

Survival



For tribes, for nature,
for all humanity

Filming tribal peoples

What we want is respect

Davi, Yanomami shaman Brazil

50
years



When you come to us, come as guests, with respect

Declaration from the Penan tribe Malaysia

Why care?

The way filmmakers and photographers portray tribal peoples shapes how the public thinks of them, much more so than for most other groups, because their work might be the only way viewers ever learn anything about the tribe in question.

Public opinion is a key factor in how well or how badly tribal people are treated, and filmmakers and photographers therefore have an important responsibility to present their subjects fairly and accurately.

Tribal peoples should be treated with the same standards that responsible broadcasters apply to minorities in industrialized countries. Filmmakers should ask themselves, “Could I portray a community of black, Jewish or Muslim people from my own country in this way?”

Negative portrayals feed negative stereotypes which underpin systematic and gross violations of human rights, including genocide. Governments use them to justify the theft of tribal land and resources.

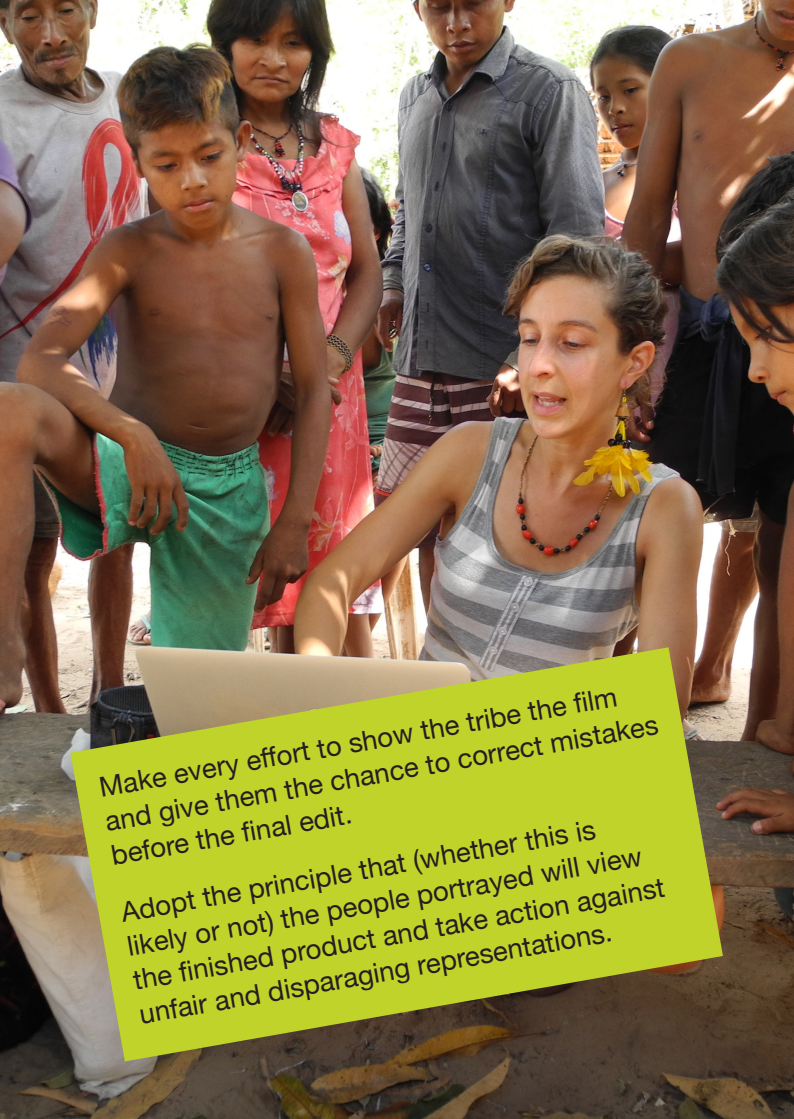
Mind your language!

Terms such as “primitive,” “backward,” “savage” or “stone-age” are often used to describe tribal peoples but they are false and discriminatory.

As BBC Guidelines emphasize, care must be taken to avoid confusing a people that is not industrialized with one that is not part of the modern world or 21st century. To suggest otherwise implies they and their way of life belong to the past.

Please visit the BBC Guidelines for more information about terminology and guidance on the reporting and portrayal of tribal peoples: www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/reporting-tribal-peoples/guidance-full





The checklist

- ✓ Consider the safety implications for the tribe as much as you would for your film crew.
- ✓ Could your project cause the tribe harm, either physically, or to their wider struggle – by giving ammunition to those who persecute them?
If so, don't proceed.
- ✓ The free, prior and informed consent of the tribe must be obtained before filming starts. They must be told what the film is intending to portray and how it will be used.
- ✓ Accept any limitations the tribe stipulate.
- ✓ You may need special permission from the authorities to film in tribal areas.
- ✓ If the tribe wishes to withdraw from the project, their request must take precedence over other considerations, including your financial commitments.

Make every effort to show the tribe the film and give them the chance to correct mistakes before the final edit.

Adopt the principle that (whether this is likely or not) the people portrayed will view the finished product and take action against unfair and disparaging representations.

An aerial photograph of an indigenous village nestled in a lush tropical forest. Several traditional dwellings with thatched roofs are visible, surrounded by dense green vegetation. A group of people, some wearing traditional attire, are gathered in a clearing. A yellow circular callout box is overlaid on the top left of the image, containing text about filmmaking ethics.

Filmmakers should never seek to film uncontacted tribes, or those who have only sporadic contact with outsiders. It is extremely dangerous for both parties and is likely to result in the death of tribal people through infectious disease to which they have no immunity.

Uncontacted and isolated tribes

Rigorous precautions must be taken, including medical checks, to ensure that all crewmembers are healthy before entering any indigenous territory where the inhabitants may not have such immunity.

When filming or photography is carried out for an uncontacted tribe's benefit - for example to prove their existence in order to defend their land rights - it may, in rare cases, be justifiable to film them from the air.

They obviously have not consented, so special care must be taken to ensure the least possible disturbance.

Only non-intrusive footage, which portrays them positively, should be shown.

Responsible aerial footage of picnickers in a city park, for example, would not feature identifiable individuals in ways they would not want broadcast, and nor should aerial footage of tribespeople.

What's authentic?

Don't let your preconceptions guide you: accept what you find when you visit a tribe, and show that to the viewer.

Don't hide factory-made objects or ask tribespeople to swap their everyday clothing for traditional dress (or nothing at all) to make the setting appear more "authentic." Conversely, don't ask them to wear clothing if they normally don't.

Avoid set-ups or misleading stunts – the pursuit of a "good story" mustn't lead viewers to an unfair representation of the tribe.

If you wish tribal peoples to re-enact ceremonies and rituals of their ancestors which are no longer in practice, you have a responsibility to explain this to the viewer, who would otherwise not know this.

Don't portray unusual behavior or cultural practices without putting them in the context of daily life. This is more important than when filming non-tribal peoples, because your film is likely to be the only representation of the tribe the viewer has seen.





Quality control

Be aware of potential conflicts of interest between the tribe and intermediaries such as companies, missionaries, local NGOs, officials and others.

The tribe may not be able to speak freely, especially in areas which are under repressive government (or corporate) control, for fear of reprisal. It may be necessary to preserve anonymity and to satisfy yourself that translations are accurate and not manipulated by outsiders.

All tribal peoples face serious challenges – the theft of their land, in particular, endangers their very survival. When filming other aspects of their lives, it's only fair to mention such threats.

You may be the first film crew to visit this tribal community.

Remember, your presence may be disruptive and risk draining scarce resources - think about compensating for this, and behave as you would if a guest in a stranger's house!

Further reading

- ✓ Survival International's use of terminology:
www.survivalinternational.org/info/terminology
- ✓ Channel 7 censored over “racist” infanticide report after Survival International complaint:
www.survivalinternational.org/news/8145
www.survivalinternational.org/news/8683
- ✓ “Turning a Blind Eye to Pure Old Vibrations”
Survival's director Stephen Corry critiques Jimmy Nelson's photography:
www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/23986-turning-a-blind-eye-to-pure-old-vibrations
- ✓ Survival International complaint to OFCOM over “racist” Channel 4 piece:
www.survivalinternational.org/news/11421
- ✓ BBC Travel Channel show slammed as “staged, false, fabricated and distorted”:
www.survivalinternational.org/news/7549



**They took the
footage they
filmed here far
away, and lied
about us**

About Survival International

We are the global movement for tribal peoples.
We're fighting for their survival around the world.

Our mission

To prevent the annihilation of tribal peoples. To give them a platform to speak to the world and to bring about a radical change in public opinion which will make sure they have a future.

Our vision

A world in which tribal peoples are respected as our contemporaries and their human rights upheld.

Our story

Founded in 1969 in response to the genocide of Brazilian Indians, we've grown into a movement of supporters in over 100 countries around the world. Our offices are in Berlin, London, Madrid, Milan, Paris and San Francisco.

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