

LUIZ BOLOGNESI. *THE LAST FOREST*. SANTA MONICA: LAEMMLE MONICA FILM CENTER 2021. 76 MINUTES, COLOUR.

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The last forest, directed by Brazilian filmmaker Luiz Bolognesi, tells the story of the Yanomami people who inhabit territory at the border of Brazil and Venezuela in the Amazon Forest. They have lived here for over a millennium, long before these two countries existed. Following the discovery of gold in the area in the 1980s, gold miners brought weapons, violence, and disease to the region. This film shares a story of resistance as Davi Kopenawa, co-screenwriter and leader of the Yanomami, fights for the preservation of his community against encroaching gold prospectors. The entire film is in the Yanomami language with no embedded subtitles (excluding the title cards). This is one of the very few ethnographic films streaming on Netflix in the United Kingdom, and, using their subtitle feature, one can have the film translated to almost any language.

At its core, this is a story about protecting the forest from gold prospectors, with Bolognesi placing the environment at the centre of the film through wide shots of the Amazon Forest. The first few scenes focus on food and subsistence practices. We see hunting in the forest, butchering at home, and collecting in the river. These scenes are interrupted by a speech Kopenawa gives to the Yanomami. He explains how he must leave for a while to educate white people on Yanomami culture with the hopes of protecting it. He finishes his speech by saying, 'We are the children of Omama, the last children of the forest, we must fight so that our children grow up healthy...'

Throughout the film we see moments of Yanomami resistance, but also times when white culture seeps into the community. In one scene, white miners with shotguns try to enter the forest, but they are met with several Yanomami men armed with spears, bows, and arrows, ready to defend their territory. Kopenawa says, 'If we don't protect ourselves, after they find gold, they'll come by the thousands'. Later, Kopenawa is talking on the radio, warning others of 10,000 gold prospectors approaching. One Yanomami man is tempted by his brother-in-law to join them. Kopenawa tries to convince this individual that the Yanomami are inconsequential to the gold prospectors' agenda. The film also features the story of a woman whose husband never returns home from hunting. She pleads with Kopenawa and other shamans to help bring him back, and they perform a ceremony for his return. The movie ends with her husband still missing. She decides to start a women's association to weave and sell baskets to white people so that Yanomami women can be economically independent without their husbands.

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A stand-out element of this film is the blending of documentary and fiction. For example, it features fictionalised scenes where members of the Yanomami community act out their origin story. Bolognesi says in an interview that while living with the community for two weeks, the Yanomami insisted on telling the story of brothers Omama and Yoasi on their own terms. Kopenawa narrates: Omama dug a hole through the forest and water accumulated into rivers and lakes. He and his brother, Yaosi, grew lonely and tried to birth a woman. Yaosi copulated with his own leg but gave birth to a boy. Later, Omama found Thuëyoma, a woman who emerged from the underwater forest. Yaosi has intercourse with her but harmed her with his misshapen penis. In the end, Omama married Thuëyoma and they became the progenitors and protectors of the Yanomami people. Yoasi was expelled to the other side of the great ocean river where he created death. Omama buried the evil spirits and disease along with the ores underground.

The film cuts back and forth between Yanomami community members who are acting out their origin story for the film, and Kopenawa, who sits in a circle while men and women make spears and weave baskets around him. I found this part of the film to be the most important because it highlights many themes of the film, the Yanomami way of life, and shows the Yanomami's agency in telling their origin story. The interspersed cuts between present day and the Yanomami's origin story combine the old and the new, crossing time and space, and shows the continued relevance of their history. This story also provides context for why the Yanomami so fervently fight off gold prospectors. When prospectors mine ores, they unleash both the disease and evil spirits that Omama initially buried underground. Though an origin story can seem distant, acting out this story in the film makes it tangible for an outside audience. The film's final scenes show Kopenawa at Harvard University, educating students about the threat of gold miners to the Yanomami people and the harm of city commercialism to the Amazon Forest. This scene is once again interspersed with bird's-eye drone shots of the forest, visually signifying the forest's importance in the film. The film ends with title cards explaining how in 2019 the Brazilian government stopped enforcing restrictions on mining in the forest. This created several problems for the Yanomami community, including mercury poisoning and the spread of COVID-19. These cards also say that Kopenawa has been receiving death threats for pushing back against mining.

Bolognesi, along with Kopenawa and the collaborators in the Yanomami community, set out to create a film which shares a story of continued indigenous resistance against the threat of profit-driven gold mining. The most unique parts of the film are the fictionalized scenes integrated into the larger documentary format which share the origin story of the Yanomami and explain the threat of gold mining within the community. The film itself is an act of resistance, continuing Kopenawa's mission of educating white audiences about his community, their way of life, and how the Yanomami resist encroaching gold miners.

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