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## Colonialism In The Motorcycle Diaries

The 2004 biographical film, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, reveals the journey of the 23-year-old Ernesto "Fuser" Guevara. The movie takes place in 1952, where Ernesto, who is about to complete his medical degree, along with his friend Alberto Granado, a biochemist, leave Buenos Aires in order to travel around Latin America eventually reaching a leper colony, which they intend to volunteer at, in just four and a half months. Even though the journey starts out as just a thrilling adventure, Ernesto is soon exposed to the disparity of the indignant peasants, and the pervasive ideas of injustice are clearly demonstrated by the poverty of the poor native people. Throughout the movie a new intriguing identity of Latin America, filled with the cruel exploitation of the native people and their lands is revealed to Ernesto. These experiences would later fuel Ernesto's revolution against political repression and economic inequalities.

Even though the initial goal of Ernesto and Alberto's journey is to just have fun and explore as much of Latin America as possible, the movie actually helps reveal the economic and social disparities and tries to decolonialize Latin America. But what does it mean to decolonialize Latin America? In Mignolo's book *The Idea of Latin America* Mignolo argues, "The idea of America...is a modern European invention and limited to Europeans' view of the world and of their own history" (Mignolo 8). This means that Europeans used coloniality in order to further their own endeavors and modernity. Throughout the novel, Mignolo thus argues that modernity and coloniality are just two sides of the same coin. One can not exist without the other. For example, in order for European imperialists to feel 'modern' they had to look, think and act superior to somebody else, and unfortunately that ended up being indigenous people, especially in Latin America. It is thus modernity that will not eradicate coloniality but rather fuels it. In his novel, Mignolo then goes on to describe the logic of coloniality which thrives through economic domains, meaning the exploitation of land and labor from the indigenous people, political domains, or the absolute control of authority and law, civic domains, which control gender and sexuality, and finally the complete control of knowledge and thinking. Even though one side of the world is portrayed as modern and all knowledgeable, on the other side there are, "Societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed... millions of [women and] men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life – from life, from the dance, from wisdom" (51). Thus, part of the job of the movie to reimagine Latin America without the influence of imperialists trying to control the native people, and even though in some aspects the movie does accomplish this goal by revealing economic political, and social disparities, but in other ways the movie fuels colonialism even more.

The first way the movie decolonializes Latin America by revealing the economic exploitation of the native land and people. For example, when Ernesto and Alberto visits the Incan ruins of Machu Picchu, the movie illustrates the breathtaking views, and beautiful handcrafted stone work but also the emptiness of the once lively city. This causes the travelers to realize the beauty that the natives created was so easily destroyed by imperialists set on industrializing the nation. The scene in Machu Picchu is then juxtaposed by the busy, dirty hustle and bustle of Lima. This reveals how the Europeans so easily took a beautiful city and emptied it only to build a more 'modern' urban city that fits their agenda better. While in Chile, Ernesto and Alberto also come across a poor couple who had been persecuted for their communist beliefs. They

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travel together to a copper mine, where Ernesto witnesses the cruelty inflicted on the workers. In the scene it is scorching hot rocky mountains and the men are selected one by one to go squeeze into the back of a small crowded truck. Thus the movie is representing the exploitation of the people, because they are so desperate for money that they are willing to work in inhumane conditions. This helps to reveal the logic of coloniality, and thus portray the consequences of modernity in a different light.

Another way that the movie decolonializes Latin America, is through the Leper Colony. One of Ernesto and Alberto's goals was to make it to Peru and work in a leper colony there. Throughout their three week stay there, Ernesto is able to witness the division between the healthy and sick. The colony is set up so that the healthy doctors and nurses, which represent Europeans, are on the north side, and then the sick patients, which represent the indigenous people, are on the south side, and there is a river that separates the two civilizations. While Ernesto is working there, the audience is also able to witness the disparities between the two civilizations. For example, just based on the clothes they wear, the doctors wear very nice clean clothes, while the sick look dirty and dressed in rags. This reveals the economic disparity between the two civilizations, but also reveals that the healthy don't really seem bothered by this fact. Also, when Ernesto and Alberto arrived to the southern colony they were told by the doctors, that they are required to wear gloves at all times while with the patients, even though they were not contagious, so gloves were not necessary. This reveals that the doctors believed themselves to be of a superior class compared to the patients, and that they could not even touch them because they were viewed as diseased. Another aspect of the colony that reveals coloniality, is that the nuns force the patients, along with Ernesto and Alberto to go to church, otherwise they are not fed. The problem with this is that, everybody needs to eat in order to survive, and the only way to eat is to go to church, thus the nuns are forcing christianity down the throats of the patients. They are thus equating christianity to life, and without it, one will not live. Forcing people to convert to another religion was a major attribute of coloniality, during that time period. By revealing this aspect of coloniality, the movie is thus trying to decoloniality Latin America.

Another way that the movie tries to decolonialize Latin America is through the character Esteban. Esteban is wealthy individuals from Latin America, who went to university in Europe, his goal is to then come back to South America and teach everybody European knowledge, and make Latin America more modern, like Europe. However, in the movie Esteban is portrayed as pompous and egotistical which reflects the European colonizers attitudes towards the native people as well. This helps to decoloniality europe because it reveals the modernistic, selfish views of the colonizers and portrays them in a negative light.

However, there are certain aspects of the movie that fuel modernity and coloniality. One example of this is Ernesto and Alberto's exploitation of the bike shop owner. Ernesto and Alberto's motorcycle unfortunately broke down towards the beginning of their journey, but in order to get it fixed they decided to exploit and lie to some of the native people. They told the shop owner that they were both famous doctors in order to get their motorcycle fixed for free. Then when they got caught, Ernesto and Alberto completely destroyed the man's bike shop. So, they ended up exploiting the native people's time and resources just for their own net gain, which is exactly what the Europeans did, which is a problem because the movie does not portray this as a terrible thing which they did but rather, something of necessity in order to get their bike fixed so that they could complete their journey. Another time that Ernesto and Alberto exploited some of the native people was when they arrived in a town, and decided to seduce or

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trick two local sisters into buying them food, drinks and giving them a place to stay. This scene was once again not portrayed as an exploitation of the women's services, but rather a comedic ploy put on by Ernesto and Alberto, which only fuels coloniality.

Finally, the movie still portrays Latin America through the lens of modernity because it depicts Latin America as a pretty cohesive group of countries. Meaning, that it is difficult to tell the countries apart in the sense that they are all given the same 'identity'. Throughout the movie, for example, they reveal the parties and fun that some of the indigenous people have, but even though different parties take place in different countries there is no cultural distinction between them all. The indigenous people are also all just viewed as poor and exploited but in reality there are very distinct aspects of each country, but the movie just mashes them all together to form one unified Latin America. This fuels modernity because it is just pushing one viewpoint of Latin America, and not showing all the different cultures that truly exist there.

After witnessing the injustices in Latin America, Ernesto would later become a major leader of the Cuban Revolution because of his Marxist views. His diary of his travels was later discovered and then in 2004, the Motorcycle Diaries was created in order to portray the story of Ernesto as well as display the injustices he saw in Latin America during this time period. Thus the movie tries and succeeds in some aspects of decolonialising Latin America but also follows the logic of modernity at other times.