

DIANA M. RUGGIERO

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS, USA

MÁS ALLÁ DEL FÚTBOL: VALIDATING AFRO-LATINO CULTURE AND DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM THROUGH FILM AND FILMMAKING

ABSTRACT

Though recent scholarship illuminates the significance of film in increasing visibility of Afro-Latinos and expanding the Spanish language curriculum, it fails to consider how film validates oral traditions in the African Diaspora as well as challenge the curricular assumptions that marginalize orality. I therefore consider the counterhegemonic potential of film through a discussion of my 2008 Fulbright funded documentary film on the Afro-Ecuadorian communities of the Chota-Mira valley. A decolonizing process and project, Más allá del fútbol documents the oral tradition of bomba as a means of celebrating afrochoteño culture and raising awareness of their subalternity. Interdisciplinary, it presents bomba and afrochoteño culture as represented by afrochoteños themselves. It thus provides a space within and through which afrochoteños counter their silence.

This article reveals the necessity of critically engaging film and filmmaking as decolonial tools that validate afro-descendant oral traditions and counter the epistemological violence of colonialism and colonial slavery.

KEYWORDS

Afro-Latinos; Afro-Ecuadorians; film and filmmaking; subalternity; decoloniality.

DIANA M. RUGGIERO

Diana Ruggiero is currently an assistant professor at The University of Memphis. She graduated with a Ph.D. in June 2010 from the Ohio State University. Diana is focused on Afro-Latino history and culture, Afro-Ecuadorian oral traditions, and Spanish for the Professions

and linking the University of Memphis with the local Latino community. In 2008, she produced a Fulbright funded documentary film on Afro-Ecuadorian Bomba and the communities of the Chota-Mira valley. Dr. Ruggiero has presented and published on research in Ecuador pertaining to Bomba and the Chota-Mira valley.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I address the potential significance of film in researching and representing Afro-Latino history and culture from the perspective of a filmmaker and scholar of Spanish literature and culture. Though academics of literature and culture by now acknowledge the value of film in broadening the literary cannon and expanding the curriculum to include marginalized populations and traditions, they have yet to embrace film as an alternative means of representation and knowledge production.¹ Here, I wish to treat film not so much as text, but rather as a means of approaching, better understanding, and validating oral traditions such as music and dance. I therefore discuss my own approach to and experience filming *Más allá del fútbol*, a documentary film about the afro-descendant communities of the Chota-Mira valley.

Funded by a 2007 Fulbright award, *Más allá del fútbol* documents the highland Afro-Ecuadorian genre of music and dance known as *la bomba* and addresses its significance for contemporary *afrochoteño* identity. *La bomba* constitutes one of several oral traditions in the Chota-Mira valley that visibly and aurally distinguish the unique culture of the region's afro-descendant population. Though marginalized through much of the twentieth century, *la bomba* is today nationally recognized as a symbol of *afrochoteño* identity. As such, it provides a discursive platform and vehicle through which to represent and negotiate highland black ethnicity as well as contest racism. In presenting interviews on *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity with local community members, leaders, musicians, and dancers, *Más allá del fútbol* thus additionally addresses the current dynamics of race and racism in Ecuador.

Despite the historical importance of *la bomba* for the *afrochoteño* communities, and with a few notable exceptions, there remains a dearth of scholarship on *afrochoteño* history and culture. This trend is not unique to Ecuador, however, as scholars have only recently begun to recognize the contributions of Afro-Hispanic communities to the formation of national culture in Latin America. Yet, with the exception of a few notable authors and literary works, Afro-Hispanic oral traditions remain marginalized within the area of Hispanic literature and culture. As numerous scholars in the humanities and social sciences have argued, the marginalization of Afro-Latinos in academic scholarship and in the Spanish curriculum in particular is linked to the legacy of colonialism and colonial slavery.² Postcolonial scholars specifically note, for instance, that the primacy of the written word established during the process of colonization consequently relegated oral traditions to a marginal status.³ It is likely that Afro-Hispanic traditions such as *bomba* have been and continue to be overlooked as repositories for knowledge and sources of knowledge production simply for being an oral rather than literate tradition. *Más allá del fútbol* was produced, in part, as a way to counter this trend and help validate *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture.

¹ See for example Davis (1986), Gerster (2006), Gerster and Zlogar (2006), Villegas Rogers (2006), and Watson (2013).

² Here I make reference to and build primarily on the respective writings of Walter Mignolo (2000, 2001) and Catherine Walsh (2002, 2006, 2007) on the lasting legacy of colonialism and its implications for modernity, knowledge, and alterity.

³ See Mignolo and Escobar (2010) and also Walsh (2006, 2007) for a discussion of decoloniality.

In the following essay, I present an overview of *Más allá del fútbol* and briefly provide background information on the production of the documentary. For further contextual information, I address the social and political dynamics informing current representations of *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity. I then address the making of the film itself and reflect on how my engagement with *bomba* and the communities of the Chota-Mira valley through film has allowed me to better understand and represent *la bomba* and the *afrochoteños*. I contend that film and filmmaking provide an effective means of countering the historical marginalization of Afro-Hispanic communities. For scholars of literature and culture in particular, I urge for a consideration of film as a valuable resource in validating Afro-Latino oral traditions not just as supplements to, but on par with Afro-Hispanic literature. As a dynamic way of documenting oral traditions, film and filmmaking are a necessary and vital part of researching and representing Afro-Latino history and culture in the twenty-first century.

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Más allá del fútbol is a feature length documentary film about the highland Afro-Ecuadorian communities of the Chota-Mira valley and the genre of music and dance known as *la bomba*. It was produced in 2008 as part of a 2007-2008 Fulbright funded research project that I undertook in Ecuador. Through interviews with local community members, leaders, musicians, and dancers along with footage of music and dance and light commentary, the film presents an overview of *la bomba's* origins, history, and development as well as illuminates the significance of this unique oral tradition for *afrochoteño* identity and culture. In the process, the film's narrative likewise exposes viewers to the dynamics of race and racism currently informing representations of *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity.

I was inspired to undertake this project after a telling experience in Quito, Ecuador during the 2006 FIFA World Cup. At the time, I was director of The Ohio State University summer study abroad program in Ecuador. Among my responsibilities was leading students on cultural excursions and tours throughout the country. These tours extended from the highland indigenous markets of the Otavalo valley to the Galapagos Islands and the rain forest of *el oriente* (the eastern part of Ecuador). Having led students on several such tours by the summer of 2006, I felt secure in my knowledge of the people and culture of Ecuador. I was therefore surprised to learn that the national Ecuadorian soccer team competing in that summer's FIFA World Cup was comprised almost entirely of a population previously invisible to me and my students: Afro-Ecuadorians.

The national soccer team garnered international attention during the 2006 World Cup, bringing to the fore tough questions for many Ecuadorians concerning the visibility of Afro-Ecuadorians, national identity, and the issue of racism. As I

subsequently learned, there are two nationally recognized historical black settlements in Ecuador: the coastal province of Esmeraldas and the highland region known as the Chota-Mira valley (provinces of Carchi and Imbabura). Both populations have distinct origin stories and developmental trajectories contributing to distinct regional cultural formations. While the afro-descendant population of Esmeraldas is historically linked with maroonage and is culturally identified with the *marimba* and its various rhythms, that of the Chota-Mira valley is similarly linked with colonial slavery and associated with *la bomba*. Both populations, however, share a common history of, and struggle against, racial oppression and discrimination in Ecuador. While Afro-Ecuadorians are frequently stereotyped by non-black Ecuadorians as lazy, uneducated, hyper-sexualized, violent, tricksters, thieves, and drug dealers, they are at the same time hailed for their athletic abilities. It was indeed ironic, then, that the celebrated heroes of the 2006 Ecuadorian national soccer team hailed primarily from the Chota-Mira valley and Esmeraldas.

Following the World Cup experience, I visited the Chota-Mira valley to learn more about the *afrochoteños* and their history and culture. The Chota-Mira valley consists of over thirty communities, many of which are the remnants of former sugarcane plantations once owned by Jesuit priests. The region straddles the rivers Chota-Mira and encompasses two provinces (Carchi and Imbabura). Arriving there consists of taking a three-hour bus ride north of Quito along the Pan-American highway toward Tulcán, Colombia, passing the popular tourist destination of Otavalo and the city of Ibarra. Descending from Ibarra into the Chota-Mira valley, the landscape changes suddenly to reveal lush green sugarcane fields, a rushing river, and numerous valleys, each tightly enclosed by rolling mountains. The semi-arid climate along the river basin, where many of the *afrochoteño* communities are situated, ensure warm and dry temperatures throughout the year. Though the former plantations have long been dissolved, sugarcane remains a prominent industry in the region and many *afrochoteños* continue to work as agriculturalists. The diversification of household economies is common, and many *afrochoteños* are intimately connected to Ibarra and Quito if not through family, than through entrepreneurial activities, studies, or professional occupations. This is significant considering that passage to and from the region became considerably more feasible after completion of the highway late in the twentieth century.

Though I had been warned about traveling alone to the Chota-Mira valley by my *mestizo* friends in Quito, my reception in the community of Chota was as gracious and hospitable if not more than any I had thus received in Ecuador (see fig. 1). I made fast friends and soon found myself listening to stories while drinking coffee in the home of a woman who would later be instrumental in helping me film the documentary. It was not long before the conversation turned to the cultural traditions of the



FIGURE 1. COMMUNITY OF CHOTA ALONG THE BANKS OF THE CHOTA RIVER (IMBABURA PROVINCE, ECUADOR).

region and an impromptu *bomba* performance ensued. I was immediately captivated and enamored by the joy of this tradition and the depth of its historical and cultural significance, which I was yet to fully grasp. It was then that I decided to apply for a grant that would allow me to return and produce a documentary film on *la bomba* and the *afrochoteños* as a means of illuminating the rich history and culture of the *afrochoteños* beyond their passion for soccer.

AFRO-ECUADORIANS: SUBALTERN WITHIN THE NATION

As an oral tradition, *la bomba*, its history and meaning, resides in the collective memory of the community and in its current practice.⁴ My research on the history and development of *la bomba* thus necessarily consists of oral histories collected from various commercial and non-commercial *bomba* musicians, youth dance group members, festival and event organizers, record producers, community leaders, Afro-Ecuadorian organization members, local scholars, and other community members with knowledge of local traditions. In addition, I draw on my personal experiences and observations while living among and participating in the ongoing daily activities of the *afrochoteño* communities. In short, *Más allá del fútbol*, as a cultural study as well as documentary film, relies on ethnographic research. This much is a consequence of as well as a response to the subaltern condition of the *afrochoteño* communities.

Despite claims to the contrary, racism very much exists in Ecuador. Only recently and as a result of long standing social

⁴ No known historical documentation of *la bomba* exists save a descriptive account in an 1867 travelogue in which Hausserek describes a performance of a mimetic dance known as *alza que te han visto* accompanied in this instance by a group of vocalists, a person playing a shaker, and a *bomba* player (1868: 344).

tensions are Ecuadorians acknowledging and engaging the deep-seeded inequalities of power that marginalize the indigenous and black communities. This much is evident in the 1998 and 2008 revisions of the Ecuadorian constitution, which increasingly recognize the existence and relative autonomy of the nation's diverse ethnic groups and acknowledges the pluricultural identity of the nation. Despite the popular rhetoric of *interculturalidad*, which now dominates political and cultural debate in Ecuador, Afro-Ecuadorians remain marginalized and discriminated against. Their continued absence from history texts, museums, academic literature, and positions of social and political power and influence, make them invisible within the nation. In short, they are subalterns.⁵

To recognize Afro-Ecuadorians as subalterns, however, is more than to label them as yet another minority group among others in Ecuador's diverse population.⁶ It is rather to recognize the ways in which the dual historical moments of slavery and colonialism continue to act upon the formation and articulation of blackness in Ecuador.⁷ The asymmetrical power dynamics created by the transatlantic slave trade produced a distinct subaltern in "*el negro*" that is entirely negative and contingent in its construction.⁸ By this I mean that the idea of blackness is conceived in opposition to "whiteness"; neither here nor there, afro-descendants in the Americas are, as anthropologist Jean Rahier astutely notes, the ultimate "other" (1998: 422). As such, afro-descendants exist (or are visible) only in so far as they support the hegemonic structures of power and knowledge that produced them (Ibid.).

Such is the case with the Afro-Ecuadorians and *afrochoteco*s specifically. As elsewhere in the Americas, enslaved Africans in the *Audencia de Quito*, were considered sub-human, objects to be bought, sold, and consumed for the express purpose of advancing the wealth and power of the *audencia*, viceroyalty, and imperial crown. The very necessity of their labor-power, spurred by the New Laws of the Indies,⁹ positioned them in a strata below, or perhaps more accurately entirely outside of the continuum of humanity represented by the *indio* and European.¹⁰ The continued exploitation, discrimination, and invisibility of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities post-emancipation, and up through the present day in the name of modernization, speaks to the legacy of slavery and colonialism in Ecuador. It is this legacy that Peruvian sociologist Alberto Quijano refers to as the coloniality of power (1997, 2008).¹¹

Within this subaltern context developed the distinct regional hybridities represented by the *afrochoteco* and *afroesmeraldeño*. As noted previously, the cultural differences between these two communities speak to their divergent origins and experience of blackness in Ecuador and the ways in which the particulars of their respective struggles inform the expression of their distinct cultural identities. While the *afroesmeraldeños* of the northwest Pacific region of Esmeraldas originate in the free-black republic founded by the *ladino* Alonso de Illescas and his

⁵ I make reference here to the founding statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group which recognizes the shifting and dynamic nature of subalternity in its conflictive and discursive relation to the nation (1995: 142).

⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes me particularly sensitive to this distinction in her criticism of the broad application of the term subaltern (1988: 37).

⁷ I draw on Mignolo's work on the geopolitics of knowledge and the coloniality of power, a phrase borrowed from Alberto Quijano (1997, 2008), which seeks to illuminate the epistemological violence of colonialism in Latin America. See Mignolo (2000) and Walsh (2002) for an overview of Mignolo's thoughts with regards to this topic. See also Walsh (2006) for an application of these theories to Ecuador and the ideologies of *interculturalidad* and *etnoeducación* specifically.

⁸ I use the word negative here in the sense used by Ranajit Guha to refer to the relational quality of subalternity (1999: 18).

⁹ Enacted in 1542 as a result of the debates over the treatment of the colonized indigenous peoples of the Americas initiated in part by Bartolome de las Casas, these new laws limited the use and enslavement of colonized Indians and granted them certain protections against abuse.

¹⁰ See Walsh (2006: 5).

¹¹ See Mignolo (2001) for a discussion of this concept in relation to subalternity in Latin America.

fellow marooned slaves in 1553, the *afrochoteños* are the direct descendents of enslaved Africans brought to the Chota-Mira valley by Jesuits in the sixteenth-century.¹² Stereotypes popular in Ecuador pertaining to the disposition of coastal blacks as “hot-blooded” and rebellious and of highland blacks as passive and submissive reference these historical differences.¹³ These, as well as other, more general stereotypes concerning blacks in general—as lazy, hyper-sexualized, violent, uneducated, and uncultured for example—reflect and serve to reinforce the hegemony of thought that positions the white-*mestizo* and the notion of modernity and progress they represent opposite Afro-Ecuadorians.¹⁴

Given this context, it is little wonder that serious scholarly treatment of the Afro-Ecuadorian population and its culture did not begin until after the mid 1960s and even then with the work of foreign scholars. Only recently and with the impetus of the indigenous uprisings of the 1990s did regional differences in black culture begin to be conceptualized and expressed explicitly in terms of blackness. The growth in academic interest in Afro-Ecuadorian, and specifically *afrosmeraldeño* and *afrochoteño* history and culture, reflects this development.¹⁵ Most telling, however, is the fact that to this day, much of the research dealing with Afro-Ecuadorian communities is carried

¹² For an overview of the origins and history of the Pacific black communities, see Tardieu (2006) and Walmsley (2004). For the afrochoteño communities, see Feijóo (1991), Jaramillo (1994), Pabón (2007), and Chalá-Cruz (2006).

¹³ Stereotypes commonly overheard while conducting research in Ecuador.

¹⁴ See Rahier (2003) for a discussion of stereotypes and its impact on perceptions of blackness and black identity in Ecuador.

¹⁵ Since the 1990s, there has been a marked increase in academic interest and scholarship on Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture as evidenced by the recent growth in publications and development of such repositories and forums for continued research as the Centro documental afroandino in the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar of Quito and various other Afro-Ecuadorian cultural organizations.



FIGURE 2. GRUPO PODER NEGRO PERFORMING AT EL BOMBAZO, 2008 (IBARRA, ECUADOR).

out by non-Ecuadorians and by Afro-Ecuadorians themselves. As previously noted, within this small but increasing body of literature, few major studies exist pertaining to *afrochoteño* history and culture specifically and even fewer treating *la bomba*.¹⁶

Though perhaps on account of the need for documentation at this early stage in the literature, these studies fail to consider the ways in which the cultural traditions of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities evidence the tensions and ambiguities inherent in their subalternity. Too often they focus on the content and substance of black identity and culture as though these were given to reality in the same way as the identity and culture of the Warorani, Napo Runa, Cayapas, Otavalos, and other autochthonous peoples of Ecuador.¹⁷ This tendency, evident also in the broader literature dealing with black identity in the African Diaspora, has led to a predominant concern with processes of culture contact, of acculturation or transculturation and the degree to which black culture is either distinctly American, African, or somewhere in-between.¹⁸ Yet if we consider for a moment the origins of blackness in the disjuncture of slavery and epistemological violence of colonialism, we understand blackness to be a construct whose essence can be neither here nor there, nor even in-between. It is, rather as Jean Rahier astutely comments borrowing from Edouard Glissant, a *metisage sans limite* in its particular subaltern hybridity (1999a: 292).

As Rahier implies, to speak of cultural change in this context would thus be misleading if not entirely misguided.¹⁹ In *Más allá del fútbol*, I therefore choose not to examine *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity in and of themselves *per se*, but the ways in which *la bomba* as an expression or articulation of *afrochoteño* identity indexes or registers the subaltern tensions that constantly move through, or continually inform *afrochoteño* identity. In this regard, I follow Homi Bhabha in his approach to the study of cultural difference rather than of cultural diversity “as an epistemological object” (1994: 34). Cultural difference, he states “is the process of the enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification” (Ibid.). This allows us to understand the articulation of *afrochoteño* identity as a form of agency which challenges the very epistemological hegemony that would seek to negate, or subjugate its existence. It also allows us to sidestep the issue of authenticity and cultural change in addressing *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity in their current temporal and cultural contradictions. As Bhabha notes (Ibid.: 35):

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic.

¹⁶ For afrochoteño history and culture, see Bueno (1991), Chalá-Cruz (2006), de Pólit (1992), Feijoó (1991), Jaramillo (1994), Lipski (1987), Vallejo (1996), Noboa (1992), Obando (1985), Pabón (2007), Peters (2005), Savoia and Ocles (1999), and Schechter (1993). For studies addressing *la bomba*, see Coba Andrade (1980), Bueno (1991), and Schechter (1993).

¹⁷ Granted we can just as well question the authenticity of indigenous cultures knowing full well the movement, contact, and intercultural exchange of pre-Hispanic communities as most notably seen in the indigenous empires of Central and Latin America. Nonetheless, I maintain that the violence of the disjuncture created by the transatlantic slave trade distinguishes and foregrounds this problem for black communities in the Americas.

¹⁸ See for example Herskovits (1941, 1958)

¹⁹ This much is acknowledged by other scholars focusing on the dynamics of identity in Diaspora and in Latin America; see for example Gilroy (1993), Hall (1990, 1999), and Canclini (2001).

The current efforts among the Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous communities to reclaim their cultural heritage and thereby re-envision and (re)present their identity as a political act reflects the above observation. This process of reinvention, which inheres in the subaltern condition of the *afrochoteño* communities, has significant implications for *la bomba* in terms of its value, representation, and form. As such, to speak of *la bomba* is at the same time to speak to the particular subaltern condition of the *afrochoteños*. Illuminating this relationship and condition is my express purpose in *Más allá del fútbol*.

SEGÚN LOS ANCESTORS: REPRESENTING BOMB A AND AFROCHOTEÑO CULTURE THROUGH FILM

My use of ethnographic research and of film as an investigative tool, methods more closely aligned with the social sciences, complicate my position vis. a vis. my chosen field of study. This distinction epitomizes, however, the false dichotomy represented by the division between the humanities and the social sciences. Yet such interdisciplinary methods are necessary if we are to examine the depth and complexity of the processes of identity formation among afro-descendant and other historically marginalized and subaltern populations in Latin America.

Indeed, it is worth emphasizing that though ethnography originally emerged within cultural anthropology during the early part of the twentieth century as a means of interpreting and representing cultural meaning,²⁰ it has since been adopted by scholars in other related fields, including ethnomusicology, sociology, communication, and cultural studies. And though the specific investigative tools and questions employed in ethnographic research vary with each area of study, they nonetheless now share a common foundation in the assertion that cultural meaning is produced and interpreted through social (inter)action (i.e., discourse, performance, text, etc.).²¹ Ethnography as a method in pursuit of cultural meaning thus transcends disciplinary boundaries in addition to forms of representation.

My own approach to ethnography and film in ethnographic research follows that of Sarah Pink. In *Doing Visual Anthropology*, Pink asserts that ethnography is more than a means of gathering data, it is rather a “process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on the ethnographer’s own experiences” (2007: 22). Furthermore, she asserts that rather than claim to represent an objective truth, ethnography should strive to “offer a version of the ethnographer’s experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced (Ibid.). Of particular significance is the notion that ethnography is a creative process that actively involves the ethnographer in the production of knowledge.

With this in mind, I set out to capture and convey in film and writing what my particular field research experiences had

²⁰ See Robben and Sluka (2007) for an overview of ethnographic fieldwork in anthropology. For an overview of the origins of ethnography, see also Robben (2007).

²¹ On culture, meaning, and ethnography, see Clifford (1986: 2-3), Geertz (1973: 3-5), and Pink (2007: 22).

revealed to me about *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture. In the process, I also hoped to provide not only a platform from which to present *afrochoteño* history and culture to a broader audience, but also a space within and through which *afrochoteños* could represent themselves, and thus allow them to engage in the critical discussion of their own culture. Indeed, as I show in the following, the creation of *Más allá del fútbol* was truly a collaborative endeavor the product and conclusions of which reflect the intersubjective ways in which they were conceived.

Given my approach, I make no pretense as to the objectivity of this film. Rather, I situate the numerous and often contesting histories, interpretations, and practices of *la bomba* collected and represented in this project in relation to the sociohistorical and sociopolitical context within which they arise. In this way, I place emphasis on the ways in which *afrochoteños* resource, or make meaningful and relevant *la bomba* in their daily lives. How such self-representations engage local and global ideologies, discourses, and representations of blackness is the focus of my analysis (in this case reflected in the final edit of the film itself). I am therefore not concerned with discerning fact from fiction, truth from myth, and thus establishing a definitive interpretation of *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity. Rather than dwell on the issue of authenticity, lament the loss of local cultural identity in the wake of globalization, and police contesting claims to local cultural knowledge, I focus on the ways in which such discourses and representations inform and mobilize identity. In this regard I follow ethnomusicologist Heidi Feldman in my intention to represent *afrochoteño* identity, cultural traditions, and history not so much in terms of *what* they are or ultimately mean, but *how*, they come to be and are made thus meaningful in the present day (2005: 12).²² Doing so goes a long way toward not only illuminating *afrochoteños* within the nation and beyond, but in rectifying the epistemological violence that has led to their invisibility and misrepresentation as well as to the denigration of *la bomba* and other such oral traditions since the colonial period.

In keeping with my objectives, I set out in the spirit of collaboration and dialogue to engage *afrochoteños* directly about their perceptions and knowledge of *la bomba*. To this end, I interviewed musicians, community leaders, elders, and others with knowledge of *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture. During the course of a year, I filmed over 30 interviews, attended and recorded various community events and festivities, many involving *bomba*, and collected over 40 hours of video and audio footage in the communities of Chota, Juncal, Santa Ana, la Concepción, Mascarillas, Carchi, Carpuela, Pimampiro, and Chalguyacu in the Chota-Mira valley (see fig. 2, fig. 3, and fig. 4). My research also led me to the urban centers of Ibarra and Quito where I conducted additional interviews with *afrochoteños* who have since emigrated, scholars of Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture, and *afrochoteño* social and political leaders. I also attended and recorded cultural events involving

²² Feldman discusses her approach in terms of memory projects, which refers to the creative and strategic ways in which individual and communities use memory in the mobilization of personal and collective agendas (2005: 12).

performances of bomba put on by the Afro-Ecuadorian cultural centers of Azúcar and the *Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano*. The Fulbright Commission of Ecuador and the *Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar* provided additional support for my research.

The interviews were designed to allow collaborators to develop and express their thoughts on the subject rather than to simply collect data. Though questions pertaining to general knowledge and perceptions of *la bomba* were asked of all participants, interviews consisted more of conversations between myself and collaborators. These discussions were tailored, however, so as to allow individuals to speak to their particular area of knowledge or expertise. For instance, *bomba* musicians spoke more specifically to the music and dance while community leaders addressed broader cultural and social questions. The focus of all the interviews, however, remained *la bomba*, and my concern overall was with eliciting the perceptions of the individual interviewed rather than with discerning an objective “truth”.

This strategy allowed for flexibility in terms of the direction of the interview, which in turn impacted the shape of the overall project. Collaborators not only answered questions, but additionally posed questions during and following interviews, thereby engaging me in critical dialogue. These experiences challenged my original assumptions and forced me to rethink many of my initial thoughts and questions regarding *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture. As a result, these dialogues were crucial in determining the final content and narrative of the film. In this sense, *Más allá del fútbol* represents a collaborative effort between myself and those interviewed, reflecting the widely accepted view of ethnography (be it written or visual) as a creative and intersubjective process as well as production.²³

During the filming of the documentary, I lived in the community of Chota in the province of Imbabura. Its central location and proximity to the Pan-American highway allowed for greater mobility within the Chota-Mira valley as well as between the region and the urban centers of Quito and Ibarra. Chota was also significant in that it was the home of FECONIC and the site of the major regional pre-Lenten carnival celebration known as *Carnaval Coangue*. Chota also held personal significance as it was my initial encounter with the communities of the Chota-Mira valley and the home of several individuals and families I had befriended in my previous trips to the region. Toward the end of my project, I moved to Ibarra so as to gain even greater mobility as all of the communities of the Chota-Mira valley are connected by the city’s main bus terminal.

Filming occurred mainly during the weekends as many in the communities worked during the week. While off-camera, I explored the region, attended local events, developed friendships, engaged in countless conversations, played and took care of children, and otherwise participated in ongoing daily life in the community of Chota. What I learned from these more

²³ I refer here to Geertz’s assertion that ethnography is an interpretive process (1973: 7). For an insightful discussion of ethnographic writing as interpretation, see Clifford (1986: 6-8).



FIGURE 3. THE BANDA MOCHA OF CHALGUAYACU PERFORMING AT A FESTIVAL IN JUNCAL, 2008 (IMBABURA PROVINCE, ECUADOR).

informal interactions proved invaluable to my understanding of *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture and likewise informed the course and shape of the film project.

After the interviews and filming were completed, I began the process of editing the footage. As noted above, it was my intention from the outset to allow the *afrochoteños* to represent themselves to the extent possible. Rather than impose my own narrative and structure on the film, I allowed the story to emerge from the content and direction of the interviews and ethnographic experience itself. I coded the interviews then edited and arranged the relevant segments according to topic. The juxtaposition of the individual voices resulted in a dialogue of sorts that propelled the narrative forward. The discussion takes the viewer from a general overview of the region and *afrochoteño* culture to a specific discussion of *la bomba*: its origins, practice, recent change, and meaning for the people of the Chota-Mira valley. As a means of contextualizing the content of the interviews and illustrating certain aspects of *afrochoteño* culture, I additionally interspersed footage of *bomba* performance and dance, as well as life-stories, and images of people and of daily life in the region.

In keeping with the notion that the ethnographer/filmmaker plays an integral part in the intersubjective production of knowledge, I decided to include myself in the film and its dialogue. I appear at times in the margins of the film, often off camera asking questions so as to maintain transparency and remind the viewer of my involvement in the interviews. At other times, I may be seen interacting with members of the commu-

FIGURE 4. BAILE DE LA BOTELLA (BOTTLE DANCE) PERFORMED AT A CULTURAL EVENT IN THE COMMUNITY OF MASCARILLA, 2008 (IMBABURA PROVINCE, ECUADOR).



²⁴ Here I refer to documentary films produced by Ecuadorian social and cultural organizations dealing primarily with issues of poverty and health. While these films document and expose relevant social and cultural issues, they do so using filming techniques that impose the interpretation and agenda of the filmmakers, such as off-camera narration and little or no use of interviews. A catalogue of these films, as well as many of the films themselves, may be found at the Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano (Afro-Ecuadorian Cultural Center) and the Fundación de Desarrollo Social y Cultural Afroecuatoriana, “Azucar” (Afro-Ecuadorian Social and Cultural Development Foundation) in Quito, Ecuador.

nity as they carry on with their daily routines. During two key transitions in the film, I foreground my own presence. Rather than impose an authoritative perspective, however, I use these occasions to provide the viewer with relevant contextual information and to pose broader questions informing the film’s production. As such, my presence in the film serves as framing device and as a means of situating myself in relation to the *afrochoteños* and their representation in this film.

My decisions as a filmmaker and editor in terms of how to represent *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture distinguishes *Más allá del fútbol* from other documentaries about Afro-Ecuadorian culture made during the twentieth century.²⁴ As a collaborative endeavor, the film intends to not only document *la bomba*, but to provide a space in and through which *afrochoteños* could represent and meaningfully discuss their own culture and traditions. Indeed, many interviewees expressed an earnest desire to collaborate explicitly as a means of cultural advocacy. Such comments reveal an awareness among Afro-Ecuadorians of their marginality within the nation. Additionally, their call to engage me as the filmmaker in a collaborative act of cultural advocacy speaks to a keen perception on their

part of the potential role of media and scholarship in generating international support for local social and political agendas. Far from documenting an external objective reality, *Más allá del fútbol* thus presents a power-laden discourse of which I and the film itself are now a part.

As described above, *Más allá del fútbol* partakes of a counterhegemonic project and agenda as a collaborative and intersubjective endeavor. Rather than speak for and thus reify *afrochoteño* identity and culture, it seeks to the extent possible to allow *afrochoteños* to represent themselves through collaboration, dialogue, observation, and participation. In the end, what emerges through the film's exploration of *la bomba* is an affirmation of *afrochoteño* culture, heritage, and identity that defies the history of marginalization that has sought to invalidate the *afrochoteños*' history, culture, self-worth, and place within the nation.

VALIDATING ORAL TRADITIONS AND AFRO-LATINO CULTURE THROUGH FILM

My experience with *Más allá del fútbol* as a filmmaker and educator make me keenly aware of film's potential as a means of better representing and validating Afro-Latino culture. Though I chose to focus on *la bomba*, what I learned in my engagement with the *afrochoteños* is that it is in the every-day interactions and interpersonal exchanges that cultural knowledge and meaning are conveyed. Games, riddles, jokes, stories and legends, music and dance, daily rituals of exchange, and social codes governing interpersonal interactions serve as repositories and vehicles for the transmission of this knowledge. *La bomba*, as viewers learn in the film, imparts local history and meaning through its text while its music and dance encode and celebrate the sociohistorical experiences and cultural development of the *afrochoteño* communities.

The *bomba* drum and dance likewise transmits local values and beliefs concerning gender relations and complementary duality in their symbolism. These traditions are passed on and adapted from generation to generation through participation and observation. As evident in the film, *la bomba*'s significance is intimately understood by *afrochoteños* themselves. Yet because of its marginalized status as an oral tradition, it remains undervalued and little known outside of the Chota-Mira valley. Participating in ethnographic research and using film as the medium through which to represent what I had learned allowed me to validate *bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture on its own terms and through their own words.

As an educator, *Más allá del fútbol* has been an effective resource in representing Afro-Hispanic history and culture beyond literature in an engaging and thought provoking way. The film serves as a focal piece for critical reflection and discussion in my classes about the history of slavery and race relations in Latin America, the current struggles of Afro-Hispanics, and the centrality and value of oral traditions as forms of knowled-

ge production. I contextualize the film with relevant readings and through a discussion of my personal involvement in the filmmaking process. Whenever possible, I supplement the film with viewing questions, discussion, and experiential activities such as a *bomba* songwriting and dance workshops. In the process, I challenge my students to think about how oral traditions as *la bomba* may serve as forms of knowledge production. Additionally, the film's discourse presents ample opportunity to discuss more broadly the issue of race and racism as experienced by the student's themselves. My use of the film in class is welcomed by my students who appreciate the opportunity to engage *la bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture through a visual medium and who likewise relish the opportunity to discuss and make connections with issues relevant to their own lives.

To present *Más allá del fútbol* within the context of a Spanish language and literature program specifically is to not only expand and supplement the current curriculum, but to challenge its very assumptions. Specifically, it forces us to rethink the privileged place of literature and all that the written word signifies for the Western world in asking what constitutes valid forms of knowledge and knowledge production. Might we not consider *la bomba* and other such oral traditions a distinct way of knowing to be acknowledged, approximated, and validated on its own terms? How might doing so move *la bomba*, the afro-descendant communities of the Chota-Mira valley and other such oral traditions and Afro-Latino communities from the margins to the center of the Spanish language curriculum?

In turn, such a line of inquiry also demands of scholars a more critical engagement with film as process and not just as product. How might film be better suited to researching and representing Afro-Latino cultural traditions? Similarly, as *Más allá del fútbol* attempts, how might filmmaking allow us to circumvent, undermine, and possibly even counter those asymmetrical power dynamics maintaining the subaltern status of afro-descendant populations? To what extent are such critically conceived films as *Más allá del fútbol* successful in their decolonizing aims? By extension, what are the limitations of film and filmmaking in such an endeavor?

Regardless of whether or not *Más allá del fútbol* as well as other such counterhegemonic and decolonizing projects fully realize their objective, the fact that it raises such critical questions makes it a worthwhile endeavor. Indeed, If today we recognize that Afro-Latinos as well as other subalterns are deserving of representation beyond literature, then it stands to reason that we must also take seriously the notion that "other" modes of encoding and transmitting local history, cosmology, values, and collective wisdom are equally as valid as the written word. As I have argued throughout this essay, doing so is not only about recognizing the diversity of Latin America's population, but a moral obligation and imperative incumbent upon us as scholars and educators in the twenty-first century.

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