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# Conversion and Colonial History in Icíar Bollaín's *También la lluvia* (2010)

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## **Abstract**

This study concerns the representation of colonial Latin American history and the characterization of Daniel/ Hatuey in the film-about-a-film *También la lluvia* (Icíar Bollaín, 2010). A metacinematic work comprising historical study and political commentary, *También la lluvia* has received mixed critical reactions regarding its portrayal of the historical and social inequalities it analyses. This article examines the ambiguous nature of the work by analysing the motif of conversion. It argues that, by foregrounding the contemporary conversion story of Costa, the film sacrifices nuanced historical attention to the colonial past it dramatizes and sustained development of one of its apparently central characters: Daniel/ Hatuey, who is repeatedly converted into narrative and symbolic figures of secondary prominence, despite their importance to the development and legibility of the work as a whole.

## **Resumen**

Este estudio examina la representación de la historia colonial latinoamericana y la caracterización de Daniel/ Hatuey en *También la lluvia/ Even the Rain* (Icíar Bollaín, 2010). Una obra metacinemática que es, a la vez, un estudio histórico y un comentario político, *También la lluvia/ Even the Rain* ha recibido una crítica mixta debido a su representación de las desigualdades históricas y sociales que analiza. Este artículo examina esta problemática centrándose en el motivo de la conversión. Al priorizar la historia de la conversión contemporánea de Costa, la película sacrifica tanto una aproximación detallada al pasado colonial que dramatiza como el desarrollo sistemático de uno de sus personajes aparentemente centrales. Daniel/ Hatuey termina convirtiéndose en una serie de figuras narrativas y simbólicas de carácter secundario, a pesar de su importancia para el desarrollo y la legibilidad de la película.

*También la lluvia/ Even the Rain* (2010), directed by Icíar Bollaín and written by Paul Laverty, dramatizes the efforts of a crew led by Costa (Luis Tosar), a Spanish producer, and Sebastián (Gael García Bernal), a Mexican director, as they shoot

a film meant to highlight the harsh realities of early Caribbean colonization.<sup>1</sup> While Sebastián, idealistic and immersed in his vision for the film, uses historical records – most notably the writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas – as its basis, the work is shot in Cochabamba, Bolivia, to save money by under-paying local crew members and extras. This raises issues of exploitation and representation pivotal to one of the main critical questions posed by *También la lluvia*: to what extent do Costa and Sebastián perpetuate the same inequalities they apparently seek to denounce?

This central question emerges from the interplay between the shooting of the film (whose title is never revealed, hereafter the ‘film-in-production’) and the simultaneous social instabilities in Cochabamba occasioned by the attempted multinational privatization of its water supply and the protests of local residents fighting to maintain their access. Based on the Cochabamba Water War (1999–2000), *También la lluvia* ties this real-life crisis to the fate of the film-in-production through one of its local actors, Daniel (Juan Carlos Aduviri), a leader in the protests. Problems for the film crew worsen when Daniel, who plays the prominent role of the Taíno *cacique* Hatuey in their epic, is arrested and beaten, thus putting the production in jeopardy. Later, when Daniel’s daughter Belén (Milena Soliz) is injured, his wife Teresa (Leónidas Chiri) turns to Costa for help at the very moment the crew is preparing to flee the outbreak of violence. Costa, the producer, who has shown little interest in or empathy for the local people up to this point, undergoes a radical change of heart and races through the city to save Belén. In the final sequence Costa and Daniel meet again for an emotional farewell, as Daniel thanks Costa for saving his daughter, and Costa departs Cochabamba, telling Daniel he is unlikely to return.

The film-in-production in *También la lluvia* deals with early colonial history in the Caribbean and, as such, contends with a limited textual record. Fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century written records of the Spanish presence in the Caribbean include the navigational and epistolary writings of Columbus, the 1498 *relación* penned by the Hieronymite Ramón Pané, historical writings by the first official chronicler of the Indies, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, and the polemical works of Las Casas (Chang-Rodríguez 1994: 113–18). Colonial writings like these frequently resort to suppositions about the histories and cultures of Amerindian peoples, from the notion that they viewed arriving Europeans as gods – what Matthew Restall (2004: 108) calls ‘the apotheosis myth’ – to the idea that they lacked any prior religious beliefs and could therefore be easily converted to Christianity. These ‘myths of the Conquest’ tend to correspond to the beliefs, desires, and strategies of those writing rather than those being written about.<sup>2</sup>

1 Thank you to our students at Christ’s, Emmanuel, and St John’s colleges (2016–17) who both inspired and encouraged us to write this teaching-led collaboration.

2 The term ‘myths of the Conquest’ is used in the sense described by Restall in *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*: ‘something fictitious that is commonly held to be true, partially or absolutely’ (2004: xvi).

*También la lluvia* rehearses some of these foundational myths, highlighting the extent to which the film-in-production propagates the logic of Conquest. In a neoliberal twist on the 'apotheosis myth', for instance, Costa brags on the phone to his financial backer that the Cochabamban extras see the filmmakers, not as gods, but rather, as magnanimous employers: 'Two fucking dollars a day and they feel like kings'. Daniel, within earshot the whole time, confronts Costa by repeating back to him, '¿Dos putos dólares, no? Y ellos están contentos. Yo he trabajado dos años como albañil en los Estados Unidos. Yo me conozco esta historia', before leaving the set with his daughter (34' 08"–35' 02"). A new myth of indigenous convertibility also figures prominently in *También la lluvia*, as the filmmakers have elected to substitute Quechua-speaking *cochabambinos* for Caribbean Taínos. When María (Cassandra Ciangherotti), who appears with a handheld camera making a behind-the-scenes documentary of the film-in-production, asks Sebastián and Costa about this choice, Costa cites its financial viability and adds, 'son todos iguales' (06' 39"). In both of these instances, the reworking of colonial myths emphasizes a connection between early modern and contemporary exploitation.

The resultant message is powerful and unambiguous: as contemporary conflicts replicate colonial abuses, the filmmakers who look to represent the colonial past must not be blind to how they continue to benefit from and participate in its legacy of injustice. As *También la lluvia* is a film about a film, its critical portrayal of filmmaking has a clear self-reflexive dimension, but the extent and implications of this self-reflexivity have been a matter of debate. In reviews of the film, for instance, popular critics Roger Ebert (2011) and Stephen Holden (2011) both wondered whether Bollaín and Laverty, like Costa and Sebastián, had also underpaid local Bolivian extras. Bollaín addressed these concerns directly, explaining in an interview (Poland 2011) that the production paid extras fairly and made contributions to their communities, all according to stipulations made by local leaders. Still, a similar question may be raised about representation: if *También la lluvia* interrogates the portrayal of the colonial past envisaged by Sebastián, to what extent does this affect its own representational strategies?

Scholarship has been ambivalent on this point, criticizing *También la lluvia* for its emphasis on the filmmakers or its occasional lack of coherence and direction. At the same time, however, studies tend to find the shortcomings of *También la lluvia* to be productive and already anticipated within its reflexivity. To date, scholars have approached *También la lluvia* in terms of its relationship to the Water War, its status as a co-production, its articulation of human rights discourse, and its place in the oeuvre of Bollaín. Other studies analyse the relationship between *También la lluvia* and previous films on colonial history, most notably the lionizing portrayals of Columbus in a body of works produced circa the 1992 quincentenary. However, few studies have interrogated the portrayal of colonial history in the film-in-production, its narrative and symbolic understanding of the writings of Columbus and Las Casas, and how this understanding affects the dramatization of contemporary injustice and exploitation. Taking these questions as a point of departure, the following study examines the critique and rehearsal of myths

of the Conquest in *También la lluvia*. We focus, in particular, on the portrayal of conversion and convertibility, motifs that unite the historical and contemporary planes of the film. While rhetorically central to the Spanish colonial project in the Caribbean, conversion is most palpable in the film in the figure of Costa. At the same time that Costa comes to the fore in his heroic conversion, Daniel/Hatuey takes on a number of different roles that are both vital to the structural coherence of the work and consistently minimized. He is a palimpsestic figure, endlessly convertible within the narrative and symbolic fabric of the film. The conversion of Costa and the convertibility of Daniel, in turn, reinforce the overarching reliance of *También la lluvia* on the iconography of Christianity, the very apparatus that was at the centre of the colonial enterprise the film-in-production seeks to criticize. Ultimately, the multiple forms of conversion that underpin *También la lluvia* serve to reveal the limits of its self-reflexive nature.

### Conquest and conversions

Myths of the Conquest are foundational in the colonial textual record. In the 1493 report on his first transatlantic crossing, the famous letter written to Luis de Santángel, Columbus exalts the beauty and abundance of the islands he has visited, and describes their populations as timid, handsome, tractable and, most importantly, easily convertible: ‘se farán cristianos’ (Colón 2003: 222). Religious conversion, moreover, is bound up with idealized obedience, since the native peoples, according to Columbus, ‘se inclinan al amor e servicio de Sus Altezas y de toda la nación castellana’ (Colón 2003: 222). Columbus had worked for years to gain the support of the Catholic monarchs for his voyage and would strive to keep their backing during the remainder of his life, so these claims carry an important rhetorical force.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Hulme (1986: 37) has called the question of Columbus’s motive ‘very old and vexed’. The textual record of his voyages has been interpreted variously to show a man obsessed with a cosmographical principle, grasping at riches and recognition, or convinced of the religious and chiliastic significance of his discoveries.<sup>4</sup> Such characterizations are not mutually exclusive: rather, the imbrication of the worldly and otherworldly endures from Columbus’s letter to Santángel until his fourth *relación de viaje*, where he writes in an indignant and desperate tone about the trials of his final expedition. Comparing himself to the biblical figure of Job in his suffering (Colón 2003: 485), Columbus recounts an episode of

3 The ‘Capitulaciones de Santa Fe’ granted to Columbus by the Catholic monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand set out the terms on which Columbus could explore and profit from ‘todas aquellas yslas y tierras firmes que por su mano e yndustria se descubrirán o ganarán’ (Nader 1996: 263). The document details the distribution of any material wealth obtained in the Conquest, as well as the hope of the monarchs that ‘con la ayuda de Dios, que los pobladores Yndios de las dichas Yndias se convertirán a nuestra sancta fe cathólica’ (1996: 265).

4 The bibliography on Columbus is immense and we cannot do justice to it here; however, select studies that have informed our argument include *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn (1999), to whose memory *También la lluvia* is dedicated; O’Gorman 1995; Kadir 1992; and Zamora 1993.

divine revelation that culminates in a layered reference to the 'privilegios, cartas y promesas' that he will receive for his efforts (2003: 492). While his claim of receiving a divine message seems to validate interpretations of Columbus as a man convinced of his own millenary importance, at the same time, the wording of the passage also serves to remind royal readers of the rewards promised to Columbus in return for his successful voyages. The sacred and the profane, worldly and otherworldly gains, are tightly woven in the textual record, 'vexing' modern approaches to Columbus. In *También la lluvia*, debates over the historical nature of Columbus come to the fore when Sebastián's vision of a one-dimensional, greedy explorer comes into conflict with the scepticism of Antón (Karra Elejalde), who portrays Columbus in the film-in-production.

Antón stands out from his fellow cast and crew members as a cynic who questions the vision of colonial history that guides Sebastián. Early on, Antón complains that the film-in-production employs a rather facile dichotomy, vilifying his character, Columbus, and exalting the work of Dominican friars Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de Las Casas: 'El plan está claro: santificas a este par de cabrones [Montesinos and Las Casas], y a mí me lincháis. Esto no es arte; esto es pura propaganda' (21' 33"–21' 40"). Nevertheless, when rehearsing the film-in-production, Antón embraces Sebastián's scripting of Columbus as a man primarily motivated by the search for gold. We see this when his scepticism about the project as a whole does not prevent an improvised and awkward interaction with a local woman, a member of the catering staff standing by during rehearsal. Reaching out and physically removing her earring to use as an impromptu prop, Columbus/ Antón demands that she tell him where to find more gold: 'Ya sabes a qué me refiero, mujer, ¡oro!'. For a moment, her silence seems to reflect the mutual incomprehension that would have prevailed during the first encounters between Columbus and indigenous Caribbean peoples, an incomprehension that Columbus worked to minimize in his own writings.<sup>5</sup>

When Antón breaks character, asking jocularly, '¿Y a quién le importa una mierda el oro? Necesito un copazo, joder', he returns the woman's earring and adds, 'disculpe señorita, los actores somos así, unos puros egoístas'. The moment ends for the other actors, who laugh easily. The caterer, silent up until this point, nods and replies 'de nada' (12' 15"–12' 27"). Throughout the scene, she occupies a doubly subordinated position: within the reenactment, she is made to play a silent Taíno; however, she is not one of the actors, but a member of staff forced into an unanticipated scenario by a customer. The exchange highlights the power of Sebastián's characterization of an avaricious Columbus: the scripted notion that his interest in the Americas was only its mineral wealth seduces even Antón.

In contrast to the avaricious Columbus in the film-in-production, Antón presents a much more complex and sympathetic character: Sebastián and Costa worriedly allude to his alcoholism and we find out that he has a poor relationship

5 In his letter to Santángel, Columbus wrote that he had taken captives on Hispaniola, 'para que dependiesen y me diesen noticia de lo que avía en aquellas partes, e así fue que luego entendieron [sic] y nos a ellos cuando por lengua o señas' (Colón 2003: 222–23).

with his family. By the end of the film, Antón, like Costa, stands out as one of the few crew members who decides to assist the repressed Bolivians rather than flee the violence. In offering a drink to protestors who are being held in a military truck, Antón does not undertake a heroic rescue like Costa, but the gesture nevertheless shows his capacity to move from cynicism to sympathy. Antón/ Colón is one of the key figures in the overarching metalepsis of *También la lluvia*. As Luis Prádanos argues (2014: 92), his interaction with the caterer constitutes the first instance of metalepsis, when the reality of the film-in-production and the reality of contemporary Cochabamba merge. In this way, the character development of Antón also affects that of Columbus, giving rise to a protagonist 'neither caricatured nor idealised' (Wheeler 2013: 246). The metaleptical tension that produces this interesting figure, however, privileges the contemporary moment: the disillusioned Antón redeems the greedy Columbus without really challenging the reading of colonial history espoused by the film-in-production. While Sebastián reduces the motivation of Columbus to the search for gold, any significance that religious conversion might have had in the Conquest is displaced by the more compelling personal conversions of contemporary protagonists including Antón and, especially, Costa.

Many have noted that the transformation of Costa from the insensitive, pragmatic producer to the enlightened and compassionate hero is unconvincingly abrupt (Cilento 2012: 253; Hulme-Lippert 2016: 116; Weiser 2015: 281). Nevertheless, this is arguably the driving force of the film, its primary conversion narrative. In visual terms, the arc of Costa's story opens and closes the film, as his departure from Cochabamba contrasts sharply with his arrival. Both are shot from the interior of cars. The entrance of the filmmakers into Cochabamba highlights the directorial gaze of Sebastián: the camera is focused primarily on point-of-view shots of *cochabambinos* walking the street and lined up for casting as the car passes, at times with a slight elevation that intimates the distance between filmmakers and the people they are looking to turn into extras. Costa does not even appear in this scene until the car stops and he gets out, complaining to Sebastián about the time-consuming nature of an open casting call. In other words, Costa is the consummate removed producer, and his initial absence from the opening shots emphasizes this.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the final scene foregrounds Costa insistently. Again shot from the interior of a car, the scene is presented through shallow focus, highlighting the face and profile of Costa while the passing Cochabamba is indistinct. Even the shots that approximate point-of-view emphasize Costa as the central figure, in contrast to the opening ones (Figures 1 and 2). The final moments show both Costa and Cochabamba in soft focus, with the profile of the producer superimposed and finally blending with images of his surroundings (Figure 3), perhaps to underscore his new-found sympathy for the community he once saw as a means to an end. Leaving aside the abrupt nature of

6 In his study of the opening scene, Andrew Hageman (2013: 74) points out that it sets in motion both 'the dynamic tension between artistic vision and the hard pressures of time and money' and the tension between the filmmakers and local residents.



Figure 1. A point-of-view shot from the opening scene of *También la lluvia*. We do not see Sebastián, but instead what he sees – the surrounding Cochabamba.

Source: Screen grab from *También la lluvia/Even the Rain*, 2010, dir. Icíar Bollaín (Morena Films, Mandarin Cinéma, Alebrije Cine y Video, Vaca Films, También la lluvia AIE).

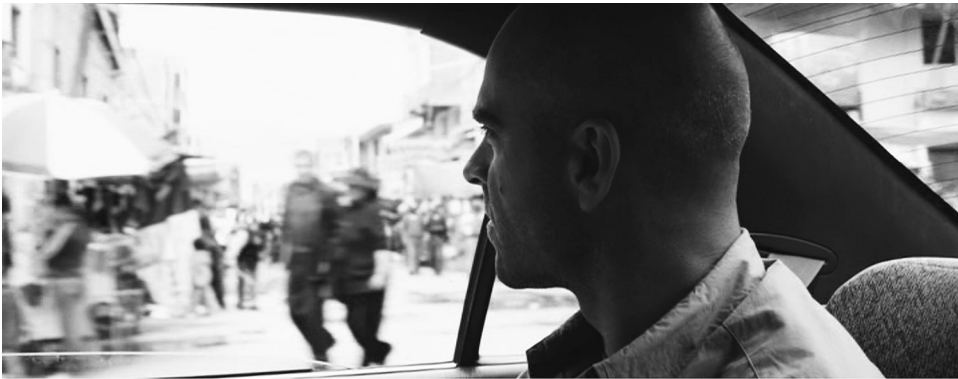


Figure 2. A shot from the closing scene of *También la lluvia*. Costa is central here, and the surrounding Cochabamba appears in soft focus.

Source: Screen grab from *También la lluvia/Even the Rain*, 2010, dir. Icíar Bollaín (Morena Films, Mandarin Cinéma, Alebrije Cine y Video, Vaca Films, También la lluvia AIE).

Costa's conversion, however, we should note how the shift in narrative privileges the contemporary over the historical: the film-in-production that was meant to criticize the inception of the Spanish presence in the Americas has ceded to the personal narrative of Costa.

The contemporary conversion of Costa dovetails with the oversimplified understanding of colonial history adopted by Sebastián: the historical Columbus is driven by greed, while his modern-day avatars – Antón and, to a greater extent, Costa – undergo changes of heart. Michelle Hulme-Lippert has suggested viewing the conversion of Costa in relation to Las Casas rather than Columbus, noting that it is 'intentionally improbable and yet imaginable, echoing that of Las Casas on hearing Montesinos's sermon' (2016: 116). Hulme-Lippert is referring to an episode recorded by Las Casas in his extensive *Historia de las Indias*, and dramatized in



Figure 3. The superimposition of Costa's profile (far right), blending with the image of Cochabamba as he leaves in a taxi.

Source: Screen grab from *También la lluvia/Even the Rain*, 2010, dir. Icíar Bollaín (Morena Films, Mandarin Cinéma, Alebrije Cine y Video, Vaca Films, También la lluvia AIE).

the film-in-production as Las Casas/ Alberto (Carlos Santos) listens to a sermon delivered by Montesinos/ Juan (Raúl Arévalo). According to Las Casas, Montesinos had given an impassioned sermon on Hispaniola in 1511, condemning abuses of the indigenous population, asking:

Decid, ¿con qué derecho y con qué justicia tenéis en tan cruel y horrible servidumbre aquestos indios? [...]. ¿Y qué cuidado tenéis de quien los doctrine, y conozcan a su Dios y criador, sean bautizados, oigan misa, guarden las fiestas y domingos? ¿Estos, no son hombres? ¿No tienen ánimas racionales? ¿No sois obligados a amarlos como a vosotros mismos? ¿Esto no entendéis, ésto no sentís? (Las Casas 1951: II, 441–42)

Hulme-Lippert implies that this speech was personally transformative for Las Casas, an implication supported by the film-in-production when Sebastián directs Juan/ Montesinos, 'intercambias una mirada con Bartolomé', laying the groundwork for another narrative of personal conversion to parallel that of Costa. It is important to note, however, that by his own account, the conversion Las Casas experienced occurred three years later, in 1514. And rather than taking inspiration from a fiery speech, Las Casas describes the defining moment as arising from his own sermon preparations and his reading of Ecclesiastes 34 (Pagden 1991: 152). In fact, although Las Casas praises Montesinos in his *Historia de las Indias*, he specifically notes that the famous sermon had little effect on its listeners at the time: 'los dejó atónitos, a muchos como fuera de sentido, a otros más empedernidos, y algunos algo compungidos, pero a ninguno, a lo que yo después entendí, convertido' (Las Casas 1951: II, 442; our emphasis). Not only is there no mention of any personal revelation, *no one* is converted as a direct result of this sermon. Of course, any autobiographical reconstruction of epiphany may be just as unreliable as the myth perpetuated by Sebastián, but the choice highlights one of the ways the film-in-production manipulates history in order to present a compelling narrative, what Robert Brent Toplin (2002: 1) has analysed as the tendency of historical



films to keep things 'simple and understandable' through the selective use of evidence. If this selective use of history is understandable in terms of genre, it is also closely intertwined with the problematic portrayal of Daniel/ Hatuey, as we discuss in the next section.

### The palimpsestic figure of Daniel/ Hatuey

The precise narrative of the film-in-production remains undefined, glimpsed only through disjointed rehearsals and select scenes. It appears to deal with the first two decades of Spanish presence in the Caribbean, from the 1492 arrival of Columbus in Hispaniola to the 1512 execution of Hatuey in Cuba. The only figure in the film-in-production that unites these two Caribbean islands is Hatuey. A *cacique* originally from Hispaniola, Hatuey fled to Cuba in the aftermath of the Spanish arrival and was later captured and executed by forces led by Diego Velázquez in 1512. Las Casas records the story of Hatuey in both his polemical *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* of 1552 and his monumental *Historia de las Indias*. Las Casas claims that Hatuey attributed the Spanish greed for gold to their veneration for the mineral: "tienen un dios a quien ellos adoran y quieren mucho, y por habello de nosotros para lo adorar, nos trabajan de sojuzgar y nos matan" (2016: 91). He also describes the *cacique*'s refusal of baptism at the moment of his execution. In the film-in-production, Hatuey/ Daniel is the only major figure who appears in scenes with both Columbus and Las Casas (themselves a generation apart), confronting Columbus/ Antón when he demands that the natives of Hispaniola provide tribute in the form of gold, and later executed in front of a devastated Las Casas/ Alberto.

The vital role of Hatuey – bringing together the figures of Columbus and Las Casas, and the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba – is never narratively explained in *También la lluvia*, forcing Hatuey/ Daniel, like the caterer during the rehearsal, to act as a silent facilitator rather than as an agent. While the caterer had not consented to being involved in the scene Antón acts out, Daniel has agreed to act in the film-in-production; however, his casting is presented as the incidental, felicitous choice of Sebastián, despite the fact that his character is the figure that holds together the otherwise disparate colonial scenes that viewers see. The understated narrative significance of Hatuey, moreover, allows the condensed history of the first 20 years of Spanish presence in the Caribbean to go unquestioned: the crew may argue over the merits of Las Casas, but only Antón brings up the simplistic foil created between Columbus and Las Casas, and no one remarks on the historical cohesion that Hatuey/ Daniel brings to the film.

The pressbook released for *También la lluvia* describes Sebastián as obsessed with creating a film about 'uno de los grandes íconos mundiales; Cristóbal Colón' (Vitagraph Films 2010: 7). Sebastián wishes to compare Columbus to Las Casas and Montesinos on the one hand and, on the other, 'enfrentar a Colón con otro personaje histórico: Hatuey, el primer líder indio que fue quemado vivo en una cruz como ejemplo para los que se opusieran a los cristianos' (2010: 7). The

film-in-production, then, places Columbus at its centre, and casts Las Casas and Hatuey as different kinds of oppositional figures. In so doing, it displaces the narrative and symbolic centrality of Hatuey. Strikingly, the *Cuaderno pedagógico* developed by Alta Films and Morena Films (*También la lluvia* n. d.) does not mention Hatuey at all.

Hatuey's loss of centrality is the result of a series of conversions foregrounded by the film and its film-in-production: the colonial past becomes the neoliberal present, Taínos become *cochabambinos*, and the cold-hearted Costa becomes an enlightened hero. The character of Daniel/ Hatuey constantly facilitates these conversions, but the many roles he plays accumulate rather than develop, rendering him a palimpsestic protagonist, that is, a figure whose significance is repeatedly reconstructed. Whereas Costa and – to a lesser extent – Antón undergo conversions that follow a clear narrative arc, the mutability of Daniel/ Hatuey is driven by the historical, social and religious themes of the film. While Hatuey provides an unarticulated coherence to the colonial moments portrayed in the film-in-production, Daniel/ Hatuey is unmistakably the figure that symbolizes both past and present oppression, yokes together the historical and social realist modes of the film, and acts as the unwelcome social conscience that prompts the conversion of Costa. Fulfilling so many roles, paradoxically, renders Daniel/ Hatuey both a lynchpin and a secondary character. In this way, the palimpsestic characterization of Daniel/ Hatuey constitutes a cinematic form of native convertibility, a contemporary rehearsal of the myths of the Conquest.

*También la lluvia* presents Daniel/ Hatuey as the primary conduit through which viewers come to associate the abuses of the Conquest with the injustice that sparked the Water War. This parallel is achieved in part by emphasizing the continuity of character between Hatuey and Daniel: both indigenous leaders resist, and their resistance is met with violence. Thus, the doubled Daniel/ Hatuey serves as a focal point for reading indigenous Latin American history in transhistorical terms. Within *También la lluvia*, Sebastián most clearly propagates this transhistorical logic. As noted, Costa has chosen to shoot Bolivia as Hispaniola and Cuba to save money by employing large numbers of indigenous extras. Unconcerned with the specificity of the Caribbean context, Costa asserts casually that 'son todos iguales' (06' 39"). His dismissive attitude rests on the assumption that the diversity of Amerindian populations need only be a fungible Otherness for most filmgoers. Costa, then, relies on a specific kind of convertible indigeneity in order to make shooting the film-in-production a successful venture. Viewers soon see that the position of Sebastián is hardly more critical. While clearly uncomfortable with the economically motivated substitution that Costa trivializes, Sebastián seizes on another type of indigenous convertibility: transhistorical identity. When Sebastián witnesses the angry defiance of Daniel at the initial casting call, he sees in him a ready-made Hatuey. In this way, Sebastián's view is a circumscription and a demand: he looks for twentieth-century indigeneity to be a continuation of its sixteenth-century predecessor, and Daniel strikes him as a figure who embodies such a continuity.

The scene in which Sebastián tells Costa of his decision to cast Daniel as Hatuey presents this transhistorical continuity in striking visual terms: first, the crew scrutinizes Daniel on the screen (Figure 4), and Sebastián argues that his gaze and persona perfectly capture the Hatuey he has imagined for the film. When Costa continues to object, Sebastián manipulates the mouse to reveal Daniel's screen test for Hatuey in makeup and costume (Figure 5). Thus, with the smallest possible gesture – a click – Sebastián fixes Daniel as the embodiment of the Taíno *cacique*. The directorial perspective of Sebastián circumscribes the contemporary Daniel within the liminal space of the transhistorical for the sake of his artistic project. His view on indigeneity is in this way an analogue to that of Costa: whereas the producer dismisses the significance of the geographic, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the indigenous Americas, the director seizes on transhistorical convertibility, valuing the Daniel of the present insofar as he reflects an ideal of past indigenous resistance. The *mise en abyme* of this scene – in which viewers



Figure 4. Costa (left) and Sebastián (right) argue about casting Daniel in the film.  
Source: Screen grab from *También la lluvia/Even the Rain*, 2010, dir. Icíar Bollaín (Morena Films, Mandarin Cinéma, Alebrije Cine y Video, Vaca Films, También la lluvia AIE).



Figure 5. Sebastián (right) shows Costa (left) Daniel's screen test for Hatuey.  
Source: Screen grab from *También la lluvia/Even the Rain*, 2010, dir. Icíar Bollaín (Morena Films, Mandarin Cinéma, Alebrije Cine y Video, Vaca Films, También la lluvia AIE).

observe Sebastián and Costa as they observe footage of Daniel – dramatizes its replication of the ‘imperial gaze’ as described by E. Ann Kaplan: ‘an objectifying gaze, one that refuses mutual gazing’ (1997: 79).

*También la lluvia* thus foregrounds the shortcomings of the transhistorical framework through which Sebastián views Daniel. At the same time, we must note that the sweeping historical parallels and overarching social message of *También la lluvia* often rely on the same logic of transhistorical convertibility. In his work on the historical film genre, Toplin (2002: 42) notes that filmmakers often incorporate ‘subtle hints’ to help their audiences spot connections and the relevance of the film to current issues. *También la lluvia* opts for clarity over subtlety, its metaleptical structure rendering the film-in-production an obvious iteration of the colonial enterprise: as one poster for the film bluntly states, ‘water is gold’. Daniel/ Hatuey is the key to this connection, assuming the mantle of the ‘great man’ – an eponymous theory of historical change developed in the nineteenth century that, as Toplin points out (2002: 37, 180), can be applied to filmic representations that personalize historical narratives, allowing for a simplification of the plot and a reduction in the number of protagonists. As the ‘great man’ of the film, Daniel/ Hatuey synecdochically focalizes and drives two distinct histories. This helps to explain the condensation of the protracted protests that collectively formed the Water War between December 1999 and April 2000 into the more digestible personal struggle of Daniel portrayed in *También la lluvia*. At the same time, as noted above, Hatuey serves as the unifying figure through which viewers glimpse the exploitation and abuses of the first decades of Spanish colonial presence in the Caribbean. And finally, as a synthesis of both of these, Daniel/ Hatuey acts as the major figure in which both lines converge. As such, his character is both central and, somehow, invisible: a vanishing point.

It might be argued that, like Daniel/ Hatuey, the other actors in the film-in-production – most notably Antón/ Colón and Las Casas/ Raúl – are also required to function across its metalepsis. And yet there is an important difference in terms of their explicit investment in the project: Antón and Raúl, we know, have strong and divergent opinions on the representational project of the film-in-production, which are most clearly shown in their argument at dinner with other members of the cast and crew. In sharp contrast, *También la lluvia* does not reveal how or why Daniel decided to be in a film for which he did not formally audition, but instead presents his suitability for the film-in-production as a foregone conclusion. The audience, like Costa, discovers this casting decision when Sebastián presents the filmed shots of an already costumed and made-up Hatuey/ Daniel. Interestingly, however, Daniel has no narrativized agency here: perhaps he only stays so that his daughter Belén, the reason for which he was at the casting at all, has a chance to act.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the narrative does not foreground Daniel, but

7 Aduviri, on the other hand, has spoken about how he came to play Hatuey/ Daniel and his view of the film as a whole. In the brief featurette ‘Making of *También la lluvia*’ (included on the DVD, see ‘Making Of’ on *También la lluvia/Even the Rain* 2011: 12’ 46”–12’ 54”). Aduviri remarks that the film ‘ha llegado como [...] como caída del cielo, como lo que necesitábamos

his selection by Sebastián. The fundamental role of Daniel/ Hatuey as a transhistorical figure of indigenous resistance helps audiences navigate a narrative that privileges the story of Costa's conversion. This conversion story, as we discuss in the next section, is for the most part reliant on Christian motifs, thus rearticulating colonial discourses and iconography (Dennison 2013: 191) in a way that again reveals the limits of self-reflexivity in *También la lluvia*.

### *Figurae Christi*

In reading Daniel as a broad signifier of transhistorical indigeneity, we must also note the clear allusions to Christian iconography that add another layer to his palimpsestic characterization. Numerous depictions of crosses, as well as the vial of water presented to Costa, a signifier of 'baptism' after his conversion, together speak to Stephanie Dennison's point that replicated colonial apparatuses ultimately shape the language and delivery of the film's message. Of particular significance is the scene of Hatuey's execution, a well-known episode recorded by Las Casas that evokes Christ's crucifixion. Indeed, its similarity to the biblical event has been noted previously by a number of critics (Hulme-Lippert 2016: 111; Dennison 2013: 191; Ebert 2011). In this scene, Hatuey/ Daniel acts as a *figura Christi* but ultimately fulfils a marginal role that serves to highlight the development of the characters of Costa and Sebastián. While the crucifixion scene of the film-in-production is the culmination of this reading of the Daniel/ Hatuey character, analysis of this allusion occasions a return to the preceding scenes in which the filmmaking duo meet the corrupt police chief and Costa attempts to reassure a distraught Sebastián about the validity of their focus on the film. These scenes not only lay the groundwork for a reading of the biblical motif but also highlight the narrative privileging of Costa and Sebastián.

After Daniel is arrested, Costa requests a meeting with the police chief to secure the actor's release and ensure the completion of the film-in-production. As Costa and Sebastián are led along a dark corridor, accompanied by two armed guards, the trepidation on their faces captures the mood of the scene, built by shouts and the cocking of guns before a riot squad charges into view, reminding us of the conflict raging beyond the centralized narrative of the film-in-production. The ensuing deal with the police chief alludes to the betrayal of Christ to the priests by Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26:14–50). We find the camera perched just above Costa's shoulder and experience a slow pan to the money on the table that accompanies the details of the betrayal of the *figura Christi*. Akin to the chief priest

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para contar sobre esto'. Later, in a BBC News article (Cabitzta 2011) Aduviri explains that he 'never intended to act in [*También la lluvia*]'. This resonates to a certain extent with the characterization of Daniel, who has no apparent interest in the film, and only attends the casting call to accompany his daughter, Belén. But unlike Daniel, Aduviri had made film his profession before his casting. The same article reveals that Aduviri hopes to make his home town, El Alto, 'the centre of Bolivian filmmaking'. While this extra-diegetic article offers only a glimpse at the personal and professional aims that might have informed Aduviri's appearance in *También la lluvia*, we know far less about the motivations of Daniel.

in the Gospel of St Matthew (26:15), the police chief offers the filmmakers their 30 pieces of silver in the form of their crucial scene in return for the guarantee that Daniel will be rearrested upon its completion. The role of Costa and Sebastián in ensuring his location at a specific time mirrors the promise of Judas to signal Christ for the soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane. The narrative and affective focus of this transaction, however, is not Daniel; rather, it is the differing motivations of the two Judas figures, Costa and Sebastián. Their initial disagreement about the deal, which Costa opts to accept and Sebastián frets over, emphasizes the tension this act of betrayal causes between them. The argument continues as both characters exit the police chief's office and our vantage point, once suggestive of a shared empathy, gives way to a third-party view more appropriate to the audience's reaction to the perfidious implications of their discussion. The disagreement between the two men is partly resolved when Sebastián appears to accept, albeit apprehensively, Costa's emphatic 'Sí, puedes; sí, puedes; sí puedes' (*También la lluvia* 2010: 60' 10"), and the subsequent scene begins with a guard releasing Daniel from an overcrowded cell.

The emotional cost of betrayal for Sebastián continues, made clear in a subsequent scene when we find that the director has passed 'toda la noche sin dormir y vomitando'. As Costa enters his room, an elevated shot of Sebastián emphasizes his emotional fragility. The numerous books on the bed and bedside table remind viewers of Sebastián's keen interest in the history of colonial Latin America and his desire to make a revelatory film about its exploitative and unjust character. At the same time, his discussion with Costa – particularly their melodramatic recitation of lines from the Montesinos sermon – throws into relief the fact that they wilfully (Costa) or naively (Sebastián) ignore their own replication of colonial injustice, myopically prioritizing the film-in-production over the suffering of the people involved in its making. Sebastián ultimately decides to comply with the corrupt deal and realize his filmic endeavour, thus completing the second, more reluctant, embodiment of Judas to contrast the more willing betrayal of Costa. If Costa appears to have been driven by pragmatic financial concerns and an at times fraternal solicitude for Sebastián, Sebastián himself finally betrays Daniel in the interest of his art, cementing his earlier assertion that 'La película es lo primero, siempre' (13' 45").

Both scenes work together to privilege the emotional turmoil of the decision-making processes of the transient filmmakers, those passing through who will not really experience the ramifications of the Water War, whatever its outcome. Likewise, the doubled allusions to Judas give rise to a doubly betrayed *figura Christi* – the victim of both pragmatism and artistic aspiration – emphasizing again the crucial symbolic coherence provided by the figure of Daniel/Hatuey. Like Hatuey, who holds together the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba and the characters of Columbus and Las Casas, Daniel is vital to the narrative and symbolic coherence of these acts of betrayal, but largely absent from or silent in their depiction.

The crucifixion scene within the film-in-production is rich in significance in this respect. As both the *site* where the betrayal of Daniel to the authorities is realized,

thus the Garden of Gethsemane, and the *set* on which Hatuey is executed, thus Calvary for our *figura Christi*, it requires Aduviri to provide narrative, symbolic, and structural coherence to the moment. The historical irony of this *figura Christi* is clearest when Las Casas/ Raúl exclaims ‘¡Esto no es cristiano, por Dios!’ In response, a conquistador orders that thirteen men be rounded up: ‘Uno por cada discípulo’ (65’ 19”–65’ 27”), so that Hatuey/ Daniel now serves as a *figura Christi* at both the diegetic and meta-diegetic levels, at the two distinct moments of the betrayal and crucifixion story outlined above. The mocking attitude of the conquistador represents, in the film-in-production, an ironic lack of engagement with the faith that supposedly underpinned the Conquest. The conquistadors first name the Evangelists as they pick victims before falling into jest with names, including César, Carlos, Manolo, and Paco. The guise of Christianity falls apart within the scene and we see the brutality of the colonial enterprise. The death of Hatuey completes the crucifixion of the *figura Christi* for the film-in-production, bringing about the circumstances for the arrest of Daniel – in his second position as *figura Christi* – as previously agreed by Costa, Sebastián, and the chief of police.

The scene is replete with Christian symbolism in its portrayal of Dominican and Franciscan missionaries, references to the Apostles and the Evangelists, and as the culmination of both Christic narratives in the person of Daniel/ Hatuey, first crucified, then arrested. The use of these Christian symbols and narratives in *También la lluvia* serves primarily to highlight instances of hypocrisy: within the film-in-production, the ruthless conquistador literally turns the pleas of Las Casas into an invitation to mock his faith; as embodiments of Judas, Costa and Sebastián demonstrate their ultimate willingness to participate in contemporary systems of oppression in order to serve their own ends. The clarity of this message, however, relies on the legibility of the very narratives and symbols used to justify the Conquest (Dennison 2013: 191). In addition, the message again renders Daniel a figure of vital importance – in this case, the plural *figurae Christi*–whose presence in the narrative is nevertheless minimized by the emphasis on Costa and Sebastián.

A final example of religious iconography that merits consideration is the small vial of water that Daniel gives to Costa after the producer has saved his daughter, Belén. The vial could serve as a token of Daniel’s gratitude, a symbol of their new-found transcultural bond, or a memento of Costa’s time in Bolivia, if not all three. While its significance as a symbol of thanks is beyond question, the way in which it functions as ‘un borrar de fronteras significativo’ (Cibreiro 2015: 170) requires greater attention. On the one hand, the transhistorical critique of the film has presented water as ‘the new gold’, the resource at the centre of injustice and exploitation. One unsettling conclusion from this scene, then, would be that Costa, like Columbus, successfully leaves the New World with a specimen of the prized material. On the other hand, and in light of the overwhelming presence of Christian narratives and iconography throughout the film, the vial of water might be seen as an allusion to the sacrament of baptism. In this way, the vial of water presented by Daniel draws together the two major forms of conversion

we have seen at play in *También la lluvia*: the sacramental symbolism of the water emphasizes, once again, the personal conversion of Costa as the central narrative of the film, while Daniel takes on yet another role, that of officiant.

### Conclusions

In many ways, *También la lluvia* is a work whose contradictory aims – a new representation of early Conquest history, a social and political critique, a complex metaleptic structure, and commercial success contingent on legibility – appear irreconcilable. Sebastián's vision to portray the evils of the Conquest requires a Columbus whose primary drive is the search for gold, while Antón, first cynical and later sympathetic, adds complexity to this characterization, principally through the metaleptical tension produced between actor and character. Costa, meanwhile, is the focus of the film's primary conversion narrative, and his transformation from pragmatic producer to sympathetic hero is clearly illustrated in the contrasting visual terms of the opening and closing scenes. The abrupt nature of his conversion has been likened to that of Las Casas, but this characterization does not reflect the textual record left by the Dominican himself. In contrast to the emphasis placed on Costa, Daniel/ Hatuey is a fascinating figure whose structural and symbolic importance is tremendous, but at the same time, disperse. As Daniel, he is the figure who most clearly represents contemporary resistance to the privatization of water resources in Cochabamba; as Hatuey, he holds together the lives of Columbus and Las Casas, the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba; and as Daniel/ Hatuey, he serves as a broad signifier of transhistorical indigenous resistance, drawing together the historical and social realist modes of the film. Finally, much of the symbolic language of the film relies on Christian motifs, and here, the lines again converge in the figure of Daniel/ Hatuey, the doubly betrayed *figurae Christi* whose arrest and crucifixion highlight the turmoil experienced by Sebastián and Costa – on the threshold of his heroic conversion – in their embodiment of Judas.

*También la lluvia* casts a critical eye on the colonial past, but also on the ethical ironies and representational limits of such criticism. In this way, *También la lluvia* seems to anticipate its own limits as well, but the vital task left to viewers is that of interrogating its structural symmetries and transhistorical claims. Hence the importance of scrutinizing the historical referents that inform the film: such analysis reminds us of the profound ways in which contemporary approaches to the colonial world are still bound by the legacy of its ideology and narratives. Paradoxically, and perhaps inevitably, therefore, in its attempt to rebut myths of the Conquest, *También la lluvia* finds itself rehearsing them.



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