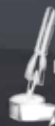


FRANCISCA
GAVILÁN

DIGNA
QUISPE

CATALINA
SAAVEDRA

LAS NIÑAS QUISPE



28. Venice
International Film
Critics' Week

A FILM BY SEBASTIÁN SEPÚLVEDA





Synopsis

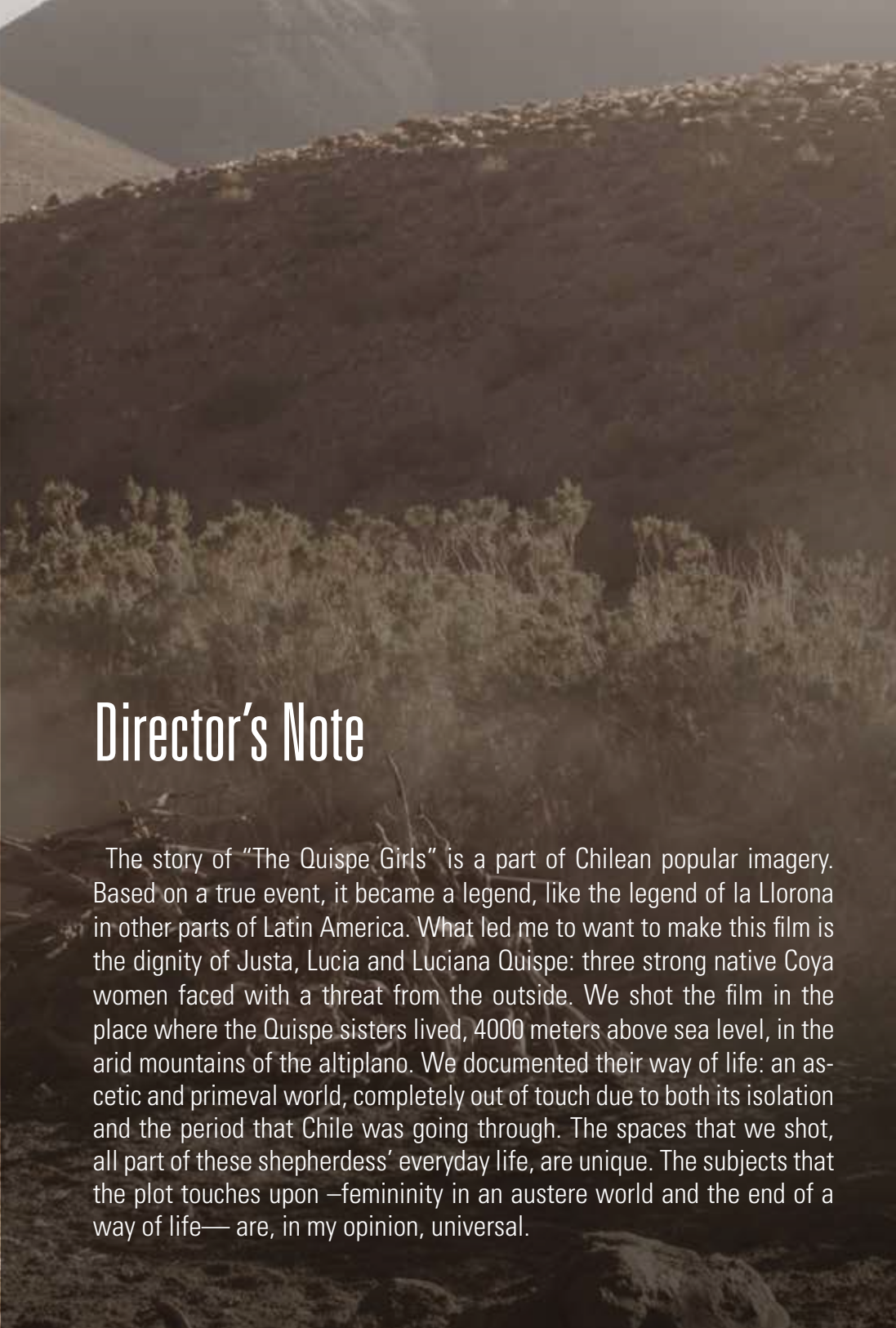
Based on a true story that occurred in 1974, "The Quispe Girls" is the tale of the sisters Justa, Lucia and Luciana Quispe, shepherds in the Chilean altiplano, who lead a solitary life. The recent death of a fourth sister and news from abroad, forces the sisters to an existential quest that will relentlessly bring them to a tragic end.



Director's Biography

Sebastián Sepúlveda

Having spent 18 years living between Europe and South America, Sebastián Sepúlveda returned to Chile in 1990 to study History. He later studied Editing at San Antonio de los Baños in Cuba and Screenplay at La Femis in Paris. In addition to working as a screenwriter and editor, in 2008 he directed the documentary "El Arenal". "The Quispe Girls" is his first feature.



Director's Note

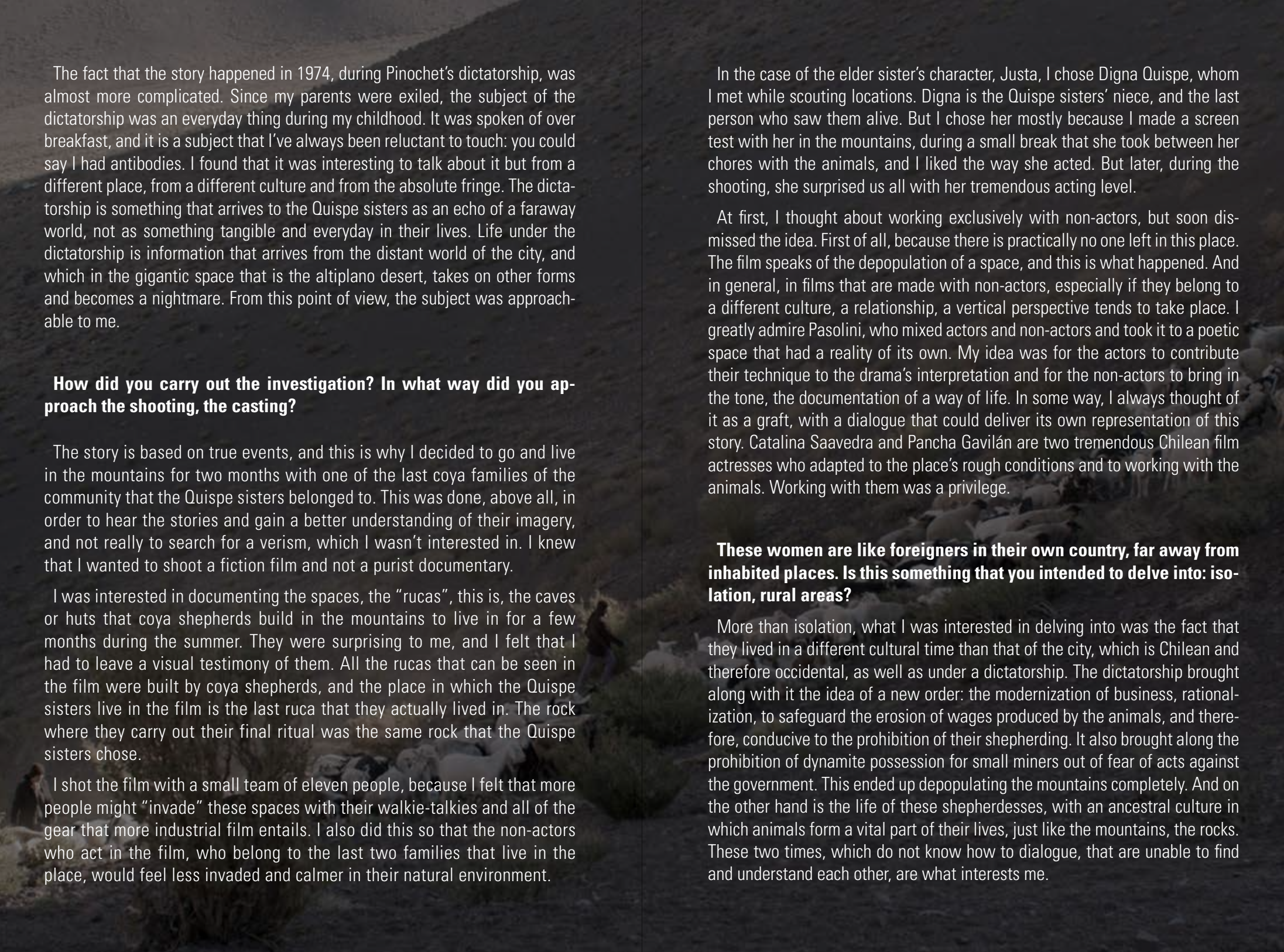
The story of "The Quispe Girls" is a part of Chilean popular imagery. Based on a true event, it became a legend, like the legend of la Llorona in other parts of Latin America. What led me to want to make this film is the dignity of Justa, Lucia and Luciana Quispe: three strong native Coya women faced with a threat from the outside. We shot the film in the place where the Quispe sisters lived, 4000 meters above sea level, in the arid mountains of the altiplano. We documented their way of life: an ascetic and primeval world, completely out of touch due to both its isolation and the period that Chile was going through. The spaces that we shot, all part of these shepherdess' everyday life, are unique. The subjects that the plot touches upon—femininity in an austere world and the end of a way of life—are, in my opinion, universal.



Interview with Sebastián Sepúlveda

Regarding the project's origins: why film this story? What interested you at first? Was the fact that it takes place in 1974 significant, seeing as you were a child back then?

What first interested me was that the story takes place in a primeval world, a state that has to do with the essential matters of human beings. The central story touches on subjects as basic as the end of the world, the end of the way of life that the Quispe sisters understood as existence. Starting from this foundation, the project was very interesting to me. Now, I don't think that films can be reduced to only a couple of subjects; they are a meander of subjects, interconnected images, words, and spaces that create, in the best of cases, living worlds in movement for the spectator.



The fact that the story happened in 1974, during Pinochet's dictatorship, was almost more complicated. Since my parents were exiled, the subject of the dictatorship was an everyday thing during my childhood. It was spoken of over breakfast, and it is a subject that I've always been reluctant to touch: you could say I had antibodies. I found that it was interesting to talk about it but from a different place, from a different culture and from the absolute fringe. The dictatorship is something that arrives to the Quispe sisters as an echo of a faraway world, not as something tangible and everyday in their lives. Life under the dictatorship is information that arrives from the distant world of the city, and which in the gigantic space that is the altiplano desert, takes on other forms and becomes a nightmare. From this point of view, the subject was approachable to me.

How did you carry out the investigation? In what way did you approach the shooting, the casting?

The story is based on true events, and this is why I decided to go and live in the mountains for two months with one of the last coya families of the community that the Quispe sisters belonged to. This was done, above all, in order to hear the stories and gain a better understanding of their imagery, and not really to search for a verism, which I wasn't interested in. I knew that I wanted to shoot a fiction film and not a purist documentary.

I was interested in documenting the spaces, the "rucas", this is, the caves or huts that coya shepherds build in the mountains to live in for a few months during the summer. They were surprising to me, and I felt that I had to leave a visual testimony of them. All the rucas that can be seen in the film were built by coya shepherds, and the place in which the Quispe sisters live in the film is the last ruca that they actually lived in. The rock where they carry out their final ritual was the same rock that the Quispe sisters chose.

I shot the film with a small team of eleven people, because I felt that more people might "invade" these spaces with their walkie-talkies and all of the gear that more industrial film entails. I also did this so that the non-actors who act in the film, who belong to the last two families that live in the place, would feel less invaded and calmer in their natural environment.

In the case of the elder sister's character, Justa, I chose Digna Quispe, whom I met while scouting locations. Digna is the Quispe sisters' niece, and the last person who saw them alive. But I chose her mostly because I made a screen test with her in the mountains, during a small break that she took between her chores with the animals, and I liked the way she acted. But later, during the shooting, she surprised us all with her tremendous acting level.

At first, I thought about working exclusively with non-actors, but soon dismissed the idea. First of all, because there is practically no one left in this place. The film speaks of the depopulation of a space, and this is what happened. And in general, in films that are made with non-actors, especially if they belong to a different culture, a relationship, a vertical perspective tends to take place. I greatly admire Pasolini, who mixed actors and non-actors and took it to a poetic space that had a reality of its own. My idea was for the actors to contribute their technique to the drama's interpretation and for the non-actors to bring in the tone, the documentation of a way of life. In some way, I always thought of it as a graft, with a dialogue that could deliver its own representation of this story. Catalina Saavedra and Pancha Gavilán are two tremendous Chilean film actresses who adapted to the place's rough conditions and to working with the animals. Working with them was a privilege.

These women are like foreigners in their own country, far away from inhabited places. Is this something that you intended to delve into: isolation, rural areas?

More than isolation, what I was interested in delving into was the fact that they lived in a different cultural time than that of the city, which is Chilean and therefore occidental, as well as under a dictatorship. The dictatorship brought along with it the idea of a new order: the modernization of business, rationalization, to safeguard the erosion of wages produced by the animals, and therefore, conducive to the prohibition of their shepherding. It also brought along the prohibition of dynamite possession for small miners out of fear of acts against the government. This ended up depopulating the mountains completely. And on the other hand is the life of these shepherdesses, with an ancestral culture in which animals form a vital part of their lives, just like the mountains, the rocks. These two times, which do not know how to dialogue, that are unable to find and understand each other, are what interests me.



**Director**

Sebastián Sepúlveda

Producers

Juan de Dios Larraín

Pablo Larraín

Screenplay

Sebastián Sepúlveda

An adaptation from the play

"Las Brutas", by Juan Radrigán

Co Producers

Marc Irmer

Diego Urgoiti-Moinot

Fernando Sokolowicz

Cinematography

Inti Briones

Production Designer

Cristián Mayorga

Costume Designer

Muriel Parra

Line Producer

Ruth Orellana

Assistant Director

Oscar Godoy

Film Editor

Santiago Otheguy

Post Producer

Cristián Echeverría

Executive Producers

Juan Ignacio Correa

Mariane Hartard

Rocío Jadue

Andrea Carrasco Stuvén

Clara Szwarc

Cast

Digna Quispe

Catalina Saavedra

Francisca Gavilán

Countries

Chile / France / Argentina

Production Company

Fabula (Chile)

Co Producer Companies

Dolce Vita Films (France)

Cinema Uno (Argentina)

Language

Spanish

Shooting Format

Digital HD

Screening Format

DCP, Color, 2.39 Scope

Sound

Dolby SR 5.1

Runtime

80 min.

Year

2013

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