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Author

Stear, Ezequiel

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Bribes, Refusals, and a Grammar of Exploitation in *También la lluvia* and *La carga*

EZEKIEL STEAR
AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Abstract

This comparative analysis of the films *También la lluvia* (dir. Icíar Bolláin, 2010) and *La carga* (dir. Alan Jonsson Gavica, 2015), examines power dynamics, transactions, and role of bribes in indigenista films set in Latin America. The central argument is that cinematic portrayals of bribes offered to Indigenous characters in these films reveal a grammar of exploitation residual from colonial discourses from the early modern era. I examine the exploitation inherent in verbal negotiations preceding monetary transactions in these films, drawing on Enrique Dussel's work on the Spanish invasion. By scrutinizing the economic implications of production and distribution, the article questions the transnational film industry's influence on cultural representations and the perpetuation of regional stereotypes. The examination extends to the commodification of Indigenous characters, emphasizing how historical fiction constructs simplify complex histories into marketable, interchangeable figures. The "great man" paradigm further simplifies narratives, allowing filmmakers to offer what appears as a decolonial experience while masking the continuation of profiteering practices. This article offers insights into the understudied linguistic foundations of filmic depictions of bribes in colonial settings. The analysis also underscores the need for a critical examination of the film industry's role in perpetuating exploitative practices. By exposing the transference of colonial guilt onto audiences, my argument prompts a reevaluation of the industry's ethical responsibilities in representing Indigenous struggles and dismantling systems of cultural and aesthetic exploitation.

Keywords: *También la lluvia*, *La carga*, Indigenista film, Bribes, Transnational Film Industry

Cinematic bribes put into sharp focus power relationships in language and visual representations. As *También la lluvia* (dir. Icíar Bolláin, 2010) approaches its climax, two film directors meet with a jailer in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and offer him cash, off-the-record, to temporarily release their lead actor. *También la lluvia* presents a meta-filmic world where Spanish director Costa (Luis Tosar) and Mexican co-director Sebastián (Gael García Bernal) travel to Bolivia to make a film on Columbus's 1492 arrival in the Caribbean. With the bribe, they wish to have access to Daniel (Juan Carlos Aduviri), who plays Hatuey, the Taino who led armed resistance against Spanish colonizers. The directors recognize Daniel as crucial to their documentary film. Yet both know he has more significant concerns as a community leader in protests against the privatization of water in Cochabamba. The film recalls the "Water Wars" in 2000, when Cochabamba sold the city's water distribution rights to Bechtel, Inc., a US-UK conglomerate that imposed astronomical water rates, causing public outrage.¹ As multiple Western

agents vie to use him for their gain, Daniel emblemizes struggles against Spanish colonialism and modern corporate imperialism.

The film *La carga* (dir. Alan Jonsson Gavica, 2015) also depicts clandestine payments amidst colonial conflicts. Set in New Spain circa 1550, the film revolves around Elisa de Ibarra (María Valverde), a Spanish widow who abandons her corrupt father to support Francisco Tenamaztle (Tenoch Huerta), a Cuzcan nobleman on trial for resisting Spanish invaders during the Mixton Wars.² She journeys from Zacatecas to the Veracruz coast to sail for the royal tribunal at Valladolid, Spain, where she will testify in favor of Tenamaztle. Along the way, Elisa develops a bond with Painalli (Horacio García-Rojas), the Nahua porter (*tameme*) who carries her on his back.³

Comparing these films brings to light their intersections between economic transactions, colonizing projects, and visual representations. These films highlight continuities between Spanish colonialism and exploitative economics inherent in coloniality, which persist across time and nation-state borders.⁴ In *También la lluvia*, Costa uses unofficial payments as an attempt to influence Daniel's actions. In *La carga*, a clergyman offers Painalli a payment for cooperation, and Elisa's father offers her a comfortable life married to the *encomendero* Alférez Díaz as a means to control her actions. In both films, verbal exchanges precede monetary transactions, as characters on imperial peripheries refuse, question, or repurpose bribes from colonizing agents. Beyond the decolonial concerns of these filmic texts, a closer look into their production and distribution reveals deep-seated practices of cultural manipulation for economic gain against the exploitation they ostensibly repudiate. For instance, Paul Lennon and Carolyn Egan raised doubts regarding the treatment of Aymara actors hired as extras in *También la lluvia* (937). Despite the director Icíar Bollaín's assurance that they received a fair industry wage (Poland 2011), the financial incentives to make and distribute a successful film dealing with socially conscious topics risk commodifying Indigenous cultures and phenotypes. As Maria Chiara D'Argenio has observed, "filmmakers can at the same time visibilize Indigenous trauma and conform to cultural voyeurism and colonial tropes" (18). Even the empathetic viewing of the bribing of an Indigenous character conveys ambivalence by lamenting colonial trauma and perpetuating economic exploitation. Filmmakers disseminate this tendency when they "display Indigenous agency but restrict it to filmic representation" (18-19). Representing the struggles of First Peoples against Spanish colonialism on the screen often proves lucrative, particularly now when transnational entertainment—Netflix, Amazon, etc.—increases its reach and influence in the global market (20). As Ignacio Sánchez Prado has observed, the global film industry has transformed even Latin America's socially -conscious films of the "Second Cinema" and "Third Cinema,"

commercializing them “into a single continuum of cultural capital” (106). As such, how do transnational production and distribution influence representations of bribes in *También la lluvia* and *La carga*? What exchange of money and culture occurs between audiences and the filmmakers? What myths and misunderstandings of regional identities in Latin America do these transactions perpetuate?

In this article, I examine bribe scenes in *También la lluvia* and *La carga* as a window into the economic implications of their production and distribution. Focusing on the exploitative logic conveyed through verbal and monetary exchanges, I draw on Enrique Dussel’s work on Spanish colonialism’s ideological underpinnings to argue that bribes in these films rely on a *grammar of exploitation*, wherein colonial agents manipulate others through language. Bribing serves to conceal past events or shape the future, avoiding inconvenient outcomes for bribers. Cinematic depictions of bribes reflect similar muted transactions, as filmmakers bribe audiences with socially committed entertainment. The transnational film industry profits from characters who stand for historical and contemporary Indigenous groups while simultaneously silencing them. My analysis reveals the exploitative linguistic foundations of filmic depictions of bribes in colonial settings and in their current distribution in a system that commodifies the decolonial. Paul Lennon and Caroline Egan’s analysis of *También la lluvia* examines how the apparently emancipatory actions of the Western characters Costa and Sebastián reify coloniality.⁵ My approach focuses on the commodification of the lines and actions of Daniel, who plays the part of Hatuey and recapitulates Indigenous struggles against Spanish colonialism. As for *La carga*, I provide the first critical examination in English, unveiling how it offers audiences a purported experience of authentic Indigeneity, under the guise of a light-skinned yet Indigenous protagonist Painalli. I will show how his association with Elisa promotes an imaginary of mestizo identity through linguistic and cultural Europeanization.

As historical fiction constructs, Daniel/Hatuey in *También la lluvia* and Painalli in *La carga* are intended to represent the struggles of Aymaras, Tainos, and Nahuas. These parallelisms reduce collective concerns to the trajectories of singular, marketable characters. Lennon and Egan describe what they term the “myth of Indigenous convertibility” in *También la lluvia*, the notion that one Native is interchangeable with any other (937). For example, in an early scene, Costa justifies casting Andeans as Tainos by stating that “son todos iguales” [they’re all the same].⁶ Lennon and Egan further elaborate on Indigenous convertibility, tracing connections with Robert Toplin’s observation that the nineteenth-century “great man” paradigm of historical narrative can also “personalize historical narratives” in film “allowing for a simplification of the plot and a reduction in the number of protagonists” (37, 180). My extension of these insights is that *La carga* also uses the “great man”

approach with Painalli the tameme to recall all members of his trade and the concerns of Nahuas more broadly. The notions of interchangeability and that a “great man” recapitulates collective concerns allow for an industry sleight-of-hand when viewers purchase a decolonial cinematic experience. Thus, my analysis brings to light acts of transference that the transnational filmmakers effect on spectators by offering them catharsis for the collective guilt of colonialism through viewing actions of Indigenous characters who oppose Spanish aims. As Terrie Goldie has observed, despite empathy, writers of Western descent have sometimes constructed Indigenous characters to address their “own needs for reflection” (233-34).⁷ Commercializing the problematic past for socially minded yet passive consumers in North America and Europe undermines the decolonial content of such films. In the long run, both colonial bribery and contemporary cinematic representation of Indigenous characters for profit depend on a grammar of exploitation.

Before proceeding, I note a few caveats. Both films touch on the work of Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Dominican who advocated for Amerindian rights under Spanish colonialism. However, my analysis does not focus on Las Casas.⁸ Likewise, the life of Francisco Tenamaztle, while central to *La carga*, exceeds the scope of my investigation here.⁹ Instead, I focus on the Western invention of Indigenous characters for economic gain. In terms of organization, I explain how colonial-era ideology shaped colonizers’ ways of speaking to Indigenous others—whether historical agents or cinematic actors—for their gain. Next, I will analyze bribe scenes in both films, emphasizing the commodification of apparently decolonial representations of Indigenous characters to enlarge audiences. My conclusions concern the implications of the grammar of exploitation for research and pedagogical activities.

A Grammar of Exploitation

As with other examples representing Indigenous characters, the films examined here have been “constructed in Western sites of enunciation and epistemologies” (D’Argenio 4). In the Spanish-speaking world, the representation of Natives through image and narrative text has a colonial precedent: Creole elites in New Spain and elsewhere used *casta* paintings in the eighteenth century, which depicted different racial combinations of men and women and their offspring in taxonomies that encouraged “the coupling of the Spanish man and Indigenous woman while deemphasizing the inverted arrangement” (García Blizzard 240). In the post-independence era, photographers and novelists in Latin American republics continued representations of First Peoples. Thousands of images of Natives by nineteenth-century photographers formed a basis for later cinematic shots of

their bodies and skin (Tompkins xxviii-xxx). Photos of Indigenous Peoples also accompanied the rise of Latin American *indigenista* novels.¹⁰ In the twentieth century, motion pictures allowed filmmakers to reach larger audiences. Mónica García Blizzard defines *indigenista* films as “those that imagine and/or set out to convey Indigeneity from non-Native perspectives and, in so doing, speak to the definition of the imagined criollo/mestizo national self” (40). Given these political and aesthetic developments, *indigenista* films like *También la lluvia* and *La carga* draw on colonial and nationalist conceptualizations, which hierarchize physical traits as markers of belonging or exclusion.

In the films I examine, bribes occur on the periphery of Western influence, indicating exploitative power dynamics through spoken propositions. To my mind, bribes represent a grammar of exploitation, which builds upon Enrique Dussel’s concepts regarding Hernán Cortés’s ethos of conquest. Given the importance of the first-person perspective in early modern philosophy, Dussel repositions the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* [I think. Therefore, I am] to describe Cortés’s invasion of Mexico; Dussel summarizes Cortés’s ethos as *ego conquiro* [I conquer], a posture that otherizes Indigenous Peoples to construct a Eurocentric identity (1492, 26, 38). I submit that bribes introduce a similar distortion: clandestine payment proposes that an Indigenous “you” will gain through cooperation with a Western “me.” Thus, I propose that the subjunctive *do ut facias* [I give so that you may do] describes a bribe’s exploitative desire to suppress the other’s agency.¹¹ The grammar of exploitation entices the other to act as an extension of the briber’s will, an expectation that bribers use to cloak their aims under the acts of those they bribe.¹² However, bribes may be disrupted by the interpretations of the briber, of the bribed, or of both. In *También la lluvia* Costa bribes the jailer and later bribes Daniel directly. In *La carga* a clergyman offers cash to Painalli for a favor. In both films, the intended recipients interpret suborning in a way that contradicts the bribers’ intentions.

Considering the character’s international commercial viability, a closer look at funding sources for *También la lluvia* suggests the construction of Daniel/Hatuey as an Indigenous leader. The film came through a cooperative venture between Morena Films in Spain, Mexico-based Alebrije Productions, and the Hong Kong company Mandarin Cinema. All three of these entities make films for international audiences, a corporate structure within which *También la lluvia* allowed them to market regional culture to a worldwide audience (McClennen 4). Filmgoers satisfy their curiosity “from the desire for difference,” appealing to the authentic and the exotic in their marketing (4). Evidence of marketing concerns in the script appears in the chronological liberty the filmmakers have taken with Hatuey. Despite care to base the Taino leader on historical information, he nonetheless “appears in scenes with both Columbus and Las Casas (themselves a generation apart).”—in the film, Hatuey

confronts Columbus when he demands gold from the Tainos, and his execution occurs in the presence of a distraught Las Casas (Lennon and Egan 943).¹³ Representing the Aymaras and cast as a Taino in the staged Columbus film in *También la lluvia*, Daniel/Hatuey helps tell a story attractive to Western consumers of World Cinema.¹⁴

La carga similarly assumes a postmodern interest in Indigenous cultural vindication, targeting both Mexican and international audiences through its distribution by Esfera Films and Zima Entertainment.¹⁵ However, the distribution of its indigenista depictions relies on a commercialization of specific criteria in the character of Painalli, which I delineate into two areas: a) Painalli's lighter phenotype and muscular build that appeal to Western and White models of beauty normative in the Mexican film industry; b) the modernization of Painalli in his fluency in Spanish and his occupation in transport that make him valuable to Western characters. Regarding the first, the Mexican film industry consistently employs Whiteness to represent Indigenous bodies (García Blizzard 4, 43). As for economic utility, I recall Aníbal Quijano's observation that Iberians, during their colonial expansion, began imposing a distribution of manual labor based on skin color, what would become a racializing legacy of the "coloniality of power" (185). Despite changes in Indigenous materiality, politics, and national borders since the sixteenth century, the extraction of commercial value central to the colonial project continues. Given these considerations, I now turn to instances of the grammar of exploitation in *También la lluvia* and *La carga* on the diegetic and meta-filmic levels.

Intimidating the Future

Returning to the bribe in the police commissary that opened this article, Costa and Sebastián use a payment to dissuade Daniel from participating in the water protests. Recalling encomenderos who met to discuss allotments of Native laborers five centuries earlier, Costa, Sebastián, and the warden each make an appraisal of the body of Daniel for their economic gain.¹⁶ The warden welcomes the stack of cash with a restrained facial expression that parallels the absence of background music. Hesitating slightly, he nods, grinning with familiarity: "De acuerdo. Pero con una condición. Apenas termina de filmar, me lo traigo de vuelta" [Agreed, but with one condition. As soon as filming is over, I bring him right back.] Sebastián recoils at the transaction: the directors excuse themselves to talk in the hallway. Fearing for Daniel, Sebastián opposes the bribe. Costa pressures him to remember their business deal as well as the fact that Daniel got himself in jail. While Sebastián's concerns allow for audience engagement and empathy, he and Costa, two light-skinned foreigners, nonetheless negotiate regarding Daniel's future, an example of the persistent "narrative privileging" of these two characters

(Lennon and Egan 947). Sebastián agrees to bribe the warden, planning to warn Daniel of the plans to apprehend him later.

When a guard unlocks the crowded cell holding Daniel, non-diegetic music, a sorrowful clarinet, punctuates the dialogue. The Spanish director confronts him: “Me lo prometiste, Daniel. Hicimos un trato y no lo has cumplido” [You promised me, Daniel. We had a deal, and you have not kept it.] Daniel returns Costa’s gaze and refuses to give in, contrasting with Sebastián’s submission and collusion with the bribe. Daniel replies, “Sin agua, no hay vida, ¿vos no entiendes?” [Without water, there is no life, don’t you understand?]. The eerie clarinet continues with strings and a low, steady rhythm that together convey the alienation Costa and Daniel experience at the mutual realization that their goals are incommensurable.

Sebastián’s complicity with the grammar of exploitation undermines the concerns his character represents. Market forces and Costa’s charisma suppress his revulsion toward the warden’s plans. Lennon and Egan have pointed out that Sebastián assumes a different “convertible Indigeneity” than Costa’s wholesale homogenization of First Peoples, that of “transhistorical identity.” After all, it was Sebastián who, during the screen tests for the character of Hatuey for the Columbus documentary-film, advocated for “the Daniel of the present in so far as he reflects an ideal of past Indigenous resistance” (Lennon and Egan 944-45). Thus, Sebastián’s empathy for Daniel has artistic and commercial ends. Sebastián’s empathy parallels the sensibilities of contemporary audiences, an effect that enhances the marketability of *También la lluvia* while also implicating the film’s distributors in a transaction of empathy for ticket sales.

The film’s distribution, in fact, disproportionately favored audiences in Europe and North America. In a 2011 radio interview, Juan Carlos Aduviri commented that France and Belgium had the first premieres of the film and that it would be shown in Bolivia—where it was shot—at an undisclosed future date (*Radio Fides*, 2011). While the Bolivian premiere did come later in 2011, it is telling that during the previous year, audiences had already watched the film in Toronto, Los Angeles, London, Valladolid (Spain), and Paris (IMDb). The producers and distributors privileged the screening of the product of Bolivian labor at affluent film festivals and locations likely to yield a return on investment. While not minimizing the film’s significance, the preference for Euro-descendant audiences does undermine its empathetic portrayals of Hatuey and other Indigenous characters.

Facing the Past

The initial de-prioritizing of Bolivian audiences downplays Aymara's cultural knowledge in the film. At another point, Costa bribes Daniel directly in his home. Daniel portrays a decolonial response via temporal references and gestures, phenomena documented in ethnographic research among the Aymara, as discussed below.¹⁷ In his bid to keep the Columbus film rolling, Costa offers Daniel an off-the-record payment to dissuade him from participating in protests against water privatization. Costa passionately describes what he believes is at stake. Again, the absence of soundtrack music builds tension between the characters. With full-armed gestures, he faces Daniel and booms, “¡Si te vas a la mierda, nos vamos todos a la mierda!” [If you go to hell, we all go to hell!]. Costa's anger reveals the weakness of his position. In the end, the Columbus film hinges on Daniel and his role as Hatuey. Daniel remains silent as Costa continues ranting:

Ah, ¿qué pasa? Que ahora vas de indio digno y silencioso, ¿no? Vale cojonudo, de puta madre. Pues mira amiguito, como te pillamos en otra manifestación no vas a ver un puto céntimo. ¿Estamos? ¿Te queda claro? Vamos a hacer una cosa, te dejamos un extra de 5.000 dólares si te quedas al margen de las manifestaciones hasta que terminemos de rodar. ¿Va?

[What now? Oh! Now you're playing the dignified, silent Indian, is that it? All right, you smart-ass son-of-a-bitch: look here, my little friend, since we caught you already in that other protest, you're not going to see a fucking cent. Got it? Is that clear? Let's do this: we will give you an extra 5,000 dollars if you stay on the sidelines of the protests until we finish filming. Okay?]

One reason Daniel does not answer is that he has already seen how Costa uses money to manipulate Indigenous extras acting in the film. Earlier, Daniel and his daughter Belén entered the film crew's warehouse that stored a full-sized replica of one of Columbus's ships. Costa suddenly takes a call on his flip phone with a financier of the documentary. Bragging about how far he could stretch the budget, he referred to the extras: “Two fucking dollars a day, and they feel like kings!” When Costa hangs up, Daniel repeats back to him wryly in Spanish, “Dos putos dólares, ¿no?, y ellos están contentos. Yo he trabajado dos años como albañil en los Estados Unidos. Yo me conozco esta historia” [Two fucking dollars, right? And they are happy. I worked for two years in construction in the United States. I know this story.] With Costa speechless, Daniel and Belén exit. From then on, Daniel kept silent on Costa's use of money.

Back at Daniel's kitchen table, Costa does not recall their earlier conversation. Assuming the

actor agrees with his proposition but not the amount, he ups the ante:

Costa: ¡Diez mil, Daniel, diez mil! La mitad la mitad ahora y la mitad cuando terminemos, coño. No vas a ver tanto dinero en tu puta vida, chaval. Joder, Daniel, es la única puta oportunidad que tienes de salir de esta mierda de sitio en el que vives, coño, y eres lo bastante listo como para saberlo, ¿o no?

Daniel: Está bien.

Costa: ¿Cómo?

Daniel: Está bien.

Costa: Okay, se acabaron las manifestaciones y vas a hacer lo que te digamos hasta que terminemos el rodaje. ¿Cuento con tu palabra, Daniel?

[Costa: Ten thousand, Daniel, ten thousand! Half now, half when we finish, you smart-ass. You are not going to see that much money in your whole fucking life, kid. Shit, Daniel, it is the one fucking opportunity you have to get out of this shit-hole you live in, you prick, and you are smart enough to see it, aren't you?

Daniel: All right.

Costa: ¿ What's that?

Daniel: All right.

Costa: Okay, the protests are over now, and you're going to do whatever we tell you until we finish filming. Do I have your word, Daniel?]

Costa acts out tactics fundamental to colonialism. An initial act of colonizer violence is to harm the inhabitants of the invaded land and then blame them for the harm they suffer (Dussel, *Invention* 137). He patronizingly calls Daniel “*chaval* [kid]” and exaggerates his dependence on the foreign film crew.¹⁸ Costa insults Daniel's house and assumes the superiority of his own in Spain. Nonetheless, having insinuated an agreement, Costa holds out his hand for Daniel to shake. Daniel, silent and motionless, stares intently at Costa. Frustrated, Costa throws the \$5,000 on the table and storms out in a musicless, quotidian silence. An external shot captures Costa's departure in disbelief as Daniel remains with Teresa and Belén.

Not responding to the propositions of a Westerner, which Costa here interprets as agreement, can mean the opposite in several Amerindian groups.¹⁹ Costa runs roughshod over such subtleties. However, to my mind, silence alone does not explain the sequence after Costa departs. As the ethnographic work of Rafael Núñez and Eve Sweetser has shown, Aymaras use the space in front of them to conceptualize the past, while the space behind them denotes the future. Aymaras'

conversational gestures reveal this spatio-temporal understanding, effectively inverting European notions (Núñez and Sweetser 413-19). With Costa gone, Daniel speaks to his wife, Teresa, who stands behind him, using a future tense, “Guarda la plata: lo vamos a necesitar” [Put that cash away: we are going to need it]. Considering Aymara gestures and temporality, the past—a frustrated Costa—lies before him, and the future –continuing the fight against water privatization– behind him. Whether strategic or not, this level of cultural detail suggests in-depth research to attract empathetic, culturally conscious viewers.

Reviewing my argument so far, I have presented theoretical and filmic precedents for the concept I advance here of the grammar of exploitation by which colonizers use language to propose short-term gain in exchange for advancing their objectives. *Do ut facias*—I give so that you may do—disregards the interlocutor’s values and does not establish reciprocity. I have analyzed the grammar of exploitation in the film *También la lluvia*, focusing on scenes that build empathy for Daniel/Hatuey and how the uneven commercial distribution of the film undermines its decolonial themes. Beyond the film’s diegesis, its production and distribution also involve a bribing effect, offering socially-conscious experiences to moviegoers in return for profitability. I now turn to *La carga* and how the grammar of exploitation functions within the film and is entangled in its marketing and distribution.

Noble Appearances

La carga takes place in the aftermath of the Mixton Wars (1540-42), which culminated in the battle of Nochistlan between Spanish *encomenderos* and Cazcan warriors defending their territory in modern Jalisco and Zacatecas. After a costly and prolonged campaign, the Spanish ambushed and captured Cazcan leader Francisco Tenamaztle. In *La carga*, manipulative payments frame its re-evaluations of imperial Spain’s military, economic, and legal powers. After losing her husband in the Mixton Wars, the fictional Elisa de Ibarra learns that her father, the historic Miguel de Ibarra (Eusebio Lázaro), conspired to murder her spouse and take over the young man’s *encomienda*. In response, Elisa joins Franciscan friars, allied with Bartolomé de Las Casas to support Tenamaztle. In the film, Las Casas defends Tenamaztle, with Elisa testifying in his favor.²⁰ As mentioned, Painalli carries Elisa on his back from Zacatecas to Veracruz. In the same vein as *También la lluvia*, *La carga* takes an ostensibly critical stance toward Spanish colonialism by featuring Native characters in leading roles. However, as we are about to see, the colonial critique conceals continuations of the Noble Savage trope and a preference for Whiteness, a pervasive cinematic legacy of colonialism.

Early in the film, Franciscan friar Juan Valerio de Medina (Fernando Morán) offers Painalli a bribe to transport Elisa to Veracruz. Painalli's knowledge of topography and his strength interest Valerio. After Elisa informs him of her plan to help Tenamaztle, the friar visits Painalli's house. Amidst a smallpox epidemic, which daily reduces numbers in the Nahua village, Valerio gets to the point:

Valerio: Tengo una carga muy especial para ti.

Painalli: ¿Y por qué no se la pidió a Itzmin, como siempre?

Valerio: Esta vez no se trata de llevar armas a los españoles: necesito responsabilidad y confianza.

Painalli: Mira alrededor: quedamos pocos hombres en pueblo, todos necesarios.

Valerio: Se trata de salvar a Francisco Tenamaztle. Es una causa justa por la que tu padre murió. Si viviera, sería él mismo que en su lugar iría conmigo.

[Valerio: I have a very special load for you.

Painalli: And why didn't you ask Itzmin, as usual?

Valerio: This time is not about taking weapons to the Spaniards: I need responsibility and discretion.

Painalli: Look around: there are few of us men left in town: each one necessary.

Valerio: This is about saving Francisco Tenamaztle. It is a just cause for which your father died. If he were alive, it would be he who would go with me in your place.]

In a close-up shot, Valerio places three silver *reales* in Painalli's palm with both hands. Painalli closes the coins in a fist, takes Valerio's hand in both of his and returns the coins, saying, "Padre, cree en ello: no necesitará esto." [Father, believe in it. You will not need this.] Painalli, who lost his father in the Mixton Wars and fought in the conflict himself, considers supporting Tenamaztle payment enough. At first glance, by returning the coins, Painalli altruistically disavows Valerio's compensation and the colonial economy.

This scene depicts stubborn, stereotypical portrayals with roots in Mexican film and the colonial legacy. For starters, Painalli's speech communicates a solemnity that focuses not on the historical moment but on a futurized imaginary of an Indigenous-and-European Mexico, which contemporary filmmakers and audiences take for granted. The omission of the definite article "el" when he explains that few men remain in the village, "quedamos pocos hombres en pueblo" [there are few of us men left in town] suggests that Spanish is Painalli's second language. Similarly, the more formal register of "ello" in "Padre, cree en ello" [Father, believe in *it*] differs from the tone of the rest of the conversation. Here, the scene recalls the silent film *Zitari* (dir. Miguel Contreras Torres, 1931),

which uses eloquent Spanish to appropriate a noble Native past and foreshadow a mestizo future. In that film, Indigenous characters use the overly formal “vosotros,” a second-person plural pronoun uncommon in Mexican Spanish (García Blizzard 74). Therefore, Painalli’s uneven yet eloquent speech imbues him with nobility that anticipates a future of national linguistic mestizaje.

Painalli’s disinterested support of Tenamaztle contributes to the Noble Savage trope via the “good Indian” / “bad Indian” binary. The unfolding diegesis shows that the usual runner of Spanish errands, Itzmin, becomes a guide to Alférez Díaz, the encomendero who wishes to marry Elisa and who chases after her and Painalli. Itzmin shows less nobility than Painalli by undermining the Tenamaztle (i.e., Franciscan) cause. Conversely, Painalli protects the interests of land that will become Mexico. Clearly, “‘good Indians’ defend a social order in which mestizaje is possible, while ‘bad Indians’ do not” (251). *La carga* presents Hispanization as a foregone conclusion since the film’s end has fewer Nahuas than its beginning. As smallpox slowly kills Painalli’s village and family, he directs his efforts to the networks of Fr. Valerio and Elisa Ibarra. This triad of characters proposes Hispanization and mestizaje as optimal paths forward.

Behind the scenes, the making of *La carga* also shows a preference for the Noble Savage as central to a mestizo national imaginary. Director Alan Jonsson Gavica explained a 2018 interview with the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE) that “Yo siempre quise tener a los indios tamemes en mi película, de una forma u otra. Quería mostrar la fortaleza, lo heroicos que pueden ser, lo nobles... todos los valores que tienen, esa raza indígena tan fuerte” (IMCINE, 2018). [I always wanted to have the Tameme Indians in my movie, in some way or another. I wanted to show how strong, how heroic they can be, how noble... all their values, that tough Indigenous race]. Jonsson emphasizes the strength, heroism, and nobility he wished to embody in Painalli. He has also grouped Amerindians into a unitary race, which is problematic on a linguistic level, as Nahuatl is only one of the sixty-eight Indigenous languages spoken in Mexico today (“Catálogo”). In identity terms as well, it remains unclear whether Zapotecs, for example, would consider themselves of the same “race” as Mayans or Nahuas. Jonsson’s silence on this point indicates an underlying racial construct that places Europe advantageously vis à vis an exotic, monolithic Indigenous “race.” His remarks also recall the pedagogical functions of film during the Mexican Golden Age for instilling behavior “associated with what is typically Mexican” (García Blizzard 52).²¹ Treating Indigenous cultures as malleable, Jonsson’s ambiguous description of “the values that they have” allows Painalli to serve as a *tabula rasa* onto whom non-Indigenous viewers can project perhaps Rousseauian hopes of freedom from colonial chains and enduring negative depictions of Natives.

At this point, I refer to García Blizard's concept of "Whiteness-as-Indigeneity" to understand Painalli as a physically attractive Native with noble qualities. Whiteness-as-Indigeneity combines the appeal of ancient Mesoamerican cultures with a preference for lighter skin as desirable for the formation of a mestizo state. Whiteness-as-Indigeneity "uses physical markers of Whiteness in the local racial formation to incite identification and desire in spectators through colonized social and visual habits while retaining the diegetic Indigeneity of the narrative context" (282). Consequently, Native cinematic characters in Mexico often have lighter skin than actual Indigenous Peoples.²² For instance, Horacio García-Rojas, who portrayed Painalli, identifies as a mestizo and has a lighter phenotype. The dual aims of Whiteness-as-Indigeneity are to reinforce national mestizo identity and produce lucrative films with "Indigenous protagonists whom spectators consume in a postcolonial Mexican context" (282). As spectators gaze more intently at the past, their postmodern sensibilities favor sympathetic portrayals of Indigenous figures while simultaneously idealizing light skin.

The Painalli-Elisa dyad represents a convergence of physical attraction, desire, and the traits of an imagined mestizo and Hispanophone community. The voluntary association between a Nahuatl and a Spanish woman comes as an apparent reimagining of historical and regional themes. However, as mentioned, the frustration of romance between an Indigenous man and a European woman has become a well-worn path in Mexican film. According to cinematic norms, deviating from the colonialized Spanish-man-and-Indigenous-woman model closes off the romantic and procreative viability for Painalli and Elisa (241-42).²³ No shortage of Mexican Golden Age film employs the trope of impossible love between a White woman and an Indigenous man, including Pedro Infante and María Candelaria in *Tizoc* (dir. Miguel Contreras Torres, 1931).²⁴ During Painalli and Elisa's journey toward Veracruz, moments of attraction and potential romance arise: Painalli watches Elisa expose her pale legs as she bathes, and during a nocturnal thunderstorm, they lie closely together under a tree and share an intimate gaze. Nonetheless, rather than consummate their attraction, they signal a mestizo imaginary, which shares language and the ability to negotiate together within a Euro-Indigenous culture.

The pair's physical traits also reflect a preference for Whiteness. Elisa's fair skin, dark hair, and brown eyes typify Iberian beauty (59-60), while Painalli's lighter skin and muscular build incorporate Western aesthetics. His desirability lies in what Richard Dyer terms "White man's muscles," a physique shaped by exercise rather than labor (145-55).²⁵ Throughout *La carga*, Painalli appears shirtless and in a loincloth. Moreover, by carrying Elisa on his back, he brings her skin close to his, emphasizing the implicit aim of whitening and Hispanizing Natives in Mexico. By conforming to White standards of

beauty and sharing the Spanish language, Painalli and Elisa reinforce the deeply rooted, racializing ideology of mestizo nation-building.

La carga immerses audiences in an exoticized past via *mise-en-scènes*, occasional dialogues in Nahuatl, and stunning shots of pristine, regional landscapes. Painalli's load as a foreshadowing of mestizaje shows his ability to adapt to the times. Post-independence, Latin American governments sought to "modernize" Indigenous Peoples. In Mexico, through vaccination campaigns and depictions of Natives with robotic appendages in murals by Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, among other measures, the national government aimed at transforming Indigenous bodies into productive, modern mestizo citizens (Dalton 18). In my analysis, I note that Painalli's use of a tumpline to carry Elisa makes him valuable to her. He effectively modernizes an Aztec transport technology to carry a White woman who will testify in favor of Francisco Tenamaztle, a goal that, in turn appeals to contemporary film-viewers. In the last part of my analysis, I will consider how the filmmakers of *La carga* perpetuate the mestizo national imaginary.

On Color, off Set

A 2019 interview with Horacio García-Rojas sheds further light on the legacy of colonized racial hierarchies in the film. He described his experience in the role of Painalli:

A mí me ha ayudado mucho Painalli, que es el personaje de *La carga* a reconocermé a mi mismo como mexicano, como mestizo, a indagar en mis raíces, de dónde viene el rostro que tengo, de dónde viene el amor por mi país que tengo, y eso creo que también es algo que es muy grato para el público" (Jonsson and García-Rojas, 2019).

[Painalli, the character from *La carga*, has helped me recognize myself as a Mexican and a mestizo to explore my roots. Where does this face I have come from? Where does this love for my country that I have come from? I also think this is something that is very satisfying for the audience.]

Rather than recognize Indigeneity itself as a positive identitary component, his comments show a preference for the displacement of the Indigenous in favor of the idealized unitary concept of the mestizo. José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo has observed that "Indigenist ideology is based on a racist view of the Indian to define its policies of assimilation or integration into national culture" (181). By perpetuating the colonial preference for light skin of the Spanish and later of Creole elites, indigenist ideology brushes aside the depth of Mexico's Indigenous heritages. In the end, "[b]eing mestizo is better than being an Indian; it represents progress towards Mexico's dream of Europeanization" (181).

In the same interview, García-Rojas proposed that global audiences watch the film to gain an appreciation for Mexican mestizo culture:

“[S]omos un país mestizo donde todos somos mexicanos, ya seas más blanco o más moreno, somos parte de esa cultura. Eso es algo que pocas veces sucede en los medios audiovisuales y más ahora que tenemos la posibilidad de entrar a *Netflix*, que es una gran pantalla, que ahora mismo después de ver esto puedes darle click y ver la película. Es una gran pantalla porque llega a muchos países y estamos regalando un poco de nuestra cultura y lo que somos como mexicanos” (Jonsson and García-Rojas, 2019). [We are a mestizo nation where we are all Mexicans, and regardless of how White or brown you may be, we are part of this culture. This seldom happens in the media, and even more so now that we can go on Netflix, a great platform. Right now, after watching this, you can click it and watch the movie. It is an excellent platform because it reaches so many countries, and we are giving out a small quantity of our culture and what we are as Mexicans.]

The emphasis here on Mexican homogeneity, regardless of phenotype, region, or language, masks an over-valuation of Whiteness. In sum, placing indigenismo at the service of mestizaje articulates a hierarchized vision of society, racialized under the pretense of colorblindness. As García Blizzard avers, “indigenismo-mestizaje is a particularly pernicious racist ideology precisely because it pretends to be raceless” (20). Looking at an imagined, whitened Indigenous past on the screen, *La carga* proposes that one can gain an enlightened appreciation of a mestizo present for the price of viewing. Through the exoticization of the Indigenous, representations of resistance to Spanish colonizers, and the racializing tendencies of Mexican cinema, *La carga* constructs a commercially viable narrative of historical fiction. *La carga* offers audiences the perpetuating myth of mestizo harmony vis-à-vis Painalli’s character.

Conclusion

My analysis of bribes and their exploitative grammar in *También la lluvia* and *La carga* sheds light on the understudied discursive and hegemonic aspects in their diegesis, marketing, and distribution. Bribers use language to suppress the agency of those receiving the bribe, aiming to shape future outcomes or conceal past events. In so doing, the grammar of exploitation as *do ut facias* [I give so that you may do] forms diegetic units. On a narrative level, characters’ interpretations of bribes make ironies that complicate Western economic colonialism. However, a closer look at the production and distribution

of these films shows that they participate in the same exploitative grammar they critique. A study of the grammar of exploitation endemic to bribery in indigenista film-making practices and literary representations of Latin America offers rich terrain for further research. This approach elucidates persistent, unequal power dynamics, pervasive in Eurocentric modernity.

The films, at first appearance, challenge the narrative of colonial exploitation by depicting characters who resist the grammar of exploitation and strive for liberation. In *También la lluvia*, Daniel apparently is not for sale: bribes do not dissuade the character from public opposition to prohibitive water fees. Notwithstanding, my analysis has shown that the involvement of the transnational film industry itself undermines the film's decolonial stance. Low on the list of locales for the film's premiere, the first showings in Bolivia came after publicity-generating lucrative events in Europe and North America. Although the film investigates Aymara culture and brings to the fore the struggles of Cochabambans to secure equitable water access, Morena Films, Alebrije Productions, and Mandarin Cinema commodified culture for a return on their investment.

Likewise, the portrayal of Painalli in *La carga* neatly aligns with established racial, cultural, and commercially viable norms in Mexican film. Painalli's refusal of Fr. Valerio's bribe presents Indigenous altruism, a desirable characteristic for audiences interested in the vindication of historically marginalized groups. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Painalli's ethics represent not the reconstruction of a historical individual, but a narrative recapitulation of hard work and sacrifice to bring about a mestizo order from colonial chaos. The film prioritizes Painalli and Elisa's storyline: even Tenamaztle recedes into the background to make room for mestizaje and the whitening of regional culture. Whiteness, Western aesthetics, and the Spanish language together form the most viable path toward a unitary mestizo national identity in Mexico. The added dimension of global distribution via digital platforms extends this mestizo messaging to a growing international audience, expanding revenues with it.

A broader implication of my examination of *También la lluvia* and *La carga* is that utterances in films representing historical exploitation can mirror present-day coloniality. Bribers seek compliance and aim to shape the thinking of the bribed, exercising a form of epistemological violence. This is even more so when film production subjugates Indigenous heritages and goals under Western financial ends. The behemoth international film industry brings together financial interests that problematize socially committed films through their commodification. Ultimately, audiences with postmodern sensibilities who long for representations of justice paradoxically consume these edutainment products in comfortable surroundings. It is vital for film festivals, academic conferences, and university classes

to allow for critical reflection on the exploitative grammar prevalent in indigenista films and the transnational film industry itself. At this stage in digital film distribution, this kind of critical pause has the potential to slow the march of the continuing commodification of Indigenous cultures on the screen.

Notes

¹ Monthly rates soared to twenty dollars, a sum one-fifth of an average household income at the time (Dennison 191-92). The film's English title is *Even the Rain*.

² See Phillip Powell's *Guerra chichimeca (1550-1600)*, especially chapter three, "Los guerreros del norte," which details actions by Miguel de Ibarra, Nuño de Guzmán, and Cristóbal de Oñate. (47-68). See Anthony Pagden's overview of the Valladolid Debates (1550-55) in *Fall of Natural Man*, chapters five and six (109-145).

³ Prior to the Spanish, thousands of tlamemeque (pl. of tameme, Evans and Webster 768) transported goods throughout Aztec regions of Mesoamerica. For a study of the tlamemeque in the Postclassic Period and the sixteenth century, see Ross Hassig's *Trade, Tribute, and Transportation: The Sixteenth-Century Political Economy of the Valley of Mexico* (1993).

⁴ By colonialism, I refer to Spain's early modern territorial and economic expansion of Spain; by coloniality, I mean patterns of extraction and exploitation via a racialized model of humanity, which have continued since the early modern era. For more on distinctions between colonialism and coloniality, see Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism-Postcolonialism* (2015).

⁵ Other analyses of *También la lluvia* emphasize its economic and juridical implications. David Martin-Jones analyzes Bollán's film as an example of "world cinema" in "Transworld Cinemas: Film-Philosophies for World Cinema's Engagement with World History" (2017). Michelle Hulme-Lippert considers the concept of transitional justice in her "Negotiating Human Rights in Icíar Bollán's *También la lluvia*" (2016).

⁶ All translations in this article are mine.

⁷ Goldie, building on Edward Said's *Orientalism*, has observed four "commodities" accompanying Native characters in literary texts for Euro-descendant audiences: "sex and violence," "orality," "mysticism," and "the prehistoric" (235-36).

⁸ On Las Casas's advocacy and its effects on colonial law and, eventually, international law, see Hulme-Lippert's "Negotiating Human Rights in Icíar Bollán's *También la lluvia*" and David Orique's "Un muy breve relato de una vida muy larga: Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566)."

⁹ On Tenamaztle's life and role as leader of Indigenous armies of thousands against the Spanish, see Miguel León-Portilla's *La flecha en el blanco: Francisco Tenamaztle y Bartolomé de Las Casas en lucha por los derechos de los indígenas, 1541-1556* (1996).

¹⁰ Indigenista novels include *Los dos indios* (1853) by Puerto Rican author Ramón Betances, *Aves sin nido* (1889) by Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner, and *Tomochic* (1893) by Mexican Humberto Frías. On indigenista novels as part of a larger social philosophy in post-independence Latin America, see chapter seven "Indigenismo: The Return of the Native?" in Rebecca Earle's *Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810-1930* (184-212).

¹¹ I draw on Henri Marcel and Hubert Mauss's description reciprocal action in ritual sacrifice as "do ut des" ["I give so that you may give"] (65).

¹² As another precedent of the grammar of exploitation, see James Scott's "vocabulary of exploitation" in *Weapons of the Weak* for how Malaysian villagers in the mid-twentieth century used linguistic cues and selected expressions to complain about exploitative agricultural practices in their communities while avoiding censure from British colonizers (186-98).

¹³ It was Las Casas who recorded Hatuey's 1513 execution for his rebellion, which he witnessed during Diego Velázquez's invasion of Cuba (45).

¹⁴ For more on this point of marketable social concerns, see Tamara Falicov's "Film Funding Opportunities for Latin American Filmmakers."

¹⁵ The film's English title is *The Load*.

¹⁶ Christopher Columbus began *encomiendas* informally on Hispaniola in 1499 and Nicolás Ovando, governor of Cuba, institutionalized the practice in 1503 (Hanke 19-20). In his "Introduction" to *Encomenderos of New Spain: 1521-1555*, Robert Himmerich y Valencia explains how Hernán Cortés distributed *encomiendas* in Mexico (3-17). For the history of the *encomiendas* institution see Chapter 22 of Luis Weckmann's "Medieval Origins of *Encomienda* and *Hacienda*: The Indian Tribute" in *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico* (350-66).

¹⁷ Rafael Núñez and Eve Sweetser videoed twenty hours of interviews with Aymaras from Chile and Bolivia, focusing on gestures used to refer to past and future events. See Núñez and Sweetser, "With the Future behind Them: Convergent Evidence from Aymara Language and Gesture in the Crosslinguistic Comparison of Spatial Construals of Time."

¹⁸ The film alludes to dependence theory. See André Gunder Frank's *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967 [2009]), Fernando Cardoso's *Dependencia y desarrollo en América Latina* (1971 [2007]), and Eduardo Galeano's pivotal *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1970).

¹⁹ Silence among the Western Apache means disagreement; see Keith Basso, "To Give up on Words," also Lavonna Lovern and Carol Locust's "Manners, Humor, and Silence" (57-72). Similarly, for the Gitxaala and Tsimshian of the Canadian Pacific, silence reflects open protest against ideas affecting the whole group. See Charles Menzies's *People of the Saltwater* chapter four, "Adaawx: History and the Past" (69-86).

²⁰ Documentation exists that Las Casas was designated to defend Tenamaztle; yet records of the proceedings have not emerged (Torres 22-23). Textual evidence shows Tenamaztle and Las Casas knew each other and conversed regarding Spanish laws for protecting Native rights of self-defense. Tenamaztle wrote two *expedientes* to the court (1552, 1555). He also likely shared details with Las Casas regarding Nuño de Guzmán's invasion as the latter prepared his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (León-Portilla 118-136).

²¹ On the didactic function of Mexican film, see Carlos Monsiváis, "Mexican Cinema," 142-43, and Ana López, "Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the "Old" Mexican Cinema" in *Mediating Two Worlds*, ed. John King, et al. (1993): 147-63.

²² As a notable exception, the film *Roma* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2018) featured the dark-skinned Mixtec Yalitza Aparicio. Despite her debut film's commercial success in Mexico and internationally, telenovela actors challenged Aparicio's aptness for the Oscar nominations she received (D'Argenio 15; García Blizzard 285-86).

²³ The film *Güeros* (dir. Alonso Ruizpalacios, 2014) contravenes cinematic, racialized norms, since its couple, the dark-skinned Sombra and the light-skinned Ana achieve a romantic relationship and share an on-screen kiss (García Blizzard 278-79).

²⁴ See also García Blizzard's analysis of Deseada and Manuel in *Deseada* (dir. Gavaldón, 1951; Leonor and Tumitl in *Tribu* (dir. Miguel Contreras Torres, 1935); Lola and Coyote Iguana in *Lola Casanova* (dir. Matilde Landeta, 1949); and Lucía María and Martín in *El juicio de Martín Cortés* (dir. Alejandro Galindo, 1974) (García Blizzard 202, 246-47, 257, 276).

²⁵ García Blizzard examines the role of the shirtless Pedro Infante in *Tizoc* as typical of the aesthetic, commercial appeal of Whiteness-as-Indigeneity (265-66).

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