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Mission

Continued from Page 5

westerner.

By far the most visible Indians are the children. Most bothersome is the implied portrayal of the native as the noble savage, a simple, primitive being with a spiritual superiority exhibited through a natural talent and love for music and art (remember how Gabriel won acceptance). These spiritual beings are the ones who "forgive" Mendoza by releasing the bundle of swords and armor (literally the trappings

of his past life) he drags behind him in penance.

While this portrayal seems positive in the face of the corrupt villains, it seriously stereotypes the natives almost as dangerously as the Europeans who call the Indians "vicious savages." Both concepts refuse to accept the people as human beings, and thus both place them in positions inferior to the European heroes, the Jesuits.

The serious shortcomings of the film can be summed up in

the very practice of addressing the concept of colonialism from a western point of view rather than from the point of view of the oppressed. The bridge of time has made it easy to look back and point fingers at the "evils" of past nations, but the very nature of colonialism goes on to this day. Grounded in the needs brought on by a burgeoning capitalist economic system, namely the need for raw materials and foreign markets, colonialism exists in our relationship with the Latin American countries where American business keeps labor costs down to guarantee cheap raw materials and foods at the expense of the freedom of the native peoples.

"The Mission" seems to be addressing such issues on the surface but ultimately it supports only colonial attitudes by dismissing the voices of the oppressed peoples and telling the story from the position of a western power, where capitalistic practices are simply accepted as "the way of life" and white infiltration in underdeveloped countries is somehow accepted as positive, inevitable or both.

This is ultimately my criticism of the film. Creators Joffe and Bolt tell a classically western narrative about the relations between western culture and South American culture. And once again the cinema is faced with white heroes who bravely defend their loving tribe, made strong by the westernizing influences of religion and European culture. It was the same story told in the 16th century and the same told in the news of today. The question is, when do the native Indians tell their story?

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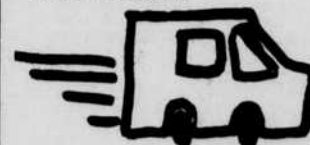


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