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# The Teacher's Rhetoric of Liberal Democracy and Minori'ethage in La patota (Argentina, 2015): An Open Decolonial Debate

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Article abstract

La patota (Argentina, 2015) recreates the experience of Paulina, a young lawyer who participates in a civics program in a rural school next to Posadas (Misiones). As in the plot of the original 60s film, the lawyer-teacher is raped by a gang (patota), of which some of her students are a part. She becomes pregnant and decides not to have an abortion. Based on the modernity/coloniality perspective, this socio-critical study applies the neologism "minori'ethage" to disarticulate the way in which the 2015 remake problematizes five centuries of coloniality and highlights the patriarchal environment in which everybody got trapped, underscoring the dangers of "playing fake democracy."

ANA M. FERNÁNDEZ

# The Teacher's Rhetoric of Liberal Democracy and Minori'ethage in *La patota* (Argentina, 2015): An Open Decolonial Debate

La patota/Paulina *(Argentina, 2015) recrea la experiencia de Paulina, joven abogada que decide participar en un programa cívico en una escuela rural próxima a Posadas (Misiones). Al igual que en la trama original de los años 60, la maestra es violada por una banda (patota), la cual involucra a algunos de sus alumnos. En consecuencia, queda embarazada y decide no abortar. Basándose en la perspectiva modernidad/colonialidad, este estudio sociocrítico aplica el neologismo "minoriédad" para desarticular la forma en que la adaptación problematiza cinco siglos de colonialidad, resalta el entorno patriarcal en el que todos están atrapados y revela el peligro de "jugar a la democracia falsa".*

Palabras clave: *(de)colonialidad, violencia de género,* La patota*, Santiago Mitre, representación de escuela y* minoriédad*, sociocrítica*

La patota *(Argentina, 2015) recreates the experience of Paulina, a young lawyer who participates in a civics program in a rural school next to Posadas (Misiones). As in the plot of the original 60s film, the lawyer-teacher is raped by a gang (patota), of which some of her students are a part. She becomes pregnant and decides not to have an abortion. Based on the modernity/coloniality perspective, this socio-critical study applies the neologism "minori'ethage" to disarticulate the way in which the 2015 remake problematizes five centuries of coloniality and highlights the patriarchal environment in which everybody got trapped, underscoring the dangers of "playing fake democracy."*

Keywords: *(de)coloniality, gender violence, La patota, Santiago Mitre, representation of school and* minori'ethage*, socio-criticism*

In the context of cultural and film studies, movies as a sociocultural and aesthetic recreation are capable of exposing prejudices hidden at the core of societies from their very foundation. For Gonzalo Aguilar, "[o]ne of the tasks of cinema criticism is to construct its own object through movies, with the

goal of becoming aware of the relationship between cinema and society" (2). In his 2015 adaptation of Daniel Tinayre's film *La patota* (Argentina, 1960), Santiago Mitre portrays Paulina, a young lawyer and doctoral student who decides to interrupt her studies to teach in a rights and democracy program that she has helped develop for a rural school. She moves from Buenos Aires to Posadas (Misiones), the city of her childhood, where her widowed father Fernando, a judge, lives. The duality of the relationships between Paulina and her father, and the students against Paulina, creates the ideological counterpoint that moves the plot, revisiting the modern metanarratives (Lyotard) of Progress and Democracy. Robert Stam, quoting Mikhail Bakhtin, argues that "[l]iterature, and by extension the cinema, must be understood within what Bakhtin calls the 'differentiated unity of the epoch's entire culture'" (Stam et al. 201). In this vein, the plot is updated by revisiting internal colonialism in Argentina and opening a decolonial debate through the characters' experiences and dialogue exchanges, in a very tense relationship between the urban-Creole teacher and the rural Guarani-descendant students. As she tries to teach liberal democratic values to the local students, they turn against her. In this way, the plot revisits the teacher's rhetoric as an example of European hegemony in the learning environment. The film becomes extremely violent in parts, especially in its depiction of rape. Therefore, it has been exclusively classified for audiences 16 and older.

I argue that Mitre's plot problematizes five centuries of colonialism; thus, exposing coloniality, highlighting the threatening patriarchal environment in which everybody is constrained. His film reveals that, in a corrupted society, justice and injustice are so complex that they are almost impossible to comprehend in the forever-perpetuated matrix of power professed in our modern world. This matrix represents "the very foundational structure of Western civilization" (Mignolo, *The Darker Side* 16). I contend that the remake's thesis establishes how everybody is trapped in prisons of their own making, except for the new life within her that Paulina will protect fiercely. She is forced to navigate by herself an interracial gender violence experience, which she had neglected to problematize either as a lawyer or as a civics teacher. In this analysis, from a decolonial and sociocritical stance, I applied the neologism "minori'ethage" (Fernández, "Una lectura" 30; Fernández, "Paradoxes of Global" 416; Fernández, "Minori'ethage Memories" 83) as a heuristic socio-critical tool (it will be discussed below) to disarticulate how the remake recreates the dyad of Paulina–students, including the gang (*la patota*). Mitre's plot depicts the colonial structures of power, reflects on minori'ethage, and opens a decolonial possibility. At the outset, I present the remake in relation to the referential and production contexts and engage in

a brief discussion of (de)coloniality. Next, I focus on Paulina's discourse and her rhetoric of liberal democracy, symbolized at its best by the students accusing her of being a *caté,* i.e., the White race imposing itself as superior since the independence of Argentina (and for five centuries). Secondary characters like Silvana and Vivi come up with discourses standing for ethical interpellation (Dussel). These secondary voices turn out to be effective as a counter-discursive force interrupting "the scene" with the ethical interpellation (Dussel, *Filosofía*; Dussel *Método*). These "interruptions" are also effective in reinforcing the student's observation and revealing the darker side of modernity, thus, coloniality (Quijano; Mignolo). I demonstrate how, through his representation of Paulina, Mitre (dis)articulates the colonial structures supported by the patriarchy and proposes, not without contradiction, a decolonial debate where nothing is dichotomous; therefore, the system exit is not outside or inside but in a sort of in-between border thinking (Mignolo, "Delinking"). By extension, the (im)possibility of the pseudo-democracy recreated in the diegesis may provide some hints on institutional mediation towards a decolonial path.

Undoubtedly, Mitre's remake represents the ideological, racial, and gender polarization between Paulina and the local (gang of) students. For example, ethno-culturally, she represents a *criollo* descendant – with a phenotype characterized by fair complexion, blond hair, and green eyes – and a Spanish speaker, unable to understand Guarani, the language her students speak. In contrast, the group of students represents a rural bilingual community with brown complexion, dark hair, and dark eyes. They are speakers of both Guarani and Spanish. At the rural school, the students find Paulina as foreign to their culture as the local culture is to her. During a ludic activity on democracy that the teacher proposes to the class, a student accuses Paulina of setting the rules because she is a *caté* (the Guarani expression for someone belonging to the so-called White race and favored class). In this sense, the remake echoes Aníbal Quijano's standpoint, "[t]he racial axis … has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established. Therefore, the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality" ("Coloniality of Power" 533). According to Walter Mignolo, "since the late 1980s, … Quijano unveiled 'coloniality' as the darker side of modernity and as the historical perspective of the wretched, the outcast from history told from the perspective of modernity" (*The Idea* 5). Thus, in his remake *La patota/Paulina*, Mitre breaks with the synthetic and pedagogical intentions of the original in which the students declare having learned their teacher's lesson. As Julio Vallejo Herán notes, Mitre tends to provoke the audience, jolting the viewer out of his comfort zone, and this remake is no exception ("Paulina").

From a sociohistorical viewpoint, the professedly "liberal or Western" democracy defends equality before the law (as a right provided by a constitution); conversely, Mitre states that pseudo-democracy comes with (no guarantees of) rights for the pseudo-citizens, who turn out to be equally vulnerable to crime, in this case, rape. In a series of crimes, Paulina is attacked at night, in a case of mistaken identity, by a gang of her students led by her friend Vivi's ex-boyfriend, Ciro. Vivi offers to help Paulina: Vivi tells the victim that Ciro had wanted to rape her "to teach her a lesson," but Paulina's driving the scooter borrowed from their friend Laura, Paulina's friend and colleague at school, resulted in him attacking Paulina instead. Vivi reveals that she too was raped by her uncle when she was 14 years old, and now, consequently, she has a son, Brian. It is also conveyed that some police officers have abused the entire gang and have raped Ciro at the police station to teach him a lesson. Paulina's father, Fernando, was the judge who placed the gang members in police custody. However, he never imagined that the local institution would be capable of such brutality, which speaks to his incompetence as a guardian of the law, i.e., he is unable to discern the corruption in his own law enforcement machinery. This fact generates tension between (the widowed) father who wants to help his (only) daughter, and Paulina, who, as a lawyer and local civics teacher, asks Fernando not to interfere in this matter as she is trying to understand the situation better before taking any action. Things get even more complicated because Paulina is pregnant with Ciro's child (due to the rape), and contrary to the will of the rest of the characters, she has decided not to have an abortion.

As the director and co-screenwriter (with Mariano Llinás), Mitre expresses his desire to underscore the ideological motive by offering an open interpretation, so much so that it turned to be very challenging both for him and the public reception ("Santiago Mitre escribe"). He also claims to have watched the original version just once so as to not be influenced by it but rather to create his own version. In Mitre's words, "something about Paulina's character was like a slap in the face. From the beginning, I wrote ... trying to understand it, but ... it was not possible ..., and that was exactly what interested me about this film" ("Santiago Mitre escribe"). In his comments for *Clarín*, a well-known Argentinian newspaper, Pablo Scholz notes that the protagonists' behavior is not to be judged but felt. In the context of the *Festival Culture et cinéma 'Femmes et sociétés'* (Nérac, France), Isabelle Furno points out that the public found the remake disturbing.

As in the original version, Mitre recreates Paulina as a young adult. However, in the new version the gang is portrayed as minors, which is not the case in the original film; now, they are minors misled by an adult, Ciro. Once pregnant by rape (by the gang of Guarani descendants), the alleged

*caté* decides not to exercise her right to an abortion. At the very end, she addresses her father, the judge (representing the viewer). Paulina explains then that this would not help resolve the inhumanity she has suffered, or any type of violence for that matter. We may note that while defending her viewpoint, she intertwines the civic education project with her pregnancy – both in a germinal stage of development and at risk given the violent environment – and this is the metaphorical aspect in which this critique is rooted. I observe that in Mitre's version, the characters are both subjects and objects of (inter)racial violence, directly or indirectly. In spite of themselves, they not only contribute but are affected by one of the older social pathologies, the so-called *Lex talionis* (law of retaliation). The remake projects the necessity of delinking (Mignolo, *The Darker Side*; "Delinking") from globalized Eurocentric paradigms, which create a false idea of democratic inclusion. As Quijano argues, "Nothing is less rational … than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnic group should be taken as universal rationality, even if such an ethnie is called Western Europe" ("Coloniality and Modernity" 177).

In 2015, with his second feature-length film, *La patota/Paulina* (Argentina, 2015), Santiago Mitre won the Critics' Week Grand Prix (Nespresso Prize) and FIPRESCI Prize at the Cannes International Film Festival. He also won the Horizontes Latinos Grand Prize, the EZAE Youth Award, and the *Otra Mirada*/RTVE – Another Look Award at the San Sebastián Film Festival, among others. As Jorge Sala points out in his critique of *La patota*, Mitre is "identified within the group of the last representatives of the cinematographic renovation that began at the end of the nineties" (115). He is associated with the directors of the last New Argentine Cinema (NCA). For Gonzalo Aguilar, despite the "differences within the poetics of new cinema … a new creative regime was constituted through the movies of recent years and this regime could be denominated … 'the new Argentine cinema'" (*Other Worlds* 8). This new cinema abandons the moralistic stories of a synthetic nature intended to entertain and educate the audience (Andermann; Aguilar; Campero). This is a key point for Mitre, who renounces Daniel Tinayre's pedagogical and monological approach. As María Silvia Serra points out, "both cinema and school, in the 20th century, took charge of deploying 'political-pedagogical' procedures linked to a philosophical-political project" (41). In this sense, for Gómez Tarín and Rubio Alcover, the remake moves away from "the Christian moralism of the original" (69). In his adaptation, Mitre changes the cultural context and reduces the age of the aggressors.

By relocating the setting from suburban Buenos Aires – in Tinayre – to rural Posadas, the new version represents a cultural minority and a long history of intercultural antagonism. This relocation stresses social inequity

and inequality and reveals the current state of the coloniality of power in the recreated context. According to Quijano, the "colonial structure of power produced the specific social discriminations which later were codified as 'racial', 'ethnic', 'anthropological' or 'national' … [as] the framework within which operate the other social relations of classes or estates" ("Coloniality and Modernity" 168). The geopolitical displacement recreates a marginalized, threatening setting, which had been forgotten in the liberal project of education comprehended as progress. By the intercultural confrontation, between "the so-called white race and the local people," Mitre not only exposes the state of the colonial matrix of power but also makes delinking a necessity in this "brutal" context.

According to Mignolo, delinking "requires analysis of the making and remaking of the imperial and colonial differences and it requires visions and strategies for the implementation of border thinking leading to the decolonization of knowledge and of being; from here, new concepts of economy and social organization (politics) will be derived" ("Delinking" 498). Mitre inscribes Paulina's experience in a pathological intercultural relationship, unveiling past and present inequities, where injustice is harming all without differentiation. Hence, I agree with Vicente Cerda's analysis of the remake as an example of intercultural cinema, i.e., "un cine político, de intenciones, de dislocamiento y de reforzamiento de los antagonismos, no con la finalidad de confrontar, sino de adquisición de un poder simbólico que permite negociar la diferencia" (76). Following this idea, I underscore that in "The Reason of the Other: 'Interpellation' as Speech Act," Enrique Dussel explains that in this type of (ethical) interpellation, "the pauper erupts into the … community of communication and producers … and makes them accountable, demand[ing] a universal right" (36). Mitre succeeds in opposing Paulina's performative discourse on universal human rights to the call for action by Silvana and Vivi on their local experiences as young women trapped in a patriarchal society.

By making the aggressors younger – portrayed as adult students in the original plot – the representation strengthens the dependency between Paulina and the adolescent students. Therefore, I apply the neologism "minori'ethage," which entwines "the notions of minority (in this case, [Guarani]), ethics in connection with aesthetics (in a Bakhtinian perspective), and age; that is minori + eth + age = minori'ethage(s)" (Fernández, "Una lectura" 30). As explained, "its written stress mark intends to disrupt the grammatical convention and create a ludic pause, underlining the importance of ethics in the representation" (Fernández, "Paradoxes of Global" 416), as it reveals the threatening local environment in which childhood can scarcely develop and the (modern) school system affecting them greatly (Fernández, "Minori'ethage Memories" 83). This neologism

enables us to disarticulate the teacher–student dyad interdependency, and, as I have argued elsewhere, "the state of risk and legal incapacity suffered by the represented local [youth]" ("Paradoxes of Global" 416; "Una lectura"). Furthermore, in the original plot, the gender violence underscores the class difference between Paulina and the gang, to which Mitre adds minority in terms of culture and age matters. Paulina is attacked by a gang of marginalized Guarani adolescents who happen to be her students; they are misled by an adult, Ciro, who also represents the poor, yet working class of society.

In this vein, it is worth noting that Quijano calls attention to the social exclusion mechanism within the project of the nation. For him, "the coloniality of power based on the imposition of the idea of race as an instrument of domination has always been a limiting factor for constructing a nation-state based on a Eurocentric model" ("Coloniality of Power" 569). In both versions, there is a confusion of the victim; in the original, the teacher and the prostitute – whom the gang/*la patota* stalked – have the same phenotype (medium height, blonde, slim). Here, the idea of class kicks in, of the urban bourgeois and the suburban underprivileged social classes. However, in the remake, Paulina is labeled by her students as a *caté*, which means a White person (European descendant) belonging to the included, privileged class. However, she is then mistaken for Vivi, whose phenotype or social class does not match Paulina's. Thus, in this confusion, race and class hierarchies are transgressed.

Besides the assault on Paulina, two other rapes are referred to in the remake, namely, the case of Vivi (ex-girlfriend of the gang leader, Ciro) and Ciro himself. Vivi is raped by her uncle and gets pregnant at 14. With no support from her family or the State, she leaves home and manages to raise her son, Brian, by herself. The gang, spying on Vivi, notices her engaging in a sexual act with a foreigner. As a sort of patriarchal punishment, Ciro intends to rape his ex-girlfriend Vivi, who had rejected him, in a gang activity. In this sense, Rita Segato points out, "aunque la agresión se ejecute *por medios sexuales*, la finalidad de la misma no es del orden de lo sexual sino del orden del poder … [L]a libido se orienta aquí al poder y a un mandato de pares" (*La guerra contra* 18). Paulina is returning home one night when she is mistakenly intercepted and attacked by the gang.

Despite the presupposed democracy of the fictional setting, the *Lex talionis* – law of retaliation – is applied and violence returns to haunt the gang, whose members are arrested and jailed. Although the scene does not show it explicitly, it does suggest they are tortured, and in the case of the rapist Ciro, he is sexually abused by the policemen. In the scene, two policemen grab Ciro by the hair and confront him with another member of the gang (an adolescent), who confirms his guilt. Ciro is then dragged off to

a room by several policemen; he is lying on the floor trying to defend himself; two police-dogs are released from a cage and enter the room barking loudly. The camera is now "outside," fixed into the facade (long shot), as a policeman roars, "Speak for fuck's sake! … You like this, don't you?" (01:22:06; English subtitles of the film); the barking of the dogs is mixed with the shouting of the policemen and Ciro's screams.

Paulina fiercely disapproves of her father's decision to arrest the gang. She positions herself as a lawyer–teacher and confronts her father Fernando, a judge. She points to his abuse of power when he directed the police to arrest the gang. Argentine judicial authorities cannot act *suo motu*, but only when the aggrieved party so requests. The judge positions himself as a father, defending his (only) daughter's life. He tells her that he only instructed the police to arrest the gang and not to abuse them. He insists that she was the one who had decided not to denounce her students, so that they would not be arrested, or to proceed with any type of legal process. Paulina replies that she was trying to find a way to cope with the situation, not to judge it (I will return to this scene later). Clearly, this highly provocative and disturbing version of the film reveals the current state of the structural and patriarchal violence reproduced by institutions, especially in such contexts, as Paulina will argue (we will return to this point in the last section). By omission or commission, as lawyer/teacher and judge, Paulina and Fernando contribute to the web in which both, as daughter and father–grandfather of the child to be born because of the rape, have been trapped. Against everybody else's opinion, she decides to continue with her pregnancy and does not agree to a paternity test as suggested by her boyfriend, nor does she agree to end the pregnancy.

In this sense, as Claudia Lozano has suggested, the rape becomes "un objeto de reflexión que relaciona una tradición cinematográfica a cambios culturales" (38). In this sense, in Argentina, there is increasing participation of individuals in feminist movements, denouncing gender violence, and demanding the legalization of abortion. Feminist collectives such as LaOlaVerde (TheGreenTide) and #NiUnaMenos (NotOneLess / NotOneWomanLess) offer proof of this phenomenon. In opposition, there is a strong presence of patriarchal and anti-abortion discourses, which may respond to the Argentine pontifical influence. The current pope, Francis, opposes the gender perspective and stands against abortion even in cases of rape, although the procedure was legalized by the Argentine Penal Code in 1921 (Felitti and Prieto). According to a Human Rights Watch report, "[t]he lack of clear and consistent regulations across the country results in a patchwork of practices that disproportionately harm pregnant people of limited resources or with less access to information about their rights" (4). The continuous discussion on the matter of rape and abortion between the

protagonist and the other characters (father, boyfriend, aunt, psychologist, and friend) throughout the plot directs the attention to contemporary feminist claims about gender violence, patriarchy, and the legalization of abortion in 2021 (*Boletín Oficial*).

The remake keeps alive the debate about the termination of pregnancy in a society where the high mortality rates from abortion are documented and claims for its legalization continue to increase (Monteverde and Tarragona). It recreates a dialogue between the judge and the lawyer, in which they speak about a hypothetical situation of domestic violence. It states that if Paulina were ever to become pregnant due to abuse by her boyfriend, Alberto, she would have had an abortion. It may be pertinent to clarify that Alberto and Paulina have been in a 13-year relationship since their youth, and no evidence of abuse or violence between them. Therefore, the judge–lawyer discussion functions as a legal, secular parenthesis – given the pressure of the Church against the legalization of abortion – and may intend to reflect the presence of domestic violence in Argentinian society, as #NiUnaMenos/ (Not One Woman Less) has been denouncing since 2015 (Palmeiro "Ni una menos", "The Green Tide"). Undoubtedly, in the referential context, the patriarchal character of institutions is highlighted, which could by no means be a conducive environment for democracy.

Through the dialogues, Mitre casts the characters (and with them, the viewers) in a complex and polarized dilemma, in which diametrically opposed ideologies paradoxically reflect different angles of interpretation. In a long sequence as the film opens (about eight minutes), Paulina is speaking with her father, Fernando. The young lawyer wishes to contribute to social change on a grassroots basis, as a teacher living in the rural community. On the contrary, the experienced judge thinks that she should change things from a top-down perspective, to help transform the laws, create new policies, and develop social programs. The establishing shot opens the story in Fernando's office in the city of Posadas. By means of shot/reverse shots, we are immersed in a father–daughter polemical exchange. As the camera plays with different angles, movements, and focus, it conveys a tense and polarized discussion, in which the adversaries cannot reach an understanding and appear highly disturbed. She accuses him of being a conservative judge, while he claims that she is behaving like a romantic hippie instead of a serious lawyer. Paulina tells her father, "I'll stay here in Posadas. I'm not going back to Buenos Aires" (00:00:12). Fernando, "Are you serious? I think it's total madness. … You are a top-notch lawyer. And you are about to get your Ph.D. …. You're giving up your career to become a rural teacher!" (00:01:10). The daughter reminds the father of his passage through the Revolutionary Communist Party. She exclaims, "A rural teacher, great[!] Your Communist friends would be proud…" (00:01:14), but

the father is concerned about his daughter's decision. He insists, "I have done all that fieldwork already, and much more … If you want to change things, you must work in the judiciary, work your way to the top, then you can make decisions and mete out justice appropriately" (00:01:48).

From the beginning, Paulina's character establishes the motivation that drives the plot. She explains to her father that after years of working on this project it has finally been approved; thus, she wants to be at the rural school to help improve things. It may be noted that she says about the project, in Spanish, "quiero ponerle el cuerpo" (00:03:02), which conveys the idea of throwing herself wholeheartedly into her project/fighting for it. However, in Spanish, this expression also refers to the body, *cuerpo*, i.e., throwing "her body." The point here is that this enunciation –referring to the body – at the beginning casts doubt over the unfolding of the events in two either metaphorically or literally contrasting ways. In Spanish, figuratively, the expression anticipates the degree of effort and level of engagement that the project will require from her. However, taken literally, it produces apprehension about Paulina's safety or vulnerability in the rural area. As the plot advances, both meanings are confirmed. In the mix-up as to the intended victim, the teachers Paulina is raped by her students.

As mentioned before, Paulina avoids denouncing them to the police. She considers that the problem is of a very complex nature and that justice is quite biased. This has to do with the social context that the remake recreates. For instance, in Argentina, there have been three major laws regulating schooling since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The very foundation of the school system was settled by the Common Education Law 1420 in 1884. It established public, secular, and compulsory education in the official language (Spanish). This centralized law was applied for more than a century (1884–1992) and came to be replaced by the decentralized Federal Education Law no. 24.195 in 1993. To better problematize and cope with the inequality and gaps in Argentine society, this law in turn was replaced in 2006 by the National Education Law no. 26.206, (*Ley de Educación Nacional*). These laws still could not succeed in closing the gap between the "core–periphery" or overcoming gender violence and intercultural prejudice.

The promises of the neoliberal model of broader access to goods and services, bypassing the State's regulation and barriers (Reinhoudt and Audier), have been proved false. The so-called neoliberal logic results in predatory production and globalization of the economy, sides of the same "free-market" manipulation; by prioritizing capital at all costs, it has been producing more marginalization and pollution worldwide (Iber; Giroux; Segato, *Contra-pedagogías*). This aspect is brought up in the film by Paulina's aunt, Victoria, who complains about the sawmill corporation

deforesting the region to cultivate a new type of wood for commercial purposes, thus, highly damaging ecological equilibrium. As they are walking through the tree plantation, Victoria says to Paulina, "700 hectares of this rubbish … Now, these bloody forestry guys come, they fuck up the earth and they make a killing" (00:56:40). Ciro, who happened to be in the grip of poverty, works in this "modernized" sawmill. Paulina is also going to this place in search of her aggressor, Ciro, in an attempt to understand the chaotic social situation.

More conflicts occur at the school, through the lesson and the exchanges between Paulina and her students. The root of the matter lies in her cultural background, as an Argentinian of European descent, which according to the students gives her the advantage since her upper social class set the rules. This episode prompts a lesson in Democracy in which she proposes a game activity. In this scene, she sets the rules, as the students have observed, but they all get to be equals while they are playing the game, as she explains to them. For Quijano, "epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings" ("Coloniality and Modernity" 177). Thus, from the foundation of Argentina, the *criollo* has appropriated the so-called (Western) "locus of enunciation" (Mignolo *The Idea* 42). Concerning Mitre's fictionalization of schooling drives, it is worth observing that the Argentine School system, founded by the same liberal *criollos* who jealously defended the liberal values portrayed by democracy, is based on the Westernized/Occidentalized bipolarity of civilized–uncivilized.

Through the students' critique framed in a lesson on democracy in which Paulina – rather than everybody – sets the rules, Mitre sociohistorically states that the (educated Spanish-speaking urban) *criollos* never really represented the interests of (all) "the people," but rather imposed, by a pseudo-democracy, their liberal values representing themselves. In this sense, in Mitre's world, Paulina's privileged enunciation is not only mocked but displaced; hence the relevance of Mitre intensifying the use of Guarani in the classroom. Then, Paulina – and the viewer, assumed to be a non-Guarani-speaker – happen to be excluded, displaced from the locus of enunciation. Through Paulina's lessons, the remake highlights the illegitimate authority that the official (Westernized) discourse reproduces, especially in its supposedly democratic claims.

In a descriptive shot, we see Paulina being driven to the rural area by her colleague Rudy in his car. On their way, they pass by a colossal, abandoned building standing in the middle of the Misiones's jungle. This is the area where she will be later abused at night due to the intended victim mix-up. As their car approaches the school, five male members of the gang (*la patota*) are waiting on top of a hill, looking at the car passing by, from a

high vantage (high-angle shot). One of them is then highlighted as a leader through a soft-focus effect, i.e., Ciro's face is in focus and the other members in the background appear blurred. Paulina – not Rudy – is looking up at the gang at the top of the hill (low-angle shot). This angle and her expression of concern portray her vulnerability *vis-à-vis* the gang. Furthermore, one of the gangsters – one of her students-to-be – is holding a wooden stick in a "savage" posture. At the same time, another member of the gang tells Ciro that his (ex)girlfriend, Vivi, is approaching. As Vivi passes by, driving the scooter that Paulina will be driving later when she is mistaken for Vivi, the gang shouts obscenities at her. The incipit thus sets the linkage between the two young women, Paulina and Vivi, framing them both in a highly intimidating environment.

Soon afterward, during her first day at school, Paulina tries to introduce her program to the secondary rural class. The setting looks very poor and cramped for the number of students, indicating that the educational environment is neglected by the nation-state. Whatever she has to say concerning the theme of her program cannot be relevant for them in such conditions. She asks them, "can anyone guess what the workshop is about?" (00:13:24). No one seems to care enough to respond. She continues, "you must all think this is about politicians…" Paulina engages in a monologue, with the students looking bored and tired. "Who knows which political system we live in?" (00:13:59). As she persists with her questions, one of the students (a member of the gang) answers, "it's a democracy." She says, "democracy, well-done" (00:14:37). Then, she explains, "it means the government belongs to the people. … The politicians work for you; they are your employees not *vice versa*" (00:14:57). She is interrupted twice in Guarani, but as she cannot understand their words, she ignores the comments and continues with her lesson.

Her incapacity sets her in a rhetorical trap, as she explains that she has no power over the class: she is only an employee, and they can then leave whenever they feel like it. Consequently, the students leave the classroom, some of them through the window, as if using an emergency exit in an accident. The teacher insists in her monologue on liberal democracy and its values. Her discourse based on the (modern) metanarrative is unable to capture, let alone retain, her students' attention. By *métarécit* / metanarrative, Jean-François Lyotard refers to a type of mega modern narrative targeting social legitimation, condensing other historically centralized narratives as if they were universal truth(s), for instance, Progress and Democracy; he points out how these narratives were taken for granted, diminishing the value of the *petits récits* (micronarratives), which are of a situated nature (7).

Paulina understands neither her students' mother tongue (Guarani) nor their viewpoint. The educational setting demands a critical intercultural approach, but she is not aware of it; she is not a teacher nor has any experience. The urgency of such an environment demands a contextualized rural pedagogy (Freire), in which "the disenfranchised segments of society are not excluded or interdicted from reading the world" (*Teachers as Cultural Workers* xv), aligned with a critical interculturality (Tubino; Walsh). As Walsh, and Mignolo and Walsh have argued, critical interculturality is a condition for decoloniality (Walsh, "Interculturalidad y (de)colonialidad," "Interculturalidad crítica"; Mignolo and Walsh). They argue that interculturality may be capable of transforming educational environments and their communities, initiating a significant change in society. Mitre depicts urgent matters to be addressed, such as racial prejudice, patriarchal dominance, abortion, gender violence (including rape and femicide), poverty, social inequalities, and official language issues.

Not surprisingly, Paulina in her double role as lawyer–civics teacher prioritizes Eurocentric/occidental narratives. In this case, as Mignolo has claimed, "Eurocentrism is equivalent to Occidentalism, as both refer to a centralization and hegemony of principles of knowledge and understanding, even if there are differences within it such as those between Christians, liberals, and Marxists" (*The Idea* 43). The intercultural confrontation between the urban teacher and rural students during the civics lesson on democracy exposes the coloniality issues haunting the school as an institution. Similarly, this is revealed in the dialogues between Paulina (a lawyer-teacher) and her father (a judge) in terms of the persistent matrix of power constraining the justice system. The necessity for decolonialization plays out at different levels, not in a prescriptive way but rather as an open debate on coloniality/decoloniality. Regarding what should be expected from the main characters in their complex situation, the film projects different political stances, working on a textual level (by means of dialogues, types of shots, ambiance) and para-textual levels (for instance, not providing Spanish subtitles for the Guarani exchange).

During the second "lesson," the teacher invites the students to play a game about democracy. The young lawyer is once again wrapped up in her own (liberal) rhetoric on democracy. Paulina tells the students, "Today, we will pay a game. Let's imagine we are imprisoned here for one month" (00:16: 14). She is again interrupted by two students speaking to each other in Guarani. She persists, "We have just enough food and water. What's the first thing we have to do?" (00:16:34). Then, one of the students (a member of the gang) answers that the first thing is to try to leave. Paulina replies that this is not possible, and the first thing is to set the rules together. The same student insists that he would rather leave, but Paulina explains that the rules

of the game do not envisage this possibility. The student then claims, "so, you set the rules, not everyone" (00:17:23). Once again, she sets her rhetorical trap, "I set the rules, so that the game can exist. Once we begin playing, we are all equal" (00: 17:29). The student counters, saying they cannot possibly be equal if she gets to set the rules.

Another student makes a comment in Guarani; Paulina does not understand what is being said, but she senses being teasing and insists on hearing the comment in Spanish. A student translates, "you set the rules because you're *caté*" (00:17:54). What they mean is that, being White/Creole, she imposes herself upon them because they are of native/local descent. Here, it is a question of domination in terms of coloniality, and this happens to be, in Quijano's words, "still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed" (Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity" 170). When fist fight between the students breaks out, and Paulina cannot guarantee a safe environment, a second teacher, Laura, comes to her aid. Paulina's second lesson in democracy also concludes abruptly and unsuccessfully.

By the time of the third and last lesson, Paulina has been raped. Now she approaches the school fearlessly; she has been transformed by the brutality she has experienced, and nothing can now stop her in her educative mission. The camera – from the viewer's point of view – walks with Paulina (tracking shot) as she firmly tells the students to go to class. The expression on her face has changed (close-up). She suggests that the class read an article from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In terms of critical pedagogy, this international document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 turned out to be inadequate to frame the topic in this threatening educational environment in a marginalized rural location. This inaccuracy is explicitly underscored by the students' intervention and, implicitly, by Paulina's semantics in terms of her choice of vocabulary. Ergo, when she refers to the class handout, she uses the word *papelito* (*papel*, Spanish for paper, in its diminutive expression, i.e., little paper/sheet of paper, leaflet, etc.).

Her expression is unusual for a teacher-lawyer introducing a lesson on human rights. By reducing the universal document to a sort of pamphlet, semantically, Mitre "delinks" the pedagogical discourse from the metanarrative. Furthermore, when the teacher asks what the content is, one of the students – knowing of the assault she has recently suffered, with some of the students being the aggressors – answers "the Constitution," (00:49:27). When she replies that that is not the case, another student adds, "the Criminal Code" (00:49:57), which is neither the case. The students contextualize the problematic situation, first, on the level of the Argentine constitution, and second, in the legal system, which is quite pertinent for

them. Instead, she brings a European document to teach the class about their universal human rights, which seemingly does not offer too many guarantees. At this point, Paulina has been raped by *la patota*. After the lesson, the adolescents are tortured and the leader of the gang, Ciro, is raped by the local police. Hence, these universal rights together with Argentine law turn out to be mere pamphlets ("papelitos").

All in all, at the end of this class on human rights, one of the students, Silvana, reads her "discourse" about colonialism and coloniality. She claims: "In the past, white men felt superior. They thought all other races were like animals and that they had the right to use them …. that … they belonged to them. Today many men still believe that others belong to them" (00:51:18). Thus, according to the thesis of the plot, there is a violent social pathology, which is regurgitated in a five-century process of modernity/coloniality, which happens to be deeply institutionalized over five centuries of history (Segato, *La crítica*; Mignolo "The Geopolitics"; Quijano "Questioning 'race'"). Mitre makes the victim a city lawyer with a European phenotype; conversely, the members of *la patota* (the mob) are all marginalized rural inhabitants, Guarani, and of mixed-race descent. This black and white aspect represents the nineteenth-century Creole dichotomous ideology of civilization and barbarism at the root of the Argentina's foundation.

In Mitre, neither education nor justice can cope with the complexity of the matter by acting apart, as is the case with a neoliberal model. Here, we agree with Cerda that intercultural cinema, "ayuda a la construcción de saberes que superan ... las ideas preconcebidas sobre raza, clase social, género, migración, preferencia sexual, postura ideológica y otras diferencias" (73). Mitre recreates a polemical, fragmented plot that allows different possibilities of interpretation, rather than focusing the story on a moral or religious point of view, as the original film did. By emphasizing sound over image, for instance, he makes the scenes overlap with each other through the dialogues, giving the illusion of continuity, while also articulating ideological meaning. The entire plot is framed by two dialogues between daughter and father which focus on de-coloniality. The opening dialogue sets the components of the debate on decoloniality, by stating that neither the socioeconomic paradigm of the past, in terms of Fernando's activism, nor the contemporary one, in Paulina's engagement, respond to the local necessities. This local context happens to be marginalized and violated by the nation-state and its policies, whatever the political model in vogue. The closing dialogue is there to confirm this hypothesis and to propose a shift towards a decolonial possibility.

Paulina is firm that she will not depose against the gang, *la patota*, because justice does not apply in poverty; so much so, that the inhumanity she suffered – or any type of violence for that matter – is not going to be

resolved through more abuse from the patriarchal institutions. She believes in education and its capacity to transform society. She intends to stay on to change things from the bottom up. She is engaged in her position as a rural teacher, and she will have her baby because that is her decision to make. It is relevant to highlight the symbolic relationship established between Paulina's pregnancy and the educational project, both in their gestation phase and threatened by a violent context. As a teacher and lawyer, Paulina has attached herself to the broad and universal narratives of democracy and human rights. Paradoxically, by this, the plot highlights her inability to problematize the sociohistorical gap of interracial and inter-gender inequalities reproducing themselves since the foundation of Argentine society, together with the Eurocentricity of knowledge that the founder Creoles left as a legacy (Mignolo, "The Geopolitics"). This contradiction is clearly stated in her last speech, of the lawyer to the judge, in the court before (not) testifying.

In the scene in question, Fernando marches energetically into the courtroom and demands that the agents leave him alone with the victim, Paulina. The expression on his face (close up and extremely close up) betrays Fernando, who is furious. He asks, "what are you going to do?" (01:43:12). She replies sharply with a question, "see what they did to them?" (01:28:41). The judge responds, "I am acting in accordance with the law … You know those guys are the attackers" (01:29:01). She explains that even if they do go to prison because of her testimony, that would not change or improve anything for her or them. He insists that it is the law and that it has to be done. He accuses his daughter of performing "an incomprehensible crusade, messianic and pointless" (01:29:36). As a judge, he strongly believes that those who raped her are criminals and could have murdered her, or any other woman. All of them, especially Ciro, deserve incarceration, "I am a judge, Paulina, that guy [Ciro] is a rapist. Who says he hasn't raped before? That he won't do it again?" (01:30:05).

As the discussion goes on, the judge is shown in his fatherly weakness, "You are a victim, my love … you are not a heroine" (01:30:32); his last attempt is, "please, darling, you've still got time" (01: 31:55). He is referring here to both testifying and having an abortion. From one emotion to another, he is exhausted. Now, he moves from a paternal role to a patriarchal one, kicking the wall of the courtroom violently, and clearly damaging it (close up). The daughter takes strength and in her last turn, "I understand you; I do. The bastards raped your daughter. You are right. Everybody would agree" (01:32:36). The judge, with head tucked between his arms, is overwhelmed and weeps. She weeps as well with her father but will not give up. She continues, "I'm not you. I'm me. It happened to me …. Being a victim doesn't help me. I am the product of a terrible world that only

generates violence" (01:33:10). The father asks the daughter to please stop, as he feels helpless. Paulina stresses what he (and by extension, public opinion) cannot easily accept, "This child is a product of a reality that you cannot understand. Me neither. It doesn't matter whether I have an abortion. It's something else now, papa" (01:33:50). The father now looks at her, "I'm here now, I didn't choose to be here. I can't go, I don't want to go. I want to carry on" (01:34:05). She reaches out to her father and tries to hug him, but he disengages and would rather remain by himself at the corner of the room, like a child not obeying the rules. Now she is called upon to testify, when an agent asks, "Do you swear with full knowledge and clear conscience to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" (01:35:42). She swears (not) to do so…

Mitre revisits social institutions, such as the legal system, school, and family. Playing a fake democracy, everybody gets trapped in a *Lex talionis* setup, in their inability to collaborate amongst themselves to cope with the complexity of the situation as members of the local community, so that ultimately everyone loses. However, as Mignolo asserts, different collective and complex movements "are introducing a fracture in the rhetoric through which democracy, freedom, and development have been marketed and justified by those in power … democracy is sold through a violent imposition of autocracy" (*The Idea* 101). Undoubtedly, Mitre's plot adds to Mignolo's reflection. Near the end of the story, Paulina is looking outside at the surroundings from the loneliness of the empty, unfinished building where she was abused. The extreme long shot turns the main character into an insignificant figure, against the size of the abandoned concrete structure in this rural area, which may represent the state of emptiness of the social institutions, where all the characters are being abused.

By staging a pseudo-democracy, everyone loses. From the beginning to the end of the story, Paulina is simultaneously trying to protect the minori'ethage and searching for "the truth." However, as the story unfolds, the so-called truth seems to be neither easily defined nor of a black-and-white nature. In this sense, Mitre's remake overwhelms the synthetic morality of the original, demolishing its pedagogical character. The filmmaker succeeds in his intention to transform the plot into an ideological arena, and this is achieved mostly by the dialogues in which there is no understanding but tension between the lawyer and the judge, and the teacher and her students, some of them members of the mob that rapes her. The plot problematizes five centuries of modernity/coloniality. Mitre's polarized and complex updated version reveals the traps of a liberal democracy, which, from the very foundation of Argentina, has been at the base of racial prejudice and inequality. Paulina projects the dangers of

playing a non-democratic game and proposes a shift toward an inclusive society.

At the very end, Paulina is forever walking toward the camera (medium close up shot), as she is trying to reach the viewers. As the camera moves with her (tracking shot), it leaves this colonial debate open to further exploration. In this vein, the remake employing the characters' dependency, i.e., the urban Creole teacher–rural Guarani descent students, rekindles historical matters, opening a decolonial debate. It exposes the threatening patriarchal environment in which the local minori'ethage hardly develops and everybody is at high risk. In his updating of the character of Paulina, Mitre rewrites the story. Recreated now as a lawyer and rural teacher, who confronts her judge father, Paulina decides to stay to be part of the solution. With this character, Mitre calls attention to the state of coloniality in the patriarchal institutions, deepening the societal and gender violence. Ultimately, the lawyer-teacher's journey represents the necessity of delinking from the Westernized matrix of power, in a shifting path to a decolonial possibility. These results inspired a second and comparative study, namely, Fernández, Ana M., and Walescka Pino-Ojeda. "La performance 'Un violador en tu camino' de LASTESIS como denuncia al femigenocidio: articulaciones entre los casos chileno, argentino y diáspora latinoamericana en Auckland." *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes* 47.3 (2022): 415-435.

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