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Performing for Hollywood: Coloniality and the Tourist Image in Esteban Ramírez's *Caribe* (2004)

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Abstract

This article problematizes US-Costa Rican cultural and ideological relations through an analysis of the film *Caribe / Caribbean* (2004) by Esteban Ramírez, positing that the film unconsciously invites an international audience to colonize it via the tourist gaze. Beginning by considering Ramírez's anti-imperialist stance within the film's plot which underscores the sovereignty of the Central American nation, I argue that these aims are undone through the exoticization of space and place. This article therefore goes on to analyse the ways in which the tropical image of the nation is seen to be internalized by the film, as well as considering the hegemonic Hollywood tropes of ethnicity and gender which are mimicked and performed.

Keywords:

Costa Rica

Caribe

Esteban Ramírez

Tourist gaze

Hollywood stereotypes

Latino tropes

'Our age became, and continues to be, a conflict of Latinism against Anglo-Saxonism; a conflict of institutions, aims and ideals. [...] Not only were we defeated in combat; ideologically, the Anglos continue to conquer us'. (Vasconcelos 1997: 10)

Nearly 100 years after José Vasconcelos wrote these words in his seminal 1925 essay *The Cosmic Race*, Latin America's preoccupation with neo-imperialism from the North – in the form of US culture and ideology – is still at the forefront of many academic and cultural debates. Indeed, Enrico Santí went on to argue in 1992 that 'Latinamericanism... is never far from the collective notion that identifies Europe, and by extension the United States, as a superior culture in comparison with all other non-European peoples and cultures' (1992: 20). With this statement Santí demonstrates his concern with what he sees as the internalized hierarchy of US-Latin American relations, which has only taken on more power in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, according to Walter D. Mignolo, it is these Eurocentric ideals and standards – of which the United States is the major purveyor – which continue to be lauded by Latin America, thus provoking the consideration of the region, both internally and externally, as an inferior 'other' to its Northern neighbour (2009). Mignolo contends that the very idea of Latin America – a homogenized area in the eyes of the West – is a result of colonialism, and that the idealization of Western images and values is an ever-present issue (2009). It is this superior-inferior dichotomy – the Latinamericanism described by Santí – and Costa Rica's relationship with the United States as a nation, and Hollywood as an industry, which is at the heart of Esteban Ramírez's 2004 film *Caribe / Caribbean*. Indeed, I argue that this is a production which overtly attempts to challenge US hegemony while in many ways unintentionally reaffirming it, thus offering up an example of the internalization of the Latin America-United States inferiority complex against which these scholars warn. Although the film's plotline appears to be in favour of forceful demonstrations of national sovereignty on behalf of local communities in Costa Rica against US powers, it also falls into the trap of performing for both the US-centric tourist gaze and adhering to tropes of *Latinidad* through its repetition of Hollywood cinematic and narrative norms. These can be seen in *Caribe's*

self-exoticism and thus its invitation to the audience to colonize the nation, as well as through the mimicry and performance of commonly-repeated stereotypes such as the magical black man, the Latino lover and the Latina dark lady. This article therefore analyses Ramírez's anti-imperialist intentions in *Caribe*, before considering the extent to which Costa Rica's nation-image is seen to have internalized prevalent stereotypes, depicting the country as a destination exotic and tropical enough to please tourists, but also as a safe space which adheres to Hollywood's accepted and expected visual tropes.

***Caribe* (2004)**

Ramírez's first feature production, *Caribe* is set in the beach town of Puerto Viejo which forms part of Costa Rica's Caribbean province, Limón. Conceived and produced when very few films had been released in the country, it was Ramírez's firm aim as director and scriptwriter to become an ambassador for Costa Rica at international film festivals (Ramírez 2014). Moreover, he is also clear that he made the film for both a local and international audience, and as such focused in on Costa Rica's famed – and protected – natural landscape in both his narrative and images. Set in 2002, the film is partly based on the true story of an ecological battle between the North American oil company, Reynolds, and the local population of Limón which aimed to revoke the company's government-approved license to explore natural oil reserves just off the coast. *Caribe* includes numerous subplots, however, and alongside the narration of the town's fight against this neo-imperialist bully, it also tells the story of Vicente, a Cuban, and his wife, Abigail, who have moved to Puerto Viejo to start a new life. Having received a substantial inheritance, Vicente has bought his dream home by the sea and a banana plantation along with it, the main client of which is a local company. A respected figure in the town, when Vicente joins the demonstrations against the government's deal with Reynolds, the US firm attempts to win his support, going to great lengths to get him on side. In the meantime, Vicente's private life has also been thrown into turmoil as Abigail's long-lost sister, Irene, comes to stay, tempting him into an

affair. Caught in a moral quandary, his life soon begins to unravel as the town turns against him and Irene discovers she is pregnant. Retracting his support of the oil company, Vicente returns home to confess all to Abigail; as she runs away from him and out into the plantation in the midst of a storm, however, he runs after her only to be shot in the back – presumably by the oil company’s henchmen. As Abigail and Irene cry over Vicente’s body, the screen fades to black and text appears informing the viewer that the environmentalists won their case against the national government to expel Reynolds. The final scenes show the victory party on the beach, followed by a sunny shot of Abigail and Irene playing with a toddler – assumed to be Vicente and Irene’s child – in the sand.

Costa Rican cinema in the twenty-first century has been a site of identitarian contestation as pointed out by María Lourdes Cortés when she states that ‘it is common to say that a country without cinema is an invisible country and that the cinema screens are society’s mirrors’ (ML Cortés 2002: 9). While this idea of a national cinema – or of seeing a nation through cinema – is often contested due to the increasingly transnational nature of film production, it is still a common tool used by critics and filmmakers alike (Schlesinger 2000: 19-30); one which is pertinent to Costa Rican cinema more widely and to *Caribe* in particular. While very few films were made in Costa Rica in the twentieth century – nine feature productions in total – that number increased fivefold between the years 2009-2017, with many of these films weighing in on the debate around Costa Rica’s place in the world in the face of globalization, and its relationship with the United States more specifically. This has meant that the majority of local productions take place in San José, the capital city, and attempt to open a dialogue around the imposition of certain contemporary values or ways of life on what is in many ways a traditional country. In their very essence, then, many of these films have chosen to focus on local culture and issues relevant to a national audience, whereas in setting itself at the geographic periphery of Limón, in including a transnational plotline in the Reynolds versus the community narrative arc, and in focusing on the natural environment, Ramírez aims his story at both a local and international viewer. It is this very

focus that leads the director to describe the film as a very Costa Rican production which he wanted to produce for these two audiences, stating that:

With this film I want to become an ambassador for Costa Rica in festivals: the main character in *Caribe* is Costa Rica, our country with its natural beauty, freedom of expression, ethnic diversity, a place where you can criticize the government. It reflects a Costa Rican essence: nature and democracy. (Dobles 2004)

It is these stated aims which are particularly pertinent to this analysis of *Caribe*, as I contend that despite Ramírez's intentions – to critique US neo-imperialism and central government's lack of investment in Limón, alongside a showcasing of Costa Rica as a sovereign and beautiful nation – the film actually showcases an internalization of the superior-inferior US-Latin America complex narrated by Vasconcelos, Santí, and Mignolo, and thus plays to Hollywood's cinematic gaze.

In terms of plotline, intrigue for both an international and local audience is created through the two main narrative strands – the transnational storyline which considers the negative impact of US trade on Costa Rica's rural population, and the melodrama of Vicente's doomed love triangle with his wife, Abigail, and newly-found sister-in-law, Irene. These plots are connected by their shared concern with economic and ecological matters, and from the beginning of the film Ramírez draws the audience into these issues through the use of affective cinematography. The opening shot, for example, is a silent, black screen, which imbues the first words which appear on it with import. As the audience reads that 'the Costa Rican ecological conflict which this film recreates is based on a true story', the use of darkness and silence which surround the cinemagoer while reading this phrase leaves room for reflection, and the knowledge that part of what will unfurl on screen has occurred in real life creates an empathetic connection between the viewer and the story. This realist quality is furthered as certain cutaways which punctuate the action throughout the film are leant a documentary-quality through the use of a shaky handheld camera which films the everyday life of Puerto Viejo's inhabitants – children playing football on a beach against a grey-blue

sky, or a man reeling in his catch of the day. Moreover, the reminder of the veracity the ecological storyline at the film's denouement, which mirrors its opening through the words on the screen, furthers this emotive viewing experience. Stating that 'thanks to widespread pressure and non-compliance with technical and legal requirements, on 28 February 2002 the Costa Rican government declared that the US petrol project in the Caribbean Sea was 'not environmentally viable''. Following this proclamation with scenes of a beach party held by local people celebrating this decision, Ramírez bookends his film with a reminder to his viewer that what they have witnessed has some basis in reality. This sense of semi-realism is therefore created in *Caribe* to cement the film's anti-imperialist stance and to win viewers over to Ramírez's theme of the importance of Costa Rica's national sovereignty.

This effect is also achieved within the plot itself as the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' and 'right' and 'wrong' is made very clear, with Ramírez employing this tenet of mainstream narrative to undermine and oppose US imperialism, represented here by the oil company Reynolds. To accomplish this aim, *Caribe* sets up heroes and villains in the narrative, and it is clear that the protagonist, Vicente, starts the film on the side of the 'goodies' as when he states 'I'm outraged that they would take advantage of the town's needs' and 'as a biologist, I am against petrol exploration', his conviction is lent an air of authority which encourages the viewer to side with him. Moreover, it is the people in the town and the local environmentalists who are portrayed as family and community-centred and who stand up against the exploitation of the local environment for money – even though the local economy is in desperate need of investment. The viewer is therefore encouraged to side with the protagonist and the local people, and the 'baddies' of the plot are clearly the North American bosses of Reynolds and their Costa Rican employees and henchmen. This dichotomy is furthered as while the local people use peaceful protests only – signing petitions, organizing marches, making banners – the US company uses threats, violence and coercion to get its way. It is implied that Vicente's main client has been forced to cease trading with him by Reynolds so that the US company has something to bargain with him

over. They then coerce him by using the threat of his plantation going bankrupt to steer him to their side, while their henchmen beat the environmentalist up one night, telling him that his wife and children are under threat unless he cooperates with them. It is also when Vicente publicly denounces Reynolds that the boss visits his house and, a few minutes later, Vicente is shot in the back in cowardly manner. This political message – which sets the neo-colonialism of the United States against the liberal, traditional values of the local people – becomes evident through this sudden act of violence against the protagonist.

While Costa Rica's external nation-image plays to US tourism and trade and is questioned through the casting of the US company as a villain in *Caribe*, then, the Costa Rican government – which is frequently lauded as a beacon of stability and democracy among the wars, violence and instability of its Central American neighbours – is also cast as a 'baddie' in this film. While not represented by any one character, it is clear from the film that Limón stands as an 'other' to mainstream Costa Rica. The fact that the government treats this 'othered' region unjustly is also frequently alluded to in the script, as the many debates which are seen around the oil company reference the opinion that there has been a lack of economic support for the province. When Vicente speaks to Jackson – who works for him at his house and plantation – for example, he states that 'Limón doesn't matter to anyone'. The town's pastor, who is pro the oil company, also notes that 'historically, the central government has imposed very, very unproductive development models on the province of Limón. With the Reynolds oil company, we will be able to make important investments'. While another man stands up at a rally and asserts that:

Limón's problem is not petrol. Eighty per cent of Costa Rica's resources leave from Port Limón and of this eighty per cent, how much of it is used for the social development of the province? How many schools are built? How many hospitals are built?

It is clear that Ramírez has chosen to include these elements within the script to depict the Costa Rican government as another filmic villain alongside the US company in order to

proclaim his message that Costa Rica is a sovereign nation which allows its people to criticize government policy openly and will stand up against the US's neo-imperialist pretensions.¹

Performing for the Tourist Gaze

Despite Ramírez's anti-imperialist stance shown through this film's scripting and narrative, however, it is through the cinematography that he undoes his stated aims as *Caribe* performs for the tourist gaze, inviting the viewer to actively take part in the neo-colonialism of the nation through tourism. Costa Rica's relationship with the United States is focused around trade and tourism, and the importance of this is seen through the Central American Free Trade Agreement and the fact that US tourists are the most frequent visitors to the nation each year – with over 15,000 US citizens also permanently residing in the country (Censo 2011). In tourist literature, Costa Rica is often referred to as the Switzerland of Central America due to its reputation for peace and stability (Christian 2013: 1600), and it moreover aims to sell itself as a green eco-paradise with serious renewable energy goals. Its tourist literature is aimed almost exclusively at the US market, as all its campaigns are written in English and feature a back-to-Eden style exoticism with slogans such as 'The Garden of the Americas' or 'Save the Americans' (ICT 2017). The choice of the Caribbean province of Limón as the setting of this film is particularly telling in terms of US ideological hegemony of the area, as this region has a unique history of trade with its North American neighbour. Indeed, the legacy of this is central to Limón's contemporary cultural and economic climate, as well as to understanding the film's setting and plot. The fact that Minor Keith, the overseer of the railroad project in the 1870s who instigated the migration of Afro-Caribbean peoples to Costa Rica, was from the United States played a large part in the fortunes and losses of the Caribbean region. After his railroad project ran out of capital, it was he who invited the United Fruit Company (UFC) to buy up vast swathes of land, thus bringing jobs and trade to the region at the price of losing locally-owned land and natural resources. Although the UFC pulled out of the country in the 1950s, that Vicente is the

owner of a mid-sized banana plantation who deals with US clients in 2002 demonstrates the power and control that the North American country wields over Limón in this century too. The fact that *Caribe* is based on a true story also showcases the fact that the colonial structures set up by the UFC – white, North American overseers and black, Afro-Caribbean workers – are still in existence in the province.

While Costa Rica's glossy branding often aims to obscure the complexities of the lived nation and it is this very issue that Ramírez wishes to highlight in his film, it is clear that with *Caribe*'s focus on the natural environment it falls into the trap – described as common in Latin American film by Hernández Adrián (2015) – of exoticizing its surroundings and performing for the tourist or international gaze. This fetishizing of the country unfolds in many ways in the film, and can be seen most clearly in Ramírez's use of extradiegetic sound, cutaways and panoramic shots which all invite the international viewer to 'discover' Costa Rica as colonizers. The opening scene of the film involves a series of establishing shots which set up this visual performativity which is carried forward throughout the film. Panpipe music plays in the background, and shots of waves lapping on the shore of a picture-perfect white sandy beach are followed by images of a lush, verdant rainforest. No people are present in these shots and the jump cut to the camera travelling as if on a boat, scanning the shoreline and the surrounding forest as we approach the coast while bobbing up and down in the waves, evokes images of exploration and discovery. Costa Rica is therefore set up as a virgin terrain waiting to be discovered by the viewer, and this colonial narrative is heightened when the camera cuts away to a large spider slowly moving across its giant web in the forest, therefore using these images to ascribe exotic, tropical characteristics to the setting, while also warning the viewer that danger resides there – the colonial narrative retold to Europeans by the conquistadores.

It is at this point that the scenery turns to black in order to display the film's title – *Caribe* – thus immediately naming the place the viewer has discovered, just as Columbus and other conquistadores did in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This motif is

perpetuated in the film through the use of cutaways and extra-diegetic sound. Between each scene, the camera cuts to a picture-postcard image – a traditional association with both Costa Rica and the Caribbean's tourist image – of crystalline waters, a brightly coloured toucan whose yellow beak stands out against a bright green leaf which frames it, or a sloth ambling from tree to tree in the forest. Moreover, just as loudly as the dialogue itself, the viewer can hear the crepitation of grasshoppers, the hum of insects, or the rushing of the waves throughout the film. In this way, the tropicalization of the setting is ever-present and the viewer is forced to experience *Caribe* via the lens of the tourist-colonizer gaze. As Catherine Palmer reminds us, then, the entire Caribbean region is usually experienced as either a site for tourism or coloniality (1994: 794-5), and in *Caribe* the audience is invited to explore the Costa Rican Caribbean as both tourist and colonizer.

This idea of tourism and coloniality as going hand-in-hand is also told through Abigail and Vicente's relationship. We are introduced to them as a white couple lounging, smilingly, on a hammock against a backdrop of gardens filled with seemingly giant plants and trees, underlining the tourist associations of a Costa Rican vacation. When Abigail meets Irene, she explains that she and Vicente fell in love with Puerto Viejo while travelling there, again denoting the story of the tourists who decide to settle in a land that is not their own – not due to forced migration but out of a colonial desire to appropriate land. This theme is hinted to many times within the script, and Vicente is certainly set up by Ramírez – although perhaps unwittingly – as an archetypal conquistador and slave owner. Abigail tells Irene 'my husband's passion is the earth', equating Vicente with a colonial rhetoric as he is a plantation owner who cultivates the land he now owns, employing Afro-Costa Ricans to work it for him for his own profit and thereby mirroring the master-slave relationship. Vicente even mentions this when attempting to convince his chief client not to leave him, stating 'there are so many families who depend on me', a traditional argument against the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century. Moreover, Vicente is set up visually as an imperialist himself as he is a foreigner and a white man in a traditionally Afro-Costa Rican and indigenous province.

The differences between the social position of these groups is highlighted in the beach scene where Abigail and Irene chase each other among the waves, eventually going to sit on the sand with Vicente to enjoy a picnic and take photos of themselves. Immediately prior to this scene, however, the camera shows groups of Afro-Costa Ricans fully-clothed using the sea and beach for fishing, denoting that they depend on this natural resource for their livelihood, while for Vicente and Abigail this is solely a site for leisure.

Vicente, moreover, also acts the part of the colonizer, taking pleasure in his 'discovery' of new flora and fauna in his garden. When he photographs these, the viewer experiences this as a point-of-view shot down the camera lens, forcing us to gaze upon and discover this 'new world' of bright, exotic colour through Vicente's eyes. Later in this scene, when a tropical storm's rain and high winds force him under cover, Vicente is seen via a medium shot standing on his open-sided porch. As he looks out over his land the sound of the rain is amplified, and he is made to seem small in the frame compared to the vegetation around him and the roar of nature's thunderous temper. Again, then, we see the colonial duality of Latin America as a tropical, exotic location to be discovered and enjoyed, but also as a site of fear and the unknown. This idea is highlighted in the film's denouement when, after Vicente tells Abigail about his affair with Irene, she flees through the plantation with Vicente pursuing her. It is night, the picture is so dark that the viewer struggles to see the action on-screen. At the same time, the rain and wind are so loud that even Vicente's cries are barely audible to the audience. This moment evokes both the region's independence when the colonizer was chased out of the colonized land as well as the image of an intrepid explorer in a hostile environment. In this case, however, when two shots ring out loud and clear, breaking the scene's tension, it is the neo-imperialist US firm and not the local population which has rid the land of Vicente, and it is the colonizer Vicente with whom we are meant to empathize. While the political message of the film is clear in its opposition to US imperialism through the eco-battle plotline, then, it is undercut by the exoticized image which portrays this film as trapped in the tourist gaze. In this way, the nation is shown to adhere to Frantz

Fanon's definition of a colonized people in that it has internalized the colonizer's image of itself which it follows by outwardly performing it (1986: 118).

Mimicking Hollywood

It is not only via the performance of the tourist-colonizer image that *Caribe* performs for a US audience, however, as the film also mimics Hollywood norms – both cinematographic and narrative – thus demonstrating the extent to which the superior-inferior dichotomy of US-Latin American images has been absorbed in this film. This is seen through the employment of colonial tropes which are common in Hollywood cinema and which appear in this film regarding people of colour and women. The 'othering' of these groups in Hollywood film is common, and stems from historic Eurocentrism which is particularly pronounced in Costa Rica's own internal nation image (Cortés 2003). Indeed, Costa Rica adheres to the implicit power structures which are a legacy of Spanish colonialism which is particularly problematic when it comes to ethnicity and gender, as Costa Rica's mythical homogeneity is based on frameworks of power which, as bell hooks contends, exist throughout the world and denote the normative stance as that of 'white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy' (2000: 19). For those existing outside this paradigm of superiority – such as indigenous peoples, Afro-Costa Ricans and women in this film – the nation-image has been the root of prejudice, violence and harmful stereotyping (Hidalgo 2004: 7 & 22; Sandoval García 2000: 2 & 11).

Although indigenous populations, such as the Bribri and Maleku, have been present in Costa Rica since pre-colonial times and still inhabit land in the country today, they have long been erased from the imagined nation. Not only does the founding myth of Costa Rica state that there were no indigenous people present in the country when European colonizers settled there – thus maintaining the fiction of their peaceful uptake of the land – but the very real populations are frequently denied space in the nation through a lack of recognition of their languages and traditions (Cortés 2003). This is seen in the film through the visual portrayal of well-known stereotypes, for example the indigenous community meeting which is

filmed in Bribri and shows members of the community sitting on low benches in a semi-constructed wooden hut. The leader states that 'they are not going to trick us like they did our grandparents', describing the land as 'Indian's land'. While the Bribri community of Costa Rica does fight to hold onto its traditions in the modern world, it is also known to be fairly assimilated into normative Costa Rican culture in terms of clothing, speaking Spanish and, often, living outside indigenous reserves (Stevens Rojas 2009). Ramírez's portrayal is therefore based on mythical assumption and stereotype, showcasing this community as primitive and unaccustomed to modern-day Costa Rica.

While their invisibilization within Costa Rica does not follow the same historical narrative, Afro-Costa Ricans have also been wilfully excluded from the nation, both legally and ideologically. Despite Ramírez's narrative which attempts to revalorize Limón as a neglected province in the eyes of Costa Rica's mainstream, Limón as an 'other' is also underscored in *Caribe* due to its treatment of Afro-Costa Rican characters as noted by Solano Moraga (2016). Indeed, the protagonists of the film are all white or *mestizo*, and although Ramírez includes Afro-Costa Ricans and indigenous peoples in some shots, their mere background presence does not equate to their inclusion in the film's rhetoric. Indeed, the community campaign against the oil company is led by two white men – Vicente and the environmentalist – who presume to speak to and for the Afro-Costa Rican and indigenous inhabitants in an example of cultural ventriloquism. In the two meetings held about the oil explorations, both feature a white man standing up in front of an audience of seated Afro-Costa Ricans, explaining which option would generate more jobs for them. Their conclusion that Reynolds should be opposed stands in direct opposition to the black activists from the Church and from the rally who encourage Afro-Costa Ricans to vote for the oil company coming to the town as they will bring with them much-needed employment. That the audience is made to side with the white environmentalists against the black community when it is they that suffer from this government neglect reaffirms the Eurocentric nation-image upon which Costa Rican and Hollywood norms are based.

While the majority of Afro-Costa Rican characters are included only as extras in the film, then, rarely given dialogue and never possessing narrative agency, the character of Jackson – who is a labourer on Vicente's land – is an exception. Similar to the depiction of the indigenous community, however, Jackson also adheres to the tropes of the submissive slave and the magical black man, both common in Hollywood film and internalized and mimicked by Ramírez's production (Glenn and Cunningham 2009). Jackson lives in a dilapidated wooden hut which stands on stilts. His house appears twice in the film, and both times it is framed in the shot by towering vegetation, as though he lives alone in a jungle. Moreover, with no more than cut-out holes for doors and windows, the viewer is visually reminded of slave accommodation built on plantations. The image of Jackson as a slave-figure is enhanced in the scene in which Abigail comes to bring him coffee while he works. Although she speaks to him politely, she is timid and almost afraid, glancing at him nervously as he continues to work while she places the tray next to him. This shot features Jackson sanding wood, and the continuous, back-and-forth motion of his arms as he works also creates a repetitive sound which evokes the vision of slaves working in colonies without respite. Abigail's response to him further demonstrates this as she plays the part of the white woman who should be afraid of the black man's physical prowess.

Running parallel to this image of Jackson as the subservient slave to his masters, Vicente and Abigail, however, is also the portrayal of him as the magical black man character. Although he only plays a minor role in this film, the scenes where he is given most lines are when he is helping Abigail. Initially, she goes to find Jackson in his house to procure a cure for a rash on her hand. In this scene, Jackson appears behind her, materializing as if from nowhere to answer her call. Almost without speaking, he takes a plant and rubs it on Abigail's hand, curing it as if by magic, despite her contention that she has tried medical cures to no avail. Appearing when he is not called but when he is needed the most, and the association of the Afro-Costa Rican with natural – and perhaps supernatural – elements tie the character of Jackson to the trope of the magical black man

who can cure ills and whose main purpose in a film is to support the white protagonists (Glenn and Cunningham 2009: 137). Moreover, Jackson furthers his supernatural abilities as he is also able to predict that tragedy is going to befall the family; he tries to warn Abigail when he tells her that 'storms are moving closer; you know where I am', therefore foreshadowing the events at the film's end when Abigail runs through the plantation to his house in the storm to escape Vicente. Like the indigenous community, then, Jackson as representative of the Afro-Costa Rican population could well be living in another century as a slave, and is stereotyped according to mythical values. The issue of perpetuating these stereotypes is, according to Noble, that they serve only to marginalize and exoticize whole groups of people who are already 'othered' by mainstream discourse (2005: 130-134), and as these are common tropes in Hollywood film and in Costa Rica's won nation-image, it would appear that Ramírez has internalized visual portrayals of these groups and mimicked them in *Caribe*.

Internalizing Latino Stereotypes

In addition to these stereotyped portrayals which serve to make Costa Rica an exotic yet safe and recognizable location in the eyes of the presumed US viewer, undermining the core plot's anti-imperialist stance is a seemingly deeper – and unintentional – internalization of Latino stereotypes which are presented as the norm within the film. Indeed, Ramírez appears to showcase the whole of Costa Rica as a colonized 'other' in the eyes of the external, foreign observer. According to Charles Ramírez Berg, there are six core stereotypes used to depict Latinos in US cinemaⁱⁱ and three of these tropes are evident in *Caribe*: Vicente as the Latin lover, Irene and Abigail as the harlot and Irene as the dark lady (2002: 66). The Latin lover is a character who plays a loveable rogue with an insatiable sexual appetite, and it is clear that this is certainly the image built up of Vicente in *Caribe*. From the opening scenes which revolve around the town meetings about the oil explorations, it is clear to see that he is a much-loved local character, with charisma complimenting his power as a landowner and influential employer. This charm with which he

has won the town over marks him as the loveable rogue character, as without this adoration his immoral actions – when he accepts money from Reynolds and cheats on Abigail – would see him viewed as no more than a filmic villain. In order that he fully embodies the Latin lover character, added to these traits is his capacity for flirtation and his sexual prowess which are demonstrated through his relationships with both Abigail and Irene. As a Latin lover, these relationships must be entirely voluntary rather than coerced, and within *Caribe* the sexual relationships are set up as wholly desired by the women involved. Abigail, for example, proclaims that she has followed Vicente wherever he goes, supporting his dream of owning a plantation in Puerto Viejo. Irene also falls in love with him, and the viewer is made aware of her sexual feelings towards him when, upon arriving home from a nightclub, she sees Abigail and Vicente having sex and she immediately runs to her room to masturbate.

Vicente appears to be aware of these two women competing for his attentions within his household, and while in the narrative he attempts to assert moral control of himself – proclaiming that he loves his wife and will not cheat on her – he is seen as unable to control his sexual appetite which leads him to start a relationship with Irene. Indeed, there are three key sex scenes between Vicente and Irene – on the bed, in the hotel and on the beach – and each one is preceded by protestation on Vicente's part. Before they first have sex, Vicente demands that Irene leave the house immediately; before meeting her at the hotel and before taking her to the secluded beach, he tells her he cannot keep seeing her. This vision of Vicente as an unwilling conqueror of women whose Latinidad means he must cheat on his wife is never more apparent than in the scene where he leaves his and Abigail's bedroom after having sex with her. In this shot, Abigail is seen in the background, naked and asleep under a thin sheet while, in the foreground immediately outside their bedroom door, Vicente gazes down on the half-naked sleeping figure of Irene. As both women lie down, powerless in their slumber, Vicente's stance and gaze demonstrate his power over their bodies and the narrative itself. His sexual desires in the film, however, are seen to control

him rather than the other way around, forcing him into the trope of the Latin lover even though he is morally opposed to this characteristic. This adherence to hegemonic Hollywood norms also represents the power structure at play within the filmmaking process itself, as although Ramírez wanted his film to critique the exploitative relationship between the United States and Costa Rica, it also in many ways conforms to the very neo-imperialist attitudes he wishes to critique.

This is also true of the ways in which the women are seen in the film as Abigail and Irene represent the harlot character in different guises. Indeed, the female bodies of these two Latinas are eroticized in the film, from their clothing to the camerawork used to show them. Abigail dresses in crop tops and bikinis throughout *Caribe*, and when she is in the house the camera frequently shows her at waist height, focusing on her bare midriff, chest and crotch against which she holds Vicente's head. Abigail further uses sex with Vicente to bridge the growing gap between them, tempting him into bed rather than asking him what is wrong. Irene also plays the part of the temptress in order to underscore this harlot trope and clear Vicente of moral blame for their affair. Indeed, she flirts with him stating that 'a man who cooks can't be all bad', and telling a friend who tries to kiss her that she has a lot of kisses 'but not for your mouth', eventually stealing into Vicente's bedroom to smell his aftershave. It is this incident which leads to their first sexual encounter, and Ramírez's use of blocking shots curtails Irene's agency and depicts her as a body to be used for sex rather than a complex character in the film, thus underscoring the idea of the Latina harlot. The camera is positioned on the outside of the doorway looking in, with the edge of the bed visible to the right. Vicente, drunk, grabs Irene and pushes her onto the bed so she is sitting meekly while he towers above her. While they begin to kiss, however, Irene's face is entirely covered first by her hair, then by Vicente's hands which hide her from the viewer, and finally by the door frame as she lies down. This positioning cuts her head off from the audience's gaze, leaving her as a semi-naked body with which Vicente can do as he pleases, encouraging the viewer to see her in the same way. At this point Irene stops being seen as

fully human and instead becomes her sexual organs, her breasts being the only part of her on show.

It is this eroticization of Irene which also leads to her categorization as the classic dark lady Latina figure in *Caribe* too, as she is depicted as an exotic beauty – highlighting the conflation of female exoticism and eroticism which, according to Andrea Noble, often go hand in hand (2005: 131). Indeed, Myra Mendible contends that the Latina woman on screen is seen as a ‘doubly inscribed fantasy’ who is dark, voluptuous and sexually gratifying (2007: 1). In choosing the two contrasting female actresses to play Abigail and Irene as well as in their styling, Ramírez has assumed and mimicked this visual trope. Abigail is pale-skinned, with light hair and eyes, she has a thin and diminutive frame which embodies Eurocentric notions of beauty. Irene, in stark contrast, is much darker skinned, her voluminous dark hair is thick, and her voluptuous body is frequently showcased in graphic detail, thus underlining an association of her with exotic and erotic myths of indigenous women (Noble 2005: 131). According to Mendible, many films actively identify women with this trope, which she describes as adhering to the ‘unambiguous self-tropicalization, binding Latina femininity to bodily excess, sexuality, or indulgence and imbuing Latinidad with a fixed set of traits, values, and images’ (2007: 3). I would argue that one of these core values is the association of the Latina dark lady with nature, making her into a sexualized, tempting Eve figure which Irene is clearly styled as in this film.

This is seen as, the morning after Irene first arrives at the house, the camera shoots her from the end of her bed as she turns around and opens the window above her, leaning outside in her underwear. Her half-naked buttocks are at the centre of the screen, with her face facing away from the camera; she is surrounded by plants, trees and vegetation through the open window. The rainforest sounds are once again enhanced, and this scene gives the viewer an establishing shot of Irene as a character, associating her with sexuality and nature. This theme continues throughout the film, as Irene serves no purpose within the plot other than to disrupt Vicente and Abigail’s lives with her exoticism and sexuality, almost

becoming the Malinche figure to Vicente's Hernán Cortés persona. This stylization is most apparent when, after having slept together twice and appearing to be in a relationship now, Vicente takes Irene out on a motorboat to a deserted island off the coast of Puerto Viejo. Again, the idea of discovery and coloniality takes hold as these two discover each other's bodies on the secluded beach while Vicente uses Irene as a confessor of his sins with the oil company; leading Irene to betray her sister and her new home town just as the mythical La Malinche also did. In this scene, Irene is once more naked and surrounded by nature as she walks out of the sea in a bikini framed by the rainforest and beach, beckoning Vicente towards her. When they start passionately kissing in the water, the camera again cuts her head out of the shot, and instead chooses a close up of her naked nipples as Vicente fondles them. Irene therefore represents plenitude in many forms as she is the classic dark lady who is tropicalized and used for her voluptuous body, and she also later confesses her pregnancy to Vicente thus showing her maternal capability and again reaffirming this link between the colonizer and indigenous woman who began the *mestizo* nations of Latin America. Just as Tim Bergfelder asserts around the exoticism of women of colour in Hollywood film, then, Irene's 'otherness' is confirmed here in her opposition to Abigail, but her exoticism is made safe through Vicente's desire for her and her maternal possibilities (2004: 63).

Conclusion

With *Caribe*, Ramírez interrupted the drought of Costa Rican filmmaking and started his career as an ambitious auteur in the country. That his desire for this film, which was clear to him from the scripting process right through to post-production, was for it to showcase Costa Rica's nature and democracy to a national and international – specifically US – audience is apparent in the film's basic plot. Indeed, through the hero versus villain dichotomy which is set up in the narrative and which sees local communities as the 'good guys' and the US imperialists as the 'bad guys' Ramírez consciously demonstrates a questioning of accepted norms of the Latinamericanism complex narrated by Enrico Santí.

As it is Costa Rica that wins this battle with both the US and central government, the scripting achieves the aim of subverting and undoing the superior-inferior dichotomy of US-Costa Rica relations. As this article demonstrates, however, through the cinematography and elements of the narrative *Caribe* also showcases the extent to which US hegemony of the nation-image, as well as the hegemony of Hollywood filmmaking, has been internalized in this production. Through an exoticization of the nation and its people the viewer is invited to see the country via the tourist-colonizer gaze, discovering its wonders and mysteries rather than its social or cultural complexities. Moreover, the Hollywood stereotypes which are also found within Costa Rica's own national images and myths, such as the mythical indigenous and magical black man, are also made apparent through the part played by indigenous and Afro-Costa Rican characters in this film. Further to this, the internalization of the Latino stereotypes perpetuated by Hollywood film are also performed by the protagonists in *Caribe*, and the common tropes of the Latin lover, Latina harlot and the Latina dark lady go some way to undoing Ramírez's anti-imperialist pretensions. What *Caribe* demonstrates, then, is the impact that US-Costa Rican relations have in shaping the nation-image and its representation on local film.

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ⁱ While Ramírez states that he did not take the campaigns for and against the controversial Central American Free Trade Agreement referendum which would take place in 2006 into account when making the film, it is clear that at this point in 2002-4 when it was scripted and filmed, national sovereignty was a key issue for the nation (Ramírez 2014).

ⁱⁱ These six stereotypes are identified as the bandido, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the Latin lover and the dark lady (Ramírez Berg 2002: 66).