UNLEARNING COLONIAL AND NATION-STATE HISTORY IN DOCUMENTARY FILM BY AND ABOUT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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This article opens by asserting that Latin American Indigenous media production and distribution processes challenge ethnographic documentary practice, and these stories and histories are narrated most effectively through Indigenous produced documentary, feature and animated film in culturally appropriate contexts. By foregrounding Indigenous peoples as sources and producers of knowledge not only about their own cultures or media practices, but also about social communication in the modern nation-states, citizens begin to unlearn colonial and nation-state history. Two films somewhat critique colonization and nation-state orthodoxy in this way because of Indigenous participation in their production: También la lluvia (2010) is analysed as it critiques social realist conquest film traditions using insights offered by those participating in the film, and documentary performs a central role in this critique. The documentary film Tierra adentro (2011) challenges the current nation-state narrative of citizenship in Chile and Argentina through a form of participatory documentary-making that relies on four historical precedents. The distribution of these films also furthers these goals.

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Indigenous communication begins by creating a pathway to freedom, engaged with reality and its transformation. Indigenous communication must become stronger by being present in Indigenous territories, among peoples and organizations, transversally and politically, as well as being a tool for undoing patriarchies, and raising intercultural and decolonizing dialogue. Thus, we restate that it has to keep the focus on historical struggles, exchanging content, and forming networks, as well as making us adopt a critical perspective on our own practices, so as to positively contribute to our peoples’ struggle. (Declaration of the Continental Pre-Summit for Indigenous Communication, La Paz, Plurinational State of Bolivia, 17 to 20, September, 2014)
This 2014 Declaration of Indigenous Communication (Bolivia) emerged from a media network that operates parallel to the expansion of social media in uprisings and occupations across the globe, suggesting renewed confidence in the performative role that audio-visual technologies may play in enabling citizens to communicate their specific goals for social transformation through activist networks (Poell). Although the varied platforms of these new media offer complex mediations that may mirror the mainstream media’s focus on protest as spectacle rather than on the proposals of activists, Poell explains that the highly visual aspect of this expanded distribution of documentary video is indisputable and serves as a potential tool for advocacy, which is nevertheless dependent upon the social and commercial networks already established in an environment where commercial media dominate (728). In analyzing these media, it is essential to locate them within the historical and social contexts where they are produced and distributed.

Indigenous peoples across the globe have been establishing television stations and independent media collectives to serve their communities by addressing myriad issues affecting their survival as peoples, from human rights violations in their territories to the maintenance and revitalization of languages and cultural practices, and from an outdated essentialist primitivism based on colonial fantasies to a commitment to protect Mother Earth.\(^1\) At the same time, these media address global inequities and other legacies of colonialism from their own contexts. In 2003, Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay coined the term “Fourth Cinema” to describe a way of conceptualising, producing and distributing film that is outside what he called “the nation-state orthodoxy of First, Second and Third Cinemas”.\(^2\) Through transnational networks, many Indigenous media producers participate in a process that was common for Third Cinema directors and feminists committed to the performative role of audio-visual media, uniting theory and practice, and the quotation from the 2014 Declaration above suggests these similarities. Clearly, the relationships strengthened through filmmaking facilitate ongoing reflection and theorizing from experience across diverse groups and nations that create new knowledge. However, in the Indigenous case, they do this by drawing on the long history of place, prior to colonialism and the construction of the modern nation-state.
This article will first focus on the decolonizing potential of the critique of the nation-state as one of the major contributions of Indigenous documentary practice. It asserts that citizens in modern nation-states cannot understand their own histories and world history more generally without learning stories and histories told by Indigenous peoples in their own words and images, narrated most effectively in their documentary, feature and animated film in culturally appropriate contexts. This approach to documentary foregrounds Indigenous peoples as sources and producers of knowledge not only about their own cultures or media practices, but also, and arguably more importantly, about social communication in the modern nation-states, where colonial legacies continue, in this case, in Abya Yala, the Americas. It is from these stories that citizens begin to unlearn both colonial and nation-state history.

After the first section, I will analyze two films, the feature También la lluvia (Even the Rain, 2010) and the documentary Tierra adentro (Native Land, 2011), to assert that the active participation of Indigenous peoples in the production of these films changed the original storyboard and script of the directors and allowed these films to somewhat decenter both the colonial and the nation-state orthodoxy that might have otherwise framed their work. It was through this process of unlearning that Spanish filmmaker Icíar Bollaín and Argentinean Ulises de la Orden were capable of communicating some decolonizing aspects of colonial history in the first case, and nation-state history in the second.

The confidence in the use of documentary video and film for social change reminds us of the theory and practice of Third Cinema filmmakers, whose alternative media projects under dictatorship from the 1960s to the 1980s formed part of the longer history of what Enrique Dussel has referred to as a philosophy of liberation. While the academic study of media in society continued during the dictatorship era, it flourished following the return to electoral democracy in the work of Ariel Dorfman, George Yúdice, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Néstor García Canclini and many others, ironically coinciding with governmental acts of media privatization. Gaining momentum especially in the neoliberal 1990s, the concentration of media ownership as result of privatization, both in telecommunications as well as print, reduced citizens’ participation in media production as well as their confidence in the role that major media conglomerates play, and more generally in the possibility that media might have any influence
in promoting social change. Over the last decade, however, social movements have organized, often using new social media, to force governments to reverse neoliberal orthodoxy in media policy by introducing new media laws.

The academic and legal analysis of the media’s role as accomplice of dictatorship is only now gaining attention, as part of a wider movement to force the state to reassert limitations on commercial media in the interest of promoting citizens’ rights to information and communication as basic human rights. These actions are emerging in parallel with Indigenous peoples’ leadership in securing their right to information and communication as approved in the 2008 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP), Article 16, which addresses the right to communication.

In comparing newer theoretical approaches to documentary film with previous studies of Third Cinema, an important social difference tends to be overlooked. Third Cinema was the first film theory developed outside of Europe or the United States, and Fernando Solanas is regularly cited by film specialists in Europe and the US as the authoritative source on the specificity of film in non-European contexts (Gabriel, Guneratne, Wayne, Willemen). Other Latin American practitioners of New Latin American Cinema such as Patricio Guzmán, Glauber Rocha, Julio García Espinosa and Jorge Sanjinés are regularly cited as filmmakers and producers of knowledge about their own national film traditions, but only Solanas (and to a lesser extent Octavio Getino) is regularly cited as a source on “Third Cinema”, a term introduced by Solanas and Getino to refer to a movement that encompassed not only Latin America but filmmakers of the “Third World as a political project.”

The inclusion of Solanas by European and US film theorists marks an epistemological shift or watershed parallel to the recent recognition of Latin American-born filmmakers who have gone global. In the case of theory, for the first time, a film practitioner from the “Third World” joined the ranks of European and US film theorists, cited as creating knowledge about film beyond his own national context. In the case of film production, Latin American directors such as Walter Salles, Fernando Mireilles, Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro González Iñárritu (many of whom have expressed their debt to New Latin American Cinema directors), have been lauded for their ability to gain access to the transnational market to tell
stories about the world, no longer limiting story-telling to characters and locations in Latin America. The fact that two Mexican directors won Oscars for best director in 2014, 2015 and 2016 contributes to this perception. Some theorists locate these directors as part of “World Cinema”, others as “Transatlantic or Transnational Cinema”, often critiquing the extent to which transnational co-productions reinforce rather than decolonize stereotypes (Dennison, Shaw, Perriam, Falicov).

These recent examples of Latin American participation in knowledge production about film, and in film production itself, may be an indication that the production of media knowledge from Latin America is entering a new phase in which it is no longer indirectly influencing media produced in the US and Europe, but is finally being recognized for producing original knowledge about the world that influences how media are used for larger goals of social communication. While their work has transcended the national context typical of film productions of the past, this may not, and probably does not in any way, contribute to the kind of transnational networking I describe here. However, the use of documentary style cinematography focusing on local stories in many of their films adds a sense of realism through the use of handheld cameras, ambient sound, archival footage and non-professional actors, among other conventions, that remind viewers of trends common to Third Cinema, as well as those taking place in Latin American cinema today.

Here I suggest something different, however, that Indigenous peoples are producing new knowledge about audio-visual media through their participation in the transformation of communication by decolonizing the relationships that make communication possible.

Scholarship on Third Cinema or New Latin American Cinema, or more recently in World, Transnational or Transatlantic Cinema Studies, has not included Indigenous media or their practitioners as knowledge producers or theorists in the field of media or in studies of films about Indigenous peoples and the nation-state. There are now excellent studies about Indigenous media produced in specific contexts, and studies of Indigenous media more generally by Faye Ginsburg, Freya Schiwy, Amalia Córdova, and Juan Salazar, among others. It is still rare, however, to have Indigenous film producers cited as producers of knowledge about film more generally, and there are few greater claims made about ways in which these media
represent important forms of social communication that inform the rest of the world about our shared history since the era of colonial conquest.

The increasing interest in Indigenous media is evident in the number of Indigenous themed film festivals, such as Toronto’s ImagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, Denver’s Indigenous Film & Arts Festival, New Zealand’s Wairoa Maori Film Festival, the Puebla Festival Internacional de Cine y Video Indígena, and in the work of the Coordinadora de Cine y Video de los Pueblos Indígenas or CLACPI, described below, among many others. The major distribution of Indigenous media work, however, follows alternative media networks and circuits, often using Internet. In studying their work and distribution policies, one can observe how they redefine what communication is and should be in contemporary societies because of the focus on decolonization.

**Visuality in the American Nation-State and the Ethnographic Documentary Tradition**

Nation-state theory has recently focused on the ways in which citizenship was constructed in the nineteenth century as the creole elite consolidated its hold over an emerging state designed to govern a heterogeneous set of indigenous nations and African and Euro-descendent settlers through new forms of visuality. Jens Andermann explains how the state required a set of optics that disavowed the violence involved in making this social transformation possible in Brazil and Argentina (2007). The audiovisual repertoire (museums, monuments to nineteenth-century generals, paintings of major battles, national anthems) even today speaks volumes about the optics of settler-indigenous history in the Americas, which normalize Eurocentric supremacy, as theorized by Andermann. In essence, the late nineteenth-century celebration of nation-state modernity was often represented as the moment when Indigenous nations who were living in these territories were military defeated.

An analysis of this confluence of social processes and visual technologies offers an explanation as to why from its inception ethnographic documentary so often chose indigenous communities as its preferred subject matter. The unstated goal of Europeans and Eurocentric settlers in the Americas was often to use audiovisual technologies to explain to themselves and others why and how settler communities were entering modernity, at the same time as they
explored why and how Indigenous communities responded differently to these overwhelming and “inevitable” transformations. The history of ethnographic documentary tends to privilege the distanced if at times sympathetic perspective and gaze of the Eurodescendent subject at the Indigenous individual or community within this context of an unstoppable march of modernity that implied the inevitable demise of Indigenous peoples.

Even the most socially engaged documentary producers, such as Argentinean Jorge Perlorán, define as their goal in documentary film to “give voice to those who have none” (21) and to thereby represent “all the citizens of the nation-state” (26-7) in order to educate the public and the authorities so as to best enable Indigenous peoples to defend themselves, a goal “never achieved” because the authorities in Argentina never wished to serve any citizens, least of all Indigenous peoples (27-9). The goal of giving others voice overlooks Indigenous nations’ own achievement of survival and struggle for communication, and the focus on the nation-state ignores the fact that most Indigenous nations cross current nation-state borders. I return to this in the study of Tierra adentro.

Many film directors (assuming the gaze and goals of anthropologists) also wish to capture the image and voice of Indigenous peoples “before they die out”, in order to maintain a document of how they once existed. In these visualized representations, First Nations peoples admirably and resolutely retain their “archaic” norms, but, just as in the nineteenth century, they are presented as though they were naturally destined to die out rather than positioned as facing constant threat by modernity, many aspects of which settler society also faces. If ethnographic photography and documentary film of this nature appear to belong to the past, there are plenty of current examples that provide evidence to question this assumption, such as the heavily promoted and commercially lucrative “before they pass away” photography of Jimmy Nelson. A study of the role of colonialism in film and the need for Indigenous peoples to make their own films was the goal of a series of articles edited by Adolfo Colombres in 2005. Yet here again, no Indigenous person is cited as an authority on their own filmmaking practices.

Since 2004, the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Cine y Video de los Pueblos Indígenas, or CLACPI, has provided a space to screen documentaries made by Indigenous peoples and provide workshops to learn audio-visual communication in a culturally appropriate process that
holds self-determination as the central goal of audio-visual work. While they are not the only Indigenous film collective in Latin America, they serve as a network to facilitate communication across the Latin American region and with other Indigenous transnational networks in the Americas and across the world. The website of the CLACPI also includes filmed interviews with participants, and information that assists visitors to understand how autonomous video and filmmaking might take place (www.clacpi.org/).

Their approach to filmmaking and distribution locates this work within the broader area of communication, and those who work on media are comunicadores, a role much greater than that of a director, producer or filmmaker because it is a non-commercial endeavour designed to promote the interests of the community. Defending the right to communication as a human right in which video and documentary are tools used to achieve the full exercise of rights and legal protections, as well as the creative exercise of expression, this filmed material is destined for screening in communities where the filming took place and is regularly exchanged with other communities in acts of trust and reciprocity. This aspect of distribution distinguishes it from commercial and other types of film production.

While generalizations across cultures may fail to be relevant for some local contexts, Barry Barclay’s work in the Māori context suggests that the appropriate approach to documentary filmmaking by Indigenous peoples should follow the culturally specific ways in which the film director situates him or herself among the community being filmed, so that the community feel that it is well represented when it views the film. This is obviously best achieved when the director understands the language and cultural protocols, and when the director’s own long-term personal goals coincide with those of the community. In this sense, any Indigenous person filming in a community that is not his or her own will also need to learn the specific protocols and basic terms in languages of other communities. Barclay also examines in detail the problem of copyright that is inherent in modern filmmaking and used against Indigenous peoples in his last book Mana Tūturu: Māori Treasures and Intellectual Property Rights.

Achieving the goals outlined by Barclay often means abandoning many of the commercial and festival documentary film conventions. There are generally not specialized
roles such as director, producer, scriptwriter, editor or sound; instead these roles are taken by any or many comunicadores in a non-hierarchical manner. The focus is on working with the community to tell their story in the way the members believe is most effective, and this requires negotiation among those members. A storyboard created prior to filming is written by the community involved since the process of having the community tell its story is a major aspect of this filmmaking. Other core cinematographic and documentary film aspects such as specific shots (partial head-shots may be offensive), a specific pace or rhythm of the shots, editing conventions, length of the piece of work, and venues for screening, will differ as well because the purpose of the film or video is non-commercial. Finally, alternative notions of “copyright” and distribution are outcomes of non-commercial media, which is why Internet, often with limited access, has become a normal space for the distribution of Indigenous media. While all of these are goals, the realization of this practice is much more arduous than many other forms of filmmaking.

At a more general level, a theoretical work which explains why the epistemological approach to Indigenous peoples requires prior knowledge is Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012), in which she offers ten reasons that traditional history excludes Indigenous peoples. Her observations explain why most Indigenous peoples have found dominant research methodologies irrelevant or unhelpful in understanding Indigenous cultural history, and therefore why a decolonizing methodology must take Indigenous knowledge production seriously as knowledge about world history. By extension, Indigenous film and media are necessary for the larger settler society to understand its own history more clearly. A decolonizing approach to filmmaking and distribution does not imply that non-indigenous peoples have little to offer in accompanying Indigenous peoples in their goals for self-determination, however. Instead it requires a decolonized relationship established between those behind and in front of the camera. Obviously, this requires making explicit both the goals and the intended audience of the documentary, but a far greater objective should be to narrow the huge disparity in access to resources that non-Indigenous filmmakers tend to have over Indigenous peoples in many contexts.
Two recent films employ documentary strategies to decolonize colonial and nation-state optics in different ways. This analysis proposes that the foregrounding of indigenous sovereignty in each film challenges both colonial history and nation-state citizenship in ways that have not previously been presented on screen, and that this decolonizing potential of film is especially important for non-Indigenous viewers. I will argue further that this type of film could not have been made without the active participation and mentoring of the filmmakers by the Indigenous peoples filmed; and it is their contribution to the film which offers ways of understanding some of their fundamental claims. This is also obvious in the distribution of the film.

Examples of current documentary theory and practice will demonstrate ways in which También la lluvia (Even the Rain, 2010), offers a critique of the conventional filmed narrative of colonization and introduces aspects of documentary practice that suggest a decolonizing approach to this subject. On the other hand, Tierra adentro (Native Land, 2011), directly challenges the legitimacy of the contemporary American nation-state by lending visual legitimacy to a number of Indigenous claims that are considered revolutionary by the dominant culture and its media in Chile and Argentina. When read alongside each other, the documentary production and distribution strategies of these two films reveal processes used by the colonizing and republican elite to make domination appear natural and inevitable. The decolonizing potential of documentary film, therefore, lies in presenting the fundamental claims of contemporary Indigenous peoples in their own words in ways that assist the viewer to understand a shared history by unlearning colonial and nation-state orthodoxy.

**Attempts at Decolonizing Conquest Film in También la lluvia (2010)**

Filmmakers anticipated the quincentennial of the conquest in 1992 by releasing a series of anti-imperialist and anticolonial films depicting the heroic struggle of Indigenous peoples against European invaders. Historians joined in this process, as evidenced in Howard Zinn’s A People’s History of the United States (1980), which opens by denouncing Columbus’s relation to the first Indigenous peoples he met. In spite of their diverse critiques of European imperialism in Aguirre, The Wrath of God (1972), The Mission (1986), El Dorado (1988), Jericó (1990),
Cabeza de Vaca (1991), 1492: Conquest of Paradise (1992) and La otra conquista (1998), these films represent Indigenous peoples as victims who inevitably succumb to the stronger European invader after a series of battles. While planning a new film on the conquest, Spanish film director Icíar Bollaín worked on a script written by her partner Paul Laverty using ideas introduced by Howard Zinn’s History. There are references to these prior conquest films which indicate familiarity with the established tradition. However, as they progressed in writing the script, Bollaín and Laverty discovered that the 2000 Cochabamba Water Wars in Bolivia had rewritten settler-indigenous history. They decided to do the same in their version of the conquest narrative.

También la lluvia juxtaposes several critiques of historical and current imperialism to offer a critical reflection on the social realism typical of previous conquest films. The original idea for this film was to foreground the positive role played by Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas in denouncing the atrocities of the conquest, referring to them as crimes against humanity and decolonizing the myth of Columbus by representing him as one of the major perpetrators of acts of genocide. Anti-imperialist films of the 1990s had used various stylistic variations of social realism employing a documentary style with handheld cameras, ambient sound and non-professional actors on location throughout Latin America. Although perhaps unintended, the representation of a relatively homogenous Indigenous mass fighting an impossible battle against superior individualized Spanish forces normalized the impression of a relatively rapid and inevitable European victory over the Indigenous peoples in the Americas.

También la lluvia departs from this tradition by introducing a metafictional style that reveals the ideological, economic and political negotiations involved in decisions taken by the director, producer and film crew in making a fictional film on the conquest in dialogue with those being filmed. By demonstrating this form of participatory decision-making in representing conquest while filming on location in Bolivia during the Water War of 2000, a parallel critique of neoliberal atrocities becomes obvious and relevant.9

What is new here is that the film crew never completed their film, being forced to flee because of the mass uprising of the Indigenous movement for self-determination. As witnesses to the acts of resistance by Indigenous peoples, the filmmakers, and by extension the viewer,
implicitly locate ourselves in this moment in the 21st century, when it is no longer obvious that the Europeans were/are able to subject the Indigenous peoples to their imperialist desires. The actors’ and film crew’s conversations about the film implicitly reflect recent research on the conquest that emphasizes the long process by which Europeans and the Eurodescendent population attempted to subjugate Indigenous communities over centuries. What the Indigenous resistance of 2000 offers viewers is clear evidence that their cultures survived the five centuries of military occupation and were not finally defeated. A similar process of rewriting history achieves a comparable objective in *Tierra adentro.*

The metafictional and symbolic structure of the film opens with a documentary style, juxtaposing two alternative approaches by the lead actors in relating to Indigenous peoples, as the handheld camera follows the fictional Mexican director, Sebastián (Gael García Bernal), along with the pragmatic Spanish producer, Costa (Luis Tosar) who select actors for their film from a long line of Indigenous people waiting in the hot sun in Bolivia. Sebastián’s viewpoint shows us the diversity amidst the mass with closeups of the concerned faces of each individual from the perspective of the artist who will pay any price to complete the film as he has written it in his mind. From a distance, Costa attempts to control Sebastián’s decisions, concerned that they stay within budget.

This clearly allegorical opening sets the more sympathetic creole, accustomed to dealing with indigenous masses on a daily basis and attempting to write the history about this process, against the Spaniard, ultimately in control from afar through his economic decision-making. We learn in the first few minutes that Costa chose Bolivia against Sebastián’s wishes because the extras would be cheaper. At the end of the opening sequence, against Costa’s opposition, Sebastián selects a noncompliant and angry Indigenous leader, Daniel, to play the Indigenous protagonist, the historical character Hatuey, who was murdered by burning at the stake by Columbus’s forces, an event recorded in Las Casas’ chronicles. Both Daniel and his daughter Belén will receive quite a bit of screen time, although far less than Sebastián and Costa, still individualizing the Indigenous actors instead of folding them back into the homogeneous masses.
The metafictional aspects of the film are reinforced through conversations among the actors who play the roles of Montesinos, Las Casas and Columbus when they step out of their roles and discuss the historical figures they represent in several scenes, allowing the viewer to become well aware of the debates currently taking place about the establishment of colonialism and the extent to which decolonization has been achieved.

What is most innovative for the purposes of decolonizing conquest film is the introduction of the two lead Indigenous actors who will also play double roles and react to decisions made about the film: Aymara actor Juan Carlos Aduviri, in his two roles as Daniel, the leader of the Water Wars, and as the historical Indigenous figure Hatuey, and Daniel’s daughter, Belén, who also assumes a role in the fictitious film, of a child who watches her father being tortured on the orders of Columbus for not having discovered enough gold. Including Belén’s viewpoint at several points in the film achieves at least two goals: when she is injured in the final uprisings and must be rescued by Costa, her victimization adds a dramatic focus as Costa and Belén face a common enemy, yet throughout the film, she is a witness of the filmmaking process, giving us a viewpoint of the next generation’s ethical observations. Filming a feature from a child’s viewpoint has become an increasingly common perspective that has enabled Latin American filmmakers to analyze the consequences of dictatorship and the Dirty Wars from the perspective of the next generation. The fact that these two Indigenous characters play two different roles and converse about the film begins to decolonize the ethnographic gaze, by deconstructing the sympathy of the Eurodescendent viewer toward an essentialized Indigenous identity stuck forever in nature and in the past, naturally destined to be the victim on film. Instead, to the viewer sees how little film represents the reality of the Indigenous community being filmed.

Furthermore, the film crew and viewer are forced to take sides in the Water War, explicit in a scene in which Sebastián converses with the Mayor of Cochabamba, who defends the use of arms in suppressing popular protest when Sebastián states that their protest against a huge increase in the price of water is justified. When the film crew has to rely on government protection, they are placed in an uncomfortable position, and this ethical dilemma implicates film and media more generally as potential accomplices in justifying the values and practices of
the dominant culture. The viewer may be aware that after the Water War, the Gas Wars of 2002 helped pave the way for the eventual election of Evo Morales in 2005, who led the government as it introduced one of the most innovative constitutions in the world in 2008, which renamed the nation as the Plurinational State of Bolivia, guaranteeing the right to water and making its privatization unconstitutional.

The film includes one scene of collective decision-making by assembly, representative of the social movements that brought Morales into power. It is this scene that would not have been included had Bollain and Laverty not been aware of the importance of this process among the social movements. This scene also has a documentary feel, and the dialogue suggests it was written with the actors. Some lines are spoken in Aymara and left untranslated, reminding the viewer that there is another reality and forms of knowledge that are not directly translatable into European languages. Bollain has explained in interviews that she needed to spend significant time negotiating with assemblies on how these scenes would be filmed and how payment would be made, and this process indicates a more participatory mode of filmmaking took place than was originally planned.

Two scenes in the film place the viewer in a position to share with Indigenous characters a skepticism that film will narrate a story of any benefit to them. A young member of the film crew, María, is making a documentary about the making of the fictional conquest film, a reference to Les Blank’s *Burden of Dreams*, which followed Werner Herzog as he filmed *Fitzcarraldo* in 1982. She is the only member of the film crew to leave the security of the hotel and film in locations where she learns about life in Bolivian communities, and she realizes before the others that there will be serious resistance to the Bolivian Government’s sale of water rights. She begins to film Daniel and his friends while they work at the side of a road, and asks what they are doing. He explains that they are digging trenches for several kilometers to reach a water source, an historically accurate scene which helps explain why the population of Cochabamba were willing to fight for their legitimate rights to water. María then asks what making the conquest film means to them. After her question, Daniel breaks from his work and appears not to understand the question. She repeats it, asking whether he believes it is a form of “Indigenous resistance”, but the other friends answer that he is only in it for the money and
they joke that he only wants to take his clothes off. Importantly, one man asks her why she is asking so many questions and wonders if they should trust her.

This challenge to María’s assumption that she has an automatic right to film them is an important moment when white privilege is again placed directly under scrutiny. As she realizes that they don’t take her work seriously, María shuts the camera off just as a truck from the water company arrives. When Daniel and his friends see them, they run up to the vehicle with shovels and shatter the glass windows, causing the water company workers to speed away. This form of resistance gives María a clear indication of the power of the community to defend their interests not only against the water company but against her intrusion into their community. It reinforces the idea that the film made about Indigenous peoples has unintended and undesired consequences for them.

In another scene, Sebastián wants to film Indigenous women as they appear to drown their babies in a lake so the Spanish conqueror’s dogs won’t harm them, but the women refuse to participate. Sebastián tries to explain to them that these acts are historical and necessary for the film, but the women again refuse, and following his conversation with them, Daniel explains to Sebastián that they simply cannot imagine such a thing. Once again, as in several points in the film, the viewer realizes how little Sebastián’s film actually has to do with Indigenous people being filmed, and in fact, his portrayal of their history is offensive to them.

As the violence escalates, most of the crew flees, but upon hearing Belén’s mother’s appeal to him, Costa decides to stay and rescue Belén, who has been injured. Allocating the dramatic finale to the Spanish hero who saves the Indigenous victim follows the typical White Messiah narrative arc common in Hollywood features, and suggests a desire to ensure that the film end in familiar territory for commercial motives, as Dennison rightly claims (193). This does not negate the fact that the fictional film does not get made because of Indigenous agency and that there are several scenes that cause the viewer to reflect on the way in which film narrates a form of social history that reflects the values and interests of a particular sector of society. On the official website, there are additional historical materials for reflection on colonialism, and the teaching materials are useful in decolonizing colonial history.
Furthermore, it is likely that Bollain was aware that there were similar movements being organized in Spain at the moment of filming, because just a few months after the shooting, the movement of the *Indignados* would occupy the streets in Spain to protest structural adjustment policies similar to those that were previously introduced in Bolivia. While many states in South America have now rejected neoliberalism as an economic model, the European countries, especially Greece, are facing the same policies that had devastated communities in Latin America in the 1990s. This awareness might have led Bollain to write an alternative ending that would place the film crew on more equal footing with the Indigenous actors. Placing European workers on the same level of Latin American and other workers worldwide who are joining struggles across national borders furthers decolonizing strategies. However, such a structural change would have compromised the transnational cinema values that tend to operate in recent co-productions as argued by Dennison (“Debunking” 192).

Although it is not a documentary, *También la lluvia* introduces a number of scenes of street blockages and protest during the Water War that imitate documentary, as well as archival footage in the background that together lend a sense of authenticity to the filmed narrative, and the repeated image of María's attempt to portray a more veridical history through her documentary raises the issue of how documentary is made and whether it accompanies Indigenous peoples in their own struggles for self-determination or simply reinforces a foreign or ethnographic stereotype of them. The viewer may come away with the impression that if a documentary is not changed by interaction with the filmed subjects, it may victimize them by ignoring their agency and thus end up offering no better representation of their reality than the feature film dreamt up by Sebastián.

**Decolonizing the Nation-State in Tierra adentro (2011)**

If *También la lluvia* offers a potentially decolonizing narrative about conquest film, *Tierra adentro* by Ulises de la Orden interweaves the historical and contemporary memory of settler and Indigenous peoples in Chile and Argentina in order to decolonize the history of these nation-states just after the bicentennial celebrations had died down. What emerges would have been unthinkable just one decade before, because the viewpoint from which history is analysed...
required that history itself be made in several locations in order for the director of this film to reflect back on the history of Southern Cone over the last two centuries, and make this film, in this way, at this time and place.

The documentary elicits our affective attention by focusing on two young Argentines, Marcos and Anahí, who take a road trip that follows the historical journey of soldiers who fought in the “Conquista del Desierto” of 1877-79 into the interior of Argentina. Marcos O´Farrell’s great-great-grandfather was General Eduardo Racedo, Ministro de Guerra, later Governor of Entre Ríos, a major historical figure or prócer who wrote a book on the Conquista del Desierto, which was a series of military campaigns that killed and displaced hundreds of thousands of Indigenous residents. Marco’s ancestor’s three occupations – general, governor, historian – foreshadow the three sectors of elite power that will be scrutinized throughout the documentary: the military, the political structure, the historical record, which, woven together served to provide wealth, legitimacy and prestige for the estancieros to emerge as a social class that played a leading role in the consolidation of the Argentinean nation-state as it entered the twentieth century as a world-leading exporter of grains and beef.

Marcos’ travel companion, Anahí Mariluán is a descendant of the Mapuche communities who survived brutal massacres only to be dispersed, many displaced to concentration camps where they were converted into slave labour. Her distrust of official Argentinean history enunciated through questions about the icons that surround them everywhere, (paintings, monuments, currency, etc) and her ability to communicate personal details drawn from the recent historical memory of her grandmother, here identified as Mapuche, encourage us as viewers to ask how Argentineans who claimed to be the civilized ones were capable of such barbarism. Such a question locates this behaviour in the past, however, and the achievement of the film lies in the ways it does not allow this history to remain as past.

Marcos and Anahí travel together and meet face-to-face with people living at historical landmarks along the way, mostly Winka or Huinca, a Mapuzungun word meaning “foreign thief”, used frequently by the couple to describe those settlers who show us their vast and beautiful country estates, invite the couple into their homes, and encourage viewers’ gaze to
linger over the leather and silver gear associated with cattle raising and horses. Among their most prized possessions are the silver stirrups and weapons created by Mapuche smiths similar to other priceless items displayed in museums. When they learn that Marcos is related to historical greatness, we hear the response of these residents in a double register, as Marcos and Anahí listen together.

The documentary does not open the story with these two attractive young people and their road trip, however. Instead, the frame for our understanding of their journey first opens with comments by historian Walter Del Río about how the official history of Argentina taught in schools and inscribed in monuments, currency, street names and parks through which Argentineans move every day, is a recently invented history that began with the Desert Conquest. This military moment was a watershed that marked a “before” as savagery and an “after” as civilisation. President Julio Argentino Roca, a George Washington type figure highly admired for having brought civilization to Argentina through this process, proudly stated that “no Indians walked on the Pampas” after the Desert Campaign he led. Throughout the film in small doses, Walter Del Río and historian Mariano Nagy provide alternative evidence to show that the historical record does not support Roca’s claim, an idea still prevalent in 2014.11 The comments by del Río and Nagy suggest that the process of murdering and militarily displacing people and then forcing the survivors to become invisible as slave labour required a specific type of authoritarian structure that a democratic society can no longer afford to tolerate and must acknowledge.

This form of reconciliation cannot be achieved without reaching a consensus about historical truth. This, therefore, is the first historical precedent necessary for this film to have been made. The “Truth and Reconciliation Commissions” of Chile and Argentina have brought to the awareness of their citizens the need to deal with truth before reconciliation is possible. In many ways, these nations have contributed as world leaders to a change in International Law on crimes against humanity because of their experience in making the transition from dictatorship to democracy. This film documents a process in which this understanding is now transferred to the nineteenth-century crimes against Indigenous peoples.
The first voice from the Indigenous side of history to appear in the documentary is a young Mapuche teacher who explains the past to Mapuche children through a game in which they are forced to jump on a small piece of cloth and stay standing, hugging each other to remain standing, while that cloth becomes smaller and smaller. “This is our history”, she tells them, “they are forcing us to have smaller and smaller places to stay, and some have no place at all”. In the next scene, on a train, Mapuche media producer Alfredo Seguel writes on his laptop, and tells us in voiceover that he was raised knowing almost nothing about his ancestry. His story will take him from Temuco, Chile, across the Andes to the Argentinean coast –across Wallmapu, the territory of the Mapuche people– to interview Mapuche elders about their own stories so they “will open a path to the future”. In this way, the film creates a living archive having different individuals tell their personal stories as a form of testimonial for a new generation prepared to listen to them, and these narratives connect the present to the past and future, at times offering mutually exclusive viewpoints about that history in juxtaposition, leaving the viewer to interpret them.

Historian Mariano Nagy presents maps, letters and ledgers to demonstrate the economic imperative behind the drive by the settler population to remove people from their land: he shows how Argentina entered the world market as an agro-export economy through this process. In Chile, the same process used a more positive term: the “La Pacificación de la Araucanía” or Pacification of the Araucanian Region. By explaining the logic behind the production of wealth that implied these acts of genocide, these historians enable viewers to realise that the economic gains enjoyed by one social group came at the high cost of human lives, human rights and basic human dignity of another group, legitimized through the narrative of national progress and glory.

The next scene takes us to Temuco, Chile, where Emilio Painemal explains in Mapuzungun to Alfredo Seguel how he spoke his language until he went to school, where they told him he should speak only Spanish. He states that it is time for Mapuche people to recover their own language. In the discussion that ensues, the Mapuche speakers explain in Spanish that in contemporary Chilean society, the mainstream media are the instigators of discrimination against Mapuche people by rendering both the Mapuche people and therefore
the truth of Chilean history invisible, constantly reinforcing differences between Chileans and Mapuche (economic progress versus obstacles to the same) by not allowing Mapuche people to explain history so that Chileans may learn it. Most Chileans are not aware, for example, of the 1641 Treaty with the Spanish Crown recognizing Mapuche sovereignty, and other treaties up to the 1830s were later ignored by the new Chilean State, created only 200 years ago.

Mariluán and Marcos read extracts from General Racedo´s book: “You are to approach your mission with the twin virtues of patriotism and Christian Charity. By removing these pariahs of progress from their lonely jungles to settle them in towns where men move amidst misery and greatness, you will have rendered them useful to their fellow citizens, while enlightening their minds with the radiant light of the Gospels.” Citations of historical texts by these protagonists in this context enable viewers to deconstruct the canonical history of the nation-state.

While both Chile and Argentina celebrated 200 years of independence in 2010, many Mapuche, who are struggling to keep or regain land that was illegally stolen from them before or during the dictatorships from 1973, are in prison on terrorist charges, although they never participated in any act that international law considers to be terrorist. Many dictatorship era laws have been repealed in Chile, yet the anti-terrorist law put in place under dictatorship has been applied exclusively to Mapuche and leaves them without the basic legal protections of other citizens, treating them as foreigners in their own land.

In the Bariloche scenes, it is through the viewpoint of Mapuche teenager Pablo Humaña Llancaqueo and his friend that the viewer understands how the past carries youth into the future. As they observe the statue of General Roca in the central plaza, they read graffiti in Mapuzungun that denounces Winka. This statue, which one presumes is from the 19th century, was actually located there only in 1940. The boys state that this version of Winka history makes them totally invisible, as if they never existed, but the community school or Ruca Mapuche teaches them their own history and language. Pablo must make difficult decisions in his daily life if he is to perform a different identity as a Mapuche person in Argentina. At the Ruca, as he learns his history, he asks a fair-looking older man whether he is Mapuche, and the man responds that he was raised as Mapuche even though his mother had been raped by a white
man. Pablo’s own mother tells him that she was ashamed to speak Mapuzungun. In these intimate spaces, stories from Mapuche families in their own words are told with a directness that elicits understanding if not empathy. In a most moving sequence of images that form a montage that summarizes many aspects of the film, Pedro walks through the local cathedral, and slowly contemplates an immense stained glass window, whose story shows a Mapuche warrior slitting the throat of a priest. Next to that image is a godlike figure, whom we now recognise as General Julio Roca. This is not only secular history, then, but a form of sacred history as well. General Julio Roca’s image appears on the $100 peso note. Mariano Nagy, the historian, reminds us that the famous painting of General Roca and his men from which this image is taken is false because this particular group of men were never united in the way the painting indicates. When we later hear that General Racedo believed that by taking the Indians as prisoners he was doing them a favour, this act now sounds completely contemporary.

It is when Marcos and Anahí meet a wealthy estanciero that we realise that the ideas behind the Conquista del Desierto not only survive but are still dominant in some places, perhaps in the most powerful places. As he talks about his family, the landowner defends Roca with the common sense of the majority, that what is forgotten in this revisionist history is that the Indigenous too, were warriors, and took captive women. He neutralises the horror of history by stating that “the good were not so good but the bad were not so bad either”. When the estanciero is told that Anahí is Mapuche, he suddenly remains silent. The same person who says that civilization was inevitable (and therefore the demise of Indigenous peoples as well), shows Marcos the beautiful stirrups of Baigorrita, one of the most famous Mapuche leaders.

From the preceeding discussion, I propose that four historical precedents were necessary to make this film: 1) the usage of testimonial to achieve a form of historical truth as defined under International Law supporting a claim that genocide took place; 2) the existence of plurinational states in reality rather than in theory (Bolivia and Ecuador), which makes it feasible to conceive of the recognition of Indigenous nations in other states; 3) a camera that brings Indigenous subjects to the center as knowlegeable about nation-state history in order to teach the viewer their knowledge; and 4) the participation of Indigenous subjects in telling this story from their own experience in a compelling way using testimonial narrative.
The last two precedents may be the most important and least understood: in order for the camera to tell the story in this way, the viewer’s normalized ethnographic gaze in relation to the Indigenous subject/victim must refrain from eliciting only the form of compassion that distances the viewer from the victims. Instead of locating viewers as superior in order to elicit pity from them, this story explains what has happened to all of us as crimes against humanity, and these will continue unless we come to terms with this past. It does this by enabling these subjects to speak in a way that positions them as knowledgeable. This required negotiation with the subjects filmed.

Argentineans perhaps more than citizens of any other nation have had to analyse their recent and distant past after the 2001 economic collapse that brought people of all social classes into the street to demand a more accountable political and economic system. This film suggests that a new cultural history is in the making. The critique of historical figures taking place also confirms this shift.

The many voices of those who are on the invisible side of mainstream history directly challenge common sense about Argentinean and Chilean national history by introducing a longer history that crosses the Andes. A new generation of intellectuals hear this history and use all of the arms of contemporary knowledge about domestic and international law to question the ethics that underpin the normalised national narrative of Argentinean and Chilean sovereignty based on genocide. This approach, then acknowledges that the moves toward democracy that Argentina and Chile have successfully achieved in some areas need to be expanded to others. The archive is a mirror into which both nation-states must gaze in order to achieve that expansion.

One of the most powerful statements comes near the end of the film Tierra adentro, when a land-owner and educator states that the army militarily “cleaned up the land” and then he connects this process of cleaning to his own position: “I wouldn’t have this comfort, and you wouldn’t be sitting there if those gentlemen had not bothered, and if Racedo hadn’t existed. These people built this country because we started having farmers. European farmers. That was the glory of these people!” This statement comes very close to sounding like the Final Solution to which all film viewers have been sensitized by decades of holocaust film. This parallel takes
on new meaning in the context of an earlier statement by an elderly Mapuche woman who remembered her own grandmother had been one of the women who had experienced the horror of the Desert Campaign personally. Her people had cultivated crops and ate well until the military came and forced them off their lands, bringing only hunger and suffering, and later slavery. The many voices of women who were taken as domestic servants and raped come across in the historical memory of their descendents, and one scene is especially moving when Anahí describes what happened to her family while Marcos silently drives.

One of the final scenes brings the horror into sharp relief. As the camera pans across showcases in the museum, the voiceover asks how it is possible that the same people who were denounced as barbarian were admired for their silver work, now located in museums and shops because they are considered priceless. Later a similar pan across a photograph will show us rows and rows of skulls that were on display until relatively recently in the Perito Moreno museum. Alfredo Seguel views these in silence and then states that this is a museum to the holocaust of Indigenous peoples.

In directing our attention to academic arguments, Walter del Río refutes the idea that one can excuse genocide because the values of the past were different. Mitre himself expressed the fear that if those crimes had occurred (we are speaking of 1878), they would be “crimes against humanity”, and if left unpunished: “what was going to happen when the campaign went to Patagonia? It wouldn’t just be the execution of warriors, but also the death and murder of women, children and old people”. Del Río confirms that Mitre wasn’t wrong, and that’s what the social memory of the communities is recovering. All through the Pampa and Patagonia different communities treasure their historical recollection, the social memory of their ancestors’ experience, mentioning war episodes and expeditions as a period of deep pain suffered by all the families, and this is paradoxical, according to del Río: “while for us the idea of the campaign was a moment of occidental rationality, from the experience in the memory of the Indigenous people, it was absolutely irrational”.

De la Orden ends his documentary by closing with an interview with Raúl Zaffaroni, a Supreme Court Justice, offering considerable weight to the thesis that acts of genocide of the past need not be considered over. He uses the word “state massacre” to elaborate a concept
that extends the ideological influence of that process, begun by the Generation of 1880s and extending to the last military dictatorship.

*Tierra adentro* is currently on the *Telesur* website ([videos.telesur.tv/](http://videos.telesur.tv/)), a transnational television network that joins work by writers, journalists and professional as well as non-commercial filmmakers to offer viewpoints on world news from different locations across Latin America. This form of distribution is one more indication that documentary produced in Latin America is offering knowledge about history to the rest of the world ([videos.telesur.tv/video/44118/tierra-adentro-historia-del-pueblo-mapuche](http://videos.telesur.tv/video/44118/tierra-adentro-historia-del-pueblo-mapuche) and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZv5Vx305gE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZv5Vx305gE)).

The processes of social communication introduced by Indigenous peoples across Latin America are rewriting history and enabling filmmakers to tell decolonized histories through documentary and feature film that ask the viewer to reflect on the film and video production and distribution process. *También la lluvia* and *Tierra adentro* are two examples of films that reflect four historical precedents that have enabled this new history to be told. The first is the acknowledgement that colonialism continues, and that crimes against humanity must be acknowledged and related to acts of genocide. The second is the reality of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions which have introduced the concept of plurinational states that safeguard the rights of all nations within the modern state. The third is the participation of Indigenous peoples in creating film and in offering their knowledge through stories in a way that viewers are able to hear them. In order for this kind of communication to have been achieved, the fourth precedent, a decade of independent indigenous filmmaking supported by the CLACPI, has offered a structure to strengthen Indigenous movements across the continent so that they may represent their knowledge about the world.

**Works Cited**


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**Notes**

1 Harald Prins critiques what he calls the “primitivist perplex“ as a colonial fantasy in visual media history, yet he explains how Indigenous communities strategically utilize discursive and visual imagery that seem similar for their own purposes.
3 The year 1972 saw the publication of both Getino and Solanas’s “Toward a Third Cinema” and Dorfman and Mattelart’s Para leer al Pato Donald, attempts to identify the imperialist ideology behind mass media that replace other forms of popular culture (Getino and Solanas, Dorfman and Mattelart). Enrique Dussel’s later works elucidate the philosophical thinking behind ideas that informed these movements for social justice.
4 Estimates are that as much as 85% of media are privately owned, in many countries by just a few major corporations. As Hintz describes it, “Several large transnational enterprises, connected with each other both horizontally and vertically, have been struggling for television market shares, including Globo from Brazil, Televisa from Mexico, the Venezuelan Grupo Cisneros, and the Argentinean corporations Clarín and Telefe (Mihr, 2005). The telecommunications sector is even further concentrated, with Spanish telephony giant Telefónica and the Mexican América Móvil approaching a virtual duopoly in the regional market (Mastrini & Aguerre, 2009).” (151)
5 See Hintz for an overview of changes in media law.
6 Chavez was overthrown in a brief coup that some described as media coup (2002), and he was first in the region to enact legislation that opened access for citizens to participate in media production.
7 Article 16 states: “1. peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination. 2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.”
8 Vijay Prashad explains the history of the term “Third World” and movement of Third World leaders to genuinely combat colonial legacies as part of the process of decolonization in *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*. He also explains many of the reasons that this project was later abandoned. As the term “Third World” fell into disuse, US academics sought other ways of describing film from the “developing world”. Some, influenced by South Asian studies used “postcolonial” or “subaltern” later “world” or “global”, cinema, but these terms never became common in Latin American scholarship.
9 I have made a similar case with more detail in an extensive analysis of the film in “Encrucijadas anticolonialistas y soberanía indígena: Repensar el imperio desde la periferia en También la lluvia.” In *Encrucijadas Globales: Redefinir España en el Siglo XXI* Forthcoming by Editorial Iberoamericana/Vervuert in April, 2015.
10 Las Casas describes Hatuey and his last words (modified in *También la lluvia*) in his *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (92), and in more detail in *Historia de las Indias*. (Libro III, capítulos 21 y 25).
An editorial of the major daily *La Nación*, of October 22, 2014 criticized Indigenous protest as inauthentic because there were never Indigenous peoples in Argentina, those who came were from Chile and those who protest today are activists.