

4. Crafting contemporary indigeneity through audiovisual media in Bolivia¹

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The turn of the millennium brought about significant transformations in Bolivia. From 2000 onwards, social movements comprising urban popular and middle classes, together with peasant and indigenous mobilisations, led two 'wars' against the privatisation of water and natural gas. Through these struggles, the movements managed to topple neoliberal President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003 and his successor Carlos Mesa in 2004.

Alongside the consolidation of an oppositional movement initiated in the 1980s by peasant unions and coca leaf producers – later transformed into the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) – the so-called 'wars' over natural resources in 2000 and 2003 set the stage for the historic election of 2005. This was notable for being the first time a representative of the Bolivian indigenous and peasant unions – Evo Morales – had received 54 per cent of the vote. Although further historical developments would later raise new challenges for, and ruptures within, the MAS government and the unique alliances that emerged between 2000 and 2007, during his first years Morales focused on creating the conditions for 'refounding the state' by involving social groups – in particular, indigenous peoples – that had historically been marginal to it. Hence, a few months after his inauguration, Morales responded to the demands of indigenous organisations to install a Constitutional Assembly, a process which resulted in a new political constitution being written in 2007 which had a distinctive focus on indigenous peoples' rights and redefined the Bolivian state as 'unitary and plurinational'.

The prominence of indigenous struggles during this extraordinary moment of national redefinition has generated transformations that not only challenge political and legal practices, but also contribute to redefining the role of indigeneity within the new state. This chapter explores a particular aspect of this redeployment of indigeneity in contemporary Bolivia by analysing the work of a group of mediamakers who are creating audiovisual productions

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to fortify recent social mobilisations.² The Plan Nacional Indígena Originario de Comunicación Audiovisual (National Plan of Indigenous Communication) is a non-governmental initiative coordinated by three entities: a group of indigenous and non-indigenous filmmakers who form the Centro de Formación y Capacitación Cinematográfica (Film Training and Production Centre – CEFREC); an organisation of indigenous mediamakers from different regions of Bolivia: Coordinadora Audiovisual Indígena Originaria de Bolivia (Indigenous Audiovisual Coordinating Body from Bolivia – CAIB); and Bolivia's five national indigenous and peasant confederations.³ As Himpele (2008) argues, indigenous media within the Plan Nacional have been instrumental in producing and circulating contemporary images of indigeneity that attempt to challenge dismissive stereotypes of the Indian, while complementing recent efforts undertaken by the government and social movements to reimagine indigenous participation in national political life.

While it is true that indigenous mediamakers are actively creating and disseminating new, self-conscious images of indigeneity, my argument here is that these practices are simultaneously circumscribed by the structural and historical conditions moulding how mediamakers see themselves and their realities. These conditions include the visual repertoires that demarcate and inform indigenous film aesthetics and narratives; the ways in which image production is affected by different audiences' expectations of indigenous films; and how indigenous mediamakers learn to interact with varied publics and cultural brokers in film festivals and markets. Thus, contemporary depictions of indigeneity in Bolivia are not only structured by First Peoples' efforts in creating their own images, but also by the expectations and meanings that indigenous and non-indigenous audiences invest in these images, a process inevitably mediated by the cultural and economic dynamics of circulation and consumption. The tensions surrounding such depictions may be illuminated by examining the extent to which indigenous media production challenges, or contributes to, the commodification, exoticisation or spectacularisation of indigeneity.

- 2 Mediamaker or *comunicador* is the term that Plan Nacional members use to describe the collective and political nature of their work, as opposed to 'filmmaker', a term they associate with an individual artistic trajectory. Nevertheless, throughout this chapter I refer to Plan Nacional productions and activities as films and filmmaking, since they broadly describe a genre beyond specific formats (although all Plan work is produced in video format).
- 3 These confederations are: Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (Bolivian Indigenous Peoples' Confederation – CIDOB), Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia (Union Confederation of Migrant Settlers of Bolivia – CSCB), Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Bolivian Peasant Workers – CSUTCB), Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qollasuyo (National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyo – CONAMAQ) and Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas y Originarias de Bolivia 'Bartolina Sisa' (Bartolina Sisa National Federation of Indigenous and Peasant Women of Bolivia – FNMCIQB-BS).



Figure 4.1. CAIB communicators shooting an indigenous march in the Bolivian Highlands, 2003. Photo courtesy of CEFREC-CAIB.

After briefly summarising the Plan Nacional's history and method, this chapter will discuss three main aspects of media production: i) the ways in which films resist or reproduce the existing visual repertoire, which often draws on discriminatory or essentialising stereotypes of indigeneity; ii) how indigenous mediamakers emerge as spokespersons, and how their authority is mediated by their interaction with diverse audiences and by distribution politics; and iii) the kinds of tensions these mediamakers experience in relation to issues such as collective authorship, property, status and recognition of their work.

The development of the Plan Nacional de Comunicación Audiovisual

Since 1997, the Plan Nacional has worked with indigenous communities and with the powerful peasant and indigenous confederations to produce and disseminate videos that build upon their social and political reality.⁴ The Plan has always remained independent of state funding, since its main supporters

4 Following the changes brought about by the Constituent Assembly, the Plan Nacional redefined itself as a communication system, changing its name to Sistema Plurinacional de Comunicación Indígena Originario Campesino Intercultural (Plurinational System of Indigenous, Originary, Peasant and Intercultural Communication), and thus encompassing all indigeneity ascriptions acknowledged by the new constitution in 2007.

are international organisations, particularly the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and Spain. All the mediamakers, self-identifying as indigenous peoples from different regions of Bolivia, have been appointed by their organisations to participate in the scheme. While many are leaders with an in-depth knowledge of, and wide-ranging experience in, organising within their regions, others previously worked as popular reporters in community radio stations prior to being involved with the Plan. These indigenous mediamakers are situated in a unique political space that demands previous knowledge and engagement with the struggles of indigenous peoples, an active involvement in debates led by community leaders, intellectuals and government representatives, and technical knowledge of media technologies such as video and radio. In addition, indigenous community members and organisations participate in various stages of video production such as scriptwriting, acting, staging and distribution activities.

In the early days Plan Nacional productions focused on documenting cultural aspects of indigenous life, sometimes creating fictional films based on oral stories, but since 2004, the Plan has concentrated on more explicitly political content, including documentaries and fiction films that recreate and dramatise political problems confronting indigenous communities and organisations. Responding to the socio-political moment, from 2006 onwards, the Plan started to foster a debate among communities and organisations from different regions of Bolivia regarding a series of proposals to be negotiated at the Constituent Assembly. For this purpose, it developed a special project called *Estrategia de Comunicación, Derechos Indígenas Originarios y Asamblea Constituyente* (The Strategy for Communication, Indigenous Rights and the Constituent Assembly).⁵ The three-pronged approach of this comprehensive strategy includes: the political and technical training of mediamakers and promoters from different regions; the collective production of fiction and documentary videos that express the main demands of indigenous movements to build a plurinational state, addressing topics such as intercultural health and education, land and territory, natural resources, gender equality and self-determination; and distribution campaigns through touring workshops and itinerant video screenings among communities and in cities, as well as radio and television broadcasting at community, regional and national levels.

Owing to the communication strategy's emphasis on collective work and its ambitions for political transformation, film production and distribution generally involve a great deal of negotiation and disagreement among

5 After the Constituent Assembly had concluded, the training activities undertaken by the Communication Strategy became the basis for founding the *Escuela Integral de Liderazgo Indígena en Derechos, Género y Comunicación* (Integral School of Indigenous Leadership in Rights, Gender and Communication).



Figure 4.2. Production of Bolivia Constituyente television programme, Sucre, 2006. Photo courtesy of CEFREC-CAIB.

mediamakers, organisation representatives, trainers and professionals who participate in the Plan Nacional. The latter's permanent collaboration with national indigenous and peasant confederations, together with the fact that indigenous peoples in Bolivia constitute a demographic majority of over 60 per cent of the population, allows for a unique national scope, unlike other indigenous media projects based in Latin America, such as those developed in Mexico – especially those derived from the Transference of Audiovisual Media to Indigenous Communities and Organisations Programme, created by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenista Institute – INI) around 1989 in Mexico (Wortham, 2002), and the Video in the Villages project created in Brazil in 1987 as part of the Centre for Indigenous Advocacy (Centro de Trabalho Indigenista) (Turner, 2002; see also Aufderheide, 1995). Although these projects have achieved significant expansion and original, good-quality production, their regional developments within larger countries, and the fact that indigenous populations constitute a demographic minority in these nations, limit their potential to broker nationwide alliances and augment their reach.

Most Plan Nacional indigenous mediamakers agree that the technological possibilities of video to disseminate knowledge about indigenous struggles

have offered an invaluable contribution to the participation of these peoples in national political life. This sentiment gathered strength from the late 1990s, particularly in 2003 after the achievements of indigenous movements, which were followed by the electoral triumph of Evo Morales in December 2005. The opportunities that have arisen for the Plan to adapt itself to changing political situations are due, in part, to the fact that its members define it more as a 'process' than as a specific communication project, an aspect that underlines its unfinished, ever-changing and long-term character. Yet, despite their emphasis on present and future depictions of indigeneity, Plan Nacional productions remain influenced by an existing repertoire of discriminatory images of First Peoples.

Crafting 'new' images of indigeneity

While indigenous films seek to resist and respond to the legacy of these images, they often (sometimes unintentionally) reproduce exoticist displays (Himpele, 2008; Raheja, 2011). In other words, when producing their films, indigenous mediamakers are constantly caught between portraying realistic, though problematic and contradictory, aspects of life in their communities and employing a visual repertoire characterised by what some anthropologists have termed 'Indigenism' (Ramos, 2001) or an 'American Orientalism' (Coronil, 1997). As Ramos argues in relation to Brazil, this repertoire is built from the vast collection of 'images, attitudes, and actions that both non-Indians and Indians have produced along the history of the country's interethnic front' (2001, p. 2). This scenario underscores the fact that the mediamakers' gaze is not autonomous from the social and historical context in which they live. In the Bolivian case, the visual repertoire is historically constructed through colonial, postcolonial and nationalist dynamics that have normalised certain imaginaries of indigenous peoples, for instance, through early 20th-century film, photography, mural painting and literature in the indigenista tradition. This ideological current depicted Andean peoples as 'telluric', that is, with a mysterious, opaque, earthy and untameable nature comparable to the rocky and rough geography of the Andean mountains (Sanjinés, 2006; Vargas, 2007). Other significant interpretations included the manipulation of images of the Indian to symbolise a miserable past, which, via the 1952 National Revolution, would be overcome by forging a single national mestizo race (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2003, p. 84).

From the 1990s, contemporary representations of indigeneity have been influenced by the reemergence of indigenous movements in Latin and North America, Australia and New Zealand. Images of Zapatista soldiers defending their autonomous territories with makeshift weapons in Mexican jungles,

or of native Canadian people protesting with drums and chants against the exploitation of natural resources, have circulated widely through international media mobilising an imaginary of indigenouness as intrinsically revolutionary, politically coherent, community-oriented and environmentally respectful. Since Evo Morales took up his presidency, Bolivia has become a focal point for projections of this imagery, which fetishises indigenous struggles, political successes and autonomy, along with specific approaches to resource sustainability. This depiction often overlooks internal stratification and fragmentation within communities and organisations, as well as the often-contradictory ‘indigenous’ practices relating to natural resources.⁶ Following Alcida Rita Ramos, I would argue that this imagery, while effective for indigenous struggles, could be regarded as a means of essentialising and exoticising the romantic colonialist images mentioned above (Ramos, 2001, p. 9; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003).

Indigenous mediamakers as spokespeople

Both when producing a film with specific audiences in mind, and when presenting their videos in public spaces and institutions, indigenous mediamakers are continually negotiating their political and artistic involvement in media production within already-established dynamics and markets. This apparatus in many ways dictates what their films should look like, or how an indigenous representative should dress, speak, or behave before a non-indigenous audience. The mediamakers who participate in the Plan Nacional are situated in a social space which demands that they act as spokespeople for indigenous struggles, or as intermediaries between their communities and organisations, and the various audiences who watch their films. As in the case of political leaders and other intermediaries, this position requires mediamakers to learn the existing mechanisms for displaying indigeneity, to act within them and to manipulate and mobilise ciphers of indigeneity accordingly.

As mentioned above, such mediamakers are usually appointed by their organisations, meaning that their work is not seen as part of a personal career but rather as supporting broader political structures in search of collective goals, for instance, those advocating indigenous participation in national politics. This orientation is also marked by the fact that they receive training through the Plan that is both technical and political. In this regard, both as authors and

6 The TIPNIS conflict in 2011 clearly illustrates such contradictory practices regarding natural resources and territory among indigenous organisations in Bolivia. Evo Morales's approval for constructing a highway in the Amazonian region known as the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore (Indigenous Territory and Isiboro Sekure National Park – TIPNIS) led to a series of protests from both indigenous sectors that had originally supported the MAS government and other middle- and working-class sectors throughout Bolivia.

representatives, mediamakers learn to speak in a collective voice, which often involves exploring politics drawing from personal experience and the stories of people living through similar situations. Miguel Ángel Yalahuma, a Movima mediamaker from the Lowlands, offers a useful example of how he and his colleagues have approached political issues by basing films on experiences taken from their own lives. When presenting a script idea for *Renacer: historia de un Movima* (*To Be Born Again: The Story of a Movima Man*, 2005), he proposed a story of exploitation located within the cattle *estancias* (ranches) in Beni's eastern department:

Then, I presented my script, a story based on the reality of my town ... Before, the cattle owners were Movima people, but not any more. Now Movima people are the employees, the exploited ones. So I based my story on that ... because my family lived through that, right? And I started writing. My dad's family owns cattle. My mother's too. But there were various deceits; that's how rich people took cattle and land away from them. That's when my family decided to leave everything and come back to town. That was in 1982. That same year my town also suffered a flood. So everything was lost, so we had to start over again. By 1988 we were in the *estancia* [hacienda] again working for the *patrones* [bosses] because there was no other job. That's where I grew up until I was ten or 12. I only started school when I was 12.⁷

While documenting the experience of his own family working for the *patrón* (boss) in the hacienda, Miguel Ángel's film also tells a story common to most Movima families of the region. Another film, *Venciendo el miedo* (*Conquering Fear*, 2004) brings together a series of personal experiences of domestic violence and gender discrimination into a fictional storyline about the gender tensions that families suffer in a tropical community in the north of the La Paz region. These examples illustrate how mediamakers value their own and other people's personal experiences for their potential to expose collective issues through fiction films. In this sense, depictions of indigeneity rely on the authority that mediamakers, as spokespeople or mediators of their realities, have gained to render their personal and community stories collective in a first-person voice.

Mediamakers' concerns about the appropriate representation of indigenous struggles and their awareness of potential audiences' responses to their films also affects their depictions of indigeneity. While many films portray internal conflicts within communities in terms of land distribution, gender discrimination or community justice, these conflicts are generally resolved on screen through peaceful dialogue and consent, which is not always the case

7 Miguel Ángel Yalahuma, interview with the author, La Paz, July 2006.

in reality. Furthermore, Plan Nacional productions have sought to omit or to negatively represent aspects of indigenous culture that could be regarded as 'polluting' influences or indicators of a loss of 'authenticity', but that are undeniable aesthetic references for most mediamakers and communities. These elements, widely consumed in peasant markets in provinces and cities, include *chicha* music;⁸ comic TV shows, like the *Cholo Juanito*, that ridicule indigenous life; videoclips with folklorising indigenous music and dances from different regions of Bolivia; and American or Asian action films. Despite the interaction between indigenous and 'outside' communities and cultures, Plan Nacional videos rarely portray this dynamic. When such elements appear in a film, they are used to accentuate the construction of urbanised characters who are losing their identity. These examples demonstrate that Plan film production involves self-conscious negotiations over how indigeneity should be presented to different kinds of audiences, notably whether communities should be portrayed as harmonious and politically coherent, whether audiences should learn about their conflicts and possible resolutions, and whether identity contradictions should be depicted in ideal or realistic ways.

The dynamics of distribution, including both the mediamakers' negotiations with established film markets and their interaction with different audiences, also inflects the Plan's representation of indigeneity through film production. Plan Nacional members do not wish their films to circulate as commodities in themselves so the majority of their screenings are accompanied by presentations and debates led by mediamakers. This formula is adapted to different venues: while film screenings in rural communities are often developed as part of informational campaigns, those in cities are organised as debate forums in which after-film discussions about specific topics are encouraged. Alternatively, films presented at international festivals are usually followed by a question-and-answer session. This conception of films as motors for public debate prioritises their consumption as educational or informational tools, thus diminishing the importance of private or entertainment usage. This particular approach to film circulation, common to many projects with a political orientation, involves a great deal of negotiation with established film markets (even independent circuits), particularly in relation to their demand that copies be packaged and sold to viewing publics independently of discussions led by the producers. So, while educational institutions and film distributors have asked to buy or distribute Plan Nacional films, this remains a controversial

8 The popular *chicha* music distils and brings together traditional Andean rhythms like *huayno* with tropical rhythms such as *cumbia* and *guaracha*.

issue for the organisation's members.⁹ Other anxieties surrounding distribution dynamics focus on pre-existing funding and distribution structures that prioritise individual over cooperative authorship; the risk of falling prey to piracy networks; the need to negotiate with funders to maintain control over themes and film circulation; and internal debates within the Plan about how to use the potential earnings generated from the sale of videos in ways that benefit all those involved in the production. I argue that the medimakers' continuous negotiations regarding distribution demonstrate that, far from allowing indigenous medimakers to remain autonomous from a capitalist market logic (Schiwy, 2009), current distribution mechanisms dictate the still-limited circulation of Bolivian indigenous films.

The images produced by the Plan Nacional films are also informed by an awareness of distribution dynamics, depending on their differentiated engagement with specific audiences, and may oscillate between communicating politically radical messages, reinforcing discourses on cultural identities, or adding to multicultural versions of nationalism. For example, *Aymaranakan sarawinakapa* (*Aymara Traditional Democracy*, 2003), a film on the potential for Aymara political and religious forms of organisation to challenge Western ideas about democracy, was originally intended to echo demands raised by indigenous peoples' mobilisations of the time, which, a few years later, became central to the Constituent Assembly debates. In the context of its production, the goal of this film was explicitly political because it called viewers to imagine alternative ways of understanding democracy beyond its liberal, individually-oriented principles. In 2005, it was screened at First Nations\First Features, a prestigious international showcase organised in New York City and Washington, DC by academic, artistic and cultural institutions and featuring representative indigenous films from various parts of the world.¹⁰ Audiences at the festival venues in which it was shown comprised film specialists, academics and activists. In addition, Latin American migrant organisations invited Patricio Luna, the film director, and other Latin American participants, to screen their films at a community celebration. In this international context, although a section of the public was engaged with the political aspects of the film, most of the audiences, including the ones attending the community event, highlighted its cultural value and its contribution to understanding Bolivia as a culturally diverse nation. Attention was drawn to aspects representing

9 Only recently, the Plan Nacional agreed to sell, for the first time, a limited number of films to the Princeton University Library. For a list of the productions PUL has acquired, search for 'CEFREC-CAIB' on: http://searchit.princeton.edu/primis_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=PRINCETON (accessed 26 Sep. 2013).

10 The Festival-organising institutions were the National Museum of the American Indian, New York University and New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA).

Aymara cosmovision, including rituals, symbols, decoration and clothing, as well as to images that could pass as emblematic of Bolivia, such as Andean rural people and landscapes. The Bolivian Embassy functionaries who had partly sponsored the event were at the time representing a government confronted by indigenous struggles, and seemed to value the film more in terms of its national representation in a prestigious international event than for its foregrounding of the indigenous movement's demands.

This example demonstrates how the value and meaning attributed to images of indigeneity not only depends on the medi makers' intentions, but also varies according to the contexts in which the audiences consume the films. In this instance, the different screenings of *Aymaranakan sarawinakapa* shifted discussion of the film away from its overtly political claim for indigenous self-determination, recasting it instead as an official celebration of indigenouness as part of the nation's cultural diversity. This example is not intended to establish a dichotomy between culture and politics, nor to oversimplify the more complex interpretations audiences may make of the films. Rather, this case is a useful illustration of how a film, originally intended to support a series of mobilisations *against* the neoliberal Bolivian government of the time, lost its political potency when shown to audiences who prioritised its cultural content within a space created for presenting films of indigenous peoples as minorities, one which also, in some ways, permitted a spectacle of multiculturalism.

The differentiated ways in which indigenous medi makers and audiences engage with images of indigeneity are linked to the technological characteristics of audiovisual media. On the one hand, the possibilities of reproduction and transportation permit the circulation of films among the various audiences described above. On the other, as with photography, film mechanics are based on an 'indexical' record of what appears before the camera – people, objects and places featured in the film were actually there at the moment of shooting. Film and video images constitute, therefore, a trace of things that actually existed. Aside from creating a sense of reality, this indexical record allows for an 'excess' of visual information that escapes the context of production and allows audiences to concentrate on details that the producers do not necessarily intend.¹¹ For instance, if a film recreates the scene of a community celebration to emphasise local unity, the record of this scene might also show people dressing, preparing food or rehearsing dance steps, and it could encompass images of the place in which the event takes place, and even of improvised interactions or gestures among actors. All these details can be planned, or not, for the recording, but they will doubtless provide additional elements for audiences to generate their own readings. In this way, images of indigeneity are

11 I take the concept of indexicality from Roland Barthes's work on photography (1981), and the notion of 'excess' from Deborah Poole's work (2005).

not only crafted by their producers, but also by what audiences interpret from their focused attention to specific visual details in the context of their own cultural and/or political expectations.

Finally, the ways in which indigenous mediamakers learn to act as legitimate representatives of their communities and organisations when they have to present and discuss their films before different kinds of audiences also influence distribution dynamics. At such events, mediamakers act as experts of the realities presented either because they lived them directly or because, through their films, they are supposed to bring forward the voices of people acting in them. The audiences often expect to become enlightened and informed by these first-hand experiences. In this sense, these mediamakers' public presentations in these institutional and civil spaces are yet another form of negotiating with existing economies of display in which presenters are expected to 'look' or to 'behave' like an indigenous representative. Wearing traditional outfits, greeting the audience in a native language and of course explaining the film's content as an insider are some of the transactions that occur between mediamakers and spectators at national and international film venues.

Such displays of indigeneity are often combined with what some authors have called 'performances' of professionalism (Himpele, 2008; Turner, 2002) in which indigenous mediamakers publicly demonstrate their savvy operation of technological equipment. Film screenings, then, constitute an additional strategy for publicly mediating indigenous struggles. Here, the work of Ramos on Brazilian indigenous leaders illuminates the ways in which these mediamakers appropriate technologies while also emphasising their cultural differences:

Indigenous people in the country are now matching their traditional ways of expression to such Western channels as writing, video, tape recording, radio, and television. But it seems that these new media are not displacing old models of thought; rather, they are providing indigenous peoples with more effective means to conduct their struggle for recognition as legitimate Others. (1998, p. 139).

Ramos uses the figure of the 'interethnic Indian' to explain the mechanisms that indigenous peoples develop to collaborate and negotiate with non-indigenous agents so they can make themselves visible by simultaneously emphasising their national belonging and their difference (1998). Analysing the kind of issues that indigenous activists encounter when confronting the mandate of bureaucratic institutions, particularly indigenist NGOs, Ramos argues that they are pressured to perform 'the perfect Indian whose virtues, sufferings, and untiring stoicism have won for him the right to be defended by the professionals of indigenous rights' (1992, p. 9). Similarly, indigenous mediamakers are required

to develop strategies to both assert their legitimacy as artists and political representatives during their presentations at international events, and to signify their difference. In these spaces, the relationships that these mediamakers cultivate with international audiences, activists, film distributors, producers, funders, festival organisers, and even with state authorities such as embassy representatives, put into play issues of status, notions of personal and political achievements and actual political alliances, as well as unexpected interactions with political antagonists. While becoming conversant in all these different, and sometimes unexpected, scenarios, indigenous mediamakers might also foster, as Ramos would say about the Brazilian scenario, the 'effective means to conduct their struggle' (1998, p. 139). These processes of presenting themselves before different audiences are regulated by tensions surrounding their status among other mediamakers, who are permanently joking or commenting about how their colleagues learn, for instance, to dress as a 'real' Indian or to speak about the national situation when attending an international festival. This tension requires us to ask who is authorised to represent a specific community or situation, and what are the different scenarios in which this authority becomes possible or even necessary.

Ambiguities around collective authorship

The emphasis on collective authorship is the most distinguishing aspect of the Plan Nacional's work. The Plan defines those in charge of productions as '*responsables*', and not as 'directors' or 'filmmakers', in order to highlight that the production process is cooperative and does not rely on a specific individual or author. Indeed, this conception of authorship seeks to prioritise collective political commitment over personal benefit. Although most teams comprise indigenous videomakers and non-indigenous *técnicos* (facilitators), who are in charge of productions and who offer their own aesthetic and narrative input, the contributions made by the communities and political organisations that participate in scriptwriting, shooting and distribution activities are also significant.

As positive as this notion sounds, the process of collective authorship is far from the friendly attribute that some mediamakers have described as 'the essence of indigeness'.¹² There are numerous tensions concerning property, recognition and status, the mediamakers' relationship with funders and distributors, and authenticity. For example, although most of the former work according to the principle of collective authorship, the individual processes of learning they undertake and the satisfaction they feel when, for instance, a video is finished, or when it wins awards at international festivals, do not

12 Franklin Gutiérrez, CEFREC, interview with the author, La Paz, May 2007.

seem to sit easily with a commitment to all the people who made it possible. The emphasis on the principle also introduces the question of how much a cooperative production strengthens or limits the creative possibilities of specific individuals, and how much the collective label conceals the relationships that competition triggers between mediamakers. This issue is reflected, for instance, in the anxiety and tensions which emerge when it is being decided who will be selected to attend an international festival, or in the jokes and resentment expressed by some mediamakers against those who attract attention. Likewise, the notion of collective authorship conceals the individual quest of some mediamakers for recognition. While most of them acknowledge that they do not work for money, or to become 'film stars', some have expressed concerns regarding the scarce monetary compensation they receive for their work. Moreover, although most mediamakers garner recognition from their families, communities or organisations, the fact that their work involves international trips and funding, as well as handling expensive video equipment, sometimes generates suspicion among the groups they seek to represent. As Wortham notes in her work on Mexican indigenous media (2004), this phenomenon is common to other such community projects and even to wider peasant and indigenous organisations (Edelman, 1999). At the same time, international funding and grant mechanisms, in their attempts to acknowledge the mediamakers' talent, often contravene their collaborative and local commitments, for instance, when offering individual grants to indigenous producers involved in processes of collective authorship (Córdova, 2005). This aspect represents yet another instance of how the mediamakers' role as political representatives situates them in the middle of external and internal pressures that condition their ability to respond coherently to the different subjects involved in media production and distribution.

The emphasis on collective authorship is not merely evident at the level of discourse, however, as it has also influenced the formal results of films in terms of length, narration and quality. Such aspects are constantly negotiated not only within production teams, but also with the communities and organisations they seek to represent, as well as with the varied audiences and markets they are attempting to reach. On this point, CEFREC founder and trainer Franklin Gutiérrez noted:

I think audiovisual production results from the ability to negotiate and achieve consent on what we want to tell and how we are going to tell it. And this happens between different groups: the original owner of the idea, the production team, and the community with which you work. And then at a larger level there are still the Confederations, in the case of the Communication Strategy, who have to decide if the message is in tune

with their political goals. So, the Communication Plan is a permanent process of negotiation, coordination and planning.¹³

Gutiérrez explains that ‘negotiation’ and ‘consent’ are conditional aspects of collaboration within the Plan Nacional. The acknowledgment of these two elements elucidates the significance of power dynamics in this communication process. The intense negotiation that takes place regarding aspects of video production, such as aesthetics and narrative and stylistic innovations, proves that it does not represent a coherent and common practice for all its members. Nor does video production express a pre-existing root, essence or cosmovision that defines an ‘indigenous’ way of doing things. Instead, it is possible to identify numerous objectives and battles at the moment of defining, for instance, how the story will be told, how a character should dress, or how s/he should react to specific situations. Thus, far from being an essential feature of indigenous films – and of indigeneity itself – collective authorship constitutes fertile ground for interrogating this notion, as well as a productive strategy to stimulate negotiation, debate and consent concerning how indigeneity can ‘best’ be depicted, who should assume authorship of this process, and what audiences they are targeting.

Conclusion: commodify, exoticise, spectacularise

My efforts to understand the kinds of tensions that inform contemporary depictions of indigeneity, produced by a group of indigenous mediamakers in Bolivia, has led me to question how such processes involve a two-fold relationship with varied film audiences, within which funders and distributors also play an important role. This relationship situates mediamakers in a conflicting position, in which they fight against – while sometimes unintentionally reproducing – the imagery and practices of display that commodify, exoticise or spectacularise indigeneity. By showing members of indigenous communities making decisions regarding the issues they face on a daily basis, the Plan Nacional films help to normalise an imaginary of indigenous peoples that did not exist previously in national politics. In this way, the productions contribute effectively to the forging of political pathways (Himpele, 2008). Scenes of community assemblies discussing the access of women to land ownership in films like *Venciendo el miedo*, images of a Moxeño community opposing a lumber company in *El grito de la selva* (*A Cry From the Forest*, 2008), or scenes recreating collective procedures to punish llama thieves in *Markasan jucha thakahuipa* (*Justice of our Peoples*, 2005) make visible daily life procedures that one decade ago did not form part of a national imaginary. Such scenes resituate indigenous peoples as politically active subjects who, drawing from their own experiences, are able to

13 Interview with the author, La Paz, May 2007.

play a part in the elaboration of laws and state policies, as occurred with the Constituent Assembly.

On the other hand, in their own representations, mediamakers engage with the aforementioned arsenal of (neo)colonial imagery: they are familiar with the ways in which First Peoples from Bolivia have been historically represented, as well as with stereotyped images of indigenouness mobilised in soap-operas, music videoclips and comedy shows. Although mediamakers seek to distance themselves from these stereotypes, their films are often informed by the aesthetics and imagery that preceded their productions. Plan Nacional images of indigenous peoples as wise and 'of the earth', or its reiterative uses of icons of indigenous struggles, such as the coca leaf, regional diversity, the *wiphala* flag and demonstrations, are not, then, entirely disconnected from recent representations of indigenouness that echo neocolonial forms of discrimination through new forms of exoticisation and the fetishisation of the struggles.

This chapter's emphasis on understanding circulation and consumption dynamics as critical aspects of indigenous film builds on the attention that anthropology has given to consumption 'as a constitutive part of commodity production processes' since the 1980s (Ferry, 2009, p. 59). The case analysed here highlights a paradox since the Plan Nacional is reluctant to circulate its productions as commodities and, therefore, to offer them to audiences in conventional ways, namely, by directly assigning films (products of their labour) an economic value. Yet, it is through circulation that films, as cultural products, acquire other kinds of value. Film screenings and the discussions that ensue provide the forum where mediamakers consider the different values that audiences attribute to their work, where they are asked to make their messages explicit and where they learn to speak for those they are expected to represent. Through their creative distribution strategies, mediamakers participate in the 'visual economy' of indigeneity, that is, in the process through which images and displays of indigeneity acquire value, recognition and meaning according to specific circulation dynamics and markets (Poole, 1997).

As the examples developed throughout this essay demonstrate, the legibility of politics – and in this case of indigenous struggles – relies to a great extent on processes of commodification, performance and spectacularisation. By becoming conversant in these particular modes of crafting indigeneity, these mediamakers, together with other representatives of Bolivian indigenous struggles, are effectively strengthening the presence of First Peoples in national politics. This presence builds its way through contradictions, a lack of coherency and the unintended reproduction of stereotypes, revealing that reappropriations of contemporary indigeneity in Bolivia are still struggling with, and are moulded by, the histories of inequalities to which they seek to

respond. In other words, echoing the long-standing debate about whether those in a condition of subalternity can 'speak' (Spivak, 1988) or 'be seen' (Grandin, 2004), the Plan Nacional raises questions about the extent to which contemporary displays of indigeneity paradoxically depend on the skills that medi makers develop in order to become conversant with an already dominant language established by indigenous media circuits.

Contemporary images of indigeneity displayed in Plan Nacional films, despite being constrained by power relations and historical dynamics, result from an interesting political practice, namely, from a space that generates debate, negotiation and disagreement about reality in order to envision alternative national futures. In this space, those participating in the production of films – including community members, leaders, medi makers and audiences – impress their personal experiences on fictional stories to bestow upon them both a sense of reality and their hopes concerning how this reality could be improved. In this way, films not only serve as sources for imaginaries but principally as sites for political intervention. By making reference to the political past, challenging the present, and imagining possible futures, fiction and documentary videos reenact the continuities and ruptures of national political projects in particular ways. The mechanisms through which indigeneity is being depicted in the Plan constitute political uses of history that are central to the demands that indigenous mobilisations have been making for over a decade of the emerging plurinational state in Bolivia.

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Filmography

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