Decolonial Encounters in Ciro Guerra's *El abrazo de la serpiente:* Indigeneity, Coevalness and Intercultural Dialogue

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Abstract
This article analyses the politics and aesthetics of the depiction of the encounter between the West and the non-West in Ciro Guerra's film *El abrazo de la serpiente*, examining the ways in which the film deconstructs colonialist imagery and discourses and engages with the notion and cinematic representation of indigeneity. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the article identifies and discusses the strategies employed by the film to decolonize the category of the 'Indian': the challenge of colonial linguistic of domination, the undermining of the tropes of imperialist representations, the staging and re-enacting of colonial encounters and the subversion of the power relations embedded in colonialist ethnography.
The article posits that *El abrazo de la serpiente* acts as an instrument of political and cultural enquiry into the past and the present, and that it proposes as well as enacts multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue as cinematic approaches to native culture. While the notion of indigeneity at play is not exempt from problematics, the film succeeds in foregrounding indigenous points of view and 'points of hearing' challenging Eurocentric politics of recognition and evolutionary epistemology in favour of a 'coevalness' of the native.

Keywords: Ciro Guerra, Latin American cinema, Colombian cinema, Postcolonial cinema, Indigeneity, Colombian Amazon

A year after the 1992 Columbus Quincentenary, J. King, Ana M. López and M. Alvarado edited a collection of essays under the title *Mediating Two World*. As the work's subtitle reads, the book gathered contributions that addressed various forms of 'cinematic encounters in the Americas'.[1] Among those essays, Jean Franco's study of the representation of tribal societies in feature cinema might serve as a useful point of departure for this article. Franco argues that European films that have represented tribal societies attempting to engage critically with western colonisation and exploitation have, in fact, ended up 'reproducing oppressive acculturation'[2]. Her case studies are *The Mission* (1986), *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and *The Emerald Forest* (1985). All these films fail, according to Franco, in representing the ecological concerns they set out to address. The main reasons she identifies are, first, the films' failure in adhering to their claims of historical truth; second, their transposition of contemporary (real) issues in the historical past thus 'freez[ing] real problems in an

anachronistic mode'[3]; third, a journey of a hero that reinforces, rather than challenges, paternalism; and, four, the arduous task of addressing ecological concerns through films that depend on capitalist modes of production. Franco pinpoints a difficulty in overcoming the exoticist gaze not only in western cinema but, more broadly, in the realm of art. She uses as an example of this issue the renowned 1984 MOMA art exhibition '"Primitivism" in Twentieth-century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern', stressing how the configuration of the exhibition betrayed the ethical intent that guided it by reproducing the asymmetrical power relations inscribed in the very notion of Primitivism.

The global political and cinematic arenas of the second decade of the twenty-first century are, of course, very different from those of the 1990s. Since then, indigenous socio-political activism has gained in strength and visibility by articulating indigenous people's rights and achieving changes in constitutional reform and jurisprudence.[4] If 1993 was proclaimed the 'International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples' by the United Nations, more recently, the historical exclusion of indigenous practices from nation-state institutions has been challenged by the appearance of 'earth-beings in social protests'[5] and national politics (in countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia). Furthermore, the global circulation of the discourse and politics of indigeneity and the public presence of indigenous intellectuals, as Marisol De la Cadena states, have 'successfully undermined evolutionary historicism's authority to force a rethinking of the notion of indigeneity itself'.[6] Cinematically, since the 1990s, there has been a rise of indigenous filmmaking which has challenged dominant 'tropes of indigeneity' such as the 'binaries erected between the local and the global, stasis and movement, and dwelling and migration'.[7] In the art exhibition curatorial domain, the stronger presence of indigenous artists is questioning the notion of the otherness of indigenous art.[8] There have also been exhibitions, such as 'Primitivism Revisited: After the End of an Idea' (2006) that have explicitly revisited the 1984 MOMA's show.[9] However, we shall ask whether the primitivist

gaze has been surpassed in fiction films that deal with native cultures and whether cinematic contemporary representations of such cultures are (interested in) challenging imperialist ideologies, especially in the current context of transnational cinema, which seems to favour, as Randall Halle points out, the creation of 'distant strangers' and of 'stories that Western audiences want to hear'.[10]

This article analyses the politics and aesthetics of the depiction of the encounter between the West and the non-West in the 2015 film *El abrazo de la serpiente*, the third feature film of Colombian director Ciro Guerra, focusing on the ways in which it engages with colonialism and colonialist imagery and discourses. *El abrazo* was very successful in terms of box office and critical acclaim. It won awards at Cannes and other international festivals and became the first Colombian film to reach the final shortlist of nominations for Best Foreign Film at the US Academy Awards. The Oscars nomination impacted on the film's distribution and prompted an interesting appropriation of it by the national media and certain state institutions, thus producing a feeling and narrative of 'national belonging'. As Claudia Triana, the director of *Proimágenes* put it, the nomination changed the film from one 'to be watched by Guerra and his friends' to one that every Colombian should watch 'otherwise they would [...] feel guilty.[11]

El abrazo is a B&W film, shot entirely on location in the Amazonian departments of Vaupé and Guainía, and spoken mostly in indigenous languages. The film's plot and mise-en-scene draw inspiration from the journals and photographs of Theodor Koch-Grunberg and Richard Evans Shultes, a German ethnographer and an American ethnobotanist who travelled in the region in the early and mid-20th century respectively, and whose works are among the main sources of information on the Amazonian cultures of Colombia. *El abrazo* relates the men's separate journeys across the tropical jungle and along its river in search of the sacred curative plant *yakruna*, through a parallel narrative structure that cuts back and forth between

the two journeys and the two different historical periods. The narrative element that bonds them is a man called Karamakate, the main protagonist, a native shaman, the last of his people, who possesses knowledge on the *yakruna* and agrees to guide both scientists in their search; he is depicted as a young shaman/warrior in the first story and as an older subject dealing with the loss of his knowledge and identity in the second one.

The film engages with several of the problematics discussed by Franco: the link between native culture and the past, the recapitulation of the history of the Amazon, the claims of historical truth; moreover, it presents a visual and narrative language that dialogues both with art-house and mainstream cinemas. Nevertheless, in what follows I argue that not only does *El abrazo* avoid re-enacting oppressive acculturation but it also manages to deconstruct the racial hierarchies and structures of dominance that belong to imperialist practices and discourses as well as to address, albeit ambivalently, some of the contemporary issues surrounding indigeneity. I also argue that the film acts as an instrument of political and cultural enquiry into the past and the present and that it proposes as well as enacts multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue as cinematic approaches to native culture.

Opposing the linguistic of domination

El abrazo opens with a caption that serves as an epigraph. The text is presented as a fragment of Theodor von Martius's journal written in 1909 during his journey through the Amazon:

> It is not possible for me to know whether the infinite jungle
> has already started on me the process that have brought
> many others to a complete and irremediable madness.
> If this is the case, I can only apologise
> and ask for your understanding, for the display I witnessed
> during those enchanted hours was such that I find it impossible
> to describe it in a language that would make others
> understand its beauty and splendour; I only know that when I came back,
> I had become a different man

The words are shown on a black screen while the sound of the *selva* anticipates the next scene. Amazonian nature is subsequently shown: a shot of the river frames the trees reflected in the water; then the camera, placed at the river level, moves towards the shore where an indigenous subject – Karamakate – stands in a squatting position,[12] partially naked and wearing significant accessories; he has a fierce bodily expression and is looking attentively at the river when he notices an imperceptible modification of sound. The camera then cuts to Karamakate framed from behind, surrounded by vegetation; the camera zooms in towards him until an over-the-shoulder shot shows us what he sees: a canoe arriving to the shore. On it, there are the ill Von Martius and his indigenous guide Manduca; they are looking for Karamakate to save the life of Theo who, we soon find out, can be cured only with the *yakruna*, the sacred and healing plant whose knowledge only Karamakate and his people hold. From the start, the visual language challenges the negative politics of recognition that inform Eurocentric verbal and visual discourses: editing and image composition give Karamakate centrality; his accessories, face paintings and bodily gestures convey warrior-like qualities which do not fit with the western conventional imagery of indigenous shamanism; the native subject is framed alone and not in relation to a white man; and, finally, an indigenous 'gaze', which is constructed through camera work and mise-en-scene, makes the spectator assume Karamakate's point of view.

I will return to the visual depiction of Amazonian people and landscape, but now I want to focus on what happens on the screen before their visual entrance in the story. Significantly, the first depiction of the jungle is the verbal image articulated in the caption/epigraph. This image is relevant for it reformulates the tropes of colonialist representational regimes and because it is challenged throughout the film. The caption represents indigenous geography through the tropes of threat and desire, danger and wonder, on the one hand, and ineffability and the sublime, on the other hand, which have defined the New World's land and tropical reality in European travel writing, from the earlier chronicles to romantic writers and beyond.

Along the lines of previous narratives, Von Martius describes the jungle as a place of otherness, opposed to rationality: it produces ‘madness’ as well as ‘enchantment’; its ‘infiniteness’ is associated with beauty and splendour. The language used by the ethnographer reformulates a well-established repertoire of tropical images that had been articulated in the accounts of the colonial encounters to both justify the colonial enterprise and construct the ‘modern’ identity of Europe.[13] Columbus repeatedly used the terms *maravilla* [wonder] and *maravilloso* [wonderful] in his letters and diary. In the sixteenth century, Bernal Díaz del Castillo stated that ‘it was like the enchantments they tell in the legend of Amadis’.[14] Such imagery persists in the romantic depictions that associate the tropical jungle with origin, transcendence and immensity.[15] At the turn of the twentieth century, when Von Martius’s story is set, within the context of European formal and informal colonialism and of the ‘rediscovery of America’ brought about by Latin American processes of nation building a century after independence,[16] a prolific production of textual representations of the tropics took place in both European and Latin American fiction from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to José Eustasio Rivera’s *The Vortex* (1924) and Rómulo Gallegos’s *Canaima* (1935). These work, as Charlotte Rogers explains, represent the jungle as the primitive other of European civilization, as ‘a timeless place, a “place devoid of history”’ (15) although, according to Lesley Wylie, texts such as Rivera’s and Gallegos’s used those tropes to counter rather than support the dominant relations of power between Europe and Latin America. In the same years, a similar process of othering of the tropical jungle was proposed by modernist Primitivism.

Among the tropes of colonialist discourse, I am particularly interested in the ‘ineffability’, which has defined the American territory from the early Conquerors until the early twentieth century. If Hernán Cortés declared that ‘There is no human language able to explain its [of indigenous culture] greatness and peculiarities’, the texts of the early twentieth-century *novela de la selva*, presented a jungle that ‘insistently overwhelms the traveller and his

ability either to comprehend or to describe the tropics'.[17] The ineffability prompted an 'imprecise language of "marvel" and "wonder"',[18] which is found both in the early chronicles and nineteenth-century documents and resonates with the aesthetic of the unrepresentable of the early twentieth-century texts as well as Alejo Carpentier's concepts of *Real Maravilloso* and American Baroque language.[19] By writing that it is not possible for him to verbalise what he sees, Von Martius is echoing the conceptual and linguistic impossibility that shaped the colonial encounters and subsequent representations of the tropics. In addition to a specific rhetoric of wonders, that 'impossibility' produced also very powerful strategies of appropriation. The linguistic and conceptual impasses engendered by the encounter with the new lands led to political strategies of naming and fictionalization. As Beatriz Pastor argued in her 1983 seminal study of the narrative discourses of the Conquest, the travellers encountered a reality that they 'were not able to conceive of' in real terms.[20] Referring to Columbus, Pastor explains how he did not 'discover', but rather 'identified' and 'verified' the geography, flora and fauna he had before him drawing on a set of textual sources,[21] thus fictionalizing the American lands and the very process of the 'Discovery'.[22] Von Martius's text re-enacts that linguistic impossibility, or sense of ineffability; however, the actions prompted by such impossibility in the two contexts are very different. In addition to reducing, deforming and fictionalizing the new realities, Columbus and the subsequent conquerors carried out political acts of naming. The linguistic act of naming has been a performative exercise of power that has shaped the imperialist venture. Since Columbus, naming has been an instrument for announcing territorial claims and taking possession. The political implications of naming have been underlined by several scholars: in Evelina Guzauskyte's synthesis, naming has been defined as an 'an act that first erases and negates (thus creating vast spaces of *terra nullius*) and then invents a new world based on mental constructs rather than the physical reality'[23] and as a manifestation of power. In Columbus's enterprise, naming was a 'political act of

appropriating and legitimizing as the names of places were inserted into what Greenblatt has called the European representational machinery'.[24] As Stephen Greenblatt explains, for Columbus, taking possession was a performance of a set of official and public linguistic acts: declaring, witnessing and recording.[25] Naming has been a crucial practice of dominance of both formal and informal colonialism. It was a way of appropriating not only territories but also nature more generally. Scientists were deeply implicated in European formal and informal colonialism as is evident by what has been called 'scientific colonialism' - 'a process whereby the centre of gravity for the acquisition of knowledge about the nation is located outside the nation itself'.[26] Whether coming or not from the formal colonial power, botanist expeditions mapped the South American regions before and after the regions' independence from Spain. In the seventeenth century, new human sciences ordered 'the varieties of humankind into a single natural hierarchy of difference and similarity'.[27] Anthropology, for example, developed with European colonization of the non-Western world, participated in the colonial organizational system[28] and reinforced the epistemological basis of imperialism.

Through the epigraph and the characters of the scientists, the film engages with the historical and political nexus between language, power and naming which has shaped the history of the encounter between the West and the non-West in the Americas. While Von Martius's words evoke the linguistic impossibility generated by the encounter with the 'discovered' territories, and the subsequent strategies of appropriation/fictionalization, the characters of the ethnographer and botanist evoke the role played by natural and human sciences in the identifying and cataloguing operations of colonialism. The film is critical about such a nexus and operations. *El abrazo* challenges the imperialist linguistic of domination by deploying a set of strategies which ultimately replace the politics of 'naming' with the politics of 'translating'. One strategy is the characterization of the scientists. Both scientists are not depicted carrying out taxonomic endeavours. They are not identifying, naming nor cataloguing

nature and people through their scientific work; instead, they are portrayed in a condition of lack. Theo lacks health and the necessary knowledge that might cure him. Similarly, Evan lacks knowledge about the *yakruna*. They both look for and need the help *and* knowledge of the indigenous Karamakate. The positioning of lacking is eloquent since lacking has been a key trope of colonialist and Eurocentric discourses; according to Shohat and Stam, lacking can be understood as 'the projection of the racially stigmatized as deficient in terms of European norms, as lacking in order, intelligence, sexual modesty, material civilization, even history'.[29] Paraphrasing what Teresa de Lauretis states about the subversion of gender roles in cultural production, the film positions the scientists outside (of, namely, power) by displacing them within it.[30] What is displaced here is the western scientists' agency. According to Wylie, in postcolonial writing about the tropics, the jungle is no longer a 'source of self-edification'[31] for the western traveller. In our case, the jungle is not even depicted as being an object of study of western science.

A second strategy is the centrality of the indigenous languages. *El abrazo* is spoken in several indigenous and western languages: the dominance of the colonial language (Spanish) is undermined by the presence of other western idioms such as Portuguese, English, German and Latin but especially by the utter primacy of indigenous languages (the film is spoken mostly in *cubeo*, *uitoto*, *ticuna*, *guanano*) over western ones. The use of language is crucial in films that deal with indigeneity. The representation of the voice is a cinematic mechanism that challenges Eurocentrism by producing a polycentric and multicultural approach.[32] Against both Columbus's denial of the indigenous voice and the depiction of 'a' dominant language, the very dichotomy authority/language is contested through the film's multilingualism. Furthermore, multilingualism is also part of the characterisation of the indigenous people. Manduca, for example, in addition to speaking Spanish and German and his own indigenous idiom, shows familiarity with other native languages when he addresses Karamakate for the

first time. While the multilingualism might have been a choice that responds to the search for verisimilitude, what is relevant is that it contributes to dismantle the colonialist positioning of knowledge and overturn the colonialist grammar of lacking. It is Theo who needs to speak the language of Karamakate and not the other way around. And it is Karamakate who establishes what language they must speak. Theo's knowledge of the native language does not show superiority nor is it associated with the exercise of dominance.

A third crucial strategy is the deconstruction of the conceptual and linguistic impossibility commented above. This is achieved through the character of Karamakate. Having been informed by Theo that members of his people, who he thought had all been killed by the white men, are still alive, Karamakate reluctantly agrees to take the scientists to them to find the *yakruna*.[33] Upon acceptance, he sets the rules that Theo must agree to:

> The jungle is fragile. If you attack her, she strikes back. She will only allow us to travel if we respect her. We must not eat meat or fish until the rains begin and we ask for permission to the Owners of Animals. We can't cut any tree from its root. If a woman is found, no intercourse until the change of moon. Do you accept?

These rules give us clues about the relationship between nature and human beings proposed in the film. The very setting of rules of behaviour implies an understanding of the jungle as an 'earth-being', borrowing the term from de la Cadena.[34] Unlike, and in opposition to, the European travellers and conquerors, Karamakate can 'conceptualise' the jungle, relate to it and even 'verbalise' it. The relationship between human and non-human beings is not one of dominance but one of respect: the jungle is a being which needs to be 'respected', is 'fragile'. Its 'fragility' challenges the Eurocentric representation of a nature that overwhelms, dominates and drives the rationale western man to madness. Furthermore, Karamakate verbalises its needs. His linguistic operation can be understood as an act of translation: he renders the non-verbal signs of the jungle into verbal signs; moreover, these are communicated to the westerner thus granting the latter access to the native world. While in Eurocentric representations the

Euro-American character acts as a mediating bridge, here it is the native character who serves as such. This film does not eliminate the 'otherness' of the tropical nature, rather, it deconstructs its colonialist attributes. In a way, Karamakate is translating for the sake of the European traveller the relationship between the indigenous subject and the territory, the sense of belonging to the land which is a defining feature of (the representation of) indigeneity. However, this belonging is not rendered through an exoticized, primitivist or aestheticised tellurism; instead, we are presented with a relationship made of respectful coexistence and awareness of the fragility of nature which speaks more to current ecological concerns and processes of rain forest exploitation than to imperialist discourses.

In this film, language might be understood as a 'contact zone', adapting Mary Louise Pratt's notion, rather than an instrument of power (as in colonialism): in other words, a site for 'cultural encounters, wherein power is negotiated and struggle occurs'.[35] Language(s) allow cultural encounters of different kinds, all involved with power relations and historical struggles. Within the film's story, language allows the encounter between the travellers and the natives, and the symbolic sharing of experience and knowledge that takes place; it also allows, as I have argued, a contact between the westerner and nature – through the mediation of Karamakate. But the notion of 'contact zone' applies also to the linguistic and cultural interactions that the making of the film entailed. The making of *El abrazo* involved a textual study of written sources on Amazonian cultures and an on field-research in the Amazonian communities. The latter, for which Guerra was helped by anthropologist Ignacio Prieto, proved to be crucial for the filmmaker's understanding of indigenous cultures and for establishing a dialogue with the communities – these were asked permission to shoot in their territories. What is interesting about this dialogue is not only the information gathered which fed the film script (in terms of cosmogony, mythology, history) but also the very encounter between people from different cultures and languages which lies at the heart of the film. Here, the 'racial politics of casting'

come into play.[36] Unlike other films on the tropics, the indigenous characters are played by non-professional actors from the regions where the film is shot. Although the film is a re-creation of a fictional world with no real names of nature and plants and sacred beings being used, the languages spoken are among the native languages of the Colombian Amazonian region. Since these languages are not written, the production crew used a translation technique which would not involve writing. They created a sort of 'indigenous dictionary' to be learned by the non-indigenous actors (Jan Bijvoet and Brionne Davies).[37] Hence, the film pre-production and shooting was dependent on native people's agency: the members of the indigenous communities granted permission to the crew, shared their history and culture which was reformulated and adapted in the script; the indigenous protagonists did not follow a written script, they translated ideas communicated by the filmmakers;[38] during the shooting, native people collaborated by manufacturing elements of the mise-en-scene such as clothing accessories.

Although a fictional film, *El abrazo* presents the 'intertextuality' that David MacDougall identifies as a key element of ethnographic filmmaking. MacDaugall's notion of intertextuality refers to the multiple voices that make the ethnographic plural cinema. As Charlotte Gleghorn points out, for MacDougall intertextuality has less to do with 'layers of citations', a notion coming from linguistics and literature, and more with what he calls 'repository of multiple authorship'.[39] In *El abrazo*, both notions are applicable, but it is this second notion that allows us to address aspects that, alongside others, challenge the dominant Eurocentric gaze. This second notion of intertexuality, coupled with the film's engagement with ethnography via ethnographic photographs, mise-en-scene and western characters, give the film the 'ethnographic feel' signalled by some reviewers. While this assessment might be easily contested – the film uses ethnography but could not be defined as an ethnographic work – I believe that the function of intertextuality is even more important since it undermines the

'heterogeneity' of this film.[40] Despite its heterogeneity, *El abrazo* does not fall into the incongruences or slippage that Franco identifies in the postmodern *indigenismo* of 20th-century films, as I will argue in the next sections.

Decolonial encounters

The above-mentioned displacement of the grammar of lacking is part of a broader displacement of the positioning of knowledge. There are two episodes in which *El abrazo* operates such a dislocation while also challenging the Eurocentric paternalism implied in both the idea of the good savage and primitivism. The first episode depicts the encounter between the indigenous subjects and western technology - photography - an encounter that is problematic in its very nature since it inevitably recalls the material and symbolic signs of western civilization and the hierarchies embedded in the history of colonialism and early anthropology. When the young Karamakate sees his image on Theo's photographic plate, his first reaction is of keeping it as it is 'him'. However, after Theo explains that it is an image, Karamakate is not portrayed as either speechless or surprised, that is, as one lacking the necessary knowledge to understand what is before him. Maintaining the same fierce bodily expression that he has throughout the film, Karamakate performs another act of translation, understanding the latter in its broad meaning of transposition of one set of signs into another and as an act of cultural rendition. Karamakate 'interprets' western technology and translates it to his own language and cosmogony. He reads the photograph as a *chullachaki*, an empty human being. This act of cultural translation undermines the 'primitiveness' of the native and deconstructs the colonialist belief in the superiority of western knowledge/technology. Furthermore, it challenges the hierarchies embedded in the ethnographic encounter. The asymmetrical relationship of anthropologist and native subject as 'observer' and 'observed' is replaced by an intersubjective communication between two interlocutors, which undermines

the 'otherness' of the native constructed, as Johannes Fabian has demonstrated, in the anthropological accounts.[41] Although the natives in the film are depicted as historically oppressed by the white men, Karamakate is not represented as a subaltern figure, but rather as one able to counter the above-mentioned idea of superiority with indigenous mythologies and beliefs. The native shaman symbolises a whole civilization which is represented equally, if not more complex and richer, than western civilization.

The use of the *chullachaki* myth has further implications. For one thing, it is an example of the film's adaptation and reformulation of existing practices and myths which enable Guerra to construct a fictional yet convincing depiction of indigenous culture. In that sense, it is important to note that no real names of plants and other earth-beings considered sacred by the native communities are employed in the film. Such a decision is an example of the film's 'rigour' and 'intercultural respect' in approaching native cultures, one form of respect that, it has been noted, is often absent from western films about native people. These two notions are evidence of how the film addresses the ethical issues and responsibility at stake in artistic practices that involve minorities and how the film's 'intervention' in the life of local communities has not been disruptive.

It is precisely such rigour and cultural awareness that allow the film to mix heterogenous native cultural material without incurring the risk of creating fake 'instant Indians'.[42] In fact, the *chullachaki* myth does not come from Colombian Amazonian cultures. The quechua word ['of uneven foot'] refers to a myth of the cosmogony of Michiguenga people in the Peruvian Amazon. The *chullachaki* is a mythical figure feared by people, able to transform into different creatures and to deceive. The transformational element is reformulated in the film as an 'empty body'. This figure is given an allegorical meaning in the story. The old Karamakate declares that he has become a *chullachaki* since he hast lost his knowledge and, hence, his identity. In this way, Guerra speaks to the current loss of traditional culture felt by

some native communities' members before the changes brought about by the contact with the outer world.[43]

The second episode in which Eurocentric primitivism is challenged is more explicit. During their journey, Karamakate, Manduca and Theo receive hospitality from a local native community, whom Theo knows already. Once the three set out to leave, Theo realises that the natives have kept his compass. He accuses them of stealing it and tries to get it back but is stopped by Manduca and eventually agrees to leave. Through the subsequent dialogue between the ethnographer and Karamakate, we understand that Theo's concern was not the loss of the instrument but rather the loss of the native ancient knowledge that the use of the foreign technology would entail. When Theo tells this to Karamakate, the latter contends the scientist's paternalism stating that he cannot prevent them from learning and that white men do not possess the monopoly of knowledge. This scene mobilizes ideologies and identifications. The western spectator identifies with Theo, his misinterpretation of the act of exchange/stealing and his genuine concern with the natives' 'authenticity'. However, all these ideas are shattered by Karamakate's words, which disclose ethnographic paternalism and challenge the very notion of monopoly of knowledge just as they do with that of the monopoly of language. But, more importantly, Karamakate's words are also a critique of essentialist notions of indigeneity which freeze indigenous cultures in the past and its preservation, and of the 'salvage idiom [that] attempted to repress signs of change' in those cultures drawing, as Gleghorn explains referencing Faye Ginsburg, on the idea that 'values originating elsewhere are polluting of some reified notion of culture and innocence'.[44]

The reflections triggered by these episodes encourage us to think of this film as an instrument, not of rhetorical inquiry, as Christopher Carter argues in relation to other films critical of colonialism, but of cultural, political and even ethical inquiry.[45] An inquiry that is not limited to the past but that concerns the present too. This aspect, while arguably increasing

the film's ideological appeal to a global audience, distances it from the films and the MOMA exhibitions discussed by Franco as well as from other more recent and thought-provoking contemporary artistic productions. A relevant example is the interesting work of Colombian artist Alberto Baraya. In his *Herbario de plantas artificiales*, an in-progress project started in 2000, Baraya uses his installations made of artificial plants and flowers to perform a critique of scientific expeditions' colonizing enterprise in the Americas. He transfers scientific methodology to the art domain; he collects, catalogues, archives, analyses and displays artificial plants producing alternative taxonomies that invert the binary fiction-truthfulness.[46] His 'alternative interpretation of scientific discourses' aims to undermine the equation science-truth: 'By picking up…plastic flowers on the street, I behave like the scientists that Western education expects us to become […]. By changing the goals of this […] task I resist this "destiny"'.[47] Baraya's work can certainly be seen as an act of resistance, however, we might ask what enquiries into the present it prompts and what current identities, hegemonies and representations it mobilises.

In addition to the above mentioned fictional encounters charged with symbolic meanings, the film also depicts discrete historical encounters between the native Amazonians and the white men, shaped by massacres and abuses. *El abrazo* refers to two specific events of western exploitation: the missionary forced evangelization and the atrocities of the rubber trade. On their way to the Cohiuano people, Theo, Karamakate and Manduca make a stop at the capuchin Mission of Anthony of Padua in the Vaupés region. In the film, the mission is situated in the former rubber station of *La Chorrera*. This episode relates to the historical religious and political role played by the missions in the colonization of the Amazonian territories, a process that was undergoing a revival at the turn of the nineteenth century. As Amada Carolina Pérez explains, since the mid1800s, the increase of missions was promoted by the expansionist aims of both the Vatican and the recently established Colombian State.

With the rise of global capitalism and need for primary goods, new missions received state funding in line with the 1887 concordat.[48] The aim of the missions was to 'civilise the savages and convert them in sons of God and of the homeland' while taking care of the national borders.[49] In *El abrazo*, the character of the friar embodies the missionary repertoire of themes and discourses as they have reached us through official reports. As Pérez points out, the friars' representation of indigeneity was shaped – not surprisingly - by a dichotomy between civilized society and indigenous savagery. Among the motives that justified missionary labour were 'bringing out of the shadows, of barbarism and primitive life' the indigenous subjects. The latter would be reincorporated to civilian life and even to their territories once educated, however they would no longer own their lands, but rather become part of a subaltern workforce; their 'normalization' entailed the 'disarticulation' of their social structure and culture. According to the reports, the rehabilitation of a race would be best carried out through the control over childhood with a view to creating a 'new generation'.[50]

This repertoire is re-enacted in the film. On the one hand, the episode fulfils an informative function by offering a convincing depiction of the missions' endeavour in the Amazon. Historical truth is particularly relevant in films that deal with indigeneity and exploitation, which are invested more than others with truth claims and audience expectations. The episode also fills significant narrative gaps: it provides the spectator with a visual explanation for Manduca's scars and an elucidation regarding Karamakate's childhood. However, its function goes well beyond this, serving as it does to stage and subvert asymmetrical relations between the oppressed and their oppressors. The subversion is articulated through the characters of Karamakate and Manduca. When the friar states that the mission's aim is saving the souls of those kids made orphans by the rubber war and rescuing them from 'cannibalism and ignorance', Karamakate, in a highly symbolically gesture, stands up and leaves the table. The camera foregrounds his rejection of the Eurocentric civilizing

discourse by framing his fierce body language and following him through the path that conducts outside. Once there, he carries out an action of deculturalization. He speaks to a group of children in their language, tells them about their origins and ancestors, and teaches them the names and functions of the plants as well as native rituals and mythology connected to those. He also reveals that he has suffered from similar experiences. This sequence displays several issues. Karamakate opposes the act of naming entailed in the botanist work. He 'erases' the colonial names replacing them with the native ones; he also restores the original function of the plants. His action of deculturalization opposes the forced acculturation practised by the missionaries. Indeed, the film addresses the issue of cross-cultural interaction from the start. When they meet, Karamakate accuses Manduca and his people of surrendering to the whites; later, he accuses him of being a 'caboclo' having lost his culture and serving the oppressor.[51] These indigenous characters might seem to embody, rather schematically, two different approaches to cultural contact. In Karamakate's view, Manduca is a traitor of his original culture. Instead, Karamakate would embody indigenous resistance to cultural, political and economic subjugation. He embodies indigenous resistance when he tells the children in the mission: 'never forget who you are or where you come from' and 'do not let our song fade away.'[52] However, the film's ideology is not as simplistic as it might seem. Firstly, the character of Karamakate is more nuanced as I have argued above. Perhaps in a contradictory way, he embodies both culture preservation and the defence of the right for indigenous people to incorporate change. After hearing the missionary abusively punishing the group of children, Manduca too carries out an act of resistance/rebellion by hitting the capuchin. He and Karamakate freed the children; however, since they need to continue their journey and the children might be killed by their peers loyal to the friar, Karamakate encourages them to escape. While this seems an act of liberation from oppression, the spectator knows that the children will most probably die since they are left alone in the jungle without their traditional knowledge

or know-how; the awareness of the kids' inevitable fate is rendered visually by the hesitance of the three characters. Hence, and secondly, the film offers no easy solutions of decolonization, but instead exposes a problem, namely how difficult it might be to deal with processes of deculturation, acculturation, transculturation and culture preservation.

It is not by chance that the place of the mission is *La Chorrera*. *La Chorrera*, nowadays a town in the Amazonas department, was an important rubber station at the turn of the century. Roger Casement's *Amazon Journal* devotes a chapter to it. As it is now well-known, the rubber trade in the Amazon was built on extremely violent abuse, torture and violations of the native population. The main rubber company in the region was the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company (later re-named Peruvian Amazon Company), which operated in the area of the Putumayo river in the Colombian southern borders, where *La Chorrera* was. The company was directed by the Peruvian Julio César Arana with a British Board of Directors. The north American W.E. Hardenburg was among the first people to denounce the abuses he witnessed. His accusations eventually led the British Government to send a Commission of Inquiry captained by Roger Casement to investigate the abuses in 1910. The company was subsequently closed in 1913. The film's cinematography highlights the link between *La Chorrera* and the rubber exploitation: when the canoe reaches the area, a shot of a plaque alerts us to the historical significance of the place. The plaque reads: 'in recognition of the Colombian rubber pioneers who brought civilization to the land of cannibal savages and showed them the path of God and his holy church. Rafael Reyes. President of Colombia, August of 1907'. The denunciation of the rubber industry's atrocities is also articulated through the character of a rubber victim who, having been mutilated in most of his body, implores Manduca to shoot him, which the latter eventually does. The plaques and the mutilated indigenous body are, according to Pedro Adrian Zuluaga, alongside the marked rubber trees and the other scarred indigenous

bodies, example of how the jungle is not depicted as a nature deprived of history, but rather as a nature which has been 'intervened, written and re-written'.[53]

Although *El abrazo* does engage with what Franco calls the 'ghostly recapitulation of the history of the Amazon itself',[54] it achieves an historically rigorous representation of the past through historiographic accuracy, a *mise-en-scene* that recreates realistically the original settings, the actors' performance and a serious and well-informed script.[55] Moreover, it overcomes the risk of getting trapped in the denunciation of past exploitation and not inviting further inquiry into the present. An example of this is the link between *cauchería* and the character of Evan. The botanist's search for the *yakruna* is motivated less by what he claims to be his impossibility to dream and more by the American government's interest in the use of plant's properties for war equipment. This plot element refers to the second rubber boom in the Amazon that took place during WWII. During the war, because of Japan's invasion of Malaysia, where most of rubber plantations were by that time, the rubber industry returned to the exploitation of the Amazon basin. Thus, the film expands the web of political actors involved in the exploitation of the Amazonian rainforest inducing a reflection on the geopolitical role of the region which extends to the present-day.

Intercultural dialogue

The episodes that I have just discussed show how *El abrazo* stages postcolonial and (neo)colonial encounters that 'decolonize the categories of Indian and native'.[56] The characterization of the young Karamakate deconstructs the colonialist narrative of native people as inferior, lacking, backward, savages. Similarly, the characterisation of the western traveller/scientist undermines the imperial images of the foreigner as master-of-land, explorer

or cataloguer. The relationship between Karamakate and Theo can be read as an example of a reverse ethnography, in which the native no longer holds the position of the object of study but that of the subject; here, the native possesses knowledge and all those attributes denied by imperialist discourses. Moreover, their relationship undermines the 'denial of coevalness' that, according to Fabian, has traditionally delineated anthropology's 'allochronic' discourse.[57] While anthropological 'objectifying' discourse has relegated the native 'others' to a previous, static and anachronistic time, portraying them as objects of observation, Karamakate, as stated above, is an interlocutor within a dialogical relationship; furthermore, the film's focus on the encounter between the ethnographer and the native subject, rather than on the ethnographer's account of such encounter, results in a depiction of the two subjects as existing simultaneously, as 'coeval'.

In this film, the natives are not the objects of either study or spectacle. The latter, if applicable, concerns the western explorer. In the already mentioned episode with the native community, Theo and Manduca are framed as figures of entertainment for the natives: they dance and sing provoking their laughter. Despite this scene, however, I contend that the overall narrative does not operate a 'reverse orientalism' nor a 'victimology' which identifies Europe as the source of all evils.[58] The western subject and western culture are criticised but not ridiculed. Both the young and the old Karamakate critique the concept of possession and private property of the westerners, for example. In both stories, Karamakate accuses the scientist of bringing unnecessary luggage. The old Karamakate even throws some of it away. However, in both stories this critique is juxtaposed to acts of culture contact and dialogue. In the first story, Theo's explanation of his material as the archive of knowledge and memory is not rejected by Karamakate. In the second story, the shaman does not throw away Evan's treasured gramophone. Furthermore, the scene with the gramophone – although echoing previous cinematic representations – is also another example of the cultural translation carried out by

Karamakate to allow a contact between two distant worldviews. Karamakate uses Evan's knowledge and sensibility towards music to teach him about dreams.

The relation between native and western worlds that the film seems to advocate for, is one of coexistence and interaction of forms of knowledge. Although *El abrazo* engages very critically with colonialist and neo-colonialist intervention in the Colombian Amazon, the film speaks more to an intercultural dialogue between culture than to (only) the vindication of an oppressed culture. The dialogical dimension is expressed both at plot and form level. Regarding the former, the film finale is eloquent. When the old Karamakate and Evan reach the *Cerros de Mavecure* they find that only one *yakruna* has survived and Karamakate appears recovering his memory and knowledge. While in his youth he had decided to destroy the *yakruna* to avoid further exploitation of his land by the whites, now his decision is to transfer his knowledge to Evan. In a symbolic scene, the shaman prepares the *caapi* and gives it to Evan, who enters in a hallucinatory state of trance. Within the story, this is the moment in which Evan receives the 'embrace of the serpent' that gives the film its title. The 'serpent' is the fictionalization of the anaconda of an Amazonian creation myth, which is explained by Karamakate and is at the core of the film's story. According to Amazonian cosmology, the anaconda descended from the Milky Way to create the human beings; it then transformed into rivers and left the plants as presents for the humans. Through the sacred plants, human beings can communicate with the 'original beings'; when this communication takes place, the serpent descends again and embraces the man.[59] Thus, the final 'embrace' symbolises the reception of the native knowledge by the westerner and, hence, the cultural cross-pollination. Evan's mental journey/spiritual experience is rendered through the psychedelic visual language which also evokes a historical interaction: the use of indigenous plants by the Beat Generation, the psychedelic movement and the 1960s counter-culture, as the filmmaker has declared.

In terms of form, this dialogic dimension is rendered through multiple points of focalization. In the pre-title sequence, the camera positions the spectator in three key places thus constructing a tripartite gaze. First, we are placed at the river level, *within* the jungle. Second, we are placed behind Karamakate, seeing what he sees. Third, we are placed on the canoe, with (although we do not know it yet) the western ethnographer and his westernized native guide. The second and third camera positionings show what I have called the dialogic dimension of the film. However, it is important to stress that while both focalizations are present, the indigenous point of view is dominant in the narrative: this is achieved through the enactment of a 'performative' indigenous voice,[60] the centrality of the native (language, characters, cosmogony and nature) at plot and composition level and the overall ideology of condemnation of colonialism and deconstruction of Eurocentric discourses.

The third focalization signals the role of Amazonian nature in the film. The spectator is immersed in the jungle even before its appearance on screen. Sound and cinematography challenge the dichotomy 'here' and 'there' that has defined visual and textual images of the jungle. Such a binary is also undermined by the positioning of the western traveller. Both Theo and Evan already live in the jungle; they are familiar with it; they speak the native languages and even know, partially, the territory. In this way, the film does not allow easy identifications and complicates the motif of the Euro-American character as a mediating bridge between the western audience and the indigenous characters.

In her study on the visual depictions of tropicality, Nancy Leys Stepan describes how the tropics have been constructed in the western imagery as 'places of untamed nature, a nature pregnant with meaning, awaiting discovery, interpretation or exploitation' often characterised by the 'immensity of nature', 'transcendence' and as a 'primitive world'.[61] While what I have argued so far would lead one to think that the film challenges these graphic traits, in fact the film does not. If *El abrazo* deconstructs many tropes of Eurocentric tropicality – the ineffability

and the savagery of inhabitant/jungle, the link between the jungle, cannibalism and femininity, the jungle as a source for the western traveller's self-edification[62] – others are not subverted. One example is the aesthetics of the sublime, which is re-formulated not only in the already discussed epigraph but also through the film's visual language. The extreme long shots and long shots of the canoe navigating the river and of the imposing *Cerros de Mavecure*, the aerial shots of the tropical vegetation as well as Karamakate's explanation of the multiplicity of borders of the river, all configure a landscape of enormousness, limitlessness, extraordinariness, and grandeur. Furthermore, Joseph Haydn's *The Creation* played on Evan's gramophone evokes the meanings of origin and transcendence associated with the rainforest landscape. This meaning is also reinforced through the above-mentioned myth of the anaconda. Yet, I would argue that this is not the dominant visual regime within the film. For the most part, in fact, the jungle is a territory in which the human subjects (indigenous and non-indigenous) move, which they inhabit, travel through, and know. The camera work of long and medium shots renders a sense of adaptation and mediation between the human and the natural rather than one of (physical, conceptual and linguistic) impossibility. More controversial is the fact that these apparent contradictions are complicated by the paratextual narrative that has been elaborated around this film. The film's making-of, the director's and crew's interviews and the *Caracol Television*'s documentary (cited at the beginning of this essay) have narrativized the film shooting as a 'magical' and 'different' experience thus problematically re-enacting the kind of exoticizing primitivism that the film intends – and indeed achieves – to deconstruct.

Another problematic aspect of the film is the notion of indigeneity at play and the link between indigeneity and the past. As cultural anthropology and indigenous practices have demonstrated in recent years, indigeneity has always been a 'complex emergence',[63] 'a set of relationships; […] not a fixed state of being';[64] but the extent to which *El abrazo* confronts the

diversity of indigenous societies and challenges essentialist notions is difficult to evaluate. While I have argued that the film stages different, even contradictory, postures regarding cultural contact, which account for the heterogeneity of indigeneity, it might also be argued that indigenous people are still 'bounded by place and anachronistic'[65] or, at the very least, linked to the past. Moreover, that the topic of 'loss' symbolised by the old Karamkate evokes a notion of 'authenticity' which is being contested by current indigenous agents. The very placing of a story about indigenous people in the past has been questioned by various scholars in relation to different films.[66] In *El abrazo*, the use of the B&W would seem to further distance the story from the present. However, I contend that this device, by distancing the visualization of the jungle from the audience's imagery of contemporary Amazon, while certainly risks to essentialise indigenous culture, in fact expands the realities with which its representation might resonate.

Conclusion

In her study on the cinematic representation of native Americans, Michelle H. Raheja discusses how indigenous filmmaking might be beneficial for real indigenous communities. One aspect stressed by the scholar is that the on-screen existence of native subjects bestows 'visibility' on silenced voices and 'flag[s] a broader offscreen reality'.[67] Since films are representational practices that do not 'mirror reality but can enact important cultural work as […] art form[s] with ties to the world of everyday practices and the imaginative sphere of the possible',[68] it is crucial to assess what ideologies are mobilized by such visibility. Despite its problematic aspects, *El abrazo* succeeds in foregrounding indigenous points of view and 'points of hearing'[69] challenging Eurocentric and colonialist politics of recognition and proposing a multicultural cinematic approach and a dialogic/intercultural proposal of cultural contact. While the film works with notions of indigeneity that only partially reflect the heterogenous

dynamics and reality of indigenous cultures, it does challenge universal regimes of truth and power,[70] 'reject[ing] the evolutionary epistemology that Universal History ha[s] popularized;[71] it undoes 'evolutionary viewpoints and recover[s] the historical local distinctiveness of marginalized groups'.[72] Even if such historical local distinctiveness is marked by the whites' exploitation and the film could certainly be more audacious politically, it still offers a counter-hegemonic rewriting of encounters and a deconstruction of hegemonic representations.

El abrazo operates what Raheja calls 'public pedagogy'.[73] As demonstrated by Guerra's statements, the film aims quite overtly to fill the lacunae in the 'historical consciousness of the nation'[74] and to challenge dominant historiographies and traditional sites of indigenous agency both in the political and cinematic arenas. The pedagogical fashion that shapes his endeavour has been criticised by film critics such as Zuluaga for it produces an 'enumeration' of the issues that the audience should know.[75] Yet again I would argue that its pedagogical aspect does not prevent the film from, as Zuluaga himself claims, 'ask[ing] questions as well as offering answers'[76] and prompting inquiries into the past *and* into the present. *El abraz*o's imagined 'Indians' 're-author themselves through the power of the word which […] is the power to name and change the world'[77] thus re-enacting in the fictional realm the achievements of real indigenous social activism which this quote addresses.

By way of conclusion, I would like to argue that *El abrazo* operates a cinematic 'cultural translation'. This concept usually refers to 'the ways in which cultures are transported, transmitted, reinterpreted and realigned through local language' and to 'the realities of how individuals on both sides experience and interpret such encounters in the "contact zones" between different cultures'.[78] With cultural translation, I refer to the ways in which the film aims to mediate between different cultures, render cinematically the indigenous culture and position itself as a contact zone where an encounter between cultures marked by historical unequal power positions takes place. Resonating with Homi Bhabha's reflection, translation

here is less about languages and more about (other) cultural signs. Indeed, native languages are not translated into western ones (except for the subtitles). *El abrazo* locates itself as site of mediation in different ways. It represents a 'foreign' culture without domesticating it for the western audience. At the same time though, the film offers a 'comforting' rendering of otherness since western audiences are not challenged through film experimentalism; rather, they are comforted by a film aesthetics that employs art-house elements, but is in no way disruptive. Moreover, cultural translation is not here a discourse of power and appropriation as it has been in anthropology. We might understand it is an engaged and rigorous process of making a film about 'the other', a film which does not reproduce oppressive interventions and instead challenges the ways in which otherness has been historically constructed; which ultimately proposes a particular kind of 'intercultural cinema' – adapting Laura Marks' definition[79] – one which is informed by and stages an interaction between different cultural regimes of knowledge, and manages to do so from its western site of enunciation.

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[1] King John, López Ana M, Alvarado Manuel (eds), *Mediating Two Worlds. Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, London: BFI Publishing, 1993.

[2] Franco, Jean, 'High-tech Primitivism. The representation of Tribal Societies in Feature Films' in *Mediating Two Worlds. Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, J King, A M López, M Alvarado (eds), London: BFI Publishing, 1993, pp 81-94, p 82.

[3] Franco, 'High-tech Primitivism. The representation of Tribal Societies in Feature Films', p 83.

[4] Gilbert Helen, Gleghorn Charlotte (eds), *Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas*. London: Institute for Advanced Study, 2014, p 4.

[5] De la Cadena, Marisol, 'Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond "Politics"', *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(2), 2010, pp 334-370, p 336.

[6] De la Cadena, Marisol, Starn, Orin (eds), *Indigenous Experience Today*, Oxford & NY: Berg, 2007, p 3.

[7] Gleghorn, Charlotte, 'Indigenous Filmmaking in Latin America', in *A Companion to Latin American Cinema*, M Delgado, S Hart, R. Johnson (eds), Hoboken NJ: John Wylie & Sons, 2017, pp 167-186, p 167.

[8] In the description of an exhibition of indigenous art from Australia at Harvard Art Museums in 2016 for example, we read that: ‘Indigenous art is no longer positioned as “other,” but as another form of contemporary art that demands our critical attention. This exhibition presents an opportunity to introduce audiences to the central role that Indigenous art plays in the global narrative of contemporary art.’
[9] This exhibition was held at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York.
[10] Halle, Randall, ‘Offering Tales They Want to Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism’, in *Global art cinema: new theories and histories*, R Galt, K Schoonover (eds), NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp 303-319.
[11] See the documenatary ‘*El abrazo de la serpiente*: una historia para el mundo’, Bogotá: Caracol Televisión, 2016. This and all translations are mine unless otherwise noted. The quotes from the film are from the English subtitles included in the DVD *Embrace of the Serpent*, (2015) [DVD] Colombia: Ciudad Lunar, Peccadillo Pictures, Caracol Televisión.
[12] Karamakate’s position re-enacts the pose of an indigenous subject from one of the early 20th-century photographs shown during the end credits.
[13] See, for example, Hulme, Peter, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the Native Caribbean. 1492-1797*, London & New Yor, Methuen, 1986.
[14] Quoted in Greenblatt, Stephen, *Marvelous Possessions: the Wonder of the New World*, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, p 132.
[15] Stepan, Nancy, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, London: Reaktion Books, 2001.
[16] Wylie Lesley, *Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks. Rewriting the Tropics in the novela de la selva*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2009.
[17] Wylie, *Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks*, p 9.
[18] Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*.
[19] Carpentier, Alejo, *El reino de este mundo*, Mexico DF: Iberoamericana de publicaciones, 1949.
[20] Pastor, Beatriz, *Discursos narrativos de la conquista: Mitificación y emergencia.* Hanover: Ediciones del Norte, 1988, p 26.
[21] On the topic of the ‘invention of Latin America, see also O’Gorman Edmundo, *The Invention of America*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961.
[22] Among the sources used by Columbus to construct his narrative discourse about the ‘new’ territories were: Pierre d’Ailly’s *Imago Mundi*, Pliny’s *Historia Natural*, Eneas Silvio’s *Historia Rerum Ubique Gestarum* and a Latin version of 1485 Marco Polo’s *The Travels*.
[23] Guzauskyte, Evelina, *Christopher Columbus's Naming in the 'diarios' of the Four Voyages* (1492-1504), Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014, p 4.
[24] Guzauskyte, *Christopher Columbus's Naming in the 'diarios' of the Four Voyages* (1492-1504), p 4.
[25] Greenblatt, Stephen, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, p 57.
[26] Johan Galtung (1967) quoted in Lewis, Diane, ‘Anthropology and Colonialism’, *Current Anthropology*, 14(5), 1973, pp 581-602, p 584.
[27] Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, p 6.
[28] Lewis, ‘Anthropology and Colonialism’, p 582.
[29] Shohat Ella, Stam Robert, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*. NY: Routledge, 1994, p 23.
[30] De Lauretis, Teresa, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
[31] Wylie, *Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks*, p 9.
[32] Shohat, Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, pp 214-215.
[33] The full exchange is ‘Can the plant cure me?’/ ‘Do my people still exist?’

[34] See De la Cadena, 'Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond "Politics"'.
[35] Pratt, Mary Louise, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession*, 1991, pp 33-40, p 34.
[36] Shohat, Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, pp 189-190.
[37] Antonio Bolívar Salvador Yangiama (who plays the old Karamakate) played a crucial role in the translation and rewriting of the screenplay. He was the translator of the crew and taught the native languages to the foreign actors. See also http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/cultura/el-diccionario-de-lenguas-no-escritas-articulo-618566
[38] See http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/cultura/el-diccionario-de-lenguas-no-escritas-articulo-618566
[39] Quoted in Gleghorn, 'Indigenous Filmmaking in Latin America', p 182.
[40] See Cornejo Polar, Antonio, *Writing in the Air: Heterogeneity and the Persistence of Oral Tradition in Andean Literatures*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.
[41] See Fabian, Johannes, *Time and the Other*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
[42] See Bataille Gretchen, Silet Charles, 'The Entertaining Anachronism: Indians in American Film', in *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*, Miller R (ed), Englewood, NJ: Jerome S. Ozer, 1980.
[43] See Guerra's interview at http://screenprism.com/insights/article/in-embrace-of-the-serpent-what-is-the-concept-of-the-chullachaqui
[44] Gleghorn, 'Indigenous Filmmaking in Latin America', p 167.
[45] Carter, Christopher, 'Material Correspondences in Icíar Bollaín's *Even the Rain*: Ambiguities of Substance', *KB Journal*, 11(2), 2016, w/p, available at http://www.kbjournal.org/carter (accessed on 15th May 2017).
[46] Ardila, Oscar M, *La imposibilidad de la naturaleza. Arte y naturaleza en el arte colombiano*, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá 95.
[47] Quoted in Roca, José, 'Alberto Baraya. Colombia, botany and classification; fake flowers and post-colonialism', available at https://frieze.com/article/alberto-baraya
[48] Amada Carolina Pérez Benavides, 'Fotografía y misiones Los informes de misión como performance civilizatorio', *Maguaré* 30 (1), 2016, pp 103-139, p 107.
[49] Pérez Benavides, 'Fotografía y misiones. Los informes de misión como performance civilizatorio', p 108.
[50] Pérez Benavides, 'Fotografía y misiones. Los informes de misión como performance civilizatorio', p 110.
[51] In Brazil, a 'Caboclo' is a person of mixed white and indigenous ancestry. The term refers also to culturally assimilated native subjects.
[52] These words return in the end credits when we read that the film is dedicated to the people 'whose song we will not know'.
[53] Zuluaga, Pedro A, 'El abrazo de la serpiente, de Ciro Guerra: el texto de la selva', available at http://pajareradelmedio.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/el-abrazo-de-la-serpiente-de-ciro.html
[54] Franco, 'High-tech Primitivism. The representation of Tribal Societies in Feature Films', p 85.
[55] The film presents chronological and geographical inconsistencies, yet I maintain that they do not undermine the historiographic value of the fiction told.
[56] De la Cadena, Starn (eds), *Indigenous Experience Today*, p 11.
[57] See Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
[58] Shohat, Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, p 3.
[59] This is explained by the director Ciro Guerra in an interview. See http://www.aarp.org/espanol/entretenimiento/expertos/anne-hoyt/info-2016/ciro-guerra-director-el-abrazo-de-la-serpiente-oscar-2016.1.html

[60] See Clifford, 'Varieties of Indigenous Experience: Diasporas, Homelands, Sovereignities', p 198.
[61] Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, p 6.
[62] Wylie, *Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks*, p 9.
[63] Clifford, James, 'Varieties of Indigenous Experience: Diasporas, Homelands, Sovereignities', in *Indigenous Experience Today*, De la Cadena, Starn (eds), pp 197-224, p 198.
[64] De la Cadena, Starn (eds), *Indigenous Experience Today*, p 11.
[65] Gleghorn, 'Indigenous Filmmaking in Latin America', p 167.
[66] See, for example, Franco and Shohat, Stam.
[67] Raheja, Michelle H, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty and Representations of Native Americans in Film*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010, p xiii.
[68] Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*, p xiii.
[69] Shohat, Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media.*
[70] Shohat, Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media.*
[71] De la Cadena, Starn (eds), *Indigenous Experience Today*, p 6.
[72] Clifford, J, 'Varieties of Indigenous Experience: Diasporas, Homelands, Sovereignties', *Indigenous Experience Today*, De la Cadena M, Starn O, Oxford & NY: Berg, pp 197-224.
[73] Raheja, Michelle H, '"Will making movies do the sheep any good?" The afterlife of Native American images', in *Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas*, Gilbert H, Gleghorn C (eds), p 20.
[74] Luna, Ilana D, 'También la lluvia: Of coproductions and re-encounters, a re-vision of the colonial', in *Colonial Itineraries of Contemporary Mexico: Literary and Cultural Inquiries*, Estrada O, Nogar Anna (eds), Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014, pp 190-210, p 192.
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