

## Post-Conflict Visual Ecologies: Violence and Slow Violence in *Chocó* by Jhonny Hendrix Hinestroza and *La tierra y la sombra* by César Augusto Acevedo

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In the present article, I explore the imbrication of violence and slow violence in recent films from Colombia and show how they make connections between the conflict (violence) and ecological crisis (slow violence). Specifically, I study the connection between representations of the Colombian conflict, systemic violence and representations of ecological crisis by engaging with six ecocritical elements that appear in *Chocó* (2012) by Jhonny Hendrix Hinestroza and *La tierra y la sombra* (2015) by César Augusto Acevedo. These elements are environmental concern, filial conflict, concern for children, sense of place and home, labor precarity and social and/or political resistance. I explain these elements and their representations on each of the films to explore the imbrication between violence and slow violence. Further, I claim that this imbrication provides a possibility for a wide discussion on how to understand the Colombian post-conflict through a lens that pays attention not only to the direct consequences of the conflict and its violence, but considers the incidence of ecological questions in thinking of the Colombian conflict and post-conflict at large.

My contention is that *La tierra y la sombra* and *Chocó* are not only interested in the stories of this rural subaltern communities at the margins of the Colombian nation-state but they are also interested in representing the complex troubles facing these communities and the ecological trouble that the country faces (and the planet at large). There is a connection in the films between the human and the non-human, which is explored through an intersectional lens: one that must recognize the incidence of race, class and gender dynamics and prejudice across the different subjectivities present (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016). Through close readings of these films, I will explore the visual ecologies of the Colombian post-conflict: the way that humans and non-humans are imbricated in networks of violence and slow violence and what it means for our understanding of the Colombian post-conflict.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the Colombian film industry has experienced a boom, with many of its films being shown in festivals around the world, an academy award nomination, a new cinema law that encouraged filmmaking through public and private investment and specific marketing strategies by the Colombian Ministry of Culture, Colombia has seen a resurgence of production after

a low point in the 1970s and 1980s (Jaramillo Morales 2005, 74-86; Ospina 2009, 2017; Suárez, 2009).<sup>1</sup> We can divide these past three decades of Colombian cinema in two clearly defined waves. First, in the late twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first, with a focus on urban spaces and stories, and most recently, with a “rural turn” and a focus on natural and rural landscapes in the last decade or so. In the first of these waves, Colombian film was largely interested in exploring urban spaces and violence through varied means, with films using both trained and non-professional actors, appealing to documentary and neorealist aesthetics and telling narratives consistent with the history of Colombia at the end of the twentieth century (and consistent with the global image of Colombia of the same period): drug trafficking and consumption, corruption, institutional collapse, criminality, etc.

Some of the most representative films of this period are *Rodrigo D: no futuro* (1990) and *La vendedora de rosas* (1998) by Víctor Gaviria, in which the urban space of the *comunas* and the travails of their inhabitants are explored. Other films of this era, such as *La estrategia del caracol* (1993) and *Perder es cuestión de método* (2005) by Sergio Cabrera, explore urban society through a questioning of the political, economic and social forces that shape urban space through gentrification and real estate speculation. Some of these narratives wanted to appeal to the international film market and mass audiences with action-filled sequences and Hollywood aesthetics in plot and image such as in *Perro come perro* (2008) by Carlos Moreno, *Sumas y restas* (2004) also by Gaviria and *Satanás* (2007) by Andrés Baiz. The diversity of these films in terms of content, cultural value and appeal varies greatly but the representation of the city, and its narratives, is a constant preoccupation of this period, largely mirroring the preoccupations of Colombian society.

Nevertheless, in the last ten years, Colombian film has largely moved away from the representation of urban spaces and violence to focus on the representation of rural and natural landscapes, paying attention to the subjectivities that inhabit these spaces and their myriad disputes, conflicts and preoccupations. María Ospina has already identified this turn in Colombian cinema as a “rural turn” and she explains that this turn is also a return, as these important themes had

already been present in the films of Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo in the 70s and 80s. Ospina further explains that there have been major historical changes in the territorial understanding of the country related to this rural turn in cinema:

Among these are the intensification of the armed conflict and the militarization of many rural areas at the turn of the twentieth century, massive internal displacements and peasant struggles for land ownership, territorial reconfigurations produced by the expansion of extraction economies and, more recently, processes of transitional justice and concomitant post-conflict discourses, as well as official tourism and investment campaigns that promote rural regions for travel and development (Ospina 2017, 248).<sup>2</sup>

The films that I set out to study in this article are part of this rural turn, accompanied by others such as *Los colores de la montaña* (2010) by Carlos César Arbeláez, *El abrazo de la serpiente* (2016) and *Los viajes del viento* (2009) by Ciro Guerra, *Pájaros de verano* (2018) by Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra, *Señorita María, la falda de la montaña* (2017) by Rubén Mendoza, *La sirga* (2012) by William Vega and *Porfirio* (2012) and *Monos* (2019) by Alejandro Landes. However, *Chocó* and *La tierra y la sombra* are representative of a particular subfield of this rural turn: films that pay attention specifically to the ecological fate of these rural and natural spaces as they tell the stories of the marginalized communities that occupy them. In these two films, the human and non-human protagonists are subject to violence and slow violence through their positionality and relationship to the extractivist economies represented—gold mining and sugarcane production, respectively—and through their relationship to their environment and the institutional forces that reproduce systemic violence in their lives.

To study the imbrication of human and non-human protagonists in these stories and the violence that they face, I have in mind the work of Rob Nixon on “slow violence,” but also, other definitions of violence by Slavoj Žižek and Johan Galtung. Nixon’s slow violence refers to an environmental or ecological violence that takes place gradually and cumulatively over time, a violence that does not happen instantaneously and is often not perceived as violence at all. This violence is that which contaminates landscapes, increases the toxicity of air and water, increases the temperature of the earth’s atmosphere and overall, destroys local environments and resources. This violence is related to what Galtung calls structural violence or what Žižek calls objective violence: a silent violence that is not physical, overt or direct; and a violence that is not perpetrated by a clear subject or agent, but rather by a system. Both slow violence and objective violence, as expressed by Nixon and Žižek, are related to the neoliberal order of precarity for workers and communities in exchange for higher dividends for shareholders and deregulatory practices and rampant economic globalization that favor

corporations without thinking of the human and environmental consequences (Galtung 1969; Nixon 2011; Žižek 2008).<sup>3</sup>

Slow violence is further related to what Nixon (2011) calls the environmentalism of the poor, following the work of Joan Martínez-Alier (2002, 2014): the usual affected communities by slow violence are the “losers” of globalization, those communities that do not have political and economic power in the capital world-system and which often reside in the Global South. This is certainly the case in the films *Chocó*, which deals with Afro-Colombian communities in the Colombian Pacific Coast, and *La tierra y la sombra*, which represents indigenous and mestizo peoples in rural areas of the Valle del Cauca province. Deforestation, habitat extinction, the expansion of monoculture and extractivist economies historically have destroyed rural communities and their environment in Latin America, and that destruction continues until today, as it is represented in these two films (Anderson 2016).

Visions of the conflict and the post-conflict are also present in the film in a tenuous or non-direct manner. In neither of the two films it is directly related to the plot of the narrative, it is instead “lurking in the background,” either as a visual reference in passing or as part of the systemic violence represented in the story. At the very least, the slow violence in these two films could be an allegorical representation of the conflict. Nevertheless, in my view, violence and slow violence work together for a more complex understanding of conflict, which takes into consideration eco-critical questions that are relevant to imagine a post-conflict Colombia and the questions the country must ask itself as it looks into the future.<sup>4</sup>

*Chocó* and *La tierra y la sombra* are films that have much in common: they both represent extractive industries and the ecological and health consequences to humans and environment that come along with them; they both focus on a nuclear family and their dynamics; they both represent the travails of work, social resistance and existential crises in their human protagonists; and they show the imbrication of human and non-human in the ecological destiny of Colombia and the world. Moreover, these films both focus on experiences that take place in the Pacific coast of Colombia: *Chocó* takes place in the eponymous Colombian province, while *La tierra y la sombra* takes place in the Valle del Cauca province, adjacent and to the south of Chocó. These rural landscapes, and the populations that inhabit them, not only are the populations more greatly affected by the effects of slow violence, but rural communities in Colombia have been the ones more directly affected by the sixty plus years of the Colombian conflict, from La Violencia and partisan violence between liberals and conservatives, through the advent and growth and expansion of illegal coca cultivation and the traffic of narcotics and the continued violence brought for by the presence of guerrilla and paramilitary groups, as well as the Colombian military: in these rural spaces, violence and slow violence are necessarily imbricated by the complex history of the nation

(Bushnell 2014; Pizarro Leongómez 2002; Sánchez and Bakewell 1985).

*Chocó* is a film about an Afro-Colombian mother who works at a local gold mine and takes care of her two children, Candelaria and Jeffrey. Chocó's work at the mine is dangerous and exploitative. The mine uses mercury for gold extraction—a highly toxic process to both environment and humans—, and the mine's owners reproduce racist and precarious working conditions. While the location of the film is not explicitly said, we can surmise this town is in the Chocó province of Colombia, well-known for its gold mines and for having one of the largest Afro-Colombian communities since colonial times. Everlides, Chocó's husband, often returns home late at night and forces himself on Chocó in the small house they share with their children. In the final sequence of the film, Chocó castrates her husband when he attempts to rape her once again. In the struggle, a fire starts in their small home, and Everlides remains in the house as it goes up in flames. The film continuously proposes that we should understand the intersections of this racist and patriarchal order in connection with ecological crisis: through this allegory, Chocó's body and natural space are intertwined, their fates are shared, and their resistance to this regime are one and the same.

*La tierra y la sombra* also represents the connection between social problems and ecological catastrophe. The film focuses on a multi-generational family that lives together in a small home. The grandfather, Alfonso, has returned, after twelve years of absence, to take care of his sick son Gerardo. Alfonso's wife, Alicia, share their family home with Gerardo's wife, Esperanza, and their grandson Manuel. Gerardo has fallen ill due to the massive amounts of dust and ashes generated by the burning of sugarcane in its production: their home is surrounded by land that has been turned into a monocultural field of sugarcane. Since Gerardo is sick, Alicia and Esperanza work harvesting sugarcane, while Alfonso looks after Gerardo and Manuel. The workers in the fields strike to protest their work conditions and lack of pay but, after their short-lived protest, Esperanza and Alicia are fired from their work. Esperanza wants to leave their small *finca* and move away to live with Alfonso but Gerardo will not leave his mother behind: Alicia, the matriarch, refuses to leave. At the end of the film, Gerardo dies, and Alfonso, Esperanza and Manuel move away from the sugarcane fields while Alicia decides to stay behind to take care of her home, even though it means saying goodbye to her grandson and family. The film explicitly connects the exploitation of the land through monoculture (and its implicit eradication of biodiversity) with the exploitation of human bodies who suffer the consequences of their precarity and environment.

I will engage with six ecocritical elements that are represented in these two films in order to elaborate my analysis: environmental concern, filial conflict, concern for children,

sense of place and home, labor precarity and social and/or political resistance. These six dimensions are a set of concerns or conflicts portrayed that are intricately connected among each other and show the relationship between violence and slow violence in each of the films. They are related to what Adrian Ivakhiv calls the geomorphic (spatial), biomorphic (natural) and anthropomorphic (human) dimensions of film-worlds. In Ivakhiv's study, *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, the imbrication of these three elements elucidate key components of filmic narrative. While Ivakhiv's ecocritical nodes lay out the connections between space, nature and the human in film-worlds, they do not explicitly consider the imbrication between slow violence and violence. My categories, however, expand on Ivakhiv's triad by paying attention to the social and political components of narratives that, implicitly or explicitly, connect human institutions (the state, neoliberalism and precarity, family, etc.) and agency (political movements, social movements) with the ecological preoccupations represented.

While this article will show how these six ecocritical elements apply specifically to *Chocó* and *La tierra y la sombra*, a brief explanation of each of these categories is in order as they can be used to read other ecocritical films that intervene in the understanding of the Anthropocene, and its cultural, social, political and economic dimensions; or more specifically, they can be used to read other Colombian films of the rural turn to highlight the connection between violence and slow violence.<sup>5</sup>

Environmental concern refers to the representation of precise ecological problems, whether that might be the toxicity of air, water or land, the depletion of natural resources, the destruction of habitats and animals or the devastation of whole ecosystems through extractivist economies. The ecological trouble represented does not only affect environments, but also human and animal habitats: human and non-human are interconnected through these concerns. In *Chocó*, the protagonist and many secondary characters are concerned with the toxicity and pollution from the gold mine and the film uses extremely long shots to contrast the lush greens of the natural landscapes of the Colombian Pacific Coast jungle and the dark grey and yellow hues associated with the contamination from the mine.<sup>6</sup> This mining is not only polluting the water and destroying the landscape but it is also affecting the health of the people in the community. When the protagonist Chocó (named in clear reference to the region) is fired by the *paisa* Jiménez, the driver who takes the women to work at the mine tells her that it is for the best, as the mercury they use for mining is toxic. This reference comes up again later in the film when Chocó meets a little girl in the forest, Florencia. She shows Chocó that she has six toes on one foot and attributes this to the fact that her mother worked in a mine when she was pregnant.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the film presents itself as an allegory that connects human and non-human: Chocó the woman, Chocó the land. This connection between female body, telluric space and nation has been critiqued by María Ospina (2017), Juanita Aristizábal (2016) and Eduard Arriaga (2018). Ospina and Aristizábal critique the film from eco-feminist perspectives pointing out such a connection. On the one hand, it complicates a spatio-political analysis of the film that highlights the power of traditional communities against extractivist economies; and on the other, it allows a male civilizing gaze to overtake readings of the film. Arriaga critiques this film, along with many other recent films representing Afro-Colombians, as falling into the traps of representing racialized bodies as inherently connected to natural territories and traditional practices, as this kind of connection disallows for a complex understanding of race and of minority communities across Colombia. While I agree with these critiques and I think they add important levels of complexity when thinking of the argument of the film, I would like to add that Chocó's relationship with the natural is not only allegorical (Chocó as woman and as land); she is, as Haraway would say, "making kin" with nature, and learning to see the natural world in a different way. When Chocó is fired from the gold mine by the owner after a disagreement with him, she starts working with Don Américo, a local Afro-Colombian community leader that has an artisanal gold mine. Don Américo's mine does not use mercury and uses a shared-governance business model: he shares the work and the profits with his wife, oldest son and a neighbor, all working together in all aspects of the mine. The film portrays these two distinct choices for gold mining, and places value in the possibility for a different relationship with the environment and with work—one that is sustainable, led by the community and artisanal or small-scale in nature. Through her association with Don Américo's gold mine and through her meeting of Florencia, Chocó is changing her ways of being in the world in the face of ecological crisis.

In *La tierra y la sombra*, the burning of the sugarcane makes Gerardo sick and the use of monoculture is destroying a sense of place and putting a strain on humans and environment. There are various sequences in the film where characters have to cover their face and eyes as trucks drive by and pull up debris present in the environment and leaves and plants have to be thoroughly cleaned as their surfaces are filled with ashes and dust from the burnings to harvest the sugarcane. In one scene at the dinner table, Manuel tells her grandfather Alfonso that they cannot have dogs in the house because they die from the ashes (just like his father, Gerardo, is dying as well), alluding directly to the problems of air pollution and indirectly to the problem of loss of biodiversity. In a key sequence near the end of the film, there is a wide shot of the family standing outside of their home, while the sugarcane field around the house is on fire and smoke fills the screen. This shot takes place right after an ambulance takes away Gerardo's dead body: they are surrounded by the pollution that killed him, haunted by its presence. The house is not

welcoming and the smoke is oppressive: the environment is like a prison, and they are trapped.

While the term Anthropocene suggests that humans, as a whole, have become a crucial cause of climate and environmental change, it is important to remember that such discourses hide the deep differences in output of carbon emissions globally between developed countries of the Global North and the rest of the world, and moreover, that it is subaltern communities worldwide that often bear the highest burdens of environmental consequences (Martínez-Alier 2002, 2014; Nixon 2011; Yusoff 2018). These two films explicitly want to make this clear by showing the environmental plight of slow violence and how it affects these rural communities in the Pacific Coast of Colombia.

Another important element often represented in ecocritical narratives is filial conflict: as home and environment come undone through ecological trouble, the family as the nucleus of traditional and modern societies, however complex and/or non-normative that family might be, also undergoes change. In *Chocó* we see Everlides's abuse of Chocó and his overall lack of support for his family and lack of sharing of domestic responsibility. At the same time, we see Chocó struggling to keep her family together through working multiple jobs and trying to instill values onto her children. In *La tierra y la sombra*, the grandfather (Alfonso) and the grandmother (Alicia) are estranged after Alfonso abandoned the family years earlier. He returns to help out but tensions ensue as he takes care of Gerardo and Manuel while Alicia and Esperanza go to work to keep the family afloat. Esperanza wants to leave with Gerardo and Manuel in order to get away from the sugarcane burnings that are making Gerardo sick, but Alicia will not leave her home (which she has fought to keep among the buying up of land for sugarcane production) and Gerardo, in turn, will not leave his mother behind.

Related to the filial conflict is the concern for children. The representation of children, their coming of age, their passage from innocence to an experience of the world is a common narrative trope in ecological narratives. Children's eyes are opened to the problems in their society, and their understanding, whether partial or complete, of the environmental crises around them, allude to a future to come and call on the spectator to think about that future that awaits those children in the face of catastrophe. In fact, Latin American cinema has a long history of representing children and adolescents. Classic films such as Luis Buñuel's Mexican production *Los olvidados* (1950) and *Tire dié* (1960) by Fernando Birri have represented the plight of children in urban contexts and the last decades have seen a growing number of films that focus on childhood and adolescence, including Colombian films such as *Rodrigo D.* (1990), *La vendedora de rosas* (1998), *Los colores de la montaña* (2010) and *La sirga* (2012), among many others.<sup>8</sup>



The work of María Ospina (2019) on the representation of children in recent Colombian cinema sees children and adolescents either as witnesses to the conflict that serve as a mechanism to inquire about historical memory on the one hand, or as agents that have an incidence in the political present on the other. In the case of films with ecological preoccupations such as *Chocó* and *La tierra y la sombra*, the films, rather than looking into the past or the present, look forward to the potential future lives of the children. They are both a means to inquire about the future and a depository for the anxieties of adults about what this future might hold for this new generation.

In both films, the narrative element of concern for children is made clear by this imagination of the future, represented by the birthdays of Candelaria and Manuel, respectively. In *Chocó*, other anxieties over the future are placed on the main children in the film: Candelaria, Jeffrey and Florencia, respectively. Candelaria turns seven and wants a cake. *Chocó* has no money to buy the cake and eventually trades sex for money with the *paisa* Ramiro, who owns the town's shop so that she can celebrate Candelaria's birthday. Moreover, Candelaria gets into trouble for insulting and fighting boys and *Chocó* reprimands her by telling her that she must respect "men." In the case of Jeffrey, he skips school to go play in the jungle with his friends, though his mother catches him and reprimands him as she hopes for him to go to school and eventually aspire to a better life. In one of these scenes, Jeffrey and friends play in an abandoned excavator, expressing their desires to work in a gold mine in the future. As Juanita Aristizábal (2016, 40) explains, referring to this scene, the future of the children is enmeshed in the history of exploitation of the region. There is also Florencia, the girl that *Chocó* sees in the jungle, who has six toes. The three children function as a reflection of *Chocó*'s anxieties in different spheres of life: Candelaria in the domestic (a patriarchal order), Jeffrey in the world of work (a racist and exploitative system) and Florencia in the ecological (a coming world of ecological catastrophe).

In *La tierra y la sombra*, Alfonso buys a paper kite for Manuel's birthday while his father is bedridden and his mother and grandmother are working the sugarcane fields. Moreover, Alfonso teaches Manuel how to recognize the singing of different birds and how to feed them, and encourages him to clean the plants full of dust and debris. In other words, Alfonso teaches him to take care of his home and environment: this multigenerational connection is pedagogical, the passing forward of rural traditional knowledges as a form of hope for the future. Esperanza's desire of leaving the humble *finca* has to do with Gerardo's sickness, but more than anything, with sparing Manuel from a similar fate.<sup>9</sup>

There is very little agency in these children in both films, they are merely reflections of adults' anxieties about the future, of the very idea of what the future might hold, and its explicit imbrication with the environmental trouble

represented. Nevertheless, the children's potential for futurity and the plethora of threats they face (social, political, patriarchal, economic, environmental), portray the coming effects of slow violence in their lives: their adulthood will come with the devastation and consequences of these systemic inequalities should the course of their destinies remain the same.

These two last elements closely engage with the sense of place and home, which refers to the representation of places that are being undone or homes in danger of destruction. Closely related to the environmental concern, films represent this element through spaces that are in flux, peoples that are being displaced or homes that are being reconfigured or destroyed by ecological trouble. As Jennifer Fay points out in her book, the Greek root of eco is *oikos* or home, dwelling, and ecological thinking is intimately integrated into the thinking of home. Fay explains that in thinking of films and ecological concerns, questions of hospitality—how humans are hospitable (or not) to the environment and how the environment is hospitable (or not) to humans—is key for an understanding of representations of the Anthropocene and how humans can imagine their future in the world. Reflections upon the politics of place and home often have an incidence on the environmental concern through resistance, as ecological trouble is undoing the logic of place and causing people to change their relationship to the spaces they inhabit (Fay 2018, 1-20).

In *Chocó*, the protagonist's home and many moments of domesticity are portrayed: she teaches her children to behave (at times imposing strict gender roles as well), plays with them, sings songs, prepares the children for school, and takes care of all the aspects of their home. In other words, home is the space of the production and reproduction of ideology. Even Everlides has a role in this idyllic representation of home in some sequences where he plays the marimba for the children and teaches Jeffrey how to play. Nevertheless, home is also the space of trauma, as it is the space in which Everlides sexually abuses *Chocó* and reinforces the patriarchy under which *Chocó* survives. But all of that changes at the end of the film, in the moment when *Chocó* castrates Everlides. She escapes from the house with the children as the house burns down, with Everlides inside: the burning of the house is a symbolic tumbling down of this patriarchal order of society.<sup>10</sup>

In *La tierra y la sombra*, the house where Alicia and Alfonso's family live is continuously shot in darkness, as windows need to be closed because of Gerardo's pulmonary illness. Most shots of the inside of the humble home are almost claustrophobic, with narrow hallways and small rooms. Shots of the outside of the house are only partial throughout the film, showing one corner of the house or a section but never the house in its entirety: one does not understand how the house exists within its environment as there are no establishing shots that include the house, and the house is barely shot in its totality with the environment around it. There are only three

wide shots when the house is shot in its entirety. The first one at the 30-minute mark, in a wide shot at dawn, where the light is quite similar to all the scenes inside the house, and the house and environment are not quite visible: it is still not clear to the viewer that the house is completely surrounded by sugarcane. Towards the end of the film, at the 90-minute mark, there is a tracking zooming shot that shows the house with all of the sugarcane around it burning and a minute later a similar shot that shows the house in the middle of a partially deserted field: the sugarcane has been burnt down for the harvest.

The claustrophobic shots of the inside of the house and the partial shots of the outside of the house with the fields around it create a sense of intimacy, as the characters move through these sequences and interact with each other, and we get to see their affections and experiences play out in the screen: they are creating *space as place* for the viewer, showing the connection of these humans with their natural environment and their home. The three wide shots of the house with sugarcane fields around it function contrapuntally to the former, showing us the destruction of place, as the monocultural fields creep up around them and are finally burned down, with smoke covering the screen, destroying their sense of place.

In one of the most touching scenes of the film, Alicia and Alfonso sit outside their home on a bench, and Alfonso asks for forgiveness for leaving many years before. He recalls the orange trees and the rain trees that were present in the landscape before. Evoking the biodiversity that existed in the past, Alfonso says he left because he could not stand seeing what was being done to his home—namely, turning the landscape into a monocultural field. Alfonso reveals that he left precisely because a sense of place was being destroyed as the sugarcane fields were overtaking all the nature around them, connecting the human and environmental plots of the film.

Aside from the representations of environmental trouble, the complexity of family dynamics, and the questions of place and home, ecocritical films often engage with important questions in relation to the individual and the social. Labor precarity appears in these films often related directly to the very cause of environmental trouble: exploitation of nature and humans goes hand in hand in creating precarious living conditions. Chocó works multiple jobs in order to make ends meet and support her family, and she is consistently running about from one place to the next in order to fulfill her responsibilities. In *La tierra y la sombra*, Alicia and Esperanza have to take up the mantle of breadwinners after Gerardo falls sick and can no longer work in the sugarcane fields. The workers complain of their lack of pay and precarious conditions and eventually go on strike. The strike only lasts a day, and then, they have to make up the work missed. Unfortunately, Alicia and Esperanza are fired because they cannot finish two-days-worth of work in one day, leaving the family in an ever-increasing precarious state. It is interesting to note that in both

films there is a reversal of traditional gender roles, as it is the women who are at work, while the men are either non-present, sick, or work at home.

Accompanied by this precarity, an element of social and/or political resistance is present in these narratives, often related to the ecological trouble directly, or at times indirectly. It may also appear as a way to point out the intersections of race, gender and class in an understanding of the different subjectivities present, as often, an intersectional understanding of these realities shows that communities are not affected homogeneously in the face of environmental crises. In *Chocó*, the artisanal gold mine of Don América is a type of community-building and community-making enterprise. Don América puts emphasis on the mine as a place to create a community, without mistreating the land and not thinking of the process as a get-rich scheme or merely for financial gain: though the mine does not work outside of the confines of capitalism, it purports to imagine the dynamic of work in a more horizontal fashion where all members work together for a common goal and they all share in the profits.

Aside from the communal resistance to conventional gold mining and the ecological trouble that it causes by mercury contamination, Chocó herself also resists patriarchy in various, if—at times—ambiguous, ways: in a scene near the end of the film, Chocó discovers that her husband has been stealing her savings and, after she confronts him at the local store ran by the *paisa* Ramiro, Everlides punches her outside the store, to the quiet gaze of men and women in the community. It is after this moment that she decides to have sex with the *paisa* Ramiro, who has been harassing her throughout the film, in exchange for the cake for Candelaria's birthday. This ambiguous moment that plays out as both sexual and personal empowerment and disenfranchisement sharply and bitterly points out the intersectional oppression faced by Chocó by both black and *mestizo* patriarchy, within a community that has faced historical racism in Colombian society. In the film, the lighter-skin *paisas* are in control of the methods of production of capital (Ramiro is in charge of the town's store and Jiménez owns the gold mine) and consistently reproduce racial superiority by their treatment of the local community—Ramiro not only harasses Chocó, he also verbally abuses Everlides throughout the film, and Jiménez exploits the women at the mine by underpaying them. Alongside this racial hierarchy, there is also a patriarchal order that oppresses Chocó. The film makes clear these complex dynamics to show the racial and gender oppression she faces, but she resists the patriarchy when she castrates Everlides and burns down their house. The film's intersectional lens represents the precarity of the lives of Afro-Colombians under a racist system that exploits their land and labor as differentiated from the protagonist's further subjection to a sexist and patriarchal society that takes advantage of her: we must read Don América's resistance to gold mining as different than Chocó's resistance both to gold mining and the patriarchy.

In *La tierra y la sombra*, the workers in the sugarcane field strike first to complain about their wages. Later, as Gerardo is dying, the workers unite to oppose the overseer (Cabo) in an act of solidarity with Esperanza until a doctor is called for Gerardo. There is also an intersectional lens in *La tierra y la sombra*, though perhaps not as clear as in *Chocó*. On the one hand, we do see that Esperanza and Alicia are fired from the plantation for not being able to keep up with the work on the day that they returned from the strike and they are the only women working in the field. On the other hand, the majority of the workers of the sugarcane plantation are Afro-Colombians while Esperanza, Alicia and family are *mestizos*: they have a home, that while humble, they were able to keep when others probably had to sell and leave or stay and work under more precarious conditions. This racial difference gives more power to that moment in the film when the workers revolt to support Esperanza and force the overseer to hire a doctor for Gerardo, as it implies the creation of community across racial and gender lines. Nevertheless, as opposed to *Chocó*, where the possibility of a different work paradigm that would combat both capitalist oppression and environmental degradation altogether is present (Don Américo's mine), in *La tierra y la sombra*, the workers' struggle does not accomplish nor promises any structural changes to the environmental problem at hand.

The representation of spaces and subjectivities in the films *Chocó* and *La tierra y la sombra* pays close attention to the intersection of environmental trouble and the way it affects different gendered, racialized and classed bodies through slow violence. Capitalist practices of exploitation of natural resources in these narratives (gold mining and industrial sugarcane cultivation, respectively), told as intimate stories of subaltern subjects, point out the different ways in which material production affects different subjectivities as well as highlights the inevitable social and environmental crises propagated by these endeavors. This imbrication of exploitative capitalism and environment has short and long-term consequences in the lives of these spaces: a biopolitical regime of exploitation destroys their bodies through precarity while their resources are being depleted and their environment destroyed. In fact, one could claim that in *La tierra y la sombra*, Alfonso, Esperanza and Manuel become environmental refugees. In the case of *Chocó*, after Chocó's house burns down, it would not be unlikely that she and her children would migrate to look for a better life. These two films, and their shared concern with non-human and human subjectivities in rural and natural contexts, provide a further understanding of the rural turn of Colombian cinema and the relevance of representations of space and place in a time of ecological crisis, and its imbrications in national, global and planetary dimensions.

In a country that has known massive internal migrations due to political and social violence in rural areas, it is interesting to see these stories of violence and oppression that are based

on ecological and health concerns, or slow violence, without explicit references to the violence of the Colombian conflict. But environmental degradation and the Colombian conflict are related. In a scene in *Chocó*, in which the protagonist and other women are being transported to the gold mine for work, the camera pans a military base in the background and infantry men in camouflage fatigue with firearms walking on the side of the road. The film does not refer to it explicitly but this is a militarized zone. The province of Chocó has been one of the epicenters of the Colombian conflict and its communities throughout the sixty plus years of Colombian violence, as seen in the massacre of the municipality of Bojayá (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2010). In addition to this, the topic of gold mining in Colombia has been receiving significant international attention in recent years after Afro-Colombian activist Francia Márquez received the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2018 (Francia Márquez). She is a social justice leader and environmental activist that has brought questions of race, environment and violence, and the intersections between them, front and center in the Colombian public sphere. In addition to this, the death toll of social justice leaders has grown in recent years (after a short period of waning right after the signing of the peace agreement between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government in 2016) with 250 social leaders being killed in 2019 (*El Tiempo* 2019).

In the case of *La tierra y la sombra*, the film was released in 2015 long after the Agro-Ingreso-Seguro (AIS) scandal of 2009—a political and legal scandal in which money from the AIS government program, meant to give funding to small agricultural growers to improve and make their production more efficient, was actually diverted to small number of wealthy families with large monocultural *latifundios* (Escobar 2014; *Revista Semana* 2009). The Minister of Agriculture at the time (under President Álvaro Uribe) was Andrés Felipe Arias. He was convicted for his role in the scandal and escaped to the United States, and is currently embroiled in a complicated case ongoing in 2020. It would be difficult for a spectator familiar with recent Colombian history not to think of the AIS scandal when watching the film, the struggle of a family with a small farm to stay afloat among a large monocultural sugarcane field: the story of *La tierra y la sombra* is deeply embroiled with the long history of land expropriation and land ownership in Colombia, one of the most important elements of the Colombian conflict and of the post-conflict negotiations.

Films like *Chocó* and *La tierra y la sombra* bring together a critical look at the environmental degradation of slow violence and the oppression of subaltern communities perpetrated by political and structural violence and bring this imbrication to the forefront of thinking about a post-conflict Colombia. They engage in thinking of the conflict and the post-conflict beyond political violence and bring to the table the question of slow violence and how it affects subaltern communities. Also, they are important imaginaries to

think through these difficult questions and create an affective response from viewers about the possibilities present in this particular juncture to think about the future. Post-conflict Colombia must contend with the imbrication of violence and

slow violence in order to solve the complex structural and political problems that the country has faced, and will continue to face in the coming years as it imagines, relentlessly, a future peace.

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### Notes

1. Alejandra Jaramillo Morales, writing in 2005, has a more skeptic take on the 2003 cinema, being cautiously hopeful of what the law will actually accomplish. Juana Suárez and María Ospina writing from a few years to more than a decade after, and having seen the growth of Colombian Cinema, take a clearer stand in favor of what the Cinema Law has already done for the promotion and development of Colombian cinema.
2. In these connections that Ospina makes between precise historical changes and its relationship to the rural turn in Colombian cinema, the state appears as an agent that shapes discourses through PR campaigns meant to increase tourism and foreign investment. Filmmakers, on the other hand, have a more critical view of rural spaces and their particular realities. What one has to contend with, as paradoxical it may seem, is that part of that militarization and discourse of *seguridad democrática* mixed with myriad PR campaigns with mottos such as *Colombia es pasión* and *Colombia es realismo mágico*. These ensured the growth of tourism in rural areas, probably helped and supported the efforts of filmmakers who needed access to those rural areas in order to create their films. In fact, many of the films of this rural turn are critical of state discourses and of the complicity of state in the violence in rural areas that has affected its communities, but to what extent did this militarization operate to enable these filmic practices? This is a factor to keep in mind in the complexities surrounding this discussion.
3. Zizek categorizes objective violence as either systemic or symbolic. Systemic violence is the violence perpetuated by institutions, states and systems that cannot be attributed to a specific subjectivity. Symbolic violence is the violence that is perpetrated through language and its forms. On the other hand, subjective violence would be that which could be attributed to a specific subjectivity, in opposition to systemic and symbolic forms of violence. Galtung makes the distinction between structural, or indirect, violence and direct violence. Direct violence would be equivalent to what Zizek calls subjective violence, while structural would be equivalent to what Zizek calls objective violence. For the purposes of my discussion, I will use Nixon's term (slow violence) as well as Zizek's (objective violence, subjective violence) (Galtung 1969; Nixon 2011; Zizek 2008, 1).
4. While questions at the intersection of the environment and the humanities have been gaining notoriety since the 1970s and 1980s, it is in the 1990s and the turn of the century that the field of environmental humanities and ecocriticism was more clearly established (Emmett and Nye 2017; Garrard 2012; Nixon 2011). In the last decade or so, there has been growing interest in Latin American literary and cultural studies to study cultural artifacts through ecocritical lenses. Many critical works from interdisciplinary perspectives including those of Heffes (2013), de la Cadena (2015), Gómez-Barris (2017) and recent edited volumes and journal dossiers such as those by Heffes (2014), Anderson and Bora (2016), and Kressner, Mutis and Pettinaroli (2019), among many others, have established a growing and visible ecocritical preoccupation within the study of Latin America. In Colombian literary studies, Ana María Mutis (2014) has studied ecological discourses of novels across the literary history of Colombia while Gardeazábal Bravo (2019) has studied the connection between violence and slow violence

in recent fiction. Important work in the field of eco-criticism has been done in non-print media in Ivakhiv (2013) and edited volumes by Rust, Monani and Cubitt (2013, 2016), Narine (2015) and Weik von Mossner (2014). Particularly in Colombian film, Ospina (2014, 2017) and Aristizábal (2016) have studied recent production through ecocritical lenses.

5. I understand Anthropocene following the work of Atmospheric Chemist Paul J. Crutzen and Ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer who defined the term in 2000. Anthropocene is defined as a new geological era in which humans have altered drastically the planet's environment and the amount of carbon dioxide has increased dramatically due to human activity. Crutzen and Stoermer believe the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century is the beginning of the Anthropocene and Will Steffen and others believe that there has been a further acceleration of humanity's effect on the environment from the 1950's onward. For a discussion on this, see Eugene and Stoermer (2000) and Ellis (2018) in the bibliography.
6. For a useful visual reference of my descriptions of the films *Chocó* and *La tierra y la sombra*, visit the Proimágenes Colombia website which has trailer videos and stills from these two films, (and many other Colombian films). Proimágenes Colombia is a private-public fund that advances filmic production and distribution in the country. See Works Cited for details.
7. *Paisa* is a demonym for the people of Antioquia specifically and also of the people of the coffee-growing region of the country at large: because of Antioquia's geographical proximity to Chocó, the *paisas* have long taken interest in the exploitation of natural resources in the region. In the context of the film, the word *paisa* also has the meaning of outsider, someone who comes from the interior of the country and who is racially and culturally different than the community of the Chocó province. In another film of this rural turn, *El vuelco del cangrejo* by Óscar Ruiz Navia, a similar conflict between a *paisa* outsider and an Afro-Colombian community in a Pacific coastal town is represented. Similarly, in Tomás González's debut novel, *Primero estaba el mar* (1983), the plot revolves around conflicts between a *paisa* hippie couple and the Afro-Colombian community of the Urabá region of the Antioquia province, a region adjacent to Chocó and inhabited largely by Afro-Colombians. Indeed, this has become a common trope in Colombian cultural production, based on existing historical realities.
8. Along with the growth in film production focusing on children and adolescents, there has also been a growing number of edited volumes and monographs that study the representation of children and adolescents in Latin American cinema, including the work of Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet (2012), Geoffrey Maguire and Rachell Randall (2015) and Deborah Martin (2019). María Ospina (2019) studies recent Colombian film with a focus on representation of children and adolescents.
9. Esperanza's very name in *La tierra y la sombra* is a clue here to an imagined future, as she is the one that continuously expresses hope (*esperanza* in Spanish) and desire to move away. She is one who calls Alfonso to return home, hoping that he could help convince the family to leave their home for a better life.
10. This moment in the film makes me think of Audre Lorde as Chocó consistently struggles to adapt her life to the racist and sexist structures around her, but finally, the house burning down means that she has drastically changed her life, for "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (as Lorde would say).