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### Approaching Pixar's *Coco* during the Trump Era

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An archaeology of media approach guides this analysis of the film *Coco*, a 3D animated fiction movie inspired by the Day of the Dead or *Día de los muertos* in Mexico, and released by Pixar Animation Studios, a subsidiary of Walt Disney Studios, in 2017. In particular, I explore the tensions and contradictions within Pixar's most successful movie at the box office in taking a stand against Donald Trump's presentation of Mexicans as "rapists and drug-trafficking criminals". I argue that this film, despite its praise by audiences and critics as a 'pro-Mexico' film, does ultimately not vindicate Mexico's "good people". Instead, it promotes an institutionalized nationalist image of Mexico's heritage and identity, which goes back to the nineteenth century. Considering that Disney has the largest global market share in the film industry, *Coco*'s director Lee Unkrich's good intentions to make this film 'right' help to disseminate and support the Mexican government in its reconstruction of an imagined sociocultural homogeneity, which marginalizes non-dominant ways of life in a culturally rich and diverse country.

**Keywords:** *Coco*, Pixar, Trump, Día de muertos, Media Archaeology



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## **Approaching Pixar's *Coco* during the Trump Era<sup>1</sup>**

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### **1) Archaeology of Media**

The importance of mass media to everyday lives compelled the discipline of anthropology to analyze the significance of information produced through newspapers, magazines, television and film-production studios, including its means of distribution.<sup>2</sup> Anthropology has been one step ahead of archaeology when it comes to reinventing itself to approach cinema studies.<sup>3</sup> Not even the release of the blockbuster film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Spielberg 1981) incited a prompt analytical response from archaeologists, even if after its release, their departments experienced significant growth in student enrollment. No wonder, Thomas Elsaesser suggests that the emergence of the archaeology of media is more a symptom than a desire to create a discipline to analyze the power structures and micro-histories of the dominant narratives dispersed by them, something also noticed by Rodney Harrison.<sup>4</sup> Symptom or not, literature on Media Archaeology has grown over the last decade to a point in which we are in a position to approach the tensions and contradictions embedded in the narratives and accounts of 'the other' in the world of animated cinema.<sup>5</sup> The following pages discuss the film *Coco*, produced by Pixar-Disney, as an example.

The archaeology of media has been particularly concerned with the mass production of fictional stories and imaginary worlds as the new process of history making,<sup>6</sup> of which *Coco* is no exception. Such a concern requires film analysis to discuss the powerful reach of cinema to distribute information and images to different types of audiences, along with the interests of those who own and control them.<sup>7</sup> Given the induced social transformations by mass media worldwide, Appadurai (ibid. 35f.) made a call for anthropology to explore these phenomena

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning and portrayal of archaeology in contemporary popular culture derives from the larger research focus of 'Alternative Mexico', a project by the author and supported by UNAM-PAPIIT. Research presented here was conducted while holding a research award invitation from the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung at the Iberoamerikanisches Institut and the Rathgen Labor of the Preussischer Kultur Besitz in Berlin in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See Appadurai (1996).

<sup>3</sup> See David / Wogan (2009).

<sup>4</sup> See Elsaesser (2016: 181) and Harrison (2010).

<sup>5</sup> See Hiscock (2012), Holtorf (2016), Huhtamo / Parikka (2011) and Parikka (2012).

<sup>6</sup> See Harrison (2010: 2).

<sup>7</sup> See Appadurai (1996: 35).

through its distinctive theoretical concerns and methodologies. Appadurai introduced the term "mediascape" to analyze the political setting in which a large repertoires of images, narratives and group identities reach a massive number of viewers (Appadurai 1996: 35f.). The term "mediascape" is used here to demonstrate *Coco's* narrative is based on loose accounts of those living in Mexico, offering endless possibilities to construct imaginary worlds inhabited by characters and objects telling new stories about 'the other'.

## 2) *Coco* – where the north meets the south

*Coco*, directed by Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina, and co-produced with Darla K. Anderson, tells the story of Miguel Rivera, a dark skinned boy, who wants to become a musician against his family's wishes. The music and colorful pecked paper with skull images shown in the opening of the film creates the perfect setting for the audience to know the story will unfold on *Día de muertos*. Praised by the film industry and critics for its 'respect' of Mexican culture, this 175 million USD film casts Mexican actors Alfonso Araú, Gael García Bernal and Ana Ofelia Murguía. Receiving two Academy Awards for Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song, and Best Animated film at the BAFTA Awards and the Golden Globes, *Coco* has above all been highlighted as a 'pro-Mexico' film.<sup>8</sup> For critics and audiences, the film takes a stand against Donald Trump's portrayal of Mexicans as rapists and criminals, as highlighted in a rambling speech he gave during his presidential campaign in 2015.

Such an anti-Mexican sentiment is not new to the US, but Trump broke here with norms of political correctness that had dominated world politics for decades. Furthermore, his offensive speeches granted permission to publicly express suppressed feelings of discrimination and hate towards Mexicans. In this context, Trump has resorted to an ancient and effective *divide et impera* strategy, which forced individuals to take sides on every issue at stake during the campaign, including essentialist and xenophobic notions about Mexicans in an already fractured social environment. Contrary to Trump's remarks, however, it could be argued that "Mexico has helped make Hollywood great again" (Rose 2018) by sending their best actors, directors and cinematographers. The industry was already in need of a different approach to provide entertainment movies, and that was introduced by Mexican filmmakers Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo del Toro, and cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki, who dominated the Oscars in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

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<sup>8</sup> See Rose (2018).

The release of *Coco* on October 20, 2017, during the Morelia International Film Festival in Mexico, took place within the political backdrop of Trump's campaign. As the film opens, Unkrich's good intentions to vindicate Mexico's good people begin with a mariachi version of the iconic song 'When you wish upon a star', used at the beginning of most Walt Disney Company films. The film takes place in Santa Cecilia, hometown to Ernesto de la Cruz, a beloved singer and artist who achieved fame thanks to his song 'Remember Me'. Miguel Rivera tells the story of Mamá Imelda, who was abandoned by her husband so that he could pursue his career as a guitar player. Despite Mamá Imelda prohibiting the family to play music, Miguel spends his free time learning how to play the guitar in the hope of becoming a famous musician,

Determined to participate in a talent show at the town plaza, taking place on *Día de muertos*, Miguel grabs his guitar to make his dream come true, accompanied by a street dog, a Xoloitzcuintle, conveniently named Dante. Miguel hides Dante and his guitar under the altar, which displays photographs of the deceased members of his family, along with flowers, food offerings, and candles. Dante accidentally knocks down a picture of Mamá Imelda, which had been folded to cover the torn photograph of Mamá Coco's father, who is revealed to be holding the same guitar used by Ernesto de la Cruz. After insisting de la Cruz is Mamá Coco's father, his "abuelita" destroys the guitar. Defying the family, he runs away and takes de la Cruz's guitar placed at his mausoleum. As he begins to play the first strokes, Miguel is taken to a world inhabited by skeletons, among them are his deceased family members, who have crossed over from the Land of the Dead through a border with a Maya style façade and pink neon sign, which could be interpreted to be the US-Mexican border.

Anybody who has crossed the US-Mexican border can relate to what the skeletons go through when customs agents ask for their visa and passport. In *Coco*, the dead are only able to cross if their photograph was placed at their family altar and they too have to declare their belongings to custom agents. Evidently, the deceased live in a better world than the living, a modern land with tall fancy buildings in a European style and urban transportation. This is the US side, contrasting strongly with the underdeveloped town of Santa Cecilia. These scenes allude to those who have crossed illegally into the US and who are unable to go back to Mexico for fear of being deported. The film portrays a skeleton named Héctor, attempting to cross the border with a fake identity, only to find himself faltering in the 'desert' (represented by a Mexican marigold field) before he is detained by border police. In these scenes, the producers make very explicit references to Trump's immigration policies, which include, among other measures, reinforcing border security by completing the building of a wall, and deporting immigrants who arrived in the US as children.

Miguel is seen in the film crossing without the right papers to see Mamá Imelda, who lives 'on the other side' / *al otro lado* and is stranded in the Land of the Living, as her photo does not appear to have been placed at the altar. Making her case to customs agents, she finds out that Trump's "bad hombre" not only transgressed the world of the dead, he took her photograph from the altar and stole Ernesto de la Cruz's guitar. Facing 'deportation', Mamá Imelda demands Miguel to place her photograph on the altar and give up music. In line with Trump's rhetoric, Mamá Imelda, says, "You go home my way or no way". Miguel refuses, runs away and meets Héctor, whose photograph has never been placed at an altar, and is most likely the image of the *coyote*, a smuggler of illegal migrant. Subsequently, he 'charges' Miguel with a 'fee' for disguising him and helps him find de la Cruz in the Land of the Dead. In this new journey, Miguel finds himself in Diego Rivera's atelier, one of Mexico's most iconic painters, and meeting famous painter, Frida Kahlo. Finally meeting de la Cruz, Miguel is introduced to Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete, icons of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema who most likely inspired Ernesto de la Cruz's character. They are shown in classic black and white clips in the film, and the beautiful women look and dance like actress Dolores del Río. For such links to the Mexican Golden Age period, Unkrich could draw on earlier Disney films, including *The Three Caballeros* (Ferguson et al. 1944), produced by Walt Disney himself after his visit to Mexico as Goodwill Ambassador under the orders of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. At the end of the story, Héctor finds out that de la Cruz murdered him for his songs. After publicly unmasking de la Cruz, Mamá Imelda gives Miguel her unconditional blessing to play 'Remember me' for Mamá Coco upon his return, and she shows him the missing piece of the family photo, which ensures that Héctor does not meet his final death. In a traditional Disney happy-ending structure, the villain receives justice and Miguel pursues his vocation as a musician.

### 3) Defying Donald Trump's anti-Mexican rhetoric with *Coco*?

In 2018, the producers of *Coco* received the Oscar and BAFTA award for best-animated feature film. For both awards, Unkrich thanked the people of Mexico for their beautiful culture and tradition, saying, "[w]ith *Coco* we tried to take a step forward towards a world where non-white children can grow up seeing characters in movies that look and talk and live like they do. Representation matters. Marginalized people deserve to feel like they belong" (Unkrich in BAFTA 2018: 00':46"-01':01").

Shortly afterwards, *Coco* 'became the talk of the town'. In blogs, newspapers and periodicals like *Vogue* and *VanityFair*, writers highlighted that *Coco*'s narrative defies Trump, making it

the most important film of 2018.<sup>9</sup> Since the story is also about the importance of family, the film resonated with every culture around the world and became a blockbuster, ranking within the top 20 highest grossing animated films ever. Undoubtedly, behind *Coco* are the producers' good intentions to send a positive message about Mexico.<sup>10</sup> However, I remain concerned about the rhetoric behind the narrative of this 'love letter to Mexico'. In my opinion, the film disseminates a nationalist image of Mexico's heritage and identity, which has obscured alternative accounts and non-dominant narratives of a far more diverse Mexican culture. In particular, the film reproduces a stereotypical image of Mexico and its citizens, which resonates well with tourists.

Discussed in more detail elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> Mexico's current definition of heritage results from nation-building needs and interests after its subjection to the Spanish Crown came to an end. Drawing on the spirit of the French Revolution, a national historical consciousness was developed that includes the heritage of indigenous populations as emblematic of its national ethnicity. Not by coincidence, *Coco* displays images of Mexico's infatuation with French culture and spirit, enhanced during Porfirio Díaz' presidential terms, by creating a world populated with French style buildings. The film also had to include examples of Mexico's archaeological richness, declared by Porfirio Díaz as national properties in 1902,<sup>12</sup> and even artistic monuments, a concept institutionalized by President Victoriano Huerta in 1914.<sup>13</sup>

It is, however, President Lázaro Cárdenas's merit to bring these elements together as Mexico's cultural patrimony in 1939, by founding the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) for the protection and promotion of Mexico's economic and social welfare programs. Tied to its foundation, Cárdenas implemented a business model to reduce Mexico's poverty levels, which creates economic value from Mexico's patrimony by fostering its tourism. For indigenous populations to contribute to Mexico's economic growth, this business model included the selling of crafts or *artesanías* as 'survivals' of Mexico's past.<sup>14</sup> Key to this model was the support by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and now Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI), the Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías (FONART) and the Museo Nacional de Artes e Industrias Populares (MNAIP). Although tourism and craft selling proved to be unsuccessful strategies for poverty reduction, the strategy remains in place and is consequently also key for *Coco*. In particular, the Secretariat of Tourism created "Pueblos

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<sup>9</sup> See Ruiz (2018).

<sup>10</sup> See Keveney (2019).

<sup>11</sup> See López Varela (2018; 2015).

<sup>12</sup> See Schroeder Cordero (1984: 672).

<sup>13</sup> See Rodríguez Morales (2011).

<sup>14</sup> See Dietz (1995).

Mágicos" in 2001, to promote a magical experience through the natural beauty these towns have to offer to its visitors, along with their cultural richness, traditions, folklore, historical relevance, cuisine, art crafts and great hospitality. *Coco* draws on this tradition and, as such, it stands for Mexico's 'policy of assimilation', centered on the state's long-time interest in forging a culturally homogenized and modern nation.<sup>15</sup> This includes the alienation of languages, traditions and technologies of those living in poverty, because they are considered obstructions to Mexico's economic growth.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4) *Coco* as mediascape

*Coco* disseminates a series of images and narratives that align with Mexican state sponsored ideology, which has created tensions in its definition of heritage, as it sets strict temporal limits for the preservation of archaeological, artistic and historic monuments, leaving Mexico's modern heritage resources unprotected. Beyond the twentieth century, stewards preserve only properties exhibiting relevant aesthetic values. By binding heritage to strict temporal limits, the state has excluded alternative forms of heritage that are relevant for Mexican society, such as the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. Mexico belongs to one of very few countries in the world, which remain unable to recognize outstanding citizens as part of its heritage, such as actors Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete.<sup>17</sup> The film industry is not completely at fault for not showing 'alternative' values of Mexico's heritage. For more than two centuries, the Mexican government has tried to 'hide' the physical, intellectual, moral, and economic underdevelopment, which restrains Mexico from becoming a country like Germany, France or Japan.<sup>18</sup>

*Coco* promotes a tourist image of Mexico, accentuated by the neon-lit atmosphere of colonial Spanish-style charming streets and buildings inhabiting the Land of the Living. Inspired by the producers' and crew's visit to Michoacan, Oaxaca<sup>19</sup> and Guanajuato<sup>20</sup>, a city not far away from San Miguel de Allende with a population of ten thousand retired US and Canadian citizens and veterans, the film highlights a particular vision of Mexico's national heritage properties with focus on archaeological, artistic and historic monuments. Undeniably, these 'towns' are part of Mexico, but so are other regions of Mexico, populated with history and legends, telling a different 'story' about Mexico's people, especially those living in 'rural' areas, who are forced to migrate to the US to compensate for the economic and social failures of the Mexican state.

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<sup>15</sup> See Caso (1958) and Gamio (1916).

<sup>16</sup> See López Varela (2015).

<sup>17</sup> See López Varela (2019).

<sup>18</sup> See Gamio (1916: 10).

<sup>19</sup> See Imaginario (2018).

<sup>20</sup> See Rose (2018).

When *Coco*'s teaser came out, it sparked a debate surrounding its originality. Who got it right, *The Book of Life* or *Coco*? I would argue that both films are good examples of past and present governments' efforts to make its citizens and viewers around the world accept and internalize one homogenous national identity model. *The Book of Life*, produced by Guillermo del Toro and directed by Jorge Gutiérrez for Century Fox in 2014, is another story about Día de Muertos, based on cultural dynamic experiences of urban life, which are closer to Mexico's modern national identity than to its revered archaeological past. The film takes place in San Ángel, one of Mexico City's wealthiest neighborhoods, characterized by colonial churches, manors, highly visited crafts markets, cobblestone streets, expensive restaurants, luxurious boutiques and homes, including Diego Rivera's atelier. San Ángel's 'beauty and magical charm' is hardly the norm where Mexican children grow up. Still, San Ángel is a living reality for a highly privileged sector in Mexico. Maybe from the point of view of those who have absorbed the state narrative as part of their identity, *Coco* exalts Mexico's national historic consciousness and for them it takes a stand against Trump, but this does not work from an archaeological point of view.<sup>21</sup>

For example, *Coco*'s mise-en-scène drowns in a world of crafts found at various markets. At Mexico City's well-known *Bazar del sábado*, one can buy carton skeletons wearing European aristocratic attires with French-style makeup, along with colorful pecked paper, as shown in the film. Portraying the dead as 'catrines' and *catrinas*, the producers dignify wealthy Mexicans of the Porfiriato, but not Mexico's masses back then – and even less Mexican masses today. These skeletons created by illustrator and lithographer José Guadalupe Posada are satirical images of wealthy Mexicans during this period, wearing make-up to make their skin look whiter, and to erase their 'shameful' non-European origins. The fantastic animals shown in *Coco* co-existing with the dead were created by Pedro Linares López in the 1930s, captivating Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, who made them popular. In the 1970s, British filmmaker Judith Bronowski, fascinated with *alebrijes*, took them to local artisans in Oaxaca, who adopted their making through her craft workshops. The *alebrije* in *Coco* is not a substitute for the belief among many populations in Mexico that every individual, since birth, keeps a spiritual coexistence with an animal that will determine its personality and destiny.

At Cuentepec, in the State of Morelos, people celebrate *Día de muertos* very differently. Celebrations for *mehkailwitl*, Day of the Dead, begin on October 28, when those who perish in an accident or violently will arrive at noon. On October 29, those who drowned will join them.

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<sup>21</sup> See Parikka (2012: 2).



Those who no longer are remembered because they no longer have living family members come on October 30. The unborn and those who were never baptized arrive on the 31st, while children come on November 1 and adults on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. To welcome them, people place an offering on the ground, over a palm rug or *petate*, which is spatially divided in two, by placing a censer with white candles in the middle to honor the deceased matrilineal (right) and patrilineal (left) sides of the family (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: At Cuentepec, in the State of Morelos, the offering on Día de muertos is placed on a mat. The offerings are divided in two by a censer, and to honor the deceased matrilineal (right) and patrilineal (left) members of the family with tamales, oranges, mole, sweet bread, flowers, coffee, and soda (López Varela 2000: Cuentepec-CONACyT Project).

Overall, *mehkailwitl* is a celebration for renewal, not only are people bought new clothes that day, everything at their 'altar' is freshly made. For the offering, women have usually spent days gathering ingredients to cook green mole and white tamales (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Preparing tamales on *Día de muertos* by two women at Cuentepec (López Varela 2000: Cuentepec-CONACyT Project).

Since this is a town where most live in extreme poverty, they add pieces of chicken to these main plate offerings if they can afford. Clay jugs with water, cups filled with salt and bags of sugar are also placed on the offering, along with bottles of coke and tins filled with flowers. If one were to visit other nearby towns on *Día de muertos*, one could appreciate the enormous diversity of this celebration, which does not tend to include 'catrines' and *catrinas*. In this sense, *Coco* gives not only an oversimplified but very misleading tourist view of the Day of the Dead.

The problem is not about who got it right, Del Toro or Unkrich, because both films were ultimately created for mass entertainment. If, however, these films are the center of this discussion it has to do with the power of Disney and Century Fox studios to disseminate a fictional story to be consumed as the D-Day of the Dead in Mexico. It has the potential to obscure the lifeways of 'others', who evidently were not 'attractive' enough to be included in these films and would not contribute to the \$807 million USD in gross earnings of the film, as they do not provide the visitor with a 'picturesque image' of their poverty.

Regrettably, the Trump era has created a 'post-truth' age, where the world is consuming fake news and even the oxymoron, "alternative facts", introduced by Kellyanne Conway, US Counselor to the President during an interview in 2017. Today, people are having a hard time separating facts from fiction, and it is possible that Unkrich (2018) really believes there is only one Mexico – the brown toned skinned one – to which children can relate to through *Coco*'s characters, as they look alike, and they talk like they do. However, Mexico comes in different skin colors and backgrounds, although the obsession with ethnicity made its way into a constitutional change in the 1990s, when Mexicans were divided into indigenous and non-indigenous populations.<sup>22</sup> Already Kracauer wrote that "[f]ilms are the mirror of the prevailing society", and financed by powerful corporations, they have to adapt to the tastes of the audience in order to make a profit (Kracauer 1995: 291). He furthermore argues, the more incorrectly these films present "the surface of things", the more correct they become and the more clearly they mirror the secret mechanism of society (Kracauer 1995: 292). *Coco*'s script is one example for this as it is based on loose data, and it is at risk of substituting anthropological research with a narrative that constructs a homogeneous society and therefore helps the Mexican state reproduce its "imaginary community" (Anderson 2006). The potential of mass media to produce nations and shape national imaginaries,<sup>23</sup> is the reason why Arjun Aappadurai is central to this analysis. *Coco* fulfills all the characteristics of a mediascape with the potential to suppress existing alternative accounts and non-dominant narratives of 'others'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See López Varela (2015).

<sup>23</sup> See Ginsburg et al. (2002: 11).

<sup>24</sup> See Harrison (2010: 329).

### 5) Bitter ending

Since the 19th century, 'white' camera lenses have shown substantial interest in 'indigenous populations' and their exotic lives, not without criticism of their films for being politically charged and creating a romanticized record of these people.<sup>25</sup> The film industry turned their exoticism into popular entertainment and at first large numbers of Plains Indians signed on to play 'Indians' in movies,<sup>26</sup> as this matched the taste of early 20th century audiences. Since then, the taste has changed and now the portrayal of 'Latinos' is one of the US advertising industry's most coveted market segments (Dávila 2002: 264).<sup>27</sup> However, profits do not tend to reach the people portrayed. This is particularly obvious in the case of *Coco*, which raised \$807 million USD in gross earnings but did not pay back any significant amount to those communities that the film took inspiration from.

For example, family and friends of María Salud Ramírez Caballero, an artisan living in Santa Fé de la Laguna, in the state of Michoacan, claim their 105-year-old 'Nana Salud' has significantly inspired Mamá Coco.<sup>28</sup> Granddaughter Patricia Pérez Hernández has stated the unfairness behind the producers not giving her official recognition in their modeling of Mamá Coco's character after her appearance. This is not the first time the private industry has appropriated Mexico's 'indigenous' cultures. From Carolina Herrera, Nestlé to Hermés and even Pineda Covalín, these companies have taken from Mexico's culture, without hardly recognizing it or paying what Mexico's producers deserve for their selling of products for thousands of US dollars. Unfortunately, the issuing of a new law,<sup>29</sup> protecting indigenous populations in Mexico through the National Institute for Indigenous Populations, not only came in late, it mandates the institution to create measures to protect intellectual property without any mention of sanctions or compensation to indigenous populations. If those living in Santa Fé are right about their town was used in *Coco* as part of its scenery, Disney-Pixar have taken from this community. On the other hand, the only 'benefit' their appropriation brought to the community is their being visited by tourists who want to meet Nana Salud and take their picture with her, which could mean further income for the town's selling of crafts. While municipal authorities recognized Nana Salud as ambassador of the region's artisans for her contributions to her hometown,<sup>30</sup> *Coco*'s producers have kept quiet.

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<sup>25</sup> See Prins (2002: 61).

<sup>26</sup> See Prins (2002: 61).

<sup>27</sup> See Dávila (2002: 64).

<sup>28</sup> See Arrieta (2018).

<sup>29</sup> See DOF (2018).

<sup>30</sup> See Arrieta (2018).

If there is a genuine interest in writing against global inequalities and in representing people in distant villages as part of the same cultural worlds we inhabit,<sup>31</sup> then surely archaeologists require new skills and sensitivities for communicating effectively with the wider audience. Unfortunately, there are hardly any programs offering correlated degrees in film studies, despite archaeology and its fieldwork adventures appealing to a large number of people. Overall, the discipline of archaeology has created huge profits for the film and television industries by taking advantage of state discourses and disregarding films, documentaries and TV series as valid forms of entertainment to communicate research.<sup>32</sup> It is worth stressing that the *Indiana Jones* films, for example, have played a significant role in stimulating the public's interest in archaeological exploration. In recognition, actor Harrison Ford became an elected member of the Board of Directors of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) in 2008. All this highlights that archaeology is a brand, which has to be developed further.<sup>33</sup>

In Mexico, archaeologists and anthropologists have in particular failed to understand the dominant representation of research and the development of human culture in mainstream cinema.<sup>34</sup> Mexico's stewards have created a YouTube channel promoting their activities with only 118k subscribers in a country with a population of 130 million inhabitants.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, there are exceptions of good practices of creating entertainment programs to communicate scientific information. German Public Television (ZDF), for example, collaborates with institutions and experts to produce programs in which artificial intelligence is used to 'discover' and 'illustrate' people's past. *Terra X*, a TV program, shows scientific 'discoveries' through documented expeditions. The President of the Preussischer Kultur Besitz, Hermann Parzinger, is casted regularly as part of the TV show 'Rätsel alter Weltkulturen' and has been interviewed many times by the Deutsche Welle, giving a more complete picture of the role of an archaeologist in today's world. Parzinger is an expert in making archaeology 'public knowledge' and, as such, one of the few archaeologists taking advantage of the novel opportunities mass media creates to communicate the contributions archaeological research makes to the contemporary world.

Therefore, it is time to abandon the conservative approach to archaeology in Mexico, which was well suited for the educated classes of the twentieth century but is far from suiting contemporary audiences with diverse social backgrounds. The value of national monuments as

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<sup>31</sup> See Ginsburg et al. (2002).

<sup>32</sup> See Holtorf (2016).

<sup>33</sup> See Holtorf (2016).

<sup>34</sup> See Hiscock (2012).

<sup>35</sup> See López Varela (2019).

people's heritage has changed. Society has transformed its value systems. If we do not change the nationalistic approach to archeology, how can we complain about the film industry perpetuating stereotypes of Mexico as a paradise dream for every villain wishing to escape justice or that of a country in which men are lazy drunks, while women's aspirations rely on serving a wealthy home and marrying the family's handsome rich son?

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