

HOLLMAN MORRIS IN

UNWANTED WITNESS

A FILM BY JUAN JOSÉ LOZANO



© INTERMEZZO FILMS, DOLCE VITA FILMS
www.temoinindesirable-lefilm.com

DISTRIBUTION IN SWITZERLAND

Laurent DUTOIT
AGORA FILMS
8, rue des Moraines
1227 Carouge, Switzerland
Tel: +41 33 8230303
Fax: +41 22 8230304
agora@agorafilms.ch
www.agorafilms.net

PRODUCTION

Isabelle GATTIKER
INTERMEZZO FILMS
28 rue de Bâle
1201 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: 41 22 741 47 47
isabelle@intermezzofilms.ch
www.intermezzofilms.ch

Marc IRMER
DOLCE VITA FILMS
19, Bd Rochechouart
75009 Paris, France
Tel: +33(0)1 48 78 70 21
marc@dolcevita-films.com

INTERNATIONAL SALES

Philippa KOWARSKY
CINEPHIL Distribution & Co Productions
18 Levontin Street, Tel Aviv 65112,
Israel
Tel: +972 3 566 4129
Fax: +972 3 560 1436
philippa@cinephil.co.il
www.cinephil.co.il



SSA/SUISSIMAGE AWARD (BEST SWISS CREATION FILM)
VISIONS DU REEL INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, NYON,
2008

LOCARNO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, 2008

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, 2008

"Cuts straight to the truth... vertigo-inducing"

Le Temps

"Excellent documentary"

L'Hebdo

"Like a thriller"

24 heures

"Words that ring true"

Le Courrier

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

LOCATIONS OF SHOOTING	Several regions in Colombia Madrid (Spain) New York, Washington (USA) Monterrey (Mexico)
DIRECTOR	Juan José LOZANO
CAMERA	Sergio MEJIA
SOUND	Carlos IBÁÑEZ
EDITING	Ana ACOSTA
MUSIC	Vincent HÄNNI et Gabriel SCOTTI
COLOUR GRADING	Eric FRECHOU
MIXING	Fred BIELLE / Adrien KAESLER
LINE PRODUCERS	Liliana RINCON / Sebastien AUTRET
PRODUCTION CH	Isabelle GATTIKER / Intermezzo Films Marc IRMER / Dolce Vita Films FR
COPRODUCTION	Télévision Suisse Romande SSR SRG idée suisse Earthling Productions
WITH THE SUPPORT OF	Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) // City of Geneva // Canton of Geneva // Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation // Amnesty International // Fonds Regio Films // Pour-cent Culturel Migros // Loterie romande
DISTRIBUTION IN SWITZERLAND	Agora Films (release in November 2008)
DISTRIBUTION IN FRANCE	Eurozoom (release in January 2009) .
INTERNATIONALS SALES	Cinephil
THEATRICAL VERSIONS (25frames/sec)	35mm, 1:1,85, Dolby SR, 87min. Spanish, subtitles English, French and German
TELEVISION VERSIONS min.	HD /BetaD, 16:9, Stereo, 87min and 54 min. Spanish, subtitles English, French and German
TITLES IN THE LINGUISTIC VERSIONS	TEMOIN INDESIRABLE, UNWANTED WITNESS, UNERWÜNSCHTER AUGENZEUGE, SIN TREGUA

PRODUCTION YEAR 2008

PRODUCTION COUNTRY Switzerland and France



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Hollman Morris is an internationally acclaimed journalist whose weekly television show, *Contravía*, boldly confronts the violence that ravages his homeland of Colombia. Though he has won prestigious awards abroad, at home he is faced with death threats and intimidation, and this puts a strain on his family life.

LONG SYNOPSIS

At the heart of the humanitarian drama in Colombia, a journalist fights to denounce atrocity and to document events through his weekly television show *Contravía*— a show one of its kind amongst a plethora of soap operas and show-biz gossip.

Hollman Morris' exclusive eyewitness accounts have won him international recognition and prestigious prizes, as well as intimidation and death threats. Living in an increasingly hostile environment, Hollman Morris and his family contemplate leaving the country.

Going beyond the typical war reporter's account on courage and heroics, UNWANTED WITNESS draws a candid portrait of a complex person who, at the heart of a country torn apart by war, is full of convictions, motivations and fears but devoted to liberty of expression.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

CONTEXT

Hollman Morris, 39 years old, Colombian journalist.

For 15 years Morris has covered the internal conflict in Colombia, paying particular attention to the theme of human rights. Since 2002 he has produced and directed the television show *Contravía* "countercurrent". Through dozens of half-hour shows, Hollman Morris has filmed eyewitness accounts of the most serious human rights situations in Colombia, constituting one of the most important video archives of the country's recent history. The show has been supported by the European Union, the Open Society Institute and the governments of Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

In November 2007 he received one of the world's most prestigious prizes: the Human Rights Watch Defender Award.

Colombia: under the specter of self-censorship

According to 'Reporters without Borders', Colombia remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. Even though the frequency of kidnapping and murder has diminished during the last three years, the pressure exerted on journalists by hidden forces (guerilla, paramilitary, drug traffickers, politicians and corrupt government officials) remains overbearing. In many regions of the country that remain controlled by the interests of a select few, the most aberrant attempts against human dignity occur in the midst of a conniving silence. Journalists and their employers prefer to keep quiet or change the subject, justifying themselves by saying: *in this country many people who have spoken out have died, and the justice system doesn't work anyway. The assassins occupy powerful positions and people are tired of it all, they just want a break.*

This environment of self-censorship along with the significant economical crisis at the end of the 90's considerably reduced the freedom of the press in Colombia. In 1999, out of the three nationwide newspapers, only one survives today and is owned by the families of the Vice-President and the Defense Minister. This newspaper is written by journalists based in Bogota, far from the conflict zones. Articles covering the conflict's impact on civilians are usually taken straight from the Defense Ministry's official press releases. The language used in these official releases directly reflects the sitting government's security policy: for example, the expression *internal conflict* is replaced by *terrorist threat*, an interpretation that ignores more than four million internal refugees and insists on speaking of a terrorist threat instead of internal armed conflict.

It is only fair to mention that the journalists most critical of the régime and those who denounce the humanitarian crisis

lived by civilians or those who venture to seriously analyze the situation do give their opinion in this newspaper, but only in the little-read editorial pages. And only 200'000 copies are printed in a country of 28 million adults!

A distant war

The last few years have brought enormous changes to the world of televised news: documentaries covering the internal conflict that involve travel outside of Bogota and filming in the field have completely disappeared (with the exception of CONTRAVIA of course). Today two of the three national television channels have opinion shows, interviews and debates which sometimes discuss the war in Colombia, but from afar, without showing images from the field. The effect of these aseptic debates on the public is to make them think that the war is far away, and that in the end, *it is not so bad*. Because even if the subject of debate remains macabre - such as the massacre of a whole village - the images that reach the public are neutral: well-dressed, educated people sitting around a table in a television studio, with a nighttime city view as a backdrop.

In the end, the news shows argued that the public was tired of seeing corpses and that positive aspects of the country must be discussed. Thus 70% of every show is dedicated to covering sports, local show-biz and catchy anecdotes about national policy.

CONTRAVIA, the show

It is in this absence of images of the 'other Colombia' (that of the war and its victims), that CONTRAVIA was created. For the first time indigenous peoples, Afro-colombians, organized farmers, community leaders and victims of war crimes were given an opportunity to voice their opinions on television. Their lives and stories finally reached the public. But this 'other reality' is not good publicity for the country, and the lead journalist started receiving threats, mainly after certain episodes led to the reopening of criminal investigations against army officers or government employees implicated in human rights violations. The journalist's communications were tapped by police authorities; the show was suspended, then shifted to a less favorable time slot. After the journalist received threats against his family the show was once again suspended; consequently he briefly moved abroad and the show was eventually put on the air again but at an even less favorable time than before. Several international awards followed, meaning bad publicity for the country, even more persistent threats, a newly elected government hostile to criticism, the EU's disengagement from programs promoting democracy and peace in Colombia, and, finally, the possible end of the show.

After receiving the 2006 Canadian Journalists for Free Expression "International Press Freedom Award", Hollman declared: "Seen in an international context, Colombia represents one of those *grey zones* for which there appears no

solution. One of those endless conflicts that fails to interest either the media or public authorities and is eventually forgotten. For us journalists coming out of these grey zones, we know to what point our words can save lives, and it is not only about the life and death of our compatriots, but also about the life and death of Humanity in short. As said by Anna Politkovskaïa: 'It's about all of us'."

INTERVIEW WITH JUAN LOZANO

What was the starting point for your film?

In 2006, after living in Geneva for several years, I returned to Colombia to shoot *Until the last Stone*, a documentary film about a community of farmers living in a strategic war zone in Colombia. In order to edit the film I needed archival images of fighting in the area. In my search I was confronted with a devastating fact: the owners of news programs had decided to stop sending reporters to "danger zones" and there seemed to be a complete lack of footage covering atrocities committed during recent years throughout the country. The war had literally disappeared from television screens. My research eventually led me to Hollman Morris, a journalist with whom I had collaborated during my studies. He seemed to be the only person with images of the conflicts and human rights abuses occurring in Colombia during the last few years. Hollman gave me complete access to his archives, offered me the footage that I needed and showed me episodes from his weekly show *Contravia*. A few months later he wrote to me announcing that his show would be taken off the air due to lack of funding. It was then that I decided to tell his story.

How did you choose the angle from which to tell the story?

The story about the lack of recent reporting allowed me to look at Colombia's present history differently. The more I thought about it, the more I became frightened of the idea of a country without history and without memory. It was impossible not to think of George Orwell and his totalitarian society while I observed the mainstream, Colombian media transforming itself into appendices of the current government. But my initial intention was simple: I wanted to make a film which would defend the liberty of the press in Colombia, one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. In addition we had to move quickly: Hollman's show was due to end in six months. Even so, I gave myself the time to plunge into the deepest part of this man's life, to study the phenomenon of both Colombian censorship and self-censorship and to try to analyze the role of the media as the first rough draft of modern history. This arduous, theoretical, hazardous work, done thousands of kilometers from the film's location allowed me after some time to begin to clearly see the thread of my story: Colombia and its deplorable situation with respect to human rights and freedom of the press was not going to be the center of my story, but rather the framework within which my character was going to evolve. Because of this, Hollman interested me not only as a dedicated, courageous journalist who needed to be protected, but also - and mainly! - as a typical father who dresses his kids in the morning and takes them to school or a husband who shares his daily worries with his wife. The filming occurred at a turning point in his life, a time when he understood that sooner or later the

constant pressure and the presence of his children would make him choose between his commitment to his profession and, not less importantly, his commitment to his family, his children and his life. The atmosphere was also tense given the regional elections in Colombia, which gave rise to hostility towards people, such as Hollman, critical of president Uribe's régime.

Is this film about Colombia, about journalism or about commitment?

It is a film about a man, a real man. It takes place in Colombia, and in this sense it is also a story about Colombia, but this story could take place, with variations, in many other countries where journalists are under pressure. But in my opinion it is not merely the story of a journalist: it goes further; for me this is a story about a

citizen and about our role as members of a society. About the concept of commitment in a world that tends to sometimes lose its meaning.



Where does your character's drama take place?

Inside himself! Hollman has dedicated his life to denounce the atrocities of an absurd war that has lasted a long time and that has modeled the face of the country in a dramatic way. Only the majority of Colombians prefer to look elsewhere, and pretend that nothing is happening. Such is the drama of our character: a desperate fight to attract the eyes and ears of a public that, apparently, does not want to see nor hear. But at what price? And until when?

Did Hollman Morris review and authorize the film?

No, Hollman did not authorize the film as such. He reviewed and commented on several sequences during editing, but in a perspective of dialogue, not one of censorship. Early on we established our conditions: mine were to have access, along with my crew, to all moments of his life, unconditionally and without restrictions. His were to maintain control of the situation in the field, in order to keep us out of danger.

I can say today that the success of this collaboration resided in our total respect of these conditions, as well as in our total confidence in the work of the other. We maintained this respect in spite of the enormous differences between the work pace and methods of his crew and mine.

What were your questions and doubts while you worked on this film?

Even though I still admire Hollman and his work, and though I profoundly believe in his struggle to the point of letting myself be taken away in the film by sequences that praise commitment in a heroic personification of his character, I was plagued by doubts throughout the writing and directing of the film. And even today I am divided.

Let me explain myself: in the 50's, during the civil war in Colombia, almost half a million people were assassinated with machetes. When my grandfather evoked these years, it was to complain about the inexistence of television at the time: *"If I described what I had seen, no one would believe me, no one would believe the inhumane and perverse things that Man is capable of inflicting on other men. No one would believe me because it is unimaginable. One would have to see it to believe it. But at the time, television did not exist to show it. That is why the killings lasted so long and why people today don't know what happened, and that is why tomorrow people will say that it never happened."* Today my grandfather is dead. And the killings of the 50's were followed by those of the 80's, 90's and 2000, and it all happened even while television was everywhere. But people continue to not want to believe, not want to see.

I was tormented while directing this film: on the one hand was the faith, like that of my grandfather, in the power of images to change the world. On the other the "skeptical realism" of many people today, and the renunciation of all types of communication, of denunciation... in short, of faith. Intellectually I



sometimes continue having doubts, but in the end it is my grandfather who wins, because otherwise, it would be impossible to continue living.



THE FILMMAKER

A Swiss and Colombian national, Juan José Lozano, was born in 1971, and studied at the National University of Colombia. An independent producer and director, he has made a series of television documentaries for the Colombian Ministry of Culture (1994-1998). In 1998 he moved to Geneva, where he made several politically committed films dealing both with his host town- exploring young foreigners' experiences of immigration and assimilation in *Un train qui arrive est aussi un train qui part*, 2003, and the armed conflict in Colombia, examining its effects on the people (*Le bal de la vie et de la mort*, 2001 and *Hasta la última piedra*, 2006). Juan José

Lozano has also worked as a video artist on Omar Porras and Marielle Pinsard's stage projects, and with Philippe Macasdar at the Théâtre de St-Gervais in Geneva. Alongside all these activities, he is pursuing a literary career, with his first novel, *Aquí no pasa nada* soon to be published.

THE PRODUCERS

Isabelle Gattiker

Born in 1978. After a dual masters degree in Contemporary History and Cultural Management, Isabelle Gattiker was named General Coordinator of both the International Film Festival on Human Rights and the *Cinéma Tout Ecran* Festival in Geneva. For three years she organized, produced and managed these two events. The French-Israeli director Amos Gitai then hired her, first as his assistant, then as production coordinator for his feature film *DESENGAGEMENT*, starring Juliette Binoche and Jeanne Moreau (awarded at the Venice and Toronto Film Festivals). She worked at his side for two years. At the same time she developed several projects on media education and human rights in Geneva, notably in the context of the mobile cinema *Roadmovie*, of the Haute Ecole des Arts Appliqués and of SOS-Racism. She also produced several films for the UN and the ICRC.

UNWANTED WITNESS is her first feature film production.

CINEPHIL handles the sales of distribution rights for International, Israeli and Palestinian films all over the world. It is based in Tel Aviv and since its establishment in January 1997, CINEPHIL has become the sales agent and home for leading producers and filmmakers from around the world.

Cinephil has also been known as a Co Producer for international productions such as “Trembling Before G-d” by Sandi DuBowski, “5 Days” and “Flipping Out” by Yoav Shamir and “Sweet Mud” (feature film) by Dror Shaul.