

Visual representation of Latin Americans in National Geographic

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Abstract

The National Geographic Magazine is one of the American media products recognizable and read by millions of people all over the world. The Magazine considers itself as an educational, quasi – scholarly publication for the ‘increase and diffusion of geographic knowledge’. With this authority and more than one century tradition, National Geographic disseminates knowledge about different topics, including people and their cultures. What makes the Magazine especially popular and influential is the abundance of beautiful and colorful pictures. The visual representation of the ‘Others’ constitute a significant part of magazine’s content and add to the popular discourse about the issue.

In this master thesis I am concerned how visual representation of Latin Americans in National Geographic is constructed. The constructivist theory is a background for my research. To analyze the photographs I employed semiological approach as outlined by Roland Barthes. The study incorporates also feminist and post – colonial theories, particularly the arguments concerning the representation of the ‘Other’.

The analysis of visual representation of Latin Americans in National Geographic resulted in finding few myths which the Magazine disseminates about the group in focus. The Latin ‘Other’ is represented as a member of a Third World, trapped in the primitive state of nature and living in literal or metaphorical jungle. Further, Latin American ‘Other’ is represented in the context of contemporary socialist movements in the region and relationships with the United States. It results in mythologizing the Latin revolution and its leaders.

The general conclusion of the research is that photographs in National Geographic presents only particular part of the Latin societies and creates reduced image of the Latin ‘Other’. Visual representation of Latin Americans in the Magazine is not balanced, but focused on a narrow field of issues, often controversial and presented in a stereotypical way. It results in construction and dissemination of myths that are often far from reality.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In this paper I investigate how photographs of Latin Americans in the *National Geographic* magazine can be analyzed as visual representation of a Latin American ‘Other’. I focus on photographs which are one of the most powerful means of communication in our image – saturated world. Together with other media, still images influence the way we see and understand the reality. I am particularly concerned with how photographs function in the original (American) version of *National Geographic* – world wide monthly magazine of popular interest. In the process of describing, interpreting and comparing images of Latin Americans, I hope to find out if there are some general tendencies in the way the visual representations of Latin Americans are produced by *National Geographic*. I connect my study to the notion of racial and gendered ‘othering’ as it is constructed through representational practices. Taking into account the context of magazine industry, I intend to analyze how visual representation symbolically constructs myths about Latin Americans in *National Geographic* and presents them as objective facts.

1.1 Background

The *National Geographic* was placed on fifth position in the Magazine Publisher of America ranking from 2007 in both Average Total Paid and Verified Circulation and Average Paid and Verified Subscription Circulation with around five mln in both cases. The magazine was granted the first prize in the National Magazine Awards 2007 for ‘General Excellence’ in the category over 2,000,000 circulation – ‘Vanity Fair for Columns and Commentary’. As the MPA describes: “The award honors the effectiveness with which writing, reporting, editing and design all come together to command reader’s attention and fulfill the magazine’s unique editorial mission”.¹ What is more, it occupies the 35th place in the Magazine 300 Index from 2006 run by ‘Advertising Age’ – ranking by total circulation gross revenue and advertising revenue. Even though the Magazine’s total gross revenue was 249,244,000 \$ in 2006, its parent company still considers itself ‘a non-profit scientific and educational organization “for the increase and diffusion of geographic knowledge”’².

¹ www.magazine.org [10.04.2008]

² *National Geographic Magazine*, February 2008, p. 15

The history of the *National Geographic Society* that is the parent company for the *National Geographic* magazine, is a successful and romantic story of a small geographic association established in 1888 with no more than 200 members³. Today its prints, programmes and web sites are extensively consumed in United States and all over the world. The yellow frame of the magazine is easily recognized from the newsstands and contains every month the greatest pictures taken by magazine's photographers. These are pictures that appear as the first association when we think about *National Geographic* today. Colorful, striking, sometimes odd, without doubt, grasp the attention and circulate in the memory for long. Since the first photo essay from Lhasa, Tibet, appeared in 1905 issue of the magazine, the publication relies heavily on visual presentation of its explorations, adventures, travels, reportages and research. Therefore, visual images in *National Geographic* reach millions of people around the world shaping their beliefs, views and opinions. Among photos of nature, archeological findings, historic sights, images of people and their surroundings occupy a significant part of the magazine's pages. Because of the scale of the phenomenon, I found it interesting and necessary to investigate how *National Geographic* represents people from particular cultures or regions of the world.

1.2 Research focus

Due to the size of this paper, I had to narrow down the focus of my research and I therefore chose to analyze the visual representations of people from Latin America in *National Geographic*. The choice of the region – Latin America (I consider here Mexico, Central America, Caribbean and South America) – results from my personal experiences as a photographer in the region. During four journeys to different parts of the region, I photographed extensively people and their cultures. Comparison between my own photographs and those published in *National Geographic* rose up several questions on the issues of representation of the 'Other'. Two basic questions occur – what and how is depicted. Answer to those two questions creates another one – why this is depicted and why in this way. These questions became basis for my study of images of Latin Americans in *National Geographic*. In other words, I am interested in what kind of knowledge or myths, from which position and by what kind of means the magazine disseminates. Before the core of my study that is analysis of photographs of Latin Americans, comes the description of the context

³ Bell, Dr. in: Grosvenor, G., *National Geography Society and its Magazine*, Washington, D.C., U.S.A., 1936, p.23

within which the photographs are located. It is the *National Geographic* in the magazine industry, its brief history, use of photographs and depiction of people from different cultures.

The representation of Latin America as a region will be analyzed with a focus on persons and groups. I wish to investigate how Latin Americans are represented visually in American issues of *National Geographic* over the last five years. The research will be based on a sample of ten articles focusing on cultural and sociological issues. The investigation will be presented in the context of relations between United States and particular countries of Latin America depicted in the articles. I will also refer to previous studies on this subject based on the samples from earlier period.

1.3 Theoretical perspective

To analyze the photographs of Latin Americans in *National Geographic*, the thesis will be divided into ten chapters.

In chapter two I will describe the theoretical background for my thesis. Constructivist approach, as outlined by Hall, is the basic theoretical perspective. To understand how representational practices construct the ‘otherness’, feminist and post-colonial theory will be discussed. For ‘reading’ the photographs, I will use the semiological approach, as outlined by Barthes. Description of his method appears in the methodological chapter that is chapter three in my thesis.

As Stuart Hall and other theorists of visual culture and photography studies argue, investigating the ‘meaning of photography’ without considering the institutions of production, distribution and consumption does not make sense⁴. Hence, the visual representations in the magazine must be understood as culturally embedded constructs placed in a broader context. First, I want to place my argument within the context of *National Geography Society* as an institution, its development, policy, target group and representations of different cultures in magazine’s articles. Therefore, an overview of *National Geographic* history and principles will be given in chapter four. Then, pictures from selected articles will be analyzed from different angles and within many contexts. In chapter five I will outline the internal context of

⁴ Evans, J., Hall, J. (ed.) *Visual culture: The Reader*. London: Sage Publications, 1999, p. 2

photographs that is brief description of the articles in which photographs are located. Chapter 6 is designed to show how the photographs in Latin American articles build a story. Here the layout and the order in which photographs are organized will be described in order to show how the narration is constructed. Next chapter reveals general characteristics of all analyzed photographs that are repeating motifs, objects, situations and technical aspects like colors, focus, vantage and frame. In chapter eight I will analyze clusters of images, grouped along different categories, like gender and age of depicted figures, type of activity they are involved in, kind of surrounding and others. In the last chapter of my analysis, I will refer to Barthes again and use his notion of myth. Hence, I will move from the first level of semiological analysis to searching for myths as a final stage of my analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

Different approaches to the representation of the 'Other' in cultural Studies

2.1 Constructivist approach

In simple words, according to Hall: "Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people"⁵. The language here is understood not only as a system of linguistic signs, but also other, non - 'linguistic' signs. Visual images, produced by hand, mechanical, electronic, digital or other are also languages, the same as other non-'linguistic' things, like 'language' of the body, 'language' of the fashion or music. Representation then involves the use of all these different languages, signs, images, which represent things, to produce meaning which is then exchanged among members of a culture. There are three approaches explaining how representation of meaning through language works. These are the reflective approach, the intentional and the constructionist (or constructivist) approach.

First of them, the reflective approach, argues that language works as a mirror which 'reflects' the meaning of things as they already exist in the world. In other words, meaning is in object, person, event etc. and there is a transparent relationship of imitation between word that is sign and a thing.

The second, intentional approach holds an opposite argument. According to it, it is the speaker, the author, who gives the world a meaning through a language. These are his/her intentions on which depends the meaning. However, this approach is arguable because people to understand one another have to share meanings and cannot 'invent' a new one, each time they try to communicate with others. Therefore, every, even personal meaning, has to locate itself in the boundaries of rules, codes and conventions of the language. This assumption is a ground for the third approach described by Hall.

⁵ Hall, S. (ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 15

This third approach, that is constructionist theory, focuses on the social character of language. It rejects both previously outlined approaches, arguing that neither things in themselves, nor the individual users of the language on their own, are able to fix the meaning in language. As Hall explains, “Things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs”. (This is why this approach is called ‘constructionist’). Furthermore, according to this approach, there is a difference between a material world that does not convey a meaning and the symbolic processes through which representation, meaning and language operate. It’s neither an object, nor a speaker that constructs the meaning, but the language, or other system that people use to represent their concepts. In this approach, people are treated as social actors, members of groups and cultures, who use the conceptual systems of their cultures and groups to give the world a meaning and communicate effectively with others. These systems consist of signs that are not only symbolic, but also have a material dimension. However, images, sounds, marks, impulses and other signs are not important due to their material dimension in constructing a meaning, but due to their symbolic function, because they symbolize or represent concepts that then function in language and signify – construct a meaning. What is important is the ‘arbitrariness’ of signs – an argument stating that natural relationship between the sign and its meaning or concept does not exist. These are codes that are necessary to give the signs a meaning. Codes are part of every culture, they result from social conventions and are internalized unconsciously in the process of socialization, becoming shared ‘maps of meaning’. They are different in different cultures but shared inside the cultures that enable their members to communicate effectively. As a result, the chain of signification consists of three parts – signs, codes and meanings. In Halls’ words: “Meaning depends on the relation between a sign and a concept which is fixed by a code”. Therefore, meaning is ‘relational’ and can never be finally fixed⁶.

The Constructionist approach is based to a big extent on the works of Swiss linguist, Saussure (1857-1913). It was him who first assumed that ‘Language is a system of signs’, and signs, like “sounds, images, written words, paintings, photographs etc. function as signs within language only when they serve to express or communicate ideas...⁷. The important part of his work is the distinction between two aspects of signs – signifier and signified. The

⁶ Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 15-29

⁷ Ibid, p.31

first one applies to the form of the sign, like a word, image etc. and the other one to the concept of the object in human's mind. Furthermore, the relation between those two aspects of the sign is neither natural, nor fixed, but dependent on cultural and linguistic codes. Therefore, sign is arbitrary and meaning is also arbitrary, as in constructionist approach described before. These are the cultural and linguistic codes that construct the relationship between signifier and signified, giving the sign a meaning. It sustains representation, which is thus also constructed, never fixed or natural. For this reason, to analyze the representation, the process of interpretation must be involved. Because every language and culture has a distinct way of organizing the world into concepts and categories⁸, the same signs can mean very different things. Representation, which uses signs to communicate ideas about the world, has to be studied within reference to a particular context. This apply very much to a visual representation, that might seem the 'universal language', but actually does not have any fixed meaning on its own, until it's interpreted in particular context. In this point, thinking about signs meets with some photography theories that make the same assumption. As a consequence, photography took over also the methods of analysis from linguistic, particularly semiotics, to analyze how signs function, that is produce meanings.

To sum up, representation is a practice through which a meaning is constructed. There is no direct relationship of reflection, imitation or one-to-one correspondence among languages of different kinds and the real world. It is the 'work' of representation – signifying – that produce a meaning. Moreover, there is no just one system of representation, but many different that work in different ways, producing different meanings. One way representation function is stereotyping.

2.2 Stereotyping and the construction of the 'Other'

Stereotyping, according to Hall, is a set of representational practices like 'essentializing', reductionism and naturalizing. It involves issues of power, fantasy, fetishism and construction of 'otherness'. Through stereotyping people are represented as reduced to few, simple and essential characteristics, which are introduced as given by Nature. These characteristics are usually exaggerated, simplified and fixed. Further, it not only fixes the difference, but symbolically constructs boundaries between the normal and acceptable and the

⁸ Culler, (1976: 23), in: Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p.32

abnormal and unacceptable. Thus, it excludes everything that doesn't belong with the area of accepted normalcy in a society. In other words, it works to maintain the social and symbolic order by drawing the lines between 'normal' and 'pathological' and between Us and Them. They are all who are beyond Our norms –the 'Others'. And the 'Others' are symbolically exiled. Consequently, the practice of stereotyping involves issues of power. It tends to occur where there are big power inequalities. According to Foucault, stereotyping is a 'power-knowledge' sort of game. It classifies people within the norms and tags those who do not match as 'others'. Hence, stereotyping is based on binary oppositions, but understood in Derrida's way – as oppositions in a hierarchical order. Instead of an equal relationship, one pole of the opposition is upper than the other. In the practice of stereotyping these are those who possess symbolic power and judge who belongs or who is excluded⁹. But stereotypes construct not only meanings. Within circulation in the society, they become a social knowledge and together with other constructions on the same subject, create a particular discourse.

In cultural studies the notion of the 'Other' refers mainly to two categories – gender and race. In the core of my interest is systems of representation of the gendered and racialized 'Other' photography. To analyze the subject, I will first outline the notion of 'Otherness' followed by examples of representation of the 'Other'.

The basic assumption in the discussion on the 'Other' is the notion of difference. Questions of 'difference' are present in cultural studies in recent decades and are approached differently by different disciplines. Stuart Hall gives an example of four explanations – the linguistic, the social, the cultural and the psychic – to analyze racial representation. For analysis of representation of Latin Americans in an American popular magazine like *National Geographic*, it is worthy to begin with the introduction of approaches to 'difference' and 'otherness', as outlined by Hall.

First explanation comes from linguistics, associated with Saussure's model of culture based on use of language. The main argument is that 'difference matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist'. He argued that meaning is relational. We are able to understand meaning of a word only because we are able to relate it to its opposition.

⁹ Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p.257-259

We know what words mean, he argued, not because they have some essence of meaning, but because meaning depends on the difference between opposites. Although we actually construct understanding of the world on oppositions, the binary oppositions are somewhat reductionist and over-simplified. There is always something between black and white - the whole scale of grays. In addition, according to Derrida, there are very few neutral binary oppositions, because usually one pole is the dominant one, setting the whole model in relation of power.

The second explanation of the importance of 'difference' or 'otherness' in contemporary debates within cultural studies also comes from linguistics, here from Russian linguist and critic, Mikhail Bakhtin who studied how the meaning is sustained in the dialogue between two or more speakers. He argued that the meaning doesn't belong with any of the speakers, but can only be constructed through a dialogue. Therefore, the 'Other' is essential to a meaning, because everything we say and mean is dependent on the interaction with other speaker.

The third argument derives from anthropology and classic writing on symbolic systems by Emile Durkheim and studies of mythology by Claude Levi-Strauss. Mary Douglas, following these classics, argues that social groups construct the meaning of their world through ordering and organizing things into classificatory systems. By defining the difference among things, one is able to classify them and therefore order them in some organized system. 'Difference' is then essential for cultural meaning. On the other hand, however, it can also disturb the cultural order when things turn up in a wrong category or when they do not fit to any of binary categories at all. Stable, organized societies require order and reject everything that distracts it. It is argued that this applies also to foreigners, intruders, aliens or 'others' that are 'matter out of place' – something like a taboo or a sign of pollution that has to be cleaned. According to it, in every culture exist symbolic boundaries and everything marked as 'different', out of these boundaries, is stigmatized, and expelled as abnormal. On the other hand, what is strange and different often become centered, as Babcock pointed: "what is socially peripheral is often symbolically centered"¹⁰.

¹⁰ Babcock, (1978: 32) in: Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p.237

The last, fourth explanation of ‘difference’ comes from psychoanalysis. The argument here is that we as subjects need the ‘Other’ to constitute our own self and our sexual identity. It is based on Freud’s Oedipus complex and Jacques Lacan’s consequences of ‘the mirror stage’. In both cases, the ‘Other’ plays a fundamental role in the subjective development of a child. This subjectivity and the consciousness of the ‘self’, appears during the symbolic and unconscious relations between child and the ‘Other’, which is different from itself.

To sum up, all above referred explanations of the ‘Other’ are both positive and negative consequences. According to Hall, ‘difference’ is ambivalent. On one hand, it constitutes the meaning, the formation of language and culture and it is important for social identity. On the other hand, it can lead to exclusion, negative feelings, or even aggression towards the ‘Other’.

As Stuart Hall gives the reasons why ‘difference’ matters so much in contemporary cultural studies, now let’s look how it is seen from anthropological point of view. It is important in the analysis of visual, because the discourse of the ‘Other’ in photography takes to a big extent from its perception in anthropology. The main reason for that is that anthropology was developing parallel to photography, and camera was one main tools of record of anthropological findings. What is then the anthropological attitude toward the ‘Other’ or primarily, what is the ‘Other’ in the field?

Anthropology as a contemporary discursive practice having a disciplinary identity has become institutionalized (Stocking, 1987): as such it is an institution fundamentally involved in the reproduction of Western society. (...). It manifests and highlights that egocentric tendency of our Western mind to identify itself as separate from what it perceives as external to itself¹¹.

Therefore, the ‘Other’ is one outside from West; it is the alien, the different, since anthropology is focused on the impact of the imperial cultures of Europe and homogenization of world cultures under the impact of those powerful states that dominated in the ‘Age of Discovery’. Anthropologists, together with geographers, explorers and militaries, were all taking part in the colonization of the Third World, although the first ones’ activities were

¹¹ McGrane, B., *Beyond anthropology. Society and the Other*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, p. 5

more symbolic in contrast with actual actions. What is more, during the nineteenth century imperial expansion, “camera joined the gun in the process of colonization”¹². It was used not only to record, but also to define those who were colonized. Therefore, the history of photography, especially ‘documentary photography’ and representation of the ‘Other’ is very much linked to colonial and economic exploitation of other nations by Western world. From that time West has become a norm and other cultures has begun to be judged on it. It resulted in the notion of the ‘Other’ as non-Western.

Furthermore, the concept of the ‘Other’ is linked directly to the geography, as it always applies to particular territories and its cultures, usually distant and not accessible for average people. In the beginning, they were anthropologists or ethnographers who were ‘bringing’ us the distant ‘Other’. Today, media has this function. What is more, we took this role through media: “(...) we are all ethnographers, to the extent that all kinds of ‘Others’ are exposed to our gaze (...)”¹³. Due to media, we became audience to performances happening in other places. Media, therefore, constructs new geographies and influence the way we imagine space and place. We depend on media in our imagination of non-local people, places and events, and the more distant they are – the more we rely on media in construction of our knowledge¹⁴. As Appadurai argues, some places become ‘showcases for specific issues over time’. It means that in media, the same as in anthropological theory, places are associated with ‘gate keeping concepts’ that limit the interest in a particular place to some dominant and quintessential questions¹⁵. One result of this process is representational practice, known as stereotyping. It was Edward Said that argued for increased repressive tendencies of new communication media that instead of improving intercultural relations actually reinforce stereotypes by which the ‘Other’, in his writing – the Orient, is viewed¹⁶.

¹² Wells, L. (ed.), *Photography. A Critical introduction.*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p.171

¹³ Morly, D., Robins, K., *Cultural Imperialism and the Mediation of Otherness.* in: Ahmed, A.S and Shore, C.N. (ed.) *The Future of Anthropology*, Athlone, London, 1995, p.235

¹⁴ Said, E., (1979: 26) in: Ahmed, A.S and Shore, C.N. (ed.) *The Future of Anthropology*, Athlone, London, 1995, p.238

¹⁵ Appadurai, A. (1986: 357-8) in: Morly, D., Robins, K., *Cultural Imperialism and the Mediation of Otherness.* in: Ahmed, A.S and Shore, C.N. (ed. by) *The Future of Anthropology*, Athlone, London, 1995, p.243

¹⁶ Said, E., (1979: .26) in: Ahmed, A.S and Shore, C.N. (ed.) *The Future of Anthropology*, Athlone, London, 1995, p.238

2.3 Approaching photographs – from semiotics to ‘mythology’

Photography theory is an interdisciplinary field that incorporates philosophy, art and film theories, psychology, sociology, political science, economy, anthropology, technological determinations, media studies, semiology and phenomenology. In different times in history, different authors focused on different aspects of the phenomenon. The fact, that many texts on photography have been produced by writers, poets, novelists, photographers, journalists, philosophers, film theorists or semiologists, makes the photography theory messy and unsettled, broadly debated but without a consensus.

Victor Burgin in the introduction to the classical collection of essays *Thinking Photography* begins with the statement that photography theory doesn't exist yet. He argues that the object of the photography theory is not its techniques, but photography analyzed as a practice of signification as a result of its vital role in production and dissemination of meaning. However, he did not mean to restrict photography to classic semiotics but treat it interdisciplinary¹⁷. A photograph itself, according to Burgin, had different social understandings in different points of the history. In the context of nineteenth century aesthetics, it was mostly considered a record of reality. With the invention of daguerreotype, it was considered of “absolute truth”, which possesses the ability of accuracy better than any painting. In addition, it was seen as a tool of memory, a record keeper, but rejected as a fine art. Baudelaire who was on this position, argued that photography contributed to “impoverishment of the artistic imagination, fueling the notion that art and truth lie in the exact replication of the visual world rather than the world of the imagination, dream and fantasy”¹⁸.

Recent debates on photography follow usually two paths: a relationship between image and reality that is a problem of ‘truth value’ of the photograph and the interpretation of the image, focusing on the reading of ‘visual texts’ that is photographic representations. The latter problem is the one I will concentrate on in the analysis of images of Latin Americans in *National Geographic*. For this purpose I will use the approach outlined by Roland Barthes that belongs with constructivist theory in Halls’ terms.

¹⁷ Burgin, V., *Thinking Photography*, Houndmills, London, 1982, p. 1

¹⁸ Elkins, J. (ed.), *Photography theory*, Routledge, New York 2007, p. 7

The author of *Mythologies* used semiology to study popular culture. This approach is defined as a science of signs based on structural linguistics developed by Saussure. Hence, the narrow linguistic level of analysis moved to a wide, cultural level that is based on the assumption that culture can be studied as a system of signs in the same way as language do. One main argument is that reality is always constructed and objective experience of material and objective world does not exist. Reality is intelligible to human understanding through systems of meaning. The latter one is culturally specific and depends on codes. These are historically and socially specific codes and signs that allow us to make sense of the material reality. Thus, meanings are constructed and this process, called by Barthes 'the process of signification', depends on changing codes, conventions and signs¹⁹.

The production of meaning takes place on two levels - denotation and connotation. The first one is a basic and descriptive level on which the understanding of signs is usually common. Here particular material things are understood through basic codes. After this obvious interpretation that is recognizing objects as trees, animals, clothes etc., we move to the second, connotative level of signification. It links the signs to broader, cultural meanings and concepts, like trees with nature or clothes with fashion, elegance etc. According to Barthes, the connotative level of signification deals with 'fragments of ideology' – culture, knowledge and history²⁰. Here begins the second stage of Barthes' analysis of culture – the level of 'myth'.

*Myth is a system of communication, that it is a message' (...) it is a mode of signification, a form (...), myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse*²¹.

Barthes calls the myth 'a second-order semiological system' since it relies on signs in the first – order system, like language. On the level of myth, called also meta – language, the sign from the first level of signification becomes an empty signifier. This first element of 'myth' is called 'form'. And the signified of meta-language is called 'concept'. The correlation of those two Barthes calls 'signification'. This is what the 'myth' consists of and to read it, one has to move from first – order process of signification to this broader, second

¹⁹ Strinati, D., *An introduction to theories of popular culture*, Routledge, London and New York 1996, p.108-110

²⁰ Hall, S. (ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 36-39

²¹ Barthes, R., *Mythologies*, Vintage, London 1993 , p.109

level. Barthes gives instructions how to deal with this complex, two – leveled process. The meaning from the first order has to be put in a distance, so one can fill the form with a new meaning. Thus, the meaning is not rejected but hidden; it's in one's disposal, so the 'form' can constantly be rooted in it again and again. In Barthes words: 'It is this constant game of hide –and- seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth'²². And to define the 'myth': 'I must pass from the state of reader to that of mythologists'²³.

Further, he argues that 'myth' is historically formulated and it is not possible to find it in the 'nature' of things. It makes statements about reality taking from the historic context and expressing it as natural state of facts. It talks about the world without contradictions because it does not have the depth. It purifies the things from their historic context and makes them 'innocent', clear - natural. Through the myth 'things appear to mean something by themselves (...)'. Eventually, they become instruments of ideology²⁴.

2.4 Feminist theory

Feminist theory is based on the concept of the 'Other', used primarily in psychoanalysis, identity theory and post-colonial theory. Like the latter one, feminist theory is concerned with the study and defense of marginalized 'Other'. It results as a resistance to patriarchal ideology within which the male is taken as the norm and woman is the 'Other', that is 'not male'. Similarly, in racist's ideology, being white is taken as a norm, and blackness is seen as 'Otherness'. The construction of 'otherness' is based on the opposition between 'us' – the dominant group, and 'them', often dependent or inferior to 'us'.

Within this approach representation of genders and gender roles are analyzed. Although we can speak about masculine representation in visual communication, it is the woman that is represented as an 'Other'. Stereotypes play in this process a crucial role.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau is interested in how feminist theory is concerned with representation of women in visual culture: "Central to feminist theory is the recognition that woman does not speak herself: rather she is spoken for and all that implies: looked at,

²² Barthes, R., *Mythologies*, Vintage, London 1993, p. 118

²³ *Ibid*, p. 124

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 58

imagined, mystified and objectified”²⁵. According to her, photography is a potential tool for dissemination of cultural ideology and for her it is a gender ideology. Feminist analysis focuses on the ways in which photographs reproduce the notion of male as a viewer and female as a viewed or, in other words, male as an active subject and female as a passive object of the gaze. As John Berger expressed it in *Ways of seeing*:

*One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight*²⁶.

Furthermore, feminist theory involves the problem of looking that is a part of the broad perception analysis. Victor Burgin, mentioned already before, made a contribution to the discourse in his collection of essays *Photography, Phantasy, Function*. A conjunction of psychoanalysis with semiotics informs his own three essays in which he develops the model, which links the image, interpretation and ideological discourses. He refers to Freud’s theory of fetish and J. Lacan’s writing on the gaze in the discussion of psychological aspects of the act of looking, noting that looking is not indifferent, but directed by voyeurism and fetishism²⁷. In psychoanalysis, ‘fetishism’ applies to the sexual drive, which has to be concentrated on some part of the body, as the substitution of the ‘absent’ phallus. Then, this substitute becomes an object of sexual desire, invested with sexual energy and power that cannot find expression in the object to which it is really directed. On the other side, in anthropology, it applies to the way a spirit of a god can be displaced on to an object. In general, in Hall’s word, “fetishism takes us into realm where fantasy intervenes in representation; to the level where what is shown or seen, in representation, can only be understood in relation to what cannot be seen, what cannot be shown”²⁸. Fetishism is a representational practice that turns a subject into a thing, a whole to a part. It also allows voyeurism, which is the eroticization of the gaze. And when it becomes an obsessive search for sexual pleasure in looking, even if there is nothing more to see, it turns to be, what Freud

²⁵ Solomon-Godeau, A., in: Barret, T., *Criticizing Photographs. An Introduction to Understanding Images*. Fourth Edition, McGraw Hill, New York, 2006, p.194

²⁶ Berger, J., *Ways of seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1972, p.47

²⁷ Wells, L. (ed.), *Photography. A Critical introduction.*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p.48

²⁸ Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 266

called, 'scopophilia'. Additionally, it becomes perverse, if it becomes restricted exclusively to the genitals²⁹.

What is more, Burgin argues that to look is to get involved in an ideological discourse. The way visual texts incorporate and activate the subject within a particular discourse is called a suture. In photography, it occurs primarily as subject's identification with the camera. Further, this ego-identification with the eye of photographer is positioned between voyeurism and narcissism that is between a gaze that controls the represented object and identification with this object.

Research on visual representation of women shows that female's depictions are abundant in some areas and almost invisible in others. It is not science, photojournalism or political subjects that use visual representations of women most broadly, but art and commodity culture with genres like advertising, fashion, tourism and pornography. While women are represented in particular roles, surroundings, poses etc., it contributes to Foucault's construction of knowledge about women and situates them in a particular place in power relations in contemporary Western society. In the binary opposition male –female, she is the one to be subordinate, passive and powerless. Hence, woman is the 'Other' in the sense of being the object of male gaze, judgment, sexual desire and satisfaction.

There are many critics who paid attention to this stereotypical and highly coded representations of women (Berger, 1972; Ramamurthy, 1997). To understand the way women in ads are stereotyped, it is necessary to analyze how they are depicted. It includes poses, gestures, parts of the body shown/hidden, type of light, angle, other objects included, and the way she looks. Another feature, of more contemporary advertisements style, is the fragmentation of the body. Women are often depicted as part of their bodies – legs, eyes, lips etc that makes them more easily commodified. It leads also to the 'packaging' of the desire – concentration on particular parts of the body instead of the whole image of a woman³⁰.

The history of the exploitation of the exotic or primitive 'Other' in the commercial world begins in nineteenth century within the European imperial expansion. The camera

²⁹ Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997 , p. 268

³⁰ Ramamurthy, A., *Constructions of illusions*, in: Wells, L. (ed.), *Photography. A Critical introduction.*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p.153-170

allowed the photographers as well as viewers that are Europeans, to perceive their own superiority. It was not only anthropologists or explorers who made an use of photography in the colonized world at that time, but also those, whose intentions were simply economical. French colonists are an example. They were paying local women to pose in their studios in Algeria for images that were sent back to France in a form of postcards. These images, as Alloula analyzed, represent the French vision of Orient, as the models did not have any influence on the image taking process. There were male French who constructed the exoticism within their vision and imagination instead of Algerian women who were just passive objects of western fantasies. The way the Algerian women were depicted and the historical context of that process, bolstered the power relations – white, rich, male vs. non-white, poor, female subject. Further, as these images were sold in thousands, they added to the commodification of female body in general, and exotic, ‘other’ body in particular³¹.

‘Otherness’ in representation of women involves also a problem of race. According to Jewelle Gomez, black women were simply unrepresented for a long time since camera was invented. When finally their images entered the women magazines, they represented images that showed their conformity to American values of beauty, consumption and success. Further, American, ‘white’ magazines of 1960s were writing about ways to achieve an American success, giving examples of those famous black women who have already done it. Celebrities were the only black women depicted and sports figures had a special position. Their images showed the growing acceptance of Afro-American in the white arena. What is more, black women were depicted in comparison with whiteness and way of getting closer to it through advertisements of wigs, skin bleaching creams and hair strengtheners. What is more, they were depicted as a reflection of white women. Here, *National Geographic*, analyzed by Collins and Lutz, is an example. They argue that in the magazine ‘other’ women were depicted in a parallel way to the popular representation of American womanhood of the various periods of the magazine production. These popular images were primarily of a woman as a mother and as a beautiful object. Although they found some exceptions in opposition to stereotyped images (‘other’ women depicted as hard-working breadwinners of their communities), *National Geographic* idealized dark-skinned women by presenting them as like, or aspiring to be like, their American counterpart. Even though the other woman seems to be exotic due to her appearance, she is similar to white woman on a deeper level. All

³¹ Ramamurthy, A., *Constructions of illusions*, in: Wells, L. (ed.), *Photography. A Critical introduction*., Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 168-184

women of the world are eventually mothers and their main goal is to make herself beautiful through fashion³².

In summary, representation of black women has many aspects. It is not only about the gender and issues of black beauty and sexuality, but also class, social roles and position in the labor market. The general topic of racial representations include both genders and will be discussed in the following part of the paper.

2.5 Post-colonial theory

Post-colonial theory derives in a big extent from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) who examined the wide range of practices constituting the social knowledge about the Orient, taking as a starting point Foucault's notion of a discourse.

While semiotics understand representation as a production of meaning on the basis of the way words function as signs in the language, the theory of discourse is concerned with the production of social knowledge, rather than only meaning, through a representational practices. Thus, discourse is a system of representation, it is:

(...) a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment...Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But...since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do - our conduct - all practices have a discursive aspect³³.

Foucault treats the discourse in a broad sense, breaking the simple distinction between the language and human actions, including many other kinds of practices and institutional regulations. He argues that discourse constructs objects of our knowledge - topics and ideas that can be meaningfully discussed and reasoned about. It is never about one statement or one action, because a discourse appears across many texts and at different social institutions in a

³² Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.166-167

³³ Hall, S. 1992, p. 291 in: Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 44

particular historical moment. However, the ‘discursive events’, as he calls them, often refer to the same object or pattern and then they belong with the same discursive formation.

Further, Foucault argues that ‘nothing exists outside of discourse’, which means that things in themselves do not have a meaning, but it is the discourse that constructs a knowledge and gives a meaning to the ideas. To find and analyze the meaning of objects in the world, one has to take in consideration following elements: statements, rules (ways of talking about topics), ‘subjects’ (those who personify the discourse), authority (acquired by knowledge about a topic; constitution of the ‘truth’ about it in a particular historical moment), practices (within institutions that deal with the subjects) and acknowledgement that new discourses will appear on the same topic in future, as none of the discourses are stable across the time but is always vulnerable to social, political, economical and other changes.

Referring to Foucault, Said investigated how colonial discourse functioned as an instrument of power. For him, colonial discourse produced stereotypes that served to confirm constantly superiority of the West over the inferiority of the East, delivering ‘a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves’³⁴.

In *Orientalism* Said also refers to Foucault’s assumption that the ‘truth’ of a discourse of the ‘Other’ depends less on what is said and more on who is saying it and when and where it is said³⁵. It shifts the focus from what and how the ‘communicative events’ tell us about to why, by whom and for whom they are created. The result is that representation of the ‘Other’ actually says more about those who represent than those who are represented. Further, according to Said, *Orientalism* is ‘(...) and *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction...but also a whole series of ‘interest’...It is, rather than express, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly different world’³⁶. Applying these assumptions, photographs of Latin Americans in National Geographic can tell the American reader more about himself than about his neighbors. Like the ‘Orient’ helped to define the West, so does the construction of Latin

³⁴ Said, E. (1991[1978]) in: Gandhi, L., *Postcolonial Theory. A critical introduction*, Columbia University Press, New York 1998, p. 77

³⁵ Storey, J. *Cultural theory and popular culture. An introduction*. Fourth Edition. Pearson, Harlow 2006, p. 103

³⁶ Said, E. (1978) in: Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. Second Edition. , Routledge, London 2007, p.154

‘Other’. Referring to this approach, photographs in National Geographic can be read as intentional messages of what is the Latin ‘Other’ for American.

Homi Bhabha, other best known theorist in the field, defines the colonial discourse as follow:

[Colonial discourse] is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a ‘subject peoples’ through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. (...) colonial discourse produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to Realism.³⁷

According to Bhabha, the construction of ‘otherness’ is a central issue for colonial discourse with the stereotype as its major discursive strategy. He approaches the stereotype as more ambivalent and dynamic as Said does. Central to the stereotype is this process of ambivalence, since stereotype always operates between what is already known and something that has to be constantly repeated. Because stereotype cannot be really proved, it is through this repetition that it gains its currency. The constructed ‘otherness’ is ambivalent because it is simultaneously ‘an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity’. Thus, the author proposes to read the racial stereotype of colonial discourse in terms of fetishism. Stereotype as fetish is a contradictory form of recognition of similarity and anxiety associated with difference. While fetishism vacillates between the archaic affirmation of sexual wholeness and the anxiety based on lack, the racial stereotype operates between the belief that all people belong to one human race, but at the same time some have different color of the skin or different culture. However, the fetish of colonial discourse differs with the one from general theory of fetishism. While sexual fetish is

³⁷ Bhabha, H., K., *The other question: the stereotype and colonial discourse*, in: Evans, J., Hall, S., *Visual culture. The reader*, SAGE Publications, London 1999, p.371

a secret, racial fetish is not. Skin, as a main signifier of racial and cultural difference in the stereotype, is the most visible characteristic of the racial 'Other'. Recognized as a 'common knowledge', it provides the justifications for discriminatory exercise of power. 'The stereotype (...) for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defense – the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, color and culture'³⁸. It is this multiple play of contradictions – recognition of difference and disavowal of it that is significant for colonial discourse. Thus, the colonial discourse depends on this paradoxical mode of representation, called by Bhabha 'fixity' - a form of knowledge and identification that at the same time connotes order and disorder. What is more, stereotypes require other stereotypes to signify successfully.

What is characteristic in colonial discourse is the fact that each chain of stereotypical significations are dramatized by the separation among races, cultures and histories, within histories. There is always 'before' and 'after' in colonial representation that separates 'us' from 'them' and gives authority to the official motives and justifications of colonial power. It represents the colonial 'Other' as reformable under colonial domination, but incapable of self-government or western modes of civility after obtaining independence³⁹.

Stuart Hall points out three moments in history which gave rise to abundance of representations of racialized 'Other' in Western popular culture. The colonial discourse depends on the notion of race that emerged within the European imperialism. It started with the sixteenth – century contacts among European traders and the West African kingdoms, providing a source of slaves for three centuries. Another moment was the European colonization of Africa and struggles between European empires for control over territories, markets and raw materials. The third encounter that shaped Western ideas about 'race' and representation of racial differences was the post-World War II migrations from 'Third World' to Europe and North America. Therefore, the discourse of race and racial classifications has a social nature since racial boundaries are defined in the context of social struggles. The result of this practice is that groups in power use the biological argument of observable physical differences to justify, explain and affirm these boundaries and following actions of discrimination and oppression. What is more, according to Henry Gates, 'racial and cultural

³⁸ Bhabha, H., K., *The other question: the stereotype and colonial discourse*, in: Evans, J., Hall, S., *Visual culture. The reader*, SAGE Publications, London 1999, p. 374

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 370-378

difference became coded ways of talking about other differences that matter, differences in power and in interests'⁴⁰.

European representations of racial differences begin with the images of new discovered continent - Africa. In the middle ages, this image was ambiguous but rather positive; Africa was a mysterious place. Within time, this image had been changing. Blacks began to be identified with Nature that symbolized 'the primitive' in contrast with 'civilization'. By the nineteenth century Africa was thought of a 'marooned and historically abandoned...a fetish land, inhabited by cannibals, dervishes and witch doctors...'⁴¹.

The way West approached new discovered land and its inhabitants, influenced the way they began to be presented in popular imagination. The background of representation of racial 'Others' lies in the relation of power that inferiority of colonized toward superiority of colonizers. Other binary oppositions like civilization vs. savagery, culture vs. nature or white vs. black structure the discourse of racial differences. However, the color of the skin is the first recognizable, striking difference that initiates the whole discourse of racial 'Other'. The color of the skin has been the primary justification for treating 'Others' as something different than 'Us' and has become the evidence for a naturalization of racial difference. Then, naturalization is reducing the culture of blacks to Nature and serves to fix the racial difference forever as something that cannot be changed, in opposition to 'cultural' difference. Moreover, the continuous withstanding whites and blacks (or others no-whites) is hierarchically structured and it's never a relation of equality. Racial 'Others' had been represented as primitive, back warded and even created at different times than whites – according to the theory of 'polygenesis'. Furthermore, the distinction between Culture and Nature was applied in racial theory differently to the two opposite groups. Whereas among whites Culture was opposed to Nature, it coincided with Nature amongst blacks. Black's 'primitivism' as a cultural characteristic and 'blackness' as a natural feature became interchangeable and fixed. Similarly to representation of women, blacks were represented in terms of their biology as their 'destiny', which one cannot avoid. Therefore, blacks were reduced in their representation to their essence. Features like laziness, simple fidelity, mindless, trickery or childishness were ascribed to blacks as a race. What is more, the link between opposition black\white and

⁴⁰ Gates, G. in: Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.155-156

⁴¹ McClintock (1995: 41) in: Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 239

Nature\Culture created the whole clusters of distinctions around races. On one hand, there is an intellectual development associated with Culture and on the other hand, all that is instinctual that is associated with Nature.

Overall, practices like reductionism, essentialism, simplifying and naturalizing black people are all means of stereotyping the object. One example of it is popular representation of daily life during eighteenth – and nineteenth- century slavery, when part of the natural order was that white men sit and slaves stand or run after riding white women with umbrella protecting them from the sun, or that slaves are punished with torture. On the contrary, some other representations were idealized and sentimentalized, but still stereotypical. Representation of blacks in cartoons, illustrations and caricatures was often focused on their physical differences: thick lips, fuzzy hair, broad nose etc. These representational practices have been continued still hundred years after the abolition of slavery⁴². However, the stereotypical representations of blacks have been always contested to some degree. The British anti- slavery movement was disseminating alternative images of relations between blacks and whites, which were stressing a common humanity instead of difference. Although the extreme racialized representation of blacks has been altered, the stereotypes persisted. American cinema from the first part of twentieth century is a documented example of it⁴³.

The way different ‘races’ have been represented in American visual culture illustrates how ‘regimes of representations’ depend on historical, social, institutional and economical context of times. Signifying practices will differ from institution to institution and from one period in history to another. In analysis of representations, it is also necessary to take into account who is speaking to whom that is a question of information flow (sender – receiver) and who is speaking on behalf of whom that concerns the power relations. At this point, such terms as ‘Third World’ should be discussed as one key concept of post-colonial theory.

The term ‘Third World’ used for the first time in 1952 during the Cold War to distinguish countries aligned with neither United States nor the Soviet Union, very quickly became a cliché reproduced mainly by media, to connote ideas of poverty, diseases, war etc. What is more, it serves as a general metaphor for all underdeveloped countries and difficult

⁴² Hall, S. (ed.) , *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p.239-249

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 251-6

social conditions. While the term has been disappearing from academic writing due to its pejorative connotations, it still vibrantly circulates in the common knowledge in a form of myth, to which I will come back in the chapter nine.

The post-colonial studies apply also to analysis of the way ethnographers and anthropologists used visual technologies for constructing racial types. Deborah Poole's main finding, in the article *An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies*, is that Victorian anthropologists tended to focus on collecting photographs from India and other British colonies; French ethnologists gathered images of Algerians; and academics from United States were concentrating on images of Native American 'types', which is an evidence of colonialist sympathies of these early scholars.

One problem about the visual representation of the 'Other' in science that concerns me in my thesis is the encounter of photographer and the object photographed. While it involves communication, exchange, and presence, it is challenging for the requirements of objectivity in a science. The way of diminishing the problem was editing out the presence of all non original objects from the images, as well as avoiding the eye contact with photographed objects. These practices were aimed to establish a desired distance and sustain the authority of a science man. The traditional ethnographic accounts included however the presence of ethnographers. The same practice happened to occur on photographs of distant cultures in National Geographic until 1969.

Lutz and Collins analyzed what the purposes of these practices were and why they were finally abandoned. First, presence of Westerner on the discussed images had a validating function to ensure the reader that *National Geographic* staff was really *there*. Secondly, it served to dramatize intercultural relations, however in different ways depending on the relation of the photographed people. The example given - an image of two female Western travelers looking at a tribe man in central Africa from 1960 - encodes colonial social relations of that time in that the look is nonreciprocal. These are women who look at the man and additionally stand upper than he, and smile gently. They are in the position of superiority and put the viewer of the photo in the same place. Relation between 'Others' and 'Us' is constructed through our identification with the white man from 'Our' civilized world included in the photo. What is more, by the presence of the Westerner in the photo, we may find ourselves in the position of being viewed, the same as people on the photo are. Here, the

contradictory act to voyeurism takes place. It became a threaten to American self- coherence in the age of decolonization, when Third World began to be more dangerous place, where white people are not so very welcomed. Decolonization process undermined the way American saw both the Third World and themselves. In this situation, standing behind the camera was safer way of observing the world. Other reason for withdrawing Westerners from the images of distant places and culture was the rise in international tourism. It was no more interesting and necessary to prove who was the one to be *there* and meet *Them*, since more and more people could travel and experience exotic by themselves⁴⁴.

Among introduced theories and approaches, I will base my analysis of visual representation of Latin Americans in *National Geographic* mainly on the constructivism as outlined by Hall and Barthes' semiological model. In this process I will also refer to feminist theory and post-colonial theory, in particular the way they are concerned with the notion of the 'Other' and stereotyping practices used to construct it.

⁴⁴ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 203-7

CHAPTER THREE

Methodological perspective

In this study, I am focusing on how visual representations of Latin Americans create an image of the object. This problem involves, as discussed before, signifying practices that produce meanings, which in consequence make up common beliefs, knowledge, opinions, sometimes prejudices about a topic. I intend to find out what kind of representational practices are used to construct the image of Latin Americans and what kind of image it is.

Work on representation in the media takes largely from the development of semiotics in linguistics and was often applied to images, as shown before. But in general media studies have moved away from semiotics as a method of analysis, after recognizing how issues of media ownership, the diversity of audiences, economical and developmental determinants all influence the media production of meaning⁴⁵. In the case of photography, these and other determinants, like captions and context should be also included in analysis. In my study, I will combine semiotic analysis of the text taken from Barthes, role of captions and a broader context in which photographs are located, that is *National Geographic* as a popular magazine. Because of the size of the paper and focus on images, I will not study the audience and its response to *Geographic's* photographs. Since I am interested in the American version of the Magazine, the American readers would be in focus. Still, I do not have the possibility to reach this group.

Other reason for not including audience's responses to the photographs in my thesis is that the perception of photographs always involves feelings and it is always very subjective, as underlined by some writers on the problems. It often leads to normative statements of liking or disliking or comments concerning technology and artistic value of the image. Such a research would not discover the whole spectrum of other determinants that I am interested in, while rejecting other issues of photography analysis. Basing on my study, I can only speculate what kind of impression and influence images of Latin Americans have on the readers of the Magazine. However, my study does not concentrate on reception analysis. On balance, I am

⁴⁵ Geraghty Ch. *Representation, Reality and Popular Culture: Semiotics and the Construction of Meaning* in: Curran, J., Gurevitch, M. (ed.) *Mass media and Society*. 4th Edition. Hodder Arnold, London 2005, 46-47

interested in the medium – the photograph - and the way it constructs knowledge through different representational practices. It will allow me to see what kind of discourse Magazine's representation of the region is part of. Further, I want to discover how the production of knowledge about Latin Americans in *National Geographic* is tight to Magazine's ownership, image, principles and target group. In other words, I will investigate the context of production and exhibition of *Geographic's* photographs.

First stage of my analysis takes from two – leveled reading of the text: denotation and connotation. On the descriptive level of denotation, I will describe the photographs, taking in consideration following aspects of the photographs: object (that would be people, as I am not interested in photographs of nature or archeological findings), its age, gender (difference in depiction of genders), look, clothes, activity its involved in, situation and scenery\ background it's located in and set of relations it's involved in. One relation the object can be involved in is among photographed objects – how they are situated toward one another, do they look at one another, do they touch each other, do they talk, are they involved in the same activities etc. Another is relationship between photographed objects and Western world, either Magazine's photographer, writer of the article or other involved in the image taking process. Here the question is about the presence of Western world representatives, if not in person, then in the look, posture, location of the photographed toward the imagined photographer. In addition, presence of elements of First World or signs of civilization will be investigated, like machines, technological items etc. A third important relation to be discovered in the study of particular photos is the one between local people and Nature and Culture. What is more, I will describe briefly sort of light, time of the day and the way focus is used to further describe the 'aura' of the photo. Although I am not interested in technological values of photographs in *National Geographic*, some of the characteristics have to be involved in the analysis to get the full description and following interpretation of images. Sort of light and use of focus are two main dimensions of photographic image which decide about the character of the photo. They influence very much how particular objects are seen and evoke special feelings that can vary from fear, mystery, anxiety, bewilderment, pity to amusement, happiness or admiration. Other formal characteristic of the photographs that will be included in the study, are vantage (the point from which camera perceives the main objects), focal length and sort of light.

On the second level of reading the visual text – connotation – I will link the visual signs to broader, cultural themes. I intend to find out what particular signs mean according to my

European background and cultural codes. As mentioned in theoretical part, every reading of the signs is arbitrary, because signs in themselves are arbitrary. They can be read in very different ways, which depends on cultural background and time in the history. What is more, the so-called 'universal language of photographs' is a construct that does not function in reality as spoken language. While the latter have a grammar, syntax and vocabulary, which allow us to understand meaning of the speech, such a structured system in case of photography does not simply exist. While everyone can look at the photo and understand it in a particular way, this meaning can never be universal, because language of photography does not belong with any coherent structure. To enable the study, I base my argument on the assumption that both American and European audience shares the cultural codes of capitalist, modern society. Therefore, we link the same visual signs to the same or similar meanings. On this ground, it has to be taken into account that I analyze the images of Latin Americans taken by members of 'Western' culture and from the position of representative of the same culture. What is more, on this level of analysis I will confront the connoted message with the caption that, in Barthes' words, 'anchors' the meaning and lead the reader to a particular reading of a visual text. Hence, the meaning is a combination of visual signs and written caption, and understood in this way it becomes the basis for the second stage of my analysis.

After finding out the meaning of photographs of Latin Americans, second stage of my analysis is looking for myths constructed by the representation of Latin Americans. The starting point is the meaning discovered on the first stage of the analysis, that becomes a form on this stage. The meaning discovered in the first system has to be abandoned, so I can fulfill the form with a new meaning, called by Barthes 'concept'. This process is called signification and links the form with concept that is tied to the general ideas, to the 'totality of the world'. This second stage of analysis Barthes called meta – language or just 'myth'. Again, what I intend to discover, are western myths of Latin Americans. Here, I will also analyze what kind of representational practices are used to construct particular myths.

In the conclusion, I will connect the mythical speech of magazine's photographs to a general history. In Barthes' words it is the move from semiology to ideology that allows revealing the function of myth. In my analysis it is to link discovered myths with the context of *National Geographic* as an American picture magazine of popular interest and a broader discourse of the 'Other'.

My analysis is based on ten articles on Latin America from last five years, each containing between five and 15 photographs. I will also include pictures of people from other articles concerned with subjects as archeology, nature or explorations. The choice of data from last five years results from the assumption that production of meaning in media depends on historical context and it applies to representations in *National Geographic* as well, as Lutz and Collins showed in their study of photographs from the magazine from the period between 1950 and 1986. Because I am not intending to make a comparative study, I have chosen data from a short, recent time of existence of *National Geographic*. However, I will refer to the study of National Geographic by Lutz and Collins (Lutz and Collins 1993).

CHAPTER FOUR

Institutional and historical context of National Geographic's photographs

4.1 Magazine industry in the context of photographic inventions

The beginnings of magazine industry results from photographic inventions of year 1839 – one, by Louis Daguerre, of the first practical and popular photographic process called *daguerreotype* and the other – *calotype* - concept of negative and positive image announced by Henry Fox Talbot. In the early 1840s several illustrated magazines were launched across all Europe, like *Illustrated London News* (1842), *L'Illustration* in France and *Illustrierte Zeitung* in Germany (1843) followed by *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (1855) and *Harper's Weekly – Journal of Civilization* (1857) – first illustrated magazines in North America. At that time magazines were all using wooden engravings to illustrate the news. Industrialization and technical innovations as well as shift to market economy and new legal privileges encouraged the growth of magazine industry, which boom took place in the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century⁴⁶.

At the same time the photography discourse shifted to the aesthetic politics of mass production. Both rapid technological changes, like invention of 35 mm Leica, perforated film, heightened photo-sensitivity of the film, wide aperture lens, photographic paper, and emergence of magazine industry, resulted in new approaches toward photograph. The abundance of photographs was considered as an expression of capitalist society – its mechanical superficiality, banality and spiritual meaningless (Benjamin 1936, Kracauer in: Elkins 2007). The way to rescue photography from its replication of capitalist values was seen in giving it a caption that could construct the meaning - a revolutionary one⁴⁷.

In this period, ideas and news were also disseminated through other means like newspapers, lecture platforms, church pulpits, theater stages, and the graphic arts. However, none of these succeeded to the extent that magazines did. Still magazines had to compete with breaking-news newspapers and often it was difficult to make a distinction between these two.

⁴⁶ Becker, K.E., *Photojournalism and the tabloid press* in: Wells, L. (ed.) *The photography reader*, Routledge, London 2003, p.292-293

⁴⁷ Benjamin, W., *Illuminations*, Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square , London, 1968, p. 219-254

Many weekly and monthly magazines dropped their cover prices and shaped their style and content to fit the needs of new market segments – particularly the vast, educated and ambitious middle class, generated by the expanding public-school systems and the easier access to colleges and universities. The numbers show the size of the phenomena. Between 1885 and 1905 the number of magazines published in America increased from 3,300 to 6,000. The advertising revenues grew from 360 million to 542 million dollars between 1890 and 1900. What is more, 11,000 different magazines had been launched during that period, which indicates that also many new established magazines failed after short time of their existence. *The National Geographic Magazine*, launched in 1888, is one of very few from that period that is operating until today.⁴⁸ According to the Magazine Publishers of America (MPA), there were over 18,000 consumer and business titles being published in America in 1997⁴⁹.

There are many factors causing the success or failure of a magazine, but one, that is especially underlined by the *National Geographic's* chronicles, is the use of illustrations. The emergence and use of the halftone illustrations created a new, cheaper method for reproducing photographs that initially many publishers resisted. They thought that the dot-patterned photographic reproductions looked “trashy” or even “vulgar” in comparison with fine-line steel engravings used before. Despite the disadvantages of the halftone method, it took over the field, and the reason was simply economic. While a full-page steel engraving cost \$100, a halftone was available for less than \$20⁵⁰.

4.2 Photographs in National Geographic

The first photos appeared in *The National Geographic Magazine* in 1896 and they were subordinate to, and illustrative of, the text. These first reproductions were high-quality, but very expensive and slow to produce, steel engravings. When the cheaper, halftone method appeared; Grosvenor immediately recognized the potential of this new technology and implemented it to the production of the magazine. On the contrary, many publishers resisted it, because they did not look as fine as steel engravings. Nevertheless, the economic advantage

⁴⁸ Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p.82-83

⁴⁹ Hesmondhalgh, D., *The cultural industries*, 2nd edition, SAGE Publications, 2007, p.287

⁵⁰ Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p.83

of new technology let it take over the field⁵¹. Another turning point was a day, when Grosvenor realized that actually photos is what people really want in the Magazine: ‘The Magazine should use pictures – realistic ones replete with human interest...the character the Geographic should take gradually became clear: lucid, concise writing, material of general, not academic, interest; an abundance of pictures’⁵².

Even though in the beginning Grosvenor was criticized by the Board members for ‘turning the magazine into a picture book’, different writers analyzing the phenomenon of *National Geographic* agree that photography was the key to the real success of the Magazine. [Abramson 1987; Bryan 1987; Lutz and Collins 1993]. Its usage became common on the pages of the Magazine somehow accidentally, when Grosvenor received a package from some Russian explorers with 50 unsolicited photographs from Tibet at the moment when there was a deficiency of articles for the next issue of the Magazine. Against the Board, that “frowned on photographs unless they were ‘scientific’”, Grosvenor filled the January 1905 issue with 11 full pages of photographs from Lhasa. Although he was expecting to get fired afterwards, he got a very positive feedback from members of the Society and was elected to the Board of Managers and appointed a member of the executive and finance committees⁵³. Encouraged to use more pictures, he filled the April issue with 138 photographs from Philippines, which added to the magazine’s growing identification with photography and by 1908 photographs occupied half of the 80 pages of the magazine⁵⁴. What is more, the membership rapidly grew from 3,400 in the beginning of 1905 to 11,000 by the end of the year. When the membership reached 424,000 in 1915, the Associate Editor John Oliver La Gorce wrote in a Society promotional pamphlet:

...the National Geographic Magazine has found a new universal language which requires no deep study – a language which takes precedence over Esperanto and one that is understood as well by the jungaleer as by the courtier, by the Eskimo as by the wild man from Borneo, by

⁵¹ Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p.83

⁵² Ibid, p.86

⁵³ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America’s lens on the Word*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.61-62

⁵⁴ Poole, R.M., *Explorers House. National Geographic and the world it made.*, The Penguin Press, New York 2004, p.67

*the child in the playroom as by the professor in the college; and by the woman of the household as well as by the hurried business man – in short, the Language of the Photograph!*⁵⁵.

There were photographs that made the Magazine readable to a broader audience, since they could be perceived as a kind of ‘universal language’ in La Gorce’s words. The Magazine was experimenting later with different photographic methods, incorporating color images. First autochrome, or natural - color photograph appeared in 1914 issue and color has been included in the every issue of the publication since September 1927. Photographs on the cover have been appearing from September 1959. The color became a characteristic feature of the Magazine, isolating it from the photojournalistic style. In the post-war era black and white photographs began to be more valued and color was considered shallow and frivolous. Referring to Ed Hanningan, “*National Geographic’s* pictures, with rare exception, were all pretty much of the picture postcard type of idealistic beauty, rather than photojournalism”⁵⁶. According to Lutz and Collins, color changes the nature of representation in the way it dominates in the image and therefore affects the mood. Relying more and more on color, in February 1962 *National Geographic* became the first major American periodical to print an all-color issue.

Apart from use of color, the Magazine pioneered in use of other photographic developments. In 1940s appear first high-speed photography images freezing on a film the rapid movements of nature. Later, in 1946 appears the first photo taken from space. And in 1960s *National Geographic* photographer Bates Littlehales with the *National Geographic* photo lab and the Photogrammetry Corporation designed a better model of an underwater camera that revolutionized this field of photography⁵⁷.

When Kodak released the first commercially available, professional digital camera in 1991, a new era of photography began. In the beginning it was extremely expensive and marketed to professional photographers. Within years, digital camera became a popular and cheap gadget changing the nature of photography. Lower costs of new technology led to massive production of images of all types. The attitude towards photography has also changed

⁵⁵ Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p.133

⁵⁶ Hanningan, E. in: Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p. 294

⁵⁷ <http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photographers/photography-timeline.html>, [5.09.2008]

since every kind of image manipulation is now easier and faster to perform. This raised many questions about the truth value of photographs and objectivity of visual reporting. Hence, the same questions appear according to *National Geographic* and its trustworthiness.

4.3 Target group of the Magazine

Other significant change in media industry, especially concerned the magazine industry, were the social fragmentation of readers markets, broadly discussed since 1980. In contrast to the notion of 'mass culture' and 'mass audience'- undifferentiated and passive, audience segmentation became the main marketing preoccupation in the cultural industries. It applies both to the texts production, as well as to the advertising and means that more and more texts began to be produced for audience groups, differentiated along gender, status, income, age, occupation or interests lines. This shift from an era of mass audience to an era of segmentation and specialization is analyzed in terms of increase of income and amount of cultural products created for leisure and entertainment in industrial countries, increasing levels of education, a 'rebirth of pride in social differentiation' and increasing amount of young, single adults with energy and time to spend. Different ways of spending free time led to new social fragmentation, creating segments with different needs and interests. Although these changes have been much discussed in the last three decades, audiences have always been segmented, especially along gender lines and within magazine industry, as David Hesmondhalgh argues. The magazine industry is the most-niche oriented of all cultural industries but the media market segmentation in general should not be exaggerated, since hit texts, like Hollywood films or soap operas for example, dominate the shared consumption⁵⁸.

We can put the same argument toward the success of *National Geographic*, which shifted from a scientific and geographical publication to a popular magazine with an abundance of beautiful and colorful pictures, attracting broad audience (a catholic audience in case of the United States) world wide and becoming a huge financial success. Here the pattern is reversed, from the narrow specialization of the scientists and explorers to a broader and more popular interest for the consumption of the working classes. As such, the Magazine can be located as a cultural product with what the so-called Frankfurt's School called the paradigm of 'mass culture'. The Frankfurt School theorists saw mass culture as degenerate

⁵⁸ Hesmondhalgh, D., *The cultural industries*, 2nd edition, SAGE Publications, 2007, p.287-288

and manipulative and far away from representing the real voices and tastes of the popular classes. Instead, mass culture was seen as produced by dominant classes to develop false understanding of their situation in a capital society⁵⁹. However, both the understanding of mass culture and categorizing *National Geographic* within this category is arguable. According to the Magazine, the variety of its readers raises questions about its position in cultural industries.

According to 1941 Society's booklet, there were 529 different categories of loyal members listed within a total of 1,199,738, among them: physicians and surgeons (53,514), housewives (39,543), farmers (36,816), clerks (32,589), clergymen (27,843), bankers (15,084), executives (13,710), dentists and dental surgeons (11,715), undertakers (3,000), barbers (1,557), politicians (228), college matrons (261), road builders (207), senators (159) and royalty (114)⁶⁰. Gilbert Melville Grosvenor, who took over as editor in 1970, described an average Magazine's reader in 1984 as a 43 year old, earning \$25,000 a year, having 2.2 children, that attended college for 1 year, employed in a professional or managerial capacity and liked to spend time outdoors. According to Grosvenor, the membership was about evenly divided between the sexes. A decade later, Lutz and Collins concluded their analysis that the Magazine had spoken to a large group "(...) extending from highly educated professionals and managers through white-collar clericals and technicians into the working class and lower ranks of the service sector. The magazine claims to articulate a national vision, addressing the concerns and curiosity of all U.S. citizens"⁶¹. Furthermore, Abramson gives the overview of the members of the Society from its beginning due to its president's aims. In the beginning, Gardiner Greene Hubbard wanted to bring educational knowledge to the upper classes of provincial Washington. Then, Alexander Graham Bell hoped to popularize geography among the upper middle classes. Next president, Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor wanted to appeal to the vast and growing middle class. Finally, Melville Bell Grosvenor wanted the Society to become a successful and wealthy institution of the masses. As a result, Abramson concluded,

⁵⁹ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.5-6

⁶⁰ Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p.254

⁶¹ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.6

the Society turned to be a giant commercial publisher and mail-order house instead of charitable and educational institution it was supposed to be in its beginnings⁶².

4.4 Marketing strategies in National Geographic

Since the increase of membership became the Society's principal role, reaching more and more audience became dependent on market research. The marketing department of National Geographic makes various studies, analyzing readership patterns, reading practices and profiles of its audience. Despite the commercial aims, the Magazine continuously works on sustaining its status as an educational institution "for the increase and diffusion of geographic knowledge". The cultural legitimacy of the Magazine, given it by its connections to the state, national identity, and science invites its readers to look at the world through its pages from a point of the world's most powerful nation. What is more, its style reminding more of a book or encyclopedia, strengthen even more the impression of professionalism and accuracy. For keeping the reputation of a serious, quasi-scholarly publication, the editors of the Magazine have been always very careful with the selection and placement of the advertisements.

Until 1980, advertisements could only show up on the first and last pages of the Magazine in order not to disturb the readers in their contemplation of photographs and stories. In the early years, the advertisements of liquors, beer, wine, and patent medicine advertisements were banned, because the Magazine was broadly used at schools. In late 1960's the ads of consumer goods became common practice, focused on luxury commodities such as cars, watches, cameras, insurance, diamonds – all targeted to an exclusive, well-off group of consumers⁶³.

Apart from advertising space and magazines, the Society began selling newsletters, maps, globes, atlases, books and records. Due to Society's expansion and multi-channeled production, its audience has diversified even more and the income was gradually growing. The Magazine was to be interesting and reaching broad, mass audience. As G.M. Grosvenor pointed in an interview for "Washington Post" in 1984: "I would rather have a taxi driver than

⁶² Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America's lens on the Word*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.218-219

⁶³ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.82-84

a Ph.D. as a reader. A Ph.D. knows how to get information he wants from a library, but a cab driver doesn't necessarily know...My feeling is that American journalists favor the rainy side of the street. We favor the sunny side of the street. It's a hell of a lot harder to do that, and stay interesting"⁶⁴. What is more, he was convinced that the future of *The National Geographic Magazine* rested in other areas than the magazine-publishing, but in video products – films and disks. In 1986 Grosvenor signed an agreement with Turner Broadcasting, to bring the National Geographic Explorer cable television series to Turner's Atlanta-based station, WTBS. In the same year he revealed that he had been prepared to enter joint venture with outside firms for the production of films or television shows⁶⁵. Today *National Geography Society* has its own TV channel – *National Geographic Channel* and owns not only one but many magazines: *National Geographic Magazine*, *National Geographic Traveler Magazine*, *National Geographic Adventure Magazine*, *National Geographic Kids Magazine*, *National Geographic Little Kids Magazine*, *National Geographic in the classroom: Explorer Magazine*, *National Geographic in the classroom: Young Explorer Magazine*, *National Geographic in the classroom: Extreme Explorer Magazine*, *National Geographic Green Guide In Association with National Geographic: Glimpse Magazine*. In addition the company sells books and atlases, clothing and accessories, DVDs, maps etc. Even though the Society operates through different channels, still the Magazine is its biggest success, locating itself on the top of American magazine industry. What is its strength about? As the writers on the issue and the author of this paper agree, is the abundance of its beautiful, colorful photographs that can be collected on readers shelves, miniaturizing the world in the yellow cover of the Magazine, serving as a kind of souvenir from the travels that one might has never realized. To analyze photographs in *National Geographic*, it is necessary to see the historical background of magazine's contemporary shape. It will allow the reader to understand how the changes in *National Geographic* were influencing the nature of its photographs.

4.5 Beginnings of National Geographic

The story began in early 1888, when *National Geographic Society* was formed by a group of six wealthy Washingtonians led by Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a lawyer, a member of a prominent Boston family, and a patron of science. On the first meeting held in Cosmos

⁶⁴ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America's lens on the Word*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.250

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 245

Club in downtown Washington, 33 distinguished geographers agreed that the new society will be more accessible than the New York-based American Geographical Society that was the nation's leading geographic group at that time and an organization of and for professionals. Hubbard, chosen the first president of the Society, claimed: "I am not a scientific man" and by his very election, the founders had shown that the Society would not be only for professionals "but will include that large number of people educated in other professions, who, like myself, desire to promote special geographic research and exploration by others and to diffuse that knowledge"⁶⁶.

The founding fathers of the *National Geographic Society* had decided to "increase and diffuse" geographic knowledge by holding meetings with presentations and lectures of its members and then publishing their and others' work in a journal to be called the National Geographic Magazine. First issue showed up in October 1888 and, as following issues, was "dreadfully scientific, suitable for diffusing geographic knowledge among those who already had it, and scarring off the rest.", as summed up by one writer⁶⁷. Apart from the highly technical character, it was printed out of any schedule, whenever the volunteers managed to get enough material to fill the pages. After several years of its irregular publications sent to the Society's members, the Board decided to issue the Magazine every month, beginning in January 1., 1896 and put it on newsstands. Next year, Gardiner Greene Hubbard died and in January 1898 the presidency was taken over by his son-in-law, Alexander Graham Bell⁶⁸. The husband to Mabel Hubbard became famous first in America as a teacher of speech to deaf people and then gained the world fame as an inventor of the telephone. From the moment he accepted the nomination, changes began to occur in both the Society and the Magazine.

Bell saw the possible success of the Magazine, but through different path than it was envisioned in its beginnings. He understood that people would read about geography but only if it was presented in entertaining, easy and understandable way. To reach more readers, he wanted to offer the magazine as a bonus for membership in the Society, instead of selling subscriptions to the magazine. The increase of the membership would be the key to further growth. Bell believed that many people would be interested in supporting scientific

⁶⁶ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America's lens on the Word*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.33-34

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 37-38

⁶⁸ Grosvenor, G., *National Geographic Magazine and its magazine*, National Geographic Society, Washington D.C., U.S.A., 1936

explorations and research through belonging with an organization or club, if it was available for a reasonable payment. The middle-class became his target group. To implement new strategy, in 1899 Bell hired Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor (who later became his son-in-law).

To build the circulation, Grosvenor began with promotion and marketing. As the membership in Society had always been by nomination, he was developing lists of individuals who could be nominated. According to the content, he began to reject articles proposed by the editorial committee when he felt they were too technical or difficult. Reaching broader audience through making the content lighter met the opposition from Board members, who were trying to divest Grosvenor from his position. Due to Bell support and control over the money, he stayed and by 1902 was appointed editor and director of the Society⁶⁹. Under his rule, “The magazines personality changed: Articles were less academic, of broader interest; thought was applied to layout and graphics to make the stories more appealing to the eye”⁷⁰. Grosvenor was a driving force behind the *National Geographic Society* for more than 60 years, transforming its technical journal with a circulation of a few hundred, into a glossy, colorful, popular monthly with a circulation extending 5,000,000 at the time of his death⁷¹. The magazine began to balance on the boundary between science and entertainment, which influenced its character and was gradually increasing the membership. “Editors were attentive to both the market and the scientific community but slave to neither”⁷².

4.6 Seven Principles

While extending the use of photographs in *The National Geographic Magazine*, Grosvenor began to create a set of guidelines for editing the Magazine that reflected, according to its current Editor Wilbur E. Garrett, Grosvenor’s “own cultured background, thoughtful personality, and Victorian courtesy to create a different, but highly successful, form of journalism”⁷³. The ‘golden’ rules’ of Geographic’s style have been influencing not only writing but the character of photographs as well. To analyze the visual representations of

⁶⁹ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.22

⁷⁰ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America’s lens on the Word*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.57

⁷¹ Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p.49

⁷² Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.25

⁷³ Bryan, C.D.B., *The National Geographic Society. 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1987, p.90

Latin Americans in the Magazine, it is essential to take into account, what have become known as the “Seven Principles”, detailed by Grosvenor in 1915 issue:

1. *The first principle is absolute accuracy. Nothing must be printed which is not strictly according to fact. The magazine can point to many years in which not a single article has appeared which was not absolutely accurate.*
2. *Abundance of beautiful, instructive and artistic illustrations.*
3. *Everything printed...must have permanent value, and be so planned that each magazine will be as valuable and pertinent one year or five or ten years after publication as it is on the day of publication...*
4. *All personalities and notes of a trivial character are avoided.*
5. *Nothing of a partisan or controversial nature is printed.*
6. *Only what is of kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided.*
7. *The content of each number is planned with a view of being timely. Whenever any part of the world becomes prominent in public interest, by reason of war, earthquake, volcanic eruption, etc., the members of the National Geographic Society have come to know that in the next issue of their magazine they will obtain the latest geographic, historical and economic information about the region, presented in an interesting and absolutely nonpartisan manner, and accompanied by photographs which in number and excellence can be equaled by no other publication.*

In addition, Grosvenor later wrote:

Too often in my long lifetime have I seen unfair and erroneous statements made about other nations in the name of ‘objective reporting’ or ‘constructive criticism’. The Geographic has always dealt in facts, not bias, rumor or prejudice⁷⁴.

According to Grosvenor’s principles, one can imagine the Magazine as a beautifully illustrated window to a peaceful and wealthy world. But can we call presenting only one, kindly nature of our reality accuracy? What kind of image of particular country or culture is constructed while avoiding any unpleasant or controversial issues? Is it possible to combine

⁷⁴ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America’s lens on the Word*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.63-64

‘absolute accuracy’ with ‘artistic illustrations’? Revising *Seven Principles* after almost 100 years brings a lot of questions and doubts about what kind of magazine was Grosvenor thinking to create. Looking at the current issues of the Magazine reveals many contradictions with what Grosvenor wanted to achieve. Therefore, further insight to *The National Geography Magazine’s* history is necessary to find the factors that have led the Magazine to today’s shape.

4.7 National Geographic’s explorations

At the same time when Lhasa essay was published, Bell finally resigned from his position in the Society, leaving the full control in Grosvenor’s hands. While the Society was getting more members and more funds, Grosvenor decided to develop one of the first and mostly mentioned goals of the Society – diffusion of the geographic knowledge through discovering the undiscovered. In practice, it meant to fund the explorations. The first expedition in 1890 to Mount St. Elias in Alaska was completely sponsored by Gardiner Greene Hubbard, as the Society did not have any funds to support it. After 20 years, in 1911 Grosvenor decided to use 15 percent of Society’s dues each year to support expeditions, research and connected projects. Although the decision was justified by the scientific goals, obviously it was another step to increase the Magazine’s readership by filling the pages with reports and stories from far and exotic places. Funding the explorations would give the members a feeling of contributing to the discovery of the world. Therefore, explorations became a significant tool of reaching even more audience. It led to some misrepresentations, like the statements that it was the Society who funded the discovery of Machu Picchu in Peruvian Andes. In reality, the Society supported financially Bingham, the discoverer of the ancient Inca’s city, but after he had already located the site. As Abramson reveals, it became Grosvenor’s habit to overestimate the Society’s input in world discoveries to promote the National Geographic and build up its positive image⁷⁵. Nevertheless, due to Grosvenor’s promotion, Bingham and other discoverers became famous and archeology became a regular subject in the magazine, next to natural history, ethnography, explorations, and science⁷⁶. The pattern is visible in contemporary issues of the Magazine. On balance, there is a good number

⁷⁵ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America’s lens on the World*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.110 - 116

⁷⁶ Poole, R.M., *Explorers House. National Geographic and the world it made.*, The Penguin Press, New York 2004, p.111, 116

of articles that could be called ‘social’ – about people as groups, cultures, traditions, social and political structures.

As Gilber H. Grosvenor once said:

Geography is more than a thing of maps and charts. It is “the study of other fellow.” People would be more interested in a tribe of men 10 feet tall than in a mountain 30,000 feet high. They like what might be called the small-talk of geography. They enjoy human gossip about a race just as they enjoy gossip about their neighbors...⁷⁷.

While archeology provides a tool to understand our collective history, a subject of ‘human interest’ is what people are really interested in. While *The National Geographic Magazine* had been gradually distancing from being a strictly scientific, geographical journal, it paid more attention to current issues of public interest, reaching more audience with light, often entertaining reporting. Moreover, it wanted to keep its members ‘updated’, as it began during the world wars.

4.8 Coverage of controversial issues

When the World War I broke out in August 1914, every issue of the Magazine contained detailed maps of the events on battlefield due to which membership grew from 285,000 in 1914 to 650,000 in 1918⁷⁸. It was an extraordinary success in comparison with other magazines in U.S. which readership was falling during this period. Although the monthly issuing of the Magazine was a drawback in the time of war due to thorough, every day reporting given by newspapers, the staff of the Magazine managed to cope with the topic in an interesting for American reader way. Instead of war news, the Magazine was publishing articles on history and culture of the nations in conflict. As Poole comments, these articles made an impression of pieces from “an encyclopedia or prepared by press agents for allied governments”, as “many were written by government officials, army officers, and others associated with the U.S. war effort”⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America’s lens on the World*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p. 121

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.119

⁷⁹ Poole, R.M., *Explorers House. National Geographic and the world it made.*, The Penguin Press, New York 2004, p.114-115

Furthermore, during the World War II the Magazine continued to publish maps from every battle zone. Readers of *National Geographic*⁸⁰ were not the only clients of the Society's maps, but also American army, navy, federal agencies, American Red Cross and Canadian Postal Corps. What is more, every issue of the Magazine during this period contained at least one major article on the war. In addition, during both wars, the Society was publishing a daily news bulletin for newspapers and sending it free of charge that was to establish a geographical authority among newspapers readers and helped to build up the connections with press world⁸¹. While the Society established close connections with the government and created the image of a 'national institution', it guarded its status as private, tax-exempt organization, not controlled or limited by the government. Nevertheless, Grosvenor had close relationships with several individuals in government, including presidents of United States. Again, *National Geographic* served as an agent of country's officials, taking one, and clear side in the conflict. Following the *Seven Principles* it avoided a confrontation with 'real' news from the battlefield, like suffering, genocide, inhumanity and death.

In the birth of another conflict, the Cold War, the steers in the Society were already taken over by Melville Bell Grosvenor, son of the previous Chief. He continued the longtime, strong nationalistic and anti communist viewpoint of the Society that fit well in the confrontation with a new world order. Faithful to Society's principle of good-news-only presentation, the only way the Magazine could be anti something or someone was to ignore its existence. Therefore, the Soviet Union had not appeared on the Magazine's pages from the end of the World War II until 1959. When it finally occurred, it showed Soviets in the tone of ethnocentric stereotypes, pointing out for example the lack of consumer goods in Russia. What is more, Magazine's coverage of Eastern Europe after the World War II was guide lined by ups and downs of each nation's relationship with the Soviet Union⁸².

When the Vietnam War began, the *Geographic* faced the dilemma that had never occurred before in the confrontation with war coverage. In the Society there was a new group, known in the organization as Young Turks – photojournalists from Midwest, who were interested in changing the Magazine, through, among other things, coverage of more

⁸⁰ In 1959 the Magazine's name changed from *The National Geographic Magazine* to *National Geographic*

⁸¹ Abramson, H.S., *National Geographic : Behind America's lens on the World*, Crown Publisher, Inc., New York, 1987, p.176-183

⁸²Ibid ,p. 194-195

controversial issues. It was also during the Vietnam War when for the first time Americans could see the ‘real’ images of the war, depicting all the worst atrocities. The individual soldiers and civilian were shown in the context of war, giving it the personalized character. There was a growing disagreement among Society’s board on how this war should be covered. Nevertheless, no images of wounded or death bodies appeared on the pages of the Magazine during this period. As Bryan concluded, the Magazine’s coverage of Vietnam War was rather innocent in comparison to other publications like *Life* ⁸³. Nevertheless, any representation of war cannot be ‘innocent’ or apolitical. “Withholding images of dead aims to give the impression that war is something more human in scale than it actually is”⁸⁴. Other way of ‘softening’ the war practiced by *National Geographic* editors was through a caption. And if there appeared any pictures from a wartime, these were shots from war victim’s funeral.

Images always operate in a particular political context and for *National Geographic* was it a close tight with government officials, nationalism and partisanship on the American side. Therefore, the intent of editorial staff was to support governmental version of the goals and values of the conflict⁸⁵. Results of these actions, as seen on the Magazine’s pages, could be always justified through the light, kindly character of the Magazine’s reporting.

But finally this noncontroversial style of the Magazine had to be changed. Grosvenor understood that this optimistic style of reporting conflicted with the principle of absolute accuracy and could lead to decrease in audience interest that was eager for real-life dramas presented by other media. Although Payne – Magazine’s president since 1967- was opposing changes, controversial issues began to appear on pages of the Magazine, including a 1986 article on the Ndebele people of South Africa or stories on environmental degradation. The latter are common practice in recent issues of the Magazine, like an article on Brazilian part of the Amazon from January 2007. In next part of my thesis, I will describe how the recent issues of the Magazine cope with coverage of controversial stories about Latin Americans that appear among other, ‘kind’ and ‘pleasant’ articles.

⁸³ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.41-42, 99

⁸⁴ Rozycka, J., *What is the controversy of war photography about? Does images of atrocities need justification?*, University of Oslo, 2007, p.4

⁸⁵ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.100

CHAPTER FIVE

Introductory analysis of articles about Latin America

Every photograph circulates in a net of contexts and so does each of the analyzed images from *National Geographic*. The first, external context, applies to the conditions of production, exhibition and distribution of the photo. In my analysis it is *National Geographic's* place in media industry, its history, principles and marketing strategies, all described in chapter four. The second is the context of articles which are illustrated by analyzed photographs and captions that are part of them. Third context applies to the work of photographer and the situation of image taking. Although this information could bring new understandings for my analysis, I will not include them in my study. What interests me the most is this internal context that is the photograph's subject, its form and relations between photographs. As an introduction to it, this chapter will outline the main characteristics of the articles that are illustrated by analyzed photographs. One part being captions, that in Barthes' words 'anchor' the visual image with a specified range of meanings.

Referring to Barthes, caption is a form of ideological control and it leads the viewer to a particular meaning. The "linguistic message" is the only way to "counter the terror of uncertain signs", that a photograph is full of. Photographs circulate in the realm of connotations, that is not a part of the photographic structure but it always depends on a context, which is often ideological. According to Barthes, the 'Edenic state', in which a photograph is a 'clear', non-coded iconic message, is a utopian stage that never exists in reality⁸⁶.

Many thinkers such as Alan Sekula or Geoffrey Batchen argue that context is vital to a photographs meaning. Alan Sekula, especially interested in photography's functions in the system of capitalist commodity, believed - as Barthes - that photographs always depend on external conditions to obtain a meaning. He uses the term "photographic discourse", to describe "... a system within which the culture harnesses photographs to various representational tasks. Every photographic image is a sign, above all, of someone's investment in the sending of a message"⁸⁷. One of the post-modernist theorists, Geoffrey

⁸⁶ Elkins, J.(ed.) , *Photography theory*, Routledge, New York 2007, p.19-22

⁸⁷ Alan Sekula, *The Invention of Photographic meaning* , 5-6 in: Elkins, J. (ed.), *Photography theory*, Routledge, New York 2007, p.28-29

Batchen, sustains the same argument that photographic meaning is determined by a context and photographs as such do not signify.

Referring to Barthes and other writers concerned with photography, the semiological analysis of photographs are combined with the written context they are situated in. Although I will not analyze the text of the articles, I will briefly outline their topics and some general features.

My research is based on a sample of *National Geographic* issues from the last 5 years. It consists of 56 issues of the Magazine from January 2004 to August 2008. Between January 2004 and August there are 23 feature articles covering Latin America and 1 photo reportage, among which 8 are strictly on social or cultural issues. There are few articles with a mixed content, where images of local people occurred. These are articles on archeology, history or nature. Photographs of people from these articles are included in analysis. In sum, I analysis was performed on 107 photographs, ten articles in detail and single photos from another four articles. Among these there are 40 photographs from Colombia, 20 from Brazil, 14 from Mexico, 13 from Venezuela, eight from Bolivia, seven from Peru, three from Argentina and one from Guatemala. Before semiological analysis of photos and looking for myths about Latin Americans, which is the core of my research study, I will outline some general points about analyzed data, focusing on contexts that surround them.

Although the study is not interested in the coverage of other regions, it is interesting to see how much attention *National Geographic* pays to Latin America in comparison to other regions in the world. In the period analyzed by Lutz and Collins (1950-1986), 35 percent of all articles were on Asia, nearly 22 percent on Latin America, 15 percent on the Middle East and North Africa, 12 percent each on Africa and the Pacific Islands, and 6 percent on the Polar regions⁸⁸. Although counted differently, the sample between 2004 and 2008 shows a similar distribution of attention to particular regions. In the analyzed period articles on North America (excluding Mexico) appeared 53 times, on Asia – 38 times, on Africa – 30 times, on Latin America – 24 times, on Europe – 18 times, on Middle East – nine times, on Oceania – three times, on Pole regions – three times. These are feature stories concerned with issues from particular regions. Apart from these, there are many articles on science that apply to

⁸⁸ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p.120

different regions and were not counted. Lutz and Collins outlined few reasons for covering or not covering particular regions by *Geographic's* staff. The *National Geographic's* 'fashion in ethnic other', how authors call it, depends on country's relationship with United States, international relationships, perceived beauty and value of the region, search for the remote and the so-called economy of desire – a tendency of the Magazine to avoid the 'too uncontrolled other'. Other criteria are based on the assumption that market for images of particular ethnic groups, countries or regions changes over time. The *National Geographic* editors also rely on the marketing research to assess popularity of their articles and pictures⁸⁹.

When it comes to the distribution of attention to particular countries in Latin America, Mexico is on the top of the list with nine articles in the analyzed period. In the second place with 3 articles are Brazil, Colombia and Peru. Bolivia was covered twice, Argentina, Guatemala and Venezuela once. In addition, there is one photo story from Latin America titled 'Latin America from the Sky' with ten, two – page aerial shots of nature from different parts of the region. According to the topics in coverage of Latin America, ten of the articles are on social issues, seven on nature and seven on archeology and history.

In the analyzed period there are four articles on Latin America which are concerned with an issue common to Mexico and United States. These articles are not strictly on Latin America but on a topic shared between these two countries, like Mexico – U.S. border (May 2007) or Chihuahuan Desert shared by Texas and Mexico (February 2007). As they are not illustrated by pictures depicting people, they will not be analyzed. However, they add to the general interest in Mexico that is highest among all Latin American countries. On the contrary to the 'search for remote' reason of covering particular regions, here the geographical proximity can be a strong argument. Two articles on social issues from Mexico that I am interested in are also concerned with issues somehow connected with United States. Photographs from an article 'Mexico's Other Border' from February 2008 depict illegal immigrants from Central America crossing the borders to Mexico. Some of them are searching better life in Mexico, while others continue the migration to the United States. The same as articles about Brazil from the period analyzed by Lutz and Collins, articles on Mexico from my sample identify its experience with that of the United States, but are distinguished from it afterwards. According to many countries their present is shown as the

⁸⁹ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 122-24

United States' past⁹⁰. In the case of this particular article, the problem with illegal immigrants is shared by these neighboring countries, but finally it is United States, which has to cope with it since it is the destination of most of the immigrants from the region. Other photos from Mexico come from an article 'Mexico's Pilgrim Cowboys' from August 2007. It is a story of Mexican cowboys in the context of religious pilgrimage. Presenting Mexican cowboys in the context of Christianity again links the country to American experience to show how much these countries have in common.

Colombia is a country that was most often covered in the analyzed period when it comes to strictly social issues. Three articles: 'Cocaine country' (July 2004), 'Indians of the Sierra Nevada' (October 2004) and 'Medellin's Mean Street' (March 2005) deal with problems of drug trafficking and land conflicts. The subject of all three articles stands in opposition with the *National Geographic's* principles of presenting places and people in positive light. Controversial issues like guerilla movement, military intervention, violence, poverty and social inequalities are all included in the representation of Colombians. It applies both to article about Medellin as the world's most dangerous city and Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta where life of Indians is interrupted by guerilla and military intervention.

Among three articles from Brazil in the analyzed period, 'Last of the Amazon' from January 2007 depicts inhabitants of Amazonia in the context of a destruction of the rain forest. Here Manoki Indians – indigenous Amazonian peoples are juxtaposed with local farmers, cowboys, ranchers and police. The article deals with one of the most often discussed environmental problem, which is related to a land conflict. Here *National Geographic* is again breaking up with its long tradition of 'kind' reporting. It represents Brazil from a well-known and established perspective of illegal deforestation of Amazon and its consequences for the world's condition. At the same time it assures its readers about its mission that is 'Inspiring People to Care About the Planet'⁹¹. The title of the article suggests another thing that is a gradual extinction of indigenous inhabitants of the region – a common practice in representation of remote and tribal cultures. Another article, 'Brazil's Wild Wet' is a story about Pantanal – one of the world's largest wetlands. While it is mainly an article about nature, photographs of people also appear.

⁹⁰ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 125

⁹¹ <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/> [10.10.2008]

Visual representation of Bolivians and Venezuelans in the analyzed period occurs in the context of two articles: 'Bolivia's New Order' from July 2008 and 'The New Venezuela' from April 2006. Both articles deal with social issues in the context of politics. The article on Bolivia depicts Bolivian society under the presidency of Evo Morales – elected in 2005 first indigenous president in the history of the country. The article on Venezuela depicts the Venezuelan society from the perspective of Hugo Chavez's rule. Both articles focus on countries' leftist leaders and their policy. A common feature of both articles is the reference to socialist thinkers and communist leaders, like Marx, Lenin, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. The latter appears on few photos in both articles. Since American relations with both of the states are very unstable with conflicts over oil and coca plantations, *National Geographic* covered very touchy yet important subjects for the United States. Following its principles on objective reporting, the articles show different aspects of the issues. Yet the focus is on the instability of the countries and the leaders' inability to lead the countries out of the crisis. It is illustrated by the juxtaposition of photos and captions. Depiction of Evo Morales walking in flying confetti is captioned: 'greeted like a rock star'. The photograph of Hugo Chavez on a TV screen opens the article 'New Venezuela'. From the beginning the leaders' role is narrowed to spectacular communication with the nation, followed by a story of social disparities, unequal distribution of resources, problems of health and educational institutions, and situation on labor markets. In general, the articles evoke critical feelings toward leftist presidents and suggest a need for change. Still, to sustain the impression of balanced reporting, the Bolivian article is prefaced with an article on nature with beautiful photographs from Bolivian Altiplano.

The last article from which the photographs will be analyzed covers archeological expedition in Peru. On the contrary to the *Geographic's* tradition of assigning explorations and scientific investigations to its staff, in the article from February 2004 titled 'Lost Outpost of the Inca' there are locals who search for Inca ruins in Vilcabamba mountains. It illustrates the change in *Geographic's* policy toward letting locals speak for themselves about their history. This happens also in other articles from Peru that all deal with history and archeological expeditions. Yet representatives of the western world of science also appear in these articles. Generally, Peru appears to be of interest to *National Geographic* over the last five years exclusively for its history and archeological explorations.

The general points about *Geographic's* articles on Latin America appeared as an introduction to analysis of photographs. Without this chapter the analysis would be incomplete and difficult for the reader to follow. Making the reader familiar with these contexts in which analyzed photographs are embedded is another step to discover any myths about Latin Americans reproduced in *National Geographic*.

CHAPTER SIX

Pictures as series – how images built a story

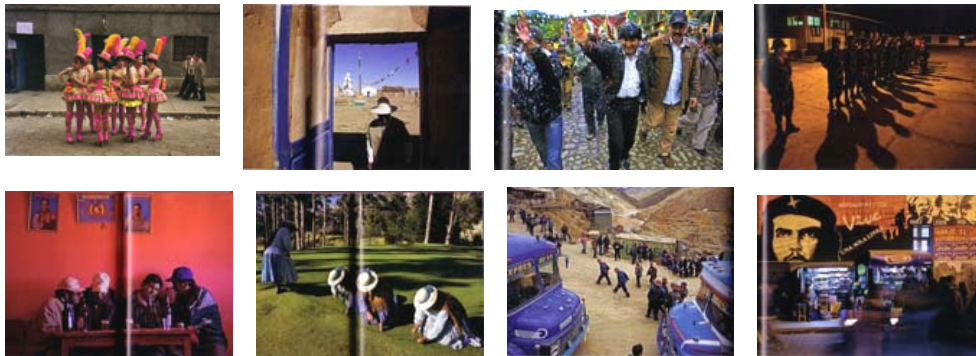
After brief description of the articles that contain the photographs of interest, I will continue the analysis on a more specified level. I will now analyze photographs as series, as they appear in articles to see how they build stories. Since *National Geographic* is to a big extent a picture magazine, many of its readers go through its pages without going deep into the written text. The photos construct the stories that are most interesting for much of *Geographic's* audience.

As Manuel Alvarado argues, photographs on their own are parts of a narrative. He stresses the fact that photographs are not, as often discussed, extracted from the flow of events, freezing a single moment but are elements of 'narrativity'. He postulates the possibility of detecting certain narrative elements from photographs based on Barthes' connotative analysis. According to this approach, a photograph is no longer read as a moment seized because the meaning partly depends on the implicit ordering of events, that is the situation 'before' and 'after' the shot⁹². It applies both to single still images, as well as to series like in *National Geographic*. In the case of the Magazine the narration plays a special role since its readers usually go through its content in a fixed order. According to Berger, 'the meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it'⁹³. Therefore, the organization of photos on the Magazine's pages influences the way images are read. Single photographs become 'scenes' from a flow of events and function as indicators to follow the story. In this way photographs become elements of a narration. If we leave out the written text, it is this narration that 'anchors' the meaning of single photographs and leads the viewer to particular interpretation. Advocating this approach, I will now analyze photographs as they appear in particular articles about Latin America.

⁹² Alvarado, M. in: Alvarado, M., Buscombe, E., Collins, R. (ed.) *Representation and photography*, Palgrave, Houndmills, 2001, p. 150-60

⁹³ Berger, J., *Ways of seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation, London 1972, p. 29

6.1 'Bolivia's New Order', July 2008



A photograph of a group of Bolivian dancers appear on the content page of July 2008 issue of *National Geographic*. These are young girls in platform shoes, wearing pink and yellow dresses and ornamented with plumes. The caption informs that they are waiting for the performance on the streets of Oruro. A couple of men with trumpets walking on the pavement appear in the background. The article opens with a two- page photo of middle –aged man in traditional clothes, walking through a gate. There is a village yard, with a flag in the middle on the second plan. There is nothing happening on the yard, the village looks sleepy, without life. Looking at the second picture gives an opposite impression. There are people walking in a march, confetti is flying over their heads, some are smiling or laughing. A man in the middle of the photo – Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia, is smiling too and waving to gathered people. The picture is very lively; it is a time of celebration, happiness and excitement. The next photograph is very different again. There is a row of policemen standing on a yard surrounded by some concrete buildings. It is dark and the figures give long shadows on the ground. The photograph creates anxiety and evokes a feeling of danger. What I see on another photograph is a group of four men sitting next to a wooden table with beer bottles and plastic glasses on. The place where men are sitting is modest and simple, with wooden table and chairs. The closed eyes of the man and poses of all depicted figures suggest they drank too much alcohol. It looks a bit pathetic and evokes feelings of pity. Following, this photograph is juxtaposed with an image of four women in traditional clothes working on a golf course at La Paz Golf Club, as we learn from the caption. In order to balance the story, here come men in uniforms and casks on their way to work on the next photograph. From the caption we know that these are workers at Huanuni, state – owned Bolivia's largest tin mine. The closing picture of this article is a night shot from the city street. Because of the long

exposure time, the moving figures are not clear, only the still objects that are buildings and people standing or sitting in front of the shops. What is most striking however on this photograph is not people but graffiti on the walls behind them. A huge graffiti of Che Guevara with the text 'Vive' (lives) and few figures with guns walking up the hills are juxtaposed with portraits of Marx, Lenin and Mao. All depicted personalities are symbols, but understood differently in Latin America and in the United States or Europe. From the caption we read that these graffiti are located next to the entrance to the public university in Cochabamba and target presidents' political party 'Movimiento Al Socialismo'.

The photo story of New Bolivia tells about the socialist revolution led by the indigenous peoples and their new hero – Evo Morales. The 'new order' is depicted in the context of work, police, alcohol and a charismatic leader. Che Guevara, is the icon of socialist revolution who fights in the name of the marginalized, exploited and poor Indians, appears on the last photograph in the article. The way Evo Morales is depicted reflects the way Che Guevara was usually portrayed: surrounded by and in warm relationships with ordinary people. Further, the story gives impression that apart from the enthusiasm of the people, not so much has changed in the country since the election of the new president. The image of policemen suggests that it is dangerous. Moreover, working conditions have not changed and people use too much alcohol to forget about their problems. Depiction of icons like Che Guevara, Marx, Lenin and Mao serve to underline the illusionary belief in socialist principles and Indians' hope for better life.

6.2 'Mexico's Other Border', February 2008



This article opens with a two side picture depicting a group of men on railway tracks. Some of them are sleeping (their eyes are closed, they are covered with a blanket), others are sitting on the tracks. This surrealistic situation evokes bewilderment. The second picture is a long length view on many small boats rafting across the Suchiate River between Guatemala and Mexico. The following picture depicts a few men crossing the river by foot. They carry big plastic containers on their backs and hold wooden sticks to support themselves, which look rather tiny in comparison with the load they are carrying. The river seems to be deep and broad. Elements like the flow of the river, wooden sticks and huge containers on men's back create suspense. It is not known what will happen with the people, but their situation looks stark. A scene from another photograph looks more familiar. There is a city street with a woman carrying a big box on her head on the first plan. Some people seem to be making businesses, other are standing and looking around. The grayness of the image gives an impression of pollution. There is a chaos on the street and too many children. From this urban setting next picture takes the viewer to rural area again. The scene takes place on a sugarcane plantation. There is a middle age man, sitting on a truck and eating from a plastic bowl. His posture and dirty clothes suggest he is working hard, but still cannot afford adequate nutrition. The caption informs that it is a legal Guatemalan immigrant who works on a Mexican plantation. Even though the life of immigrants in Mexico is still miserable, the following picture assures that the immigration continues. There are many men clung to a tanker car during a seven hour trip to Palenque. Another picture depicts a situation from the 'trip'. There are five half naked Honduran men on the bank of the river washing their clothes or going to take a bath in the water. Then next picture in the story shows possible results of illegal immigration. There is a young man on a hospital bed who lost his leg under the train and is

now making bracelets, waiting for an artificial limb. This image evokes pity and criticism at the same time. The last photo of the article does not show anything more positive. There is a Guatemalan boy, around 14 years dressed as a clown, who juggles for tips at a Tapachula intersection. It is already dark and no other people besides cars are visible in the background. Using an image of a child in such a situation in the end of the story adds to the drama of illegal immigration.

In summary, the pictures from the article build a story of a well-known American problem. Illegal immigration takes place in the United States for years and concerns mainly its neighboring state – Mexico. Mexico has to cope with the same problem, since many people from poorer Central America try to sneak through the Mexican south border. Mexico is presented as a sister state that copes with the same problems. Yet it is incapable of dealing with it as Americans do. This can be easily read when we compare this article with the one about Mexican – U.S. border (May 2007). The latter one focuses on walls where no people are depicted. These are products of technology – electrical fences and cameras that control the illegal immigration. On the contrary, the Mexican south border is wild and uncontrollable. Additionally, depicted problem refers to the United States since many of illegal immigrants from Central America continue the migration farther to the United States.

6.3 ‘Mexico’s Pilgrim Cowboys’, August 2007



This article consists of 5 pictures of Mexicans cowboys. Opening with a close-up of a man reclining in the saddle, the story continues with an image of a procession passing between a crowd of cowboys standing next to their horses. The third picture is a reference to the first one, depicting two men and two boys next to a small village church. Afterwards there comes a picture of a crowd again. There is a long parade of cowboys on their horses riding on a tiny, windy road in mountains. Few of them are carrying Mexican flags. Like in a puzzle, last photo from the article depicts individuals again. It is a close-up on 3 men sitting on their horses with a statue of Jesus Christ in the background. The story does not evoke any special

feelings nor does it create suspense. It is a very coherent story that represents common for Mexico and the United States values and traditions – Christianity and cowboy culture. Additionally, images of crowd function to stress the scale of the phenomenon.

6.4 'Last of the Amazon', January 2007



It is an article with 13 photographs among which 11 depict people. The first photograph depicting people is a close-up on four indigenous men in different age. They all look exotic with their half naked, painted bodies, strange jewelers, instrument and simple tools they are holding. There is a clash between the naturalness of the people and the destruction of nature that surrounds them. Yet there is a very different scene on the second photograph. Here the man is juxtaposed with technology. On the contrary to the previous photo, there is development and progress that occurs among people that look familiar. Through a close up on a blurred face of a farmer, there is a man standing on a truck connected with another big machine. The caption informs that the scene is on soybean farm in Mato Grosso. Another photograph is a surprisingly different image that would be hard to understand in the context of other photos without the caption. There is a boy leaning against a cemetery cross and looking straight into the camera. It says that the boy mourns a nun who was killed by a hired fireman for fighting to save the forest and helping workers. Next two small photographs depict men at work again. There are two cowboys on their horses together with a herd of cattle on the first image. The second frame depicts an elderly looking man cutting a tree with a logger. It would be an ordinary shot of a man at work if not the fact it depicts destruction of Amazon forest. To

illustrate the solution for the problem, scene depicting soy industry follows. It includes elements of high technology and development. And straight after there is an evening shot from a village depicting group of children hanging out in front of a corner store in the dirt-road neighborhoods. It does not say anything special apart from the fact that the depicted area is poor. Other pages of the article contain two small pictures, both of police in the natural surrounding. On the first one, they are drilling a hole in a road with a machine and on the others are investigating something while holding guns. Another photograph depicts local people again. There are some naked figures running in the rain. The situation takes place on a yard of a village. There are wooden houses with thatched roofs around. The houses and palms behind them give the image an exotic character. The nakedness of figures running in the rain connotes exoticism on one hand and primitiveness on the other.

Like in a story about illegal immigrants, this article closes with a photo of a child. It is a boy, looking seriously into the camera, without a hint of joy. The timber and devastated nature that surrounds him add to the general sad expression of the image.

In sum, the article is a story of a world wide known problem – the destruction of the Amazon rain forest. Local people occur in the story for two reasons. On one hand they are naturally involved in the problem. On the other, their appearance transforms the same, well known story of an environmental problem to a story about Manoki Indians. They are presented as a group on the edge of an extinction resulting from devastation of the rain forest. Their images are interwoven with images of farmers, cowboys and police – the external forces that interfere in their simple life. The article refers to common problems of minorities in Caribbean and Brazil – problems of inter-group relations based on the plantation issues.

6.5 'The New Venezuela', April 2006



This article consists of 12 photographs depicting people and opens with a photograph on a content page. It is an image of smiling Hugo Chavez on Venezuelan flag colors painted on one of Caracas' buildings. There is a boy passing in front of the wall. The first photograph from the article again depicts Hugo Chavez, but this time on a TV screen while recording the programme *Alo Presidente*. There are also other people in the studio, but obviously it is the president who is the most important figure in the frame. His importance is strengthened through double image – his face appears both on a TV screen and in 'reality'. He absolutely grasps all attention – of the cameras and staff in the studio, of the audience in front of TV boxes in Venezuela, of the photographer of *National Geographic* and of me – the one looking at the image. Multiplication of gazes assures the viewer about the significance of the person. What is more, the pose and face expression of the president indicate the importance of his speech. His look is concentrated, his mouth is open in the moment of speech and, most importantly, his hands are raised next to his face. This gesture connotes many meanings - a focus on what he is saying, a focus on whom he is speaking to. It indicates the direction to see, to think. This gesture gives him authority and serves as a sign of leadership. Thus, it connotes relation of power and knowledge. He is the one who speaks and seems to have something important to say. Although one cannot see his viewers, it is inevitable a very large audience.

Another picture, captioned 'Target group' illustrates the inhabitants and neighborhoods of one of the poor zones of Caracas. There are some people, mostly black, walking or standing on a road somewhere in the slums located on the hills of the city. The image is strengthened with the repeated trick that is depiction of children. They are on the first plane of the image holding some pieces of food in their mouths. Generally, the place looks dirty and poor with its houses, which resemble barracks with an abundance of electric wires hanging above people's heads. This is contrasted with the view on a city in the valley. Skyscrapers of the city clash with the metal barracks of slums. This view connotes social and economical disproportion. This message is strengthened with the following photograph. It is a two page close-up shot on fragmented bodies of young, pretty women, laughing and dancing next to each other. Their clothes, make-ups and jewelers imply a world of wealth, entertainment, consumption, happiness and beauty. This image is followed by an image of a 'living' Che Guevara - a portrait of a middle age man looking exactly like revolutionary hero. His image is juxtaposed with the picture of real Che Guevara hanging on the wall behind him. There is also a picture of Hugo Chavez hanging there. Both the depicted person and figures on the photographs behind him serve as symbols of socialistic revolution and political orientation of contemporary Venezuela. After that begins a series of small photographs depicting average people in the context of Venezuelan oil industry, medical and educational reforms. The picture depicting a medical investigation is presented in the context of the socialistic revolution - again there are photos of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro hanging on the wall behind the main figures. The outcomes of leftist rule are portrayed immediately in the following two page image from a rural area. There are some people on a boat in a village constructed on a lake. There are children on the first plan again to stress that they are the one who suffer most the poverty.

Contrasting with the previous photograph representing upper class entertainment, the photograph depicting men in a cockfight local stresses the differences between rich and poor. Here the people do not look so elegant while entertaining themselves in a very simple or even primitive way. Since drunken women in a night club can look pretty, drunk men in a cockfight local looks rather pathetic. To make them look even more backward the following picture depicts again a western type of entertainment. There is a scene from the Venezuelan version of the popular show *Idol*. However, balance in the coverage has to be sustained. For this purpose, this image is on the same page with a small picture of a man playing the harp. The figure is a modestly dressed man wearing a big hat in a rural surrounding. The closing

image from the article depicts a man and a teenager working on a field. They look tired and miserable. This photograph leaves the viewer with feelings of empathy; especially it depicts a very young person doing hard work.

In sum, the way photographs are organized in this article gives mixed feelings about Venezuela. On one side there are symbols of wealth and development and on the other – poverty, backwardness and misery. These contradictory features are presented in the context of a political system with a visible lack of coherence. While Hugo Chavez and Che Guevara symbolize the socialistic revolution while western modes of entertainment indicate capitalistic values. The latter is represented by images of leisure, fun and happiness. The play of contradictions on one hand leaves the viewer with mixed feelings and on the other simulates fair and balanced reporting.

6.6 ‘Brazil’s Wild Wet’, April 2005



It is an article about Pantanal – one of the world’s largest wetlands. Although it is an article mainly on nature, it consists of 5 pictures depicting local people. The photographs show life of inhabitants of this rough and unfriendly human region. What is characteristic in these photos is the fact that there are only men, mostly young, depicted in the article. The first image is extremely interesting from an aesthetic point of view. It is a unconventional portrait. There is a face reflected in a car mirror. It is a middle age man observing attentively the area around. The only thing that is visible about him is that he is dark skinned and he is wearing a cowboy hat. Another picture from Pantanal is a two – page size photo depicting three local men. They are all young, dark skinned, with naked torsos, but wearing cowboy hats. The scene is located in front of a wooden stable and there is a horse visible in the background. Another photo depicts a person confronted with technology - it is a man on a tractor. Next picture continues the same motif – a human in the confrontation with a machine. This time there is a man checking a tourist bus after a wooden bridge collapsed under its wheels. The last photo in the article depicts two men who stand in the flooded forest. The one in the front

is holding a big fish in one hand and a knife in the other. He has a naked torso and a cowboy hat on his head. The man in the background is fully dressed and he wears the same type of hat. The men are standing in the water and forest is surrounding them. The place, men's appearance and the dead fish make the image an exotic spot and show the link between man and nature. Additionally a knife used as a hunting tool connotes primitiveness and backwardness.

In general, photographs from Pantanal build a story of a man in confrontation with the power of nature. Opening the story with a photograph of a man observing the surrounding from his car and closing the story with a photograph depicting the men with capture, resemble initial and final stages of a hunt. The figures' daily routine is depicted in the context of nature on which their survival depends. Apart from the vehicles depicted on 3 photographs, no other signs of technological advancement are visible. While Brazilians living in Pantanal are depicted without clothes and hunting food with simple tools, they appear as uncivilized primitives trapped in the state of nature.

6.7 'Medellin's Mean Street', March 2005



This article contains of 11 pictures of people from Colombia. A photograph opening the article depicts two children in urban scenery. There is a girl about 10 years old, wearing a first – commune dress, with a delicate make-up and big silver earrings. She holds two rotten bananas in one hand. There is a small child in front of her, dressed up and with a make-up that gives him a look of a penguin. The clash of children's unusual clothes and the location of the

situation give the image an unrealistic, yet surrealistic character. The photograph is followed by a close-up of a several half naked men in Bellavista Prison. Their poses and faces express aggression. The scene looks like from the beginning of a fight and creates suspense. Moving to next picture increases the tension. There is a night shot from a place of accident. There is a bleeding, young, male body lying on the street in front of a house. In the background there is a group of people, mostly children. The clash of drastic scenes and presence of children evokes bewilderment and disapproval. An image of an accident is a picture we are used to, but it is not acceptable that children are witnessing such a drastic scene. The feeling is sustained by another small picture depicting two boys sniffing glue kept under their shirts.

In order to release the tension, the following picture depicts some more familiar, 'western' scene - people in a night club. But although it is a scene from a party, the face expression of frontal figure does not evoke positive feelings. And this impression is strengthened again by following image. There is a woman and a baby lying in the bed. The woman is covered with a blanket and she looks absently sideways. The place with its bare bricks looks like under construction. Few rubber toys on the 'brick shelf' over the bed add to the general picture of misery. What is more, the caption informing that the woman is a prostitute and lives in slums alone with her three daughters deepens the feeling of empathy. There is a striking contrast between this and the next picture that depicts two models in underwear posing on the cat walk. Another photograph again depicts a 'western' scene that shows three boys playing golf. In order to stress the social disparities, images of children are used again. An image of a 'slums' baby' is juxtaposed with an image of rich family children. With another photograph the viewer is taken to a prison cell. There is a man, with a T-shirt on his head, so only his eyes are visible. The caption informing that he is a leftist rebel explains why there is a poster of Che Guevara hanging on the wall of the cell. Holding the viewer in the criminal world, the next picture depicts a group of police officers with guns in outskirts of Medellin.

As in previously analyzed articles, the pattern of closing the story with an image of a child repeats in this case too. It is a shot from a poor *barrio* depicting boys playing football and small girls watching them through a fence. As a whole story shows the dark side of Medellin, children are those who suffer most. Framing and filling the story with photos of children in the context of violence, poverty and suffering successfully creates a negative view

on the place and its people. Children symbolizing innocence are presented as victims of the street violence and drug conflicts.

In sum, the organization of photos in this article keeps the viewer in constant tension. Photographs of children are interwoven with images of criminals and dead body. These are also photographs of children that initiate and close the series. Through these practices, violent and dangerous sides of Medellin are strictly tied to the most defenseless group in the society. Moreover, photographs of models, people on the party and boys playing golf seem not to match to the story about violence in Medellin. Although the intention of showing these photographs might be to show different aspects of the problem, the result is that they create a general image of chaotic, unjust world ruled by laws of the jungle.

6.8 ‘Indians of the Sierra Nevada’, October 2004



Another article covering Colombia contains 14 pictures depicting mostly Indians from the mountain area in the north of the country. The story is framed in two photographs of Indians in the jungle. The opening image depicts a group of people looking straight into the camera. In between them there is a figure walking up the path towards the forest that looks like inviting the viewer to follow. It functions as an invitation to the story. On the final side of the story, there is a man again turned back to the viewer and walking up steep stairs toward the jungle, leaving the viewer behind. In between these two photographs there is a story of Indians’ life disturbed by external interventions. Sign of this intervention immediately occurs

on a next picture. There is a military airplane and a group of locals squeezed to the side of the frame. They look small and scared in comparison with the size of the machine. To create more positive 'aura' of the story, somewhat an anthropological motif occurs. It is a classic portrait of an Indian boy in local clothes. This image resembles an anthropological shot, where the background as a 'disturbing' element, is edited out in order to catch the 'pure type'. Next photograph is kept in similar style, but depicts a group of people in their natural surrounding. It shows a kind of ritual that creates an atmosphere of magic and mystery. The caption tells us that the men are meditating. Another photograph depicting a local man walking in mountains speaks in the similar, almost anthropological tone. However, the caption 'Imbalance' destroys the 'pleasant' aura and function as an introduction to a set of following controversial pictures.

Three following pictures are all on two pages of the magazine with a common title 'Pressures from all side'. They depict locals confronting outsiders, like militaries or those looking for a land. In this group of photographs appears also a dead body. It is one of the local people murdered on the grounds of land conflict. After the cluster of photographs depicting problems which locals have to cope with, there is again a positive image of real Arcadia. Traditional, simple houses in the middle of the forest, a horse standing on a side and a child in canvas dress running towards the settlement fill the frame titled 'Equilibrium'. Additionally, the smoke coming from the roofs of the houses and sun setting light add a romantic atmosphere to this idyllic picture. This impression of coherence is sustained by another picture titled 'Renewal'. It's a close up on a group of local people hugging each other, smiling, bending in different positions. One of the men is playing accordion. There is a kind of chaos on the picture but a positive one due to smiles and relaxed poses of depicted figures. Their face expressions and poses suggest that they might be drunk or under the influence of other substance. Two pictures juxtaposed on another page continue the 'kind' style of representing Indians from Sierra Nevada but here the focus is on young girls. On one frame there are two girls washing their cloths and bathing in a river and on the other there are four girls in different age posing to the photograph. Both images are pleasant pictures of local people in their everyday surrounding. Photo that follows depicts a woman working on a 'poporo' – a local tool for knitting, appearing in few photographs along the story. This image resembles the 'anthropological' portrait of the boy since the background here is also edited out.

Generally, this story has many similar points with the ‘Last of the Amazon’ article. It also represents Indians in the context of a land conflict. As a consequence, juxtaposition of Indians with external forces occurs. Apart from people, there are machines and other symbols of technology that contrast with simple tools and traditional clothes of local people. The photographs are kept in greens and whites that give the story coherence.

6.9 ‘Cocaine country’, July 2004

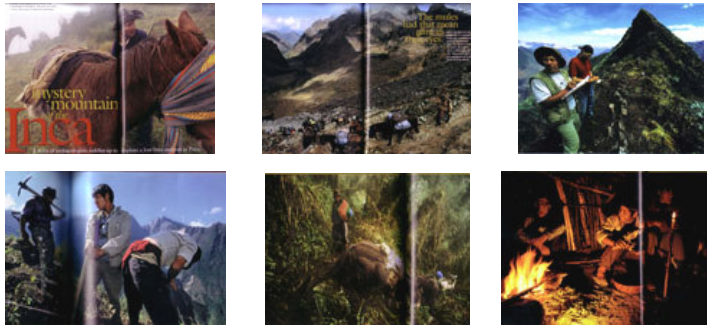


It is an article about ‘Colombian villages where coke is king’ as we read on the front page of the issue. The article contains 15 photographs and opens with a photograph on a magazine’s cover page. This photograph illustrates the controversial character of the article. There is a female guerilla member holding a machine gun. This object is occurring along the whole story, assuring the reader that guns rule Colombian reality. Other object that reminds the reader about what Colombia is really about is cocaine. It appears straight in first photo depicting an old farmer functioning as an introduction to the story of cocaine business. It leads the viewer through different stages of production, ways of selling and consequences. After a photo of bunch of coca leaves, guerillas with their guns appear again. In order to give a hint of balanced reporting, a small photo depicting ordinary town in Latin America occurs. It prepares the viewer for the next image that evokes bewilderment, if not anxiety. There is a female rebel with a big machine gun who talks to a teenage girl in soccer garment. The girl looks at the woman with her eyes wide open and seems to be very scared. The image

represents how drug trafficking steps into lives of ordinary people. To impact the viewer even more, it is a child confronted with a gun. On the same page of the magazine, there is a small photo of the shop interior. It is a wide focal length shot, with a counter assistant on the first plan. Everything would be ordinary again if not a plastic bag with a white powder lying on the counter. The story of the cocaine market continues with the next photo depicting a cocaine transaction. There are people of different sex and age being involved in the situation. Next photograph depicts different kind of transaction – a fish market. On one side it balances previous image but on the other repeats the message as soon as we read the caption under the photo. It explains that cocaine is not only a commodity produced and sold, but also a currency used to pay for other commodities. The suspense is retrieved with right another picture. There are ordinary looking girls on a medical bed, but first plan of the frame is occupied by a plastic bag with white powder. The caption is shocking – these are prostitutes waiting for pregnancy test who pay with the same currency they are paid – cocaine. And here comes the apogee of the message – young boys skilled with machetes are cutting coca plants. The culmination of coca story is the fact that children are involved in this ‘dirty’ business. What is more, these are not only children involved, but old people as well that is provided with another photograph depicting an elderly couple processing coca in their house. To remind the viewer what is the whole thing about, a close-up on FARC rebels with guns in the jungle follows. On the same page there is a small photograph depicting an operating room where doctor extracts bullets from a guerilla shot by paramilitaries. It shows directly what consequences the civil war has. The closing photograph depicts a rebel with a gun standing for security while a dealer weighs a kilo of base.

In summary, the story’s photographs represent one of the biggest problems in Colombia by means of best – recognizable and stereotyped signs – guns, guerillas and cocaine. In order to evoke even stronger disapprobation and criticism, average people and especially children are involved in the images. The article is a stereotypical story about Colombia and so are the photos illustrating it.

6.10 'Lost outpost of the Inca', February 2004



Among 10 pictures in this article about Peru, 6 pictures depict people. The photos take the viewer on a trip with a group of archeologists to discover the lost Inca ruins in Peruvian Andes. The organization of the photos leads the viewer along the day in chronological order of events. It starts with saddling up the mules and ends with the evening shot depicting explorers around a fire place. In between there are shots depicting how difficult hiking in Andes is. There is a group of people and animals walking down a steep path and a close-up on mules' legs climbing up rocky stairs. Further, there are few photos depicting men at work and their archeological findings. These images are much smaller than those depicting landscapes or men taking care of animals. In the middle of the story, appears an image resembling a scene from a fairy tale. There is a man in traditional clothes, resembling a dwarf who stands behind mules in the middle of the forest. The nature is overwhelming, almost devouring the figures. It is foggy and humid. Additionally, weak focus blurs the scene, adding to the magic atmosphere.

In summary, the whole story juxtaposes the power of Nature with the people looking for lost civilization. The contemporary Peruvians are depicted in the context of their history and natural landscapes. What differs this story from most of the archeological articles is the fact that here these are local people given the authority to investigate scientifically their own history, whereas there are usually westerners to have this privilege in other *National Geographic* stories. An article from March 2005 titled 'Ancient Peru's Power Elite' contains one more photograph of a local person while excavating works. In this case it is a unique photograph depicting a local in such a situation.

The structure of a magazine requires from its readers a specific 'order' of consumption. As mentioned before, in the case of *National Geographic*, significant part of its

readers often look only at photographs without going either to article's text or to captions. They view photographs in the order they appear one after another. It results in a construction of a story. For these reasons I found it necessary to analyze the layout and size of the photographs. Further, looking at how the story begins, develops and finishes; how the suspense is constructed and how particular characteristics of the photographs create an atmosphere is one of the aspects of multi-contextual analysis of visual representation of Latin Americans. It is a perspective which is significant while discussing magazine's photographs and the way they construct the 'Other'.

CHAPTER SEVEN

General characteristics about 107 photographs of Latin Americans

In the universe of 107 analyzed photographs I found motives, objects and characteristics that are repeated in the depiction of Latin Americans.

Many of analyzed photographs refer to problems of violence and crime. One of the most striking characteristics is the presence of guns in many articles, most often in the Colombian stories. In the analyzed data there are also two images of dead bodies - both from Colombia. One of them is from streets of Medellin (Fig. 39) and the other from Sierra Nevada in Santa Marta district (Fig. 40). Both images depict victims of murder on the grounds of drug or land conflicts. What is more, coverage of Latin America from last five years includes images of drunken people (Fig. 3), wounded bodies, illegal immigrants, children sniffing glue (Fig.2) or working on the street (Fig.17). These articles stand in opposition to how *National Geographic* intended to present the world in its beginnings. While Lutz and Collins's analysis of photographs from 1950 to 1986 led the authors to the conclusion that the Magazine presents 'an idealized world...relatively free of pain or class conflict...' ⁹⁴ my analysis unveils an opposite - a world full of violence, poverty and injustice. Images of children at work, in poor areas, in the context of dead or drug business, strengthen the negative image about the region. The representation of small Latin Americans in the analyzed period is not balanced since it shows almost exclusively negative side of childhood in the region.

Other element common for many photographs, which intensifies the negative image of the region, is the presence of drugs. Obviously, it appears strongest in the 'Cocaine country' article that focuses on a drug business. Here the abundance of images of cocaine in all possible forms leaves the impression that cocaine is everything what can be said about Colombia. And this is the most common stereotype of the country. On other picture, also from Colombia, there are children sniffing glue. Even though the article is not directly about drug business, it refers to the same problem. Eventually, everything in Colombia is linked to cocaine business.

⁹⁴ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 46



Figure 1 ‘Cocaine Country’



Figure 2 ‘Medellin’s Mean Streets’

Apart from depiction of drugs, there are few images representing alcohol use. In all of them it is more an abuse than an ordinary consumption of alcohol. People represented with alcohol are usually either on a party, during leisure time or celebrating some event. Each time, they are depicted as already drunk, thus clumsy or in a strange pose.



Figure 3 ‘Bolivia’s New Order’



Figure 4 ‘Medellin’s Mean Streets’

Another motif stressing the criticism towards Latin American world is the juxtaposition of poor and rich. It does not appear so much on single photographs, as in the organization of photographs. What is common for the Magazine is that signs of social and economic disproportions are usually abundant in the stories about countries that have either leftist leaders or are in problematic relations with the United States. It happens in the case of Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela. On the contrary, images of nation’s leaders who are friendly with the United States are rarely juxtaposed with images of poverty, violence and suffering⁹⁵. However, in the case of coverage of Latin America in last 5 years, these leaders do not appear at all.

⁹⁵ Guimon, J. (1988:57) in: Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 74



Figure 5 'Medellin's Mean Streets'



Figure 6 'Medellin's Mean Streets'

Consequently, countries that lead social revolutions are in focus of the Magazine. Instead of 'increase and diffusion of geographic knowledge', the Magazine practices political partiality on behalf of American state. Bolivia and Venezuela are represented in the context of revolutionary leaders, incapable of dragging the countries out of their miserable situation. What is more, they are juxtaposed with the images of other leftist leaders, like Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Marx, Lenin or Mao. Identifying contemporary leaders with such icons naturally locate them on the 'other' side. Since the beginnings of *National Geographic*, its staff has been standing in opposition to communism and has been clearly expressing its criticism. The contemporary chiefs and editors seem to maintain its position through the way Venezuela, Bolivia and leftist guerillas in Colombia are represented.



Figure 7 'The New Venezuela'



Figure 8 'The New Venezuela'

Further, my analysis of *National Geographic's* issues from last five years dispels the myth that the magazine is mostly interested in exotic and dying cultures. Although it is true to some extent, there is more focus on already extinct civilizations than on existing ones. Maya, Aztecs and Incans get much more attention than living tribes or minority groups of the region. There are just two stories about tribal societies - Indians in Colombian Sierra Nevada and Manoki Indians in Amazonas. And in the case of these two articles, stereotypical 'othering' takes place. Photographed groups are represented in the context of Nature and their simple, idyllic life in the contrast with external world. The latter is usually represented by a land conflict that is a chronic problem of indigenous societies, and symbols of technological progress.



Figure 10 'Last of the Amazon'



Figure 9 'Peru's City of Mystery'

On the contrary to the data analyzed by Lutz and Collins, family relations are depicted quite rarely. While the stereotypical representation of 'other' women often shows mother – child relations, it is not the case according to the analyzed photographs. There is one direct depiction of mother with her baby but still it is not a typical picture (Fig. 12). The mother is lying under the blanket whereas the baby lies uncovered in a distance from the woman. Even though the 'other' woman is a mother, like an American woman, there are no traces of love in the representation of motherhood. On balance, there are many depictions of children in groups, often close to each other, resembling family connections (Fig. 11). Instead of 'normal' model of family where parents take care of children, in Latin America children have to take care of each others. Further, there is a lack of images of the basic family relation – the one

between man and woman. This way of representing family points at what is missing instead of showing the importance and richness of family relations in the region.



Figure 12 ‘Indians of the Sierra Nevada’

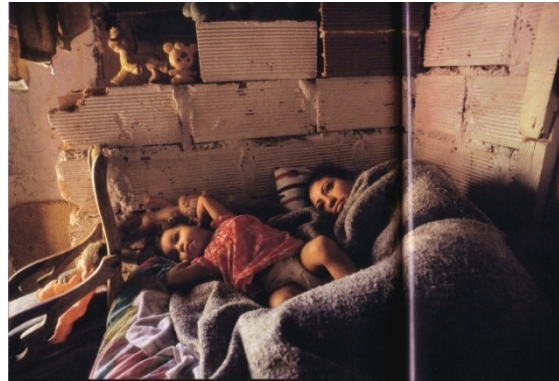


Figure 11 ‘Medellin’s Mean Streets’

As often in representation of sexes in popular culture, women are underrepresented in comparison with men. In the analyzed photographs, only men are depicted four times more often than only women or both sexes. Further, old people are also underrepresented when compared with children, young and middle age figures.

Another characteristic of analyzed photographs is the twice often depiction of people in groups and in rural surrounding in comparison with images of individuals and in urban surrounding. Analyzed pictures represent Latin American societies as community societies leaving mostly in rural areas.

Further, among analyzed pictures, people at work appear double as often as in leisure time. There are more often men than women working and few times there are also children. It gives a picture of a traditional, male bread - winners societies yet dysfunctional. System is not functioning properly if children and teenagers have to work. The images of children on the streets, never at schools or other educational institutions, add to the picture of dysfunctional system.

What is common for many pictures from the analyzed period is the appearance of animals. Representations of Mexican or Brazilian cowboys, Argentinean gauchos or Peruvian archeologists mark the link between people and animals. Even though it is a well known fact that cowboy or gaucho cultures depend on use of animals, it is repeated in every image of representatives of these cultures. It creates a stereotyped image of the people who are reduced

to the basic feature of their culture. Further, Brazilians are depicted holding some rare and exotic animals that also suggest they live in tight relations with nature (Fig. 14).

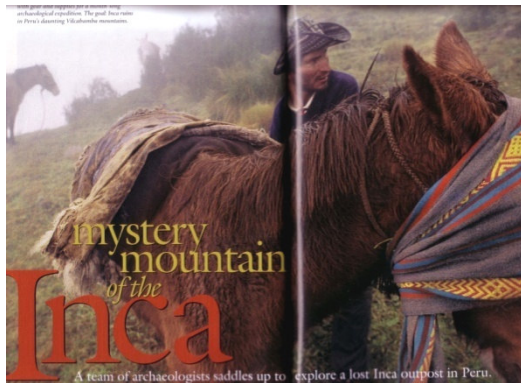


Figure 13 'Lost outpost of the Inca'



Figure 14 'Rio's Backyard Rain Forest'

Elaborating the way cowboys are represented, I found few stereotypical features. Mexican cowboys, Argentinean gauchos or Brazilian cattle ranchers are mostly young, strong and handsome. Their gentle smiles give a hint of naivety and innocent youth. Slightly open mouths of few depicted cowboys connote childishness and simplicity. These features create an image of a kind, ready to help gentleman, conformed to Christian values and at the same time veil possible other features of this group. Cowboys in *National Geographic* are like many other cowboys we know from popular culture. Their representations do not create new meanings apart from already known stereotypes and myths.

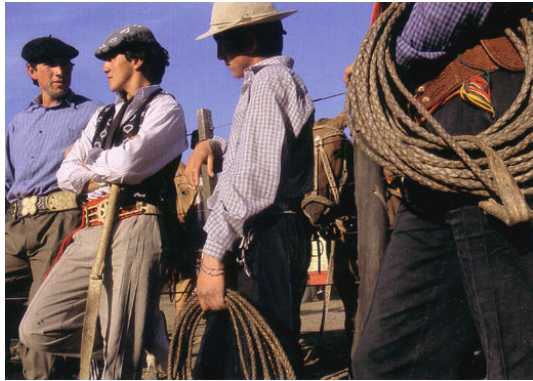


Figure 15 'Patagonia the Wild Wild South'

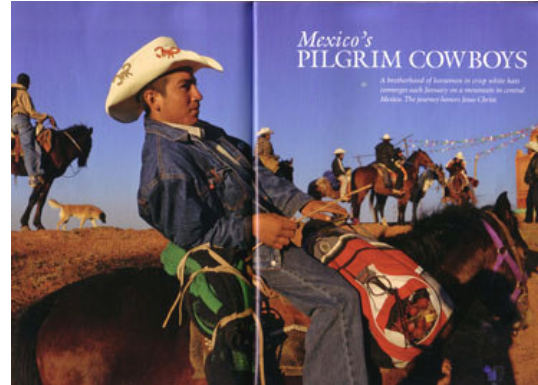


Figure 16 'Mexico's Pilgrim Cowboys'

What is also characteristic for depiction of Latin Americans in the analyzed photographs is that they rarely look into the camera. Among 14 images depicting people who do look at the camera, there are mostly children. According to Pierre Bourdieu 'Looking at the person who is looking (or who is taking the photograph), correcting one's posture, one presents oneself to be looked at as one seeks to be looked at; one presents one's own image'⁹⁶. Referring to this argument, adult Latin Americans do not want to be looked at, since they usually turned back from the camera. On the other hand, children are usually happy to be photographed that means for them to be noticed and to be priced. But although they often look into the camera lens, they do not pose in a classical way. They neither stand straight nor do they hold foreheads high. This typical for portrait photography pose is linked to culturally embedded values, according to Bourdieu. The 'desire for frontality' derives from a demand for respect and respecting oneself. Children do not perceive themselves and the encounter with the other person in this way, so they behave more natural in front of the camera. The intention of striking a pose is to avoid being captured as 'natural'. Normally people are embarrassed when they are asked to behave naturally. Bourdieu attributes this behavior to lack of confidence and undervaluation of self⁹⁷. Children do not manifest these feelings, which results in more natural behavior, even if they are photographed.

The fact that people are rarely looking into the camera, even if they are aware of being photographed, gives the photos a journalistic or even scientific authority. There are these genres that capture people by surprise, in natural situations. In most of the *Geographic* photos people know that they are photographed, but they still ignore the camera. Presumably, it

⁹⁶ Bourdieu, P., *The social definition of photography*, in: Evans J. And Hall S. (ed.) *Visual culture: the reader*. Sage Publications, London 1999, p. 168

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 166-167

results from the fact that photographers of *National Geographic* spend a lot of time with their subjects. They often follow the story and their objects for weeks, so finally people are getting used to them. This practice is comparable to what Malinowski called 'participatory observation' – a method of scientific investigation relying on a participation in researched situations or events in order to describe and analyze other cultures. Unlike the anthropological or sociological participatory observation, the photo stories in *National Geographic* are not systematic and objective observations. They present only pieces of reality, which selection depends on a chain of staffs' decisions. Yet it is arguable to what extent these are pieces of reality or rather pictures of reality. Referring to constructivist theory, I analyze photos as representations of reality rather as pieces cut out from it.

Other characteristic feature of photos depicting Indians is presence of machines or special technical equipment. Local people are juxtaposed with technology that stresses their underdevelopment, yet primitiveness.

While analyzing photographs, it is not only what is visible that counts but also what is omitted. One important feature of Latin American societies that is invisible in analyzed pictures is strong family relations, mentioned before. The other one is the richness of region's cultural heritage. When it occurs it is only in reference to lost empires of Maya, Aztec or Inca. Contemporary Latin American societies are deprived of cultural heritage. Exceptional are two photographs of people playing instruments (Colombia, Venezuela), knitting (Colombia) and dressed in traditional carnival clothing (Bolivia) but we never see any images of artists' or craftsmen's work. While presenting country's cultural heritage gives a good impression about a place, Latin American societies are diminished in this aspect. To balance this lack, there are photographs of different kinds of entertainments, like parties or TV show that substitute the representation of traditional leisure activities. An exemption is an image from a cockfight.

As the last point of the general analysis of the sample of 107 photographs, I will briefly outline some technical characteristics like vantage, focus, colors and type of light as they are parts of the system of visual signs that produce the meaning of images. About 30 percent of photographs are wide focal length shots from a distance and 25 percent are close-ups. There are also 15 shots from behind a person and few aerial pictures. The latter usually do not aim to present people. A common practice is to photograph a situation or people through some object on the first plan. It is visible for example on photographs from Colombia,

where many shots are taken ‘through’ a gun or a bag of cocaine. These are sometimes also people on the nearest plan. This strategy underlines particular aspect of the constructed message. The objects on this first plan together with array of background elements build up one image which meaning is molded by the symbolical character of this first plan object. Although these objects are usually blurred since the focus is on the background scene, they are easily recognizable.

What is characteristic for the photographs in *National Geographic* in general, is the use of vivid colors. Colors can create a particular atmosphere of an image and influence the way we perceive depicted objects. Some colors are culturally coded signs of different kinds of emotions or ideas yet often contradictory. Red can connote passion, love, energy, vitality, warmth but also symbolizes anger, blood or revolution, especially the socialist one. On the contrary, white connotes peace, innocence or purity and blue is associated with cold, calm and distance. Further, yellow is the ‘sunny’ color associated with warmth and positive energy and green is said to have the calming and relaxing power. Black often symbolizes grief, night or evil but is associated with elegance and luxury when it comes to fashion or commodities, like cars, electronic equipment etc. Hence, color is used in the visual culture to communicate particular meanings, but it does not possess any universal features. Colors, as signs, are ambivalent and signify only to the extent people share common understanding of them. Additionally, it is not only color itself that communicates a message, but its characteristics, like saturation, purity, modulation or hue. Further, colors help to create coherence and unity of the text by two practices – repetition of the same color or ‘color’ coordination that is the same degree of brightness or saturation⁹⁸.

According to photographs of Latin Americans in *National Geographic*, use of color depends on the story. In the Venezuelan and Bolivian photos, red, as a symbol of socialistic revolution, appears quite often. Indians of Sierra Nevada are clothed white, which connotes their purity and innocence. Peruvian expedition in Andes is saturated with blues and greens that connote cold, distance, infinity. These features apply to Andean landscapes on one hand and to the lost and remote Inca civilization on the other. ‘Coca country’ photographs depict the metaphorical ‘dark’ side of the Colombia and they do it by use of literally dark colors. Obscurity of the jungle and interiors where cocaine business takes place, connotes the hidden,

⁹⁸Kress, G., Leeuwen, T.V., *Colour as a semiotic mode: notes for a grammar of colour* in: Visual Communication 1(3), Sage Publications, London 2002.

illegal and dangerous character of drug trafficking. On the contrary, whites, yellows and oranges of the 'Mexico's Pilgrim Cowboys' shed a positive, 'sunny' light on Mexicans and the cowboy culture.

Barthes in one of the essays in *Mythologies* writes that 'colouring the world is always a means of denying it'⁹⁹. He makes this point while analyzing how a film *The Lost Continent* represents the myth of exoticism. He argues that 'beautiful pictures' in the film cannot be innocent since they deprive exoticism from its history. This can be true to some extent according to photographs in *National Geographic* too. The fact that they are colorful, aesthetically beautiful pictures, give them some special quality. Contrasting with rough, often blurred and badly composed photojournalistic shots, Geographic's pictures are carefully organized, fine exposed and originally framed. Even if depicting misery, they are pleasant for the eye and use of colors plays here a special role. They diminish the often negative overtone of the images. Aesthetic images of human misfortune are often critically commented in contemporary visual studies. However, since *National Geographic* considers itself as a scientific publication, it gets rid of such accusations. While it is considered a publication balancing between science and entertainment, the color is used to make 'the science' fun. According to representation of different cultures, it claims to be an objective source of information, but presented in a way understandable for all kinds of readers. Use of vivid colors and artistic compositions results in 'flattening' depicted problems and controversies. In addition, joining beautiful colors with sometimes controversial content of a photograph makes it appealing to many senses at the same time, as one picture editor of the Magazine said¹⁰⁰.

The last technical characteristic of images that I am concerned with is type of light. Most of the shots are taken in a midday light that gives them more 'natural' expression. Few shots from the evening or night either depict situations seen only at this time of the day or aim to achieve a better aesthetic effect. Night shots can also function to create the atmosphere or evoke special feelings, like fear or mystery. Examples are the night shot of policemen in Bolivia or an image of a Guatemalan boy on a Tapachula intersection at dusk.

⁹⁹ Barthes, R., *Mythologies*, Vintage, London 1993, p. 94

¹⁰⁰ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 70

The description of general characteristics of all photographs aims to separate few clusters of photographs along these features. In the realm of motifs, objects, situations and technical determinants, I have found few that tend to repeat in different photographs and occur as patterns of representation of Latin American 'Other' in *National Geographic*. In next chapter of my thesis, I will analyze groups of photographs along these categories.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Analysis of photograph's clusters with examples

After describing the general and most striking characteristics of all analyzed photographs, I will continue the analysis on a more specified level. It combines the denotative description with connotative analysis of photo clusters formed within particular categories. At some points I will refer to the same characteristics that I had introduced in previous chapter, but on a more detailed level. In others, I will analyze photographs along other categories.

8.1 Groups vs. individuals

First category applies to representation of groups versus individuals. As mentioned before, people in groups are presented two times more often than individuals. Among depiction of the latter, no one is smiling. There are few children depicted, few old people and the rest is middle age. Generally, there are more often male figures represented as individuals than female. While few children look into the camera, old people avoid the eye contact with the camera. It results from the fact that children pose to the photo without involvement in any other activity, whereas older people are depicted while doing something. In few cases, individuals represent victims of a problem described in the article. These are a Guatemalan boy working on a street (Fig. 17), a man who lost his leg while illegal immigration to Mexico (Fig. 18) or a boy suffering the poverty in Mato Grosso. On the contrary, there are few individuals representing perpetrators of depicted problems, for example guerilla rebels or illegal logger.



Figure 18 'Mexico's Other Border'



Figure 17 'Mexico's Other Border'

When it comes to representation of groups, there are two types of images. First type of photos depicts small groups of a few people and the second depicts big groups or crowds. In the small groups people are often related to each other more directly than in big groups. There is either a physical contact or verbal communication, or active involvement in the same type of action. On the contrary, people in big groups do not demonstrate such personal relations and they take a passive role in a common activity or situation. An exception is an image of a big group of Colombian Indians who demonstrate close relations, leaning against each other, hugging and smiling (Fig. 20). This behavior connotes strength of community solidarity ascribed to native inhabitants of the land. This feature differentiates native Latin Americans from the Spanish descendants on one side, and from western world on the other. Western culture values more individualism that deprives people of the atavistic sense of community belonging.



Figure 19 'Mexco's Pilgrim Cowboys'



Figure 20 'Indians of the Sierra Nevada'

8.2 Type of activity

In both feminist and post colonial representation analysis, type of activity is a category within which the construction of the 'Other' takes place. For this reason, I am looking at images of Latin Americans from the perspective of sort of activity they are involved in. As mentioned before, people at work are depicted twice as often as in leisure time. According to Lutz and Collins, to portray people at work, is to keep with magazine's principles of positive presentation of other cultures that is the work ethic, highly valued in the United States¹⁰¹. However, depiction of people at work generally is not that frequent as in other kinds of

¹⁰¹ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 162

activities, coded as ‘other’¹⁰². Photographs depicting work illustrate usually physical type of occupations as farmer, cowboy (Fig. 24) or service occupations like policeman (Fig. 23) or shop assistant. Additionally, half of these shots depict people in a break at work than in a real working activity. Few depictions of high status occupations like doctor (Fig. 22) or scientist are almost invisible in the realm of analyzed images. There are few representations of women doing house work, like washing clothes or hanging laundry (Fig. 21).



Figure 22 ‘The New Venezuela’



Figure 21 ‘The New Venezuela’



Figure 23 ‘Bolovia’s New Order’



Figure 24 ‘Last of the Amazon’

In the case of depiction of Latin Americans in context of leisure time, these are shots from parties, bars or bathing in hot springs. In the article from Venezuela extremely different modes of spending free time connote the social disparity. On one side there are celebrities on a party (Fig. 25) and participants of *Idol* show in a TV studio. On the other there are men in a cockfight local (Fig. 26).

¹⁰² Activities that depict neither work nor leisure time.

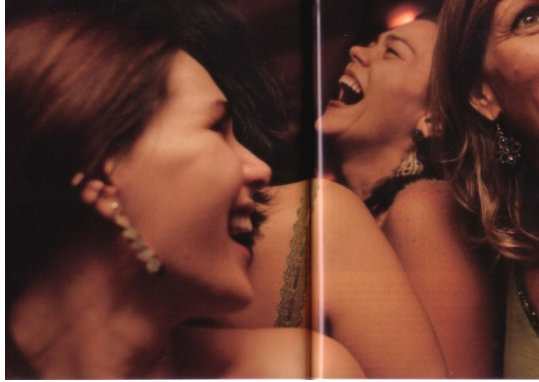


Figure 25 ‘The New Venezuela’

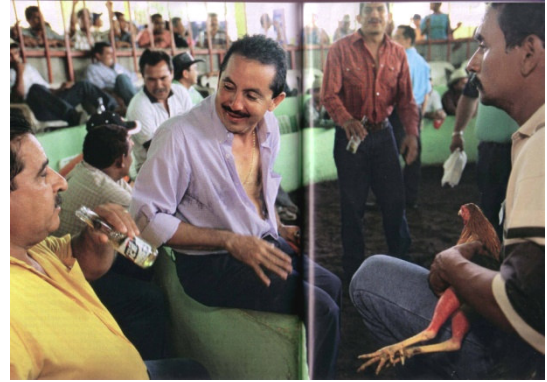


Figure 26 ‘The New Venezuela’

Other types of activities categorized as neither work nor entertainment are for example daily routines. In this category food consumption is depicted few times yet always in ‘uncivilized’ manner. Peruvians at the fire place, Colombian and Venezuelan children on the street, Guatemalan immigrant on a sugarcane plantation or Brazilians catching a fish connote primitiveness or lack of good manners. Latin Americans in *National Geographic* do not eat food from a plate, using cutlery, at the table, but instead they use hands or plastic bowls, they stand or sit on the ground. Instead of going to a supermarket, they hunt or grow the food by themselves. Further, they use fire instead of ovens and do never go to restaurants. The ways Latin Americans get and eat food add to the primitiveness of the Latin ‘Other’. It is further strengthened by the depiction of other daily routines. For example, Central Americans sleep on railway trucks and wash themselves in rivers (Fig. 28), the same as Colombian Indians do (Fig. 27).



Figure 27 ‘Indians of the Sierra Nevada’



Figure 28 ‘Mexico’s Other Border’

8.3 Gender

Along with feminist critic of visual representations, *National Geographic* duplicates the common pattern of under representation of women at work. Few representations of women at work depict a doctor (Fig. 22), models (Fig. 29), women cleaning the golf course, police and FARC members (Fig. 30). In two cases women are depicted during house work – doing or hanging laundry (Fig. 21). On one side women are depicted in low – skilled jobs, assigned stereotypically to women. On the other they take a role of rebel or police. The second, unusual depiction of women occurs in stories about cocaine business in Colombia where the focus is on everything that is abnormal. On the contrary, a photograph of models on a cat walk is a highly stereotypical representation of woman as an object to be followed by a male gaze. This stereotypical message is strengthened through the depiction of half naked bodies being photographed by media.



Figure 29 ‘Medellin’s Mean Streets’



Figure 30 ‘Cocaine Country’

Within the analysis of representation of female Latin Americans, other common for popular culture pattern occurs – lack of representation of black women. Here the problem of racial and gender representation interweaves. Even though in countries like Colombia, Venezuela or Brazil, blacks make up a significant part of the population, they are virtually invisible in the representation of Latin Americans. The rare exemptions are represented by children or men (Fig. 31, Fig 41).

Developing the problem of representation of naked bodies, an important finding is that there are more depictions of naked men than naked women in the analyzed period. However,

these depicted totally naked are children. Lack of representation of black female bodies breaks the magazines' former practice to conform Euramerican myths about black women's extensive sexuality¹⁰³. What is more, only one of four depictions of female partly naked bodies belongs to indigenous women. The other photographs depict rich upper class women for whom, like in western culture, showing a naked body is not a subject of taboo or embarrassment. Moreover, these photographs are examples of presenting women as aesthetic and sexual objects in a style of commercial photography, instead of as an ethnographic fact that was common practice in early years of the Magazine.

When it comes to male naked bodies, bare chest functions analogous to female breasts as signs of gendered sexuality¹⁰⁴. Male muscles connote strength and masculinity. Bare – chested men are depicted in different situations, but it is often a close up shot. There are Indians, ordinary men and boys depicted without parts of their clothes. Depiction of bare-chested boys with machetes cutting coca plants gives them the authority of being a 'real man'. Although boys, they are well built, strong and masculine while presented half naked doing physical work. Depiction of bare-chested prisoners functions in parallel yet different way (Fig. 32). In this case, the muscles and scars on the body affirm the aggressiveness and physical strength of the men. When it comes to naked Indians it is to show 'how they really are', to mark the exotic and primitive nature of indigenous people.



Figure 31 'Last of the Amazon'



Figure 32 'Medellin's Mean Streets'

¹⁰³ Lutz, C.A., Collins, J., L., *Reading National Geographic*, The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London, 1993, p. 172

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.174

8.4 Type of clothing

Other signifier of difference is type of clothes. Half of the pictures depict people in casual, western-style clothes, like T-shirts, jeans, jackets etc. Only 20 percent of images show traditional, local clothes and most of these are photographs from ‘Indians of the Sierra Nevada’ article. Among them there is the frontal portrait of a local boy, depicting in detail the type of local clothing (Fig. 34). It is a kind of ‘natural’, canvas dress. It is modest and white, yet dirty and torn out. It is exotic yet simple. According to natives from ‘Last of the Amazon’ article, the traditional clothing is lack of clothing (Fig. 10). These are painted bodies and natural jewelers that make the ‘Other’ an object - an exotic on one hand and primitive on the other.

The cowboy garment can be also included in the category of ‘traditional clothes’, even if it marks its difference mainly due to headgear. The big, white hats are most recognizable symbol of cowboy culture. The same applies to Argentinean gauchos (Fig. 15), Bolivian Indians and Brazilian farmers (Fig. 31) who always wear hats or other type of headgears. What is significant in representation of Mexican cowboys is that one of them is wearing a shirt patterned with an American flag (Fig. 33). Among crowd of cowboys depicted in the article, the one wearing an American national symbol appears in order to underline Mexican liking for the neighboring country. In this way, *National Geographic* creates a positive image about the ‘sister’ state, persuading its readers that Mexicans are something more than only illegal immigrants working on black in all low status occupations rejected by native Americans.



Figure 34 ‘Mexico’s pilgrim Cowboys’



Figure 33 ‘Indians of the Sierra Nevada’

In general, clothes function in visual representation as connoted messages about the culture and they communicate some important information. Depicting Latin Americans in western - type clothing 'westernizes' the object. However, the modesty and casualness of this clothing indicates on one side poverty and on the other Latin Americans' negligence about the appearance that stands in opposition to exaggerated care for it in the western world. Those who are depicted in better garments are representatives of upper class, like in the article from Venezuela. Thus, the type of clothes in the analyzed pictures indicates more the differences between Latin Americans than between 'Them' and 'Us'. It symbolically separates poor from rich. Yet, signs of wealth connote endorsement for material values that are the core of capitalist ideology. Representing rich people in confrontation with poor can lead the viewer to identification with the former and disavowal of the latter. Further, Latin Americans wearing western type of clothes evoke two contradictory feelings. On one hand they disappoint, as the viewer of the 'other' culture expects something exotic or at least different. On the other hand, they decrease the distance between the western viewer and the 'Other'. Within this practice, Latin Americans generally are depicted as aspiring to be like American or European yet still different.

As argued above, clothes do not determine the 'otherness' of Latin Americans so much as they represent social stratification of nations in focus. The class and status segregation is connoted also by other signs like type of entertainment. Photographs from Venezuela and Colombia are good examples of this strategy. Depiction of upper class women on a party (Fig.25) clashes with the image of men on a cockfight ring (Fig.26). Other example is juxtaposing a photograph of man playing harp with the shot from recording *Idol* show. One more example is the striking difference between images of boys from a rich family playing golf (Fig. 6) and a group of boys playing football on a dirty yard of Medellin's poor *barrio* (Fig. 5). These pairs of photographs appear together in the same articles, strengthening the ambiguous picture of Latin Americans.

8.5 Beliefs and rituals

Other way of marking the 'otherness' of some groups is by depicting the religious rituals. On one hand, Mexican cowboys are depicted in the context of Christianity that posits them on 'our' side. On the other hand, Indians from Sierra Nevada are depicted while

meditating to their own gods that distances them from western culture (Fig. 35). A photograph showing a ritual that combines animistic beliefs of ancient Mayas with Catholicism from May 2004 article titled ‘Maya Royal Grave’ constructs other meaning (Fig.36). A boy in a western – style clothes is putting crosses around a fire place and a woman in traditional Indian clothes is standing on a side. The clash of clothes and use of familiar symbols in unfamiliar way mislead the viewer. The woman due to her age and type of clothes becomes a representative of ancient Maya tradition, while a teenager personifies the progress and aspiration to be part of western world. As a result, Latin American becomes a member of a society in transition. On one hand he is embedded in its tradition and history, on the other hand evolves to become a part of western culture. A convert to Christianity symbolizes this transformation.



Figure 35 ‘Indians of the Sierra Nevada’



Figure 36 ‘Maya Royal Grave’

8.6 Progress vs. backwardness

The post colonial discourse about the representation of the ‘Other’ often refers to objects that signify technological backwardness or development. In the analyzed photographs, tractors, trucks, loggers and other advanced technology are juxtaposed with simple tools of native inhabitants of Amazon, Pantanal and Sierra Nevada. Modes of production like capital and machines belong to landowners or farmers. By means of technological advantage, they gain the symbolic superiority over Indians. The hierarchical relation between Indians and other groups is marked while juxtaposing indigenous people with heavy machines, like airplane (Fig. 37).



Figure 37 Indians of the Sierra Nevada Nevada'



Figure 38 'Brazil's Wild Wet'

In other case, Latin 'Other' is presented as incapable of coping with high developed technology. On the photograph from Pantanal a man checking the bus after it destroyed a wooden bridge, point to the helplessness of the person as well as to lack of adaptation of local conditions to imported technological progress (Fig. 38). Highlighting one of the big problems of rural areas in Latin America that is lack of good infrastructure leaves the Latin 'Other' on the margin of civilization.

8.7 Violence and crime

Further, the 'otherness' of Latin Americans is constructed by stereotypically linking the *latino* with gun violence and crime. Photographs of weapons, dead and wounded bodies or prisoners represent Latin American people as dangerous, unpredictable and deprived of basic human values. This image begins to function in reference to all inhabitants of the region even if the photographs refer to specific groups and situations. An image of a gun is so heavily involved in a set of negative connotations that its meaning always dominates over meanings constructed by other signs appearing in the same frame. Depiction of shot dead or wounded body points at lawlessness ruling the region. Juxtaposition of perpetrators and victims initially locates the viewer on the side of the latter but eventually distance from both. Eventually local conflicts are not viewer's problem. The local violence and crime is the problem of the 'Other' that the viewer becomes familiar with through media but do not cope with personally. Constant exposing the Western viewer to images of violence in Latin America makes him finally used to the problem as 'This is how it is there'. Although some people would be concerned with the issue and maybe inspired to take some action, most of the viewers stay indifferent.

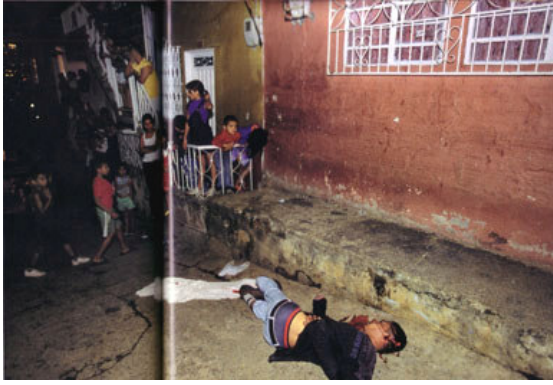


Figure 39 ‘Medellin’s Mean Streets’



Figure 40 ‘Indians of the Sierra Nevada’

8.8 Type of surrounding

The last category that I use to group the photographs into clusters is the surrounding in which people are depicted. Rural surrounding appears on half of the analyzed photos. The other half is distributed between urban scenes and shots from different kinds of interior. The latter one is in few cases a bar or a night club, shop interior, medical office or a house interior. In the image from Colombia a figure is in a prison cell and in Venezuela story TV studio appears twice (Fig. 7). We never see cultural, educational, governmental or religious institutions. In case of shop interiors, there are usually modest counter shops or rooms provisionally used for exchange of commodities. Thus, the modern or luxurious shopping centers that are abundant in many Latin American cities do never appear. In case of home interiors, these are either rough and ready rural or slum homesteads. The exception is a room in which Venezuelan socialist resembling Che Guevara is presented. There the walls are painted green and ornamented with pictures of Hugo Chavez and real Che. When we look at shots depicting an operation or medical investigation, the places are usually on a low standard.

Further, the shots located in urban surroundings reduce Latin American cities to what is ugly, dirty and dangerous. Falling fences, metal barracks on slum hills, abundance of electrical wires, rubbish and grey buildings connote the negligence and poverty. We never see the other side of these cities – beautiful colonial architecture, parks, colorful markets or stylish cafes and restaurants. What is more, juxtaposing slums with skyscrapers connotes the social stratification and isolationist strategy in city organization aimed at economically underprivileged (Fig. 41). Further, depiction of city crowds wandering around without a concrete aim connote chaos and can suggest the high rate of unemployment (Fig. 42).

Without knowing that many people actually work on the streets in Latin America, a western viewer can get impression that *latino* is just lazy from his nature. In addition, there are two images located on a golf course, one in La Paz and the other in Medellin. Although Latin Americans play much more often soccer or do other kinds of sports, the reference to golf appears to highlight the social disproportions. Golf carries the burden of connotations related to luxury, snobbism, wealth and upper class life style. Therefore, juxtaposing poor *barrios* with golf course indicates the extreme economic differences dividing Latin societies.

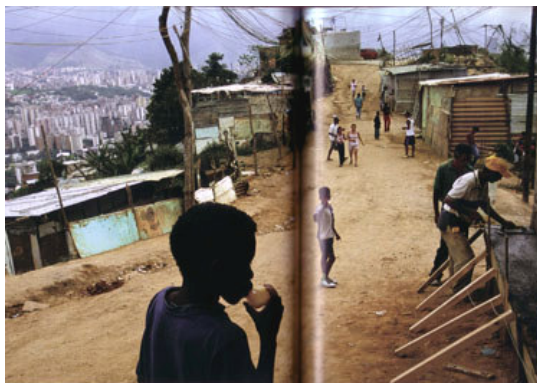


Figure 41 'The New Venezuela'



Figure 42 'Mexico's Other Border'

Last but not least, the representation of people in natural surrounding must be commented. Roughly speaking, the analysis of 107 photographs results in conclusion that Latin Americans live in close tights with nature. Even though more than 80 percent of Brazilians and 66 percent of Colombians live in cities, tropical forest constitutes around 25 percent of all types of surroundings in which Latin Americans are depicted. It is mainly the shelter for indigenous population and guerilla rebels (Fig. 43). These two groups are most strongly stigmatized through different representational practices, including depiction in the jungle. Native Brazilians or Colombians are thus reduced to place of living associated by Westerners with primitiveness and exoticism. Other most commonly depicted surrounding of Latin American is a mountain (Fig. 44). There are also few shots from the field or plantation and rural settlements. Even though all of depicted countries (excluding Bolivia) have the access to the ocean, the coast does never appear on the analyzed photographs. Further, there is lack of waterfalls, flowers, fruits or vegetables – all these attributes of Latin American nature that make it beautiful and extraordinary.



Figure 43 'Indians of the Sierra Nevada'



Figure 44 'Indians of the Sierra Nevada'

Analyzing photographs along different categories reveals the patterns in the representation of Latin Americans in *National Geographic*. Repeating motifs, objects, situations and surroundings in which Latin Americans are depicted, carry important information about the object. The validity or objectivity of these 'information' depends on how we look at photographs in the magazine. My analysis of the photographs in *National Geographic* is based on a constructivist approach. Hence, I look at them as connoted messages constructed to communicate particular messages rather than objective 'facts' or 'statements about reality'. However, I assume that they appear as such for readers of the magazine that defines itself as scientific and educational. Applying the semiological approach for studying cultural texts and Barthes' notion of myth, I argue that although magazine's photographs seem to 'speak' objectively about Latin 'Other', they actually mythologize the object. By means of stereotypical representation, some already existing myths about Latin 'Other' are revealed and others are constructed. This issue will be canvassed in next chapter of my thesis.

CHAPTER NINE

Looking for myths

From the first level of signification in the semiological model for reading photographs in *National Geographic*, I will now move to the second level of signification, that is the level of myth. According to Barthes, myths are elements of ideology that reproduce the values and ideas of the dominant groups in society, sustaining current structures of power. They function in society as ‘systems of facts’ since they ‘naturalize’ the relationship between signifier and signified. The myth – consumer reads systems of signification, like images, as *presence* of things, a statements without contradictions that are obvious and do not need to be discussed. The mythologist, on the contrary, demystifies myths providing a ‘structural description’ that aims to find the transformation of what is historical to what is given as natural¹⁰⁵. Here, I will take the role of the latter.

On this last level of analysis my aim is to show that *National Geographic* to some extent mythologizes the Latin American ‘Other’. Taking into account the limits of visual analysis and the narrowed field of my investigation, I do not claim that these myths are representative for American popular culture or Western discourse of the Latin American ‘Other’ in general. Yet, with the world wide popularity of the Magazine, its representational practices concerning use of photographs constitute a dominant representation of the Latin American ‘Other’ in American media.

As the semiological analysis on the first level has shown, the images in *National Geographic* give some general characteristics about what the Latin American is like. These features derived from repeatedly appearing motifs and objects seemingly presented as natural, but symbolically linked to particular ideas and values. These ‘facts’ about Latin American are elements of myths, constantly repeated in the construction of the Latin American ‘Other’ through stereotypical modes of representation. As Barthes tells us, myth reproduces itself through stereotypes, which reduces everything to Nature. According to Levi-Strauss ‘the purpose of myth is to make the world explicable, to magically resolve its problems and contradictions...myths are stories we tell ourselves as a culture in order to banish

¹⁰⁵ Storey, J. *Cultural theory and popular culture. An introduction*. Fourth Edition. Pearson, Harlow 2006, p. 95

contradictions and make the world understandable and therefore habitable; they attempt to put us at peace with ourselves and our existence'¹⁰⁶.

9.1 Myth of 'Third World'

To begin with the 'statements' about Latin Americans deriving from semiological analysis of *National Geographic's* photographs, I will refer to the post-colonial myth of Third World as one of the most common ways of perceiving the non-Western 'Other'. As a myth, it reduces all underdeveloped countries to its economical, political and social backwardness without explaining the processes lying behind it. And so does it with Latin America. The meaning of analyzed photographs takes its nourishment from the Third World myth in order to represent the Latin American 'Other'. The photographs do not give new meanings, but state some 'facts' about the region that are used to tag the Third World countries. Poverty, social inequalities and different kinds of social pathologies are naturalized while presented as 'This is how it is'. Further, child in a miserable situation is an iconic representation of this myth. Meaning of signs in the photographs derives from what is already known and does not need further explanation. We see what we are told to see that is ideological speech of those who poses the power to speak. Reproduction of the Third World myth helps to sustain the power relations and keep the inferiors in their subordinate position. Purity and simplicity of the myth gives away with the historical explanations of its object. Thus, Latin American appears naturally as a 'Third Worlder' that is lower on the development ladder.

Further, the notion of Third World signifies inability of developing countries to achieve independent economic and political identity in the era of neo-imperialism. The latter one is exercised by the global capitalist economy usually epitomized by the United States and its expansionist policy. On the contrary to direct colonization of Latin America by Europeans, neo-imperialism refers to American role in shaping 'Third World' cultures and economies by instruments of indirect power like multinational corporations, cartels and NGOs. As colonial discourse 'tends to exclude statement about the exploitation of the resources of the colonized, the political status accruing to colonizing powers, the importance to domestic politics of the development of an empire, all of which may be compelling reasons for maintaining colonial

¹⁰⁶Levi-Strauss, C. in: Storey, J. *Cultural theory and popular culture. An introduction*. Fourth Edition. Pearson, Harlow 2006, p. 90

ties'¹⁰⁷, so does visual representation of Latin Americans in *National Geographic* as a tool of neo – imperial ideology. Reproduction of the myth of the Third World by means of stereotypical representation of Latin Americans naturalizes the inferiority of the latter.

Representation of Latin Americans in *National Geographic* can be also understood from the perspective of colonial discourse because it constitutes statements about once colonized people from the position of centrality of Western world. Both abundance of articles on United States and other Western states and relating articles on other countries to the West, indicate center – periphery relations between 'First' and 'Third World'. Balanced and fair reporting, as one of the principles of *National Geographic*, is reduced to favoring own culture and interests. Further, the practice of comparing Latin America to the West derives from the hierarchical relationship in which West is seen as the centre of the world, thus possessing authority to talk about and judge the peripheral 'Other'.

9.2 Myth of 'chaotic jungle'

Another 'colonial' myth of Latin America which appears in the photographs analyzed in my research is the myth of the region as a chaotic jungle. The notion of a jungle appears both on denotative and connotative levels of signification in the representation of the Latin American 'Other'. As mentioned before in this paper, Latin Americans were depicted on the analyzed photographs most often in rural surrounding and within this category, most often in a jungle. Hence, Latin American is attached to the Nature as like he has never moved forward from his primitive state of evolution. This applies especially to representations of native inhabitants of Amazonia and Sierra Nevada, which function as a representation of minority groups in the region, reducing them to primitive life in the style of their ancestors. Other group represented extensively in the jungle surrounding, is Colombian leftist guerilla. In this case the myth of the jungle is expressed literally through the depiction of objects in a thick tropical forest.

In the late twentieth century Latin America was often represented in the U.S. media through the lens of drug trafficking, terrorism, infant mortality, street urchins and

¹⁰⁷ Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. Second Edition. , Routledge, London 2007, p.37-8

barbarism¹⁰⁸. This perspective of looking at the region is still practiced and *National Geographic* is an example. Even though lots of Colombians lead decent and normal lives, they are depicted as guerilla rebels and criminals such as murderers, prostitutes, drug dealers etc. Further, the Latin American jungle is full of homeless children who abuse drugs or are forced to work which results from the disintegration and instability of the system. What is more, the drug problem is presented as a cause of the spread of the jungle in the United States itself, since most of the drugs consumed in the country come from the south. As a myth, it neither takes into account the social reasons of drug consumption in the States nor the reasons for coca production in Latin America.

9.3 Myth of ‘primitive state of Nature’

What appears to emerge from my empirical material fits to an American myth about their Latin neighbors which says that they remain static by being trapped in a primitive state of nature. On the contrary to the civilized West that masters the nature, primitive Latin American is its victim unable to conquer it. According to Pike, these stereotypes derived primarily from the attitudes of British settlers in America toward Indians and imported African slaves. Later, they were transferred to Latin Americans and function to some degree until today¹⁰⁹.

Photographs from *National Geographic* tend to reproduce this myth in a stereotypical representation of people in the region. Photographs in the magazine essentialize Latin Americans by repeating particular visual motifs. Latin Americans usually live in rural area, work on a field, use simple tools and animals in their everyday existence. Even if they use some advanced technology and stay in the cities, they are far behind the West. They do not show traces of education or higher culture but are reduced to the every day struggle for survival. They are often depicted naked and in situations that for westerner could be embarrassing or even humiliating. Further, they represent features that the West managed to conquer on the civilization path. Instinct, emotions, childishness, vivid sexuality are what West had grown up from to become mature, rational, pragmatic and restrained. In other words representation of Latin Americans reproduces the myth of the superiority of civilized West over primitive Latin America.

¹⁰⁸ Pike, F.B., *The United States and Latin America. Myths and stereotypes of civilization and nature.*, Austin, Texas 1992, p. 345-8

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, preface

9.4 Myth of ‘male superiority and female inferiority’

The post –colonial studies and feminist theory intersects in the notion of representing colonizer as male and the colonized as female. In both fields the ‘Other’ is inferior, dependent and powerless in the confrontation with the dominant, powerful and superior. Male in the feminist theory and colonizer in the colonial discourse share the same traits and one serves to depict symbolically the other. Since the United States are seen as contemporary ‘colonizers’ of its Latin neighbors, their relation can be perceived as the one between man and woman.

The myth of imperial masculinity, against which both feminism and postcolonialism collaborate, justifies the exploitation of natural resources in the colonized lands by personifying the colonized with a fertile mother, rich of resources, thus sharing and nourishing. In the photographs in *National Geographic* Latin Americans are represented in the context of an abundance of natural resources like soybean farms, sugarcane plantations, mines, forests or oil platforms. It points the richness of Latin land and inability of its inhabitants to benefit from it. Juxtaposing photographs depicting poverty and underdevelopment with abundance of natural resources suggests that Latin American needs help from outside to make use of what ‘she’ naturally has. The myth of female, non-rational Latin America and male, rational U.S. justifies the latter’s domination over the former.

Further, Latin America mythologized as female is the one to be looked at and judged, imagined, mystified and objectified. Because she is passive and powerless she is spoken for. She does not speak for herself. It is the position of subaltern ‘Other’ in which Latin American is stereotypically represented. The ‘male’, powerful and dominant United States poses the authority to speak for the ‘Other’. It takes place in media and has been a standard in anthropological studies. However, in the latter field there is more insistence on letting the ‘Other’ to speak for himself, which results in focus on indigenous media products. Yet, in the era of globalization of media, the powerful media corporations, like *National Geographic*, are the one who have the voice and speak for ‘Others’ depriving them of self-expression.

9. 5 Myth of 'Latin revolution'

The leftist movements in Latin America are usually symbolized by such icons as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. This also happens in the case of *National Geographic's* photographs where images of both appear few times. Further, the stereotypical features of these characters are transferred onto contemporary leftist leaders, like Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia. The representation of these figures in National Geographic is essentialized and reduced to what myth of Latin revolutionaries tells about: charisma, populism, personal relations with ordinary people and elocution on one side and fanaticism, authoritarianism and hatred for United States on the other. Hugo Chavez is depicted in a television studio, talking to masses, with a fixed and fanatic look, clothed in a red shirt. Evo Morales personifies other characteristic of social revolutionist that is close relationship with the ordinary people. In the photograph from 'Bolivia's New Order' article he walks with the crowd of his electorate – Bolivian natives. These characteristics of the leftist leaders are represented in a context of poverty, social inequalities, and different kinds of pathologies, all associated with socialism as a 'myth from the right'. Presumably, the strongest negative connotation is given through the representation of leftist guerilla as criminals and terrorists, who eventually end up in a jail. The link between socialism and crime is articulated very directly in a photo of a leftist prisoner with the image of Che Guevara hanging on the wall of the cell.

The socialist revolution becomes for the viewer the source, instead of the result, of poverty, inequalities, and exploitation of marginalized groups, revealing itself through violence and crime. The myth of Latin American left naturalizes the historical context and local modifications of the Marxist ideology and its implementation in the region. It appears as a matter of fact. It is located in a binary opposition left-right, where Latin American socialism appears as an enemy of American neo - liberalism. The core of the latter is a market as a universal truth, upon which civilization can be measured. It was Adam Smith who used the notion of commodity as a category to distinguish the 'civilized' from the 'barbarous' that is embedded in the ideology of empire. What makes the savages a 'civilized' body is an

exchange of commodities that connect people without direct contacts¹¹⁰. On the photographs in *National Geographic*, the ‘civilized’ exchange of commodities on a free market is almost invisible. On the contrary, Latin market is depicted in the context of residues of natural economy or illegal trades where cocaine substitutes money. Again, ‘They’ are opposed to ‘Us’ in a hierarchical relationship. Latin American left is represented and judged from the ideals of Western economic liberalism. As a myth it does not explain the contradictions and historical context lying in its background, but naturalizes the relationship between Marxism and Latin American reality. But Latin American Marxism has to be seen from the perspective of its local modifications.

Socialist movements in Latin America derive from Marxism yet its modified version. The general assumption of the ideology, mistaken by many Marxists, is that revolutionary struggle against capitalism can success only if led by urban proletariat¹¹¹. On the contrary, Latin American revolution is based on the indigenous struggle for liberation from post-colonial exploitation. Since the liberation from European rule between 1811 and 1825, Latin American states have been the subject of neo-colonialism in the form of U.S. imperialism on one side and exploitation of peasantry by the new establishment from the other. The Latin peasantry did not benefit so much from the nineteenth century independence revolutions since they were led mainly by white European settlers – *criollos* - and led to establishment of a predominantly European society. What is more, in some countries like Argentina, indigenous inhabitants were exterminated and in others, where they make up a significant part of the contemporary society, were marginalized, repressed and exploited. With the new rules, shifts from natural economy to capitalistic modes of production and urbanization, peasantry has been suffering poverty and problems of landlessness until today. The peasant revolutions make up the history of the region¹¹². Thus, central to Latin American Marxism is this reconstruction of ideas on the ground of local contradictions. Yet, it is often represented as another version of communism in a Soviet style.

¹¹⁰ Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. Second Edition, Routledge, London 2007, p. 149

¹¹¹ Rex, J. Introduction. New nations and ethnic minorities, comparative and theoretical questions in: UNESCO *Race and class in post-colonial society. A study of ethnic group relations in the English-speaking Caribbean, Bolivia, Chile and Mexico*. Paris, 1977, p. 44

¹¹² Schwarz, R. (1992: 39) in: Young, R.J.C., *Postcolonialism. An historical introduction*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001, p. 194

9. 6 Myth of ‘everyone loves America’

Referring to the myth of Latin socialist revolution reproduced in *Geographic's* photographs, one other thing should be outlined here. In the case of the article on Venezuela, photographs connoting socialist ‘new order’ are juxtaposed with Latin American mimicry. This important for post-colonial theory term, is crucial for Bhabha’s notion of ambivalence of colonial discourse. It suggests that the colonized subject is represented as ‘almost the same, but not quite’ as a result of copying colonizer’s cultural habits, fashions, institutions and values. In post colonial analysis this process is seen as containing both mockery and ‘menace’ and therefore possibly destabilizing the colonial discourse¹¹³. In *National Geographic* mimicry occurs in images of *Idol* show, Venezuelan celebrities on party, Colombian children playing golf or Indians adopting Christian tradition. Still, Latin American mimicry represented in *Geographic's* photographs appears as myth since it is deprived of mockery and ‘menace’. Latin Americans do truly copy the United States and there is no trace of mockery and ‘menace’ in it. ‘They’ want to be like ‘Us’ in fashion, ways of entertainment, technological advancement. However, they are not only geographically but timely distant from ‘Us’ that does not let them finally be alike. One of the reasons is ‘clinging’ to Marxist ideology that impedes the progress. As a result, the notion of Latin American mimicry becomes a tool of neo-imperial ideology. The territorial dominance is replaced with symbolic hegemony of Western culture over Latin tradition. The latter one is conquered with consent. If it is depicted, it is exotic, strange and on the edge of extinction.

The myth that everyone, especially *latino*, loves America is often exaggerated and leads to simplification of complex and often contradictory attitudes toward the United States and Americans. Not only the cultural conformism to American values and fashions performed by many *latinos* but also the realm of alternative attitudes should be taken into account if an objective image of a society is an aim. In the case of Latin American societies the notion of *gringo* is articulated on different arenas, especially in the personal encounter with the ‘Other’. The notion of American *gringo* referring originally to American soldiers on Latin land became a tag for all Westerners. Sometimes used automatically, it usually carries a burden of negative connotations. Common usage of the term among Latin Americans reveals a general

¹¹³ Bhabha, (1994: 86) in: Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. Second Edition. , Routledge, London 2007, p. 125

attitude towards foreigners that is far from welcoming since all Westerners, especially among low educated people, are linked to exploitation and interference.

Referring to Barthes again, everything can be myth as long as it is conveyed by a discourse. The photographs in *National Geographic* constitute a part of a 'mythological speech' about Latin American 'Other', next to other 'discursive events' about this object. Applying Foucault's approach to the discourse, myths about Latin Americans reproduced in *National Geographic's* photographs tell us more about those who construct them than about those to whom they apply. The representation of Latin Americans mirrors fears and desires of contemporary U.S.: poverty, environmental degradation, violence, drugs, illegal immigrations and social inequality on one hand and community life close to nature, fertile soil abounding in natural resources, rich and long history and tradition on the other. Further, myths understood as tools of ideology, are created in order to sustain power relations. In case of myths about Latin Americans produced by conservative, government supportive media institution as *National Geographic Society*, this is the neo-liberal ideology.

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusions

The contemporary discourse of the 'Other' involves a very broad realm of cultural and social practices, institutions, products, laws and rules. My thesis is embedded in this space yet describes only a small part of it that is the representation of the Latin American 'Other' in the *National Geographic* magazine. Although it is a narrow area of analysis, it requires reference to broader problems. From the study of a more general context of *National Geographic* as an American magazine of popular interest, I stepped down to the denotative and connotative levels of the photographs depicting Latin Americans in last 5 years issues of the publication. As a summary, I will combine the findings from the content analysis with that broad context that was once the starting point of my thesis. I want to draw the link between the myths about Latin Americans reproduced in the magazine's photographs and the position of *National Geographic* as one of the American big media corporations that makes up the discourse of the 'Other'.

As a subsidiary of the *National Geography Society* with its more than one century old principles, the *National Geographic* magazine has gained the authority of a serious, objective and educational institution. With Gilbert M. Grosvenor as a chairman of the Society today, this 'nonprofit scientific and educational organization' earns millions of dollars annually from the Magazine's revenues. Colorful, printed on a glossy paper, abundantly filled with photographs, the Magazine has become a world wide brand. Published in more than 30 different languages, it is read by millions of people on all continents providing the audience with the insight into distant cultures. Through this and other media an average person meets the geographical and cultural 'Others'. The latter is though observed, imagined and judged by media producers and consumers. In this process the object itself is to a big extent deprived of the voice on the international arena while others speak on his behalf. It is a photographer, a journalist, an editor, an owner of a media corporation - West in general that speak for the distant 'Other'.

Due to media and its authority to define and represent 'Others', some subjects and places become more important than others. It refers to the 'gate keeping' concept used to

describe how media coverage favors some regions and issues and tends to ignore others. In my analysis *National Geographic* appeared as a ‘gate keeper’ of particular regions and issues too. In the last 5 years of the Magazine’s publication, only few countries from Latin America were covered, among which Colombia, Brazil, Mexico and Peru more than once. Central America or countries like Chile, Equator, Uruguay, and Paraguay were virtually invisible. The ‘gate keeping’ concepts apply also to subjects of the coverage. In the case of the articles about Latin Americans, these are often controversial, thus ‘newsworthy’ issues, like cocaine business, deforestation of Amazonas, socialist movements. To balance the ‘aggressive’, journalistic bias of the Magazine, articles about Mexican cowboys or archeological explorations in Peru appeared. The latter ones help to sustain the educational and scientific image of the Magazine as a publication for ‘increase and diffusion of the geographic knowledge’.

Since I focused on the visual representation of the Latin American ‘Other’, the analysis of photographs appeared as one of the possible ways to understand how media construct the ‘otherness’. Adopting Hall’s constructivist approach to analyzing popular culture, I treated the photographs as systems of signs that produce meanings. The assumption that photographs do not possess meanings in themselves but acquire it in the process of signification became the background for further analysis. In order to find meanings of images of Latin Americans, I used the semiological approach as outlined by Barthes. The descriptive level of analysis was combined with the connotative analysis of the second, broader level. To reveal the process of photographs’ signification I referred to feminist and post-colonial theories. The way both discourses approach the ‘Other’, guided me to recognize the representational practices used in the construction of Latin ‘Other’ in *Geographic’s* photographs.

Stereotyping, ‘essentializing’ and hierarchical ‘othering’ of Latin American occurred as practices that reproduce some more general beliefs about the object – myths I have analyzed in chapter nine of my thesis. Depiction of Latin Americans mostly in rural surrounding or in confrontation with Nature; in the context of poverty, violence and social inequalities reveals some myths about the inhabitants of this part of the world. First of all they appear as naturally belonging to the ‘Third World’- the underdeveloped and inferior periphery of our planet. The myth of ‘Third World’ naturalizes the historical backgrounds and local conditions of countries tagged with this term. This myth, like stereotype, requires other myths

to successfully overcome the contradictions of the world. These are myths of 'chaotic jungle' or 'primitive state of Nature' that refer to the same issues as in the 'Third World' myth. Native Brazilians, Colombians or Peruvians are depicted in the jungle as it always was and forever will be their natural surrounding. Depiction of Latin Americans in urban surrounding also refers to the same myths. Dirty streets full of children that no one takes care of, brutal violence, drugs and general chaos reproduce the myth identifying underdeveloped countries with a jungle. Latin American as trapped in the realm of local conflicts and difficult living conditions appears as in need of external help. Represented and judged from the position of Western observer, the latter one symbolizes the hope for overcoming the problems. Like in a colonial discourse, the dominant and powerful state that is U.S. in this case, symbolizes a mythological male force.

Further, the myth of Latin revolution is reproduced in many of the analyzed photographs. The image of Che Guevara as the symbol of Latin revolution appears on few photographs from Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela. In the case of Colombia he is a hero of leftist guerilla partisans who are depicted exclusively from the perspective of their involvement in cocaine industry. Therefore, his image is linked naturally to terrorism. In the story of 'new Venezuela' the image of Che Guevara appears few times. Apart from his images hanging on the walls of interiors, he reincarnates in the body of his imitator. The photograph depicting a man strikingly resembling real Che functions as an ironic commentary on what the 'new socialism' in Venezuela is about. It is a romantic struggle in the name of poor and marginalized yet utopian, childish and without perspectives. The situation of the countries where the movement takes place gives an evidence of the helplessness of their propagators. In the articles from Bolivia and Venezuela this is portrayed through images connoting difficult social conditions, social inequalities and general misery.

What is especially striking about the visual representation of Latin Americans in *National Geographic* is the abundance of images of children. As discussed in previous chapters, Latin American child appears as neglected, hungry, dirty, often working instead of studying and trapped in addictions, like glue sniffing. What is more, it often comes from pathological family (Colombian baby lying in a bed with its mother - prostitute) or seems not to have family at all (children wandering on the streets of Medellin). The Latin child suffers all evil of this world that American parents want to protect their children from. The depiction of Latin children's misery connotes the inability of their parents to properly and responsibly

take care of their offspring. Moreover, it can connote the extensive sexual instincts of Latin Americans and lack of proper education that both lead to high birth rates and many unwanted babies. These stereotypical representations add to negative myths about inhabitants of the region.

Whatever objects of a photograph in *National Geographic*, it always catches the eye. Some photographs are visually less interesting than others, but generally they all grasp attention. The accurate framing, interesting vantage, play with focus depth and vivid colors make the photographs like a postcards from ‘Other’ lands. However, the form clashes with topics of the photographs from Latin America. Depicting Latin Americans from the negative side ‘betrays’ the fifth and sixth principles of the Magazine: ‘Nothing of a partisan or controversial nature is printed. Only what is of kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided’. What is more, the idea of bringing distant and original cultures to Magazine readers’ homes is reduced to two articles about Latin indigenous peoples during 5 years of publication. What the reader learn more about the inhabitants of the region, is the kind of problems the region has to cope with, usually concerned with politics, economy and environmental degradation. The choice of subjects resembles more a journalistic principle of ‘newsworthiness’ usually associated with controversy, catastrophe or human misfortune than a scientific verification of the facts.

Instead of ‘diffusing the geographical knowledge’, the photographs in *National Geographic* are designed to satisfy the demanding tastes of its U.S. readers: ‘31 million (...) who are curious, passionate, actively engaged in making a difference in their lives (...) well-educated, highly influential, affluent global business decision-makers and consumers’¹¹⁴. Paradoxically, the Magazine aspires to ‘care about the planet’ and at the same time publishes advertisements of luxurious goods, such as cars, watches, cameras, mobile phones or liquors, which production and consumption is far from the issue. It aspires to change the world, but through mythologizing the ‘Other’ and its problems, leaves the reader in peace. Even if it depicts controversial issues, it always aims to entertain its reader. This is visible in different practices like the juxtaposition of articles on social issues with landscape shots, balancing ‘unpleasant’ photos with something mild and through all technical tricks like use of glossy, fine paper, vivid colors and the format of a small, handy encyclopedia. Depicting the ‘Third

¹¹⁴ <http://brandedcontent.adage.com/360/details.php?brand=23> [10.10.2008]

World Other' seems more as to satisfy the ego of white, male and conservative American reader than to provoke him for action. Stereotypical representation of the Latin American 'Other' ensures the patriotic and proud citizen of United States that he lives in a better, or even best - 'first' - world. This supposed effect of stereotypical 'othering' can be understood in terms of Bhabha's notion of colonial stereotype.

According to Bhabha, stereotyping the 'Other' derives from recognition of the difference which stands in opposition with the archaic affirmation of the wholeness. The ambivalence of racial and gendered stereotypes results from this contradiction and function to overcome it. One of possible ways is through marginalization of the primitive and weaker 'Other'. Stereotypes feed themselves with the myths that exist to let us live in peace, in a world without contradictions, as Claude Levi-Strauss argued in writing about this phenomenon. Because the Latin American 'Others' are different, Westerners love and hate them at the same time. To overcome this inner conflict, Latin American is stereotypically represented as opposite to everything that the West achieved on the way to civilization. It takes place in order to veil the nostalgia for lost wilderness on one hand and to justify its marginalization on the other. Representing oneself as rational, strong, responsible, justifies the domination over the irrational, weak and irresponsible. In this way both gender and racial stereotypes function to sustain the power relations. They are naturalized and add to the construction of social knowledge in Foucault's terms.

Last, but not least finding about photographs of Latin Americans in *National Geographic* is that some of them carry the traces of myth that everyone loves America. Together with the domination of American audiovisual productions on international markets, issues of cultural imperialism are often discussed nowadays. Since the topic is very broad and involves many aspects, I will not discuss it in more details. What is important for conclusions of my thesis is the fact that American cultural imperialism is often exaggerated and taken for granted without seeing the complexity and influence of local cultures. It results in a common belief that the entire world follows American fashions, entertainments, life of celebrities etc. In the photographs in *National Geographic*, Latin American 'Other' follows often the same path. It refers to Bhabha's notion of mimicry and stereotypical representation of the 'Other' that is almost like or aspiring to be like 'Self'. Latin 'Other' follows the American dream and it results in copying everything what's American on a local ground. As a myth it naturalizes

again the historical conditions and locates the United States as a super power of modern world.

In summary, the analysis of 107 photographs depicting Latin Americans on the pages of the *National Geographic* magazine brought few general conclusions. First of all, they illustrate the conflict between the Magazine's principles and mission on one side and the way they represent the Latin American 'Other'. Secondly, Latin American is often stereotyped along colonial patterns of representation. He is represented as economically, politically and culturally backward thus inferior. At the same time he is feminized and depicted as dependent of external help. Finally, the way Latin Americans are depicted in *National Geographic* does not objectively represent their real nature. Reproduction of some general myths attached to Latin American reduces the object to few characteristics. Stereotypical representations can create false ideas and strengthen already existing popular beliefs, fantasies and knowledge about the Latin American 'Other'. The last and most general conclusion of my research is that analysis of photographs can be a fruitful approach to study and understand how media representations create the image of reality – often distorted, reduced and distant from reality.

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