

La Misma Luna:
Comments on the Mexican-US American Migration Debate

Dr. Petra Vogler

(Intercultural Education and Management, Germany)

Patricia Riggen, the producer and director of *La Misma Luna* (2009) draws our attention to a human tragedy that is often ignored:

Women are now crossing the border. It used to be men. Now, there are 4 million women in this country who have left a child behind. When people ask me if this is a true story, I tell them that it is based on 4 million true stories. These women have no other options and make the most difficult sacrifice of all because no mother would leave her child unless she was desperate. That was something I wanted to explore. Rosario has a huge dilemma having made this decision in order to provide for her child because she loves him, while at the same time feeling like she's sacrificing that love. It's not just a statistic to me. These are human beings and that's what I wanted to show. (in: *Women and Hollywood* 2008)

Riggen's drama explores the migration of nine year old "Carlitos" (Adrián Alonso) and his mother Rosario (Kate del Castillo) to the United States. The mother-son-relationship exemplifies the potential tragedy of many young Mexican women who have already migrated to the US in search for a better life while leaving their children back home. In this case, single mother Rosario has worked as a housekeeper and babysitter in Los Angeles for more than four years and her dream is to obtain American citizenship, which would allow her to bring Carlitos to the U.S. and provide him with a good education. However, this dream seems far from coming true and, instead, the contact to her son is limited to one phone call per week. Carlitos suffers from all this, and so it is no surprise that he takes the first opportunity to cross the border in search for his mother. Unfortunately, the vehicle of the two smugglers who agree to bring him to LA is confiscated at the Texan border, and there is no other option for the boy than to continue his journey on foot. In this context, he joins migrant workers hired to pick tomatoes, but as 'illegals' they are persecuted by the police. Enrique (Eugenio Derbez), a worker who manages to escape, bonds with the boy and starts to take care of him. He even helps Carlitos find his biological father but that father is not willing to help him, so Enrique and Carlitos continue their journey to LA until Carlitos is spotted by the police. Only thanks to Enrique's self-sacrifice Carlitos is able to get away, he finds the payphone from which his mother used to call him and, at the end, mother and son are reunited.

Clearly, *La Misma Luna* does not exclusively focus on the challenges of migration to the U.S., but – within and beyond this topic – in particular on the love which drives people north to

help their families survive. Love for the family is an essential element which director Patricia Riggen wants to emphasize. During an interview in Los Angeles she mentioned that the film highlights the importance of human orientation, family and care, and there is evidence that Rosario and Carlitos are driven by a higher force: Their wish to come together again is based on an extremely strong, indestructible love, and on the faith that – against all odds – their paths will cross again. It is also noticeable that the moments of sacrifice which individuals face when migrating are contrasted with alienating interpersonal experiences. In this regard, many scenes work as reminders of the importance of critical thought and understanding when talking about migrants and their motivation, and there is clear evidence that Riggen wants to encourage the audience to develop empathy for individuals who are forced into such unfortunate living conditions as Rosario and Carlitos.

When depicting a mother-son relationship, *La Misma Luna* underlines the importance of love within the family from a female perspective. The effects of being framed as an unwanted person and the link to questions of basic personal dignity and psychosomatic health in an inhumane society based on competitive and, in many respects, ‘masculine’ patterns of thought are main themes of the film. Without any doubt, the “humanization” of migration experiences is a particular strength of the film.

Bibliography

WOMEN AND HOLLYWOOD (2008): ‘Interview with Patricia Riggen, director of *La Misma Luna*’, in: *Women and Hollywood. News and commentary about Hollywood from a feminist perspective*, 19th March 2008, (<http://womenandhollywood.blogspot.com/2008/03/interview-with-patricia-riggen-director.html>) (accessed 12th of February 2012).