

Grissi Siknis

The Magic Sickness of the Jungle

SHORT SYNOPSIS

The jungle madness known as Grissi Siknis is a contagious, natural syndrome that occurs among the Miskito of Eastern Central America, effecting mainly young women. Symptoms include long periods of anxiety, nausea, dizziness, irrational anger and fear, interlaced with periods of frenzy in which the victims loses consciousness, and often believes devils are beating them.

Traditional Miskito belief holds that Grissi Siknis is the result of evil spirits or black sorcerers. While western medicine typically has no effect on those afflicted with the disease, remedies of Miskito herbalists or healers are often successful in curing the madness.

This frightening documentary analyzes for the very first time this unknown and supernatural disease. Is it the spirits protesting how nature is being destroyed while they possess the minds of the natives? Is it a disease caused by the cultural clash of a rushed and late colonization? Or, are we just witnessing fraud and black magic?

LONG SYNOPSIS

"Madness rises suddenly at Raiti. While the Ministry of Health thought the outbreak of madness was under control, the number of affected people double increased. MINSA (*Mental Health Institute*) sent today a brigade of specialists and a sorceress to have all the job done" - *La Prensa de Nicaragua*, December 17, 2003

"The outbreak of sickness has obliged a brigade of specialists consisting of psychiatrists, a sociologist and an anthropologist to depart today, Wednesday, from Managua to Raiti. They hope, with the help of a sorceress called Porcela Sandino, to restore to normality all those affected. This woman is to do all the work. She is a *zukia miskita*, a good sorceress. She will clean all the bewitched persons. This group of specialists set off to the affected community, 350 km from the municipality of Waspam, in the Autonomous Region of the Northern Atlantic, right in the middle of the Miskito jungle.

Among other rituals, the *zukia miskita* will build a big platform with trunks and branches on which she will lay those bewitched women. Underneath the wood, she will light an incense, made up of a variety of leaves and herbs, whose fumes are presumed to be breathed in by the women, so that they get rid of the sickness that tortures them.

Anthropological studies show that *Grissi Siknis* is an ancestral syndrome of collective suggestion that the native communities have been suffering for centuries in Alaska, Africa, Asia, as well as other parts of the world. It becomes epidemic, even though they may not have taken anything. This syndrome has a magical origin. The rumour that something bad, even witchcraft, has been done awakens panic among the members of the adolescent group of the community. This kind of sickness is usual for these people. It happens to happen every since and they believe it is only cured with sorcery. They refuse the use of modern medicine. They only believe a sorceress can cure them, and they get healed.

What is *GRISI SIKNIS*?

- It is a cultural disease that affects the Miskito ethnic groups of Nicaragua and Honduras. Similar cases of this disease have been noticed in other places in America, like Chiapas and Panama, in the same way *AMOK* happens in areas of the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.
- It bursts out from emotional and cultural threats. It develops anxiety, need of escaping and trance dissociative disorders, aggressiveness and self-aggressiveness, in crisis that go from around 45 minutes

to an hour and a half, four times a day. They hit houses with axes, machetes and sticks, destroy the fences around them, etc. However, there have never been death cases at all. They destroy things that don't belong to their culture.

- It usually happens in teenagers and women.
- It is a contagious mental disease, being the only one with this peculiarity.
- It is important to distinguish *grisi siknis* from *trick*, which is the spell goblins and mermaids cast on people, and that has some other characteristics.

FESTIVALS

Festival Internacional de Cine de Guadalajara (México)
Latin American Environmental Media Festival (Best feature Film)
Festival Patois New Orleans Human Rights Film Festival
Buffalo-Niagara International Film Festival
Boston International Film Festival
New York International Latino Film Festival
Cine Las Americas International Film Festival
Vancouver Ethnographic Film Festival
Lateinamerika-filmfestival DAS KINO Salzburg-Viena (Austria)
Black International Cinema Berlin
Seattle Latino Films Festival
WorldFest Houston (Bronze Remi Award)

DIRECTOR

ENRIQUE RUIZ-SKIPEY (Barcelona, Spain 1962) *Documentary Films Director.*

Director's Statement: It is *an engaging documentary, for the general public, rated as suspense, mystery and magic, being its subject matter Anthropology and Sociology. It shows details of the nature of an unknown geographical area: the only humid primary jungle of the Middle American region, populated by diverse ethnic groups as the result of the cultural miscegenation of the Gariphones, Whites, and Nahuatl, Miskito and Mayakma Indians. At the same time, this Documentary pays special attention to the way of life of these native communities that live isolated in remote areas of difficult access, and shows their ways of living: agriculture, traditions, human relations, their perfect blending with the voluptuous nature that surrounds them, their difficulty to get into the political and economical structures of the countries they belong to, etc.*

With a Law Degree and a MBA from 1988 has been working as international economic development expert and financial advisor for important multilateral agencies as the Commission of the European Union, Interamerican Development Bank and World Bank in Latin America, Arab Countries and South East Asia.

In 2005 he attended a Master in Documentary Films and since then he has directed the following movies:

- 2005: ¡Hola!, ¿Que buscas?, ¿Como eres? (Hi, what are you looking for?, how are you?) Mini DV, Color, 20 min. (Filmed in Madrid) Spanish language.

A brief documentary film about the gay chats, three characters comments their life related to the internet chats where they try to find sex, love, friendship....

Selected for the Bilbao Gay festival and the Andalusian Gay Festival.

- 2006: La vie dans la riviere du Niger (Life in the River Niger) Full HD, Color, 55 min. (Filmed in Guinea Conakry, Mali, Niger, Benin and Nigeria) French and African local languages.

Different short stories about people living in and of one of the main important rivers in the African continent.

- 2006: TCHAD un des pays sans etat. (TCHAD one country with no state) Full HD, Color, 55 min (Filmed in Tchad). French and local language. (Not finished)

Tchad is a huge African country suffering a civil war since the last 20 years. A country built up by the colonial powers that doesn't have a link in between the different tribes included inside its borders.

- 2007: La Empanada de la Removida (The Removida Pie). MiniDV, Color, 71 min. (Filmed in Madrid). Provocation and fun becomes the queen of the madrilian night as it was in the early 80's a cultural movement known as "La Movida". A new generation tell us the story of how it was and how is now. The remaining details of esthetic and talents show us that the movement is still alive.

Selected by Documenta Madrid (Madrid Documentary Films Festival) and the International Film Festival of Bogota (Colombia)

- 2008: Grissi Siknis La enfermedad mágica de la selva. (Grissi Siknis The magic sickness of the jungle). Full HD, 94 min. (Filmed in Nicaragua and Honduras).

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- 2009: International Conflicts: Where and why we kill each other. (Under preparation) To be filmed in Caucaso, Kashemire, Congo, Sudan, Tchad, Sri Lanka.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Filmed at Managua, Jinotega, Walakitan, Wiwili, Raiti, Mombacho Volcano, Miskito communities of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, Waspam, Puerto Cabezas, Bluefields.

MUSIC:

Music written by the Serbian composer Milan DURDEVIC.

Film crew:

- Director: Enrique RUIZ-SKIPEY
- Photography: Horacio GOMEZ-ALCALA
- Camera Assistant: Anibal CHAVEZ
- Sound: Ikel ROBATEAU
- Assistant Director: Monica SANDINO
- Production Assistant: Lalola D'OCON

Technical Equipment:

- Camera Panasonic HVX 200E (WHOLE KIT including filters and cases)
- Hard Disk FS-100 160Gb
- Sound Equipment: SENNHEISER MKH416 P48 3U, Rack and Modular Windshield 4 Kit Ricote
- AJ-P2C016RG Panasonic SD 16GB (2 units)
- DIGITEX BATTERIES CHARGER.
- HIGH CAPACITY CAMERA BATTERIES (4 units)
- MAC BOOK PRO 17' (Portable computer)
- Video Camera SONY HVR-A1E
- Casette Mini DV SONY Digital HD Video ME/DVM63 (40 units)
- Mobile Disk LaCie de 160 GB (8 units)

- Mobile Disk IOMEGA 1 Turia