

**The need for an integrated response to social segregation: Legal perspectives on the ghettoization of Chicano communities as mirrored in Gregory Nava's *My Family***

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Gregory Nava's international movie success *My family* highlights in a humorous but provocative way substantial differences in housing conditions between Latino communities and the dominant Anglo-American mainstream population. This is particularly obvious if we compare the small wooden house of the Sanchez family in East LA with the impressive Anglo-American residence in West LA in which young Maria works as a housekeeper. A rough road in front of the family house and the vegetable garden in the back stand very much in contrast to the well-built drive way and the decorative garden of the residence. The difference between poor migrant areas and significantly richer 'native' neighbourhoods is stressed also by the repeated 'mise-en-scène' of bridges that, on the one hand, link the two parts of the city but, on the other hand, mark the boundaries which separate the two 'camps' and act as a symbol for one way traffic (from East to West), a direct result of the economic differences. At the end of the film, Memo – the only son who lives and works as a successful lawyer in the centre of LA – is not by coincidence the first in the family to introduce an Anglo-American fiancée and her parents to the simple life of his own Latino family while trying to hide the most problematic parts, such as the criminal life and temporary imprisonment of his brother Jimmy. The film finishes with a shot from Paco standing on the wooden terrace of the family home to the skyscrapers in the centre as if there is a suggestion that all this could be the future for most Chicanos in the United States, but how realistic is such an idea?

From a legal perspective, the above mentioned scenes could be regarded as potential indications of violations of section 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (United Nations Document 1948: A/810-25)

In fact, most countries have made a declaration in similar terms considering housing a right. Nevertheless, the kind of recognition made and the effects of it in a practical sense are still far

away from the spirit of the original legislators. In December 2000 in Nice, EU leaders, the European Commission and the European Parliament proclaimed the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. This charter draws together for the first time all personal, civil, political, economic, and social rights into a single text. The way the charter was drafted was itself an achievement by involving all EU institutions, national parliaments and a broad spectrum of civil society. Although the text does not dedicate one specific section to housing, it refers to the freedom of movements and residence, understanding that this right implies housing. Nonetheless, there is a specific right to good government: public authorities must work to address citizens' needs. A good example might be Spain where references to housing policy appear in article 47 of the constitution.

By contrast, in the United States, housing has never been recognized as a constitutional right. This does not mean that the importance has not been recognised but it is probably fair to say that U.S. housing policy initiatives are predominantly aimed at supporting private housing provision and have never been the government's key priority (see Gómez Jiménez/Koebel 2007). In particular, the U.S. lack a federal or state housing plan, as it exists in Spain, although both the federal and state authorities regularly provide funds to local housing authorities. Such a housing plan, which could substantially support integration processes, would have to be developed with particular regard for cultural differences in land use, the recently again more visible 'Not in my backyard' (NIMBY) mentality and repeated claims for a "just city". As Gregory Nava highlights in *My family*, at this stage the "just city" simply does not exist, but it is essential to reduce ghettoization, criminality and monocultural identity concepts which should have no place in a globalised world, and in this context a decent housing plan could be a starting point.

## **Bibliography**

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