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## BACKGROUND

This analysis of *El abrazo de la serpiente* (Guerra, 2015) and *Pájaros de verano* (Guerra, 2018) considers the role of Indigenous representation in the project of decoloniality. While recognising this project's privileged positionality, there is hope that shedding new light on debates surrounding decoloniality and Indigenous representation will invite readers to explore issues such as white saviourism, exoticisation, and cultural appropriation.

Indigenous communities in Colombia account for 4.4% of the nation's population and live in mainly rural locations. The largest Indigenous community is the Wayúu, who inhabit the northern peninsula of La Guajira along the border with Venezuela. Despite adopting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, which recognises the cultural, linguistic, and political agency of the communities in Colombia, there has been little economic or political support and even a 'systematic eradication of Indigenous people' (Villa, 2020: 3).

However, at a time when the region of Latin America, and Colombia itself, is experiencing a wave of new leftist governments, an exploration of Indigenous socio-political agency seems particularly relevant.

## DECOLONIALITY

Determining what is meant by decoloniality requires an understanding of the definition of coloniality – a term distinct from colonialism. Aníbal Quijano understands coloniality as the structures of power, being, and knowledge that were, and continue to be, used to organise society according to Western ideals of civilisation (2007: 5). In this sense, coloniality has persisted beyond the end of formal colonialism into a postcolonial world in which these structures continue to influence society.

In the last twenty years, scholars such as Walter Dignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres have drawn upon this understanding of coloniality to define and discuss the concept of decoloniality and the later idea of the decolonial turn. According to Maldonado Torres, decoloniality should be understood as an ongoing project dealing with the damaging consequences of coloniality. In this sense, decoloniality seeks to highlight socioeconomic, political, economic, and racial injustices symptomatic of coloniality. The decolonial project critically engages with, subverts, and deconstructs these causes and effects to find new forms of being, knowledge, and social relationships.

A significant part of the decolonial discourse is the concept of decolonial aesthetics, defined by Miguel Rojas-Sotelo as 'ongoing artistic projects responding to the darker side of imperial globalisation and coloniality' (2011: 88). As part of a group of key decolonial scholars, Rojas-Sotelo calls for a reflection of decoloniality in the cultural and artistic sphere. In addition to pieces of art, theatrical productions, and literature, decolonial aesthetics is a project that champions 'radically collaborative practices' (Rojas-Sotelo, 2011: 89). The filmmaking process can thus be closely aligned with decolonial aesthetics due to the numerous creative roles it includes.



## DREAMS

As confirmed by Guerra, a thread between *El abrazo* and *Pájaros* is the importance given to the theme of 'dreams and the subconscious' (Guerra, 2015). As a theme, academic discourse and cultural symbol, dreams and the unconscious have, and continue to be, interrelated with coloniality, decoloniality and Indigenous representation in Latin America. The two films represent the border between dreams and reality in a way that contributes ambiguously to decolonial aesthetics. To evaluate the films' relationship with decolonial aesthetics, this discussion examines the role of dreams in creating an intercultural dialogue in the films' narratives and the onscreen representation of dreams.

The two films intertwine traditionally Western and non-Western storytelling genres to create an intercultural dialogue and, in doing so, appeal to decolonial aesthetics. As a film that follows the journeys made by Karamakate and two western scientists Theodor Von Martius and Richard Evans Schultes, *El abrazo* can be associated with road movies, a 'quintessentially Hollywoodian genre' (Chris Berry, 2016: 3). In many respects, the film is a 'roadless movie' as coined by Nátalia Pinazza (2018: 34), where the characters are carried by dreams rather than cars or motorcycles. By re-formulating the Western mode of storytelling and infusing it with the value of dreaming in Amazonian Indigenous culture, the film establishes an intercultural dialogue that destabilises colonial discourses of superiority.



Similarly, the more recent *Pájaros* can be categorised into several traditionally Western literature and film genres, but a hybridised narrative structure is created using dreams and the subconscious. For instance, the significance granted to dreams in Wayúu culture is intertwined with film noir, western, and tragedy elements. Kovarik notes that the narrative structure is also rooted in the Wayúu *jayeachi*, a traditional song established to transmit history and knowledge through generations (2019). The fact that this form of Wayúu storytelling is focused on the intergenerational transmission of language and culture is an intriguing choice, given that the film centres around the loss and death of culture.

The onscreen representation of these dreams and their engagement with the concept of decolonial aesthetics is questionable. Primarily, the presentation of Schultes' psychedelic dream at the climax of *El abrazo* reproduces colonial aesthetics of the sublime rather than deconstructs them. The only scene not shot in black and white is the dream at the end of the film, which begins with aerial shots of the Amazon rainforest captured using drone technology. By inciting ideas of an unimaginably vast natural space and the imposition of strict surveillance and control, the beginning of this climatic scene employs a colonial way of viewing and mapping the rainforest. The films' efforts to critique the inadequacy of Western knowledge in understanding the Amazon reproduce the very colonial aesthetics of the sublime they wish to undermine (2018).



The problematic onscreen representation of the Wayúu culture also occurs in one of the film's key dream sequences. Despite accurately portraying the traditional dress of the Wayúu, the imagery and mise-en-scène in this sequence are reminiscent of Magritte's surrealist artwork *The Lovers* (1928). Establishing a conversation with surrealist aesthetics as a way to enunciate dreams and reality does invoke notions of 'primitivism'. In other words, referencing the surrealist movement in a way that portrays Indigenous and non-Western culture runs the risk of entangling itself with the cultural appropriation often associated with the Eurocentric movement.

## COLOMBIA 2022

Despite promises of economic and cultural benefits for these communities, there is little empirical evidence that the release of the films has created meaningful change for the Wayúu and Amazonian communities. For example, according to a recent Human Rights Watch investigation, the Wayúu community has been suffering from severe child malnutrition, with around one in ten children born in the area over the last three years dying from the condition (2020).

In contrast, the outcome of the recent presidential elections in Colombia has heralded a lot of hope. Gustavo Petro will be Colombia's first left-wing president, and the next four years could mark a significant turning point in the future of the Indigenous socio-political agency. Promises made by the president-elect are far-reaching and aim to confront ecological concerns associated with oil and gas extraction, reignite the seemingly endless war on drugs, and incorporate a racially and socially diverse governmental cabinet. For example, Francia Márquez will be the first Afro-Colombian to hold the position of vice-president. There are also plans to include three significant Indigenous leaders in the cabinet (Villa, 2020). To follow through on its promises, Petro's government claims it will support the implementation of the fourteen contested Indigenous Territorial Entities (ITEs) in the Amazonian region of the country. Similarly, in an attempt to reform the country's relationship with oil and gas extraction, there are pledges to partner with Wayúu communities in setting up solar-powered farms in the Guajira region.

Whether or not these promises become a reality is yet to be seen. If there is a significant change in the country over the next four years regarding Indigenous socio-political agency, perhaps the films studied in this project will come to hold new meanings for the Wayúu and Amazonian Indigenous communities. In other words, if the more immediate socio-economic and political issues these communities face are resolved, the practical ramifications of decoloniality and contemporary cinematic representation may become more visible. Indeed, the extent to which contemporary cinema, or decoloniality for that matter, will play a practical socio-political role in Colombia will be interesting to observe, particularly over the next four years.

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