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Research article

Political activism before the premiere: indigenous audiovisual production, knowledge otherwise and gender complementarity in the Wiwa film *Ushui*

Paula Restrepo and Juan Carlos Valencia

Abstract

Audiovisual production by indigenous collectives around the world has been growing for decades. Academic analyses disagree on whether the films express an alterity that has never been subsumed by Western modernity, or just confirm that ethnic communicators are as influenced by modernity as any other audiovisual production collective. This article develops a critique of these latter scholarly analyses, because they mostly focus on end products, not on the situated analysis of their contexts, the production processes, the intercultural interactions and knowledge otherwise that result in the films. We focus on the production process of the film *Ushui*, created by the indigenous Wiwa people of Colombia. We show that although there are no pure, totally uncolonised spaces anymore, the breadth of cosmologies present in Latin America and many other regions of the world-system has never been fully subsumed. The analysis of the making of *Ushui* allows us to witness the everyday expression of the cosmo-experiences of the Wiwa people and the way film-making becomes more of an organisational and political means for them than the artistic, genre-defying, alterity-proving vehicle that academic scholars commonly discuss.

Keywords: activism, audiovisual, Colombia, gender complementarity, *Ushui*, Wiwa

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Introduction

Audiovisual production by indigenous collectives around the world has boomed in the past four decades. Diverse ‘ethnic’ communities have moved from being mostly the focus of academic analysis by visual anthropologists or an exotic topic for Western documentary makers, always in front of the cameras (Ardévol 1996), to becoming active producers of audiovisual content. In Colombia, South America, while researching indigenous production between 2008 and 2013, anthropologist and film producer Pablo Mora (pers. comm., 6 June 2013) discovered that ‘fifty to sixty films have been made by around twenty collectives coming from indigenous communities’.

Academic analyses of indigenous productions have proliferated in the literature, mostly conducted by Film Studies, Communication and Visual Anthropology scholars who largely focus on the visual and narrative characteristics of film. Some analyses conclude that ethnic communicators are as influenced by modernity as any other audiovisual production collective (Browne 2005; Ginsburg 1991) and that their taking up the cameras is proof of how capitalism continues to expand and co-opt creativity and diversity around the world-system (Hardt and Negri 2009). Other critical analyses, also sceptical and following the ideas of Marshall McLuhan (1964) and Walter Ong (1982), argue that indigenous communities in the so-called Third World are oral cultures and that the introduction of new audiovisual technologies contributes to the destruction of their traditions and intensifies their alienation. McLuhan (1964) states that these cultures suffered from an overwhelming tyranny of the ear over the eye, arguing that indigenous communities may not have the ability to develop rational, modern modes of understanding and would thus remain confined to a world of sounds, magic and timeliness. Ginsburg (1991) argues that although it is positive that ‘ethnic’ groups are no longer at the mercy of images of them, as produced by others, they nevertheless end up reproducing communicative models that maintain their subordination. Indigenous audiovisual production, in this view, reproduces the spectacle of Western media and becomes a machine for inserting the last vestiges of diversity into global modernity.

Other analyses disagree with these pessimistic views; some even insist that indigenous films express an alterity that has never been subsumed by Western modernity (Alia 2010). Yet others find that the objectives of indigenous audiovisual collectives go beyond self-representation and have larger political goals. Pablo Mora (2014), who has collaborated with indigenous producers in Colombia on many films, explains that ‘indigenous peoples do not grab the cameras because they love art or for their love of money; they do it because of issues such as threats to their land, the internal (Colombian) conflict and others’. According to Mora (2015, 29), ‘indigenous communicative experiences cannot be understood simply as artistic expression or representation of reality efforts, but instead as true political activism in defense of

life, inspired by the dream of changing the civilizational paradigms of our society'. He insists that indigenous audiovisual producers

are not interested on being *auteurs*, nor on prestige nor on producing works-of-art ... when you get to know their life histories, for example of those living in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region, you discover the fact that there is a history of violence and conflict behind ... they find in video a path to keep fighting from the inside, from a different perspective, a more political one, trying to visibilize their issues. (pers. comm., 6 June 2013)

This article develops a critique of those scholarly analyses that mainly focus on end products, not on the situated analysis of indigenous audiovisual production processes; the intercultural interactions that take place in the different stages of preproduction, production and circulation; and the other kinds of knowledge that result in the films. By focusing on the production process of a film called *Ushui*, created in the north of Colombia by Bunkuaneiumun, a team of indigenous Wiwa people and a network of non-native collaborators, we show that although there are no pure, totally uncolonised spaces anymore, the breadth of cosmologies and other epistemologies present in Latin America and many other regions of the world-system has never been fully subsumed.

Meeting of knowledges, technique and technology in *Ushui*

The Wiwa producers of *Ushui* started to work with audiovisual content in the first decade of this century as members of a production collective called Zhigoneshi, which brought together film makers from peoples in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region. They managed to produce a total of eight films, having chosen to do so because they thought audiovisual productions could serve their political goals better than other types of media.

The process of creating these films allowed the different indigenous communities to appropriate technology and carry out what Pablo Mora describes as a sort of technological cannibalism by the *mamos*, their senior spiritual authorities. This appropriation, their 'swallowing' of the Western cinema tradition, connecting it in their own terms with their own traditions, allowed 'the Mamos of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to find a way to devour the audiovisual technology of (who they call) the little siblings' (Mora 2015, 96-97).

In Zhigoneshi's film, *Sey Arimaku*, Wiwa director Saúl Gil (2009), who would later direct *Ushui*, talks in front of the camera about the existence of a mother of the images who lives in the Sierra Nevada and to whom you have to offer a payment:

before, our seniors never used images, but nowadays there is a something like a television set in the Sierra Nevada. In a special place, at night, something like a screen

emerges and changes, showing different images ... the Mother of the Image is in the Sierra, she is the mother of all images, of the mirror, of the television...

Indigenous interest in film production started when the traditional sacred authorities felt the need to look for outside allies to save the Sierra and their communities. The many violent conflicts of Colombia (guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries, drug cartels, multinational and local companies and even illegal miners extracting natural resources) had intensified to new levels in the past two decades. According to Arhuaco director, Amado Villafaña (in Zhigoneshi 2009),

Everything about the land is sacred, it encompasses our fathers and mothers; taking a picture is to strip the land and to expose it to the outside. But from 2002 on, the situation became more difficult, there are combats between paramilitaries and guerrillas and we were left in the middle, threatened by both sides. Arhuako, Wiwa, Kogi and Kankuamo indigenous people have been killed. The security of the people in the Sierra became an issue and this is why the Mamos made the decision to communicate what is going on to the outside world and to insist that by principle we never share the idea of violence.

On a scene of the television series 'Palabras Mayores', created by Zhigoneshi, Wiwa producer Saúl Gil (in Zhigoneshi 2009) explained some of the issues they have had to face:

In order to produce this television series we had to introduce the Mamos into the process of interviewing. They were not used to talking in front of the camera. They are used to talk without limits, day and night. They were not pleased to be asked to speak for two or five minutes, and felt that things were left incomplete. But we were all learning and had to tell them when to finish.

The collaboration between the indigenous communities that inhabit the Sierra Nevada in the Zhigoneshi collective lasted for more than ten years. For many reasons, though, the Wiwa people decided to break away from it and form their own Bunkuaneiumun collective, which premiered its film, *Ushui*, at the International Documentary Festival of Bogotá (MIDBO).

In this article, we the authors – non-indigenous, urban, 'Third-World' academics – want to expand the comprehension of that situated perspective through a quasi-ethnographic, reflexive analysis of the production process of the film, based on our ongoing relationship with knowledge sources directly or indirectly related to the film.

Ushui addresses issues faced by a Wiwa couple after they descend from the Sierra to visit a nearby city. The woman is pregnant. During their visit to the city they experience the impact of modern life with its noise, pollution, exploitation of nature and discrimination against indigenous people. When they return to their land, the woman starts to feel sick. The couple talks to the community's authorities, and it is

recommended that the woman undergo a healing and cleaning process, to be carried out by the community's wise women, the *sagas*, at a sacred place called the Ushui.

The Wiwa documentarists are all men. They want to film the healing process inside the Ushui, but men are usually not allowed to enter the sacred precinct. They realise that they have to ask permission from the *sagas* and the other community authorities. After a process of deliberation, shown in the film, members of the team are allowed inside the Ushui to film the healing process and record the teachings of the *sagas*. They are given specific instructions about what can and cannot be shown. We follow the recovery of the Wiwa woman, her participation in singing and dancing rituals, and the pilgrimage she makes with her family to the seashore at the climax of the healing process.

This is a brief description that we, mestizo academics, construct from a 'Third-World' urban setting. It is a product of our peculiar audiovisual literacy, based on years of contact with modern epistemologies, Western cinematography and perspectives based on what Pratt (1992) describes as the imperial gaze. Non-indigenous scholars frequently adopt a perspective described by feminist academics as that of modest witnesses (Haraway 2004) or what decolonial academics (Castro-Gómez 2004) describe as a point-zero-view, which hides or invisibilises their geocultural location and position in a field of power relations. As much as we try to make our position evident, and reflexively study and take into account our biases and habitus, there is no way to provide a transparent and comprehensive rendition of such a complex audiovisual text as *Ushui*. Numerous symbols, references and relations are inevitably missing from this brief description.

Analysing an indigenous film

We think that a film like *Ushui* is a complex expression of what Champutiz (2013) describes as cosmo-experiences, rather than cosmovisions. They are experience-based and lived forms of alterity that inform community organisation processes, and cultural and political actions. Champutiz argues that communication in general should be considered and analysed in regards to its context, its epistemological background and the cosmo-experiences that make it possible and give it meaning.

Sometimes people separate things: they say that we, indigenous people have a culture on one layer, identity on another, gender on another, education on yet another, when in fact, everything we are comes out of a cosmo-experience, not a cosmovision. I explain: it is not that we see things like this, we live this way. This is why I insist on talking about cosmo-experiences, not cosmovisions. When we understand audiovisual production as emerging from the cosmo-experiences of a community, we achieve a comprehensive understanding of the whole process: what we do is connected with what we think, feel and express. (Champutiz 2013: 131)

The concept of cosmo-experiences allows us to understand communication as a key part of social change processes. Cosmo-experiences are embodied knowledge forms that power actions in life, and affect how one relates to others, to oneself and to nature. Indigenous films help make cosmo-experiences visible.

In this article we focus on processes rather than on finished products, going beyond the semiotic or discursive scope of more conventional Film Studies scholarship and beyond the discussion of hypothetical audience effects, common in Communication and Media schools. To justify this focus we want to discuss the methodological approach put forward by Whiteman (2009), an approach described as issue-centered impact assessment. For this approach, the most significant impact of an audiovisual product is on the network of alliances that it helps create during its production process – alliances that make social change possible. To limit the analysis of a media product to its visible characteristics (presented to elite academics or experts through conference papers, journal articles or book chapters) or to the potential impact it may have on a wider public while circulating through saturated mediascapes once it is finished, is insufficient and even unrealistic. The study of the interactions and knowledge dialogues that take place during preproduction, production and circulation, between ethnic and urban organisations, experts, technicians, authorities, government officials, contractors and supporters, allows for a deeper understanding of political, decolonial and intercultural activism in the making. Whiteman's analysis emphasises the importance of everyday processes of informal, political education and interaction. These processes allow the recruitment of new supporters, the education and motivation of existing ones, and contribute to the consolidation of connected, decentralised networks of social actors interested in the issue addressed in the production, place it or prioritise it in the agenda of stakeholders, and elevate producers as valid (or even necessary) parties in public policy discussions and negotiations. We, the authors of this article, and even you, the reader, are now part of the issue network created by the indigenous producers of *Ushui*.

A film like *Ushui* is the result of a lengthy process involving a series of conversations inside the indigenous community, and multiple meetings of knowledges and intercultural interactions with people and organisations in government, the private sector and other institutions. Following Echeverry and Román (2008: 18), we understand the concept of meeting of knowledges as a Latin American tradition that values popular and ethnic knowledge and builds 'meaningful and useful knowledge for local subjects and their territory, a space of social relations. It is grounded knowledge, built on the exchange and negotiation of meanings.' It is communication across diverse cultural traditions on conditions of equality, acknowledging the deep wounds of coloniality, but allowing the parties involved to enjoy the transforming potential of the encounter. Participants may realise that intercultural interaction will

not always lead to agreements and the establishment of universal consensus (Cerbino 2002), but that all parties involved are transformed, and their consciousness of epistemic plurality and their own singularity enhanced. The intercultural interaction ignited through a meeting of knowledges detraditionalises (Fornet-Betancourt 2012: 18) indigenous communities, breaking down the dogmatic reduction of their alterity to outdated traditions that could be either exploited by the market or modernised by Eurocentric governments and institutions.

Analysing the production processes and the knowledge dialogues in *Ushui*

Some of the key issues the Wiwa people are struggling with, which can be linked to *Ushui*, have to do with gender and power/knowledge relations, the preservation of land, the appropriation of state-of-the-art audiovisual digital technologies, narrative styles and collaboration, and knowledge dialogues between indigenous producers and external collaborators.

According to Mora (2014), initially, indigenous communities in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region considered it preposterous that their people could use cameras. For them it was a painful process; their senior authorities, the *mamos*, possess a strong distrust, based on a history of colonialism and intrusion that goes back centuries, of things that come from the so-called modern world. For them, introducing audiovisual technologies to the Sierra was not just a question of appropriating devices, it was something

a lot deeper: how to introduce the technologies inside their cultural matrices without traumatizing them? For the Kogui, Arhuaco and Wiwa communities, the process began with the spiritual baptism of the cameras and with the realization that they were not really the property of white people, but had spiritual owners: the same owners of mirrors, of all images that shine, of televisions and therefore of cameras. The communities managed to incorporate the technology from their own cosmovisions. The works they create are born on their inside, this is the most interesting thing for me: they create their own works, with their own rhythms, perspectives and even their orality. (Mora 2014)

Rafael Mojica (pers. comm., 20 October 2014), one of the directors of *Ushui*, confirms Mora's perspective. He explained that the Wiwa senior authorities were concerned that the films could expose things that might put their communities in peril. The *mamos* were also worried that outsiders would sell the films for profit. The young members of the collective had to explain their goals in detail, reassure the *mamos* and promise that the films would only expose what the authorities allowed. Nowadays the *mamos* are more receptive because they have realised that audiovisual productions are useful for achieving the goal of finding new allies to defend their land and preserve their heritage. A scene in *Ushui* exemplifies this situation. The two

directors of the film, Roberto Mojica and Saúl Gil, are shown speaking to a *mamo*. A camera lies besides them. The *mamo* says:

I used to think that these tools were not useful to us but now I see that it is necessary to show the damage that men can cause to nature. We must record it and show it everywhere. This effort will help our little siblings (non-indigenous people) see and understand what is going on, and get to know our vision ... I approve of the pictures and of all that is recorded in video.

In *Ushui*, the simultaneous challenge of symbolic and technological appropriation by the Wiwa people also had to do with the use of sophisticated, high-definition digital cameras, of a brand ironically called Black Magic. The Wiwa audiovisual team had to design special transport and manipulation systems of their own, to film in their territory.

Another instance of knowledge dialogues and the construction of a thematic network that allows us to understand a film like *Ushui* from an issue-centered impact assessment perspective has to do with the interactions between members of the community and also between members of the production team. One of the first sequences of the film shows the production team discussing the topic and the script. We, the viewers, get to know from the dialogue that the film we are watching is intended for us, the little siblings. The discussion about the script deals with decisions about what can and cannot be shown to us, and how the film sequences can be made more interesting to an audience which is used to specific forms of action in films. We realise that we, the little siblings, cannot be shown and will not be able to understand everything, that we do not have the knowledge of a Wiwa man and least of all of a *saga*.

In films like *Ushui*, Mora (2014) explains, decisions about topics and scripts involve the whole community, based on spiritual consultation. The films are not the result of individual producers. Perhaps it is in the editing process that the members of the team with the most experience take individual responsibility (Villanueva 2014). The Wiwa team requested the help of anthropologist and film director and editor, Pablo Mora. The collaboration was a transforming instance for all those involved. The joint production effort was a result of constant and complex knowledge dialogues that Mora (2014) describes as ‘a decolonization exercise focused not only on audiovisual languages but also on production structures’. There are no real role distinctions within the production team; everybody is able to perform any task. According to Villanueva (2014), the absence of specialisation is strategic for the defense and security of the production collectives, frequently threatened as they are by armed groups.

Gender in the indigenous world: the moon and the sun, complementary wisdoms

Academic debates on the existence of gender lines within indigenous communities are sharp. Some feminists, especially in the West (De Beauvoir 1977) believe that the evolution of humanity created artificial gender lines that universally granted a hegemonic role to the masculine. ‘Women’ became aware of that artificiality and started to break barriers around the world in their struggle against a patriarchal order. Therefore, defending existing gender lines in ethnic communities is reactionary, a step back in women’s universal struggle against patriarchy. Other feminists (Lugones 2007; Oyewumi 1997) consider gender to be a Western creation that was imposed – during the colonial era and by the prevailing coloniality after political independence – on communities with other identity logics. According to Segato (2011: 31), these authors, ‘assert the absence of gender in the pre-colonial world’. This means that multiple expressions and experiences of gender exist in contemporary indigenous communities which would not be understandable from the perspective of Western binarism. Finally, there is a third group of feminists, to whom we feel closer – Segato (2011: 33) and Gautier (2005) among them – who believe that there is a great diversity of experiences of gender, including living, fluid, transgender identities in some communities, that are difficult to understand or categorise in terms of the Western binary sex/gender system (Rubin 1986). In some communities a specific gender identity has certain prerogatives (usually a low-intensity patriarchy). However, they insist that these communities have balances of power that prevent deep disequilibrium. Segato considers that the colonial intrusion and the subsequent republican coloniality pushed many indigenous communities towards becoming more patriarchal. They generated ruptures in internal control systems because of two factors: ‘Hyperinflation of men, in their role as intermediaries with the outside world of white people; and hyperinflation of the public sphere, ancestrally inhabited by men, with the collapse and privatization of the domestic sphere’ (Segato 2011: 34).

The Wiwa have not been exempt from the impact of modernity/coloniality and resulting processes of patriarchalisation. This might be why, in *Ushui*, we see a clear example of representations of women as ‘bearers of Indigenous knowledge and culture’ (Schiwy 2009: 109). According to Schiwy, this depiction is common in Latin American indigenous cinema, and the emphasis on gender is even more present than that of race in multiple productions. *Ushui* is another, particularly significant example of this trend. The film shows that particular gender differences persist and that the women of the community, guided by their *sagas*, preserve and defend their own spaces and political power; they have not been relegated to a disempowered domestic sphere. According to Mojica (pers. comm., 20 October 2014), ‘[w]e (the Wiwa) are privileged to have Sagas, the wise women, that other peoples do not.

Then, this is the inception of the idea of making the documentary.’ Mojica (2014) explains:

The Ushui is a sacred place that represents woman, the mother and mother earth; it is the place where knowledge is recreated, where girls and women go at all times to recreate the knowledge that has been transmitted from generation to generation, by the knowledge bearers, the Sagas.

The *sagas* are wise women and also spiritual musicians. Their music, as seen in the film, connects Wiwas with the sacred world. They are also traditional physicians, midwives and teachers of young and teenage women. Years of learning shape the *sagas*, give them their ritual knowledge, their ability to treat diseases and their status as masters to train other *sagas*. Their peers are the *mamos*, wise men associated with the sun, just as the *sagas* are associated with the moon. *Sagas*-moon and *mamos*-sun are the main Wiwa authorities. Their authority is based on their knowledge of territory, plants, rituals and the origin of the peoples of the Sierra. They know the ritual places where tribute payments must be made to ‘their owners or ancestral parents’ and are also the ones who make these payments ‘to maintain harmony in the natural and social order’ (Loaiza 2013: 152).

Ushui makes a singular effort to depict the complementarity between men and women and between the *sagas* and the *mamos* as spiritual authorities. In the first sequence of the film, the reflection of the moon, the stars and the clouds appears on rippling water. The soundtrack presents the sounds of the night, the crickets and cicadas, and the voiceover of a woman who says: ‘A single woman does not live well. This is why, at the beginning of the world, a couple was created: the sun and the moon. If the moon disappeared there would be no life.’ That image is interrupted to give way to the image of the sea on a beach of white sand; it is daytime. The film shows the transition from night to day, from the moon to the sun, from women to men. In the sequences which follow the protagonists are alternately men and women until, finally, men and women appear together.

The pregnant young woman is ill and her illness exhibits dualities that are exploited for the benefit of the story and the narrative. Her illness originated in a world that is not the Wiwa’s; it springs from an alien world that is shown as noisy, unhealthy and hostile. It is the world of the younger siblings. Disease comes from ignorance of the knowledge of the *sagas*, a knowledge that young Wiwa people have begun to lose. Mojica (pers. comm., 20 October 2014) explains that the film *Ushui* focuses on ‘the sacred space of women ... whose value is being lost, for people like you and even ourselves. Because of ignorance, rights are violated. When people visit our community they do not know if they can come inside (the Ushui). How do we show the sacredness of this place so things like this do not happen again?’

To heal herself and her baby of the malady generated by the visit to the city, the pregnant young woman must believe in the knowledge of her own people – a knowledge that is vanishing. The woman goes through various ritual moments during the film. First of all, she undergoes a ritual of healing with an old *saga* who massages her body and advises her to do what indigenous knowledge prescribes:

You must access spiritually that seed in you, so that at the time of delivery you will not have difficulties and childbirth will be easy. It was like this in the past, through us you know it was like that. When your child is born, the placenta must be stored in a clay pot and should not be buried the same day. This is what grandmas told us, after four days is the time to bury it. The burial should be made while singing a song. A hole is made and the placenta stored there. This is the correct order. If this knowledge is lost, there will be many difficulties in pregnancies. Therefore, to avoid having problems when pregnant, you must seek the mother of the river, grab a stick and place it on top of your belly. You must always keep it with you. After a long time you must throw it away to the stream. Will the stick remain idle in the river stream? No, right? So quick and easy your delivery will be.

Then she enters the Ushui, listening with other women, while they spin and weave, to a *saga* speaking about their training which starts in childhood. The ritual sequence continues with the visit of the pregnant young woman and her partner to the *mamo*, as recommended by a *saga*. The *mamo* tells them that for the woman not to experience difficulties in childbirth, the couple must make a tribute payment with some rocks found near the sea, ‘in the place where your parents originated’. The couple leaves the Wiwa territory. When they arrive at the seashore, they collect the rocks and make the payment. The man speaks to the woman about the damage the little siblings have done to sacred places. He speaks of devastation and death. Because of this process of destruction, Wiwas cannot be again as they were before, ‘they have damaged our book of knowledge’.

Ushui also engages with the Wiwa cosmo-experience of complementarity. According to Schiwy (2009: 120), ‘gender complementarity acquires paradigmatic value as it comes to stand for the possible coexistence of different orders of knowledge in indigenous media activism’. Having studied the discourses of gender complementarity in the Bolivian indigenous movement since the 1960s, Schiwy (ibid.) argues that some intellectuals of the time ‘invoked gender complementarity as a defining element that distinguishes indigenous from Western societies’. Similarly, she found elements of complementarity among the Shuar in the Ecuadorian Amazon and the Nasa in Colombia (ibid.). Discussions about gender complementarity often take place at exhibitions, festivals and audiovisual displays in which indigenous productions are put into circulation, and in which the Wiwa have participated with their work in the Zhigoneshi collective. Devoting a film to the sacred place of women and gender complementarity is not an accidental choice, but a communitarian

decision arising from deep concerns, questions and knowledge dialogues within the Wiwa community.

According to Pablo Mora, films produced by Zhigoneshi have been criticised by feminist scholars for featuring only the voices of the *mamos*. However, the directors of the Zhigoneshi films received these critiques with some reluctance, (pers. comm., 7 November 2015) ‘because they are based on an external gender perspective that pervades judgments about other cultures. According to indigenous producers, these judgements are wrong’. The critiques come from Eurocentric feminists who emphasise individualism and Western understandings of gender and sexuality (Paredes 2015). Espinosa (2014: 318) argues that

[m]any feminists living in the periphery have benefited from Western, ethnocentric conceptual frameworks, that produce their other as ‘(black, Indian, poor, lesbian, ignorant) women, from the Third World’. Yet they enjoy class and race privileges in their context. They might be at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues in the North, but in their own countries they are part of a project that makes agency and listening to the Latin American subaltern impossible.

There are evident differences between the Kogi, Arhuaco and Wiwa. The Kogi have attained significant external visibility thanks to their systematic interactions with anthropologists, especially (but not exclusively) through their contact with the famous Reichel-Dolmatoff (1985). A now long list of Colombian politicians, presidents and environment ministers have sought the ‘spiritual acceptance’ of the Kogi *mamos* as a way of polishing their public image. The Arhuaco have been known for their diplomatic and political skills. While the Wiwa have always been more hidden or less exposed, violence against them has been greater and, as a consequence, their language (Damana) is in danger of extinction. The disappearance of the language undermines their distinctive thought systems and discredits them in the eyes other ethnic groups.

When the communication agendas of the three peoples that formed Zhigoneshi diverged and the collective split, the first priority of the Wiwa (according to Mora) was the representation of the world of the *sagas*. The production of *Ushui* proves that the Wiwas not only have a great appreciation for their female spiritual authorities, but also implies that they are willing to present and highlight that knowledge as a specific feature of their culture and as distinctive in relation to the other peoples of the Sierra. In Mora’s (pers. comm., 7 November 2015) view, the violence from Colombia’s armed conflict ‘has sidelined women and diminished their social role compared to the one they played in the community three, four or five decades ago. This is why Mamo Ramon Gil and the community decided that the first film was going to be about Wiwa women, the Sagas’. *Ushui* attempts to rescue the importance of women’s knowledge through self-representation and the performance of their own culture (ibid.).

When asked about the gender composition of the Bunkuaneimun communication collective, Mojica (pers. comm., 20 October 2014) said that the team only included men and explained:

We too have asked that question. We really do not have the trained people, no women who have studied, who handle technological information. We do have the participation of the Sagas, and that was great, but they did it from a knowledge perspective, they are not part of the communication team. Some girls are being educated nowadays. Within four or five years we expect these women will be ready to perform the tasks that men currently perform.

Talking in general about the communication practices of indigenous women, Barbosa (2015: 157) reminds us that '[t]he fact that they do not do it through audiovisual media does not mean that they do not participate, but instead that they narrate and communicate on other levels'.

We believe that *Ushui* is the expression of a political subject in constant dialogue with other processes of social mobilisation. An indigenous audiovisual product like *Ushui* goes further than representing the essential characteristics of a culture; it allows us to follow and participate in the cultural, political, aesthetic and historical dynamics that shape the community's very existence. They are in themselves open windows onto what Mato (2001) describes as intellectual practices that take place in a globalised (or counterglobalised) world.

In these times of globalization the production of social representations by significant social actors – such as indigenous, civic, environmental, organizations, etc. – is related in various ways to their participation in transnational relation systems which also involve local actors from other countries and global actors ... All this does not imply that these local actors adopt without further criticism the social representations by global actors, but they instead develop them within the framework of these transnational relations. (Mato 2001: 4)

When addressing complementarity in an indigenous audiovisual production like *Ushui*, the Wiwa community is continuing a dialogue about the understandings of relations between women and men. The Wiwa cosmo-experience of complementarity, as presented in the film, is the counterpoint that the Wiwa producers provide to Western-based understandings of femininity and masculinity. This answer is articulated with a production of thought from indigenous Latin America, which is committed to problems the Wiwa currently face, such as: a disconnect from spirituality, climate change, the dynamics of knowledge/power in relation to environmental deterioration and the impact of neoliberalism.

Concluding remarks

Ushui is a film full of poetry and politics. Its apparent content seems to us to indicate the existence of cosmo-experiences that differ markedly from those common in Colombia's urban world. We notice the existence among the Wiwa of a low-intensity patriarchy, in which those whom we call men have certain prerogatives, while those whom we call women maintain their own spaces and defend a balance of power that prevents the radicalisation of patriarchy or acute power imbalances between genders.

Ushui and its production processes illustrate Wiwa cosmo-experiences in action. It represents their efforts to find allies and depicts their struggle to protect nature from the predatory and suicidal actions of those whom the Wiwa so rightly call 'little siblings'. The process that results in such a wonderful work as *Ushui* introduces its participants, both indigenous and external, to the politics of struggle at the same time as it questions us as perpetrators of androcentric, racist and developmentalist logics.

The main purpose of *Ushui* may be that of helping an indigenous community find external allies – as happened with most (if not all) the films by the Zhigoneshi communication collective – but this particular film, as Mora asserts, also attempts to help restore the role of the *sagas* as spiritual guides inside the Wiwa community. The film then is not only a product of self-representation that emphasises the role of the feminine, but also a projection of a desired future in which the *sagas* fully recover their ancient role in the Wiwa world. As Mora (pers. comm., 7 November 2015) points out,

That is perhaps one of the most important instrumentalities of audiovisual communication in the world of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. They not only want to communicate what they are. Making videos, producing research and debating internally what to do and how to do it, has also a performative effect on culture. [These measures] transform the culture, they open a new horizon of claims and cultural strengthening. This is the internal role of films such as *Ushui*.

Analysing the production processes of an indigenous film opens a door to a better understanding of the dynamics of social mobilisation underlying increased participation in audiovisual production by indigenous communities. It also, to some extent, draws scholars into the process. Indigenous films have goals that are evidently more political than aesthetic. Aesthetics are linked to cosmo-experiences, ethics and politics, gender discourses and the generation, circulation and recognition of knowledge from and among women. Indigenous peoples are a collective historical subject in permanent transformation, torn between change, recovery and conservation, always involving dynamics of negotiation, struggle and dialogue with their own institutions and the institutions that compose the nation-state. The audiovisual, with its processes and performative capacity, is a powerful means of representing and exploring these complexities.

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