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Final Paper Proposal

29 October 2020

English 101

Brenton Boyd

**Final Paper Proposal**

**Text Covered in Class**

*On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians*, 1547, by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda

**Material Informed by Topic**

*Eréndira la indomable (Eréndira Ikikunari)* (2006) directed by Juan Mora

*También la lluvia* (2010) directed by Icíar Bollaín

**2-5 Secondary Sources from Research Databases**

Austin, Elisabeth L. “Consuming Empathy in También La Lluvia (2010).” *Chasqui (01458973)*, vol. 46, no. 2, Nov. 2017, pp. 313–329. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=125978227&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

García Loaeza, Pablo. “Telling Violence: The Toxcatl Massacre at the Templo Mayor in Sixteenth-Century Sources.” *Journal of Iberian & Latin American Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, Aug. 2016, pp. 109–123. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/14701847.2016.1223463.

Jenkins, Philip. “Conquest and Conversion.” *Christian Century*, vol. 135, no. 20, Sept. 2018, pp. 44–45. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=131647838&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Moragas Segura, Natàlia, and Luís J. Abejez. “Diálogos Entre La Historia y La Arqueología: Teotihuacan, de Metrópolis Prehispánica a Cacicazgo Virreinal.” *Indiana (03418642)*, vol. 34, no. 2, July 2017, pp. 233–264. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.18441/ind.v34i2.233-264.

**Audience**

An objective audience that has a working knowledge of the three texts and is interested in how colonial ideologies manifest themselves in the present.

**Proposal**

This paper juxtaposes the European colonizer’s outlook, motivated by ethnocentric racism and eurocentrism, with the injustices endured by both Indigenous and contemporary Latin Americans to prove that colonialism is the root of modern hierarchical structures that perpetuate violence against those deemed inferior. *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians, 1547,* written by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, encapsulating the perspective of the colonizers of the Age of Discovery, will stand against *Eréndira la indomable (Eréndira Ikikunari)* (2006), directed by Juan Mora, to showcase the stark contrast between the lives and ideologies of those with and without colonial power–while Ginés de Sepúlveda justifies the correctness of the Spaniard’s colonial conquests, Eréndira, who the film follows through battles against the Spanish, represents utter suffering at the hands of colonialism on behalf of the Purépecha (native to Mexico). To address how colonialism continues to influence the present, *También la lluvia* (2010), directed by Icíar Bollaín, which follows the Cochabamba (Bolivia) Water War through a recreation of Christopher Columbus’ arrival to the Caribbean, will represent current injustices that Latinos experience. What were the different perspectives of those involved in the Age of Discovery, and how did they shape the formation of history? Were there flaws in indigenous societies that perpetuated violence? How can systemic, harmful effects of colonialism still be observed today?

Emily Freedman

Final Paper First Draft

Due 8 November 2020

English 101

Brenton Boyd

**Columbus, Christianity, Capitalism: Why the Colonizers are to Blame for Modern Violence**

There is no doubt that Christopher Columbus’ accidental finding of the Bahamas at the end of the fifteenth century changed the course of the world substantially. It gave way to the most substantial wave of European colonization in present-day Latin America, coined the Age of Discovery. When learning and analyzing historical events of great significance, such as the events that took place in this period, many educators and textbooks fail to conceptualize the occurrences at a humane level; students learn about Columbus’ three boats in nursery school, and they are fooled into thinking he “discovered” the New World, but they fail to realize the mass devastation and harm towards indigenous communities that he caused until much later in life, if ever. How could it be that one human or group sees themself entitled enough to deem themselves superior to another—even sometimes categorizing their counterparts as subhuman?

Ethnocentrism, defined by Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary as “the attitude that one’s own group, ethnicity, or nationality is superior to others,[[1]](#footnote-0)” is a principal factor in this reasoning. Similarly, eurocentrism is a preference for European ideals, and together these mindsets pervaded the ideals of the colonizers, manifesting themselves in the notion that these cultures were better than those of the individuals native to the regions they exploited. Such biases, when leading to the discrimination of a group of another race than one’s own, can be referred to as ethnocentric racism. Exemplifying this is Juán Ginés de Sepúlveda’s *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians*, a primary source written in 1547 that will be used to generalize the Spanish perspective of the time. He states that European domination and the forced subordination of native peoples—to whom he refers as “Indians”—is valid from various cultural and humane standpoints. His argument of innate hierarchy starkly contrasts the lived experiences of the people he addresses. *Eréndira la indomable (Eréndira Ikikunari)* (2006), directed by Juan Mora, follows Eréndida, a young Purépecha woman (native to Mexico), through the war in her town against the Spanish, and it ultimately demonstrates both the lies and the harm that Sepúlveda perpetuates. The eurocentric ideologies of the time subjected the Purépecha and millions of other indigenous peoples alike to chaos and the destruction of legitimate cultures that had developed over thousands of years. Not diminishing the utter violence that these people endured, the structures established during the Age of Discovery are still in effect in the present, although they may result in different manifestations of abuse. *También la lluvia* (2010), directed by Icíar Bollaín, examines the Cochabamba Water War of Bolivia in response to a privatization of the city’s water supply through a reenactment of Columbus’ interactions with the native people of the Bahamas and Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic). This monopoly on the most prized natural resource necessary for survival demonstrates that capitalism, an effect of colonialism through eurocentric philosophies of economy, serves to harm those at a disadvantage in modern hierarchical structures. This paper juxtaposes the European colonizer’s outlook, motivated by ethnocentric racism and eurocentrism, with the injustices endured by both Indigenous and contemporary Latin Americans to prove that colonialism is the root of modern hierarchical structures that perpetuate violence against those deemed inferior.

Sepúlveda argues that the indigenous peoples that the Spanish encounter are culturally inferior, a claim that works to erase the significance of indigenous peoples, subsequently establishing a hierarchy between the two groups. His so-called evidence addresses numerous factors that constitute the creation of a culture, including religion, science, language, and art. In one instance he states, “[The natives] possess neither science nor even an alphabet, nor do they preserve any monuments of their history except for some obscure and vague reminiscences depicted in certain paintings, nor do they have written laws, but barbarous institutions and customs.”[[2]](#footnote-1) (Sepúlveda, 2-3) Not only does this generalization represent the ethnocentric perspective, valuing particular ideals that are not as important in other non-European cultures, but it is simply incorrect. In regards to pre-Columbian Mexican societies, which *Eréndira Ikikunari* highlights, there are many examples that disprove Sepúlveda’s argument about a lack of native culture. The opening scene in the film shows a historic tradition of the Purépecha in which a man is stabbed for another’s pleasure[[3]](#footnote-2) (Mora, 00:02:56-00:06:40). Sacrifices (even self-sacrifices) were common among many native societies, and although they perhaps contribute to Sepúlveda’s “barbaric” image of indigenous peoples, these events do represent a culture that he belligerent attempts to erase. In terms of other instances of history he attempts to skew, both Teotihuacan and Tenochtitlán (present-day Mexico City) have longstanding examples traced to grand pre-colonial societies. Teotihuacan, one of many modern locations known for its pyramids, exhibits fascinating archeological wonders that lead historians to gather information regarding the way that the community functioned. As affirmed in *Diálogos Entre La Historia y La Arqueología: Teotihuacan, de Metrópolis Prehispánica a Cacicazgo Virreinal*, this city was “an extraordinary society, complex, stratified, and hierarchized.”[[4]](#footnote-3) (Moragas Segura and Abejez, 234) Tenochtitlán, once the capital of the Mexica (Aztecs), was a city centered around another great pyramid, known as the Templo Mayor. This artifact, although brutally destroyed by the Spanish during a holiday celebrating a crucial God, had both religious and greater cultural significance.[[5]](#footnote-4) (García Loaeza, 109-110). These examples of the existence of indigenous cultures directly juxtapose Sepúlveda’s claim to the contrary, demonstrating the importance of diminishing the natives in the process of Spanish domination. Only after said erasure—dehumanizing the others and stripping them of their pride—can an imposition of foreign ideals reach its full potential.

The significance of the Christian religion, imposed onto the indigenous peoples and a subset of culture as a whole, is a manifestation of European colonialism which still pervades in many parts of Latin America. Sepúlveda speaks to the importance of Catholicism, even drawing connections which curiously imply the inferiority of the Romans, who once ruled the Iberian Peninsula: “The Christian religion is better and truer than the religion of the Romans.”[[6]](#footnote-5) (Sepúlveda, 4) Further, he concludes his discourse by appealing to religion to, once again, justify European colonization and the subsequent harm caused by it. He states, “And the justice of this war becomes even more evident when you consider that the Sovereign Pontiff, who represents Christ, has authorized it.”[[7]](#footnote-6) (Sepúlveda, 4) These remarks are distinctly important when considering the violence they perpetuate towards indigenous peoples. Religion played an important role in many of those cultures, and stripping away their rights to their traditional beliefs is a detrimental attack on their identities. In *Eréndira Ikikunari*, it is not until the end when the Tangaxoan man (Rubén Bautista) finally decides to guide his people down the path of Christianity: “*Es mejor que seamos bautizados todos para que no nos maten, para que nosotros, y nuestros hijos, y nuestros nietos, muramos de viejos sobre la tierra*.”[[8]](#footnote-7) (Mora, 01:49:00-01:50:00) (“It is better that we all be baptized so that they do not kill us, so that we, as well as our kids and grandkids, die old on Earth.”) After the erasure of native cultures is successful, the Spanish can begin to impose their values onto their subjects, the effects of which can still be observed today. Consider the modern statistics of Christianity in Mexico—there are over 100 million Catholics and another ten million Protestants.[[9]](#footnote-8) (Jenkins, 44) Such significant numbers centuries after the Age of Discovery imply the success that the Europeans had in their domination. Among their original goals was the oppression of their counterparts, and the fact that Christianity reigns so powerful in Latin America can only suggest that colonialism continues to influence modern communities detrimentally. *También la lluvia*’s title sequence exhibits a helicopter hanging a cross over Bolivia, symbolically representing the current looming presence of Christianity in formerly colonized areas.

[paragraph about how Sepúlveda thinks the natives are subhuman]

Although many of the institutions causing harm to today’s Latin Americans can be attributed to colonialism, it is important to consider that pre-Columbian societies were not free of such actions. *Eréndira Ikikunari*’s protagonist, played by Xochiquetzal Rodríguez, shows that the Purépecha society, like many others, was extremely patriarchal. Although it is unclear if Eréndira existed in real life, her role is symbolic. The final scene of the film, in which she is riding away on a white horse, represents her liberation from the patriarchy to which she has been confined.[[10]](#footnote-9) (Mora, 01:50:00-01:51:00) Throughout the film, she acts contrary to how a woman is assumed to—subordinate to their husbands and certainly not powerful. She, however, subjects herself to compromising circumstances due to her gender, voluntarily entering the war and disguising herself, at times, as male. The Spanish had similar views in regards to how a woman should act, which is that she should be more submissive. Sepúlveda’s ideologies confirm this: “The man rules over the woman, the adult over the child, the father over his children. That is to say, the most powerful and most perfect rule over the weakest and most imperfect.”[[11]](#footnote-10) (Sepúlveda, 1) Since the Spanish and native perspectives were similar, there was not much of a change regarding the role of women in colonial societies, still, however, continuing to perpetrate violence against them. Although in recent times there has been greater flexibility in terms of how a woman is allowed to act, traditionalists still err to the default that native cultures established and Europeans furthered in their rule, which is that men are dominant. *También la lluvia*, with almost exclusively male leads, embodies both the traditional notion that men should be in positions of power. There is no reason justifying why Sebastián (Gael García Bernal) or Costa (Luís Tosar)’s characters could not be replaced by women or gender nonconforming individuals. However, the presence of few to no strong female leads also represents a flaw in the modern film industry as a whole, where, instead of pushing for on-screen representation of different types of characters, audiences are shown yet another two men with white savior complexes.

To further address modern inequalities and the ways in which eurocentric ideologies have influenced the establishment of contemporary Latin American structures, capitalism as an economic system informs unjust relations between those with and without power. *También la lluvia*’s purposefully antithetical set up between the contemporary issues in Bolivia regarding the exploitation of the lower class and the reenactment of Columbus’ colonial encounters centers the two experiences to prove that they are similar in nature. In a scene in which filmmakers Costa and Sebastián meet with the head of the company largely in charge of privatizing the water supply, discourse regarding the protests largely reveals the different attitudes towards the economic system in place. While the official reiterates his positive affirmation of the “necessary” monopoly being enacted, Sebastián and Costa are far more critical. Sebastián states that “[he] does not think that someone who earns $2.00 a day can support a 300% increment in the price of water,” to which the man replies, “That is interesting because people have told me that is how much you pay your extras.”[[12]](#footnote-11) (Bollaín, 00:50:40-00:54:10) These remarks demonstrate that, while others may have better intentions, what matters is that a majority of people continue to suffer at the hands of capitalism because the power is placed in the hands of fewer, who are usually more interested in maximizing their profits, even at the expense of others. The head of the company in the scene is quick to tie these matters back to ethnocentrism, making racist remarks about the “Indians” when referring to the people protesting: “If we budge one centimeter, these Indians will bring us back to the Stone Age.”[[13]](#footnote-12) (Bollaín, 00:50:40-00:54:10) He makes an allusion to pre-colonial times with a negative connotation, exposing his eurocentric ideologies, similar to those that Sepúlveda embodied. Sebastián exposes these sentiments during this conversation, proving that ethnocentric racism is at the root of capitalism, which cyclically affects the disadvantaged by a large margin.

While the film at large works to expose the downfalls of modern Latin American societies, the protagonists also come short of being heroes. In addition to their contributions to and perpetuations of capitalism, the filmmakers also exhibit notable racial insensitivity. Instead of appealing to the historical accuracy of the events recreated that took place in the Age of Discovery in the Bahamas, Sebastián and Costa decide to film in Bolivia for the sake of the budget. However, this choice essentially equates all Latin Americans and Caribbean folks as being the same, instead of highlighting the uniqueness of the distinct groups of these regions. Writer Elisabeth Austin affirms this notion, citing an instance in which Costa justifies his choice to film in Bolivia to Sebastián: “De los Andes o donde sea [...] son indígenas. Eso es lo que querías, ¿no? [...] No seas pesado. Son todos iguales.”[[14]](#footnote-13)[[15]](#footnote-14) (Bollaín, 00:06:02-00:07:30) (Austin, 316) (From the Andes or wherever [...] they are indigenous people. That is what you wanted, no? [...] Don’t be annoying, They are all the same.”) The principle restricting them from exhibiting complete historical accuracy is money; the filmmakers must compromise on certain relevant details for the sake of the budget. However, in deciding that this was an instance where a choice could be made to save money, the men consequently make a grave error despite their otherwise good intentions in spreading awareness of the events that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Although it may seem distant to some, the Age of Discovery was foundational for the structures that are still in place in colonized lands. Those in charge of the formation of these institutions and cultural ideals possessed incredibly flawed ideologies—from racism to sexism, they sought after the formation of an extremely hierarchical society in which those who were not deemed powerful had no way of elevating their social statuses. Many members of modern communities have a difficult time questioning if there could be a different, more efficient, and inclusive way to organize the economy or higher developments like the government, perhaps because they are uneducated, or they may benefit from their power. This cyclic nature is exactly why relatively little has changed really since western countries achieved their independence. Deep critical thinking and action is truly the only way to liberate people from suffering more systemic violence at the hands of those unjustly deemed superior.

1. “Ethnocentrism.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnocentrism. Accessed 3 Nov. 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. de Sepúlveda, Juan Ginés. *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians (1547)*. pnhs.psd202.org/documents/khill/1567600261.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Mora Catlett, Juan. *Eréndira La Indomable (Eréndira Ikikunari)*. *Eréndira Ikikunari Subtitulada Pelicula Completa (AlxIpro)*, David Distribucion, 2006, www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpthoMJyQwk. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Moragas Segura, Natàlia, and Luís J. Abejez. “Diálogos Entre La Historia y La Arqueología: Teotihuacan, de Metrópolis Prehispánica a Cacicazgo Virreinal.” *Indiana (03418642)*, vol. 34, no. 2, July 2017, pp. 233–264. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.18441/ind.v34i2.233-264. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. García Loaeza, Pablo. “Telling Violence: The Toxcatl Massacre at the Templo Mayor in Sixteenth-Century Sources.” *Journal of Iberian & Latin American Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, Aug. 2016, pp. 109–123. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/14701847.2016.1223463. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. de Sepúlveda, Juan Ginés. *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians (1547)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. de Sepúlveda, Juan Ginés. *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians (1547)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Mora Catlett, Juan. *Eréndira La Indomable (Eréndira Ikikunari)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Jenkins, Philip. “Conquest and Conversion.” *Christian Century*, vol. 135, no. 20, Sept. 2018, pp. 44–45. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=131647838&site=ehost-live&scope=site. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Mora Catlett, Juan. *Eréndira La Indomable (Eréndira Ikikunari)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. de Sepúlveda, Juan Ginés. *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians (1547)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Bollaín, Icíar, director. *También La Lluvia (Even the Rain)*. Imagine Entertainment, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Bollaín, Icíar, director. *También La Lluvia (Even the Rain)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Bollaín, Icíar, director. *También La Lluvia (Even the Rain)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Austin, Elisabeth L. “Consuming Empathy in También La Lluvia (2010).” *Chasqui (01458973)*, vol. 46, no. 2, Nov. 2017, pp. 313–329. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=125978227&site=ehost-live&scope=site. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)