COLONIALISM, EXTRACTIVISM AND VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY CHILEAN CINEMA: THE SELK'NAM GENOCIDE IN *WHITE ON WHITE* AND *THE SETTLERS**

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INTRODUCTION

Until the last few decades, the colonisation of southern Patagonia and its integration into global production systems at the end of the 19th century had been framed in a heroic, developmentalist narrative of the European settler in the region. This perspective, which can be found in the work of the award-winning Chilean historian Mateo Martinic, has promoted a narrative in which the expansion of *civilisation* is presented as a productive human achievement, in consonance with the spirit of progress of the time. In recent years, however, studies by scholars such as the Spanish historian José Luis Marchante have challenged this view, proposing a critical revision that foregrounds the violence, dispossession and genocide suffered by Indigenous peoples. The difference between these two historians lies not merely in the inclusion or omission of certain facts, but in the narrative each one adopts to interpret those facts.

This article examines two recent Chilean films: *White on White* (Blanco en blanco, Théo Court, 2019) and *The Settlers* (Los colonos, Felipe Gálvez, 2023), which constitute practically the first attempts to recount the history of the extermination of the Selk'nam people from both an aesthetic and a political perspective, positing clear hypotheses about the period of colonisation and the persistence of colonial practices today.

Hayden White conceives of narrativity as a way of making sense of historical facts. He describes the chronicle as a series of events arranged in chronological order, each of which can be independently verified statement by statement. This differs from the effort of representation and signification involved in *bending* those facts into a story. This exercise always entails a degree of

contortion, but it also provides access to a second truth: not merely the truth of each statement in isolation, but a truth in which connections and interrelations construct an interpretation and vest the events with meaning. As White explains, history takes on narrative form "for purposes of representing not only the truth about the past but also the possible meanings of this truth" (White, 2005: 151).

On the question of how the meanings in narrativised history are constructed, Robert Rosenstone suggests that "all our historical works look simultaneously to the past and to the present" (Rosenstone, 2013: 26). Faithful documentation of the events addressed constitutes only one component of the historical truth articulated in narratives. The present from which we observe and interrogate the past in light of historical developments shapes history in ethical and aesthetic terms. This reflection is already present in the work of Walter Benjamin, when he describes the historian as the Angelus Novus, who "has his back turned on his own epoch; his seer's gaze is kindled by the peaks of past events, which pile up before him" (Benjamin, 2008: 78). In this way, historical research unfolds in the tension between the past and the possibilities of the future.

THIS IS THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT EXPLORED IN *WHITE ON WHITE* AND *THE SETTLERS*, BOTH OF WHICH TAKE A POSITION ON THE MODERNITY/ COLONIALITY DEBATE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BORDER THINKING (MIGNOLO, 2005), WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DEPICTING VIOLENCE SO SHOCKING THAT IT RISKS BEING DEEMED UNSHOWABLE, IN AN EXERCISE THAT ALLOWS THE SILENCED VOICE OF HISTORY TO SPEAK

While *White on White* is set in the years leading up to the 20th century, the events in *The Settlers* take place in 1901. Both films have the same setting: the main island of Tierra del Fuego. Over this period, the region experienced a boom

Image 1. *White on White* (2019), courtesy of Théo Court

in wool production, for which historian Alberto Harambour has coined the term "ovine sovereignty" (Harambour, 2018: 59). In the late 19th century, this production was established as an extractivist project for the colonisation of southern Patagonia. In the first years after its foundation in 1848, the growth of the port of Punta Arenas was largely due to the presence of a military base and a penal colony. The limited success of this model of colonisation prompted successive governments to create incentives to move to the region, primarily through land concessions to European settlers arriving from impoverished parts of Spain, Britain and Portugal in search of a better life. With these new arrivals, the sheep population grew exponentially. From the outset, land ownership was highly concentrated: the Portuguese settler José Nogueira received concessions of over one million hectares in Tierra del Fuego, while the Asturian merchant José Menéndez initially acquired 90,000 hectares, "making use of a strategy common in auctions, known in Chile as *palos blancos* [white sticks]" (Marchante, 2014: 100), a ploy that historian José Luis Marchante explains in detail. Sociedad Explotadora de Tierra del Fuego, a company in which Menéndez and Mauricio Braun (Nogueira's heir) became partners, would eventually hold three million hectares.

This is the historical context explored in *White on White* and *The Settlers*, both of which take a position on the modernity/coloniality debate from the perspective of *border thinking* (Mignolo, 2005), while at the same time depicting violence so shocking that it risks being deemed unshowable, in an exercise that allows the silenced voice of history to speak. These films adhere to the logic of post-colonial cinema which, according to Juan Guardiola, "investigates the colonial past, denounces its injustice", and "offers a reflection on the cinematic apparatus itself, as a 'filmic machine' and as a 'cognitive instrument'" (Guardiola, 2016: 157), associated with modernity and colonisation.

THE POST-COLONIAL GAZE: CINEMA BETWEEN HISTORY, AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

In his essay "The Unforgettable", French philosopher Jacques Rancière muses: "What can history do, what can the cinematographic image do, what can they do together in the face of the revisionist will to deny what was, to pretend it never happened?" (Rancière, 2014: 45). This will to deny exists as a counterpart to history, silencing all those who are not history makers. Moreover, as will be shown below, the will to deny forms an integral part of the processes of colonisation. Rancière's reflection is therefore particularly pertinent when considering the genocide of the peoples of the global South, for example, or the colonial process and its relationship with modernity. This selective denial operates insidiously and sometimes subtly because, as Rancière points out, to deny what has been "you don't even need to suppress many of the facts; you only need to remove the link that connects them and constitutes them as a story" (Rancière, 2014: 18).

This is the approach to history taken in the writings of Mateo Martinic, who constructs a narrative about a group of European men of humble origins who come to a no-man's land and bring development, jobs and technology. From Rancière's perspective, this is a narrative of "the history makers" (Rancière, 2014: 22). Martinic tells us very little about the Selk'nam "extinction" (2001: 135), beyond a cursory acknowledgement spanning only a few pages of his extensive bibliography.

Walter Mignolo describes the complementary nature of modernity and coloniality, which provide a basis for interpreting the work of historians such as Martinic and Marchante. The first is the imperial or hegemonic paradigm, which "imposes and maintains the dominant view (which all students learn from elementary to high school and which is disseminated in popular culture and

the media)" (Mignolo, 2005: 33). The second is the decolonial paradigm, which "brings forward, on the one hand, a silenced view of the event and, on the other, shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true (and total) interpretation of the events" (2005: 33).

Modernity—with its theological roots, its distinctly male humanism, its economic prosperity, intellectual rationalism and technology—is inseparable from coloniality and its logic of control, domination and exploitation (Grosfoguel, 2006). Coloniality constitutes the "darker side" of modernity's discourse of salvation and progress (Mignolo, 2005: xiii), rendering the suppression of history important once again. Modernity as a hegemonic paradigm involves the suppression of coloniality as its dark underbelly. To heal the colonial wound, the widespread misconception that modernity is an attainable state for Latin America or any colonial territory needs to be abandoned. Modernity, initially dominated by the European empires and subsequently, after the Second World War, by the United States—requires colonial relationships with subaltern states, and the illusion that they may achieve development, which always appears imminent yet remains unattainable. The proliferation of post-colonial and decolonial theories across the Global South reflects the consequences of colonial processes that continue to wreak havoc today.

An alternative to modernity is offered in the concept of *transmodernity* developed by Enrique Dussel, who "argues for a multiplicity of critical decolonising responses to Eurocentric modernity from peripheral cultures and the epistemic location of colonised peoples worldwide" (quoted in Grosfoguel, 2006: 40). New forms of knowledge production must thus be situated outside coloniality, offering approaches that blur the disciplinary boundaries between history, aesthetics and ethics, for example.

With reference to post-colonial Britain, Stuart Hall describes a process of amnesia in relation to the nation's imperial past (Hall, 2017: 17). Similarly, Leela Gandhi refers to a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. For Gandhi, post-colonial theory is a disciplinary project involving the scholarly task of revising, remembering and above all questioning the colonial past (Gandhi, 2019: 4). This amnesia, which she considers characteristic of a feeling of rebirth in the wake of the formal emancipation of colonial states as independent nations, is both cause and effect of a continuity between the colonial and post-colonial periods. Although geopolitical events—for example, Chile's independence from Spain or the liberation of African states from European powers—indicate a chronological division, they conceal the ongoing nature of the colonial process. In her exploration of this phenomenon of selective amnesia or omission, Gandhi identifies connections with psychoanalytic theory that shed light on Martinic's work as an exercise in repressing a past that is difficult to confront and instead focusing on the perceived benefits of colonial integration. Chilean historian Alberto Harambour refers to this phenomenon precisely as a "historiography of omission" (Harambour, 2018: 61).

On this question, Rancière argues for the importance of including the representation of appalling violence, noting that:

> the conclusion is sometimes too easily drawn that the extermination is "unrepresentable" or "unshowable", notions in which various heterogeneous arguments conveniently merge: the joint incapacity of real documents and fictional imitations to reflect the horror experienced; the ethical indecency of representing that horror. (2014: 45)

In various essays, the French philosopher repeatedly returns to the problem of representation, and the question of justice in representation: who represents and who is represented. Showing the past—this particular "unshowable" past of the Selk'nam extermination—using the resources of audiovisual fiction endows the image with a certain "pensiveness" (2009: 107), to paraphrase an-

other of Rancière's texts, allowing us to look once more where we had not looked before.

Rosenstone argues that there is a certain kind of historical cinema that offers an important means of making sense of history, understood as a relationship between the present and the past (Rosenstone, 2013: 37). The radical distinction made by historians between written or academic historiography and cinema is unfounded, as written history also narrativises, condenses, selects and articulates a view of events shaped by the present; historians are also concerned with making the past available to the masses, who need to feel connected to their history. Cinema is thus called upon to become "a new kind of history for an age in which images would become more important to society than words" (Rosenstone, 2013: 32). White goes further, coining the term *historiophoty* to posit visual media as a tool for historical research, and even extolling cinematic aesthetics—editing, music, visuality—for having a more profound evocative power than written language (White, 1988). This view is in line with the work of other authors such as Cathy Caruth, who, in her analysis of traumatic events that resist representation or comprehension, argues for an expanded conception of history that goes beyond the idea of a strictly referential discipline (Caruth, 1996: 11).

The key feature of this kind of historical cinema is the relationship it establishes with a particular set of data, debates and perspectives. This analysis of *White on White* and *The Settlers* in relation to the historiographic work of Marchante and Martinic reveals that both films reflect a detailed knowledge of the politics, economics and other specific aspects of the colonisation of Tierra del Fuego, and that both subscribe to a view aligned with the ethical considerations of contemporary historiography. These films revise, challenge and interrogate the past, exposing the gaps and distortions in the history as it has been told, while also being open to the subjectivity offered by fictional narratives that explore the past.

TERRITORIAL INTRUSIONS: LAND AND OCCUPATION

White on White tells the story of Pedro (Alfredo Castro), a photographer who travels to the remote region of Tierra del Fuego to photograph the future wife of a wealthy English landowner named Mr Porter. The bride turns out to be a teenage girl, with whom Pedro becomes obsessed. The landowner never appears, the wedding Pedro has come to document never takes place, and he ends up trapped in a hostile, inhospitable and extremely violent environment.

The Settlers, released a few years later, features two characters inspired by real historical figures known for their participation in the Selk'nam genocide: *El Chancho Colorado* ("the Red Pig"), the nickname given to a Scottish soldier named Alexander MacLennan (Mark Stanley); and José Menéndez (Alfredo Castro), a local landowner who hires him to lead a hunting expedition. MacLennan is joined on the mission by Bill (Benjamín Westfall), an Indian hunter from the United States, and Segundo (Camilo Arancibia), the film's real protagonist, a fisherman from Chiloé who becomes a passive accomplice as he witnesses the horrors of the genocide without daring to oppose them.

It is worth analysing the common ground shared by the two films, which deal with the same historical period and event, while also considering their obvious differences in relation to the perspectives they offer: specifically, *the place from which* the massacre is observed, and the protagonist's proximity to the perpetrators. In *White on White*, the protagonist's profession as a photographer appears to mark the film's style: the composition, lighting and a colour palette dominated by the white winter snow all seem to reflect a photographic aesthetic. Conversely, *The Settlers*—or at least the first two thirds of the film—possesses a quality evocative of Tarantino's post-modern style, with the pacing of a Twilight Western and the constant presence of senseless

violence in a ceaseless journey across Tierra del Fuego.

While *White on White* is filled with minimalist indoor scenes where characters take refuge in their decadence, *The Settlers* takes place almost entirely out in the open. In *White on White*, the landowner is never shown; in *The Settlers*, he appears at both the beginning and the end of the film. Leaving these differences aside, this article focuses on the numerous features shared by the two films, both of which offer a reconsideration of the past, proposing fairer (documented, affective and responsible) ways of viewing and depicting it.

The settlers' occupation of Tierra del Fuego constitutes an intrusion that is not just territorial, but also cultural, religious and linguistic. These films represent the coexistence of multiple languages: alongside Spanish is the English of the settlers and the mysterious language of the Selk'nam. The plurality of tongues emphasises the liminal status of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago at that time. In this context, the political and territorial divisions are fuzzy. MacLennan's English in *The Settlers* is the native tongue of the managers brought in by local landowners to take care of their sheep. British wealth is mythologised in the character of Mr Porter, whose name is repeated obsessively in *White on White* despite the fact he never appears on screen. Both MacLennan in Gálvez's film and the character played by Lars Rudolph in Court's film speak with accents that place them on the fringes of the empire, distinguishing them from the eminence of Colonel Martin (Sam Spruell). The sheep managers brought to these far-flung reaches of the world are tough outcasts fleeing their pasts and seeking to reinvent themselves, driven by money and personal gain. The borders between the different cultures, nations and ranches are openly contested.

The motif of the barbed-wire fence serves to transform this territory into property, into sheep ranches that can be exploited by global capitalism. The image of building fences possesses an ominous and a visually powerful quality. In *The Settlers*, this image forms part of the film's opening sequence, as a fence is being built in the very same scene that introduces the two protagonists. The shot in question speaks volumes: a slow pan across an expansive empty landscape falls upon a wire fence stretching onto the horizon, before finally settling on the group of men building it. The rhythmic, mechanical sounds of the spade, pickaxe, hammer and pulley tightening the wire serve as an unsettling foreshadowing of the violence to come, although they also evoke the notion of the assembly line, the repetitive action of work with tools. In this vast, wild place, the dividing line the men are constructing marks the arrival of modernity.

There are similar percussive sounds in a fence-building scene in *White on White*, made by men working rhythmically as they stretch out the wire. In this case, the hostility of the environment is even more extreme, as the men are shown working in the bitter snow and wind. The visibility is low, and the extreme cold is evident in the coats they wear, their visible breath when they speak and the hollow sound of the blowing snow. In another long pan, the camera moves from one group of workers to where coils of barbed wire lay on the ground ready for use, and then moves onto another group erecting an adjacent fence, stressing the importance of fence-building and its ubiquitous nature at this time and place.

These dividing lines spread all over the region. Both films frame them as absurd, as they cover a vast empty territory, dividing a space that in reality is indivisible, breaking up a landscape formerly inhabited by guanacos and Selk'nam nomads who, as far as the landowners are concerned, form part of the empty void. Once the barbed wire fences are raised, as small and fragile they may seem in such vastness, the land is no longer the same; what once was wild has now become something else. At the turn of the 20th century, extractivism took over the region.

ONCE THE BARBED WIRE FENCES ARE RAISED, AS SMALL AND FRAGILE THEY MAY SEEM IN SUCH VASTNESS, THE LAND IS NO LONGER THE SAME; WHAT ONCE WAS WILD HAS NOW BECOME SOMETHING ELSE. AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY, EXTRACTIVISM TOOK OVER THE REGION

Wool production in Tierra del Fuego is referred to here as extractivism following Gudynas's definition (2015: 13): the high-volume, high-intensity extraction of a natural resource for mass export. Maristella Svampa expands on this definition, describing it as "a model tending towards mono-production that destroys biodiversity, involving land seizure and territorial destruction" (Svampa, 2019: 17), all of which are features of sheep farming in Tierra del Fuego. This model had its origins in the birth of modernity/coloniality in the early 16th century, as Indigenous thinkers and activists throughout Latin America have pointed out. Extractivism is intrinsic to the transformation of capital into capitalism and to the historical line running from the Christian "discovery" of the Americas to contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Mignolo argues that this transformation from capital to capitalism occurred by means of "land appropriation, labor exploitation, and massive commodity production" facilitated by the availability of "'new' discovered lands" that the European invaders had the right to "take possession" of (Mignolo, 2005: 30-31). This notion of legitimate possession, based on a civilisational locus of enunciation that was initially Christian and later liberal, appears explicitly in papal messages to King Afonso V of Portugal declaring the Americas to be *terra nullius* open for appropriation, despite the presence of inhabitants whom the Europeans viewed as quasi-human (Mignolo, 2005: 30).

The material wealth obtained from sheep farming is represented materially in *The Settlers*, and more mythically in *White on White*. It can be seen of course in the landowners' homes. The mansion shown at the end of *The Settlers* in Punta Arenas is particularly notable in this sense: European furnishings, a piano in the middle of a huge living room, thick curtains drawn shut to keep out the cold. Similarly, in *White on White* we see Mr Porter's manor house, which is largely unused as the landowner has multiple residences. The expensive whim of bringing a photographer to such a remote place to take pictures of his future wife is itself a luxury that signals his elevated status.

THE BARBARITY OF THE CIVILISED MAN

Genocidal violence is required to satisfy the economic interests of the extractivist model. The Selk'nam posed a threat to the riches sought by the colonisers and therefore had to be eliminated. This is made explicit in both films. In *The Settlers*, Menéndez states flatly: "The Indians are the problem. In Porvenir they cut the fences and ate all my animals, all my sheep. Like beasts. Like the beasts they are. I want you to find a route to the Atlantic for my sheep; a safe and quick route, Lieutenant. For this, you will have to clean this island." This connection between genocidal violence and the rise of extractivist capitalism is one of the most significant elements of the Marchante's historical revision, distinguishing it from earlier accounts of Patagonian colonisation, such as Martinic's. Indigenous peoples must be wiped out to make way for a model of large-scale mono-production of raw materials for exporting, chiefly dependent on foreign capital. Racism, dehumanisation and the civilising mission are also important factors behind the genocide, but they are secondary compared to the priority to establish a system that would enrich the settlers' families for generations.

TIME APPEARS TO STOP AROUND THE MEN AIMING THEIR WEAPONS, IN COMPLEX SHOTS THAT COMBINE THE IMMEASURABLE EXPANSE OF THE LANDSCAPE, THE VULNERABILITY OF THE INDIGENOUS FIGURES, AND THE CRUEL DETERMINATION OF THE SETTLERS. IT IS A MOMENT OF UNILATERAL VIOLENCE PERPETRATED WITHOUT REMORSE

Although Pedro in *White on White* is not a settler, he seems to lose no time in absorbing the logic of possession described by Mignolo. His obsession with Mr Porter's young wife develops progressively in the first half of the film. Vania Barraza links the mise-en-scène of their photography sessions to Laura Mulvey's concept of scopophilia, identifying a psychoanalytic dimension that is central to Court's film. Pedro's sexual obsession is connected to death both through the camera and through the masculinity that serves to express such drives.

While in *White on White* the massacre concludes the film, in *The Settlers* it is followed by the rape of a Selk'nam woman. In this scene, Bill emerges from the bushes declaring dissatisfaction, and MacLennan indicates to Segundo that it is his turn. When Segundo refuses, MacLennan loses control, threatening him and ordering him to rape the almost unconscious woman. Manliness here is pushed to absurd extremes: in a close-up that distorts his face, saliva spraying as he spits in rage, MacLennan feels judged by Segundo and wants to assert his dominance. He even grabs Segundo's genitals and kisses him while threatening to kill him, to "extinguish [his] fucking flame". In one of the film's most disturbing moments, Segundo goes to the badly injured woman and suffocates her with his bare hands. It is an intimate scene, composed of close-ups of their faces and hands. In Segundo's actions there is a hint of pity, but also a symmetry with the rapists: he is a man who takes control of a woman's body, deciding her fate for her.

In the context of colonisation, the female body—especially the body of an Indigenous woman—becomes something that can be controlled. There is a direct, tangible connection between genocidal violence and sexual violence. The civilised men who have come to settle in this no-man's land embody a savage masculinity. In his review of *The Settlers*, Iván Pinto points out that although the film explores the civilisation/barbarism binary through the language of the Western, it offers a kind of "inverse" reading of that binary. Mignolo articulates the same idea from a decolonial perspective: "the civilization that Creoles and Europeans had in mind has been genocidal and, therefore, barbarian" (Mignolo, 2005: xviii).

In both films, the protagonists are neither perpetrators nor victims in the strict sense, yet they do bear some responsibility for the events that unfold. They could thus be identified with Rothberg's concept of implicated subjects, who hold positions aligned with power and privilege without themselves being direct agents of harm, contributing to, inhabiting, inheriting or benefiting from regimes of domination that they neither create nor control (Rothberg, 2019).

GHOSTLY VISIONS

Considerable dramatic weight is given in both films to the massacres of groups of Selk'nam people by organised death squads. Both depict what is unmistakably a hunt: mobs of men with rifles raised, pursuing human beings who flee from them into the background of the frame. Time appears to stop around the men aiming their weapons, in complex shots that combine the immeasurable expanse of the landscape, the vulnerability of the Indigenous figures, and the cruel determination of the settlers. It is a moment of unilateral violence perpetrated without remorse. Only the

IT IS PEDRO'S CAMERA THAT CAPTURES THE WAY THE PHOTOGRAPHER MANIPULATES HISTORY, MOVING THE BODIES, PLACING THE KILLERS IN POSES, AND ENDOWING A COWARDLY, VILE AND HEINOUS ACT WITH THE GRANDEUR OF A BATTLE

films' respective protagonists, Pedro and Segundo, display any kind of restraint and are not direct participants in the killing, enabling us to distinguish them from the others. Parts of the visual composition of these scenes recall the legendary photographs of the explorer Julius Popper, a Romanian engineer who embarked on "one of the most famous expeditions to Tierra del Fuego" in 1886 (Marchante, 2009: 99) and, following a skirmish with the Selk'nam, took a number of pictures that were widely disseminated even at the time. In the scene of the massacre in *White on White*, echoes of Popper's photographs are perceptible in the specific way the killers hold their rifles, in their triumphant stances and in the static coldness of the poses. This is the shot that ends the film. The screen encapsulates what Pedro's camera captures in an image recorded without judgement by a machine that frames the photographer as he manipulates history, moving the bodies, placing the killers in poses and endowing a cowardly, vile and heinous act with the grandeur of a battle.

These men take possession not only of the territory of the Selk'nam but also of their bodies: to receive payment for their work as "Indian hunters", they must cut off their victims' ears and provide them as proof of the killing—a system that is depicted explicitly. In *The Settlers*, Bill is shown mutilating a row of bloodied corpses, which he carries out with a ceremonious calm, while MacLennan forces Segundo to move the last of the bodies. A close-up of the ear being severed provides a glimpse of the knife tearing the flesh and dark blood streaming out of the fresh body, underscoring the tangible brutality of the act. Cutting off ears is part of the job, as they serve as a form of currency that reflects the organised system of ethnic cleansing of the island implemented by the landowners and their foremen. This system, attested to by travellers, priests and ranch workers in various records from the period, is extensively documented in Marchante's work.

In these films, Selk'nam culture is depicted in mystical terms, behind a veil of mystery that renders it difficult even for the camera to capture, with a humanity and cosmology inaccessible to the cinematic apparatus. Only in a handful of images do dimensions beyond the genocide itself emerge. Their everyday activities are barely outlined, presented statically like a museum diorama: clothing, objects, a particular way of gathering around the fire. This museological quality recalls Alberto Harambour's reflections on the use of Selk'nam iconography in Tierra del Fuego today, which he describes as an "empty presence" (Harambour, 2018: 62). This perspective incorporates the Selk'nam into a *Magellanic* identity but strips them of all content beyond these iconic figures, reinforcing the idea of their supposedly prehistorical status. The real history of the region is thus understood to begin with European colonisation. Harambour argues that this relegation of the Selk'nam to prehistory creates a discontinuity between their presence in the territory and its subsequent colonisation, as if no relationship existed between the two:

> The notion of a differentiated historicity based on stages that structures the definition of territorial histories is part of its "historical context", elaborated by Mateo Martinic, who understands the island's settlement in terms of "aboriginal occupation", which "extended until the end of the 19th century, when foreign colonising infiltration began [… which] continues to the present day". These two "stages" do not overlap. (Harambour, 2018: 65)

This discontinuity is extremely common in the histories of modernity/coloniality. From the

Image 2 (left). *White on White* (2019), courtesy of Théo Court
Image 3 (right). *The Settlers* (2023), courtesy of Felipe Gálvez

16th century onwards, Mignolo notes, "the histories and languages of Indian communities 'became historical' at the point where they lost their own history. They became, in other words, museum cultures as they ceased to be human history" (Mignolo, 2005: 26).

These films propose a break with this stratified historicity by marking out clear, direct relationships between the arrival of one culture and the disappearance of another. In a manner that could be described as logical, or at least sensible, they locate the point of view in witness-characters who are either Chilean or *Mestizo*, and only in a few scenes, such as when Kiepja (Mishell Guaña) invites Segundo to escape with her, do they adopt an Indigenous perspective. This deliberate distance is reinforced by a similar scene in each film.

The Settlers and *White on White* feature strikingly similar depictions of encounters between the protagonists and Selk'nam figures wearing their distinctive ritual attire. In both cases, the encounters occur in semi-darkness. The figures are viewed from a distance, in full-body shots displaying the iconic imagery discussed above. The rhythm, sound and atmosphere of the scene mark the appearance of something ineffable, an apparition of the utmost solemnity. In *The Settlers*, the moment begins with a troubled horse that Segundo tries to calm down. Then, the moonlight shines on Segundo's face as he lifts his gaze in fright. The sound of the wind and the intermittent screeching of a bird heighten his trepidation. The appearance of the Selk'nam figure is accompanied by slow, deep and ominous breathing. When the film cuts to a close-up of this near-supernatural being, its face is dark, almost invisible. The sensation conveyed is that we are gazing into an abyss, or at a creature who is more than human.

In *White on White*, Pedro's encounter occurs near dawn. He is accompanying a hunting party and moves away from them to view a Selk'nam camp with his camera. Hidden behind a bush, close to the ground, he is shown from a slightly elevated camera angle as he raises his gaze to see the figure. It appears motionless at first, and the camera zooms in on it slowly to underscore its solemn power. The shot becomes immersive and unsettling, reinforcing a supernatural feeling that disturbs and transports us into the realm of the unknown.

These figures evoke a sense of something unattainable, a tragic cosmopolitical loss of the possibility of seeing the world through the eyes of a Selk'nam. The term "cosmopolitical" is used here in the sense given to it by Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, as a relationship between radically different cultural alterities that even include divergent conceptions of what is (and what is not) human. This sense of cultural loss is consonant with Harambour's conception of

PHOTOGRAPHY BECAME ANOTHER TOOL OF DOMINATION, SO THAT EVERYTHING CAPTURED BY THE CAMERA SERVES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE VICTORS. IT IS A TECHNOLOGY USED BY THOSE BEHIND THE CAMERA TO SUBJUGATE THOSE POSITIONED IN FRONT OF IT

discontinuity discussed above, and with the historiographic tendency (exemplified in Martinic's work) to describe what happened to the Selk'nam as an *extinction*. However, it is important to distinguish between the preservation of an ethnic identity through direct biological descent—i.e. through survivors—and the preservation of a way of living and seeing the world. In *The Settlers*, this painful distinction is reflected at the end of the film in the character of Kiepja, who is now married to Segundo, living on Chiloé Island and dressing as a Chilean woman. When Vicuña, a representative of the Chilean State, asks her for her name, she replies that it is Rosa. This name change encapsulates one of the genocide's irreparable consequences. Survivors, in order to go on living, have to give up their former identity: in a sense, to forget who they were. Yet in the final sequence, Kiepja does not forget. Directing an inscrutable look at the camera, she questions, accuses and defies the "official history" the Chilean government official seeks to construct.

These encounters conclude with the ceremonious disappearance of the Selk'nam figure, a farewell to a bygone world. Although these are brief moments in the film, their importance is central. The sublime impression they leave underscores a separation between worlds: an unknowable spirituality and characters who have been sacrificed to Western modernity. It is telling that these moments occur in the context of the imposition of an extractivist economic system that concentrates the land into a few hands. This is an inherent feature of the integration of a territory into the global capitalist system. In his discussion of capitalist realism, Mark Fisher stresses that it entails the loss of all beliefs outside capitalism. This loss of alternative cosmologies is a definitive aspect of capitalism, which "is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics" (Fisher, 2022: 4). This moment when a particular form of ritual or symbolic elaboration is forever banished by capital is precisely what both films attempt to depict, recognising colonialism as a direct antecedent of capitalism, or as the way of integrating territories into an economic system even before their political domination.

Image 4. *White on White* (2019), courtesy of Théo Court

It is impossible to analyse post-coloniality—a state of affairs in which global capitalism is a major force—without considering its images. These films reflect on those images as a way of understanding and narrating the world, taking us back to the historical moment when the tech-

nical reproduction of images first became intertwined with the broader project of modernity.

Photography became another tool of domination, so that everything captured by the camera serves for the construction of the official history of the victors. It is a technology used by those behind the camera to subjugate those positioned in front of it. Photographs function as evidence, yet their truth is always relative; it is a half-truth that includes both the perspective of the photographer and the image of the subaltern subjects with no control over the history their own portraits come to represent. There is always a process of construction at work. In *White on White*, Pedro meticulously directs his subjects in order to stage an epic mise-en-scène of the recent massacre. This directly recalls Julius Popper's photo album, as Vania Barraza observes:

> The de/montage of Pedro's photograph in Court's film helps explain the montage of Popper's history and, by extension, the historical montage involved in the narrative of colonisation in Tierra del Fuego. (Barraza, 2022)

In a sense, *The Settlers* reaffirms Barraza's observations regarding *White on White*. At the end of the film, Vicuña, explicitly acting in the name of justice and the Chilean state, stages an institutionalised version of Segundo and Kiepja's lives, adopting a tone of compassion towards them yet subjecting them to his will. The result is another historical montage, this time of a new version: the Chilean one. In front of the camera, Kiepja's gaze disobeys the civilised man's instructions, opening a tiny crack of resistance in the film's conclusion.

Image 5. *The Settlers* (2023), courtesy of Felipe Gálvez

CONCLUSIONS

The Settlers and *White on White* engage in a critical dialogue with the past, particularly with the gaps in a history that has only been partially told. *White on White* offers an audiovisual exploration of post-colonial theory's psychoanalytic dimension—the amnesic repression of modernity's dark side—while also engaging in direct dialogue with historical reconstruction and Julius Popper's photo album. *The Settlers* meticulously stages what may be the most significant connection obscured by the historiography of omission: the establishment of a model of extractivist colonisation as the primary cause of the Selk'nam genocide.

The purpose behind Court's and Gálvez's approaches to the Selk'nam genocide is more than just to challenge the interpretation of past events in the present; it is also to propose an ethical way of looking at the past, in dialogue with history and evidence, through an aesthetic construction in keeping with the violence contained in their stories, including murder, rape, the eradication of a worldview and the imposition of another.

Perhaps Kiepja (or Rosa) in *The Settlers* is the boldest character in either of these films, a survivor of a cosmopolitical loss. In the final scene, she refuses to drink tea, to be constructed as an image, to participate in the official history. Hers is the obstinacy of one who is forced to be quiet but will not forget. Through a small act of resistance, the ending to the film marks the distinction

between genocide and extinction. The genocide occurred, and it is turned into a macabre image in the films, its reasons and methods exposed. Extinction, meanwhile, is a myth at the service of the civilising narrative, reaffirming the "no-man's land" justification for the extractivist present. The doctrine of *res nullius*, applied by the colonial powers to seize land in the 18th century, has been discredited for erasing the Indigenous presence on that land (Zusman, 1999). The final scene of *The Settlers* underscores this erasure while stressing the partial nature of images and of foundational historical narratives. ■

NOTES

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COLONIALISM, EXTRACTIVISM AND VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY CHILEAN CINEMA: THE SELK'NAM GENOCIDE IN *WHITE ON WHITE* AND *THE SETTLERS*

Abstract

This article examines the Chilean films *White on White* (Blanco en blanco, Théo Court, 2019) and *The Settlers* (Los colonos, Felipe Gálvez 2023) as aesthetic and political interventions that revise the history of the Selk'nam genocide in Tierra del Fuego. In a dialogue with the contrasting historiographical perspectives of Mateo Martinic and José Luis Marchante, this analysis suggests that both films destabilise the heroic settler narrative and expose the structural violence of the modernising, extractivist project that underpinned the colonisation of southern Patagonia. These films are part of what Hayden White calls a post-colonial *historiophoty* that confronts the historical amnesia and proposes ethical ways of depicting colonialist violence. Both films reveal the intersecting nature of colonialism, extractivism and barbarism, which established peripheral capitalism in the Southern Cone through control over territory and over bodies. In these examples, contemporary Chilean cinema emerges as a space for a critical revision of the national imaginary and its foundational silences, positioning fiction as a critical, reflective and scientifically rigorous device for engaging with contemporary debates and historical documents.

Key words

Film; history; colonialism; violence; Selk'nam.

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COLONIALISMO, EXTRACTIVISMO Y VIOLENCIA EN EL CINE CHILENO CONTEMPORÁNEO. EL GENOCIDIO SELKNAM EN *BLANCO EN BLANCO* Y *LOS COLONOS*

Resumen

Este artículo examina las películas chilenas *Blanco en blanco* (Théo Court, 2019) y *Los colonos* (Felipe Gálvez, 2023) como intervenciones estéticas y políticas que reescriben la historia del genocidio selknam en Tierra del Fuego. En diálogo con las visiones historiográficas contrastadas de Mateo Martinic y José Luis Marchante, se propone que ambos filmes desestabilizan el relato heroico del colono y revelan la violencia estructural del proyecto modernizador y extractivista que acompañó la colonización de la Patagonia austral. Estos filmes se inscriben en aquello que Hayden White llama una «historiofotía» de carácter poscolonial, que confronta la amnesia histórica y propone modos éticos de figuración de la violencia. Ambas películas revelan el entrelazamiento entre colonialismo, extractivismo y barbarie, donde la ocupación del territorio y de los cuerpos funda el capitalismo periférico del cono sur. En estos ejemplos, el cine chileno contemporáneo emerge como un espacio de revisión crítica de los imaginarios nacionales y de sus silencios fundacionales, situando la ficción como un dispositivo crítico, reflexivo y riguroso con los debates contemporáneos y los documentos históricos.

Palabras clave

Cine; historia; colonialismo; violencia; selknam.

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