THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE COLLABORATIVE FILM PROJECT *ANAK-ANAK SRIKANDI* (CHILDREN OF SRIKANDI)

Text: *Laura Coppens*

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Critical discussions about representing the «Other» in film and video led anthropological filmmakers to think about alternative, less-hierarchical and more ethical ways to tell life stories in audiovisual media. Following Jean Rouch's idea of «shared anthropology» ([1973] 2003), I chose a collaborative and multi-authored approach to the production of the 73-minute anthology *Anak-Anak Srikandi* (Children of Srikandi).

The film was produced between 2010 and 2012 in collaboration with eight women-who-love-women from the Indonesian island Java and is part of my PhD research. The multi-story film shows the lived experiences and different perspectives on gender and sexuality from a group rarely heard and mostly ignored in the Indonesian public, revealing personal tales of exclusion and struggle, but also of love and happiness. In my written dissertation, I will analyse the film and particularly focus on the question of how both global feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights discourses and national discourses on gender and sexuality influence the subject positions of Indonesian women-who-love-women on the one hand and the identity politics of local LGBT rights organizations on the other hand.[1]

Anak-Anak Srikandi is the result of a lengthy process of constant negotiation, sharing of ideas, revision and critique. Over the two-years of its creation, our film work became an increasingly collective act, resembling the notion of collaboration described by Sarah Elder (1995: 94) as «creating an open space for dialogue». The collaborative and multi-authored approach to media production to which we aspired implied various ways of collaborating at different levels of the production process. In the following section I focus on the actual practical implementation of the project and describe the on the ground collaborations for *Anak-Anak Srikandi*. Thereafter, I address ethical issues in regards to authority and authorship that, despite best intentions, arose during the making of the film.

Doing Collaborative Filmmaking

The conception of *Anak-Anak Srikandi* as a workshop film was motivated by the wish for less-hierarchical anthropological filmmaking that redresses the power imbalance between visual anthropologist and participants. Instead of going «there» to film the «other», I wanted to make an anthology film consist-

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ing of several short films created by the participating Indonesian women themselves. In the workshop we provided the participants with the skills necessary to produce their own videos. In fact, giving access to media production tools and facilitating technical instructions with media professionals constitute an important part of the notion of collaboration as an ethical concept. At the same time, I see personal storytelling by means of autobiographic short films as a queer-feminist intervention that may contribute to processes of transformation and become a form of activism that ultimately empowers the LGBT rights movement in Indonesia. Self-representation, then, becomes a social critique; especially in the Indonesian political context «where people's experiences and memories of being used as objects of repression are still deeply inscribed, media participation and first-person storytelling become crucial agendas to pursue» (Thajib & Juliastuti 2009: 19).

From Personal Story-Sharing to Documentary Storytelling

The film production workshop was organized in four modules that focused on the different aspects of the filmmaking process: creative documentary storytelling (Module 1); technical pre-production and instructions (Module 2); production (Module 3); and post-production (Module 4). In order to give one example of the way the collaborative work was carried out I will describe the storytelling process in more detail.

In the first week of the workshop we focused on creative documentary storytelling and discussed different techniques of drafting an effective story outline and dramaturgy. The aim was to develop the ideas and eventually the scripts of the participants' individual films. We devoted a lot of the time to story-sharing circles, where the women talked about their lived experiences and pitched the first ideas for their shorts. The story sharing was not only limited to the Indonesian participants: my filmmaker-colleague Angelika Levi and I also told our experiences as queer identified German women. This «group outing» helped to break the ice immediately and based on our shared affinities (Haraway 1991) we were able to create a more sympathetic atmosphere of sisterhood and reciprocity.

The morning sessions of the first workshop module were structured around screening and discussing various documentaries and short films that dealt with the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity. Even though the films we discussed were all non-Indonesian productions the participants con-

nected the issues addressed to their own lived experiences and situated them in the Indonesian context. Watching and discussing the films were a powerful source of inspiration and helped the participants to reflect upon their own lives and eventually pin down the ideas for their individual films.

The afternoon sessions were devoted to the script development process. Within this creative space the group worked on the dramaturgy and narrative style of each story and developed different representational strategies and interventions according to the participant's film content. At the start of each creative writing session one participant would pitch her idea and read the script. After that the floor was open for an input session and everybody would provide some further ideas for the film script. By the end of the first week all directors had the final draft of their script and we were ready to look at the technical implementation process where the women were taught in hands-on training sessions how to operate the video camera and sound equipment. After getting comfortable with the technology the filmmaker-participants not only worked as crewmembers on each other's films, but also acted as different characters in the individual episodes.

Hitherto, the collaborative process I described appears very easy and harmonious. But as often the reality we face during fieldwork is less straightforward. Despite best intentions many unforeseen problems arise. In the next section, I will therefore map the ethical dilemmas that emerged in regards to authorship.

Whose Story is it?[2] Negotiating Authorship

Professional associations issue ethical guidelines and codes of practice that provide a general framework and principles for ethically sound research and conduct, but often don't address issues specific to visual practices (Wiles et al. 2008). Furthermore, the application of visual research ethics in practice is rarely discussed (for an exception see Clark 2012). In fact, there are very few visual anthropologists and documentary filmmakers who openly talk and write about the concrete dilemmas they face during the production process and the actual ethical decisions they make on the ground. I therefore argue that the discussion of practice in ethical visual research needs to be expanded, and more illustrative examples should be shared within the different *communities of practice*.

Feminist researchers are at the forefront of reflecting and discussing ethical issues in research practices (e.g. Held 2007). With its particular attention to power relations, the feminist approach

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[2] The title «Whose Story Is It?» is borrowed from David MacDougall (1991).

to ethics is based on a model of care and responsibility with a specific focus on context and specificity (Edwards & Mauthner 2002). My own visual research and filmmaking practice is situated within this framework of an ethics of care. The ethical dilemmas I encountered during the making of *Anak-Anak Srikandi* were approached through drawing on feminist values, and ethical decisions made according to my own individual morals.

My discussion of authorship can only be partial and the situation I describe needs to be understood in the specific Indonesian context of our production. Consequently, I cannot provide any resolutions or ethical strategies, nor do I believe in a blueprint of universal ethical film practices and institutionalized normative morals, but only in situated visual ethics that differ from project to project and need to be contextualized (Pink 2001; Wiles et al. 2008). Andrew Clark (2012: 18) further argues: «(...) a situated approach to image-based ethics may more appropriately take account of the concrete, everyday situations within which ethics are negotiated between researchers and research participants».

Authorship in documentary filmmaking is a very complicated topic. It so happens that I found myself trapped in the undefined sphere of «documentary writing», utterly confused about my actual role within the collaborative film project *Anak-Anak Srikandi*. The group of participants did not question my role as a producer, seeing my responsibility mainly in the collection of money in order to continue the work and eventually finalize the film. Unease among members arose, however, when I, like them, also claimed authorial credits for our film. Part of the discussion was determined by the lack of a clear definition of writing in the sphere of nonfiction film. In our case it became even more complicated, because the final film was conceptualized as an anthology of eight stories interwoven with a shadow puppet tale as overall story arc. In the view of some group members the only ones entitled to writing credits were in fact the directors of the individual episodes since they were not only telling their personal stories, but they literally have been writing them down. I had no objection to this claim, but argued that I wrote the entire concept for the film project and therefore should also get a writer's credit.

In my argumentation I expanded the narrow definition of writing that commonly refers to actual script writing well known from fiction film. This goes back to a new trend that was recently observed by the New York Times author Ton Roston (2012). In his view the Writers Guild of America (WGA) triggered this development. In the understanding of the WGA writing is not only confined to the narration or text that you can actually hear and read in documentaries, but also includes off-screen activities like writing a concept and treatment, as well as interview questions and the organization of the material for the editing. Not surprisingly this view meets controversy among the members of the non-fiction community, especially on the part of film editors and directors, as they fear the blurring of professional boundaries and ultimately the loss of their jobs (Roston 2012).

This discussion from the film world resembles a similar paradox found in the realm of academia. Indeed, the fetishization of authorship and the importance of publishing monographs and journal articles under your name is the very essence of scholarship and the visible recognition we build our careers on. Not getting the credit as an author calls our eligibility as full-fledged members of the academic tribe into question. It was not least because of the underlying institutional pressure I felt throughout my research and film production that, among other factors, brought me to claim the writer's credit in the beginning of the project.

In the process of negotiating and defining what authorship actually means in a collaborative film like *Anak-Anak Srikandi*, we managed to break down the barriers of confusion and came to understand that all of us contributed in different but equally important ways to the final film. The Indonesian participant-directors wrote and directed their individual short films, but there is no doubt about the creative and conceptual input Angelika Levi and I had in the creation of *Anak-Anak Srikandi*, too. We both served as co-authors/directors alongside the Indonesian group members and same as them also operated the sound equipment or the camera (in the case of Angelika). Furthermore, I developed the concept and narrative strategy of the anthology. My colleague then combined the different episodes in her particular style of montage. Nevertheless, the content and overall structure of the movie was determined in a process of collective decision-making. Apparently, we all co-authored *Anak-Anak Srikandi* and the only way we could properly acknowledge each woman's «contributorship» and give credit to our collective endeavor was by creating the label «Children of Srikandi Collective». The notion of a collective seemed to describe most accurately the complex working relationships embodied in the final product. We were careful, though, to list and acknowledge all individual contributions in the end credits of the film. The idea of «collective authorship» within an experimental production space, also mirrors the DIY (do-it-yourself) filmmaking style of the new generation of Indonesian filmmakers. *Kolaborasi* (collaboration), a very common concept in contemporary Indonesian arts practices, challenges the hierarchical production mode and the cult of the individual artist as known from New Order arts paternalism (Paramaditha 2012).

Collective and shared authorship is a concept that furthermore challenges ethnographic authority (see Ruby 1995; 2000) and manifests itself in a learning environment, that is «a space for filmmakers to learn to pose the questions they do not originally know to ask, a place where film subjects select the fragments

of their reality they deem significant to document, and a moral place where subjects and image makers can mediate their own representations» (Elder 1995: 94). Sara Elder's collaborative method of *shared space*, that, in the context of *Anak-Anak Sri-kandi*, was so well described by Angelika Levi as «non-hierarchical pulling together beyond all difficulties», allowed for equal distribution of power. In the course of the project the boundaries between teacher and students became permeable; everybody was involved in a learning process and shared their knowledge and skills. This kind of reciprocal exchange may have transformative potential and reveals an effective way to deal with «the moral burden of authorship» (Ruby 1995) continuously faced by many (visual) anthropologists and other media producers. The assemblage of diverse perspectives occurring within cross-cultural filmmaking practices also resembles David MacDougall's notion of an «*intertextual* cinema» that is based on a «principle of multiple authorship» (MacDougall 1998: 138). The *intertextual* and indeed intersubjective encounters are reflected in our final product, and as MacDougall further argues elsewhere «if a film is a reflection of an encounter between filmmaker and subject, it must be seen to some degree as produced by the subject» (MacDougall 1991: 6). Although, in our case the subjects are the filmmakers themselves it is true for all cross-cultural and transnational encounters and only highlights once again, that making film is a practice embedded in social processes that cannot be ignored when talking about the final product.

Conclusion

Collaborative approaches to filmmaking or research do not automatically guarantee the destabilization of power relations and a subsequent «decolonizing of methodologies» (Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Appealing in theory, proper collaboration is very hard to achieve in practice. Some scholars therefore ask the question if collaboration might not only be a fantasy after all (Barbash & Taylor 1997: 88f). There is indeed a danger that in the end it is still the filmmaker-anthropologist who pulls the strings thereby perpetuating the very power imbalances she seeks to level. However, if collaboration is taken seriously as an ethical method, addressing issues of authority and authorship, risks and harms, reciprocity and copyright, as well as undertaking an ongoing critical evaluation throughout the production, post-production and distribution process must be cornerstones of every anthropologically inspired film project. Eventually, »ethics is about *how* to deal with conflict, disagreement and ambivalence rather than attempting to eliminate it» (Edwards & Mauthner 2002: 22). Thus, critical self-reflections and the sharing of ethics in practice offer a chance to open up a greater dialogue and provoke discussions that hopefully lead us to make more ethically sound films based on mutual respect. This becomes especially important as the popularity of visual methods in anthropology is on the rise and more and more students and scholars are producing visual data and films.

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AUTHOR

Laura Coppens is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Zurich. She is currently finishing her dissertation project on «Cultural Subversion: Film, Activism, and Sexual Politics in Contemporary Indonesia» at the NYU Center for Media, Culture and History in New York. The dissertation is jointly supervised by Prof. Dr. Mareile Flitsch (University of Zurich), Prof. Dr. Bettina Dennerlein (University of Zurich), and Prof. Dr. Saskia Wieringa (University of Amsterdam). Laura's research was supported by the University Research Priority Program «Asian and Europe» of the University of Zurich from 2009 to 2012. The Swiss National Science Foundation awarded a dissertation completion fellowship within the scholarship program for prospective researchers from October 2012 to March 2013. The author expresses her gratitude to all these programs for their generous financial support.

Center for Media, Culture and History, New York University, 25 Waverly Place New York, NY 10003, USA
laura.coppens@uzh.ch