentary is not only mimetic but also analytic. It is not truth, but the fidelity to truth, that the documentary ceaselessly constructs and deconstructs* (2008: 35). But *Nanook of the North* goes far if we consider that the portrayal of the characters and hence the community, does not respond to the reality of their life. The director modified beyond subjective understanding to the point of modifying visually, resulting in an overall chronological modification of costumes and behaviors. If the information is heavily modified by the director, or in this case the enunciator of the message if we stick to practices of representation, this presents the need to understand what the director wanted to say.

There has been extensive discussion on *Nanook of the North* because of these “inaccuracies” and what they might actually represent. Today, thanks to 100 years of evolution of social sciences, the truth depicted in *Nanook of the North* has been contended as an instrument of normalization of colonialism in several publications. Julia Emberley reconstructs the actions in the film in contrast with the actions of the Canadian government when politically and socially assimilating Eskimo population subjugated to the rule of European customs, and argues about the characteristics of the film as political instrument, as being *the deployment of film and photography as emerging technologies of representation that could be used to further colonial rule by inscribing a homosocial encounter between the colonizer and his noble savage* (2007: 73). Then Emberley quotes Shari Huhndorf's breakdown of how the film defines the relationship between Nanook and the white man in the film's narrative construction:

While at the beginning of the film Nanook the brave constitutes a clear counterimage to that of the

smiling, feminine Nyla, upon his only encounter with a white man in the film, Nanook is transformed into the 'smiling one' (that is, the childish, happy-go-lucky Eskimo, the other aspect of the stereotype). He is, in a word, feminized in relation to the trader, the sole representative of the European world in the film. (2007: 74)

Indeed the film unfolds in such fashion. This sociological interpretation shows the political reality of the time and its sequels, giving us a compact and accurate definition of how we can see the film contextually, furthermore it presents the representation of the Eskimos. From this elements I want to direct the discussion in the frame of issues of representation by also giving a look to Flaherty's goals, the making of the film and the context of the film industry.

The film starts with a series of texts and maps that describe the rough conditions of this inhospitable (to us, not to Eskimos), isolated and cold region of the world, then stating the gratefulness and admiration from the director to the protagonists (describing them as *the most cheerful people in all the world*). The first close-up shot is the one of Nanook, introduced in intertitle as *Chief of the "Itivimuits" and as a great hunter famous through all Ungava – Nanook, The Bear*. The following intertitle reads *Nyla - the smiling one*, followed by a close-up of her.

A couple scenes after, Nanook arrives at the, as written in the film, *white man's post* in order to sell white fox fur and buy goods in exchange. The white man, the merchant, shows Nanook a gramophone. In amazement, as Nanook can not figure out where the music is coming from, laughs candidly, looks at the camera and eventually bites on the record. This scene, as many others, was staged and gramophones were very well known by Eskimos at the time, as revealed by the documentary film *Nanook Revisited* (1990).

It is said that the the term *documentary film* was coined by the aforementioned John Grierson: a translation from the French word *documentaire*, and firstly used when writing an article about another of Flaherty's films. At the time Grierson had been advocating on the importance of non-fictional cinema as a genre *when he started viewing it in relation to to the prevailing aesthetic of Hollywood films or the experimental cinema, which he considered to be futile and formalistic*. Grierson and his followers *introduced a statutory hierarchy between "lower categories of non-fiction (contemptible matter for rapid consumption) and a "higher" one, the documentary as "the*

creative treatment of actuality," which, like art, was made for the long term and for the thorough knowledge of the subjects in question (Lugon 2008: 35). Which is in fact what *Nanook of the North* aimed for, the film itself is the reference point for such definition of documentary film. But the idea of this format taking a distance from the Hollywood formulas is contradictory, as we will see later.

As we continue reading Grierson's text on Flaherty's work, we get a clear definition of the controversies surrounding his films, but moreover, Flaherty's personal romantic signature on his attempts (or mistakes):

I have said that Flaherty was innocent. He was all too innocent. His revolt was not just against the synthetics of Hollywood; there was at the same time a revolt more dangerous: against the very terms of our actual and present civilization. Flaherty's choice of themes was significant. It was a primitive man in Labrador, or a primitive man in Samoa or primitive man in the Aran Islands, or primitive man in industry, or primitive man, in the significant person of romantic youth, taming elephants in India. Flaherty would be shocked all over again to hear me say so, for he would maintain, with his usual great distinction, that the beauties they enact are age-old beauties and therefore classical. I merely make the point that his people and his themes are noticeably distant from those which preoccupy the minds of mankind today, and that if they were not so notably distant Flaherty would make them so ([1946] 2013: 32).

The reason for Flaherty to make primitive characters out of people has a poetic explanation in Grierson, but the sociological explanation sees in the poetry instruments of domination. The film went to be exhibited in theaters where spectators met the Eskimo's deformed description. The Eskimo to whom we have to empathize because he is simple, uneducated, humorous in his lack of knowledge of the modern world. Although also brave, exotic, extremely wise as a human in his relation with nature, the carrier of long-forgotten knowledge. Also presented as a man of western morals: a husband, a caring father.

In *Nanook Revisited* (1990) by Claude Massot, the crew travels to the site where the original film was made in order to talk with the inhabitants and clarify some of the alleged inaccuracies of Flaherty's work. They bring with them photos taken by Flaherty at the time, they also organize a screening of *Nanook of the North* in order to see the reactions of the natives to the film. The room in

which the film is presented on a TV is packed and the camera pans through the spectators' faces as they watch and react to the film, the Inuits watching the film about their ancestors. This shot has a strange feeling, it reminds you of how the camera observed Nanook and the gramophone. Massot has gone there to talk about what is wrong in Flaherty's film, but the way he observes seems to be similar to how Flaherty did it. Further in the film, the crew interviews Charlie Nayumallok, an elderly man whose father was friends with Nanook. With the help of an interpreter, he is asked if Nanook was a name given to him for the film. He replies: *He was given a name that was not his. Nanook seemed to fit the whites better.*

Charlie Nayumallok says that among the rules Flaherty set for the film, they were only allowed to wear reindeer skins, that they could not use rifles and no metal tools to build the igloo. *Only Inuit tools. That's how it went during the shooting. It was a film for white people, Inuit customs alone, where to be shown. It was forbidden to see white men's tools. Flaherty wanted only Inuit objects.*

In another scene, while playing footage from *Nanook of the North*, the film's narration quotes Flaherty's words, an explanation of why he decided to modify elements of the natives' lives in front of the camera:

I'm not trying to shoot a film on what the whites made of these people. In rags, wearing these horrible miserable hats. I'm not interested in the decay of these people. On the contrary, I want to show their primitive majesty and their originality as long as it is still possible, before the whites destroy not only their character, but also these people themselves, who are already disappearing.

Robert Flaherty was a photographer who had traveled several regions, taking photos of wildlife and Native Americans. Prior to making *Nanook of the North* he had taken a job working for a railway company as a mining prospector:

In August 1910, Sir William MacKenzie whose transcontinental railway, the Canadian Northern, was then in the initial stages of construction, commissioned the writer to undertake an expedition to the East Coast of Hudson Bay to examine deposits of certain islands upon which iron ore were supposed to be located. I made four expeditions on Sir William's behalf, during a period of six years, along the East Coast of Hudson Bay, through the barren lands of the hitherto unexplored

peninsula of Ungava, along the west coast of Ungava Bay and along the southern coast of Baffin Land. This work culminated in the discovery of the Belcher Island archipelago in Hudson Bay—a land mass which occupies 5,000 square miles. (1922)

The Belcher Island Archipelago was included in the official maps thanks to Flaherty's expeditions. The Eskimos knew about its existence. Nevertheless one of the islands was named Flaherty Island in his honor.

As a part of my exploration equipment, on these expeditions, a motion-picture outfit was included. It was hoped to secure films of the North and Eskimo life, which might prove to be of enough value to help in some way to defray some of the costs of the explorations.

During the mission Flaherty made a film about the life of the Eskimos. After putting it together he realized it was of poor narrative quality, he classified it as amateurish. Fate had it that he lost his footage to a fire and then he decided to start over. *My interest in films, from then on, grew.(...) To make a long story short, I decided to go north again—this time wholly for the purpose of making films.*

Flaherty went back to the region, casted for his film because it decidedly needed a main character that would build the arch of the story. He went for Nanook and started a series of expeditions with him and other Eskimo in order to film the different scenes of the film. The first one to be shot was the walrus hunt. Flaherty, Nanook and the crew traveled on a boat rented by Flaherty. It took them 4 or more days to get there due to having to wait at sea for favorable weather. Once on the site, it took them another two days to locate the walruses. But in the film we only see the scene of the hunt, in which Nanook approaches very slowly to the herd and then throws his harpoon at one of them. Other Eskimos then come to drag the still living walrus out of the water while Flaherty shoots the action:

For a long time it was nip and tuck—repeatedly—the crew called to me to use the gun—but the camera crank was my only interest then and I pretended not to understand. Finally Nanook worked the quarry toward the surf where he was pounded by the heavy seas and unable to get a purchase in the water. For at least twenty minutes that tug-o'-war kept on. I say twenty minutes advisedly for I

ground out 1,200 feet of film.

After the great success they went back to the post where Flaherty immediately developed the footage and showed it to the community. People reacted in amazement since not too many had seen an actual walrus hunt. But now it was not only documented, they were watching a film about it.

After this it did not take my Eskimo long to see the practical side of films and they soon abandoned their former attitude of laughter and good-natured ridicule toward the Angercak, i.e., the White Master who wanted pictures of them—the commonest objects in all the world! From that time on they were all with me.

In the rest of the article Flaherty tells the next step was an expedition to a land where they were to film a polar bear hunt. What was supposed to be only a couple weeks of traveling, turned into 55 days of getting lost and subsequently having to ration food in order to survive, which led to cancelling the hunt even when they had polar bears in sight. What happened behind the film is as interesting as for another documentary film, some would say so. This tells how Flaherty did not want to make a film about an expeditionary, but the story in the end is the story of the expeditionary and not of the main character, as we can see.

Flaherty's account shows us there is a hierarchy, the clear division between the Eskimo and the *white man*. In *Nanook Revisited*, 77 years after, the same division is laid on the table, the natives refer to Flaherty and his kind as the white man. In the 1920s the white man referred to the Eskimo implying their servitude, in the 1990s, in another film, the gap between the two is still there. It is under this social contract that *Nanook of the North* was made. Flaherty, the white man, went to shoot a film about what he wanted to see and how he saw them as a culture or ethnicity, and that is what he wanted to show. That is, in this case, what formulates the question that defines what is examined in this paper: what does the white man want to see?

One simple answer that expands in complexity, is given by another interviewee in *Nanook Revisited*. While watching scenes of *Nanook of the North*, the manager of the local TV station says: *As you notice he is wearing polar bear skin pants. People didn't wear polar bear skin pants over here. I think that the southern image of an Inuit in the 1920s, was somebody running around in*

polar bear skin pants. Robert (Flaherty) doctored this particular scene so that the image would fit the imagination.

The progressive standardization of cinema is what Noël Burch describes as the Institutional Mode of Representation, which took part during the turn of the 20th century. The camera starts to be placed closer to the actors in order to convey emotions, visual spaces are defined more clearly and hence the interactions of the characters, there was improvement of eye-line axis in order to communicate continuity. These advances also included a conceptual but more invisible part, which revealed how the narrative of the films progressively became the equivalent of novels and theater, which would finally bring the bourgeoisie to the cinema, who were already connected with these type of stories in opposition to the working classes, who were, before this, the main cinema audience as film was used mainly as gadget, illusion and simple visual entertainment. *As cinema entrepreneurs were also part of the bourgeoisie, it seems like it was a natural step forward to accommodate to cinema the stories they consumed, but in reality, as cinema as a business was expanding, the main reason for cinema to adapt to the bourgeoisie, is that they were less economically fragile and had more leisure time. It is important to realize that the extraordinary expansion of the American cinema and its rise to world dominance after World War I was a direct consequence of the creation of that audience during the period 1905-15.* (Burch, 1979)

Flaherty wanted to make a film that appeals cinema audiences and he did achieve this. But in order to do this, the rules of the game were defined largely by the market's monopoly, which standardized a style that they saw financially successful with viewers en masse. For Flaherty to succeed, he saw necessary to create an image of an Eskimo that does not exist, *so that the image would fit the imagination*, meaning to recreate the collective imaginary that the white man had of the Eskimos, to represent Eskimos as they are conceived in their primitive form.

In the 1920s five big studios owned almost the entirety of film production, film distribution and cinemas. Documentary films were never profitable until the release of *Nanook of the North*. Flaherty, willingly or not, adapted to the characteristics of that market. *To describe Nanook's life he will use the writing techniques just perfected for feature films. Cut-outs, actors direction, dramatic construction and when he has no other choice, reenactment*, says the narrator of *Nanook Revisited*, an assertion also made by others both as appraisal or criticism.

The success of the film lead Flaherty to be proclaimed not only the father of documentary film but also the father of ethnographic film.

From here onwards there has been an open discussion of what can be considered a documentary film if *Nanook of the North* is regarded as such. Veracity is always at the forefront, but behind it come the subsequent arguments about what defines that veracity: misrepresentation, alterity issues, colonialism, market's hegemony, etc. One hundred years later, there have been many films that like *Nanook of the North*, present a point of view that sparks discussion about its truthfulness and methods of representation. Brazilian director Joao Moreira Salles, known for his documentary film *Santiago* (2007) in which he makes a poignant though sensitive self criticism on his position as a privileged filmmaker, makes a clear and simple reflection on the hierarchy of cinema representation: *there is a question which I would say is also political: to the south of the equator it is always expected from us to talk about ourselves only, it is not expected from us to talk about them. They talk about us, but we can't talk about them, about the rich north. Therefore there are many films made by American or European directors about Brazil, but there are not too many made by Brazilians about the north. A disequilibrium is generated that is also related to the economic powers, the power of the north over the south.* (D'Avenia 2017)

But norths and souths have different meanings in different contexts as we can see in Moreira's own words: *It is easier for a dominant social class to film the lives of the exploited. In Brazil, when you go to a "favela" to film someone's life, almost always you get a "yes", you are authorized. Why? That authorization also belongs to the social class, of people used to say "yes" to the white and rich. But think about the opposite: if someone from a "favela" rings the bell of your luxurious apartment in Ipanema, three teenagers with a camera say to you: "We want to film your life". They would be scared, they wouldn't let them in, because you just don't do that.*

These asseverations mirror the work of the fathers of documentary film, a one-hundred-year old debate. Documentary filmmaking has been defined and exercised many times in that debatable way, from the very beginning until today. Other type of exploration requires another way of thinking, but today in almost every film school students are sent out to shoot the garbage collectors, the homeless, the minorities and the remote communities. They are even sent to poorer countries on

field trips. That is what ABC of documentary filmmaking is, hence it is still, if now to a lesser degree, a practice of privilege.

This privilege can be translated into power that belongs to the observer (filmmaker), becoming the first unspoken rule of the production process. This point of view or the power of the one observers, defines the development of the story and dictates what would be considered as the truth. Then it is going to be shown and celebrated by an audience that in many cases belongs to the same social category the observer belongs to, creating an experience of redemption for those watching. These elements: power, truth and redemption as structural components of the production and exhibition of a documentary film, are the elements that I will also utilize as the structure of this document.

We could say that Flaherty had nothing but a strong altruistic romantic goal. As he mentioned, he wanted to show the Eskimo in the glory of their aboriginal customs, now ruined with the arrival of the white man. This could be interpreted as being aware of and against a systemic discrimination taking place in Canada as native communities were being integrated into society in a way that, as in a process of colonization, meant that the natives were to adapt to the social and political conditions of the settlers. It is possible that Flaherty saw it all very clearly, but then the question would be if he made the right film for that purpose.

Intriguingly, in *Revisiting Nanook*, as the crew travels around asking people about the inaccuracies of Flaherty and his film, in one sequence the film cuts from footage of *Nanook of the North* in which we see Nyla and her baby at the white man's post, followed by a montage of the Inuits in 1987, riding motor trikes on their way to the supermarket, where a woman carries her baby on her back just like Nyla, as others stand in line at the cashier to buy boxed detergent and canned food that is then placed in plastic bags, while being filmed by the surveillance cameras of the shop's CCTV. This narration-less scene ends with images of the village's dump, where all the garbage of today's consumer products is surrounded by snow. It is not clear to me if it is a criticism to the modern world, or if it is a portrayal of how the images of Inuits and the modern world still do not match together for the director. Something very similar happened to Flaherty.

2

Power

*The reason why I switched to fiction films is because
when you make documentary films,
the worst for the character, the best for the filmmaker.*

Sergey Dvortsevov. (2020)

In documentary cinema there are various observation methods and approaches, different types of involvement and of distance by the filmmaker with a story. In general, the position of observer and observed can not be transposed. There are autobiographical documentary films, there have also been situations where the camera at some point turned to the filmmaker, but it has not happened that the observed becomes the observer.

The distance between documentarian and character, and the nature of this relationship, has been exemplarily contextualized in history by Susan Sontag when referring to documentary photography: *Photography has always been fascinated by social heights and lower depths. Documentarists (as distinct from courtiers with cameras) prefer the latter. For more than a century, photographers have been hovering about the oppressed, in attendance at scenes of violence—with a spectacularly good conscience. Social misery has inspired the comfortably-off with the urge to take pictures, the gentlest of predations, in order to document a hidden reality, that is, a reality hidden from them. Gazing on other people's reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal.* (1973: 42)

Documentarians are able to document these situations because they sympathize with the observed in

an attempt to create awareness of unjust, exotic or underdeveloped circumstances among others. But this sympathy can reveal the alien nature of the documentarian as described by Sontag, or the implicit social contract in which those at the bottom agree with being portrayed by the one who is on a higher position, as Moreira Salles asserts.

Such practices became solid foundations in documentary filmmaking. They are what documentary filmmakers should strive for and the main content in what we see as documentary exhibitions, TV programs, film festivals, etc. As a personal example, in my professional life as a documentarian in Colombia, during the last 15 years I have filmed and interviewed the following people:

- Street jugglers
- Teenage gang members
- Soldiers
- Anti-narcotics police officers
- Prostitutes
- Former guerrilla fighters
- Guerrilla fighters turned political activists
- Indigenous community leaders
- Victims of slave work
- Graffiti artists
- Coca farmers
- Farmers of remote areas
- Teachers from isolated elementary schools
- Street vendors
- Inhabitants of slums
- Former paramilitary army soldiers
- Musicians in poor environments
- Fishermen
- Young activists from marginal neighborhoods
- A blind woman who wanted to become a singer
- Imprisoned women who murdered their husbands
- Taxi drivers

- Night carwash employees

The list can reveal a stereotypical nature, but it can also reveal a widely accepted value: all the characters on the list could be characters of documentary films in other societies. It is true that the reality of these characters was unknown to me, it was not part of my daily life. It is also true that in practically all cases I belong to a higher and more educated class. Either the sympathy for the oppressed or the implicit contract of servility, show in the end that the filmmaker is, implicitly or explicitly, exerting power over the observed, thus defining a representation of them.

There are examples of films where the documentarian is not looking down and when the power scale is shifted. For a simple example, documentaries about living celebrities in the end struggle to do much more than to celebrate. The filmmaker is not in control of what the film is, the person in front of the camera is. That is, in short, control over power of representation. Another example is documentary films about the wrongdoings of big corporations, which brings companies and/or governments to lay down legal restrictions in order to mute the voice of the filmmaker before, meanwhile and after filming. That is power that belongs to a few, not to everybody. Whoever is in control, the one who grabs the power, is the one who will define representation, the lens through which the documentation will be executed.

The mention of recurring topics in documentary film production shows that in the cinematic realm this methods do not belong to a society, a nation or a community. They belong to cinema as a whole, where a hegemonic power has been able to set the rules of cinema production. This is explained by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, going back to the great cinema expansion of the USA after the first world war: *The American hegemony in film production takes on a new dimension, meanwhile the others start a process of territorial stagnation: although present in several regions, they do not compete with the hegemony, they coexist in different spheres. At Hollywood's peak, the tendency is that one type of cinema production is seen as universal and distributed as such, while the others are local expressions, big or small, but in the end only local* (2003: 9).

Such a hegemonic role of one industry that manages to influence styles and contents, bring us directly to the issues of representation that are intrinsic to it. That is the reason why the role of American cinema in culture has also been approached from a postcolonial perspective, both from

cultural studies and filmmakers.

In order to exemplify positions of power in cinematic language I want to examine the Latin American cinema movements and manifestos of the second half of the 20th century in the context of search for cinema identity and use of tools of representation. These movements are a good example of a reaction against hegemonic representation, when filmmakers from different countries start creating an international dialogue about the role of national cinemas and debates regarding the effects of homogenized film formulas and their global impact. Nevertheless, the discussion becomes more complicated as all of movements point in the direction of representation of poverty as a common language and common need in the region, but as cinema as a language and as a tool of identity evolves, the observation of poverty shows at the same time another intrinsic use of power by the ones who make the films, revealing a dichotomy in which cinema's market power plays a preponderant role.

The work of Stuart Hall in his essay *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation* frames the argument I am presenting here. Hall departs from the study of cultural identity in the “Caribbean Cinema”, which he also classifies as part of the group of the “Third Cinemas”, label that as we will see, originated in Latin America. Hall writes that *Identity is not as transparent and unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted, not outside, representation.* (1989, 68) This argument will present great importance as we observe the progression of Latin American Cinema movements of the second half of the 20th century.

The concerns then articulated by Latin American film directors were very close if not the same as those about *Nanook of the North* in regard to cinematic representation in a highly monopolized industry. The difference is that the discussion is not explicitly centered in representation, but in the political context and struggle of a time then entering the Cold War, a Latin American territory in dispute between socialism and capitalism, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and how the new Cuban approach to cinema was being applauded by filmmakers all over Latin America. The positions of the filmmakers and their rejection of Hollywood depoliticized mass entertainment formulas, which had been engrained in many countries' local production at the time, was one way or

the other connected with the ongoing social struggles in search of acceptance of socialism as a way to bring the social equality that capitalism could not provide. On the other hand, filmmakers attempted to free national culture to what they saw as a new attempt of colonization, in the context of being relatively new postcolonial nations. The search for a social equality included culture production and consumption, which lead to the embracing of poverty as the critical societal and identity element that had not been depicted, nor included as a political reality to be debated in cinematic art. The ideological and cinematic intersections between these movements and films are more than evident, but they also let us examine traces of earlier documentary film practices and also to foresee results.

One of these films was the Argentine documentary *Tire Dié* (Toss me a Dime, 1958) by Fernando Birri. The film depicts the poor living conditions of the families in the slums of the city of Santa Fe. The kids that belong to these families run next to the train asking the passengers to throw some coins out the window. The main aim of the film was to have an accurate representation of these circumstances of poverty as an element of an Argentine society that was, in cinematic terms, occupied showing entertainment that was not in connection with reality. It was conceived as a “survey film” in which the filmmaker, at the time teaching at the university, went to the slum with the students from the sociology department to interview the families, get acquainted to them, gather information and then film according to this research. During the first half, the film spends a significant amount of time in the slum talking to the parents of the kids, asking questions about if the kids go to school, if the parents are employed, if they make enough money to live, if the kids are vaccinated, etc. Naturally, the answer to all this questions is no.

The story tells it was not easy to start the project. *When we first got there, the people from the slum chased us out throwing stones at us and it was understandable. When we started photographing people, the reactions were rather hostile. “Why don't you leave us alone in our poverty?”, and there is a whole lot of dignity in such reaction. “Why don't you leave us alone? Why do you come here to bother us with those cameras?”* (2010) The whole conception and production phase of the film took two years and when released, it was intended to bring the lower social classes to the cinema to incorporate them as viewers, and it accomplished that the night of the film's premiere at the university. The director tells about many of the spectators being at a university for the first time in their lives (1964: 53). Subsequently, Birri wrote the Manifesto of Santa Fe, which starts with this

words:

Underdevelopment is a fact in Latin America, including Argentina. It is an economic and statistic fact. It is not a word invented by the left wing: "official" international (UN) and Latin American organizations (OEA, ECLAC, ALALC) use it frequently in their plans and reports. They can not avoid using it.

The causes of it are very well known: colonialism, external and internal. The cinema from these countries is participant of the general characteristics of such superstructure, of such society, and expresses it, with all its deformations. It gives a fake image of that society, of those people, swipes off people: it does not give an image of those people.

Hence, to give such image, would be a positive first step: the documentary film's task. How is documentary film to give such image: By giving it as reality is and it can not give it otherwise. (This is the revolutionary function of documentary film in Latin America) And by testifying how this reality is – this sub-reality, this unhappiness – it denies it. It repudiates it. It denounces it. It judges it, criticizes it, dismantles it. Because it shows things as they are, irrefutably, and not as we would like them to be. (Or the way they want us to believe they are – in good or bad faith)

As a counterbalance to that function of "denial", documentary film has another one of confirmation of the positive values of this society: the values of the people. Their strength, their efforts, their joys, their struggles, their dreams. Consequence – and motivation – of the social documentary film: knowledge, conscience, consciousness of reality.

Problematization. Change: from sub-life to life. Conclusion: to stand in front of reality with a camera and to document it, to document underdevelopment. The cinema that makes itself complicit of that underdevelopment, is sub-cinema. (1964: 12)

Around the same time, the *Cinema Novo* (New Cinema) movement in Brazil, gathered filmmakers against the prominent tendencies in the Brazilian cinema for the masses of the late 1950s and early 1960s, namely comedies and musicals that followed the Hollywood format. Glauber Rocha, one of the most visible representatives of the movement, made fiction films that deal with the societal and

political characteristics of a socially unequal postcolonial Brazil, in references such as politicians being crowned (*Terra em Transe*, 1967) or characters that reject independence from Portugal (*Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, 1964). His films have been celebrated internationally, specially in Europe where they harvested awards and made the movement rise to historical artistic importance. In 1965 he wrote the essay *Estetyca da Fome* (Aesthetics of Hunger), the most influential written piece in the movement, in which poverty is his main axis of discussion on cinematic depiction in Brazilian and Latin American cinema in correlation with the world cinema market:

While Latin America bemoans its general wretchedness, the foreign interlocutor cultivates a taste for this wretchedness not as a tragic symptom, but rather as simple formal information for his field of interest. Neither does the Latin convey his true wretchedness to civilized man nor does civilized man truly comprehend the Latin's wretchedness. (...) The European observer is only interested in artistic creation from the underdeveloped world to the extent that it satisfies his nostalgia for primitivism; and this primitivism is hybrid, dressed up as late legacies from the civilized world, misunderstood because imposed by colonialist conditioning. ([1965] 1983: 13)

Primitivism, a tool used by Flaherty in his films, which was criticized by John Grierson as seen above. Rocha makes it clear that Cinema Novo is a movement that does not belong to Brazil but extends it to all the Latin American nations in recognition of their postcolonial reality and their search for identity in cinema.

Cinema Novo can not be effectively developed while at the margin of the economic and cultural process of the Latin American continent, especially because Cinema Novo is a phenomenon of colonized peoples and not a privileged Brazilian entity. Wherever there is a filmmaker willing to film the truth and to confront the hypocritical police model of censorship, Cinema Novo will have a living cell. Wherever there is a filmmaker willing to confront commercialism, exploitation, pornography, technicalism, Cinema Novo will have a living cell. Wherever there is a filmmaker of any age or origin ready to put his films and his profession at the service of the crucial causes of his times, Cinema Novo will have a living cell. That is the definition, and because of it, Cinema Novo is at the margin of the film industry because the film industry is committed to lies and exploitation. Cinema Novo's integration into the economy and the film industry depends on freedom in Latin America. Cinema Novo swears on its name, on the name of its closest and its most distant members,

on the name of its crudest and its most talented, on the name of its weakest and its strongest for that freedom. It is a moral question that is reflected in the films at the moment of filming a man or a house, in the detailed observation, in this philosophy: it is not a film, but rather an evolving set of films that will give the public, finally, consciousness of its own existence.([1965] 1983: 14)

In 1968 Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas released the Argentine documentary film *La Hora de los Hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces). A historical film in three parts with a total duration of 260 minutes. The first part is entitled Neocolonialism and Violence, telling the story of how Latin America lives in a new state of colonization, in which the wealthy are in service of the colonizer while the poor are exploited and segregated, elements also present in the two previous manifests.

In the Hour of the Furnaces the new colonizer is pointed with the finger: the United States. And this assessment, being an objective truth or not, is connected both to the political atmosphere of the time as defined by socialist political groups aligned with the Cuban anti imperialist discourse, and the battles against American intervention in several countries in the Latin American region. The film visits factories where they talk to the workers about financial and labour conditions, hence their exploitative nature. They visit an indigenous community in Argentina where it is visible that the filmed do not want to be filmed. The film's voice over says: *80% of the indigenous population in Argentina suffers from syphilis or T.B. Men that stay away from the camera, avoiding the white man. They have been made inferior people, but they haven't been convinced of their inferiority yet.* The film uses the inferiority topic in order to illustrate the assessment that the colonizer tries to make the colonized an inferior person who will eventually look up to the colonizer.

Further in the film, the voice over argues about the economic exploitation of the colonized lands: *It is this exploitation the cause of the backwardness, the poverty, the oppression, it is what makes possible the high standards of living in the developed nations. It is what gave birth to this dark word invented by the imperialism: underdevelopment.*

In 1969, which was also the year of the tenth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, the directors wrote an article-manifesto entitled *Hacia un Tercer Cine* (Toward a Third Cinema). It was first published in the *Tricontinental* magazine, a Cuban publication of international print run. This is perhaps the cinema manifesto in Latin America that has had the most outreach and acceptance,

although it is possible to say that it was never really put to practice en mass. It is also possible to say that its conception is born out of the lack of clear results of previous attempts, seeing no difference in the hegemony of the cinema market, hence proposing a new approach to cinema production.

Third Cinema refers primarily to a cinema from the Third World, but it is according to the manifesto the cinema that comes after the first and second in terms of market and ideology. The first is defined as the industrial hegemonic cinema, not only from the United States but also the European cinema that accommodated to the First Cinema format. The second one is the author cinema that, in its aim for creating a new voice, ends up becoming another arm of the hegemonic cinema since it uses the same formulas. The Third Cinema would be a different endeavor very much in connection with revolutionary ideals, an anti-imperialist struggle. It would be a cinema with a different production and distribution process, in which there would be cells scattered over territories, in a guerrilla wars style, not only shooting but also screening films about, in regard and for the different peoples of the nations with a clear aim: *the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the struggling point – in a word, the decolonization of culture.* (Getino, Solanas 1969). The manifesto is clear about its pro-socialist ideology, the words anti-imperialist, militant, bourgeoisie and revolutionary are present all over the text. *The Hour of the Furnaces* was produced and distributed in the fashion proposed in the manifesto, the screenings were organized in factories, neighborhoods, schools and such places in order to get to the audience the film is trying to talk to. In the manifesto the directors approach the effect of hegemonic cinema in the audiences in a similar way as Cinema Novo and the Manifest of Santa Fe, but inscribed in a class struggle discourse:

The mechanistic takeover of a cinema conceived as a show to be exhibited in large theaters with a standard duration, hermetic structures that are born and die on the screen, satisfies, to be sure, the commercial interests of the production groups, but it also leads to the absorption of forms of the bourgeois world-view which are the continuation 19th century art, of bourgeois art: man is accepted only as a passive and consuming object; rather than having his ability to make history recognized, he is only permitted to read history, contemplate it, listen to it and undergo it.

Third Cinema goes one step forward in the aim for democratization of cinema production by stating

that anyone can be a film director, due to the technological advances of the time such as faster film and smaller cameras, which *have helped to demystify filmmaking and divest it of that almost magic aura that made it seem that films were only within the reach of 'artists', 'geniuses', and the 'privileged'.*

As a last example I want to briefly mention the essay *Por un cine imperfecto* (For an imperfect cinema) written by Cuban film director Julio García Espinosa in 1969. As film director, García Espinosa released in 1955 *El Mégano*, a 25-minute film that sympathizes with the Cuban armed struggle. Shot with the farmers playing themselves, it is a fictional simple story that depicts how they are exploited by a landowner. It is regarded as one of the most important films in Latin American cinema, as are the others mentioned above.

By the time the essay was written the Cuban film industry was at its best moment and was becoming one of the world references for cinema, almost becoming technically perfect, origin of the title of García Espinosa's essay - a concern when in connection with the ideals of the socialist revolution:

Surely the truly revolutionary position, from now on, is to contribute to overcoming these elitist concepts and practices, rather than pursuing ad eternum the "artistic quality" of the work. The new outlook for artistic culture is no longer that everyone must share the taste of a few, but that all can be creators of that culture. Art has always been a universal necessity; what it has not been is an option for all under equal conditions. Parallel to refined art, popular art has had a simultaneous but independent existence.

Popular art has absolutely nothing to do with what is called mass art. Popular art needs and consequently tends to develop the personal, individual taste of a people. On the other hand, mass art (or art for the masses) requires the people to have no taste. It will only be genuine when it is actually the masses who create it, since at present it is art produced by a few for the masses. Grotowski says that today's theater should be a minority art form because mass art can be achieved through cinema. This is not true. Perhaps film is the most elitist of all the contemporary arts. Film today, no matter where, is made by a small minority for the masses. (García Espinosa 1969)

All movements point at a supremacy in cinema and how, either that supremacy or its apparently natural replication, lacks an affiliation with a local reality that is scarcely being portrayed. And when portrayed, in the end it can not contend the dominant cinema. All the films are a reaction to imperialism whether explicitly or as a reaction to cinematic imperialism through the use of a cinematic discourse. All the directors mentioned were aware of each others' work, agreeing and disagreeing in artistic terms, but with a common political goal. Although it can not be interpreted as politically homogeneous. The methods were all different and in different political contexts and desires.

But the concerns these directors had were legitimate. The proof of that is that Third Cinema is staying until today if not as a formal movement, as a way to approach filmmaking politically not only in Latin America, but by other directors in other countries. It had a first moment of internationalization in the beginning of the 1980s due to the convergence with cinema stances of directors such as Ousmane Sembene from Senegal and Ritwik Ghatak from India among many others (de Taboada 2011).

Since this document is addressing cinematic representation, the selected excerpts of the essays and manifestos are also an attempt to find common components in that regard. Underdevelopment, poverty, local cinema, Hollywood cinema and the artist as privileged, are the ones that create a thread that let us explore representation in the cinema made before, as well as the one that will follow as I try to show further ahead. Underdevelopment is a component that is politically in opposition to imperialism, to an univocal cinematic representation. Poverty and its portrayal is the search for a visual identity connected to reality. Local cinema is the absence of representation of a reality, in this case the poor as the majority. Hollywood cinema and its format is an external representation. Privilege or the artist as privileged is the counterpart of cinema democratization, the absence of a point of view in a context of underdevelopment, where education is only for the few who can have access to it. The discourse is not about representation because the struggle of the nations is framed in the political realm and cinema wants to take part in it. But as the films and movements get recognition mainly in European author cinema festivals, what was intended to bring awareness and debate about political and social issues, started to repeat itself giving as a result a discussion about cinematic representation within Latin America.

One pivotal point came in 1978 with the release of the Colombian film *Agarrando Pueblo* (The Vampires of Poverty). In 1972 the Colombian government issued the “cinema surcharge” law: for every movie ticket sold, a portion of the price went to the support of national cinema production. Since cinemas could profit from this surcharge if they presented Colombian films, it led to the screening of local short films before every feature film. Such short films were also part of the formula of the surcharge, so the producers were seeing some profit as well. During the six years of the law 600 short films were produced, most of them of very low artistic and technical quality (Higueta 2013). In order for the filmmakers to guarantee they would get back their investment, most of them opted for making cheap documentary shorts. One recurrent topic of these films was poverty.

In the Latin American cinematic context of unity in the social struggle, this trend *had as a consequence a disastrous compulsive propagation of short films whose profitability resided in the exploitation of social distress with the aim of export to European TV networks and festivals, tailored to their standards and taste. Disguised as revolution, it was a production of prefabricated pseudo-condemnation for an international market in which the characteristics of underdevelopment have more value than the comprehension of its internal phenomena.* (Cruz Carvajal 1999). The mission of a political approach to cinema from a Latin American perspective had taken a new shape under the influence of the market.

The Vampires of Poverty was born as a reaction to that. The film follows a film crew shooting images of poverty in Cali and Bogota with the false pretext of making a film for German television. The film opens with the image of a beggar sitting next to the door of a church, the director asks him to shake the can where he collects spare change. Then the crew sets off to another location, quickly, since they are terrified of being in such neighborhoods. Then a beggar woman runs away from the camera; another poor elderly woman tries to hit the camera with her bag as we hear people shouting in disapproval to what the filmmakers are doing; another old beggar tries to scare the filmmakers away with a walking stick (which evokes the indigenous people avoiding the camera in *The Hour of the Furnaces*) and, in a more blatant progression of the plot, the director throws coins to a fountain and asks kids to dive in and find them. In this scene, a man speaks up to the crowd around the film crew saying that *it's always the same situation, foreigners coming to make money out of poverty. That's what they always want to show.* Another man in the crowd says *that's the reality!*, to what the

first man replies that *all “gringos” come to exploit them and their images without any actual help*. As the film crew is leaving the location another man shouts, reproachingly, that this is *another documentary film to be sent abroad*.

Up until here the film shows that there is a dominant film discourse that not only the filmmakers but, the onlookers, are familiar with. The film also makes clear that this is a foreign form of representation being replicated in a local setting. The local point of view of the other, the poor and the primitive. In direct connection to documentary filmmaking techniques, the film reveals that one thing that documentarians tend to overlook, is the fact that there is no unawareness of cinematic representation. In the manifestos and films mentioned before, the ones prior to *Vampires of Poverty*, they all acknowledge in one way or the other the awareness of the representation of their societies, the words primitive or underdeveloped point at that fact, but in a way it shows how the directors are resourceless before the possibility of being an active vehicle of change of what they denounce, at least within the film, by not having, for example, a critical view of their role behind the camera, rather staying as the mere carriers of the information. This establishes a connection with the constant presence of the word privilege in the manifestos, the acceptance of a disconnection to some degree with what they film. That is what makes *Vampires of Poverty* a special film to study, because it exposes the awareness of representation on the level of the individual being filmed, but furthermore it explores the role of the filmmaker in such situation.

The last scene of *Vampires of Poverty* is a parody of the film itself, in which the ultimate message of the film is revealed: The film crew is shooting an interview that they have prepared and rehearsed in advance with actors who play a poor family. They stand in front of a poorly built shack. The questions are all about if they make enough money, if they manage to survive and raise their kids, if the kids are vaccinated. The answer to all the questions is naturally 'no' (which evokes the interviews in *Toss me a Dime*). The alleged real owner of the shack turns up interrupting the interview, confronting the camera crew and the actors for shooting images of poverty, eventually fetching his machete and chasing everybody out. When finally alone in his property, where a camera was left running, filming him, he finds a roll of film on the ground, opens it and as he shouts the questions the family was asked - if they know how to read and write, if the kids are vaccinated against chickenpox - unrolls the film and wraps himself in it in ecstasy, as if degrading filmmaking, as if taking revenge against the images of the poor. The whole scene is staged and the man taking

revenge is in fact the actual owner of the shack, as revealed in the subsequent conversation the directors have with him about filming poverty.

Carlos Mayolo tells the story that he and Luis Opsina were shooting another documentary film and wanted to capture footage of a poor neighborhood in the outskirts of Cali. A man approached them and asked why were they shooting images of the poor. This man was the owner of the shack in Mayolo and Opsina's *The Vampires of Poverty*, which they were already cooking in their heads, trying to find a way to say something about the constant ongoing production of poverty films in Latin America for foreign festivals and TV networks.

Mayolo coined the term “Pornomiseria” in Spanish (which could be translated as porn of poverty) which referred to the persistent observation and objectification of poverty: *We detected that Colombian documentary films were taking poverty as the foundation for their creation and lucubration reasoning. We started writing an article for “Ojo al Cine” magazine in which we wanted to say that, almost as a cine qua non condition, cinema and specially documentary, was about poverty. (...) One more thing we discovered with the “pornomiseria” theory was the relationship between the ones filming and the one being filmed because, in a coherent cinema (...) what is made with the ones being filmed also has repercussions on the one filming. Poverty was a product with a price in international markets, and documentary films for Europe, without poverty, had no reason to exist.* (2008: 89)

Mayolo's argumentation is about ethics in documentary filmmaking as it is about the dominant market, the dominant voice. It is also the reason why Mayolo plays in the film the director of the film crew, as accepting he does not belong, underlining the fact that he is observing from a distance. In the end, the whole film is also about the filmmakers accepting their guilt, their role as cinema producers.

In order to make the film, they had to adapt its cinematic language to the dominant language. The film is about the film that would have been made by a “German” crew, so this way the message is understood by that “German” crew primarily. It was screened in a number of film festivals in Europe and two European companies acquired the distribution rights, thus the film gained momentum and became one of the few references for critical voices in documentary cinema about

ethics. But according to Mayolo, prior to its success and distribution *the film was projected all over Colombia in order to get to really define what it is, and to know which non-schematic and non-traditional dramaturgical edits was the audience getting. The film achieved that complicity with the ordinary spectator, which is the one that assimilates the film the best* (92).

On the other hand, in the political context of the 60s and 70s in Latin America, there was also a critical reception to *Vampires of Poverty* as told by Ospina: *It has been told to us that the film does not make use of cinema as a weapon of the revolution. But what Vampires of Poverty reveals is precisely that cinema is a weapon, an instrument in the hands of manipulators, whether they are right wing or left wing. Mayolo and I made a film about what we know: cinema, its ways and what it means to expose them and to call them into question. Methods and techniques from documentary film and happening are combined in the film, therefore the reality being captured is that of the filming process itself, of a way of filming to which we responded protesting, taking sides against a concrete situation that endangers both a conception of cinema and its social value.* (Caicedo, 1979)

Film as a weapon is representation itself. Latin America in its search for a common cultural identity in cinema was progressively discovering how to approach poverty, how to show the positioning of that cinema within a dominant market. As Hall defined it, a positioning by and within representation itself. The following excerpt of Stuart Hall's work when referring to Caribbean Cinema, brings us back directly to the same statements made by the manifestos and filmmakers quoted above, both in ideology and in practice. It is a clear intersection that shows how relevant these stances are still to date from both cinema and cultural studies perspectives.

In terms of colonialism, underdevelopment, poverty and the racism of color, the European Presence is that which, in visual representation has positioned us within its dominant regimes of representation: the colonial discourse, the literatures of adventure and exploration, the romance of the exotic, the ethnographic and traveling eye, the tropical languages of tourism, travel brochure and Hollywood and the violent, pornographic languages of ganja and urban violence. (1989: 78)

Which brings us back to the generic list of topics for a documentary film that I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

As a documentary filmmaker, I have witnessed first hand the difficulties of making a film out of the

market's boundaries. When a film is in its conception, the one who is to become your audience or your financial supporter gets your attention much faster at the moment you talk about the usual topics: prisons, outcasts, dangerous places, remote locations, poor villagers. Other ideas require stronger powers of persuasion.

When I started conceiving *Las Últimas Vacaciones* (Boys of Buenaventura, 2015) which is the first feature length documentary film I made, I wanted to tell the coming-of-age story of three talented young musicians who were about to graduate high-school, but had very little chances to start higher education in music due to poverty, a characteristic of the city where they live: Buenaventura, a small city in Colombia in which many films and reportages about violence and poverty had been made.

The city carried the label of being “the most dangerous city in the country”, hence it even got to be catalogued as the most violent city in the world. My film wanted to show a different face of the city, of the normal struggles of every other person through this three friends. When looking for funding possibilities, the project was not getting much attention, there was not a “drama” in the film that made it worth being supported. It was only when describing the film from that same point of view that I was opposing, that it started to be interesting to both funders and audience: a film in a very poor and violent place where these three kids want to find out what their future is going to be like.

I decided to start shooting on my own since it was not going to be easy to get funding, it never is. But I had the resolution of confronting what had been created around the city and its people. Very soon one significant anecdote showed me clearly how the common representation of a place and its people can transform into a burden for the ones being represented, how real and tactile can awareness of representation be. As I started shooting the film, people around the main characters started approaching me, asking me what the film was going to be about, manifesting that people always go there to shoot what is negative, the poverty and the violence, rarely telling a story of what the actual reality is. When shooting outside, walking on the streets, people who were encountered by the camera avoided being shot. They covered their faces or went to the other sidewalk. People simply did not want to be at risk of being represented the same way they had been. It took a long time until the characters of the film and the people around them could trust me, hence they could also trust the goal of such a film. But of course the fact that I was a man from the capital, with

education, a privileged person and practically an alien to the customs of the city, added to the lack of trust. As I mentioned before, we as filmmakers sometimes forget about the fact that there is an awareness of representation. Beyond that, we filmmakers barely ever think about or know that even when having good intentions, you are representing a person, exercising a power.

I did eventually see my faults as well and felt ashamed of myself. I saw how different was the culture, how different I was, how different we, people from the capital, are. How we look at them from that podium, and from there we define a reality and their reality. This is one of the reasons why a camera can be compared to a weapon.

Forty years after making *Vampires of Poverty*, Luis Ospina was asked how can we avoid vampirism. The existence of such question and such discussion let us see that the problem is still here:

Vampirism in filmmaking is inevitable. The photographic lens as well as the cinematographic camera 'feed' on the subject; they 'mummify' it and 'steal' its soul, whether we want it to or not. André Bazin already warned us of this with his famous essay The Ontology of the Photographic Image in 1945. One must analyze ethical schemes to avoid falling into the trap of Pornomiseria. The act of being filmed is one of the greatest gestures of generosity that a human being can make and it relies on you (the filmmaker) being faithful to that person, since it is very easy to betray it by manipulating the material so that it goes against that person. (Freixas, Bonadies, Ospina, 2018)

Filmmakers, ideally, should acknowledge their power. But this should also be the acknowledgement of the market and its characteristics, since they define greatly what is considered to be worth consuming, hence defining to a degree what a documentary film is. In the Latin American context, there was a concern about what the market defined as a film for consumption about the region, the reaction to it translated into manifestos, new possible approaches to filmmaking that were to be in connection with the social reality. But then the type of observation of the poor and its repetition, started being contended because of its intrinsic prolongation of problems of representation, a discussion that has not reached an agreement nor an end or control to these practices even nowadays, decades after the discussion was made public, making clear that the problematic dates back to the beginning of cinema.

The discussion exists because these types of representation are amplified by an external eye that in its exercise of power, as the main player of the industry, the hegemonic one, proliferates them with a potential of establishing them as a common understanding. The hegemonic market and the hegemonic film industry barely asks itself about such type of point of view and the issues of representation that it entails, because it is connected to a political tradition in which it conceives itself as the one on the pedestal. In short: the Eurocentric tradition and political conception of the world and its exercise of power. This power, naturally, defines a type of truth. This is going to be discussed in the following chapter by analyzing how ethnography and ethnographic cinema connects to such tradition.

3

Truth

The definition of truth in documentary film has always been conflictive. Mainly because what is being captured, documented, does not lead to a unique ubiquitous reading, as we have seen so far. Since the beginning of cinema there has been a very long discussion regarding this, which lead to having different definitions. One could even say that there is no real consensus since every film theoretician could give their own problematization and hence a definition, supported by either philosophy, film studies, media studies or other disciplines.

It is difficult to adhere to one such definition. All of them require a contextual analysis, all of them might be valid insomuch as all of them lack elements from the others. A definition from cinema as an art form lacks the theorization of philosophy and vice-versa, the same if we consider definitions born out of sociology, cultural studies, art criticism or anthropology. In other words, for example, what to a filmmaker is the rationalization and conception of truth in film, does not connect with that one of an anthropologist and the anthropological methodology.

In such environment, we can say that today almost all definitions point to the fact that truth, in documentary cinema, is not static. It is polyvalent, not only because its value can be examined by different sciences, but also because it includes how it is enunciated and then received, which is something that does not relate exclusively to communication studies in the practice, all other disciplines have to take regard cinema as a process of communication. That is the complexity and hence the problematic presented by the label of “reality”, an impossible goal.

Nevertheless, we need to be reminded that a film, before all possible studies and interpretations it might entail, is a work of art of storytelling techniques born from literature and transcoded to dramaturgy and cinematic language. These cinematic storytelling techniques and (ideally) the mastery of their use, as in art in general, define the quality of a film and then (possibly) its

integration inside a market. That is the reason why truthfulness has in many cases come secondary, as we have also seen.

Specifically inside the film industry realm, this discussion is transposed and somehow reduced to a fiction-or-documentary differentiation. If a documentary film presents a constructed, biased or doubtful truth, it is referred to as a work of “fiction”, which has negative connotations generally. Although, as for cinema and storytelling techniques, the hidden question tends to be: how much a fiction film can a documentary film be? Filmmaking studies and discusses filmmaking.

But if there is a discussion inherent to documentary filmmaking is the one about ethics. The problem is ethics is used as an encompassing tool that incorporates many possible problems, reducing them to being ethical or not, which results in lack of depth in the discussion since ethics refer only to the morals of the directors, of their societies.

Given the circumstances and keeping in mind the scope and topic of discussion of this document, for example, to center the discussion on the study of documentary films in which there are issues concerning the truthfulness of the information that is part of them, would result insufficient. As mentioned, filmmaking studies filmmaking primarily, truth comes secondary. Moreover, being truth in documentary cinema polyvalent, I do not aim at adhering to one definition of truth or reality. Rather, I want to present this discussion in the frame of issues of representation, first with a focus on ethnographic cinema, which offers a field of study in which due to the lack of consensus about its conception and practice, is also the field in which there has been wide inner criticism to methods of production and scientific methodology, pointing mainly at the relationship between ethnographer and object of study, hence representation.

Ethnographic documentary is a result of documentary film. Ethnographers borrowed the tools of documentary cinema as a way to have a visual and hence more truthful depiction of the communities being studied. But thanks to re-evaluation of anthropological research methods, there has been an examination on how the position of the author and of the subject of study are conceived, this as a result of the incorporation of studies of representation in anthropology, even if until today, as we will see, the very definition of ethnographic cinema does not have or has not found a concrete foundation.

The ethnographer and the documentary filmmaker have shared the will for exploration, the discovery of lands and peoples. As mentioned before, Robert Flaherty was named the father of ethnographic cinema, his work is the roots of the genre. As a first common characteristic with documentary cinema, the ethnographer is the one who is entitled to observe, due to his resources, to his position, his knowledge. The research and capture of information by both the filmmaker and the ethnographer, rely on their eye and the interpretation they make of such information. The main difference is of course the methodology of the ethnographer, that has a basis on scientific research. Even though, inevitably, there was a moment when anthropology began to discuss how much of that information is mediated. An article entitled *Politics of representation* by Gabriela Vargas-Cetina, shows the current understanding of this discussions:

Since ethnography relies on the first-person experiences of ethnographers, politics is at the heart of the anthropological endeavor. The point of observation, occasions for group participation, and personal convictions determine what an ethnographer can observe. The general social, political, and cultural settings further weigh on what the ethnographer records as data. Finally, yet another political sieve mediates the transformation of data into anthropological products: data gathered in the field and at archives will be further filtered through ethnographers' ideas, beliefs, and deductions, and the data's presentation will be shaped into a result that is understandable within a current cultural, social, and political environment, before the data become public presentations, conference papers, articles, books, and related electronic publications. (2017)

This assertion, as told by Vargas-Cetina, comes after constant revision on anthropological methodologies but mainly as a result of the “moment of crisis” in anthropology during the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, first when androcentricity in anthropology was contested by female anthropologists, and then when others started to discuss otherness, the we/us point of view in anthropological representation. But even before this, it was clear that colonialism was playing a part in how anthropology was conceived and executed: *British anthropology had thrived under British colonialism. However, the dearticulation of the British empire, resulting from the national independence of former colonies overseas, had made many anthropologists feel as though they had lost their discipline's subject.*

The discussion about ethnographic cinema methodologies has evolved hand in hand with the discussions of anthropological methodologies. Ethnography started by incorporating photographs and film as part of the research tools used by anthropologists in order to confer a visual representation of what is being studied, enabling a reduction of the subjectiveness of field notes, which shows how they were trying to tackle point of view. In a scientific approach, the use of film is only a complement to the other tools. Ideally, some proposed, the research had to be accompanied by notes and charts of the research, so the film is not to be watched as an independent piece. But as ethnographers started to see the advantages of the medium, films made under the banner of ethnography started to proliferate, even if not adhering to the rules being proposed, nor being made by ethnographers (like Flaherty), but being praised because of their ethnographic value. Along the discussions about anthropological methodologies, the discussion about ethnographic cinema methodologies found the same obstacles, resulting today in an ongoing dispute about the true definition of ethnographic film, revealing not only lack of consensus but also contradictions that keep reinforcing the debate, which is by large a discussion about representation.

The Hunters (1957) by John Marshall, who was not an anthropologist, is regarded as the most relevant ethnographic film made in North America since *Nanook of the North*, and it still carries the burden of having an overly constructed story. The film presents the life and customs of the !Kung people from Namibia in the Kalahari desert, the story is framed in a thirteen day long hunting trip made by four men in which they chase and kill a giraffe, bring the meat back to their community where they share it with their families, finishing with the scene in which the hunters share with the community the details of their trip. The film is narrated in its entirety by Marshall and we do not listen to the characters, we get to know about them from the description the director makes in a way that is reminiscent of Flaherty's style: "something of a dreamer", "a simple kindly man, an optimist", "forthright and humble". The footage was filmed over years of observation, not in the alleged two weeks of the hunt, but most importantly, years later the director had to recognize the inaccuracy of the portrayal he made, presenting them as people in a marginal environment struggling for food, which was refuted by other anthropologists. (Heider 1976: 35)

The film's importance relies on its innovations at the time, the absence of such type of filmmaking and also the lack of discussion regarding representation. In all fairness, later in his life, Marshall made films that included him, his explicit point of view, the participation of the people being filmed

and how they shaped both the film and his life, also including the self-criticism to his filming techniques. But *The Hunters* is regarded an ethnographic film even if what we see is a construction, an inaccurate representation of a community made by a foreigner for foreigners. Marshall, even if naively, filmed in otheristic forms.

Jean Rouch is the most recognized ethnographic filmmaker in film history, with a career of around six decades and an extensive production that took place mainly in northern west Africa, starting in the late 1940s when the territory was occupied largely by France. His films carry the medal of being of artistic, technological and ethnographic value. Most importantly, Rouch's biggest contribution and staple is the acknowledgment of the presence of the filmmaker, the confirmation of that disruption in the so much sought after objective reality, bringing ethnographic cinema to author form. Since this style was not in line with the ideal scientific approach of ethnographic cinema, while at the same time his films were highly celebrated, the ideal scientific films barely came to exist as they barely exist nowadays. As other noted ethnographic films did not follow such scientific methods either, the ethnographic community has always accepted Rouch while at the same time condemning him. He has been called a rebel (MacDougall, 1997: 285), his anthropological mistake was his admonition to ethnographic filmmakers: *Tell a story!* (Heider, 1976: 32).

Aside from ethnography, we have to be reminded that Rouch is also one of the most important documentary film directors in cinema, part of any film history class and influencing already two generations of filmmakers. What begins as the registration of rituals by people from different ethnicities, evolves into a more complex conception of filmmaking. There is an ocean of literature praising his work, although I will focus on how it has been criticized, since that criticism connects with the topic of discussion in this paper. I, personally speaking, never related with Rouch's work in the African continent despite his clear cinematic abilities, inventiveness and charisma. Since the first time I saw his films, I have encountered them to be reductionistic, with a tendency to portray people as inferior, hence innocent, hence comical. His films were introduced to me in film school in Colombia by Colombian professors, as revolutionary work in documentary filmmaking. Out of his vast filmography, I want to briefly introduce four of his films in order to show its characteristics, its evolution and the source of how it is criticized:

Les Maîtres Fous (The Mad Masters) from 1955 depicts the ceremony of the Hauku cult, in which a

group of men enter a state of trance and are possessed by demons that are the representation of colonial authority figures in colonized Ghana: the governor, the general, the doctor's wife and others. As we see the images of the ritual chronologically, Rouch's voice guides the entirety of the film introducing us to each one of the characters, then to the demons that possess them and every step of the ritual in which they also sacrifice chickens, drink the blood of a dog that is then cooked and eaten. Rouch films the actions and translates what the characters say throughout the film. With a candid tone in a comical approach, Rouch constructs a narrative arch in which, at the end of the film, when all the characters go back to their daily life in the city, reveals each one of the character's actual relation to the figures of authority in real life. For example, the one possessed by the general is a soldier, making it clear that the ritual is an act of catharsis of real life conditions. The filmic methodology surpasses the scientific one, we do not get to know about the origins of the ritual.

Moi, un noir (I, a black) from 1958 has the stylistic treatment of what would be called an ethnofiction. Rouch's voice introduces us to the story by telling that the two characters of the film chose respectively to play a role, a sort of alter-ego of their own life. We follow the daily life of both of them accompanied by a narration performed by themselves, talking in first person about what they are doing, describing actions and appealing to the emotions brought by those actions. Rouch's voice also intervenes from time to time. The topics of the film are the preoccupations brought by lack of money, underpaid jobs and the hardships of migrating to the city of Abidjan, along with local customs and celebrations that mark the social life and social strata of the characters. Rouch's camera fixes its attention continuously on bars, women, and the graphic art of the bars, hairdresser salons and shops. Being a fictional story, it is hard to tell what is real and what is not, which is what ultimately is required from the viewer ethnographically, to decipher the mix of cultures, the idiosyncrasy and the struggles of the community as a whole.

Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a summer) from 1961 is Rouch's most acclaimed work. Filmed in Paris, it starts by showing images of people coming out of a metro station, walking on their way to work in the morning. The film's voice over says: *This film was made without actors, but lived by men and women who devoted some of their time to a novel experiment of cinéma vérité*, which is the origin of the ulterior cinematic style of cinéma vérité, which advocated for including the interaction of the filmmaker with the characters in a film, as a way to accept and reveal the filmmaker's active role in the story, and ultimately to achieve a more honest result. The following scene presents

Rouch sitting next to Edgar Morin, co-director of the film, and Marceline Loridan, one of the main characters. Revealing what the conception of the film is, Rouch says to Morin: *Getting people to talk together is an excellent idea. But I don't know if we can succeed in recording as natural a conversation as we would without the camera being present.* At this point we have to remember the technical characteristics of the time. They were using a new, lighter camera that allowed them to move around while also recording synchronic sound, something new in cinema at the moment. Morin replies, addressing Marceline: *What we have in mind with Rouch is a film about this: how do you live? (...) In other words, what do you do with your life?*

The film proceeds to show Marceline asking people on the street if they are happy. The answers give us a glimpse on what life in Paris is, then taking us to a set of characters that will be continuously part of the film during different moments of that summer. The film explores their relationship with work, hence with their sense of accomplishment, progressively going deeper as we see the characters open up, talk with each other, evolve as characters and connect with each other as they reveal their past life and their frustrations. All the interviews and talks get to be emotionally charged since the characters do have a conversation with the directors about their feelings, constructing all together an overview of how it is life not only in Paris, but in the political context of the moment in Europe. The film ends with the characters watching themselves in the film and discussing if what they see is a truthful depiction of reality, leading to opposing opinions between them. This, which was presented as the goal of the film, results interesting ethnographically, but both cinematically and ethnographically, the film is remarkable in how it achieves an honest and strong connection with the characters, showing also how the directors were exploring their own world.

La chasse au lion à l'arc (The Lion Hunters) from 1965 is set in the remote village of the Songhay people on the border between Mali and Niger. Rouch follows the ancient tradition the *gow*, the hunters. Rouch guides the film with an ever present voice over at first addressed to children, about all details and rituals surrounding the hunt with bow and arrow, how the men make the arrow tips, how they choose the wood for the bows, how the poison is made and the spiritual ritual surrounding the whole process. Rouch translates the conversations the men are having as they set off to hunt the lions, describing the actions and its ritualistic part, as the indigenous are to ask for forgiveness from the lion after the kill, in order to set its spirit free. After weeks of patient observation, as the hunt

ends with the third lion being killed, the hunters return to the village where they are celebrated by the other inhabitants. The hunters then tell the story to the children of the village (similar to the final scene of *The Hunters*), reenacting the actions of hunters and lions. Rouch's voice over closes the film: *Children, that is the story of the go. A story of those who hunt the lion with the bow. This then is the story which you probably will never live yourselves because, by the time your are grownups, nobody will ever again hunt the lion with bow and arrow.* The film's structure and narrative arch have a very solid foundation, the hunting sequences themselves are very rare footage, unique moments of man against nature.

The four films are just one part of Rouch's work, but they do present a foundation for the criticism that has been made about his gaze and about how the characters are represented. In 1965, during a conversation between Rouch and Ousmane Sembène (Senegalese film director who at some point also embraced the principles of Third Cinema), the latter expressed what was in the mind of several others at the time:

Sembène: Will European cinematographers, you for example, continue to make films about Africa once there are a lot of African cinematographers?

Rouch: This will depend on a lot of things but my point of view, for the moment, is that I have an advantage and disadvantage at the same time. I bring the eye of the stranger. The very notion of ethnology is based on the following idea: someone confronted with a culture that is foreign to him, sees certain things that the people on the inside of this same culture do not see.

Sembène: You say seeing. But in the domain of cinema, it is not enough to see, one must analyze. I am interested in what is before and after that which we see. What I do not like about ethnography, I'm sorry to say, is that it is not enough to say that a man we see is walking; we must know where he comes from, where he is going.

(...)

Rouch: I would like you to tell me why you don't like my purely ethnographic films, those in which we show, for instance, traditional life?

Sembène: Because you show, you fix a reality without seeing the evolution. What I hold against you and the Africanists is that you look at us as if we were insects. (Sembène, Rouch, [1965] 2001: 440)

Even if Sembène attests fundamental problems of ethnographic cinema, Rouch's idea of ethnography is correct in such a context, the one that allows one researcher observe and study another community of people. Furthermore he recognizes the alien nature of the ethnographer, the disadvantage, what he is not able to see. Twelve years later, in 1977, when the questions brought by the “moment of crisis in anthropology” were starting to be part of anthropological discussion, a retrospective of Rouch's work was presented at the Margaret Mead Ethnographic Film Festival in New York. Only by reading the questions that Rouch was encountered with in an interview, we can see a summary of the problematics around representation in ethnographic cinema and how they were inline with the “moment of crisis”:

- One thing that was clear seeing several of your films on three consecutive evenings was that Chronicle has a very different look than the others. Generally in your African films, we are given long distance shots of people active in a religious ritual or some other rite involved with non-rationalist values. In Chronicle the subjects mainly talk, and they talk about complex philosophical and psychological ideas. The action is generally indoors, and there are many close-up shots.

- It struck us that the film about France emphasizes how the European thinks, while your films on Africa emphasize how the African behaves.

- That still doesn't explain the African films where nobody ever talks directly to you. How accurate is that, given the strong oral traditions of African culture? What we see in the films is a kind of homage to the primitive, to the past, to the exotic. Aren't Africans as articulate as Europeans? Isn't there a modern African society with elements as creative as the group that called itself Socialism or Barbarity? (Rouch, Georgakas, Gupta, Janda, 2003)

As the interview continues, what comes clear is the underlying incompatibility of cinema as an art form and ethnographic methodologies, something that Rouch is aware of inside and outside of his films, but the anthropologists' community will keep disputing.

- *We've come to the conclusion that your body of work is much more exciting as cinema than as anthropology. In every film there is some new experiment. Most of the time, as in The Lion Hunters, there is an imposed dramatic structure. The action builds to a traditional climax. That's effective cinema, but does it describe the tribe accurately? Doesn't a lot get lost for dramatic values?*

Rouch: This is one point where I disagree with you completely. Good anthropology is not a wide description of everything but a close identification of one technique or ritual. The rituals are supposed to be dramatic. They are creations of the people who want them to be interesting and exciting. In The Lion Hunters, twenty minutes have been left out. Those sequences showed the position of the trap, why they use traps, why they hunt in the first place. But you can explain that sort of thing in writing very well. What you can't get in writing is the drama of the ritual. Writing can't have that effect. That's the whole point of visual anthropology.

- *We indicated earlier that we thought your films posed very interesting cinematic questions but we were not so certain about their virtue as anthropology. We were thinking in terms of what an anthropological film can and cannot be. Does it just record raw data, or does it interpret? To make a film always involves a selective process and conscious intervention at specific points. That must conflict with an attempt to present anthropological fact.*

Rouch: Most people refuse to recognize that any anthropology must destroy what it investigates. Even if you are making a long-distance observation of breast feeding, you disturb the mother and her infant, even if you don't think so. The fundamental problem in all social science is that the facts are always distorted by the presence of the person who asks questions. You distort the answer simply by posing a question.

Rouch was also right inasmuch as there was and there is no consensus around how the presence of the ethnographer determines the outcome of a film, or at least the acceptance of that fact, which would help determine with some more clarity what an ethnographic film is. This ultimately becomes the obstacle that does not let these discussions, such as Rouch in his interview, have a solid foundation that would make the arguments presented reach a more concrete result, much of it stays unresolved and even if it leads to us being able to present a debate, issues of representation

and point of view were clearly already there and could have been addressed explicitly. It would even help bring this discussion to documentary film in general.

We can see that first, there is a clear incompatibility between scientific methodologies applied to filmmaking and the goals that are expected, and second, that ethnographic films needed discussions around point of view and representation since long before, but at the time when the interview took place those questions were only starting to become relevant in American anthropology as a whole. It is clear that all of this needs to be examined under a wider understanding of history, eurocentrism, processes of decolonization and the USA becoming a strong arm both in anthropology and in cinema. It does not mean that things were not to change and they did change positively, but the majority of today's ethnographic films continue to fail in the same fields.

From a Latin American perspective, in 1985 anthropologist Adolfo Colombres gave even harsher criticism to Rouch's work in the prologue of *Cine, Antropología y Colonialismo* (Film, Anthropology and Colonialism), arguing that even if Rouch's work was innovative, as a good disciple of Flaherty, he developed the chore of his filmography as the member of a colonialist society that was heavily exploiting the territories and peoples that he filmed, making his argument of avoiding politicization “laughable”. Colombres discusses that Rouch made the conscious decision of selecting characters that served the purpose of not being politically engaged, but rather following the stereotype of the observed black, who is not a good worker, is lazy but is a good dancer. Also that, again, when Rouch is filming the European, the function of such character is to think, but the black is to do funny or impressive things in front of the camera, it is not expected from him an opinion, a thought or an open condemnation on the political reality. Colombres maintains that Rouch had the evident purpose of celebrating the primitive Africa, isolating it from a modern reality. “*Everything that dehumanizes the oppressed plays in favor of the oppressor*” (1985: 18)

In 1972, anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt attempted a simple definition for ethnographic film that met ample agreement, but did not solve the problem: *Ethnographic film is film which endeavors to interpret the behavior of people of one culture to persons of another culture by using shots of people doing precisely what they would have been doing if the camera were not there* (1972: 1). The definition assumes that there is a way to film something without noticing the

presence of a camera. As we have seen, framing an image already creates point of view. That aside, we do not have to go much farther in order to dispute what images by themselves can not interpret of another culture, so much has been said already about that. In this regard, this helps us see the connection between ethnographic film and documentary film, neither of them can show reality.

In Karl Heider's book *Ethnographic Film*, a filming manual first released in 1976 but having a revised version released in 2006, meaning that there are people today reading and following the proposed ethnographic film's production guidelines, he states rules as to have minimal interaction with the camera, to avoid staging or reconstruction, that events must be presented in the order they occurred and ideally in the same duration, to avoid close-ups and to have demystifying narration. Nothing exceptionally new. But apparently aware of the continuous presence of the question: whose reality is observed in the film? he mentions in the introduction of the book that *Ethnographic film must be judged in relation to ethnography, which is, after all, a scientific enterprise. In some sense one could argue that all films are "ethnographic": they are about people. Even films that show only clouds or lizards have been made by people and therefore say something about the culture of the individuals who made them and who use them* (1976: 4). Inadvertently or not, he is stating something important that brings us closer to the heart of the matter: that every film is, at the least, an ethnography of the one who is making it, or that an ethnographic film is ideally, the ethnography of both the one making the film and the one in front of the camera. Within this definition, it is not even extreme to say that an ethnographic film that examines a different culture, might be more an ethnography of the filmmaker. It all makes sense under practices of representation, *which always implicate the positions from which we speak or write - the positions of enunciation* (Hall, 1989: 68). This is something that Jean Rouch glimpsed at or propelled. Even if he did not ascertain this mirror effect, he did face and see how his films could be talking about himself, either by the criticism he was getting or by how he could make an in depth portrayal of his own community.

This is also how documentary value is also transposed to virtually any type of film, the way we can perceive a filmic product as a documentation of an era, of how a cinema market is constructed and who are the main actors in it, the ones who have a dominating voice in it and the ones who do not. That is how fiction films can be defined as a documentary of themselves, revealing the costumes, techniques and trends of a given time. In an article that presents a critical approach to ethnographic cinema and that I consider valuable for the subject being explored in this paper, Eliot Weinberger

elaborates on documentary value: *much of what any of us know of much of the world comes from film: the daily operations of institutions like the police or the army or the prisons or the courts, life on board of a submarine, how pickpockets work the Paris metro, how southern California teenagers mate. Filling the frame of every film, no matter how “fictional”, is an endless documentation of its contemporary life: a documentation that becomes most apparent with geographical or chronological distance. (...) The ditziest Hollywood production bears a subversive documentary message for viewers in China or Chad: this is what ordinary people in the U.S have in their house, this is what they have in their refrigerator. Even the most fantastical films “document” their cultures. Nosferatu and The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari are inextricable from Weimar Germany, Steven Spielberg from Reagan America. Above all – and particularly in the United States – many of the greatest works of the imagination begin with the premise that a universe is revealed in the luminous facts of ordinary life.* (1992: 28)

Described in detail by Vargas-Cetina, after the “big crisis” anthropology gradually started incorporating forms of representation in research, refusing notions of “otherness” that were pointed out by postcolonial studies. Uses of terminology such as “primitives” or “savages” in scientific vocabulary was questioned, later permitting advocacy for the representation of communities in non-othering terms. The use of categories such as “Third World” and “aboriginal communities” was also criticized as discriminatory (2017). American Anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall, who spent significant amounts of time filming with indigenous peoples from other continents, while compiling and comparing the opinions of other anthropologists makes an analysis of the history of the visual in anthropology and describes it with a fair amount of criticism to ethnographic cinema, how it had to start discussing openly the separation between scientific methods and filmic methods, the use of other forms of cinema different to documentary started to be accepted, film analysis instead of film production became a possible approach in visual ethnography, as well as the analysis of other visual expressions like music videos or comic books. Ethnography was required to embrace and propel ethnographic films made by indigenous communities about their own communities, among other audio-visual expressions not made by the anthropologist. MacDougall shows how anthropologists required a change in their point of view, in their concept of the person they study and film. (MacDougall, 1997)

Ethnographic filmmakers had to rethink the formula that Weinberger articulated as: ***They have***

typical members. **We** do not. **They** are unusual, but can be comprehended. **We** are usual but ultimately incomprehensible. **They** are somewhat like us. **We** are not like us. **They** must be represented in the simplest possible way. **We** must be represented with subtle complexity. (1992: 46)

Regardless of what might seem a large amount of criticism to ethnographic film in this paper, evidently there are good ethnographic films. But the truth is the list of ethnographic films is long and composed largely of indigenous communities filmed by an outsider. I personally consider *Forest of Bliss* (1986) by Robert Gardner to be a very good example for an ethnographic film. Filmed in Benares, the holy Indian city on the banks of the Ganges river, noted for being the place where the corpses or ashes of many Hindus are cast in the river as part of the religion's tradition, but also where many have made films about this. Gardner's film stands out because he stays and acknowledges himself in cinematic terms as an external eye, following what is happening in the funerary ritual without commenting, without judging. *Cannibal Tours* (1988) by Dennis O'Rourke is another film that I personally connect with. It is considered an ethnographic film, but in reality it borrows from the ethnographic style to show American and European tourists in New Guinea visiting villages of the Iatmul people, how they take photos of themselves next to naked children, how they openly see the Iatmul as backwards but connected with nature, etc. The Iatmul do also speak about the tourists and how they expect them to see the community as primitive.

And the history of ethnographic cinema is nonetheless a very successful one if compared to the history of non-ethnographic documentary film, in which questions regarding representation have had a very slow pace. Research in this field comes from the experiences of filmmakers, even to their connection with the ethnographic film debate, but ultimately become author stances or cinema manifestos, creating little change. There have been advances, but these are mainly connected to what cinema and media in general has had to rethink and change as other disciplines paid attention to issues that eventually transcended to mass media, whether it was from anthropology, sociology, decolonization studies or cultural studies. Still, we can see how behind documentary film is this regard by examining some cases.

Boatman (1993) by Gianfranco Rosi also takes place in Benares, but it has an approach similar to the one in *Cannibal Tours*. It was not made under the banner of ethnography, but it has been studied

as such as well. The film is structured within the frame of a hired rowing boat trip that the filmmaker takes, as many tourists do, which leads to a conversation with the boatman, conversations with other people in the area, the observation of the funerals and the observation of the tourists that have come to do the same: to look at the corpses and ashes being cast into the river. In their conversation, the boatman openly criticizes how “Europeans” consume the Indian culture without understanding it. The other characters interviewed are mainly Europeans that have come to witness the ritual as tourists or to adapt and live there in admiration of Hindu religion. The film attempts to criticize how the place has become an object of consumption for westerners while also deromanticizing the funerary rituals since, in its chore, it is a business. The film has been appraised because of its poignant and playful point of view, that ends the moment when Rosi pays the boatman for the trip and the latter says “now go to hotel”, making it clear the Rosi does not belong there, that he is one more of those tourists and that this was his point of view all along.

Rosi's film could be evaluated as a more truthful depiction of the situation, not hiding the elements that ultimately demystify the sacred character of the funerary rituals. But Rosi constantly underlines what is reproachable, what in western culture can not be digested. Even if Rosi's film seems to be a counteraction to dozens of films portraying with western eyes the exoticism of these funerary rituals, *Boatman* also ends up being a collection of images of poverty, dirtiness and anti-environmental practices. Rosi shows us how people are curious about his camera, how cows are being washed in the river, how kids in underwear come to dance in front of him, how dogs eat what might be human remains, how (with too little context to it) women enjoy far less rights than men in Indian society, how children work among grown ups and how as the bodies are cremated, the owner of one cremation site, who covers his face refusing to be filmed, takes any valuable remains as jewelry, gold teeth, coins, etc. The presence of the tourists and the western component that was initially criticized, is shadowed by what the film ultimately says and shows, a director that willingly stayed a foreigner, shoots what is foreign to him and feels entitled to judge. Compared to *Forest of Bliss* this film feels like a step backwards 12 years later.

Issues of representation are issues of truthfulness because the observer projects an opinion, and as we saw that in ethnographic film the object of study has many times been the primitive or the indigenous, in parallel documentary film's object of observation has been the vulnerable, the poor, the one below. Both types of documentary evolve next to each other, but the discussion in

documentary film does not go much farther than revealing the evident. In 2006 Bill Nichols, American documentary film theoretician, calls for a code of ethics in documentary filmmaking, ethics being what is mainly discussed in this field and being addressed by others before. His statement is the not so openly discussed truth: *The successful careers of many documentary filmmakers have been built on the misfortune of others. Brian Winston has written indignantly that there is a "tradition of the victim" in documentary, especially in journalistic reporting. The relationship between filmmaker and subject can be similar to that between a benevolent, or perhaps not so benevolent, dictator and his subjects. What limits should be voluntarily adopted to safeguard the dignity and rights of the subject? (...)*

The difference in the power of filmmakers and their subjects can often be best measured by their relative access to the means of representation. Do subjects have the means to represent themselves? Do they have alternative access to the media apart from that provided by a given filmmaker? To the extent the answer is "no," the filmmaker's ethical obligation to avoid misrepresentation, exploitation and abuse rises correspondingly. Subjects who are dependent on the filmmaker to have their story told--subjects, that is, who occupy the lower social strata generally and who can most readily be cast into the position of victim--are most vulnerable to misrepresentation and abuse. (Nichols, 2006)

Although this is true, the question that is not being asked is where this objectification for the victim comes from and how can we have a critical view of it, which ethnographic film actually did. In 2009 an American institution called Center for Social Media released an article entitled *Honest Truths: Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges in Their Work*. It was the result of interviewing 41 documentary film directors/producers who had released at least two productions at national level. One of the first statements of the article was that *In thinking about their film subjects, filmmakers typically described a relationship in which the filmmaker had more social and sometimes economic power than the subject. (Aufderheide, Jaszi, Chandra, 2009: 6)*

In the article the filmmakers talk about issues they have faced when it comes to making a fair portrayal of their subjects, how to protect them and how to make a proper ethical use of the footage gathered. As stated before, ethics is like a big rug that covers all the problems. One statement by a film director shows again how the observed, the victim, occupies a position that allows his/her

portrayal. Methods of representation is again intrinsically a part of the problem but it is not mentioned as such: *"I usually enter people's lives at a time of crisis. If the tables were turned, God forbid," said Joe Berlinger, "I would never allow them to make a film about my tragedy. I am keenly aware of the hypocrisy of asking someone for access that I myself would probably not grant."* (2009: 7)

Sometimes documentary filmmakers are not entering a crisis, but creating an inexistent one willingly, in order to victimize, to create vulnerability, as Flaherty and Marshall did, ultimately promoting one type of representation. The British-American documentary film *The Eagle Huntress* (2016) tells the story of Aisholpan, a 13-year-old Kazakh girl from Mongolia who attempts to become the first female eagle hunter and to compete in the Eagle Festival at Ulgii, traditionally an event only for men. At the end of the film, after hard training in what seems to be a very misogynistic environment, she manages to enter the competition, creating change in her community. The film is a heart-warming, family friendly story about overcoming obstacles. It enjoyed success with audiences and received several awards internationally. But it was clear for many that the information in the film might not be real. For example, the film's publicity stated that Aisholpan fought *an ingrained culture of misogyny to become the first female eagle hunter in 2,000 years of male-dominated history* (Mulvey, 2017). A historian showed and proved that eagle hunting has been practiced by women for generations. Many of the scenes in the film are staged and create a false impression of women being underpowered by men in their society. *To some extent, the film rests on an assumption that's easy to disprove: if Mongolians have a backward attitude to empowering girls, how come 70 per cent of the students at Mongolian universities are women? Could it be that what we have here is really a fantasy for Western eyes, constructed from Western prejudice about "primitive" peoples, who took only what they wanted from Aisholpan and her family, disregarding the rest? In that sense this is not so much a film about girl power: it's a film about first world power.* (Byrnes, 2017)

Bill Nichols, in the same article cited before, presents this story as a good example of good ethical behavior: *Renee Tajima-Pea, for example, filmed a family's immigration efforts for the 2004 PBS series The New Americans. She, however, chose to not simply observe the Flores family's desperate race to get to a government office in time to claim the visa papers that would reunite the family after some 13 years; she chose to intervene and drive the family to the office herself. Her act altered*

the story's outcome, but her sense of ethical duty to the family overrode the desire to tell a story as if she were not actually there as a responsive and responsible social actor -or person—herself.

The filmmaker's intervention is taken as a disruption to the truth since the film was shot in the observational style, when the director is not visible. But in the practice, if the director decides to show or not to show this moment in the film, when she intervenes to drive them, would it really make a substantial difference in the story? Probably not. The arousal of the dilemma makes it clear that the director is in a position of power, or at least that a refusal to intervene could be understood within the rules of documentary filmmaking. Additionally, the revelation of the dilemma only works on behalf of the filmmaker, elevating her for her good actions when she was just doing what seemed to be the right thing at the moment.

Oscar winner *Born Into Brothels* (2004) is a film that has always carried an aura of suspicion. To begin with, British photographer Zara Briski goes to Calcutta's red light district to take photos of the women who work there. But along the way she meets the prostitutes' children and starts a photography workshop for some of them, which brings the kids and the photographer closer. The film tells the story of Briski (co-director of the film) trying to offer the kids a way out of the life they have. Along the photography workshop, she looks for boarding schools where the kids could be accepted, since she thinks that is the best the kids could get, but we hear little about what the mothers think of it. The boarding school idea also makes it clear that the director will not be there after finishing her project, which brings us to the common place of the wealthy explorer. During the whole film the questions that arise are: Why is she making these decisions? Is this really something the kids want? Why is she entitled to do this? Is this film about her as a savior or rather about the kids? It is not easy to sympathize with Briski but in the end you can, because you see that this is something she is doing from her heart, even if wrong. It looks like she really believes in her mission, she is really facing the struggles of finding the schools, the story is real as the closeness to the kids is real, even if the alterity distance between them can be clearly measured. Nevertheless it is a history of western ideals and paternalism with a tone of exploitation of the poor.

Lucy Walker's *Waste Land* (2010) faces similar criticism and it was nominated to the Oscars. World famous Brazilian photographer Vik Muniz goes to the biggest landfill in Brazil (and in the world) to select characters for this next project: portraits of garbage pickers. His goal is to use

garbage as the material that will give the color and texture to the portraits, in order to make garbage useful but also the source of the income that the garbage pickers will get upon selling the portraits. The motivation the photographer has is to do something for them through his art, to help them, to give back after all his success. The film is clearly sold as a story of extreme poverty, which ignites the first problems since it is again the repetition of this formula. The poster of the film reads “The Slumdog Millionaire of documentaries”, as motifs that repeat over and over: India = poverty, Brazil = poverty. What does that say about the observer, the filmmaker?

Muniz starts a friendly relationship with the selected garbage pickers. Little by little the project starts to take shape, the photographs become a reality and one of them is sold in an auction house in London for 28.000 pounds. Fortunately, the film does not end there. It continues with the new relationship Muniz has created with the garbage pickers and towards the end, Muniz declares, from his spacious house in New York, that he feels he has been arrogant, that to offer his help was something that nobody really needed, that it all only helped himself. This revelation in the film brings a difference, but the whole concept of going to another land to see the poor and sell the pictures in Europe, talks about the same order of representation we are discussing.

There are documentary film directors, maybe not too many, who have thought about all this. In *Santiago* (2007), João Moreira Salles' narration departs from the fact that he had shot the film thirteen years before, in 1992, but never finished it. The film's full title, which is revealed later, is *Santiago, a reflection on the rushes*. It is an exploration of the material he shot with Santiago, the man who used to be his family's butler in the house where Moreira grew up. Santiago is an intriguing 80 year old man who, among other things, is devoted to opera, to classic music, to middle age and renaissance art and to rewriting the life of ancient aristocracy, which he compiled in 30.000 pages dedicated to different dynasties and families, an archive that he stores in a corner of his small apartment. We are also told that Moreira's family was very wealthy, they had several servants in the now empty big house where Santiago also worked. While the camera roams around the house's now desolated spaces, Moreira recalls a moment of his childhood, when he woke up in the middle of the night to find Santiago playing Beethoven on the piano. Then he adds: “*I don't know if I would have told the Beethoven story in the 1992 film. Maybe so, but only because I would have thought it had to do with Santiago. Now, I know it's about me as well.*”

From this moment on, the film explores the footage shot in 1992 while starting a reflection about Moreira's position in the film in connection to Santiago. We see a very short shot of the director and Santiago sitting on a sofa talking: *Here I am standing beside Santiago. Of all the footage, it's one of only two images in which I was filmed next to him. It was taken by chance. A new kind of relationship was starting that day. For the next five days, I would be a documentarian, and he, my character.* We are brought closer to both of them by looking at shots that show Santiago's actual discomfort while filming, Moreira asking for things to be done and said, Moreira disregarding what Santiago suggests to show in the film, and by revealing how the evocative images in the film, such as the dry leaves falling from a tree into the empty swimming pool, were all a meticulous construction, the director's manipulation of the truth for what he thought the film was supposed to be. Santiago, in the new film, is a character that gains the relevance and importance he deserved, which he did not get in the old version of the same film. But it is because Moreira accepts frankly his role in the making of the film, his involvement as creator, the traces that inevitably will be left of his point of view, of his position in society, of his relationship with the character.

In one of the last scenes of the film, Santiago is sitting at about two meters from the camera, ready to start talking: *This is the last filming session with Santiago. It gives me the chance for a final observation. There are no close shots in this film, no close-up of his face. He is always at a distance. I know this distance was not a coincidence. While editing, I realized what now appears self-evident. The way I conducted the interviews placed a distance between us. From the beginning, there was an unsurmountable ambiguity between us, which explains Santiago's embarrassment. He wasn't just my character, and I wasn't just a documentarian. Never once in the five days of filming, did I fail to be the son of the owner of the house; and he never failed to be our butler.*

Moreira originally had made a film about the other, about the servant, the person below him. A very typical construction of a documentary film, a traditional one we could say. The reason why it gets transformed into another film, involves Moreira's acknowledgement of his power, which gives shape to a truth in which his mediation is taken into account and incorporated in the construction of the film. That is the reason why even if Moreira is the rich and powerful, by accepting that role he positions it on the same level of the one filmed, which results in a reflexion on what the truth is when filming, which is not only the truth of the filmed but also the truth of the one filming. Moreira manages to make a film that reflects on the representation he was originally making of his

character.

4

Redemption

In the past few years there have been several documentary films made in and about the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a country that was under Belgian occupation first as private territory of king Leopold II from 1885 until 1908, time during which it is estimated the local population was decimated by a half due to overwork and disease. One practice that gave historical infamous notoriety to king Leopold was the mutilation of people's limbs as punishment. In 1908, as a result of international pressure against the actions of king Leopold II, the territory was ceded to Belgium and it stayed a Belgian colony until 1960. After independence, the Democratic Republic of the Congo as other previously colonized countries, had to deal with constructing a national identity while at the same time facing interventionism typical of the cold war. Joseph Mobutu was installed as dictator of the country and governed from 1965 until 1997. Since 1996 there has been internal war in the country incited also by the intervention of Rwanda and Uganda. The conflict is a complex one since illegal armed groups started to proliferate in the rich with natural resources eastern region, even one time amounting to 50 rebel groups. The core of the conflict is the exploitation and control of the natural resources, involving the illegal actions of mining companies from rich countries.

These circumstances had the west to regard the Democratic Republic of Congo as a violent, poor and dysfunctional nation. These characteristics, which very much work as the bait for one type of documentary film production, gave as a result a wave of films made during the past years, all of them produced from abroad.

This is Congo (USA, 2017) presents an overview of the country through the observation of different situations and characters: the development of the fight between the National Army and the armed rebel group A23, a woman who works as a mineral dealer, smuggling precious stones in order to make a living for her family, and the life of a man and his family in a camp for the displaced by war. As a frame for the story, a high ranking military officer whose face we do not see and whose voice has been distorted, tells about the evolution and connivance of political corruption and

military problems, these being tied to the intervention of rich countries looking for exploitation of natural resources.

City of Joy (USA, 2016) recounts the efforts of a doctor and an activist who fund the City of Joy NGO, a place for women who have been raped, a crime that has become a weapon of war in the irregular war in the country. The women attend a several weeks long leadership workshop in order to heal scars and be able to help other women facing similar situations. The film interweaves the testimonies of the women with the history of the NGO and the life history of the funders.

Virunga (UK, 2014), the most famous of these films, focuses on the work of park rangers of the Virunga National Park and their efforts to protect the mountain gorillas. At the same time the film follows the combat with the M23 rebel group and the actions carried by British oil company SOCO, that aims for extracting oil in the park, creating a web of corruption that is directly linked to the role of the rebels in the region. The film has the difficult task of contextualizing all of these elements within one frame and because of it there is a tendency to simplification. As being the film that brought most of the attention, it has also been criticized the most. Allegedly, the film is constructed under a white savior narrative (Bauer, 2015). Indeed, two of the main characters of the film are a French white female reporter and the Belgian white male warden who is the head of the national park. The film was nominated for the Oscars, maybe because of this. Farther in this chapter I will refer to the white savior narrative.

Even if it is possible to see a tradition of the western explorer and, one might even say, of exploitation of poverty and misery, the reality is that these films show a rather positive state of the art in documentary film production and the advances in how the information, situations and characters are presented. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there are other notable films made recently that still present evident issues of representation. But these films, as a group, show good characteristics. Local people are sentient and humanized characters with clear opinions. If anyone refers to locals as “savages”, “ignorants” or using any clear derogatory terminology, these statements are immediately placed as negative. All films make reference to the colonial past and current intervention of rich nations as destabilizing factors, even if those are the countries of production of the films. The conception of the films pays attention to existing criticism that has been made to methods of production in connection to issues of representation, which does not mean

they make a perfectly fair representation of situations and characters, but they are not far from doing so. Most importantly, these films try to make good use of a foreign gaze by denouncing situations that locals could not since they would be put in danger.

On the other hand there is *The Ambassador* (Denmark, 2011) by Danish journalist Mads Brügger. It is not set in the Democratic Republic of Congo but in its neighbor to the north, the Central African Republic. The film mixes author form with investigative report. It presents real challenges to issues of representation. Brügger has an approach to documentary film that involves parody and mockery. In order to reveal the corruption in the diplomatic world and its ties with criminal activities, Brügger manages to buy off diplomatic status issued by Liberia as a consul to the Central African Republic, where he gets involved in illegal diamond trade as other European diplomats do. Throughout the film, Brügger plays the character of an extravagant white rich diplomat who wears knee length boots and smokes out of an ivory cigarette holder, not restricting himself from any derogatory situation toward the locals, which makes this film have a double blade even if, it is true, the main focus is on the actions of politicians, external power and diplomats.

As a counter example, also shot in the Democratic Republic of Congo *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (Netherlands, 2009) by Renzo Martens, gave form to these discussions of representation of the poor in cinematic form, in very much the style of *The Vampires of Poverty* but not as a local, instead he personifies the spirit of the rich colonizer in a poor land and does not try to come out of that role. Martens travels to the country to expose the structures of power in global politics and their effects in the nation's structural poverty. Martens shows how reporters from industrialized countries are the ones in charge of depicting reality, how humanitarian work ends up benefiting the NGOs more than the locals, and how all attempts to help are aimed at controlling exploitation of resources by external agents. He does it by making of himself the repetition of the explorer, accepting his foreign nature, making it clear that the representation he will offer of others will not be an accurate one, the filmed will be others and his sympathy towards locals is more the acceptance of the difference than the many times false empathetic identification. That is why Martens' film has been a controversial one, he is telling the locals to enjoy poverty from two different angles at the same time: as the personification of a colonizer, he is telling them to accept their position in society, as a critical filmmaker, he is telling them their poverty it is not their fault but people like him's fault. Keeping in mind that *Vampires of Poverty* was released thirty-one years before, we can see the very slow

progress of these discussions. Even more when *The Ambassador* is released in 2011, a film I will refer to again later.

But what all these films reveal as a group, is a clear tradition of observation of the poor in an African country. This tradition, arguably, has a deep root in colonization. Even if the intentions of the filmmakers are good, it is easy to link together the use of cinema in colonial times to its use now when the current type of observation, in connection to the current political reality, presents a very similar one to the colonial one: the others as people in conflict, with endemic problems that they need to be rescued of.

The colonial cinema made by the Belgians during the time of occupation, showed how the colonizers were educating the locals, how they were bringing progress and how harmonious was the relationship between locals and colonizers, which was a denial of the actual circumstances, a way to cover the discontent of the locals as well as the reality of the exploitation.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is still a nation whose history, as the Congolese say and as Congolese documentary filmmaker Dieudo Hamadi repeated, has been written by others. Hamadi has become visible internationally in the past few years because of his documentary films. The most successful one so far is *Downstream to Kinshasa* (2020). His work as almost the only local representative, serves the purpose of showing both the difference of a local approach to cinema and the evident existence of a tradition of a foreign gaze. The experience of watching a film such as *Downstream to Kinshasa* is revelatory by itself since it differs clearly in the type of observation exerted on the filmed, and the film itself and its approach stands out because of its absence in the film industry. The director is able to make better use of audio-visual language since he is able to show a story in development without having to underline facts, add context or translate, even if symbolically, what is not familiar to the foreign eye. The other films about the Democratic republic of Congo mentioned above, have the natural tendency to rely on interviews, which in this context are an instrument born out of the foreign nature of the filmmaker, a person who needs to extract information in a limited production time. Furthermore, the foreign filmmaker addresses information, voluntarily or involuntarily, in a manner familiar to his society, which is many times the risk or the actual device for prolongation of inaccurate forms of representation.

Even if such notions can be considered obvious, they are considerably rich in meaning when reading Hamadi's words in connection to the purposes of this paper: *I believe the Democratic Republic of Congo is a very complex country and is often told by foreigners and not in the Congolese's voice, so I wanted a Congolese voice to be heard and that is why I am producing documentaries.* (Downstream To Kinshasa Q&A with Dieudo Hamadi, 2020)

One correlation between documentary cinema and colonialism that connects with issues of representation, has been traced by Eyal Sivan, documentary filmmaker and researcher: As cinema is invented at the moment when European powers are having a large colonial expansion, documentary cinema became the tool for the observation of the other. But the colonial expansion coincides with the expansion of secularism, allowing cinema to become a secular church for the redemption of the spectator.

There is a connection, a correspondence in what is being projected: the object of redemption. In documentary practice, that object is the Other. The first Other is the worker. Then comes the Native American, the Oriental, etc. In short, Otherness is invented through the image and documentary is always about the Other. This is why the documentary has been the tool of anthropology, colonialism, and propaganda in general. (...)

The relation inscribed in the screen is a relation that spectators at the birth of cinema were already familiar with: it is the church setting. I am sitting and facing a victim who is weaker than me. This is the redemption of the spectator. (...) When I talk about redemption, I am of course referring to Christian redemption, which follows a simple formula: somebody is suffering for me. (By the way, the one suffering is a Jew, i.e., an Oriental.) It is not that I am compassionate and that there is thus a transfer of suffering, but through confirming his suffering I confirm my goodness and my humanity. (Majaca, Sivan 2016: 197,198)

This giving as a result the tradition of the observation of the oppressed in documentary, which creates in parallel the lack of the observation of the perpetrator. But the absence of the perpetrator is also a denial since, according to Sival, to frame and observe the perpetrator does not allow redemption but the interrogation of the status of the spectator, since in a context of, for example, colonial cinema, the oppressor is not the other but the fellow citizen. The films made in the

Democratic Republic of Congo serve as an example. *This is Congo*, *Virunga* and *City of Joy* could have had a direct focus on how the interests of rich countries in the mineral resources of the Democratic Republic of Congo fuel the armed conflict. The films could have framed and faced the people from governments and companies from The Netherlands, the USA and the United Kingdom, and research their responsibility. It is of course more simple said than done, basically because the access to such information and such people presents immense obstacles linked to the same power exerted politically from one rich nation to a poor nation. But it does not mean that cinematically the focus has to be directed to the oppressed, specially when it creates a reduction of the problematic that leads to filming the anecdotal, which in this case is, sadly, the war and its results. Thus the real perpetrators are not the ones shown in the films, which brings us back to a cinematic conception reminiscent of colonial cinema.

In a cinematic form in which the filmmaker is portraying the perpetrator, filmmakers would need also to address their responsibility as social agents, as members of a foreign society that has a role in the exploitation of the other nation. This is what Mayolo and Ospina referred to when they talked about a coherent cinema, one in which the one filming has as much repercussion as on the one being filmed. That is the reason why the question of the foreign gaze gains political content since it mirrors the politics of power and hence the politics of representation. The filmmaker is not an agent of change because the stories being told are not aiming at change, which means that the filmmaker is consciously not advocating for change, but for a redemption that the filmmaker will have in the first place, and then is going to be transferred to the spectator.

One way to understand this is by understanding one of Sivan's statements on filmic observation techniques: *Observational cinema does not exist: there is only projectional cinema, an object onto which I project.* (Majaca, Sivan 2016: 211) This projection is what the filmmaker is, the way the filmmaker conceives values and morals. The filmmaker projects those onto the observed in front of the camera, wishing that what happens to the observed does not happen to him or her. It does not happen in the country where the filmmaker comes from, the filmmaker is not as poor as the one filmed, the filmmaker does not come from a conflicted social background, etc.

The Ambassador is in this case one film that goes to a higher level when it comes to facing and portraying the perpetrator, it accomplishes it partially by the means of showing corrupt diplomats

and politicians. It also mentions several times through a hidden camera interview with a high ranking national security officer of the Central African Republic, that the French are the ones pulling the strings and that their great influence keeps the country in an underdeveloped state. But during the first minutes of the film, when Brügger is about to start his quest, his voice over gives a description of what he is about to face in this terms:

As the name says the Central African Republic is situated in the middle of Africa. It offers itself as a Jurassic Park for people who long for Africa of the 1970s. If the Congo was the heart of darkness, this is the appendix. Some call it a failed state, but this would only be true if there at some point had ever been a functioning state structure. Instead, there is a lawless territory the size of Texas, where a couple of thousand poorly equipped soldiers try to protect the capital Bangui from the horrors of the wilderness. Here, a small political elite spends most of its time being involved in criminal activities, while waiting for the weekly flight to Paris, its former colonial master. Of course, a country such as this, works as a magnet on white men with hidden agendas.

The reference to Texas says a lot about who this film is aimed for. Maybe Brügger was already thinking about an Oscar nomination. In the film, as Brügger goes deeper into the business of blood diamonds, the story starts to focus more and more on the perils of the director and the dangers he faces in his endeavor. Apparently his deal with the miners might be a trap in which he will lose his investment and his life might also be put in danger. And why would it not be a trap? It is a corrupt business. At the same time, his documents as a Consul have not been properly issued and validated by Liberia, he complains, although he bought them illegally. Amidst all these actions, Brügger also visits a Pygmy village where he promises to install a match factory, but the visit is in reality set up and shot so we see the Pygmies dancing around an of course taller Brügger. As a token of gratitude, the Pygmy villagers assign to him two assistants that further in the film will be used by Brügger for irrelevant comedic purposes, he will also refer to them as “my Pygmy assistants”. Then the film will lead us to a dramatic construction in which we are to sympathize with Brügger as a victim, since he might have gotten himself in trouble and his identity as a fake diplomat might be uncovered, facing the possibility of being incarcerated. Our debatable redemption is to see him come out clean of his actions as the white hero who uncovered diplomatic corruption in a “dangerous”, “underdeveloped” country where he might have been imprisoned and “who knows what else might happen to him once in jail”, one of the cinematic creations of the worst nightmare of a civilized person.

Such concepts as poverty, underdevelopment or danger are relative to the measurement exerted by the one observing. Then the observer's reality, and if accurate, is projected to an audience that agrees with it in order to engage with the film and also be recipient of redemption. *The Ambassador*, keeping in mind it was made in 2011, is a film that presents itself as avant-garde in documentary filmmaking because of its straight-forward approach, but in reality it is a film that goes backwards in the discussions of issues of representation since it clearly presents a director whose status has to be automatically considered as higher above the people he is filming. Brügger presents a view of the world that belongs to the white privileged person he is, not only as the director of the film, but also as the paternalistic figure whose authority can dictate what is right and wrong, allowing him to break the law “for the good”.

In a conversation with Brügger after a screening of the film in which I was present, Brügger was questioned about the whereabouts of Paul, the local young man who works as his assistant in the film and who becomes one of the main characters, since many of Brügger's actions are carried out by him, unaware of being in a documentary film and just doing what he is told. Brügger's reply was that after the completion of the film, the production team was able to take Paul out of the country and locate him somewhere else, so he would not be in danger. Again, the paternalistic nature of the conception of the film allowed the author the “moral” and “righteous” obligation of deciding over the life of someone who was not asked about his participation in the film.

From a perspective in line with Sivan's framing of the perpetrator, *The Ambassador* might have gone closer. But the result shows that there might be a risk of a shift of morals in the process that needs a deeper understanding, which here seems to be absent. That is exactly and foreseeably reflected on what Brügger uses as his explanation. First, on racial representation, he basically mentions that what he does is acceptable since there is also another racism in the Central African Republic, meaning it is okay to prolong racist representation by a powerful observer if the community observed, allegedly, also has intrinsic racial discordances:

- Conventional documentarians working in poor places often try hard not to perpetuate colonial relationships while they work. Does going there in character, essentially as a racist, mean you're off the hook?

- No, but it means I'm much more honest. Nobody will go to the Central African Republic, deal with the place, and come out without soiled hands, no matter how well meaning, altruistic, or politically correct a filmmaker you are. I think there's an honesty in being highly visible. Also, you do encounter a lot of racism there which you hardly hear about here and it is part of the discourse of power in the Central African Republic: black on black racism, tribal racism, racism against the pygmies, black on Chinese racism, black on white and white on black. Many people there are obsessed with race and race matters. But because it's such a difficult thing to deal with, especially if you're a filmmaker who is very careful about doing it the right way, it is something that is seldom talked about. (Leaf, 2012)

Second, Brügger implies that there is no possible shift in the point of view of the observer, the discourse stays the same and hence the type of observation and representation. The only possible change proposed is in the visual treatment:

- Marshall McLuhan spoke at length about how in a world where people consume as much information as they do, people become very aware of patterns and what is communicated to them. They become very adept at recognizing these patterns which is why people have stopped reading articles and watching the news because they already know what is in it before having read the article or seen the news story because of their ability to recognize patterns. In that sense, many of the documentaries about North Korea or the suffering of Africa resemble each other to a degree where you can speak about the generic North Korea documentary or the generic Africa documentary. While many of these films are well meaning and well made, people either can't bear watching them because they are fed up with this "pornography of suffering" or they are simply bored of it—desensitized because they have watched these films too many times. (Leaf, 2012)

Third, the consequences on others because of this type of representation, are acceptable in the scale of power proposed by the representation of others exerted in the film:

- What about the ethics of having regular people in your film who have not consented to be in your film?

- I am fully aware that in some regards the ethics in my film, to say it simply, kind of suck. They do. (...) For me, no film is worth somebody getting killed, myself included, but if you're not able to deal with a film having consequences you should not do documentaries because documentaries do have consequences. It is extremely difficult to foresee what this film will cause. There are days when I fear this film will blow up in my face and terrible things will happen, but at the same time I heard a few days ago that because of this film, the media in Liberia have been able to identify eight other "Mr Cortzens" [Brügger's alias in the film] within their diplomatic corps. (Leaf, 2012)

Virunga, as mentioned before, has been labeled as a "white savior film" since we see the struggle and sacrifices of foreign whites as agents that define the story on behalf of the locals. This recently developed categorization gives a more specific deconstruction to the role of such character: impersonates morals, is always white, and goes on a journey of self sacrifice in order to save the nonwhites. It has been developed in the frame of race issues and race representation in American fiction cinema:

This trope is so widespread that varied intercultural and interracial relations are often guided by a logic that racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites). Such imposing patronage enables an interpretation of nonwhite characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities. (Hughey 2014: 2)

This type of narrative has been identified in widely popular Hollywood fiction films such as *Mississippi Burning* (1988), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Rambo III* (1988), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *The Matrix* (1999), *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Avatar* (2009), *The Help* (2011) and many others.

The white savior narrative has not been studied or applied in amplitude to documentary cinema, but it connects with the redemptive construction of documentary films like the ones mentioned in this chapter, where the white savior is placed either on or off-screen, always creating a narrative around the morals of the observer. But this type of narrative is not only talking about racial differences even if it is conceived from that problematic. It is also talking about a social and political order:

Whether setting off atom bombs in Stargate, unleashing round after round of gunfire in Rambo III, sending young black men to their state-sponsored deaths in Monster's Ball, or sacrificing hundreds, if not thousands, of African lives for a diamond to save one black family in Blood Diamond, the savior's paternalistic carnage and bloodshed is often rationalized as unavoidable, and the savior is the only one with the moral fiber to get it done. Such pattern demonstrates the colonialist logic of these films. Simply put, (white) father knows best. Brutality and oppression are unacceptable when people of color wield these tactics but are wholly satisfactory means toward establishing a white normative order at the behest of the white savior. (Hughey 2014, 41)

Previously and similarly, in an article titled *History Died for Our Sins: Guilt and responsibility in Hollywood Redemption Histories*, Mark Golub describes how several historical American films have accommodated history in the perspective of the perpetrators but showing them as saviors. The study focuses on the films *Amistad* (1997) and *Glory* (1989) but also mentions, again, *Dances with Wolves*, *Schindler's List*, *Mississippi Burning* and others since the study converges with several of the characteristics of the white savior film. Here the main character is also white and in a quest in which will save a group of oppressed people, a story told from the point of view of the oppressor rather than from the one who was victim of the oppression. But it is not the framing of the oppressor in a sense similar to the one proposed by Sivan, rather, it is the story of an oppressor that undergoes a process of personal transformation *as they become aware of the injustice against which they will soon fight* (1998: 31)

The identification is always with a character who is an exception to the oppressive situation and so allows viewers to distance themselves from responsibility from those actions.(...) What the identification accomplishes, then, is the overcoming of guilt through an act of imagination: that "we" would not have done what "we" in fact did. (1998: 30) A type of filmic narrative that resembles that one noted by Weinberger regarding ethnographic cinema.

Golub's statements point to the fact that such films *tell us primarily about the creators and consumers of such images rather than those who are depicted. (1998: 28)* As inadvertently noted regarding the perspective of the filmmaker in ethnographic cinema by Heider.

In parallel, there has been a discussion regarding who is being represented today in a world of global news. In an article written by Stefan Jonsson, he recalls a column written by newspaper correspondent Sven Öste in Dagens Nyheter (Stockholm) in the early 1990s: *the object of his question was the tremendous energy and resources West-European media spent covering brushfires in New South Wales. The fires had claimed four lives and destroyed 191 homes. During the same period, the rest of the world was not exactly serene, Öste noted: “A gas explosion in China killed 70 workers. It got ten lines. Floods rendered 150,000 people in Sri Lanka homeless. Eight lines.” When an earthquake in Maharashtra killed roughly 10,000 Indians, the media lost interest after a day or two (...) It is fairly clear that western news reporting values a white Australian who sees his home go up in flames much higher than a poor Indian who dies in an earthquake.*” (Jonsson 2008: 167)

Jonsson's argument is that the white, male western of the owning classes, who is the producer of the news, has also a function of a model of human that requires others to identify with and emulate. This model claims to represent *the general interests – which may be coded in cultural terms (enlightenment, secularization, traditional humanist education), in political terms (democracy, parliamentarism, etc.) and/or economic terms (market economy, free trade, capitalism) – and a series of subordinate tendencies that are assumed to represent various minority interests and are often coded in ethnic, religious, cultural, or national terms.* (Jonsson 2008, 171) As noted regarding the concentration of film production by the western hegemony by Paranaguá.

Even superhero films talk about that same social order when the main character fights muslim terrorists, those are the opening sequences of many of such type of films nowadays, in which the superhero (who is also white) is to combat global terrorism for the good of the planet, for the sake of keeping a well preserved order. This is the moment when the audience is to take sides, when people identify with a political cause and then redeem while seeing the enemy being defeated, the threat to freedom being erased by that hero, who is the representation of power.

All these approaches show clearly how the other is being represented and how we, as the other, are to align with the established hegemony politically, since it is a hegemony because its causes are to be regarded as the right ones. We redeem in favor of that filmic hegemony that carries a political message in which we, as the others who do not belong to it, have to accept it and see it as a the right

model for our lives and communities. But also, in and through filmmaking, as the others, we are able to reflect on this and sometimes even to criticize it in film, but only as others. Our message will be reduced and simplified, as it has been said, as foreign, national, ethnical, etc.

This discussion gains more depth when contrasted with the role of a filmmaker in a context where representation has been traditionally exerted by the powerful. That is the case of director Dieudo Hamadi, whose statements create new intersections between the theoretical discussion about representation and filmmaking practice, but also shows the examples of how this tradition in observation has simplified peoples and countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. But furthermore, it reveals the repetition of the formula of filming the oppressed other as a channel for validation, the emulation that is expected from the hegemonic power.

His film *Downstream to Kinshasa* tells the story of the trip made by members of the society of survivors of the Six Day War in Kisangani. The group is composed of people who lost their limbs as a consequence of the war. They live now in scarcity and with no attention from the state, who was condemned to pay a large monetary compensation to the survivors, which has not happened nineteen years after the war. The group decides to go to Kinshasa in an attempt to face the central government with their demands. One big part of the focus of the film is on the trip itself, an element that also revealed the distance between Hamadi and the characters, a north and a south:

*I must confess that what got me excited about this project was this journey, which I had never done myself. I had been dreaming about discovering the hinterland from the river and discovering my country through this journey. So, as soon as they decided to head over to Kinshasa, it was obvious that they could only go there via the river, because there is no road between Kisangani and Kinshasa, and flying was obviously unaffordable. Flying inside Congo is one of the most expensive ways of traveling. Flying from Kinshasa to Paris is sometimes cheaper than flying between two Congolese cities. So in this context, the only way they could travel was by boat. As far as I was concerned, I was surprised because I did not know how people used to travel by boat. I thought we would travel on a real boat with compartments, but then I realized it was just a barge covered with turps that were supposed to protect us from the bad weather. (“Downstream to Kinshasa”:
Interview with Dieudo Hamadi [Cannes 2020])*

The trip took one and a half months and the director had no other option but to stick to his characters, which eventually brought them closer, a connection that ultimately becomes visible in the film and that was at the same time doomed to fade.

Even myself after I arrived in Kinshasa the film was no longer my priority. I needed to charge my batteries in every sense of the word. Our paths kind of slowly separated. I needed to have a shower, change my clothes, take some rest, while they were continuing the fight and keeping being rejected, and so forth. It could not have happened differently though and we can feel that in the film. On the boat we were kind of confined. And since I was on the boat too, the only way to film them was by being close to them. In Kinshasa though, I kind of returned to my life meanwhile they were keeping up their fight. But I kept working on the film. I had to show the reality as it was unfolding. That is, this city is very complex even for the people who live here. (...) So it was important to show this disillusion in the film one way or the other. ("Downstream to Kinshasa": Interview with Dieudo Hamadi [Cannes 2020])

But most importantly, as for the reception of the film in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Hamadi brings us back to awareness of issues of representation, redemption and how a society can consume a cinema made about them but not by them.

... most of the time my films... it depends on the film. Some were rejected, because the Congolese are a very complex audience. We have very few places to screen our films, very few movie theaters, and the people who come to watch our films are often not very sensitive to the image of themselves or ourselves that we portray, even though they admit that our films show what our lives look like. But just like for a lot of people around the world, cinema is supposed to offer evasion and entertainment, which are things I don't propose in my films at all, and sometimes people want to see films that are not related to their own issues. (...)

So, in Congo, my films are not widely distributed or well-known because we face a lack of infrastructure, and in the meantime... the form of cinema that I practice is not very popular in Congo, therefore I don't reach a lot of people, but to me what's most important is that the film is done, and that it remains, just like books, so it can be an evidence of our situation, as the one we are living today. This is fundamental because as a general rule we have memory issues in Africa.

Our memory was built by some others. But I think that what we do as authors and filmmakers, helps us start reclaim our own memory and build landmarks for incoming generations. In this regard, I don't mind whether my films are widely seen in Congo or not, because as long as they exist, they might, in a few years, fill the gaps that we faced as we were growing up because nothing had been done.

Hamadi's film does not portray a failed, dangerous nation in an unstoppable armed combat, neither the characters are defined only by the consequences of a war. There is indeed a sense of portrayal of poor infrastructure, of people in poverty. Hamadi might be playing by the rules of what is expected from a documentary film from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the expected reception of the film by the audience confirms how representation works locally when it has been univocal. But as explained by him, the film serves the purpose of construction of a national memory, an observation of your own nation, that in the context of his country is of great importance. The Democratic Republic of Congo and its small film industry, has not had the opportunity to address filmic historical interventionism and filmic misrepresentation in a local filmic language.

We have to remember that as in the cases exposed in Latin America, there was a significant approach to cinema differing with hegemonic observation when there was a conscious criticism of the repetition of misrepresentation. The Latin American nations were able to do it because they had some power for it as cultural agents. But so far, in 2021, regarding representation in documentary cinema within a frame of hegemony versus periphery, things change very slowly, we have seen very little change because the power comes not only from a dominant film industry that controls the market, but also from the political power adhered to it in forms of rich, white and Eurocentric.

In Brazil Moreira Salles was able to talk about himself and about social differences once Brazilian cinema regarded poverty films as a construction of the privileged in association with the prominent gaze of the hegemonic cinema industry. In Colombia Mayolo and Ospina talked about poverty while attacking the filmmakers who also used poverty as an instrument to get recognition in Europe, while at the same time aligning with the opinion of the Colombian people, who saw that foreign observation as degrading. That is the reason why Hamadi's film is not satisfactory as a strategy to detach from hegemonic filmic observation and representation, but it represents the opening of a path that might lead to a critical view of it.

Documentary films from the periphery of the industry are still required to follow a univocal form of representation: about poverty, about the oppressed. Documentary stories, when not univocal, are able to present a society in complexity. The proof of that is hegemonic cinema itself when presenting its own stories, in which characters go beyond reduced characteristics. But the hegemonic cinema struggles to accept the other as a complex individual, because if doing so, it would require itself, its filmmakers and its peoples, to examine the role they are playing in such narratives, renouncing to the possibility of redemption. That is the power of the enunciator, the technical power that allowed the big industry to apply a type of representation in mass production, establishing that type of representation to be regarded as truth, for its own redemption.

It is of importance to see the direct link between the absence of the portrayal of the oppressor (which is the observation of the oppressed) and the misrepresentation of the observed. The absence of the oppressor is the redemption of the filmmaker and his or her societal context, while for the filmed as a society is an exercise of misrepresentation, and the awareness of it. That is the largest gap that separates observer and observed.

The hegemonic film industry, the American and the ones that align with it in terms of Eurocentrism, colonialism, white point of view, etc., in the end, after all of what has been discussed here, is an industry that no matter where and how, is filming itself. All films made by that hegemonic film industry are a projection of its principles, and that is in great part the legacy that we will get from the documentary film industry during this first century of cinema.

The Living and the Dead

The practical work that accompanies this dissertation is the documentary film entitled *The Living and The Dead*, in which I aim to approach the discussions expressed in this paper in cinematic form and through a personal exploration. This short chapter focuses mainly on the anecdotal in order to give a personal recount that associates with the theoretical research.

Prior to starting to make the film, I had started to incorporate issues of representation in other works, inadvertently sometimes, never with an elaborated theoretical background, but it was part of my appropriation of documentary film techniques and it can be seen with a clear emphasis in *Boys of Buenaventura* (2015), the first feature length documentary film I made. I want to start by saying that issues of representation in cinema is something that many can affiliate to. The nature of cinema, when being the visual expression of a culture about other cultures, a projection of one culture onto another, is to present a vision that might not be in concordance with how reality is conceived by the observed or represented. In my case, as a Colombian citizen, filmic representation of my country has been controversial, as mentioned in the beginning of this paper.

Colombia has been widely represented as a dangerous, poor country in perpetual war and home of powerful drug lords. It has also been presented differently, but those cases are the minority. As a Colombian person, I grew amidst this type of representation and what I encountered always was that the truth was more complex. This is not something that I personally thought about, it is in general what Colombian citizens have felt during many years. Representation of Colombia is consciously present in the daily life of Colombians since media keeps repeating it. *Boys of Buenaventura* was born out of that type of representation, but also because the representation of the city of Buenaventura inside Colombia, mirrored the external foreign gaze on Colombia.

In the mid 2000s Buenaventura garnered in media the title of the most dangerous city in Colombia, a place where even Colombians themselves would not dare to go. I personally had a different

relationship with the city. Although she mainly grew up in Cali, my mother was born there, my extended family from her side are from that region and most of them live in Cali, the largest city in the region. The result of this is that in the multiple times I went to Cali as I was growing up, a couple of those times I visited Buenaventura as well, where my grandmother lived and worked for many years.

In 2009 I was hired as a fixer for an American production team, they wanted to shoot a documentary film in Buenaventura, about, basically, how dangerous a city it is. By then, I must confess, I was also a bit nervous about going there, even if I knew the possibility of something happening to me was remote. I was conscious of the difference between the message of media and the actual reality of the city, but the message has an effect.

In the book *The White Savior Film*, the author reminds us that there have been studies on Hollywood cinema as a propaganda system that engages in mass persuasion. Such studies have been disregarded, but ironically *films are still commonly blamed for having direct effects on audiences* (Hughey 2014: 164) such as to incite violence, to manufacture desires, etc. In the study conducted by the author about the reception of the white savior films, he gathered and contrasted the opinions of different people. One black woman said that because of Hollywood cinema, she started thinking that black men were dangerous, which made her take a distance from Hollywood films (Hughey 2014: 148).

There is an effect of media in us and there is always a distance, of any length, between what we see or hear and the actual truth. As we started filming in Buenaventura, it was clear that the American crew was ready to distort facts in order to show danger. In fact, the film never got to be completed because of the fruitless efforts to film the dangers of the place. There are criminal organizations in the city, but the impossibility to show relevant and truthful content in the film about criminality, gave way to a desperation from the producers for such footage, which led to shooting footage with exaggerated or plainly false information. We went patrolling the sea with the Navy, the producers decided to film this moment as if we were in the middle of a war zone, and that we could be shot at any moment, said the presenter. In reality we were just sailing around the calm waters of the sea. We went to a bar for drinks and they saw it was a good opportunity to shoot a scene in which the presenter stated that, most likely, the people sitting at the bar were all criminals.

Along the way we met students from a foundation that provides free musical education as a way to offer academic alternatives to children and teenagers of poor neighborhoods. There I found a group of three close friends devoted to music. I decided to go back to Buenaventura and shoot a film about what is not being said about the city, with them as main characters.

Quickly I recognized that I was projecting on them, although inversely, what had happened to me when I was about to graduate high school. I had basically found myself in confusion, I did not know what I wanted to do professionally. For them, the three kids in Buenaventura, they knew perfectly well they wanted to pursue a career in music, but they had little chances of starting university studies due to financial reasons. Being the transition to professional studies an important and somehow overwhelming moment in life, as it had been to me as well, I decided to make a film about their last vacation period, that starts the moment they graduate high school and ends the moment they do get to go or do not go to university. My other purpose was to demystify the city through a story many people can identify with, giving the characters a more complex treatment, by not portraying them as the kids who live in an environment of supposed constant criminality.

But most importantly, there were several moments during the production of the film that were connected to issues of representation in documentary cinema. Upon starting filming, one of the first questions that I was addressed with, was if I was to film and then leave to never go back. That is the reputation documentary filmmakers have managed to construct of themselves (or ourselves) through othering practices, but also because there is an exploitation of the observed that ultimately serves almost only the filmmaker, which is easily comprehended by the filmed, vampirism as Luis Ospina would put it. I also faced repeatedly people refusing to be filmed. They expressed that the films made there were all about what is negative. This is uniformed representation and awareness of it.

It took a long time until the characters of the film trusted my initiative. It happened after spending several weeks of filming, when I was able to put together a trailer of the film (<https://vimeo.com/43433584>). Upon watching it, the characters felt relieved and were finally able to see me and the project, as trustworthy, mainly because it was not another film about the violence in the city.

Not only making the film, but also the conception of it, was a challenge in the frame of issues of representation. When I started looking for production funding, as I was to transmit what the story of the film was going to be, people did not seem to be engaged by it or, to put it simply, they did not seem to be interested. It was only once I started to include the words 'danger' and 'poverty' as triggers, that the project received attention. That is part of the reason why in the trailer, there is a moment when one of the characters says “there is violence here”. The moment when we were filming, he first refused to say it alluding to the fact that such statement only presents a repetition of a type of representation of the city. We discussed it and came to the conclusion that we were to do it only for the sake of getting the attention we needed, and that it would not be the focus of the trailer.

Looking back, in connection to my role as author of the film, now I know that I had a more than a slight influence in the result of the story. Basically, I was projecting myself in their situation as I wanted for them to be able to start university studies. I had a paternalistic approach guided by the results I wanted for the film and for them. To be able to go to university was something that they wanted, but I do not think it was the only thing they were worried about or their only driving force, which did not let me see and give importance to those other things they might have wanted to say. I personified the imposed social importance of having a professional education, an act of privilege from my side, which I was passing onto them as the only option for a successful life. This is also a type of othering, a transmission of values. I do believe professional education is a vehicle to technical refinement, to critical thinking, but I have the personal tendency to see it as the only possible path and to expect the same opinion from others.

One of the characters, who had dropped out of high school, towards the end of filming was struggling with the project since I insisted several times he should go back to school, for his well being but also so I can film that moment, as a result of his personal quest in the film. Because of my pressure and the pressure from others, he did go back to school but only to drop out once again a few days after. Now I see that I was not able to fully connect with him and with what he wanted to achieve, although he was saying it to me, somehow cryptically, with his refusal to continue studying. Once he mentioned to me that he wanted to study music on his own, because to him it was not so important what he could or could not achieve musically since, even after dying, he would continue practicing and studying in the “other world”. I found this important and it is part of the

film, but I saw it only from the perspective of education being the only tool 'they' need in order to move ahead. This film does present those two territories: me and them. My conception of the world but told through them and their social context.

When the film was released it was well received in Buenaventura. People celebrated being able to see their city and their culture through another point of view. There was no criticism to the film. I do not think it is a bad film or that it prolongs the representation the city and its people have obtained, and because of that it was appreciated as a different audio-visual piece, as a film with a different message. But, if something, I felt the distance with the characters even if they are until today my friends. I did not have to make a film about them in order to be friends with them. As Moreira Salles says, the poor would agree to being filmed by the wealthy as if that agreement was part of a social hierarchy.

In 2015, as I had finished *Boys of Buenaventura*, I was struggling to find a new project and went to different places to research, to different souths, looking for a story to tell. Naturally I did not find any, since I was already aware that what bothered me about the result of the previous film, was the fact that no matter my good intentions, there was an unsurmountable distance between me and the story which had as a result a film that I did not consider honest enough.

Consequently and keeping in mind how I was to give shape to whatever story I would find, because of my role as a filmmaker who would ultimately talk about himself through whatever film I would make, and who would project himself on other characters, I decided to debate with myself why I was not able to see a story in my life and its surroundings, but saw dozens of stories in the lives of others. Departing from this logic, it was not so difficult to find a story I knew I could tell. My life was in crisis, my girlfriend at the moment wanted to have children and wanted an answer from me. Since I was not able to give her a concrete response, she had already warned me that our relationship was going to end.

I went deeper into this personal debate. I eventually asked myself why do I consider normal the fact that I do not know and do not even want to know about my half-brother. No one in my family seemed interested in doing so either. It became clear that another documentary filmmaker might have had seen in me the story that I did not see, and of course its connection with my lack of will

for parenting. The value in the story of a documentary film, is generally in direct connection with the nature of otherness in the story, as it is defined in the tradition of filming the oppressed, filming the poor or filming the exotic from a position of superior alterity. Also, as a documentary filmmaker, you set out to film the problems of others because you see those problems to be of importance, portraying them might bring help. Your problems, being you part of the same society, are not as important, you are not oppressed, you are not a victim. But would such logic have validity within what is discussed here in this paper?

From a personal political point of view after all I have mentioned, observation of the other, the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, is a tradition in documentary film that was born out of power dynamics of colonialism. It still serves the purpose of validating otherness or others as the primitive or the failed that “we” (them, the colonizer, the hegemony, the rich, the powerful, the invader) fortunately are not. If I was to make a film, it was not only going to be about me since I was to address the undeniable intervention of the author, it had to be also about my problems and an observation of myself and my surroundings, as a middle class, educated, privileged Colombian man.

The film *The Living and the Dead* is a story about finding my half-brother, son of my father, and about how now four siblings are facing paternity without the presence of any paternal or maternal figure. Long story short, father left mother when I was about five years old, my sister was three and my brother was one. He started a new relationship and the fruit of it is our half-brother, whom we never met mainly because of the fact that father died in a car crash then, right after our half brother was born, in the middle of period of a lot of resentment from my mother.

The film was also conceived as my appropriation, experimentation and research on issues of representation. Nonetheless, it does not mean that the film does not present a social problematic, which in this case is the machismo of the Colombian society, in which I had a father who was able to leave a mother with three children in order to start a new relationship. But furthermore, it was my mother who would never be able to reconstruct her romantic life since she devoted herself entirely to raising me, my sister and my brother, showing the structural societal roles in which a woman is to sacrifice and raise children in auto-imposed celibacy, while men are free to have as many women as they want. The same happened to my half-brother's mother.

It was clear to me from the beginning that the film would present the problem of precisely not portraying the usual issues under the same point of view: it was not going to be a film about drug dealers, about poverty, about indigenous peoples, about guerrilla fighters. It was going to be a film about a middle class family from an urban environment. If this renders the film irrelevant, it is not because the film, its treatment or its information is irrelevant, it would be because “it does not fit the imagination” of the what a filmed Colombian is, just like Nanook firing a rifle did not fit the imagination of Flaherty, but wearing polar bear pants did.

The process of filming the story that became the documentary film *The Living and the Dead* was in itself the experimentation and research of issues of representation presented in this paper. The elements to explore visually and conceptually were otherness, role of the director and type of observation, which materialize in the footage of the film:

Otherness:

In order to have a critical view on otherness, the project was proposed as a story of the filmmaker. The characters surrounding the filmmaker, my family, can hardly be misrepresented in such a context and they do not present alterity relations to me as the filmmaker. Otherness was a challenge when the observed were only observed, which is the reason why observation had to be executed both ways, on the others as much as on me, the director.

Role of the director:

In the beginning, the main obstacle was the uncertainty the project presented. It was not possible to know if I would ever find my half-brother and what the effects of it would be. The first chapter of the film presents a search of both information about my half-brother and about my parents. But during the 14 minutes of this chapter there are only four very brief images of me, which shows how during the first stage of this process, I was shooting a story that lacked more attachment to it from my part, an observation rather than an involvement. That is the reason why in the second chapter the camera turns towards me. It is categorized here in “role of the director” since such a role, such an action, goes beyond being the observer as we have discussed in the theoretical part of this paper. The filmmaker is an active agent as creator, point of view and projection onto the filmed. The film thus had a construction in which the story revolves around the actions of the director, of me, as they

act as triggers in the story.

Type of observation:

When a filmmaker is an active part of the actions of a documentary film, this is generally called 'participant observation'. But to measure the participation of a filmmaker, as we have seen, is more complicated than just seeing them framed or hearing their voice. In a thesis of projectional cinema, as defined by Eyal Sivan, participant observation does not exist either, meaning that every film would exercise a participant observation. In *The Living and the Dead* the experiment with observation relied on how to connect it to both otherness and role of the director. As the observer, what I wanted to show was emotions, and for that goal I aimed at filming intimate moments, but those had to be accompanied by intimate moments of my life as well. The rule when filming was, even if unorthodox, to give as much or more intimacy from my life in comparison to the intimacy of others that I had filmed. As an agent that ultimately defines the path of the story, this led to observe my life in order to give context to the type of observation being executed by me.

Another element that also needs to be mentioned here is the type of narration present throughout the film, the voice of an external agent who connects the pieces of the story. That was one of the first narrative decisions taken, to have a narration that has a distance with the author in order to refer to him in equal terms as to the other characters in the film, but at the same time the goal was also to have a narrator that knows and speaks about the director, and is able to speak about him critically. Later in the film it is revealed that it is the voice of a friend of mine, who was responsible of writing the film's voice over and to give an account of my actions from his perspective.

Narration in documentary film generally has three approaches: the voice of an unspecified narrator, the voice of the author or the voice of a character. The unspecified narrator is simply the voice of the author transposed to someone else, in order to give the voice a neutral position that in the end is much farther than neutral, it means that what is being said, is agreed upon by many, it is common sense and knowledge to be spread around. Naturally, this type of narration does not connect with the story being told in *The Living and the Dead*, neither with its theoretical background.

The voice of the author was avoided in order to give different reading to the images and the actions in the film, so the universe of the film does not go around the author but has a critical approach to

what he sees and does. From a personal stance, I also avoided being the narrator of the film with the aim to present my character without having to be self apologetic or acquiescent to my actions. So as a director, I try to reduce the possibility of having an univocal reflexion to my actions. This explains why the voice of a character of the film was also avoided.

The other experiment is the experiment with the format of the film. I connect deeply with the written research presented here, which I wanted to translate into filmic language. But as the story was taking shape in the events captured on camera, the story could tell itself independent from what is studied here. I decided I did not want to make a film in the form of a manifesto, but rather let all the elements of what is being discussed take part in a film that seems to fit the usual formula, a story that follows characters in a linear dramatic arch. These are precisely the elements of experimentation, to say something in filmic language as it is expected from the use of such language. To intend a subversion of traditional representation and at the same time to tell a story was a big temptation, but it was not necessary either. Although, I do consider the film to be a subversion of traditional representation in Colombian cinema.

The film, along with this paper, gives validity to the arguments presented here in the chapters “Power”, “Truth” and “Redemption”. As mentioned at the beginning of this document, those are not only elements of discussion in the analysis of documentary film practices, they are part of the conception and execution of a documentary film. In each one of the chapters, rather than being an accusation of filmic practices, they are the acknowledgement of the existence of such practices. In a context in which there is a hegemonic actor the sets the rules in an international market, what is revealed is precisely the existence of such rules. They have not been mentioned, they have not been written, but they exist and that is the main conclusion of this document. If we look at such characteristics as a whole, it is possible to have an approach to cinema that will not prolong the unofficially institutionalized representation of the world and at the same time it can contend it, theoretically and audio visually.

With *The Living and the Dead* I tell the story of something that happened in my family and happens in many families, but I also try to have a more coherent appropriation of issues of representation in documentary filmmaking, because as it was discussed in this paper, when we look at the messages films want to convey, they tell many things about the filmmakers, to the extent that they can tell

more about them, even when they film and observe peoples from the opposite corner of the world.

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