

Symposium Paper: Terror, Territory and Ethnic Television - Kankuama TV in Colombia – Matthias Kopp

Review by Sonja Schenkel

Summary of the Presentation:

Kankuama TV is an ethnic television station in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Martha in Northeastern Colombia. Initiated in 2008, the station produces documentaries and reports to strengthen the ethnic identity of the Kankuama people. The Community TV channel came into place in the aftermath of the Colombian conflict heavily affecting the area.

In 2005, the indigenous leaders of the Kankuama people presented a series of demands to the Colombian Government: Their community should be better protected from further atrocities and receive acts of solidarity such as humanitarian aid, support with displaced people, legal assistance as well as a radio and a TV station. In their community that had been traumatized and dispersed by conflict, media should help to foster cultural identity and a sense of community.

Kankuama TV has since been very successful and won several awards at media festivals. As explained in the presentation, the role of Kankuama TV goes further than is proclaimed educational and cultural mission. The „ethnic factor“ as in relying upon an indigenous identity has also become an essential tool when defending the Kankuama territory, resources and political interests. However, one of the key challenges currently at stake is the issue of financial sustainability and how to maintain a strong bond to the local audience. In 2011, Mathias Kopp who is part of the Latin America team at Deutsche Welle Academy, has started to build a joint project with the producers of Kankuama TV that will address these needs until the year 2014.

Review of Questions and Discussion

Kankuama TV produces documentaries about important elements of Kankuama culture such as ancient myth, traditions and on the partly lost language. It is a form of resistance that reclaims a strong indigenous identity. On the TV channel’s blog, they describe its vision and mission as in: *“To show through television who we are, where we are and where we would like to get to, and to demonstrate on a local, regional and international level, our will and our capacity to rescue, strengthen and diffuse all necessary elements to maintain our culture according to the indigenous cosmovision of the Kankuama”*(1). Being asked about the content of *these necessary elements*, Mathias Kopp explains that the intention of Kankuama TV is not merely to preserve but to reconstruct and reanimate traditional knowledge (2). This also shows in the way stories are narrated, which according to Kopp have a different rhythm, different sounds and subtext than conventional TV reports. As an example, he showed the coverage of the American Indigenous Leaders Summit in 2012, whose national TV coverage was commissioned to Kankuama TV.

The political role of Kankuama TV lays in strengthening indigenous ethnic identity both within the community and towards the governments. As such, visual media can simultaneously work as a form of encouragement and evidence with regards to cultural identity. The question of what and how things are being shown on their community

television station is highly controversial among the Kankuama. „These people are doing a dangerous job“, says Mathias Kopp. Cases of assassinated journalist in Colombia have mostly concerned the community level. The role of media in denouncing human rights violations, he adds, is unclear. On the one hand publicity and reporting violence through public media may lead to a certain protection and improvement of the situation. On the other hand, it may also increase a persons' vulnerability. When someone in the audience asks about the role of Kankuama TV for democratization or re-establishing democracy in this conflict-affected area, it becomes clear that investigative journalism or the report of incidents related to corruption and legal irregularities are hot topics. There have been no local election for over twelve years and when there are national elections, local media usually avoid taking sides by any means, explains Kopp. To this mentioning we may add the question whether the role of community TV in conflict affected areas has been sufficiently explored not as a primary producer of reports related to conflict but in co-production with international film companies or journalists reporting at the national level. Examples of collaborations of visual reporting on sensitive issues in Colombia have been given by Hollmann Morris through the national TV show "Contravía" (www.contravia.tv) or in his collaboration with Juan José Lozano in the film "Impunity" (2011). As was adumbrated by Kopp, the more publicity the better the protection for the affected people. However, he did not mention clearly whether the Kankuama have strong interest in reporting atrocities to the outside.

What became obvious during the presentation was the fact, that Kankuama TV has a problem with continuous emission. Producing TV is far more costly than other media such as running a radio station for instance. At present time, Kankuama TV cannot broadcast other than through the Internet because of a transmitter having been hit by lightning. „One of the problems that we are now trying to mediate“, says Kopp, is the lack of knowledge of how to write a proposal for funding. The Colombian government, who originally funded the equipment and initial training has completely withdrawn from the project so that sustainability has become the key issue. Sustainability not only in terms of finance but as well in terms of maintaining their relevance as a community media. According to the reviewer's perception, it may be possible that these technical troubles could lead to innovation. Today, many of the large television production companies have become cross media agencies by mixing online news, written and filmed, twitter and social media, in order to bring their content across. The Kankuama, as Kopp describes his encounter with their TV producers, showed this same fascination by constantly filming, taking pictures with mobile phones, reporting on facebook etc. In other words, Kankuama TV has already gone multi-media, which is an asset that could be further explored for the channel's future. What could be envisioned for instance, is a combination of fast-paced, low-cost online media reporting with production intensive, feature documentary reports that would be publicly shown through community events. Later would highlight communal viewing as a moment of creating bonds. Finally, a new interest could be laid on audio-visual storytelling in a broader sense than television.

Cited Sources:

1 Original quote in Spanish (translated by S.Schenkel): "Mostrar a través de la televisión quienes somos, donde estamos y donde queremos ir, y demostrar, a nivel local, regional, nacional, e internacional, la voluntad y capacidad que tenemos para rescatar, fortalecer y difundir todos los elementos necesarios para mantener nuestra cultura desde la cosmovisión

Symposium „Participatory – What does it Mean? Participatory Cinema - Participatory Video under Consideration” May 12th – 15th, 2012, Göttingen.

indígena Kankuama”, retrived from <http://kankuamatv.blogspot.com/p/mision-vision.html> May 12, 2012).

2 In this regard, Kopp mentioned a study by the Colombian Anthropologist Reichel-Dolmatoff, which was recently published in Spanish and awaited with sceptical expectation among the Kankuama. The book describes Reichel-Dolmatoff’s field work between 1944 to 1966, in which he wrote that the tribe of the Kankuama, “extinguished itself as a cultural entity during the course of the present century, after having lost its own language in the last century” (Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo. Los Ika – Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Colombia: notas etnográficas, 1946-1966”. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1991, Bogota, Colombia (translated by intermundos.org/sierra_nevada1.htm)

Links

Kankuama TV Blog (in Spanish with Video Examples)

<http://kankuamatv.blogspot.ch/>

<http://www.contravia.tv>

<http://www.impunitythefilm.com>

Documentary on Kankuama TV (Trailer): www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qPnfhQjsIE