

# Mirror, Mirror, on the Big Screen: North Americanization in Colombia through Film

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This article examines Colombian cultural productions to test the theory of North Americanization through film. The theory of North Americanization stems from the study of how different aspects of international interactions shape national identity and cultural shifts, specifically between North and Latin America. Previous literature investigated different Colombian films and how they do or do not portray Colombian cultural values or norms. The data in this project consists of 10 Colombian films, one from each of the last ten years, all with Colombian directors or production teams. When watching the films, I paid attention to dialogue, behavior, and cinematic decisions reminiscent of North Americanization as defined by previous scholars in the field. The present and missing aspects of North American influence indicate how Colombian filmmakers, and by extension the Colombian population, interact with North American norms and values and identify with them. This article affirms the presence of North Americanization in Colombia and adds to the research on cultural productions as a medium of understanding a population.

Key Words: Colombian Film, North Americanization, Cultural Imperialism



For decades, through Hollywood, the United States has dominated the global film industry, producing many of the world's most popular films. The top 50 grossing films are all produced or co-produced in the United States or with the cooperation of US-American studios. The role of Hollywood in film cannot be overstated and also acts as a symbol for the outreach of US pop culture on a global scale. This influence is particularly evident in the realm of Colombian cinema, where the pervasive impact of North American culture echoes through the frames of local films. Within this cultural exchange, how do Colombian filmmakers navigate the power dynamics at play and portray the nuances of this imperialistic influence on screen?

First, we must investigate the history between the two regions to understand power dynamics. Through the Monroe Doctrine, the United States asserted a presence in Latin America and simultaneously deterred other countries from interfering, stating any outreach to the Americas from other countries would be viewed as a hostile act. While the US insists the presence in Latin America is to assist with economic development and provide military protection, most actions are in the direct interest of the US rather than Latin America. Recently, questions have risen regarding the Monroe Doctrine; Gilderhus (2006) explains how the doctrine provides the US alone with the ability to cooperate with and intervene in Latin America. Since the articulation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the US government has influenced elections, facilitated military dictatorships, and financed military coups, all supporting the recent argument of the US using the Doctrine to promote personal interests rather than the interests of the Latin American countries (H.R. Con. Res. 943, 2024). The new resolution seeks to end "unilateral coercive economic measures," and over a dozen Republican officials signed on against the resolution to show support for the Monroe Doctrine as tensions with eastern powers increase (H.R. Con. Res. 943, 2024). Due to the Monroe Doctrine, the dominance of North America in Latin America led to cultural hegemony between the two continents. The Monroe Doctrine ideology provides the foundation for the theory of North Americanization, as the policies impacted cultural interactions between North and Latin America.

While the primary effects of the Monroe Doctrine involved trade policies and political interventions, a side effect was the cultural interaction between the Americas. Between the US presence in Latin America and migrants between the two regions, the interactions between cultures began to influence norms. Dennis (2006) explains how migrants, both to and from Colombia, exemplified a form of globalization as they brought about new styles of music and other North American aesthetics. Furthermore, migrants to the US brought back US communication technology, cassettes, and magazines introducing music and other aspects of pop culture, like styles and aesthetics associated with US hip-hop, to Colombia. As the cultures interacted more and more, new art styles with influences from both the US and Colombia emerged, and the normalization of both countries' styles and products al-

tered the popular culture in Colombia (Dennis, 2006). This example shows the framing of the US as the “origin” of the styles and Colombia as the “recipient.” The imposition of US norms, art styles, and products in Colombia through international experiences of migrants and outreach of corporations highlights a power dynamic between the two regions in which the US is the dominant influence.

The reflection of pop culture changes in Colombian film provides further insight into the depth of US presence in the country, as well as the micro-level developments in culture in Colombia as a result of the US’ lasting impression. More recently, studying the arts is an increasingly popular method of understanding the impacts certain actions have on one’s identity. The historical and contextual relevance of different art forms is often bypassed in studying a culture and how different developments impact a country, despite the “accuracy most arts have in depicting the true feelings of a population” (Bakewell & Bright, 2022). The expression of specifically Latin American identities in US films became a topic of discussion as films like *Coco* and *Encanto* rose to popularity, and critics questioned the obligation of the films to accurately reflect the respective identities and cultures (“Disney’s Animated Film,” 2021). Putting aside US intervention, many native Colombian films seek to portray traditional aspects of the culture the producers and directors deem important and relevant (“As Usual, this,” 2023). This research addresses native films, as opposed to films portraying Colombian populations made elsewhere, and the ideas and feelings expressed in these films. Looking past North American representations of Latin American populations and cultures, this project seeks to understand the point of view of the Colombian population rather than that of the US.

This research investigated how the Colombian films reflect the changing identity in Colombia due to the North American influence in Latin American countries. The presence of the US specifically in Latin America created a cultural shift many scholars trace back to the role of the United States during times of change and development – be it social, political, or economic – in Colombia and other Latin American countries. Moreover, the content of one film from each of the last ten years, produced in Colombia or by Colombian production companies, comprises the data—and all have Colombian directors. The content of the films will show whether or not the North Americanization in Colombia is deep enough to be reflected in modern art forms, as well as which aspects of North American presence the Colombian population showcases. The intervention of the US in Latin American politics and economies prompted a shift drastic enough to appear in the artistic expressions, namely films, produced in such countries. The role of films and cinema as reflection of identity makes it a worthwhile medium to study the depth of US’ intervention and prevalence in Colombian politics and culture.

The findings in this study assert Colombian films do showcase North Americanization in regard to some themes, but the theory does have limits

in its application. Colombian productions are likely to portray one or more themes of North Americanization, however, not all aspects of North Americanization appear in the sample. Furthermore, common themes in the films are more related to social rather than political issues. The literature review section will utilize existing discussion to define the theory of North Americanization as well as explain previous studies on some of the films in this analysis. Throughout the research design section, I explain how the films were chosen and the use of thematic coding during the analysis. The findings and analysis include how themes of North Americanization did and did not apply to the films. The discussion ties the findings of this project to the existing literature around the films and whether viewing the productions through the lens of North Americanization was useful or not.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cultural Productions Studies

Literature discussing the artistic expression of social issues often illuminates the similarities between contemporary works and the audience to whom the works appeal. Latin American researchers study how films and other mediums reflect social events and political developments occurring during the time of release. For example, some researchers analyze the content of films and literature through a qualitative frame to show the relevance of a work during different time periods or to provide a simplified explanation of cultural changes throughout historical events (Lanzendoerfer, 2013; Acevedo-Munoz, 2004, p. 40). Additionally, researchers may quantify the appearance of social or cultural taboos in films, such as tobacco use, then evaluate the impact the portrayals have on the audience habits, such as increased use of tobacco (Barrientos-Gutierrez, 2015, p. 2). Scholars and researchers prove films and other art forms are outlets people utilize to reflect social and political developments in Latin America. Therefore, this research studies the connection between native Colombian films and the effects of North Americanization on Colombian culture these films portray, adding more specific research to the scholarship surrounding artistic mediums and political changes due to North Americanization.

Some research investigates specific Colombian films and their relevance to Colombian identity or culture. The analysis of specific films tends to focus more on directors' choices regarding certain scenes included or excluded from films, as well as the social impact the director desires. One study of *Monos* (2019) analyzes the attention paid to sexuality and gender norms in the film and the relevance of this choice in a film about Colombian citizens' disconnect to certain conflicts (Betancourt, 2019; Landes, 2019). Castrión (2019) does a study on the cinematic choices in *El Abrazo de la Serpiente* (2015) in an attempt to determine whether the director effectively subverted the Western lens often applied to Latin American films. The author studies

the use of Amazonian myths, language, and practices in the film to test the hypothesis (Castrillón, 2019; Guerra, 2015). Both *Monos* and *El Abrazo de la Serpiente* are a part of this analysis, and the analysis will affirm or disagree with the arguments made in the former studies. This project will be able to elaborate more on the North American lens these films may have and act as a broader study of similar themes.

### **Themes Defining North Americanization**

The discussion around North American influence, hereby referred to as North Americanization as a theoretical framework, contains arguments regarding neoliberalism in Latin America. Many authors address the role of North America in the introduction of neoliberal ideas, as the ideology is not compatible with traditional culture in many Latin American countries. Buchenau (2022) studies the rise of consumerism and “mass culture” in Latin America after the perceived North Americanization. The author analyzes the history of a department store in Mexico and how the store used US practices as a “model” throughout economic hardships and political developments (Buchenau, 2022). König and Rinke (2022) discuss the effects of market-based and consumer economies through a study of Latin American cultural values and norms; the researchers use the influence of the US on Latin American businesses to explain how consumerism forms the foundation for North Americanization in Latin America. This project seeks to address how relevant the economy is in the films, and whether cultural productions touch on economic aspects of Colombian culture. The analysis of Colombian films also contributes to this discussion by determining if the films showcase consumerism and neoliberalism as the authors discuss or if more traditional economies are common.

Some scholars analyze the role of North Americanization separate from neoliberal ideologies and choose to apply the theory to a more social lens. Researchers have attempted to investigate the North Americanization of gender relations and norms. Stoner (2017) examines how Cuban mass media reflects and influences national identity with respect to Cuba’s geographical position as a “nexus point” between the Americas by showing how the cultures may have collided. This author specifically examines how the arts in Cuba portray women to show the evolution of Cuban identity over time; the analysis showed how portrayals of “the independent woman” alter Cuban identities and approaches to traditional gender norms (Stoner, 2017). Rinke (2022) also addressed how North Americanization influences gender relations through media; his analysis focuses on how the introduction of publicized media containing scandalous women stemmed from the US military involvement in Chile. The author uses different magazine productions from the US and Chile in an attempt to show how the “spillover” from North American media influenced more mass publication of nudity in Chilean media; the author frames this research as “voyeuristic media” to explain how

obsessed Chilean consumers became with sexualized productions (Rinke, 2022). My project utilizes a similar strategy to determine if the sexualization of women in media carries over into Colombian film. Additionally, my research will confirm or deny if film, like other art forms, shows women with agency, independent of their relationships with male characters. How Colombian films portray gender relations and norms will help determine whether these themes are present in other countries' media as well and could affirm or disagree with the previous claims.

Another author approaches North Americanization in Latin America through a more ideological point of view. Their research focuses on working through the frame of the US as a model for modernity. Quiroz (2022) argues that efforts towards modernization in Latin America would include not only economic, social, and cultural modernity, but also religious modernity. After defining religious modernity as a split from the monopoly of the Catholic church in Latin America, the author studies how beliefs south of the Rio Grande alter after interactions with the North American Christian as opposed to the Latin American Catholic. The author uses the interactions to explain how the "US model of the intellectual Christian over the spiritual Catholic" caused a slow evolution to religious modernity; the conclusion declares evolution ends with a return to native cultures and revival of tradition as an indicator of modernity (Quiroz, 2022, p. 111). My research attempts to understand how Colombian films portray Protestant, Catholic, and indigenous religions, and whether cinematic productions are indeed indicative of religious diversification or not. The project will utilize alternative techniques, i.e. film analysis, to test whether the theory of religious diversification as an aspect of North Americanization upholds across platforms, or is only observable in studies with human subjects.

In the same collection, multiple authors note the role of US omnipresence in Latin America, regardless of the focus of the research. Throughout the collection, the most common denominator for North Americanization is US omnipresence, but depending on the author's argument, omnipresence has a different role. One author focuses on the omnipresence through markets and products by examining the impact of the dominance of North American productions in Mexico (Buchenau, 2022). Another author explains US omnipresence as a result of North American desires in regard to "the belief in its own evolutionary cultural superiority, economic supremacy, and the search for geopolitical security" (König & Rinke, 2022). I study the role of the US in the films in both of these regards to ascertain whether the US is present in Colombian cultural productions as predominantly as it is in previous research. Depending on the prevalence of US American norms, products, and characters, this analysis will serve as a cultural study evaluating the validity of claims of US omnipresence in Colombia.

Existing literature researches artistic mediums to analyze and understand national identities, cultural values and norms, and the possible effect

of arts on the audience; this research seeks to utilize the content of contemporary Colombian films to accomplish similar goals. Furthermore, this research aligns with the current literature discussing globalization by studying the influence of North America in cultural productions. The project builds on the literature by evaluating the presence of North American influence in Colombia and assessing whether modern films portray previous scholars' ideas of North Americanization. Analyzing the influence of North America in Colombian cinema and, by extension, Colombian culture provides further understanding of the dynamics of cultural imperialism and hegemony. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates how dominant cultures exert influence over marginalized ones, shaping narratives, values, and identities.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The data in this project consisted of ten movies, one from each of the last ten years. Because the project studies the reflection of North Americanization in Colombian films, any additional types of data would confuse the results. All of the films were either Colombian-produced or co-produced; if a film was co-produced, the director or production crew had to be Colombian to include the film in the analysis. The project uses the dialogue and images of the films to form the data. The dataset is tailored to investigate the phenomenon of North Americanization within the realm of Colombian cinema. Films are a form of cultural expression and allow the project to directly engage with a primary source to identify cross-cultural influences.

Using *The Numbers* (<https://www.the-numbers.com/Colombia/movies>) and the International Movie Database (IMDb) (<https://www.imdb.com>), I found the top-grossing movie from each of the last ten years. Both sites were necessary in case the top-grossing movie was unavailable to stream in the US. Based on *The Numbers* reports, if the two top-grossing films were unavailable, I used IMDb to determine the highest-rated film in Colombia; the research is most effective when applied to popular films. Throughout the project, these films are referred to in shorthand for brevity (see Table 1). Finally, I watched, translated, and transcribed sections of the films portraying social or political themes. The use of the top-grossing or top-rated film each year ensures the project addresses either well-liked or often-watched Colombian produced films. Additionally, the method ensures the movies are chosen on merit alone, and not to support an affirmative or negative argument regarding the North Americanization in Colombian film.

The first time I watched each film, I marked timestamps to go back and transcribe particular sections based on the portrayal of the predetermined social or political issues. This lens was broad enough to ensure I transcribed applicable excerpts of the movie but narrow enough to avoid transcribing the entire movie. Throughout the dialogue, I paid attention to the characters' attitudes and actions in these scenes and marked time stamps. The social



Film	Shorthand
Manos Sucias (Wladyka, 2014)	Sucias
El Abrazo de la Serpiente (Guerra, 2015)	Serpiente
Pariente (Gaona, 2016)	Pariente
Demonios tus Ojos (Aguilera, 2017)	Demonios
Pajaros de Verano (Guerra and Gallega, 2018)	Verano
Monos (Landes, 2019)	Monos
El Olvido que Seremos (Trueba, 2020)	Olvido
El Paseo 6 (Triana, 2021)	Paseo
Los Reyes del Mundo (Ortega, 2022)	Reyes
Quicksand (Béltran, 2023)	Quicksand

Table 1

issues were: gender norms, family dynamics, spending habits, socioeconomic standings, and violent behavior. The same process applied to transcribing predetermined political issues, which were: conflicts/wars, use of and interaction with hard drugs, alcohol use, and economic systems and markets. Then, I restarted the movies and transcribed every recorded time stamp while translating the Spanish to English; if the Spanish was unclear, I first used subtitles to assist, then flagged and checked those sections with a native Spanish-speaker to ensure accuracy. Each transcription document included an overview of the storyline, the predominant theme of the movie, and tone indicators and scene descriptions within the excerpts. The transcriptions facilitated a systematic analysis highlighting the recurring themes in the dialogue while assessing the attitude of the speaker. Moreover, keeping the original transcriptions broad allowed the project to address North Americanization as a whole rather than a specific topic like Gender Relations or neoliberalism.

The analysis consisted of multiple rounds of thematic coding with the codes becoming narrower throughout. Thematic coding highlighted the most recurring dialogue and behaviors in the films. The first round of coding occurred when I watched the movies and marked down time stamps of scenes portraying those social or political issues. The second round was focused on the themes of North Americanization – Gender Relations, US omnipresence, neoliberalism, and Ideological Diversification – pulled from articles in König and Rinke’s (2022) collection “North Americanization of Latin America.” After this round of coding, I uncovered recurring issues: Gender Relations became themes like “marriage norms” and “sexualization of women,” US Omnipresence became “reference to US” and “military interference,” and neoliberalism was “consumerism” and “market-based economy.” Ideologi-



cal Diversification, being the least expansive, did not have any other codes. Thematic coding illuminated the most commonly portrayed themes of North Americanization in Colombian films. Juxtaposing the content of the films with issues and themes in König and Rinke’s (2022) collection highlighted the aspects of North Americanization Colombian cultural productions reflect more than others.

ANALYSIS

US Omnipresence

North Americanization in Colombian film is present in the form of common language and sayings from the US. While the US and Colombia do share some cultural traits, using English in films is disruptive in the otherwise Colombian contexts. The most common examples are the films’ use of English in dialogue to varying degrees (see Table 2). English is the main dialogue in *Quicksand* due to the US co-production of the film with Colombia, but the other films use it in few conversations or in passing. In *Paseo* (0:34:50), English is shown in the form of signs on a beach in San Andrés (see Appendix 2, Image 1). The use of English in Colombian cinema exemplifies the process of North Americanization, disrupting traditional contexts while also showing how Colombian cultural productions reflect North American cultural hegemony. English is a marker and symbol of US-American norms and values in Colombia and could potentially result in the marginalization of Colombian cultural expressions and identities in Colombian cinema.

Film	English Use	Frequency
<i>Sucias</i>	No	-
<i>Serpiente</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Pariente</i>	No	-
<i>Demonios</i>	Yes	Occasionally
<i>Verano</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Monos</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Paseo</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Reyes</i>	No	-
<i>Quicksand</i>	Yes	Often

Table 2

Colombian films are apt to portray certain products from the US more so than products of any other country. The most common US products in the films were alcohol, vehicles, and technology. For example, throughout *Verano*, the characters drive almost exclusively Ford pickups, and the brand is visible a majority of the times a vehicle is on the screen; similarly,

a leading character in *Olvido* drives a Plymouth Coupe – another American-made vehicle. In *Demonios*, the main character is shown with a variety of American products including Jack Daniel's brand whiskey, a Google phone, and a MacBook. While in some films the characters used nondescript social media to avoid brand names, *Quicksand* explicitly names WhatsApp and shows the lead using an iPhone and MacBook. US Omnipresence is one of the most explicit forms of North Americanization, therefore the presence of US products in films is a prime example of the process. These instances reflect a cultural preference and normalization of North American consumption patterns within Colombian society, further reinforcing the strength of North American cultural influence.

When brands are present in the films, they are almost exclusively American products, but a majority of the films avoid recognizable brands, eliminating a large aspect of the otherwise omnipresence of US products. Whether paid product placement, sponsorships, or copyright laws prevent the use of certain brands, the erasure of brand names eliminates demonstrations of US Omnipresence in Colombian films. During editing, the films *Paseo*, *Monos*, *Reyes*, *Pariente*, and *Sucias* scrub all clothing brands, technology brands, and car brands. Additionally, In *Serpiente*, despite the role of the US in the plot, the film does not utilize any of the previously mentioned products. Even though six out of the ten films do not have recognizable brands, the presence of widely known US brands in four popular films confirms the involvement of the US with Colombia enough to create a presence in the film industry. The primary visible brands belonging to US companies and lack of visible brands from elsewhere indicates how the relationship between the US and Colombia may limit the outreach of Colombia to products from other nations, as the theory of North Americanization argues.

### **Ideological Diversification**

A subtler manifestation of the US influence in the films is depicted in the portrayal of political discourse aspiring to emulate American norms. The US encourages a process of modernization causing Latin American cultures to shift away from the predominant Catholic culture. The films illuminate this aspect of North Americanization through depictions of religious and educational diversification from previously taught norms and how the public receives the changes. In *Olvido*, the discourse around new ideas and inventions motivates the main plot of the movie, and one character directly criticizes the lack of Colombian progress in medicine in comparison to the US. This film, based on a true story, shows the main character's father as a doctor, philanthropist, and professor trying to encourage Colombian authorities to utilize a new medicine to fight a disease sweeping across impoverished communities, often voicing the argument of the US adopting the vaccine months ago. The doctor impresses ideas on his son and students, despite the Catholic upbringing of the children, causing the son to criticize the hired nun's

teachings and follow in the footsteps of and idolize his father (see Table 3). The comparison to progress in the US is a lesser example of North Americanization in this case. The encouragement away from the traditional teachings, however, highlights Ideological Diversification, an indicator of North Americanization.

Ideological Diversification in <i>Olvido</i>
Nun: When you pray, you must pray consciously, not like you are reciting a list. Héctor: Does my dad pray at night? I know he doesn't. Nun: He doesn't. That's why he will go to hell when he dies. Héctor: [...] I'll never pray before bed again. (0:11:36)
Silvia: It's astounding, the US will not authorize the vaccines which have been used for many months in the US. Héctor Sr: We're always way behind, it's horrible! (0:21:48)
Héctor (to the nun): What if people have been good but they don't go to church, will they still go to hell? Sol: He doesn't want to go to church. Nun: He will go, or I'll tell his mom, the archbishop's niece! (0:29:15).
Héctor Sr: This vaccine could put and end to polio all over the world, we just have to prove it works. [...] No one has tried it yet. But, after it is proven, we can start a national program. (he prepares a shot and gives it to his son, who does not protest and helps)

Table 3

A majority of Colombian films attempt to portray the effects of religious diversification – the split from the forced Catholic teachings back into indigenous cultures or protestant religions – through characters' interactions with a variety of cultural influences. Most predominantly, interactions with US-Americans cause the shifts in the films. *Verano* showcases these developments the most clearly, first showing members of an indigenous tribe interacting with US-Americans from the Peace Corps and then later with US-Americans during a drug trade (see Appendix 2, Image 2). The leads – initially in the Wayuu tribe – begin to develop a taste for the profits of the drug trade and start to exhibit a lifestyle similar to the US-Americans involved in the interactions, distancing themselves from the traditional beliefs of the Wayuu tribe. The film *Serpiente* shows how Catholic colonizers initially converted indigenous tribes through both physical and psychological torture; the production shows the conversion in a negative light with a US-American observer. These portrayals advocate for a return to the indigenous religions

and cultures and exemplify the religious diversification processes in Colombian films, both through the introduction of US-American characters. The portrayals of diversification show interactions between indigenous cultures, Protestant religions, atheism, and Catholicism in Colombian films, emphasizing the influence of interactions with US-Americans as the catalyst for change.

Many of the films portray the continuance of Catholic beliefs or no religion at all; the difference appears to lie mostly in the genre of the movie to determine whether or not religious undertones affect the plot or intended reception of the movie. In addition to including no indications of diversification, the same films also tended to lack US-American characters, but not in all cases. Of the sample, six films did not portray religious or cultural diversification; these six films, despite covering a diverse range of genres, did not fall into the category of historical documentary films, the genre of the remaining four (see Table 4). *Demonios*, *Pariente*, *Reyes* and *Paseo* show contemporary and/or accurate Colombian culture throughout the plot with little or no influence from the US in respect to religious or cultural beliefs. While the majority of films within the sample do not explicitly endorse the notion of US-American influence on religious and cultural diversification, they are not all free from US influence in other areas. The depiction of religious and cultural diversification might be more commonly found in particular genres rather than being consistently depicted across all cinematic narratives, yet the theory of North Americanization through ideological diversification remains applicable when the films explore such diversification.

Film	Genre
<i>Sucias</i>	Drama, Suspense, Thriller, Mystery
<i>Serpiente</i>	Horror, Action, Drama, History, Documentary
<i>Pariente</i>	Western, Drama, Suspense, Thriller
<i>Demonios</i>	Romance, Drama, Suspense, Thriller
<i>Verano</i>	Documentary, History, Western, Drama, Crime
<i>Monos</i>	War Drama
<i>Olvido</i>	History, Documentary, Melodrama
<i>Paseo</i>	Comedy
<i>Reyes</i>	Action, Adventure, Drama
<i>Quicksand</i>	Action, Thriller, Romance

Table 4

The problems and conflicts in some of the movies stemmed directly from the United States. Sometimes, the US is mentioned in passing as a reason for something happening, but other times, the effect of the US involvement in Colombia is directly involved in the plot of the film. In Landes' *Monos*, the main characters, a group of young guerrilla soldiers, are in a conflict with the US and the commanding officer has charged the group to keep captive a US-American engineer called "Doctora." The presence of Doctora is a joke among the young adults, and the group mocks the woman as she records videos as proof of life; even after the US military invades the camp – presumably in search of Doctora – the group attempts to maintain control of the engineer throughout an expedition through the jungle. A less concrete example is present in *Olvido* (0:46:06 and 2:01:23); the US entered the Cold War and "claimed" Latin American countries and tried to enforce capitalism over communism, and throughout the plot of the film, Héctor Abad Gomez tries to help impoverished communities even as he is labeled a communist and becomes a victim of slander and eventually assassination. These examples illustrate the United States' role in shaping the narrative and conflicts in Colombian cinema, further supporting the argument of North American lenses in Colombian films and by extension, Colombian culture. Colombian films imply that the influence of US' ideas is comparable to that of US-American characters, with both indicating a powerful influence of North Americanization in Colombian cinema.

## Gender Relations

The introduction of women as objects of sexual desire in mass-produced Latin American media occurred first in Chile and Cuba through magazines the US military introduced to the public; now, Colombian films are consistent in how they portray women as people with agency as well as objects of sexual desire. The way women live, act, dress, and speak factor into how the male characters behave around different women. One explicit example is in *Verano* (0:55:50 and 1:29:08); the characters, initially in the Wayuu tribe – which holds women in place of honor – begin to exhibit more sexual behaviors towards women after interacting with US-Americans in a narco-trafficking scheme. *Paseo* revolves around the sexual willingness of all the different women, and how the women respond to the men's expectations; throughout the film, the male interest of the film completely ignores the main character whenever a more sexually available woman enters the scene (see Appendix 2, Image 3). *Paseo* (0:35:37) often shows the character losing interest until a woman begins to express her sexuality; this scene also shows a conversation between two women advocating for taking control over their sexuality. US magazines facilitated the introduction of women as objects of sexual desire in Latin American media according to the theory of North Americanization, and Colombian films confirm women are sexualized in modern media. Additionally, the agency given to women to act independently of male counterparts is an indicator of North Americanization. Colombian cinema's consistent portrayal of women as both individuals with agency and objects of desire reflects the enduring impact of the cultural shift.

In addition to the portrayal of women, in the last 10 years, characters in Colombian films showcase voyeuristic tendencies – the public showing or consumption of sexual scenes or nudity – in modern media. The commodification of sexual scenes or nudity is obvious in the films, as many of the films contain at least one example of these voyeuristic tendencies. One part of the voyeuristic tendencies is the previous mention of the films' use of nudity to draw attention to women, as *Paseo* portrays (see Appendix 2, Image 3). Furthermore, the characters in *Monos* provide an example through scenes showing characters' observation of the sexual interactions between other people in the group (see Appendix 2, Image 4). Half of the films portraying sexual implications did so completely separate from the plot (see Table 5). Using sex to elicit a reaction from the audience rather than to forward the plot or develop a character shows the voyeuristic tendencies of the industry and has deeper implications regarding Colombian culture outside of film and the role of North Americanization in the development. Although all portrayals of voyeuristic tendencies would support the argument of North Americanization, the use of sexual implications when they are not essential to the plot of the film emphasizes how thoroughly the commodification of sexual portrayals infiltrates Colombian cinema.

Film	Sex or Sexual Implications	Utilized as Plot Device
<i>Sucias</i>	Erotic dancing, discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Serpiente</i>	Sexual assault, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Pariente</i>	Discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Demonios</i>	Sex, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	Yes
<i>Verano</i>	Sex, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Monos</i>	Discussion of sexual acts, voyeurism	Yes
<i>Olvido</i>	Sex, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	Yes
<i>Paseo</i>	Discussion of sexual acts, voyeurism, sexual acts	Yes
<i>Reyes</i>	NA	-
<i>Quicksand</i>	NA	-

Table 5

Colombian-produced movies also exhibit voyeuristic tendencies in the grand scheme of production and writing, utilizing sex as a metaphor, plot device, or to show a sense of otherness. This goes deeper than surface-level portrayals of sexual scenes or nudity without any obvious meaning, as the sexual drive and motives are essential for the plot in many popular films. Of the ten films, a majority portray or imply sexual scenes and nudity, and some use sex as a plot device as opposed to a seemingly meaningless portrayal (see Table 5). Sex and sexual desire drive the plot of one of the films, *Demonios*, and shows the protagonist watching his half-sister's private life through a camera in her room. Furthermore, in *Paseo* (0:08:40), the conflict is based around a father trying to protect his daughter after overhearing a young man express plans to sleep with the girl to record and post the video. The voyeuristic tendencies of mass productions is an example of North Americanization through gender relations and norms. The theory of North Americanization argues Latin American societies accepted the original portrayals of sexuality in media so long as they represented the "otherness" of North American women, and the effects of this allowance have now worked their way into modern Colombian cultural productions.

The films across genres portrayed similar household dynamics; men had the power and control of the household whereas women were left in charge



of children, a sentiment present in interactions between husbands and wives and the lack of any women with jobs in the films, with only one exception. In respect to relationship norms, North Americanization seems to have little influence in Colombian cinema. This example, however, focuses exclusively on relationships and marital norms and does not disqualify or disprove any other exhibitions of North Americanization in regard to Gender Relations or other areas of discussion, but rather exists in spite of other implications.

The roles of men and women in relationships and marriages are consistent throughout popular Colombian films, often showing men try first to win over a woman, then become the head of the household. The depictions of relationships and marital expectations fall more into the Catholic influence from Spanish colonization than North Americanization. Examples of the expectations of each gender in a relationship are most prevalent in *Quicksand*, *Pariente*, and *Verano*; all of these movies contain direct mentions of a man's role in courting a woman and maintaining livelihood, and the last goes in-sofar as to show why a woman expects a man to put in effort (see Table 6).

Film	Quote
<i>Pariente</i> 00:11:30	Alfonso: "Are you planning to serenade my granddaughter?" Willington: "That's the plan. I'm going to win her back."
<i>Verano</i> 00:08:03	Zeida's father: "You know her dowry, you do not have the means to provide for my Zeida." Rapayet (pursuing Zeida): "I will return. With all of it."
<i>Verano</i> 00:13:55	Zeida's mother: "Do you know why I'm so respected? Why we demand this much? [...] Because we are capable of anything for our family, I guard it. Even if you get the dowry, the spirits warn me of you. Rapayet: I will protect her, I can, and I will return with the full dowry."
<i>Quicksand</i> 01:02:43	Sofia (to her husband): "I was top of our class, first to be published. Then I stopped. I was doing the right thing. I still believe that. I wanted to be around for the kids."

Table 6

Neoliberalism and Consumerism

Colombian films present, whether briefly or as a drive for a plot, the desire for wealth and preference towards a market-based economy opposed to the traditional economies of indigenous tribes. Most traditional economies are centered around the family and tribe, and trade of commodities is the

barter for most anything, rather than currency, a sentiment Colombian films address and disprove often. *Verano* highlights the market drive alongside the religious separation; while the main characters separate from the religion of the Wayuu tribe, they are subsequently advocating for and utilizing the profits of the drug trade to alter the economic system of the tribe. The tribe in *Verano* remains adamant against these actions, but the interference of the US-Americans in the lives of the main characters and dedication to trafficking to achieve wealth interferes with the lives of all the tribe members, not just the leads pursuing wealth. The difference between the characters' lifestyle as portrayed in the beginning of the film versus the end is dependent on the adaptation to market-based preferences and showcases the effects of a consumerist mindset in contrast to the indigenous systems (see Appendix 2, Images 5 and 6). This example especially highlights the role of US-Americans in directing a shift towards a market-based economy and symbolizes how neoliberalism has led to the diminishment of traditional economies of indigenous tribes in Colombia. The depictions provide evidence of how Colombian films imply a preference towards a market-based economy, aligning with the broader concept of North Americanization, as neoliberalism is a strong indicator of the influence.

Another theme skewing towards neoliberal ideals was the portrayal of wealth as the "key" to happiness. The films sometimes utilize economic success to motivate characters and drive the plot. In *Reyes*, a group of young boys are on an adventure to reclaim land trying to escape a life in poverty; the boys believe reclaiming the land will bring them comfort and wealth, and – true or not – go through hardships and life-or-death situations just on the dream of attaining a form of wealth or currency. The drive for wealth via drug trafficking is also present in *Sucias*; two of the characters take a risky job in order to receive a large cash sum for the drugs, and believe the money will allow them to move past traumatic occurrences in the past, further portraying money as a cure-all for any problems. By depicting wealth as the path to happiness, these films reflect the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideas originating from North America on Colombian cultural values. The cinematic representations not only mirror the neoliberal ethos North America encourages, but also contribute to its normalization within Colombian culture.

Unless the plot of the film revolved around attaining, chasing, or handling wealth, neoliberal and consumerist ideologies were not overtly present. Many films did not address or portray wealth in any form, choosing to ignore the role of economic factors in overall plots; one film even advocates *against* the pursuit of riches. Despite the luxurious lifestyle and vacation in *Paseo*, and the obvious wealth of the family in *Olvido*, neither of these films portrayed the characters as desiring wealth and did not focus on the economy or economic expectations in any form. *Monos*, *Demonios*, *Pariente*, and *Quicksand* do not utilize any drive or relevance of currency throughout interactions, and characters are not rich or poor; currency is not a factor in the

universe of the films, even if characters have jobs. *Verano* presents both sides of the argument, and while one set of characters is driven by wealth, another set – the Wayuu tribe – directly tries to steer the group away from consumerist ideas and rely on the traditional customs and way of life, and this side is portrayed as the “positive” and “heroic” side. Even though many films do not explicitly point out neoliberal and consumerist ideologies, they can be present in Colombian films in subtle or implicit ways. The depiction of certain lifestyles, aspirations, or values in characters still reflect underlying neoliberal or consumerist ideals, which are primary traits of North Americanization.

The highest rated and grossing film highlights how North American ideals and attachments to materialistic objects are not “normal” and creates a state of “incompatibility” between North Americans and tribes in the Colombian Amazon. The portrayal of a North American in the movie is subsequent to the neoliberal and consumerist ideologies the character embodies. *Serpiente* shows one man in two different times, both times the Amazonian man is assisting white explorers—one German and one US-American—in a search for a plant to heal the explorers’ illnesses. The film is a tribute to the loss of cultures in the Colombian Amazon; in two separate scenes – once with each explorer – Karamakate, the Amazonian “guide,” addresses the explorers’ attachment and dependence to objects like compasses, photographs, and the rest of the objects in their bags. The objects become a hindrance to the explorers’ survival, as the boat is weighed down, and still the explorers hesitate to get rid of any material possessions. Showing the consumerist traits of the explorers in a tribute to native Colombian-Amazon cultures highlights how the incompatibility between the two regions permeates into society. Even while portraying the direct opposite of North Americanization in the actual plot of the film, the role of North America in the creation and messages of the film are apparent.

The films emphasize neoliberalism and consumerism in tandem with the drug trafficking in Colombia. Narcotrafficking is often portrayed as the only thing happening in Colombia in American media, and the portrayal of similar themes in contemporary Colombian cinema indicates a North American lens may apply to certain aspects of Colombian film. Of the films focusing on wealth as a plot device – *Reyes*, *Verano*, and *Sucias* – two, *Verano* and *Sucias*, portray the only means of achieving wealth as being through the drug trade. The drug market is

explicitly due to US-Americans’ presence or desire to partake in narcotrafficking in *Verano*. *Sucias*, however, does not portray any North American characters, but still utilizes narcotrafficking as the only “economy” in Colombia, as the film shows very few other aspects of life for the characters. The portrayal of narcotrafficking as the only profitable “job” in two of the three films with a plot revolving around wealth indicates a more North

American lens was applied to the production of the films, even aside from the role of North America in the content of the films. North Americanization goes deeper into the cultural values of Colombia in this example, as the North American perspective penetrates the production of the films and marginalizes other ways of achieving wealth in Colombia.

## DISCUSSION

### Socio-Political Reflections in Film

The project reveals how Colombian filmmakers perceive and present themselves on a global platform. Viewing film as not only a means of entertainment but also communication allows the project to investigate the Colombian perspective in different aspects of national identity. Much like Lanzendoerfer's (2013) study of *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Colombian films often seek to address different aspects of Colombian history and cultural developments, such as the themes in *Verano*, to produce something representative of national identity. In a study of the film *Monos*, Betancourt (2019) explains how the film seeks to remain close to the characters to show how the population felt a disconnect with the conflict; my research indicated a similar idea, as the characters do not take the conflict seriously until soldiers invade the camp. Furthermore, the film "does away" with historical or political anchors to further the lack of connection to a cause, showing the kids hardly knowing or caring about what they supposedly "believe in" (Betancourt, 2019). The addition of this project to existing research is a broader study of cultural artifacts with an applied theory, rather than a study of a single work in a general context. Additionally, this project delves more into the causes and effects of cultural hegemony, rather than an informative study on a single work's impact.

The connection between the films in this project and the debate around the introduction of neoliberalism in Latin America underscores the potency of film as a medium for portraying real-world socio-political issues. The project illustrates how films address socio-political developments from the Colombian perspective. For example, my analysis of *Serpiente* aligns with the literature critiquing neoliberal influences in Latin America due to the materialistic attachments of the explorers. This film in particular is a tribute to the indigenous cultures in the Amazon, and the fictional approach to a true story allows Guerra to reflect indigenous sentiments without silencing the indigenous voice (Castrillón, 2019). My research revealed *Serpiente* serves as a critique of neoliberal ideas, and, while serving as a case study in this sense, highlights the notion of incompatibility between the two cultures, as discussed in the literature. This paper affirms the arguments stating neoliberalism has become a prominent topic in Colombia and would likely apply to other Latin American countries as well, as the film analyses reflect ideas of neoliberalism often. Furthermore, this project highlights the effects of neoliberalism.

eralism on indigenous cultures to the extent that contemporary productions reflect the themes of both neoliberal and consumerist ideas.

### **Indigenous Agency in Productions**

Applying the lens of North Americanization to the films highlights the common use of North American cultural norms and values in Colombian cinema. The theory explains why certain parts of North American culture, such as language, products, and practices may be present in the films. In doing so, the films show power dynamics as they include more North American ideals than not. König and Rinke (2022) argue North Americanization is “understood and criticized as part of U.S. economic and cultural expansion.” So, the appeal of wealth in *Manos Sucias*, *Verano*, and *Los Reyes del Mundo* in this study all showcase North Americanization via the portrayal of a neoliberal ethos as a result of this expansion. Furthermore, the authors highlight the inequality of power relations throughout the history of interactions between North and Latin America and show North American norms and values in the films to support this argument (König & Rinke, 2022). In this regard, North Americanization explains the presence of certain norms and ideologies in Colombian films. The films’ use of North American values, intentional or unintentional, explain the power dynamics between the two regions, as the films portray North American economic and political values more than traditional Colombian values.

The portrayals of one theme as being more common than another or vice versa shows the parts of North Americanization the Colombian population appears to identify more with. In other words, the lens of North Americanization, while proving useful in some respects, maintained limitations in application to the films. For example, the literature surrounding North Americanization highlights death and religious rituals as a very important aspect of North Americanization, stating “mortuary practices” in Latin America – specifically Mexico – are reminiscent of those in North America (Lomnitz, 2022). However, my research revealed death is not mentioned much in the films and is not a reflection of North American practices the one time a film touches on death and the afterlife. By showing certain aspects of North Americanization more often than others, Colombian films illuminate how the Colombian population identifies with North Americanization. Even if an aspect of North Americanization is more present in real life, the fictitious frame of the films shows certain aspects of North Americanization are more likely to influence Colombian filmmakers than others.

Despite the influence of North Americanization, the analysis reveals moments of resistance and agency within Colombian cinema. By examining how filmmakers challenge North American culture norms spreading in Colombia, this project indicates Colombian culture perseveres through the “domination” of North American culture. While the films did portray an abundance of examples of North Americanization, some also tried to

preserve traditional identities and beliefs (Guerra & Gallega, 2018; Guerra, 2015). In a discussion over how North Americanization has interrupted the matriarchal communities in many Latin American countries, Stoner (2017) highlights the ways in which Cubans attempted to subvert North American influence but were still subject to identify in comparison to the US, rather than as a separate entity. This article and the films in my study, specifically *Verano*, both contain themes of attempting to separate national identity and cultures from North American influence but finding North American influence too pervasive in a quest to “push capitalism” (Stoner, 2017). North Americanization both perfectly encompasses why North American influence is so prominent in Latin America and why indigenous cultures seek to subvert the imposed hegemony. The theory, however, does not account for the agency of indigenous and native cultures nor the perseverance of traditional values in cultural productions.

## CONCLUSION

Colombian films consistently portray themes of North Americanization, but not every aspect of the theory is observable in the films. Examining films from Colombian filmmakers reveals North American lenses, North American products, and North American ideologies are often present across genres and that those themes are more prevalent than others. The behaviors and dialogue of the characters in the films were merely one aspect of North Americanization, whether the example is characters talking in English, discussing US-American habits, or interacting with US-American characters. Some aspects of North Americanization are apparent in the pictures and themes of the films; wealth and idealization of North American culture or focus on North American conflicts are the most common examples of visual portrayals of the theory. The presence of North American influence in Colombian films highlights the depth of the impact of North Americanization in Colombian culture. Understanding this power dynamic between the two regions assists in comprehending how Colombian filmmakers depict and define themselves, as the cultural hegemony shapes national identity.

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## APPENDIX



Image 1 (Triana, 2021, *El Paseo* 6, Netflix, 0:34:50)



Image 2 (Guerra & Gallega, 2018, *Pájaros de Verano*, Amazon Prime Video, 0:20:58 and 0:42:02)



Image 3 (Triana, 2021, *El Paseo* 6, 0:31:39)



Image 4 (Landes, 2019, *Monos*, Max, 0:14:36)



Image 5 (Guerra and Gallega, 2018, *Pájaros de Verano*, Amazon Prim Video, 0:31:04)



Image 6 (Guerra and Gallega, 2018, *Pájaros de Verano*, 01:18:42)