

Even the Rain (También la lluvia, 2010)

Teresa Hiergeist

dir. Icíar Bollaín; prod. Juan Gordon; screenplay Paul Laverty; photography Alex Catalán; music Alberto Iglesias. 35mm, color, 104 mins. Morena Films, distrib. Vitagraph films.

The Spanish, Mexican, and French coproduction, *También la lluvia* re-stages the first contact between the indigenous people of South America and the Spanish, whose imperialist and violent character has been at the root of innumerable conflicts throughout history. A European film crew travels to Bolivia to shoot a film about the early stages of Spanish colonialization, focusing on the monk Bartolomé de las Casas, his resistance against the conquistadors, and his supposed commitment to a humane treatment of the native population. The idealistic intention of the fictional director Sebastian (played by Gael García Bernal) is to present a genuine version of the »discovery« of America by providing room for both the perspective of the Spaniards and that of the oppressed population. However, this commemorative and historiographical project, ambitious and naïve at the same time, is disrupted by concurrent violent protests against the privatization of groundwater, in which several of the actors are involved. While the filming proceeds, the water supply of Cochabamba is sold to a multinational company. The primary local character, Daniel (Juan Carlos Aduviri), who is hired to portray a tribal leader in the movie, turns into a leading figure in the mobilization against this neocolonial scheme, which is shown to curtail basic human rights and to especially affect the poor. Sebastian and film producer Costa (Luis Tosar) are forced to suspend their pretentious project, to face the social realities of contemporary Bolivia, and to take sides in the escalating conflict.

También la lluvia is characterized by a *mise-en-scène* and montage that repeatedly draw parallels between the historical and the contemporary situation. The similarity of scenes such as the famous exchange of gold for glass beads during the *conquista* as well as the film crew's enthusiastic conversation about the indigenous actors' low



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wages allowing for cheap production costs, is easy to detect (Verlaguet 244). Equally obvious is the fact that Europeans are shown as masters on both the intra- and the extradiegetic level of the film, while indigenous people are limited to their »traditional« roles as colonial subjects. The director and producer, who are just as little interested in the indigenous people's rights as the colonists, pressure them not to participate in the »water wars« before the film is finished. These analogies underline the continuity of the colonial hermeneutics that establish binary and hierarchical oppositions between Spaniards and indigenous people (Amago 159). The proximity of the corresponding scenes in the movie, the recurring objects on both narrative levels, and the parallel montages all further accentuate this connection between past and present. Viewers are confronted with ongoing European hegemony and Eurocentrism that is evinced in the connection between colonial history and the contemporary filmmakers' struggle to finish their film at all costs. Imperialism is not at all confined to history, but in fact still structures everyday life in the postcolonial world.

However, the ignorance and indifference of the film team serve a further purpose: namely, to generate a melodramatic effect. The emotionalized breakdown of their insincere attitudes and their final redemption is primed by the film's melodramatic structure: It arises from the fact that the film crew members condemn the imperialism of the colonists and consider themselves enlightened, emancipated, and morally superior, while they constantly affront, disrespect, and discourage indigenous people without realizing it. This exposed hypocrisy may prompt spectators to recognize the moral wrongness of these actions (Elsaesser 12). Producer Costa's personal conversion is particularly striking. Initially, he embodies the ignorant, narcissistic capitalist welcoming Bolivia's minimal pay and the indigenous peoples' precarious situation, which permits him to play out his power position (Barrenetxea Marañón 457). However, moved by the fate of a little indigenous girl injured during the violent street protests against law enforcement, he realizes his moral duty not to flee from the erupting violence like the other crew members but to take responsibility in order to rescue the innocent child. This transformation is combined with a typically melodramatic insight (Fix 83): Both Spaniards and indigenous people of Latin America share the same needs and should therefore be in solidarity with each other, a conclusion symbolized by the vial of water given to Costa at the time of his departure, which, in its striking simplicity underlined by melancholic violin music (Schäfer et al. 12), is meant to move not only him, but also the film's audience, to tears.

The intercultural contacts and conflicts in the age of globalization do not only challenge the hegemony of Western societies but also their cinemas. Every feature film is forced to position itself with regard to issues of representation and their political implications. In the case of *También la lluvia*, the outcome is rather ambivalent. On the one hand, the film raises awareness for the ongoing victimization of indigenous people in Latin America, calling for a transcultural meta-perspective (Luna 191) and drawing attention to the continuity of structural exploitation since the early modern era. Here, the melodramatic effect holds a central role, as it models Costa's awakening from his Eurocentric, capitalist indifference to emotion, compassion, and humanity—and, at the same time, appeals to the spectator to follow his example. On the other hand, this ostensibly tolerant representation entails a racist subtext, which is inextricably linked to the requirements of the melodramatic mode: by showing Costa's empathy as a key to intercultural understanding and as a universal human capacity that transcends cul-

ture, the film stumbles into two pitfalls. First, »listening to your heart« is presented as a solution to all conflicts, which simplifies the dynamics of interracial contacts and negotiates them on an individual rather than a structural level. It implies a promise that a new beginning between Spaniards and indigenous people is possible. This fantasy of a *tabula rasa* may prevent any awareness of the complexities of postcolonial entanglements and can be interpreted as a call for denying past injustices. Secondly, this empathy, which for the sake of melodramatic dramaturgy is shown as an anthropological constant, turns out to be a European construct. While *También la lluvia* at least implicitly draws attention to the fact that the humanism of the intradiegetically portrayed Bartolomé de las Casas is based on a European tradition of thought (Santaolalla 213), it does not reflect on Carlos' emotion, which, just as any possible sentimental reaction of its audience, is based on Western Christian socialization. Hence the film determinedly excludes indigenous traditions and perpetuates a colonial hermeneutics of Othering; it contributes to the invisibility of »the new world« in favor of »the old.« To avoid this, *También la lluvia* would have had to forgo the intensity of its melodramatic effect. Between respectful representation and popular success, it has chosen sides.

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