

## RECENSIONE

JUAN JAVIER RIVERA ANDÍA, PETER SNOWDON

*THE OWNERS OF THE LAND. CULTURE AND THE SPECTRE OF MINING IN THE ANDES*

*Vzw Het Vervolg/ COALFACE, 2013, 37 min, DVD.*

---

*The Owners of the Land* is a documentary about mining speculation in the Peruvian Andes. The work is the outcome of a collaboration between the Peruvian anthropologist Juan Javier Rivera Andía and the English filmmaker Peter Snowdon: together they crafted a film from a section of the installation with the same name, on display for the first time in October 2013 at the Het Mijndepot in Waterschei, Belgium. Starting from the history of a mine, the authors illuminate a traditional fringe context and its hard permanence in a contemporary era, where communities have to put them into conflict for affirming an identity out of the juncture between ethnicization and marginalization.

Rivera Andía and Snowdon mainly

assembled material recorded by the anthropologist between 2008 and 2010, during his fieldwork in Cañaris, in the Lambayeque highland of northern Peru, a predominantly Quechua area. At the time Rivera Andía's conducted fieldwork in the Cañaris community was pushing back against a mining project lead by a Canadian company. As explained in the booklet accompanying the DVD, he gathered a visual archive that testifies to the changes undergone by the community over the previous years "...not only scientifically and textually, but also in aesthetic and sensory terms" (pag. 6).

The first segment, "Cristóbal and the Mine," is an introduction to Rivera Andía's fieldwork, in Dual screen format 16:9. Following Cristóbal, *líder* of the

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons © Maria Laura Spanedda

Review - Rivera Andía, Snowdon "The Owners of the Land"

2017 | América Crítica. Vol. 1, n° 2, diciembre 2017: 209-212

DOI: 10.13125/americacrítica/3139



Cañaris community, the video chronicles the mine history using three different devices: video, photo and fieldwork diary. Some photos of the Peruvian mine La Oroya, one of the most polluted places in the world, is index of the environmental dangers it poses. As shots of Rivera Andía's ethnographic activity scroll on the screen, the text superimposed narrates, like a diary, the mine installation until 2013, when he finally returned to Cañaris.

"We Are Going to Record" is an eleven minutes single screen 4:3 clip that epitomizes some of the main issues of visual anthropology. In this segment Rivera Andía keeps quite, while experts from Lima work to record traditional chants among some members of the Cañaris and Incahuasi communities. In the DVD booklet, Snowdon, with regards to this footage, observes: "... I suddenly felt the ethnographer's archive open up to the filmmaker's eye" (pag. 21). The video ends at the eleventh minute as the filmmakers prevent us from seeing their subject singing and playing, suggesting that the most interesting part of the performance (or the performance itself) is the preparation for its execution. A sound engineer fumbles with laptops and microphones, looking for absolute silence. Meanwhile, women and men involved with the exhibition stand still, taking their assigned position,

as if posing for a radiography. The physical relationship between them and the sound engineer is instructive, he decides everything, including the position of a hand or a knee. It is an artificial set, built for recording sounds normally ascribable to playful moments. A woman, following her performance of (singing) a *kashwa* (typical dance and music of different parts of the Andes), apologizes for making a mistake, while the sound engineer notes that she performed shyly. Before starting to play his *charanga*, a musician, eager to introduce himself, is told that is not the appropriate time. We can witness such a paradoxical process where spontaneity is prescribed, reproducing a posture out of its context for making it a "product". This time suspension is a good metaphor of the break required for the ethnicization of some cultural elements, that engenders their fetishization.

The third clip in single screen 4:3 marks the passage from an artificial environment to a friendlier one, where it is possible to appreciate the daily relationship between Rivera Andía and his interlocutors, via the way they grant him explanations and stories of their daily life. "Of Guitars and Men" combines three main elements: music, harmony and alcohol. The result is frivolous but also rich of relevant ethnographic elements. A group of men shows a traditional guitar produced in the Lambayeque region.

While drinking alcohol, exchanging jokes, and playing *charanga*, men recount memories of their youth, in an attempt to explain the close relationship between *charanga* music, its execution, and the courtship of women. Between laughter and the questions asked by Rivera Andía from behind the camera, the viewer implicitly understand how *charanga* can represent the *china* (the woman), and how important it is to manage matching a woman chant in order to play a good *kashwa*. If we connect this clip to the previous one, it shows the difference between studio rules for digital music recording reproduction and cultural rules lived by the community. In light of these revelations, could we still define the lady's performance in the first video as "shy"? Is that shyness a result of her musical skills or the gaze of the expert?

"The Blood in Their Veins" is the last clip in dual screen HD 16:9. It generates a total cacophony: two screens are juxtaposed, side by side, both displaying subtitles and playing their original audio. Watching and listening to both videos at the same time is a strenuous challenge, which has the merit of representing a clash: two narratives of the same event generate contrasting imageries, simultaneously superimposing in the conflict dynamic. On the left we see riots between the police and some members of Cañaris community; on the right, an in-

terview to a Canadian mining company representative, broadcasted on a national Peruvian channel. The interview is a *climax* that builds, minute by minute, a negative impression of indigenous groups who opposed to the mine project, defining them as terrorists linked to the most extremist political groups of the country. While Cristóbal is speaking into the microphone about indigenous rights on water and land, the journalist speaks about indigenous opponents as a danger for the progress of the country; both speeches are interrupted by a growing bulldozer noise, coming from the video on the left. The noise covers everything and stops only when they close their speeches. The bulldozers' sound (the unique common element among these two videos) seems a sign of a more complex power game in which the two narratives we are shown are the only two allowed in the public space, reinforcing the idea of an impossible dialogue. A game in which the Cañaris community passes between self-representation and other-representation, defines itself in a new way, because of the relationship activated by conflict. Rivera Andía's position, in this sense, is not part of the conflict itself but is inside these evolving relationships. A careful participation that depicts his research subjects from a different kind of gaze, sometimes so close as to almost merge with them, sometimes too far to

participate.

Maria Laura Spanedda

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

[marialauraspanedda@gmail.com](mailto:marialauraspanedda@gmail.com)