

## From Cuchitambo to Otavalo to New York City

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**From Cuchitambo to Otavalo to New York City: Border-crossing in Carlos Arcos'**  
*Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina*

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**Abstract:**

This paper analyses Carlos Arcos' novel *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina* (2013) from a transnational perspective. I propose that, by reimagining the indigenous hero of Jorge Icaza's *Huasipungo* (1934) and placing him in New York City in the 21st century, Arcos delivers a novel that not only challenges the Ecuadorian literary tradition but also defies limited views about the Ecuadorian nation. I focus on the multiple borders the story identifies and crosses to argue that, in his travels, his multilingualism, and his blend of foreign and indigenous cultural traits, the contemporary Andrés Chilibuina created by Arcos counters purity and homogeneity with mixture and hybridity. In doing so, he lays bare that a key part of what defines the 'national' in contemporary Ecuador is precisely its transnationality.

**Keywords:** Ecuadorian literature, *Huasipungo*, Andres Chilibuina, Carlos Arcos, contemporary Latin American literature, transnational fiction, transnationalism.

– Mister Chilibuquina? – preguntó una gringuita. Dijo «qüinga» y no «quina». Me gustó.

– Yes – respondí –, soy yo, yo mismo.

Carlos Arcos, *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuquina* (2013: 17)

[– Mister Chilibuquina? – a gringa asked me. She said «qüinga» instead of «quina». I liked it.

– Yes – I replied – that's me, myself].<sup>1</sup>

On his first day in New York City, Andrés Chilibuquina is called 'Mister Chilibüinga' erroneously. The dieresis placed on the 'u' stands for a mispronunciation of his surname, referring to a common mistake among English speakers when faced with some Hispanic names, or, in this case, a Kichwa name. The woman who welcomes Andrés to his accommodation in Manhattan assumes that the vowel must be pronounced when Spanish pronunciation rules dictate otherwise: the 'u' is to be silenced. The error can be read as a witty line highlighting the unwillingness of some Americans to familiarise themselves with foreign names despite working in a linguistic territory as hyperdiverse as New York City. However, it can also be read as an insight into one of the main proposals of Carlos Arcos' novel *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuquina* [Memories of Andrés Chilibuquina] (2013). The Anglicisation of a proper noun like Chilibuquina is especially significant for Ecuadorian readers. It is not only that such a surname is immediately identified as indigenous and therefore its pronunciation with English language logics sounds confusing, but also that it is a direct reference to a previous Andrés Chilibuquina in Ecuadorian literature. Arcos takes this name from the hero of Jorge Icaza's *Huasipungo* (1934), Ecuador's national novel.<sup>2</sup> By referring to a canonical character of Ecuadorian literary tradition and modifying his name to fit English pronunciation, in a novel that develops its plot in a U.S. university campus right at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Arcos hints at a question often discussed in Latin American Cultural Studies: in a developing country such as Ecuador, what happens to the 'national' in a globalised context?

*Memorias de Andrés Chilibuquina* attempts to provide an answer by being a novel that, while bearing a national signifier in the name of its protagonist, also engages in multiple border-crossing experiences that defy essentialist views and definitions about Ecuadorian

national literature and the literary imagining of Ecuador. This article argues that Arcos' novel enables readers to rethink what is Ecuadorian in literary terms in opposition to the sense of 'uniqueness' based on history and territory championed by the *Generación del 30* [Generation of the 1930s], the most revered group of Ecuadorian writers and, arguably, the Ecuadorian canon to which Jorge Icaza belongs. I propose seeing Arcos' novel as a fiction that – while identifying multiple borders, be these real or symbolic – is constantly traversing them to expose their permeability. His novel unsettles exclusive categories such as 'indigenous', 'mestizo' or 'foreign' to make them fluid and to put them in dialogue with each other. The main character, Andrés, resists hard definitions by being at the same time a representative of a supposedly 'original' Ecuadorian tradition and a seasoned traveller. He continuously crosses multiple frontiers to challenge preconceived notions about himself, his community, and his nation. With his story, Arcos counters purity and homogeneity with mixture and hybridity, escaping from the binary oppositions of tradition/modernity and national/global to present us with a novel where these dimensions are intertwined. In doing so, his work suggests that a key part of what defines the 'national' in contemporary Ecuador – a society deeply impacted by migration in the twenty-first century – is precisely its transnationality.<sup>3</sup> In this light, *Memorias de Andrés Chilibingua* imagines and contributes to building Ecuador as a transnational space.

I understand transnationality in relation to the sense of inherent exchange entailed by transnationalism, a concept that defines how reciprocal dependencies and cultural networks among nations manifest themselves in the different aspects of the lived experience of society. In this paper, transnationality refers to the broad implications of the multiple ties and interactions that link people and institutions beyond the borders of their nation-states (Vertovec 2009: 2). I see twenty-first century Ecuador as a transnational space that is in everyday interaction with actors beyond its borders: not only because of the daily expressions of migrant Ecuadorian communities spread around the U.S. and Europe; but also because of the manifold effects of economic globalisation, through which Ecuador is a participant in the global market, even using a foreign currency – the U.S. Dollar – as its national legal tender.

In the context of an intercultural and plurinational country such as Ecuador, however, the notion of transnationalism presents many challenges. In the early 2000s, indigenous leaders such as Luis Macas were already signalling that globalisation – which is intimately connected to transnationalism – was a form of destroying difference in order to 'homogeneizar en un mismo comportamiento a todos y a todas' (Macas 2005: 36) ['to homogenise all men and women so that everyone has the same behaviour']. The struggle of Ecuadorian indigenous

communities to resist the extractive nature of economic globalisation, which not only poses threats to their identity claims but also endangers their ancestral territories, is very much alive today. As part of their fight for justice, the indigenous movement has periodically organised nationwide demonstrations since the 1990s. Decisively, they showed their communal strength in October 2019 by successfully leading a rebellion to overturn a presidential decree aimed at eliminating fuel subsidies and raising the price of gasoline.<sup>4</sup>

Building an Ecuadorian society where indigenous communities can participate fairly politically, economically, socially, and culturally is still an ongoing and necessary project. Yet the processes of interaction and cultural exchange in contemporary Ecuador are continuous and fluid, and transnational encounters have an effect on indigenous communities as well as on the ways in which these communities are perceived within Ecuador's broader society. White *mestizo* writers like Arcos do not speak for the indigenous experience in Ecuador. As such, his work cannot delineate what it means to be indigenous. Nor does it pretend to do so. Nevertheless, examining Arcos' novel enables insight into how indigeneity is perceived and construed in non-indigenous contemporary Ecuadorian writing. But more importantly for what I argue here, *Memorias de Andrés Chilibingua* contests the way in which indigeneity is presented in *Huasipungo*, a novel in which another non-indigenous writer portrays indigenous subjects as essential beings attached to the land. My reading suggests that in opposition to Icaza's work, Arcos' work prompts non-indigenous readers to see that Ecuadorian indigenous populations can be local and global and that their lives, like those of the rest of society, are also marked by encounters and exchanges. The implications of acknowledging such transnationality for the literary imagining of Ecuador are at the heart of this essay.

*Memorias de Andrés Chilibingua* explores the interplays between Ecuador and other nations, and what these might mean for the way fiction imagines contemporary Ecuador. It does so by telling the story of a journey that takes a young indigenous Ecuadorian musician to a foreign land. The novel is structured as the memoirs of one of the many travels of Andrés Chilibingua, a community leader from Otavalo, an indigenous community in the Ecuadorian highlands. This journey, however, is different from others Andrés regularly makes through Europe and other destinations as a travelling musician and merchant of handcrafts. This time, he visits New York City to participate in a doctoral course about Andean Literatures in Columbia University, where he is invited by the Fulbright Program to 'compartir un tiempo con estudiantes norteamericanos y conocer algo de la cultura de Estados Unidos' (Arcos 2013: 32) ['to share some time with North American students and to learn something about U.S.

culture’]. Despite the goal of his visit being to learn about North American culture, Andrés is asked to do a presentation on Ecuadorian literature, a subject on which he declares himself utterly ignorant. The lecturer in charge of the course assigns him the reading of *Huasipungo*, a novel about 'runas' [indigenous people] written by a 'mishu' [a white *mestizo* man] he has never read. With the help of his classmate María Clara Pereira – an Ecuadorian PhD candidate studying abroad – Andrés analyses Jorge Icaza's most famous novel to discover that the protagonist is named like himself, Andrés Chilibuina, and the antagonist, Alfonso Pereira, bears the same surname as his new friend María Clara.

Through the experiences of his homonymous fictional character, the contemporary Andrés Chilibuina reads about the deplorable conditions the indigenous population of Ecuador endured during the early twentieth century, dehumanised and exploited by white and *mestizo* landowners. By reading *Huasipungo*, Andrés recalls the memories of his grandfather about the suffering of his ancestors and becomes unable to distinguish between reality and fiction. He reads Icaza's text as a historical document more than a fictional tale, often wondering if he is the descendant of a previous Andrés Chilibuina that the writer knew and whose story is documented in the book. María Clara tries to keep the contemporary Andrés anchored to the reality of their doctoral course at Columbia University, but the borders between what is real and what is not soon begin to blur: *Huasipungo's* Andrés Chilibuina visits Andrés in several dreamlike apparitions to reveal to him that they are indeed related and that Icaza's recollection of his life is only partially true.

More than a figment of Arcos' imagination, the notion of a contemporary reader who sees *Huasipungo* as factual is grounded on the canonical status of the Icaza's work. His novel remains an inevitable reference in Ecuador's national education, not only in the Literature curriculum but also in Civic Education textbooks, where it is unproblematically positioned as a resource for students to learn about the conditions in which indigenous communities lived in Ecuador during the early twentieth century (Ministerio de Educación 2018: 86). Arcos' fiction, therefore, builds on the tension between what is considered true and what is not in *Huasipungo*. The way in which Andrés understands and blurs that differentiation – reality/fiction and their entanglement – signals one of the many border-crossing strategies Arcos' novel uses to lay bare the fluidities and mixtures that take place in contemporary Ecuadorian society. The 'true' side of *Huasipungo*, Andrés declares, is the suffering of his ancestors under the rule of white and *mestizo* masters. On the other hand, he puts into question the bestializing portrayal of indigeneity. That is to say, he rejects the descriptions Icaza makes of the indigenous people of

Cuchitambo, Alfonso Pereira's *hacienda*, for he argues that the author – through the narrator's voice – portrays indigenous behaviours as archaic, barbaric, ignorant, and superstitious.

Andrés' questioning of the portrayal of indigeneity in *Huasipungo* refers to an argument frequently used to criticise Icaza's work: that it is Icaza himself who sees indigenous people as archaic, barbaric, ignorant, and superstitious. Opposed to such reading, the Ecuadorian sociologist Agustín Cueva argues that the degradation of indigenous people in *Huasipungo* is part of a formal strategy of the novel to denounce the suffering of and the injustices against indigenous people. Cueva sees in the total dispossession of Icaza's indigenous characters a way of symbolically representing the result of a 'double subjugation process', in which the indigenous people of early twentieth century Ecuador are exploited both by a declining feudal system and by a nascent form of capitalism (Cueva 2008: 172). Nonetheless, in Arcos' novel, Andrés manages to see beyond the total dispossession of his people in his reading of *Huasipungo*. Filling in the blanks left by Icaza's narrative, he perceives traces of the ancestral knowledge of his community permeating through the text, even when this remains hidden by a *mestizo* writing perspective. For instance, when Andrés learns that his 'tocayo' [namesake] hurts his leg with a machete while working in the field, and is later treated by a 'yachag' [shaman] who cures the badly infected wound to save his life, he bitterly notes the derogative comments made by the narrator (whom he understands to be Icaza himself) about the process:

Recordé que el Icaza decía que el curandero que se pasó ocho días en la casa de mi tocayo, curándolo y salvándolo de la muerte, "pronunció frases de su invención". El pobre del Icaza no sabía que eran cantos antiguos, cantos que invocaban a los cerros, pidiendo fuerza para curar, para sanar; por eso mismo el yachag salvó a mi tocayo, por eso mismo le curó, para eso adquirió poder y conocimiento. Me puse a cantar en voz baja y empecé a tranquilizar mi alma, curándome yo mismo de lo que ese libro decía. (Arcos 2013: 143)

[I remembered that Icaza said that the indigenous healer who spent eight days in my namesake's house, treating him and keeping him from death, "pronounced words of his own invention". Poor Icaza did not know that those were ancient songs, songs to summon the hills, asking for power to cure, to heal; that was how the shaman saved my namesake, that was how he healed him, to do so he acquired power and knowledge. I started to sing quietly to ease my soul, to heal myself from what that book was saying.]

The words delimited by inverted commas within this quote represent the voice of Icaza talking through *Huasipungo* and later transcribed to be critiqued by Andrés. Icaza's voice is continuously questioned throughout the narration, for Andrés feels that the writer makes mostly

prejudiced assumptions about his namesake, whose heart (and that of his people) remains hidden for the *mestizo* standpoint from which Icaza enunciates his story. 'Lo único que le queda es convertirle en un animal, peor todavía, porque él y la Cunshi son menos que animalitos' (Arcos 2013: 69) ['The only alternative he has left is to turn him into an animal, even worse, because he and Cunshi are less than animals']. Although the critique is channelled through Andrés, it must be noted that behind him stands another 'mishu': Carlos Arcos. The text identifies limitations of subjectivity – namely that Icaza cannot speak for his indigenous characters being a white *mestizo* writer – only to deliberately transgress them. Effectively, *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina* ends up being a novel written by a *mestizo* author about an indigenous character who reads and questions a novel about indigenous people written by another *mestizo* author.

One could argue that Arcos is only fleshing out one of the main criticisms *Huasipungo* has received, i.e. that it is not a story of indigenous people, but a story of indigenous people as seen by whites. Icaza's novel is, after all, a prime example of *indigenista* literature, a genre in which non-indigenous writers narrate the life struggles of indigenous communities to a primarily non-indigenous readership. Icaza illustrates the genre perfectly: he was an elite intellectual from Quito who showed interest in the plight of the rural indigenous communities, towards whom he 'took a paternalistic attitude and portrayed them largely as a passive population which was acted upon by outside forces' (Becker 1995). In this light, Arcos' work has been labelled *neindigenista* to signal its belonging to a particular type of writing concerned with indigenous people almost a century after Icaza's generation. But leaving terminology aside, the crucial point in this regard is that – as Alicia Ortega suggests – *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina* 'actualiza e interpela el archivo indigenista' (Ortega 2016: 85) ['updates and questions the *indigenista* archive']. To question the Ecuadorian *indigenista* archive, Arcos' novel transgresses the limitations of indigeneity as preconceived in the 'mishu' literary tradition championed by Icaza. While *Huasipungo* fixes indigenous subjects in a particular place with a set of clearly delimited and perfectly distinguishable physical features and symbolic attributes, *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina* reflects on the permeability of borders and the impossibility of finding homogeneous spaces in contemporary Ecuador.

Arcos' novel calls into question and complicates the *indigenista* portrayal of indigeneity by putting it in tension with the global dimension represented by New York City. In this sense, we see that *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina* is a *mestizo*-written story that takes an indigenous character – who happens to be representative of Ecuador's national novel – to transform him

into a traveller, that is, someone used to crossing frontiers and interacting with others beyond national boundaries. 'Harto he viajado, como otros de Otavalo, y ya casi no hay páginas en el pasaporte donde poner los sellos' (Arcos 2013: 10) ['I have travelled a lot, like others from Otavalo, and there are almost no pages left in my passport to put more stamps'], declares Andrés when he introduces himself to his classmates on his first day at Columbia University. By intertwining multiple dimensions in one narrative, Arcos creates a novel whose whole structure revolves around the act of crossing borders, be these outside the text (in the defiance to the 'mishu'/'runa' dichotomy) or inside (in Andrés' actions).

As a character, Andrés himself is a representation of border-crossing, not only because he is permanently traversing frontiers in his travels but also because he embodies a back-and-forth interaction between what is supposed to be national and what is understood as global. To refer to the national domain, he is named after the indigenous hero of *Huasipungo*, a novel that uses the indigenous subject as a symbol of something exclusively national, that is different from whatever might be found in other territories. While it is true that Icaza denounces the exploitation of Ecuadorian indigenous communities and therefore his work is in line with a broader *indigenismo* in Latin America that 'has characterized anti-hegemonic intellectual currents', his writing has also played a role 'in serving as a means for political and economic elites to appropriate indigenous cultures for nation-building ideologies that end up maintaining the subaltern status of indigenous peoples' (Field 1994: 243). By referring to the experience of indigenous people in the Ecuadorian Andes, *Huasipungo* is critically linked to Icaza's ambition of conveying a sense of national authenticity for Ecuadorian literature by reflecting through his writing the nuances of local characters, or 'las vivencias del ser auténtico, del ser que, en cualquier latitud cultural, tiene sus raíces propias – étnicas, psicológicas, históricas. Es algo que está en la sangre de la tierra' (Icaza 1966: 213) ['the way of life of the authentic man, of the man that, in any cultural latitude, has his own ethnic, psychological and historical roots. It is something that is in the blood of the land']. In this sense, even though Icaza himself may have endorsed the *mestizo* as the national figure in his later work, most notably in *El chulla Romero y Flores* (1958), *Huasipungo* is the novel that has remained fixed in the national canon and has come to embody 'authentic' Ecuadorian writing through its non-indigenous portrayal of indigeneity.

The Andrés in *Memorias de Andrés Chilibingua* thus refers back to this tradition of national authenticity in his name and his personal history: by the end of the novel, we learn that he is the lost descendant of the *Huasipungo's* Andrés Chilibingua. In the conversations the

contemporary Andrés has with the ghost of his namesake, the latter reveals the truth of the former's origin. After the battle that ends Icaza's narration – where a group of indigenous rebels are killed by soldiers sent to protect the *hacienda* they worked in – something else happened, reveals the spirit:

Mi hijo pudo esconderse y escapó con los que quedaron vivos, y de ese Andresito vienes vos, así que somos tocayos y parientes, somos familia (...) Al Andresito lo recogieron unos otavalos que hacían feria en Pujilí. Le vieron hecho una lástima, le llevaron con ellos, agarró la costumbre otavalo y se dejó criar el huango. No olvidó el apellido, sería porque yo le hablaba en sueños. De ahí vienes. Ya sabes la verdad. (Arcos 2013: 193)

[My son was able to hide and later escaped with those who survived, and you come from that Andresito, so we are namesakes and relatives, we are family (...) Andresito was picked up by some Otavalos who were at a fair in Pujilí. They found him in a mess; they took him with them. He picked up Otavalo customs and let his hair grow. He did not forget the surname, maybe because I talked to him in dreams. You come from him. Now you know the truth.]

Andrés' origin is traced back to Cuchitambo, where *Huasipungo's* Andrés Chilibingua dies, and where his infant son survives to later join the indigenous community of Otavalo.<sup>5</sup> The change from Cuchitambo to Otavalo is quite significant. There are 18 recognised 'pueblos indígenas' [indigenous peoples] in Ecuador, but among all of them the Otavalo community is especially known for its travelling members. Since the late 1970s, their work as merchants of Andean handcrafts and textiles has taken them to other Latin American countries, the United States, Canada, and Europe, where they maintain permanent colonies in cities such as Bogota, New York, Amsterdam, and Barcelona (Ruiz 2013: 10). Social sciences research argues that the continuous movement beyond borders is a defining feature of the Otavalo community:

Frente a una visión clásica, no exenta de cierto romanticismo, que contempla a las poblaciones indígenas como “atadas” a la tierra, viajar se ha convertido en una particularidad propia de la identidad otavala. El sujeto otavalo es un sujeto móvil, no sólo por los numerosos circuitos que ha ido estableciendo sobre el mapa y por los cuales transita continuamente, sino porque de algún modo la movilidad se ha trasmutado en un valor. Un valor que otorga al individuo prestigio y status. Viajar por el mundo es hoy en día el principal referente de identidad étnica y cultural para los Otavalo. (Ruiz 2013: 19)

[As opposed to a classical view, not exempt from a certain degree of romanticism, that sees the indigenous populations as "attached" to the land, travelling has become a particularity of Otavalo identity. The Otavalo subject is mobile, not only because of the

many routes that he has established on the map, along which he regularly travels, but also because somehow mobility has transmuted into a value. It is a value that gives them prestige and status. Travelling around the world is, as of today, the primary referent of ethnic and cultural identity for the Otavalo people.]

Travelling abroad to engage in international business and placing a greater emphasis on urban life has often resulted in challenges to the perceived authenticity of Otavalo's indigeneity. David Kyle notes that since the land has been the traditional centrepiece of community membership, 'it is one's relation and proximity to the rural community and agriculture that forms the primary yardstick for "cultural authenticity"' (Kyle 2000: 180). In this light, travelling members of the Otavalo community have been accused of being 'less authentic' than other indigenous groups. However, the Otavalo poet Ariruma Kowii notes that, historically, his people have moved across territories, which has not protected them from the oppression and discrimination experienced by communities with less mobility:

Históricamente nuestros pueblos son herederos de la tradición mindala. Los mindala se especializaron en el comercio local y regional. En la colonia, la población identificada con esta tradición gozó de algunos privilegios, como la posibilidad de movilizarse de un lugar a otro, lo que no significa que no fueron víctimas de los procesos de opresión y discriminación. Los kichwas otavaleños somos herederos de esta tradición. (Welp 2003: 13)

[Historically, our peoples are heirs to the Mindala tradition. The Mindala specialised in local and regional trade. In colonial times, the population identified with this tradition enjoyed some privileges, such as the possibility of moving from one place to another, which does not mean that they were not victims of oppression and discrimination. We, the Kichwa Otavaleños, are heirs to this tradition.]

By intentionally moving Andrés from Cuchitambo to Otavalo, Arcos's novel proposes a transition from an indigenous subject attached to the land – as described by Icaza – to an indigenous subject who is not only used to travelling but whose cultural identity is defined by travelling, that is, by crossing borders. In this sense, Arcos' Andrés Chilingua counters Icaza's Andrés Chilingua: whereas the latter represents an identity linked to territory, the former represents an identity that relies upon going beyond its limits. This opposition between the two is also an opposition between notions of 'originality' and 'uniqueness' to understand and represent the national through literature, and a more complex literary representation that considers the context of intensified globalisation of the present. In twenty-first century

Ecuador, this is a context in which dominant sectors of the white *mestizo* society continue to see indigenous people as belonging exclusively to specific national spaces while denying and rejecting their presence in others. The previously mentioned rebellion of October 2019 provides a compelling illustration of such position. Reacting to the possibility of indigenous demonstrators entering the coastal city of Guayaquil, Ecuador's economic capital, the former Mayor and former leader of the conservative Partido Social Cristiano [PSC, Social Christian Party], Jaime Nebot Saadi, declared in a TV interview: '[a esos indígenas] recomiéndeles que se queden en el paramo' (El Comercio 2019) ['advise those indigenous people to stay in the moorlands']. Although Nebot Saadi later apologised for his openly racist statement, his declaration makes visible the problematic persistence of the idea that indigenous people 'belong' to a particular territory distant from urban white *mestizo* dominated environments.

In a context where statements like Nebot Saadi's are possible on national television, *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina* invites readers to challenge stereotypes and think about national phenomena in transnational terms. The contemporary Andrés personifies the argument that 'flujos' [fluxes], 'migraciones' [migrations] and 'movimientos' [movements] are defining traits of identity acting opposition to the exclusive notions of 'raíces' [roots], 'raigambre y territorio' [rootedness and territory] (Barbero 2003: 374). In Arcos' novel, the foregrounding of these dislocations is key for unsettling the canonical *indigenista* portrayal of indigeneity that, through *Huasipungo*, remains the standard of mestizo Ecuadorian literature. In this light, the contemporary Andrés is reflective of mixture and fluidity, a feature that is revealed as soon as he lands on one of New York's airports to meet his transfer driver:

-¡Ah! Eras vos. – Sonó a puro despecho al verme runa, indio, con poncho, guango y sombrero. Hasta alpargatas llevé a ese viaje, en lugar de los Reebok, que eran nuevitos. Años que no me ponía alpargatas. Me dijeron que tenía que vestir tradicional, porque íbamos representando a nuestros pueblos. (Arcos 2013: 12)

["Ah! It was you." He spoke with pure spite when he saw me Indian, with a poncho, braided hair and a hat. I even wore my *alpargatas* on that trip, instead of my brand-new Reeboks. I hadn't worn *alpargatas* for years. They told me that I had to dress traditionally because we were representing our peoples.]

This excerpt implies that Andrés is used to managing others' expectations by means of his outfit, dressing up or dressing down as an Otavalo man depending on each case. In his daily life, he does not regularly wear traditional *alpargatas* instead of ordinary trainers (like

Reeboks). However, that does not mean that he has forgotten his traditional Otavalo outfit. It is a mixture of both: perhaps he wears Reebok shoes daily, but in the same way, he also wears his 'guango' (a specific way to braid his hair that is common among men and women in the Otavalo community). Andrés is far from being an 'indio revestido' [dressed up indigenous man], a derogatory term for indigenous people who try to deny their culture by dressing as *mestizos* (Lentz 2000: 227). Instead, his portrayal shows the coexistence of what is national/traditional with what is global/foreign in one character, who can fluidly cross from one dimension to another depending on the context; or rather, be in both simultaneously.

Andrés' ability to cross borders is similarly expressed in the language he uses to tell his memoirs for – as Andrés Neuman points out – 'en toda problemática de identidad o de cultura, la lengua desempeña un papel esencial' (Lints 2016: 245) ['in every question of identity or culture, language plays an essential role']. Andrés moves from Kichwa to Spanish to English, resisting the link between his written words and one specific nation. Instead, he mixes the three languages to show a hybrid subject in which English, the *lingua franca* of the globalised present; Spanish, the language of the conquest and colonisation of Hispanic America and the majority language of Ecuador; and Kichwa, a marginalised and silenced language that embodies a past prior to the creation of Latin American nation-states, coexist.<sup>6</sup> While his narration is written in Spanish, in New York Andrés eats 'hot dogs', visits the 'desk' and shops in the 'grocery'. He describes these actions naturally, the same way he talks about his 'taita' [father] or remembers the 'guaguas' [children] and 'runas' of his community, where young punk and metal musicians are criticised for not playing only traditional Andean music.

The interchangeability of language in Andrés' memoirs responds to one of the functions of multilingualism in literature: to contribute to unite heterogeneous elements (Van Hecke 2016: 189). In this case, the heterogeneous elements united by language are several. It is not simply Andrés' indigeneity mixed with the European origin of Spanish, but the whole and more complex history of Latin American nations that are – as Néstor García Canclini reminds us – the result of 'la sedimentación, yuxtaposición y entrecruzamiento de tradiciones indígenas (sobre todo en las áreas mesoamericana y andina), del hispanismo colonial católico y de las acciones políticas, educativas y comunicacionales modernas' (Canclini 1990: 71) ['the sedimentation, juxtaposition and intercrossing of indigenous traditions (especially in the Andean and Meso-American areas), of colonial Catholic Hispanism and modern political, educational and communicational actions']. To this already mixed reality where Kichwa interacts with Spanish – and Kichwa words such as 'ñaño' [brother] are used every day in the

'mishu' Ecuadorian society – Arcos adds another layer, that of English, being spoken by an indigenous character. Andrés uses the three languages thereby uniting multiple heterogeneities in one character, who reveals that his mixture comes from his national tradition as much as from his interactions with the world beyond the nation.

Andrés crosses borders that divide languages according to nationalities, but perhaps more significantly, he also traverses frontiers externally assigned to indigeneity. In Ecuador, by 2010, less than two percent of the country's population spoke English, prompting those who did to be considered part of an 'elite' (British Council 2015: 23). However, the sentiment of belonging to 'elites', be these economic or cultural, is predominantly reserved for *mestizos* like María Clara, Andrés' classmate at Columbia. After all, Ecuadorian indigenous communities are mostly poorer than any other ethnic group in the country as 'the probability of being poor increases by 13 percent and the probability of being extremely poor by 15.5 percent if the household head belongs to an indigenous group' (World Bank 2015: 61). Similarly, only a minimal percentage of the Ecuadorian indigenous population has a university degree or a higher education level, and even less have gone on to postgraduate studies (Castellanos 2017: 146). By incorporating English into his writing, Andrés steps into the 'elite' of Ecuadorian English speakers and surpasses many of them by being trilingual. Thereby, he challenges the negative statistics and forces readers to see him as an indigenous character who is not contained within the barriers that are supposed to surround indigenous people like him.

By crossing barriers that confine indigeneity, Andrés defies colonial discourse: he refuses the 'fixity' of his own stereotype. Homi Bhabha argues that 'an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependency on the concept of "fixity" in the ideological construction of otherness' (Bhabha 1997: 293). For Bhabha, 'fixity' is a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism and – like stereotype – possesses an ambivalent nature. It is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and what must be repeated. In his clothes, his 'guango' and his Kichwa proficiency, Arcos' Andrés acknowledges and denotes his difference to the 'mishus', who can consequentially identify him as an indigenous man; but at the same time, by speaking English, wearing Reeboks and – more radically– by developing a sexual relationship with his *mestiza* classmate María Clara, he refuses to keep himself 'in place' and transgresses the limits of the ideological construction of indigenous otherness assigned to him.

In Andrés' transgressions, *Memorias de Andrés Chilibingua* rejects the construction of indigeneity as a type of perfectly delimited and homogeneous subjectivity, critiquing it of being a construct derived from the expectations of non-indigenous people. These external pressures are noted and critiqued in the ways in which Andrés is expected to 'represent' his people in his visit to New York. To do so, it is implied, he must dress as one of them, that is to say, to be perfectly distinguishable as an Ecuadorian indigenous man in front of other students at Columbia. However, precisely for that reason, he is ridiculed by another Otavalo musician living in New York, who does not feel obliged to meet others' expectations:

– Has venido como los propios – dijo, sin dejar de reírse, al mirar mis alpargatas. Me vi en la obligación de explicarle que era por lo del curso, que todos los que habíamos sido invitados representábamos a cada pueblo y a cada cultura.

– Las alpargatas no hacen que representes a nadie. A mí nadie me pide que use alpargatas para saber que soy Otavalo – me replicó y lo sentí como un reproche –, aunque se les ve bien bacanas –continuó–. ¿Me podrás mandar unas? (Arcos 2013: 98)

[“You’ve come like the real deal”, he said, laughing, looking at my *alpargatas*. I found myself obliged to explain him that it was because of the course, that all those who were invited represented each people and culture.

“The *alpargatas* don’t make you represent anyone. Nobody asks me to wear *alpargatas* to let them know that I am Otavalo”, he replied, and it felt like a reproach, “Although they look very cool”, he continued. “Could you send me a pair?”]

Andrés' friend argues that he does not need a traditional outfit to represent his Otavalo heritage. Hence, that his indigeneity cannot be reduced to exterior traits, and it is incompatible with external attempts of classification. This argument is further explored in the novel, when the protagonist recalls a Spanish anthropologist who visited his hometown. They had an argument – Andrés recounts – because the anthropologist declared that Otavalo culture was lost, since its individuals had adopted foreign words and traditions to replace truly national ones.

El peninsular no se quedó ahí. Atacó duro. De acuerdo a él solo manteníamos la identidad Otavalo, es decir, la trenza, el poncho, la música, el mismo Inti Raymi y el Paukar Raymi, el vestido de las mujeres y sus bailes, por los negocios que hacíamos afuera, que era «marca de fábrica» para vender. Según él, no teníamos nada propio, hasta la música habíamos copiado de los bolivianos y peruanos, el sombrero era de los españoles y, además, me dijo que él podía probar que los vestidos de nuestras mujeres eran trajes típicos que usaban en Andalucía o en algún lugar de España. (Arcos 2013: 128)

[The Spaniard didn't stop there. He attacked hard. According to him, we only keep the Otavalo identity, that is to say, the braided hair, the poncho, the music, the Inti Raymi and the Paukar Raymi, the women's dress and their dances, because of the businesses we have abroad, that it was our "brand" to sell. In his view, we had nothing of our own, even the music we had copied from the Bolivians and Peruvians, the hat belonged to the Spaniards and, besides, he told me that he could prove that the dresses of our women were traditional outfits used in Andalusia or another part of Spain.]

The Spanish anthropologist, an outsider in Otavalo, suggests that Otavalos have lost their identity because of their adoption of others' cultural traits. Globalisation, he implies, has swallowed their traditions. His critique privileges a homogeneous view of his host community, in which before his eyes its people *are* their braided hair, their clothes, their music, their ancient festivals and their dances. He grasps globalisation as a phenomenon detrimental to this indigenous authenticity, in which national traditions disappear when they come into contact with the destabilising influence of other nations. This is a way of thinking that builds on what Fredric Jameson refers to as an 'Americanization' process. Jameson argues that 'American mass culture, associated as it is with money and commodities, enjoys a prestige that is perilous for most forms of domestic cultural production, which either find themselves wiped out (...) or co-opted and transformed beyond recognition' (Jameson 1998: 59). In his view – as in that of the Spanish anthropologist who confronts Andrés – the 'wiping out' of national or local culture follows globalisation, through which the cultures of dominant nations take over less fortunate ones.

*Memorias de Andrés Chiquinga* proposes an alternative way to see the interactions that occur in globalised contexts, crucially factoring in the notion of 'exchange' that is inherent to transnationalism, to non-indigenous readers. That is to say, the novel notes that influencing cultural elements travel in many directions, certainly from the centre to the peripheries; however, these may also find their origins in the peripheries. Andrés' community takes elements from their visitors to make them their own, in an appropriation process he is well aware of: he claims that the anthropologists who visit Otavalo 'dejaban palabras sobre nosotros mismos, y de repente esas palabras de a poco se iban haciendo parte de nosotros' (Arcos 2013: 129) ['they left words about us and, little by little, those words started to be part of us']. However, the novel also proposes that an indigenous cosmology influences the Western world: the ghost of *Huasipungo's* Andrés Chiquinga reveals to his descendant a story of origins in which the spirit of Taita Carnaval – an indigenous deity associated with abundance – travels from the Andes to ancient Greece, where he acts upon the 'cradle' of Western civilization:

Taita Carnaval es el hijo del amor del cielo y de la tierra, de toda la energía que viene desde lo más hondo de la noche, cuando miras las estrellas, y que entra como luz en la misma tierra. Él tuvo cuatro hermanos, todos con el mismo espíritu. Eras dos parejas de gemelos. Con Taita Carnaval eran cinco hermanos, él era el mayor. El primer par de gemelos son los luceros de la mañana y de la noche. Los naporunas todavía se acuerdan de ellos porque los ayudaron a atrapar al tigre come hombres. Señorearon en el oriente y el occidente. Del segundo par de gemelos, a uno le llamaron Dionisio, él se fue a un lugar llamado Grecia, llevando el mismo espíritu de Taita Carnaval. Los mishus de Europa dicen que de Grecia viene su cultura. (Arcos 2013: 207)

[Taita Carnaval is the son of the sky and the earth, of all the energy that comes from the deepest night, when you look at the stars, and that enters like light into the land itself. He had four siblings, all of them with the same spirit. These were two pairs of twins. Alongside Taita Carnaval, they were five, and he was the eldest. The first pair of twins are the stars of the morning and the night. The indigenous people from Napo still remember them, because they helped them to hunt the man-eating tiger. They mastered the Orient and the Occident. Of the second pair of twins, one of them was named Dionysus, and he went to a place called Greece, taking with him the spirit of Taita Carnaval. The people from Europe say that their culture comes from Greece.]

It is untrue that Ecuadorian indigenous communities believe in the Andean origins of the Greek god Dionysus. Nonetheless, Arcos' novel postulates this story to highlight that, despite their profound unevenness, transnational interactions do not work one-way only, countering Jameson's notion of American mass culture swallowing up national and local traditions. By resisting Jameson's view and proposing that influences might also work the other way around, Arcos invites readers to discard what theorists of transnationalism Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih define as a binary model of culture that contraposes North to South, and dominant to resistant (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 7). This model, they argue, is limited because it places its focus almost exclusively on the vertical power relationship between a 'major' nation like the United States and a 'minor' one like Ecuador. In doing so, it also ignores the minor cultural articulations in productive relationships with the major, as well as minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 8). The Andean Dionysus proposed by Arcos embodies this argument by shedding light on the national – even when it comes from a 'minor' position – in the understanding of transnational interactions, prompting us to focus on exchanges rather than on oppositions.

Focusing on the exchanges of the quintessential national character of Ecuadorian literature, Andrés Chiliblinga, is core to the proposal of Arcos' novel. Not because indigenous communities need a new generation of white *mestizo* writers to represent them through an

updated version of an old *indigenista* character, but because *Memorias de Andrés Chilibuina* equates exchange with border-crossing, and border-crossing with a contemporary understanding of the Ecuadorian nation through literature. In this light, to fully grasp the national, it is vital to see it transnationally. That is to say, the relentless movements of Andrés do not mean that he acts as a free-floating signifier without psychological or material investments in Ecuador. On the contrary, they are revealed to be symptomatic of a character whose nation cannot be thought of as contained within clearly defined territorial borders or defined by hard categorisations. As such, Andrés is one representative of contemporary Ecuador, where he can be a hybrid subject who merges together tradition and modernity, national and global, revealing that his transnationality – and that of Ecuador – manifests in time as well as in space.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations throughout are my own.

<sup>2</sup> I understand 'national novels' in the sense given by Doris Sommer as 'the books frequently required in the nations' secondary schools as sources of local history and literary pride' (Sommer 1991: 4). Although Sommer considers Juan León Mera's *Cumandá* (1879) as the Ecuadorian example of a national novel, in my view *Cumandá*'s impact remains far inferior to that of *Huasipungo*. It is not only that Icaza's work is better known nationally and internationally, but also that, more than any other, his novel seems to represent a source of literary pride and local history for Ecuadorian people. So much is evident by its inclusion in the national education programs both as a literary and historical reference.

<sup>3</sup> Migration has been part of Ecuadorians daily life most notably since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 1999, Ecuador went through an economic crisis – known as the *Feriado Bancario* [bank holiday] – that precipitated an unprecedented migration phenomenon in the early 2000s. Social sciences define this event as an 'exodus' in which, in less than a decade, a country whose total population barely exceeded 12 million people expelled almost one-third of its economically active population (Lagomarsino and Torres 2007: 8). The effects of

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migration significantly changed Ecuadorian society, with transformations ranging from the emergence of new economic paradigms to the reorganisation of family structures.

<sup>4</sup> For analyses of the October 2019 demonstrations see Leonizas Iza, Andrés Tapia and Andrés Madrid (2020), *Estallido. La rebelión de octubre en Ecuador* (Quito: Red Kapari); and Boaventura De Sousa Santos et al. (2020), *Ecuador. La insurrección de octubre*, ed. Camila Parodi and Nicolás Sticotti (Buenos Aires: CLACSO).

<sup>5</sup> Cuchitambo is a fictional location created by Icaza. However, it is understood that it is a *hacienda* located south of Quito, whereas Otavalo is located north of the capital, on the northern side of Ecuador.

<sup>6</sup> Silvia Goldman has studied the ways in which the poetry of the Chilean author Cecilia Vicuña 'weaves' together English, Spanish and Quechua to establish a speech between languages that pierces through territorial, cultural, and linguistic borders (Goldman: 2017).