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COMMUNITY CINEMA AS A STRATEGY AGAINST VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

Experience in a Vulnerable Urban Periphery

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a genuine filming experience, this text proffers a reflection on the possibilities that community cinema offers in urban contexts impacted by insecurity, poverty and social stigmatisation. It commences by addressing the growing importance acquired by this cinematic genre in Latin America in recent decades and its association with other cinematographic and epistemological currents characteristic of the continent. The subsequent section details the production phases of a community short film produced in a popular neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) in 2023.
The text goes on to reveal this form of cinematographic expression as an innovative strategy of sociocultural and artistic intervention, useful to combat violence, strengthen the social fabric of the territories, overthrow cultural prejudices, promote intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and consolidate the cultural identity and collective memory of those who have no voice.

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1. Introduction

On 10 February 2024, the short film “Even Though It´s Night” (“Aunque es de noche”) by Spanish director Guillermo García López (García López, 2023) was awarded the Goya Award for Best Fiction Short Film. The film was entirely shot by the director with the assistance of the local residents of the Cañada Real, a shantytown situated on the outskirts of Madrid. Historically, the Cañada Real has been highlighted by the media as one of the major drug "supermarket" in the city. The film combines celluloid and mobile phone footage to offer a rough depiction of the daily life of a vulnerable urban community in one of the most economically dynamic cities in Europe. It should be noted that, at the time of the award, more than 4,000 people in Madrid were still living without electricity. The award acknowledges films that embody critical, activist, social and denunciatory cinematic practices, created in collaboration with a vulnerable community. European cinema has a long tradition of such productions.

This film cannot be considered as community cinema, which is the subject of this work, since it is a professional short film made by professionals. However, it does exhibit certain characteristics that align it with this model of film production and the utilisation of the film in this study. Primarily, it is a work filmed in an urban locale characterised by marginality and violence. Moreover, it was produced in collaboration with the protagonist community, comprising Roma and immigrant associations and groups residing and working in the area. This community has been involved in various stages of the production process. Finally, the film reflects the reality, culture and struggle for decent living conditions of this community.

Community cinema deviates from the conventions and regulations that typify commercial cinema. Its production is developed in conjunction with the community, and its dissemination, in addition to very specific film festivals and exhibitions, takes place in circuits outside the film market, such as universities, libraries, trade unions, cultural or religious centres. Over the past fifty years, Latin America has emerged as a notable exemplar in the realm of community cinema, both in terms of the quantity of productions and the number of festivals held across the continent, and in the academic discourse that has emerged, which reflects upon a distinct form of communicative expression that seamlessly integrates art with participation. However, several studies (Barranquero & Trere, 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2014) have highlighted the dearth of knowledge in European academia concerning this activity, where "the extensive history accumulated by professionals and activists in the field in other latitudes [...] the absence of dialogue with critical approaches in popular, educational, social change or decolonial communication of Latin American origin" (Barranquero & Trere, 2021, p. 175).

This text offers a reflection on the potential of community cinema as a citizen medium for social transformation in urban contexts of social vulnerability. What is community cinema? How might the production of community cinema be employed to promote social transformation in vulnerable urban territories? How can community cinema be used in these spaces? The text commences with a delineation of community cinema and its evolution in Latin America, followed by a practical demonstration in the form of a real shooting experience of a short film in 2023 in a peripheral neighbourhood of the city of Cartagena de Indias (Colombia). The initiative was undertaken as part of an international cooperation project, which sought to utilise international communication for the promotion of peace.

1.1. Community Cinema

Community filmmaking is a mode of filmmaking from the perspective of communities that differs from commercial filmmaking in all aspects of its production stages (pre-production, production, post-production and distribution). A distinguishing characteristic of community filmmaking is its amateur nature, as it is defined as "cinema made by non-professional filmmakers, on issues that interest specific groups and communities" (Gumucio-Dagron, 2014a, p. 17).

> This is a cinema that has communication as its fundamental principle. Its primary reference is not the film industry, but communication as a means of vindication for the marginalised and silenced. It is an articulation of communication, an artistic expression and a political expression. It emerges, in the majority of cases, from the necessity to communicate without intermediaries, to do so in a language that is distinct from and has not been predetermined by other extant languages, and with the aim of fulfilling in society the function of politically representing

> marginalised, under-represented or ignored collectivities (Gumucio-Dagron, 2014b). (Gumucio-Dagron, 2014b).

The advent of this cinematic genre in Latin America is generally attributed to the 1980s, a period which witnessed the emergence of Super 8 cameras, subsequently followed by the availability of affordable and user-friendly home video cameras. The advent of such equipment represented a pivotal development, as it facilitated the production of amateur films. This period is characterised by the emergence of independent video production.

> The advent of new technologies has precipitated a paradigm shift in the discourse surrounding the democratisation of audiovisual media. This has led to a heightened focus on the role of these media in fostering freedom of expression and facilitating the exercise of the right to communication and information. Consequently, this has given rise to a continental movement that utilises the audiovisual medium as a tool for historical recovery, identity reinforcement, cultural promotion, denunciation, education and democratisation (Gumucio-Dagron, 2014a).

In the 1950s, the film equipment necessary for filming (cameras, lights, sound equipment) had also become lighter. This development was already being utilised by anthropologists to conduct ethnographic research (see the pioneering works of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson). Indeed, Gumucio-Dagron (2014b) considers the aforementioned precursors to be the very pioneers of ethnographic documentary film (Robert Flaherty, John Grierson), the filmmakers of Soviet revolutionary cinema (Dziga Vertov, Aleksandr Medvedkin) and their documentary successors of observational cinema, *cinema verité* and *direct cinema* (Jean Rouch, Chris Marker, Richard Leacock, or the Maysles brothers).

It is within this geographical area and during the 1960s and 1970s (in the context of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the subsequent military reaction in the Southern Cone countries) that purely Latin American film movements such as the Third Cinema or the Cinema Novo Brasileiro emerged. This development can be understood as a response to the cultural influence of American and European cinema, with proposals from directors such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba), Glauber Rocha (Brazil), Fernando Pino Solanas (Argentina), Jorge Sanjinés (Bolivia), Marta Rodríguez (Colombia), Margot Benacerraf (Venezuela) or Patricio Guzmán (Chile), among numerous others.

These cinematic currents are characterised by a denunciation of the inequalities and contradictions of their respective societies of origin, as well as by a search for a Latin American identity. However, they are also distinguished by their utilisation of unconventional film languages and narratives, a stark departure from the conventional style of Hollywood cinema. These films propose a form of cinema that is politically and socially sensitive, designed to provoke and challenge viewers. In this regard, Gumucio-Dagron (2014b, p.12) recalls "the importance of theoretical texts". These include *For an Imperfect Cinema* (*Por un cine imperfect)* (1969) by Julio García Espinosa, García Espinosa, 1995), Toward a Third Cinema (*Hacia un Tercer Cine)* by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas (Getino & Solanas, 2014), and *Theory and practice of a cinema with the people (Teoría y práctica de un cine junto al pueblo)*, by Jorge Sanjinés (Sanjinés & Grupo Ukamau, 1979).

Clemencia Rodríguez's account details how, in the 1980s, the publication of the MacBride Report for UNESCO by the Latin American region coincided with the advocacy of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) that sought to balance global information flows, promote democratic communication that respects cultural identities, and defend and stimulate the right to communication of individuals and communities (MacBride, 1980). In response to the MacBride Report, various scholars of culture and communication (citing among others Paulo Freire, Armand Mattelart, Néstor García Canclini, Rosa María Alfaro, María Matta, Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Mario Kaplún or Jesús Martín Barbero) proposed a series of conceptual frames of reference that allowed Latin America to think about the issue of communications and culture in its own terms and to question some theories imported from the North [...]" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 15).

Independent video was employed in the 1980s by a variety of organisations and organised social collectives as a pivotal medium of communication in what was then designated as alternative communication. Precisely Rodríguez, drawing on Latin American cultural studies and Chantal Mouffe's

theory of radical democracy (Mouffe, 1999), coined a term that facilitates a more profound comprehension of the concept of community cinema: citizen media (Rodríguez, 2001). This concept, as posited by Rodríguez, serves to encompass other concepts formulated by various authors in different contexts. These include, but are not limited to, the following: "community media, alternative media, autonomous media, participatory media, radical media, participatory media, pirate media, counter-information media, parallel media, underground media, popular media, dissident media, free media..." (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 14).

However, it is at the beginning of the 21st century, with the advent of the digital revolution and the expansion and ease of access by citizens to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), that a significant stimulus to community film production is produced: As Gumucio-Dagron (2014a, p. 28) asserts, "technology serves as a catalyst for the transition from a cinema of individuals to a community cinema." Consequently, numerous urban and rural communities, which had previously relied on independent audiovisual professionals, began to assume ownership of the various stages of film production.

It is evident that since the late 1980s, community cinema has been produced in most Latin American countries in both urban and rural contexts. With the beginning of the 21st century and the expansion of ICTs, the production of this cinema has experienced an extraordinary boom (Almenarez, 2022; Álvarez Vargas, 2024; Gumucio-Dagron et al., 2014; Mendoza Rubio & Molina Andrade, 2023; Molfetta, 2016; Pritsch Armesto, 2021; Schroeder Rodríguez, 2023). These address a wide range of issues (environmentalist, feminist, indigenous, Afro-descendant, among others). This phenomenon is further substantiated by the contemporary augmentation of community film festivals (Almenarez, 2022; Osorio, 2022; Peirano & Vallejo, 2016; Peña Zerpa, 2022; Rodríguez Guerrero, 2020) communication collectives.

At present, a significant proportion of Latin American community film production occurs in vulnerable urban contexts affected by insecurity and violence (Betancour, 2022; Cardozo Veira, 2020; Chuquiano, 2021; Giraldo Castro & Rincón Ramírez, 2022).

1.2. Community Cinema: A Citizen Medium of Communication for Social Change

From the 1960s onwards, theorists from Asia, Africa and Latin America began to interrogate the concept of 'development', which had emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War and was regarded as referring to a vertical development model that prioritised and even sacralised knowledge from the industrialised regions of the North (primarily the United States and Europe), while disregarding that of the regions of the South, which were designated as 'underdeveloped' or 'developing'. The development of new critical currents of thought, such as the Epistemologies of the South and decolonial thinking, has been influenced by scholars including Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano. These theoretical frameworks question established paradigms, such as capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, and advocate for a critical evaluation of Western scientific thought. They promote the development of alternative forms of knowledge and analysis that are informed by the experiences and insights of historically marginalised and excluded social groups.

In the domain of social communication, Gumucio-Dagron (2004) elucidates how, in the 1970s, communication commenced being incorporated as a pivotal component within the development policies of non-industrialised peoples and nations. The notion of Communication for Development began to be utilised, under the aegis of prominent international agencies such as the FAO, UNESCO or UNICEF, or development cooperation agencies such as USAID. This concept has been shown to surpass other previous models of communication used in the field of development, such as market information and welfare information, which had dominated North-South relations in the post-war period. However, a decade later, Development Communication also began to be questioned because it did not take into account the socio-cultural characteristics of the territories and communities it was aimed at, turning them into mere recipients of messages conceived, once again, from above.

In this context, a new area of performance emerged, termed Communication for Social Change, which assigned community communication a pivotal role in the advancement of societies. This was achieved through the provision of universal access to the right to communication, the facilitation of access to communication tools, and the utilisation of dialogue and citizen participation as central tenets. As Navarro Díaz (2008, p. 328) asserts, "this communication is designed for social change, for

transformation, for argumentation, for the recognition of the other-different, based on the very essence of its mission to transform and emancipate subjects, which is its own". From this perspective, community cinema is, by its very nature, considered to be part of Communication for Social Change.

Over the past fifty years, Latin America has become a region characterised by a wealth of processes and experiences of popular, participatory communication. This observation has been previously noted by Gumucio-Dagron (2004, 2011). A significant manifestation of Communication for Social Change is the emergence of communication collectives.

These collectives can be defined as organised groups within communities, typically comprising all members of the community, who utilise a variety of media and communication tools (e.g. video, radio, photography, graphic design, press, internet, social media) to facilitate processes of social transformation that are participatory and horizontal in nature within these communities. The utilisation of these communication tools enables the collectives to interrogate and challenge their communities. Furthermore, these collectives serve to make the community visible. The scope of their activities encompasses a wide range of subjects, including collective memory, cultural identity, cultural heritage, health education, and various community issues such as insecurity, delinquency, and even community conflicts. It is evident that communication collectives play a pivotal role in fortifying the social fabric of the territories in which they operate.

A plethora of Latin American communication collectives have been responsible for achieving significant social impacts, including the Communication Collective La Silla Rota (Mexico), Communication for Justice (Argentina), the Communication Collective Caminos de la Libertad (Chile) and the Motoboy Channel in Sao Paulo (Brazil) (Targino & Dias Gomes, 2011). In Colombia, the last quarter of a century has seen a proliferation of communication collectives, with successful cases such as the Los Otros Abrazos collective or the communication networks for peace and conflict management in Yondó (Rocha Torres & Muñoz Pico, 2024). In this nation, which has been embroiled in an armed conflict for decades and continues to grapple with its aftermath, there is a proliferation of communication collectives that utilize citizen media within their respective communities (Rodríguez et al., 2008). This phenomenon is particularly evident in the northern region of the country, specifically in the department of Bolívar, which has been profoundly impacted by the violence of this armed conflict over the centuries. Within this context, there are numerous successful experiences that have been operational for decades (Vega & Bayuelo, 2008). This includes the Montes de María Línea 21 Communication Collective (recipient of the National Peace Prize in 2003) in Carmen de Bolívar (Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21, 2024), and the Kuchá Suto Collective in Palenque de San Basilio (Colectivo Kuchá Suto, 2024).

1.3. A Community Cinema Experience in Cartagena de Indias

The armed conflict that has affected Colombia for decades has resulted in the country currently ranking among those with the highest number of forcibly displaced people worldwide (Naciones Unidas, 2020; Segura, 2002). A significant proportion of these displaced individuals have sought refuge in the large cities of the Caribbean region (El Espectador, 2016). If the existence of urban belts of poverty and stigmatisation can be considered a distinctive feature of contemporary Latin American cities, there are examples of this throughout the region (Giménez & Ginóbili, 2003; Rasse et al, 2021). In Colombia, the armed conflict has resulted in all large and medium-sized cities, without exception, being surrounded by belts of informal settlements (called "invasions" in Colombia). These settlements are inhabited by people who take refuge in the city (Sánchez, 2012; Torres-Tovar, 2009) and who, upon their arrival and subsequent settlement, lack the most basic services (water, electricity, sewage, transport, security). This state of affairs, characterised by the absence of adequate living conditions for the population, has the potential to persist over the course of decades.

The experience under discussion takes place in the city of Cartagena de Indias, which is located in the north of Colombia. It is a port city of colonial origin, founded in 1533 by the Spanish conquistador Pedro de Heredia. The historical underpinnings of the city, including its role in the transatlantic trade in enslaved people (Múnera, 2005; Uribe Villegas et al., 2018), have led to an enduring presence of inequality since its inception. In the present day, it is a prominent tourist destination in Latin America, renowned for its islands and beaches situated in the Caribbean Sea, as well as its well-preserved historic

centre, which offers a notable example of Spanish colonial architecture. Additionally, it serves as Colombia's primary export port.

In the city of Cartagena de Indias, there is a prevalent discourse surrounding the existence of two distinct urban centres: one that is dedicated to tourism and commerce, and another, often referred to as "the Other Cartagena", which is home to over 80% of the population and is grappling with significant challenges related to mobility, infrastructure, and social services. This dichotomy is consistently reflected in official statistics (Cartagena Cómo Vamos, 2024; DANE, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Cartagena Cómo Vamos Programme, 2017), media reports (La Contratopedia Caribe, 2021; Romero, 2021; Taborda Herrera, 2019) and in the academic literature (Abello-Vives, 2015; Baltar-Moreno & Bernabé-Fraguas, 2024; Deavila, 2014; Espinosa et al., 2018; Espinosa Espinosa, 2015; Pérez & Salazar-Mejía, 2009).

In addition to its colonial and slave-owning past, the consequences of which continue to affect the Afro-descendant population today, Cartagena de Indias has not been immune to the Colombian armed conflict, which has left thousands dead and millions of people displaced throughout the 20th century. This profound violence has had a significant impact on the Colombian Caribbean and the regions closest to the city (Abitbol, 2018; Mercado Vega, 2022). Since the early years of the country's independence, many of the informal neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Cartagena were historically built by Afro-descendant communities that were displaced within the city itself (Sánchez-Mojica, 2018). This situation has continued into the present day, as evidenced by the establishment of new informal settlements, such as the Chambacú or Bocagrande sectors in the 20th century (Deavila, 2008, 2021), and to which the armed conflict has contributed decisively by causing thousands of peasant families displaced by the violence of the different armed actors to take refuge in the city, building settlements on its outskirts, as in the case of the Nelson Mandela, El Pozón or César Flórez sectors (Daniels, 2003; Quiceno, 2010).

Cartagena has achieved a notable position in global tourist rankings, being recognised as the seventh most popular city to visit in 2024 (Travel and Leisure, 2024). Additionally, it has been identified as Colombia's primary export port, a role it has played since 2022 (Carga SAS, 2022). However, it is important to note that Cartagena has also been highlighted in reports as one of the most dangerous and violent cities worldwide in terms of security (Caracol Cartagena, 2024; Muñoz, 2024; Semana, 2023). A recent study (Castellar, 2024) revealed that 79% of the population of Cartagena considers the city to be unsafe.

This phenomenon can be attributed to the pervasive inequality and historical persistence of poverty in the city, which has affected 43% of the population, particularly impacting peripheral neighbourhoods (García Martínez et al., 2008; Pérez & Salazar-Mejía, 2009). These neighbourhoods exhibit significant deficiencies in various facilities, including cultural and educational infrastructure, thereby hindering citizens' engagement in cultural activities (Espinosa-Espinosa & Toro-González, 2016). This phenomenon has been particularly noted among the Afro-descendant population (Espinosa et al., 2018).

2. Methodology

The following is a narrative presentation of the production experience of a community film that was made in a neighbourhood in the urban periphery of Cartagena de Indias called César Flórez. While the culmination of this endeavour is the short fiction film *San Fernando´s Radiance* (*El resplandor de San Fernando)* (Báscones et al., 2023), the present study concentrates on elucidating how the collaborative process undertaken for the production of this film can be extrapolated to multiple analogous contexts.

The methodology employed comprised the execution of a socio-cultural intervention, targeting a neighbourhood community that had been previously established within a city context characterised by inequality, violence and insecurity. The intervention was grounded in the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and sociocultural animation (Caride, 2005; Colmenares, 2012; Escudero, 2004; Fals-Borda, 2015; Martí, 2002). In order to engage with the community, activities from the cultural memory research methodology have also been employed (Correa, 2013).

The process of producing the film emerged in August 2023 as part of a community-based initiative to recover the community memory of a neighbourhood in the southwest of the city in a vulnerable sector of the periphery. This initiative was being carried out with an organised community and involved the

use of domestic photography, which was treasured by people in their homes. The initiative was part of a university research group's (Semillero de Historia de la Fotografía en el Caribe Colombiano, 2024).

The seedbed's existing work on neighbourhood memory was expanded in August 2023 with the arrival of two young volunteers of Latin American origin from Spain. They participated in an international university cooperation project that aimed to create an academic unit on communication against violence in Cartagena. This was with the support of the Complutense University of Madrid (Unidad Académica de Comunicación contra la Violencia, 2024). The unit was established to facilitate and disseminate communication processes that would help to peacefully combat various types of violence. One of the proposals that was put forward with the aim of developing this unit was the joint production of a community cinema film in the neighbourhood where the seedbed was intervening.
The proposal was thus presented to the community and the seedbed, and following their approval, the production process was initiated. The filmmaking process was primarily founded on the theoretical postulates of community cinema and the so-called citizen media, as well as communication for social change (Almenarez, 2022; Gumucio-Dagron, 2004; Gumucio-Dagron et al., 2014; Rodríguez et al., 2008). In this manner, community participants have been involved in all the basic stages of the proposed film production process: pre-production, production, post-production and exhibition (Barroso-García, 1994; Fernández Díez & Martínez Abadía, 1999). The subsequent section will present the results of the different phases of this process.

3. Results

3.1. The César Flórez Neighbourhood

Through the domestic photographs provided by the neighbourhood group participating in the intervention on the memory of the César Flórez neighbourhood (which belong to the genre of so-called vernacular photography), the research team was able to ascertain the origins of this urban sector, which was born as an informal settlement, in the violence of the Colombian armed conflict of the second half of the 20th century on the Caribbean coast of the country. This conflict had already been the object of study at the time (Fals-Borda, 1979).

As recounted in the text entitled *Feeling the pain of others: neighbourhood memories César Flórez (Sentir el dolor de los demás, Memorias del barrio César Flórez)* (Baltar-Moreno et al., 2023), in 1978 a group of families from rural areas in nearby departments, along with other residents in other vulnerable sectors of the city, illegally invaded some land to build houses with wooden boards and plastic and zinc roofs. Following a violent eviction at the hands of the army, a group of individuals sought legal counsel from César Flórez, a young law student at the University of Cartagena. Under his guidance, they pursued legal channels to assert their right to housing, resulting in the acquisition and formalisation of several plots of land. Additionally, they established a communal meeting place that subsequently evolved into a community centre.

César Flórez assisted other families from neighbouring sectors in the legalisation of their status. Having become a lawyer, he was murdered by unknown persons in 1985, as part of the genocide of the Unión Patriótica political party (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018). In acknowledgement of his contributions, the community has chosen to name the sector and the community house after him, thereby paying tribute to his legacy.

3.2. Filmmaking Context

César Flórez was originally an "invasion" neighbourhood but has now been formalised in the southwest of Cartagena. The majority of its houses have been legalised and constructed using cement, asphalt, street lighting, and a sewage system. Despite this, the elderly residents, many of whom were the founders of the neighbourhood, continue to exhibit strong community spirit. The Casa Comunal, a two-storey building erected over time with the efforts of the neighbourhood, is one of the few socio-cultural facilities in the neighbouring sectors.

Concurrently, during the process of compiling the neighbourhood memory, these older individuals persistently articulated their apprehension regarding the absence of a generational transition among the younger population, thereby jeopardising the perpetuation of the neighbourhood's social fabric.

This phenomenon is occurring within a broader context of chronic insecurity, which has escalated in the last decade and has had a profound impact on the entire city, particularly the peripheral neighbourhoods (Castellar, 2024).

Following the memory workshops conducted with the older members of the community, one of the international volunteers accompanied a community leader who has been leading various children's reading clubs with children in situations of extreme vulnerability, both in the César Flórez neighbourhood and in other neighbouring sectors. These reading clubs are held on a weekly basis and are facilitated by Mr. Isaías, a volunteer who operates with limited material and financial resources. He solicits the collaboration of parents to ensure the clubs are conducted in secure environments for the children, such as their homes.

The second volunteer arrived in Cartagena de Indias a few weeks after the first. She holds a university degree in Audiovisual Communication and has participated in various community cinema initiatives. Upon joining the project and becoming acquainted with the César Flórez sector, the seedbed, and the reading clubs, she proposed to the work team and the community the production of a community film, with the participation of the elderly people who run the community house and the children from Mr. Isaías' reading clubs. Consequently, the academic unit established a team of audiovisual producers comprising two volunteers and two semi-seminarians. Over the course of October, this team engaged the community in a period of collective work and creation.

3.3. Pre-Production: A Community Story Told from within the Community

The pre-production stage entailed the development of workshop meetings with both older and younger individuals expressing an interest in participating in the production. During these meetings, the prospect of engaging in the creation of a film as a collective cultural endeavour, undertaken with, from and for the community, was explained.

Following the establishment of a cohesive team with a shared determination to produce the film, the collective began the process of script development: What story did the community aspire to convey? Which aspects of the neighbourhood did they wish to emphasise? Among the ideas that emerged in the team, the older people expressed the importance of highlighting in the film the value of the community house as a safe meeting place, and of being able to transmit to the younger people its legacy as an organised community aware of the value of mutual care and the need to continue building the neighbourhood collectively. Conversely, children expressed a preference for a superhero film, proposing the incorporation of a witch character accompanied by two henchmen. Additionally, there was a proposal to incorporate elements that would serve to identify the neighbourhood and the region, including its distinctive culinary traditions, dances, attire, and accessories.

The collective opinion of the group was that the final product should clearly convey a message in favour of dialogue and against physical and symbolic violence. Furthermore, it was determined that the film should not prioritise a sole protagonist, but rather, the narrative should be driven by the collective, with the community house serving as the primary protagonist. It was also determined that, while the concept had originated from a community-based process within César Flórez, it would be more appropriate to utilise the name San Fernando in the film's title, as this name encompasses the neighbourhood and other adjacent sectors from which several of the film's participants originate.

In this manner, over the course of two weeks, a film script was constructed collectively, with the semi-seminarians and volunteers, in conjunction with the members of the community, shaping the audiovisual narrative (see Figure 1), incorporating the action and dialogue, adapting local expressions and the natural manner of speaking and expressing oneself to align with the requirements of the film language. The narrative was structured around a clear sequence of events, beginning, developing, and concluding, with a distinct delineation of characters as protagonists, antagonists, and secondary characters.

Figure 1. Script creation moment with the community

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

The resulting synopsis was as follows: an older man from the neighbourhood recollects in flashback how, during his childhood, he and his group of friends once discovered a green emerald inside the communal house that symbolised the strength of the community. However, the discovery was soon made known to an evil witch (the witch Olga), who, driven by greed and selfishness, sent her minions to steal it. The young protagonists, in a collective act of resistance, chose to confront the antagonists by utilising their combined magical abilities, including tickling and dancing, but most significantly, the power of friendship. Ultimately, the witch and her minions were persuaded that greed is not a path to happiness, and the communal house was safeguarded for posterity.

Subsequently, a collective reading and validation of the script was conducted, with the objective of correcting any details. The audiovisual equipment required for the filming was then gathered. This equipment primarily comprised a Canon T-5i DSLR camera, lapel microphones and a boom microphone, and a basic set of LED lights. These were borrowed from the university, but ultimately not utilised.

In addition, an acting workshop was conducted with the team of protagonists as a rehearsal (see Figure 2). During this session, recommendations were discussed with the aim of enhancing the dialogues and actions portrayed in the script, whilst also fostering naturalism in performance before the camera.

Figure 2. Rehearsals of the film inside the Casa Comunal

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

Finally, two days of filming were determined, and the mothers, fathers and guardians of the participating minors were asked for their informed consent to be filmed and to disseminate the audiovisual and photographic material resulting from the process

3.4. Filming and Presentation to the Community

The filming took place during the first fortnight of November on two Saturday afternoons, utilising the children's free time and benefiting from the consistent presence of some mothers and grandparents, as certain scenes necessitated filming in the street.

The filming took place in the streets of the neighbourhood, a public school, the exterior and interior of the community house and the park in front of it (Figure 3). At certain points in the filming, the group involved almost thirty individuals, including filmmakers, actors and actresses, mothers, grandparents and teachers, thereby generating a sense of anticipation for the unfolding events.

Figure 3. Filming in the streets of the neighbourhood.

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

In the process of filming, it was found that several props (for example, a compass) which were specified in the script could not be obtained. Consequently, these props had to be substituted, reworked, or imagined. Following the filming of each video clip, the crew convened to view the footage and provide feedback, repeating the shots as required until the children began to show signs of fatigue. Concurrently with the filming of the feature-length film, the filming of the behind-the-scenes process also commenced, in the form of making-off (Baltar-Moreno, 2023).

The preliminary editing stage (which entailed the editing of shots, sound and effects) was conducted using a laptop computer with Adobe Première software installed. The resultant product was a short fiction film of approximately 9 minutes, entitled *San Fernando´s Radiance* (*El resplandor de San Fernando)* (Báscones et al., 2023).

In view of the fact that the objective was to enable the local community to view the product prior to the departure of the international volunteers in December, a pre-montage was constructed and made available to the public in the community house on the last weekend of November. Approximately ninety individuals congregated on that occasion, predominantly local residents from the neighbourhood (see Figures 4 and 5). The audience included the production team, the cast of the film, mothers, fathers and grandparents, children and adolescents, and some of the city's cultural actors who were invited (school principals, social leaders, cultural managers, librarians). At the commencement of the event, a volunteer delivered an explanation to the audience on the nature of community cinema:

> Should the film be selected for a festival, and should it be awarded a prize, it is important to acknowledge that it is for and from all of you. The concept of community cinema emphasises the collaborative nature of filmmaking, involving the audience and the community in the process of creation. As my colleague asserts, the script and editing were developed collectively, with the children's contributions being central to the process. The children have also recorded camera footage. Now that the screening has concluded, we will listen to the protagonists and solicit their opinion on how we can improve the production, edit it, and enhance it further, thanks to their feedback [...] We believe that communication is a powerful tool for preventing violence and making visible and denouncing what happens in our neighbourhoods. (Brenda Báscones in Baltar-Moreno, 2023)

Figure 4. Dialogue with the participating community prior to the pre-screening inside the community house

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

Figure 5. First community screening of the film

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

And at the end of the screening, the film received a standing ovation. As one of the mothers in attendance said:

> [It is important...] that the film is taken to the sectors where the children come from, to motivate many more children to take part in these events: to be working on films, to the reading club.... that they are always motivated to be in the arts...not only in sports...because now children are all the time with "football, football"...and there are many who are very capable of [doing other things such as] being in the arts: being actors, being painters, being readers...so, it would be good if this could be taken to the sectors where they come from. (anonymous mother in Baltar-Moreno, 2023)

3.5. Exhibition

Following the initial presentation to the community, the pre-montage was also presented at the university that hosts the academic unit during the month of December (see Figure 6). The directors and representatives of the César Flórez community delivered the presentation in a solemn act attended by the rector and various directors.

Figure 6. Presentation of the film in the library of the Technological University of Bolivar.

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

In the initial phase of the project, which took place during the month of January, the two Colombian semilleristas were granted the opportunity to travel to Spain as part of the collaborative endeavour. They presented the film (see Figure 7) at a series of public events, which included universities, schools, cultural centres, and neighbourhood associations in Madrid.

Figure 7. Various presentations of the short film in Madrid

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

In mid-August, the seed group presented the film at the Corazón de María Educational Institution, located in San Francisco, another peripheral neighbourhood of Cartagena de Indias affected by violence and stigmatisation. Following the favourable reception of the short film among its students, the teaching team proposed to the group that they create a new short film, a process that began at the end of September.

The official premiere of the film finally took place on 23 August 2024, coinciding with the closing ceremony of the II Muestra de Cine Universitario del Caribe, a prestigious event organised by the University of Cartagena. The cast of the film was in attendance once more (see figure 8). Presently, *San Fernando´s Radiance* (*El resplandor de San Fernando)* has commenced screening in educational institutions and public libraries in Cartagena, coinciding with the dissemination of memory work in the communities of the Semillero de historia de la fotografía en el Caribe colombiano (Seminar on the history of photography in the Colombian Caribbean).

Figure 8. Presentation of the film during the Caribbean University Film Festival of the University of Cartagena.

Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

The film was also presented publicly on 27 August at the Biblioteca Pública Piloto in Medellín. Since September 2024, the film has begun to be submitted to the national and international community film festival market through the Clickforfestivals and Festihome platforms, with the objective of being exhibited first in specialised festivals in the region, such as the Audiovisual Festival of the Montes de María FAMMA (in El Carmen de Bolívar) or the Mini aguatia andi Palenge Community Film Festival (in Palenque de San Basilio).

Consequently, the short film has been presented to the community and at local, national and international events. Following the conclusion of its exhibition period at festivals, which typically spans two years, the short film will be made available to the public on platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The experience described exemplifies the use of community cinema as a tool to strengthen cohesion and the social fabric in a vulnerable urban context marked by violence. The film production process in the César Flórez neighbourhood of Cartagena de Indias has strengthened the bonds between the individuals involved in the film, all of whom are neighbours from the same sector.

It is evident that this process has fostered intergenerational and intercultural dialogue, and upon completion, the community has taken ownership of the product and identified with it, as it reflects their closest cultural identity, with which the people who inhabit the territory most closely identify.

Through the medium of images, the film brings to the fore the significance of the local neighbourhood, including its spaces such as the park, the sports field, the streets, the school and the community house. The plot's evolution, through the actions and dialogues of the characters, engenders reflection on the community's ongoing struggle with violence (a prevalent problem) and ways to address it. The collective outcome elevates the community as a whole. The images also serve to immortalise the space and its protagonists at a particular moment in time, thereby contributing to the creation of collective memory, a fundamental aspect of historical documentation.

In a similar manner, this experience demonstrates the efficacy of utilising the creation process of a community film to engage a vulnerable urban community in an activity of cultural, social and artistic nature. This contributes to the construction and consolidation of the social fabric within the territory where the production has been conducted. Furthermore, it serves to combat and dispel myths, prejudices and stigmas. This approach is logical, given that a community cinema film is a type of

production whose purpose is not "media production but the transformation of collective imaginaries" (Clemencia Rodríguez cited in (Vega & Bayuelo, 2008) (p. 57).

Methodologically, the production process itself has been responsive to a process of participatory and dialogic communication between the residents of the neighbourhood, thus becoming a form of citizen empowerment through communication. The short film is a cultural artefact and a medium of communication created by a community, and it serves as a paradigmatic exemplar of the utilisation of film as a citizen medium, as defined by Clemencia Rodríguez (Rodríguez, 2001). It demonstrates how the employment of film as a citizen medium functions as a tool for empowerment, identity expression and education. It is a tool for social transformation.

By being screened in other external contexts, such as festivals, universities or socio-cultural centres, the film has given visibility to a specific community and, in doing so, has shed light on some complex social issues (the vulnerability of children, the dismemberment of the social fabric, the consequences of the armed conflict on the daily lives of the elderly and minors) which, being specific to that community, can be extrapolated to many other similar contexts and which would otherwise remain hidden or misunderstood. This contributes to the cultivation of a more informed citizenry.

It is imperative to emphasise that the production process of a community film does not culminate with the final editing stage but rather transitions into the exhibition phase. In accordance with the postulates of communication for social change, which place particular emphasis on the significance of processes occurring between groups rather than on the final products, it is crucial to recognise that, in the context of film, as asserted by Fernández Díez & Martínez Abadía (1999), a film is not intended to be viewed once and subsequently stored; rather, it is intended to be exhibited publicly on numerous occasions. Consequently, for individuals or entities responsible for producing community films, this final phase must be accorded equal significance to the film's production process itself. A strategy for the circulation of the product must be formulated, with a view to identifying diverse audiences and exhibition spaces.

This experience has demonstrated that community cinema can function not only as a cinematic product, but also as an innovative and inspiring pedagogical material for other communities and groups. The screening of the film in educational institutions in neighbourhoods with similar characteristics to César Flórez has led to the initiation of additional community film projects. The inspirational nature of the subject is identified as a notable outcome of the film.

Figure 9 illustrates several of the primary aspects that community cinema can address when employed as a tool to combat violence in a vulnerable urban context. These aspects are derived from our experience in the César Flórez neighbourhood in Cartagena de Indias.

Figure 9. Community Cinema as a Tool against Violence in a Vulnerable Urban Context

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The production of *San Fernando´s Radiance* (*El resplandor de San Fernando)* serves to illustrate how international cooperation, in this instance, university collaboration, can be transformative and valuable for the communities involved in the creative and executive processes of producing such material.

In conclusion, it can be posited that community cinema, as observed in this study, represents a significant form of expression within the epistemologies of the Global South. This artistic production is characterised by its collaborative nature, with the community being both the subject and the creator. The experience documented here has demonstrated that community filmmaking is not merely a democratic communication practice; rather, it is an inherently democratic and participatory artistic and cultural practice. This assertion underscores the fundamental essence of community filmmaking, encapsulating its true essence and purpose. As Gumucio-Dagron (2014a, p. 17) asserts, "Here we are, this is who we are and this is what we want." Engaging in community film production, as the author asserts, implies the exercise of the right to communicate, in its purest form.

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