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Identity and Otherness in
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Identity and Otherness in Contemporary Chicano Cinema **– An introduction**

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1) Preliminary remarks

In the last decades, most Western nations have become countries of very significant immigration and diaspora. The effects of increasing globalisation have accelerated this process, and the results have been closely monitored and discussed, not only in political discourse but in the media as well. Cinema and TV are no exception, and in a virtual world media portrayals of cultural encounters are of key importance, be it as potential reflections of popular attitudes, ideas and preoccupations towards migration, or as regards their likely impact on popular views and opinions on the topic (see Rings 2008; Loshitzky 2010; Gömann/Jaschke/ Mrugalla 2011).

All this is a particularly hot topic in the United States as, despite all measures to reduce immigration, including the construction of a 2000-mile long border fence which has been compared to the Berlin Wall, the number of residents with migrant background is on the increase. With nearly forty-five million people (Diaz de Leon 2011), the Hispanic population forms by far the most significant minority making the US numerically the third biggest Spanish-speaking country in Latin American, preceded only by Mexico and Colombia. Considering that the vast majority of the Hispanic diaspora has Mexican roots, that Mexican-American birth rates tend to be considerably higher than Anglo-American birth rates and that more than 140,000 Mexicans continue to migrate to the United States every year (Terrazas 2010), it is no surprise that the continuous increase in people with Mexican background remains a major theme for US cinema and TV.

Chicano cinema is probably the most visible expression of this media discussion, as the ever growing number of directors and scriptwriters who have focused on Mexican migration to and diaspora life in the US have managed to bring migrant perspectives into numerous Hollywood productions as well as TV, therefore reaching North-American mainstream population on a regular basis now. While such a popularity was clearly unthinkable for the producers of the predominantly documentary–style first phase of Chicano Cinema, which was well known for its radical critique of common patterns of discrimination and exclusion of

Hispanic minorities in post WWII US (Berg 2002: 186), there is also a potential downside to this success, which includes the danger of assimilating filmic messages to the taste of mainstream audiences.

According to Berg, most examples of contemporary Chicano cinema could be categorised into one of two movements that have developed largely in parallel: There are the films of the ‘rebellious, not separatist [...] Second Wave’, for which Young’s *Alambrista* (1977) would be an early example, and then in particular the productions of the ‘Third Wave’, which starts in the 1980s with films by Jesús Salvador Treviño and Robert Rodríguez and could be regarded as ‘made either within the Hollywood system or, if not, adhering closely to the Hollywood paradigm’, and that includes a reluctance to ‘accentuate Chicano oppression or resistance’ (Berg 2002: 187). As the scholar rightly points out, the assimilation of Hollywood paradigms in that Third Wave does not necessarily imply that ‘that the films are [...] non-political, devoid of commentary about Otherness, or that their makers have sold out’ (Berg 2002: 187). However, there is certainly the danger of self-censorship of political messages and cinematic style with a view to increase or maximise the chances of box office success, which tend to be key for securing the necessary funding by predominantly white, male and conservative sponsors and/or producers in the first place.

A question of interest to all contributors is in how far the films discussed in this special issue of *iMex 2* reflect alternative perspectives to the well known Hollywood assimilation paradigms that frequently culminate in the American Dream leitmotif or the melting pot allegory as established models for national identity building. Drawing on an operative concept of culture, the identification of cinema as a key factor in the shaping of mentalities and the education of its viewers, as well as recent research on Chicano cinema, individual contributors will address at least one of the following questions:

1. How successful are the directors in providing alternative histories of migration that manage to transgress the boundaries and constraints of traditional discourses?
2. How do their films express cultural difference and interconnectedness, and to what extent could they be categorised as parts of a wider transcultural discourse?
3. How significant can the differences be between the director’s and the producer’s perspective vis-à-vis the spectator’s reception.

2) Contributions

For this special issue, we have brought together a unique combination of pooled expertise from countries that reflect key migration patterns in Western nations, and the wide spectrum of media responses to it. While the focus is obviously on the Anglo-American spectrum, i.e. on the US, the UK and Ireland, there are also contributions from Spain and Germany. *iMex 2* contributions embrace a variety of disciplines that lead current research into Mexican migration and Chicano diaspora as reflected in contemporary cinema and TV, in particular media studies (Barrow), Latin American studies (Pitman), sociology (Mora), anthropology (García Castaño, Bretones, Abuladze), intercultural and transcultural studies (Carty), postcolonial studies (Rings) and gender studies (Simón-Lopez), although all contributors are highly interdisciplinary in their critical interrogation of narratives on migration and diaspora. In addition, the short 'ámbito cultural' section offers perspectives from colleagues in law (Gómez Jimenez) and intercultural communication (Vogler).

The article section starts with Thea Pitman's redefinition of Chicano cinema beyond traditional boundaries in which racial categories have been (and continue to be) employed to frame the ever growing number of movies on the topic in a way that facilitates their exclusion from mainstream cinema. In her study, 'Allison Anders and the Racial "Authenticity" Membership-Test: Keeping "Mi vida loca/My Crazy Life" (1994) on the Borders of Chicano Cinema', Pitman argues that, while numerous non-essentialist theorisations of Chicano identity have been put forward by key critics working in the field, these same critics still struggle, on occasion, to disentangle themselves from using essentialist arguments in their own work. A prime example of this problem is the debate over definitions of 'Chicano cinema', which has frequently been reduced to films which must be produced for, by and about Chicanos. Pitman argues that such a racial limitation (by and for Chicanos) cannot be upheld any longer and proposes a more open definition which ought to focus on Chicano themes. In this context, she examines non-Chicana director Allison Anders's *Mi vida loca*, a film that has provoked a quite particular polemic. Pitman's discussion of Anders's film centres on its reception among a range of professional film critics, mostly Chicana/os, as well as reports on the reaction of a sample group of the film's subjects – Chicana gang members – to their representation on screen. It examines the factors at play in the way it has been received, and exposes evidence of recursive essentialism in such arguments where apparent.

In 'Deconstructive Humour: Subverting Mexican and Chicano Stereotypes in "Un Día Sin Mexicanos" (Sergio Arau 2004)', Sarah Barrow explores the use of humour as a subversive

tool to deconstruct certain myths and stereotypes of Mexican and Chicano identity in Sergio Arau's popular debut feature *Un Día Sin Mexicanos*. She argues that the 'Mexicans' referred to in the film's title and used in much of its dialogue stand metonymically for all Hispanic immigrants, whether recently arrived, or born in the US and of Hispanic descent, and stresses that this focus correlates with the introduction of controversial anti-immigration legislation in California in 1994, which could be regarded as a reflection of growing national scepticism if not xenophobia vis-à-vis the significantly growing Hispanic population. In particular, Barrow asks to what extent Arau's filmic satire offers a critique of the Mexican immigrant experience, and of discrimination more broadly against Hispanic minorities. In so doing, she explores the ways in which the politics of resistance that are so often aligned with these experiences are inscribed in its narrative form.

Alexandra Simon-López's study of 'Masculinities in Robert Rodríguez's "Mexico Trilogy"', discusses the various layers of masculinity, in particular hegemonic masculinity and the notion of 'machismo' used in Robert Rodríguez's key work which comprises the films *El Mariachi* (1992), *Desperado* (1995), and *Once upon a time in Mexico* (2003). Their focus on male hybridity is of particular interest for this study because it could be regarded as an important means of resistance to patriarchal masculinity which links up to the symbolism of Western colonialism in the films. Ultimately, *El Mariachi*, *Desperado* and *Once upon a time in Mexico* seem to question traditional hegemonic masculinity quite successfully, although the last part of the trilogy appears to be considerably more explicit in its post-colonial agenda.

In 'The Cinematic Cholo in "Havoc"', Richard Mora explores the role of the 'cholo', an expression used to label Mexican American (or other Latino) gang members in the Southwest of the United States. The author argues that the cholo, in his view an abject being within Kopple's controversial film from 2005, serves as the deviant other, whose personality and character is stunted by neighbourhood pathologies, and stands in contrast to the rich, white characters for whom deviancy is an adolescent rite of passage, not a final destination. This is very much in line with an earlier work by Mora (2011) in which the author explores cholo characters as stereotypes that do not develop as the film progresses. Instead, they are embedded in the narrative in very predictable ways.

Gabrielle Carty's article 'Language, Space and the Evolving Chicano Family in Nava's "My Family"' focuses on *My Family* as an outstanding example of Chicano cinema that was successful in reaching both minority and so called mainstream audiences. In particular, the study explores the film's use of language (specifically, code-switching), its representation of

space (the film is set almost exclusively in East L.A.), and its representation of the family (the film depicts three generations of a Chicano family). These categories are examined in turn to determine the extent to which *My Family* enacts a dialectic between accessibility (openness to the dominant culture) and inaccessibility (the assertion of difference), concluding that the film rejects separatism and assimilation in favour of integration.

The article section ends with Fco. Javier García Castaño's, Damián Esteban Bretones' and Tamar Abuladze's joint contribution "Mirando" *Bread and Roses*' which analyses the representations of migration and labour conflicts in Ken Loach's acclaimed film from 2000. In particular their study explores spectators' perspectives in comparison with the director's political agenda and the information provided by the producer's synopsis. In this case, the spectators are university students who have studied key aspects of contemporary migration in the 'Instituto de Migraciones' in Granada University and have seen *Bread and Roses* as part of an experiment in a module on 'Cine y migraciones'. While – considering this context – the investigators started from the assumption that the focus of students' reception would be on migration topics and theoretical concepts delivered in lectures, the results prove how far these overall rather critical spectators have actually been guided by the director's Trotskyist agenda and the information provided by the producer's synopsis. This is yet another indication of the impact cinema can actually have on the views and opinions of the the general public regarding migration and diaspora, and here in particular on Chicanos in the United States.

Under 'ámbito cultural', *iMex 2* offers trailers of all key films explored in the articles section, e.g. *Mi vida loca*, *Un día sin mexicanos*, *The Mexico Trilogy*, *My family*, *Havoc*, *Bread and Roses*, and also selected interviews with directors and actors. Furthermore, Petra Vogler contributes with an intercultural perspective on female migrant experiences as reflected in *La Misma Luna* and, in her discussion of housing rights in the United States, María Luisa Gómez Jiménez introduces thoughts from a law perspective on *My family*.

In the review section, this special issue offers a conference report by María Eugenia González Cortés on the *Primer Festival de Cine Chicano* in Mexico City, which highlights the extent to which Chicano cinema has so far been marginalised in Mexico itself, i.e. rightly or rather wrongly Mexican emigration and Chicano diaspora in the US are clearly far more a topic for the country of destination than for the country of origin. Furthermore, there are two book reviews which complement the article section because of their focus on the country of origin: Marion Röwekamp explores Giovanni di Stefano's and Michael Peters's volume *Mexico como punto de fuga real o imaginario* (Munich: Meidenbauer 2011), which deals with a wide variety of academic contributions on the migration from Europe to Mexico within the

context of WWII. Overall, the volume draws our attention to the cyclical development of migration and diaspora (Europe – from emigration to immigration; vice versa for Mexico), and could help increase intercultural awareness and competence, starting with the ability of readers from the post-industrialised West to detect their Self in the migrant. Finally, Vera Elisabeth Gerling's review of Anne Huffschmid's *Mexiko – das Land und die Freiheit* from 2010 presents a book that offers a very interesting introduction into Mexico, with particular focus on its history (e.g. its revolution and independence) and the complexities of contemporary life arising from poverty, 'machismo' and the everyday violence of the 'modern mafia', complexities which already indicate some of the numerous reasons for searching a better life in the US.

3) Continuities and discontinuities

In line with recent studies on European migrant cinema, which have highlighted monocultural patterns of thought in the filmic reconstruction and dissemination of ghetto concepts that tend to permanently exclude people with migrant background from the 'host culture' (see Rings 2008, Halft 2010), Mora and Pitman confirm essentialist identity constructs and 'racialised' patterns of exclusion in Chicano cinema with a particular focus on *Havoc* and *Mi vida loca*.

On the other hand, Barrow, García Castaño, Bretones and Abuladze draw our attention to the more transcultural orientation and reception of films like *Un día sin mexicanos* and *Bread and Roses* in a genre which aims to blur traditional boundaries in a political context characterised by increasing scepticism and/or xenophobia vis-à-vis new immigrants, although at least the Obama administration pursues within the current election period a much more open policy (see Little 2012) than its conservative opponent Mitt Romney and many European governments (see for example Cameron's push for a radical cap on immigration in the UK as summarised in BBC 2011).

Finally, there are productions like *My family* and the *Mexico Trilogy* which present scenarios that continue to fuel – even more explicitly than the films mentioned above – an ongoing debate about the acceptance or rejection of established boundaries: While Carty detects a tendency to integration and negotiation of identities in *My family*, within which the protagonists aim to destabilise the traditional binary of assimilation or exclusion, Rings (2012) regards *My family* more as film that reflects neo-colonial concepts of assimilation, which marginalise the cultural heritage of the Chicano diaspora and suppress cultural

difference in favour of Western constructs of progress, as visible also in Akin's *The edge of heaven/Auf der anderen Seite* (Naiboglu 2010) or Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* (Rings 2011). Similarly, the interplay of hegemonic and hybrid masculinities in the *Mexico Trilogy* analysed by Simon-López leaves room for further discussion.

Overall, this compilation of studies highlights the fact that the search for identity in contemporary Chicano cinema and the academic debate around it are far from closed, and there is no reason for assuming optimistically that migrant cinema will follow a linear development in its deconstruction of mono-cultural patterns of thought. However, there is hope that directors and scriptwriters will increasingly develop a more open, intercultural and/or transcultural portrayal of migration and diaspora life, which could help viewers consider Chicanos more as an essential and enriching part of contemporary postmodern US society, rather than an ongoing problem and an indicator of decline.

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Allison Anders and the ‘Racial “Authenticity” Membership-Test’: Keeping *Mi vida loca/My Crazy Life* (1994) on the Borders of Chicano Cinema¹

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Will I ever become a ‘real’ Chicano? Will I ever ‘arrive’? Will ‘they’ – the border guards of identity – ever let me? (Guillermo Gómez-Peña 2000: 12)

1) Introduction: Transnationalism, National Identity, and Chicano Cinema

In their compelling introduction to *Transnationalism from Below*, Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo argue that some of the experiences of subaltern transnational actors examined in the chapters of their anthology ‘question the hopeful expectations of those who argue that transnational practices and identities constitute “counter-narratives of the nation” that subvert essentialist nationalist identities’ – their critical characterisation of Homi K. Bhabha and others’ take on the issue (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998: 22).² They then go on to observe that, ‘If anything, these cases suggest the reinscription of group identities by transnational actors “from below” as efforts to recapture a lost sense of belonging by recreating imagined communities [that are] often no less essentialized than the hegemonic projects of nation states. Identities forged “from below” are not inherently subversive or counter-hegemonic’ (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998: 22-23).

In this analysis of the identitarian tendencies of subaltern transnational groups Smith and Guarnizo underscore a real problem concerning the formulation, and subsequently the analysis, of transnational identities that can also be discerned in the discourse on identity produced by much of the Chicano community in the USA. The Chicano situation is arguably more complex than that of other, more obviously homogeneous, transnational groups of subaltern subjects in the USA – many Chicanas/os claim at least varying degrees of indigeneity to the South-West of the United States and there is sometimes tension between such sub-groups and those comprised of

¹ An earlier version of this article was published as ‘Policing the Borders of Chicano Cinema: The Critical Reception of Allison Anders’s *Mi vida loca / My Crazy Life* (1994) by the Chicano Community’ in *New Cinemas*, 8:2 (2010), 71-86. My thanks go to the editors of *New Cinemas* for their kind permission to reproduce and to the anonymous readers of both versions of the article for their insightful comments.

² Nb. the quotation within the quotation is from Homi K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation’, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291-322, 300. Néstor García Canclini also ‘contends that transnational migration and communication have led us to abandon “obsessions with the immaculate conception of authentic national...cultures”’ (García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas* [1992], quoted in Stock 2006: 158).

more recent immigrants from Mexico; furthermore, contemporary Chicano identity discourse is often premised on its representing a 'third way', countering both assimilation to the Euro-American mainstream as well as nostalgic recreation of 'old Mexican' lifeways. Nevertheless, the cultural production and associated critical discourse of the Chicano community broadly conceived (i.e. comprising all those of Mexican ancestry resident in the United States, no matter how recent and exclusive that ancestry nor how temporary their residential status), both in terms of that production's most explicit messages and the way in which cultural products themselves are put together, has often provided at least as much evidence of a drive for the (re-)creation of essentialised, 'cultural nationalist' imagined communities that instate their own kinds of norms and hegemonies (*Aztlán*, *la raza de bronce*, and associated attributes), as of a desire to revel in the carnivalesque non-essentialising transcultural possibilities of a more accommodating form of transnational culture hailed by Bhabha.³

In this article I consider the Chicano community as a whole (film critics, audiences, gang members) as an example of a subaltern transnational community with respect to the United States mainstream and I attempt to explore the degree to which Smith and Guarnizo's caveats regarding the nature of transnational identities hold true in one, most revealing, example. Where appropriate, I also unpack some of the homogenising over-generalisations about 'whole communities' made in the above statement of position.

To be sure, the theorisation of Chicano identity is a complex matter. While the evidence of essentialist arguments has perhaps become more nuanced, less strident as the years since the 1960s Chicano Civil Rights Movement have passed, it has not disappeared altogether. Many self-aware Chicana/o academics have warned against the neo-essentialising dynamic to be found in so many expressions of Chicano cultural identity, past and present. Nevertheless, some also recognise an on-going need for at least a certain amount of Spivakian 'strategic essentialism' to counter the 'upsurge of conservative ideology' in contemporary US society (Fregoso and Chabram 1990: 203-212, 210),⁴ while others are explicit about how difficult it has been, and

³ It might also be noted that when Bhabha subsequently wants to reference a Chicano source for such a form of transnational subaltern subjectivity as seen in cultural production, he almost always picks the work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña (Bhabha 1996: 9-10), a Mexican-born performance artist who depicts himself as most often at odds with the wider Chicano community over such issues (see epigraph).

⁴ Their caveat comes in a special issue of *Cultural Studies* (4:3 [1990]) dedicated to examining the ways in which Chicano/a intellectuals choose to describe and/or attempt to 'speak for' the Chicano community, particularly the more subaltern social strata of that community: 'Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses'.

continues to be, to find a stable locus from which to articulate a Chicano critical discourse, and recognise the inevitable role that essentialism will play in such positionings:

Chicano scholars [...] must situate their critique in the uncharted spaces between cultural affirmation and the decentred subject of poststructuralist and postmodern theories. The result has often been a complex, strategic sense of place and identity in which the Chicano critical and artistic text shifts between cultural nationalism, postnationalism, and postmodernism. (Noriega 1992: xiii)

Yet despite their engagement with the complexities of the theorisation of Chicano identity, these same critics still struggle, on occasion, to disentangle themselves from having recourse to essentialist arguments – strategic or perhaps sometimes rather more gratuitous – in their own work.

The case that I propose to examine here constitutes a prime example of this problem within Chicano critical discourse. It concerns the debates, in Chicano intellectual circles, over definitions of ‘Chicano cinema’, focalised via an examination of a film that has provoked a quite particular polemic in this respect: non-Chicana director Allison Anders’s *Mi vida loca / My Crazy Life* (1994). My discussion of Anders’s film will centre on its reception with a range of professional film critics, mostly Chicana/os, as well as reports on the reaction of a sample group of the film’s subjects – Chicana gang members – to their representation on screen. It will examine the factors at play in the way it has been received, and expose evidence of recursive essentialism in such arguments where apparent. It should be underscored here that the purpose of this article is simply to reveal and warn against, but not condemn, the permanence of such recursive ‘folds’ within the discourse on Chicano identity, representation and inclusion.

2) What is ‘Chicano Cinema’?

The existence of something that might be denominated ‘Chicano cinema’ as a self-sufficient category is highly contested. Arguably the bottom line is that it exists since several filmmakers have written ‘manifestos’ heralding it, and several film critics have subsequently written books or chapters in books that go under this and related titles – see, for example, Gary D. Keller’s edited volume, *Chicano Cinema: Research, Reviews and Resources* (1985); Chon A. Noriega’s edited volume, *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance* (1992) which includes notable manifestos and interventions on the subject by Jason C. Johansen, Francisco X. Camplis and Noriega himself; Rosa Linda Fregoso’s more subtle *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano*

Film Culture (1993); Noriega's co-edited volume (with Ana M. López) *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts* (1996); and finally Noriega's single-authored *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (2000).

But what do these critics mean by 'Chicano cinema' and do they all take the term to mean the same thing? According to Fregoso in her most cogent introduction to the subject, her project 'concerns the emergence of a film culture *by, about, and for* Chicanas and Chicanos', closely allied to the goals of the Chicano civil rights movement, though she then goes on to question and refine this definition (Fregoso 1993: xiv; author's italics). Since film is a medium that is not produced by a lone creator but rather by a whole team of people and since Chicano cultural production goes on within the borders of the USA, right under the nose of Hollywood – its studios, production values, conventions and messages –, it is very difficult indeed to achieve a filmic product that is exclusively '*by, about and for* Chicanas and Chicanos' and that is totally independent of Hollywood and oppositional in nature. Indeed, if we were to stick to this definition rigorously, we would end up with almost nothing feature-length to place in the 'Chicano cinema' category – just a few shorts and documentaries. Nevertheless, this three-pronged definition was the one adhered to by those involved in making and critically constructing the first 'generation' of Chicano cinema in the late 1960s and 1970s (Fregoso 1993: xvi).

But if, in the long run, we cannot find a feature-length filmic product that is all these things at once (and this is something that even many Chicana/o filmmakers and critics have now conceded), which is more important? The 'by', the 'about' or the 'for', and what exactly should we take these prepositions to mean?⁵ Let us take just one example of this kind of conundrum to help problematise these terms: Anglo-American director, Robert Young's *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1984) has been classified by Charles Tatum as 'Chicano cinema' in comparison with the same critic's classification of Chicano director, Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* (1981) as a 'Hollywood Hispanic Film' because of its 'production values and distribution' (Tatum 2001: 50-58). Both films are frequently identified as at least very close to the core of what constitutes Chicano feature-film production and many would hesitate to distance the work of key Chicano activist Luis Valdez, regardless of the involvement of Universal Pictures, in favour of a movie such as *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* which, despite its strong Chicano credentials in many respects –

⁵ Different emphasis has been placed on these three terms over the several decades during which 'Chicano cinema' can be said to have existed. For reasons of space, this synopsis cannot entirely do justice to this facet, though it does not disregard it entirely – a more temporally-aware account is to be found in Fregoso's introduction to *The Bronze Screen* (1993: xiii-xxiii).

indeed, apart from its Anglo-American director, the rest of the ‘by’ (producer, scriptwriter, actors etc.) were all Chicanas/os –, has been criticised for its proclivity to translate Chicano/Mexican culture for ‘a white colonial gaze’ (Fregoso 1993: 82).⁶ Thus, while the ‘about’ appears essential, and relatively straightforward, in both cases, the exact nature/role of the ‘by’ and subsequently the ‘for’ are contested and can be manipulated to justify exclusion of a film as necessary to support the critic’s argument.

It is evident from the criticism available on ‘Chicano cinema’ that all films properly identifiable as such have to be substantially and realistically ‘about’ (as well as politically committed to) Chicanas/os – Robert Rodríguez’s films such as the *Spy Kids* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003) or *Sin City* (2005) really do not count, despite lead roles in *Spy Kids* being given to Chicana/o characters,⁷ and Rodríguez’s earlier feature, *El mariachi* (1992), is qualified by Ramírez Berg as ‘a significant break with two decades of Chicano cinema’ and only recuperable as part of a ‘New Wave’ that is ‘more mainstream than earlier Chicano filmmaking and far less overtly political’; one that risks eliminating ethnicity, potentially – but only potentially – compensating for its lack of Chicano politics through subversive practices in film narrative and aesthetics (Ramírez Berg 1996: 107). Such exceptions and caveats substantially problematise Jesús Salvador Treviño’s assertion in 1991 that Chicano films ‘no longer have to be about Chicanos’ (Fregoso 1993: xvi) and thus no longer about their struggle for civil rights and so on. Arguably the need for (realistic and preferably oppositional vis-à-vis Hollywood/mainstream Euro-American) portrayals of Chicano lives (i.e. the political dimension to Chicano cinema) is still deemed ideal by many even if it is perceived as a politically-correct straitjacket by others.⁸

Treviño has also argued that Chicano films no longer have to be ‘for’ Chicanos (Fregoso 1993: xvi), and, even as far back as the early 1980s, the producer of *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, Moctezuma Esparza, would have agreed with this, arguing that he was interested in targeting a ‘broad, multiethnic, multi-language audience’ and creating a film such as *The Ballad* ‘as a project

⁶ Yolanda Broyles-González (1990), however, is most cogent in the arguments she advances as to the evidence of how Valdez sold out to mainstream values and expectations in all of his feature-film productions, as well as to how badly he misrepresents Chicanas in them.

⁷ The father of the ‘spy kids’ themselves, played by Antonio Banderas, is called Gregorio Cortez. The name is used discretely, however, and the choice of Spanish star Banderas over a Chicano actor such as Edward James Olmos is perhaps another deciding factor in the film’s overall ‘identity’.

⁸ Latino director Miguel Arteta, speaking on the subject of his film *Star Maps* (1997) which deals with the experiences of a Chicano bisexual prostitute and his dysfunctional family, observed that he was ‘careful not to become a spokesman for Hispanics in his movies’, and argued for a more nuanced, individualised characterisation of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os, to stand in contrast to both Hollywood-style negative stereotypes as well as the overly angelic representations proffered by first-generation Chicana/o filmmakers (Philpot 2002).

of the Chicano community, not *for* it' (Esparza quoted in Rosen 1992: 247; original italics). Yet while the desire to show positive images of Chicanas/os to a wider community is to be applauded, as is the desire to move beyond an oppositional 'for' that cannot cope with any negativity or indeed realism and that can only sanction positive but nonetheless Manichean images of Chicanas/os, many still feel the need for a form of cinema that speaks 'to' as well as 'on behalf of' this particular community (Fregoso 1993: xix).

Furthermore, if we were to concede that the 'about' and the 'for' are now irrelevant, that would only leave the almost inevitably essentialist 'by' category with which to judge the nature of a film. To his credit, Noriega, in his introduction to *Chicanos and Film* argues against Manichaeian classifications of film products based on the ethnic origin of their director – a tendency influenced by the 'presence of the color line' in United States society – and offers examples that illustrate that "'identity" cannot be equated with the text or its producers, but rather occupies provisional, multiple, and contradictory spaces within discourse' (1992: xxi). Nevertheless, when forced to define what he means by a "'Chicano" film' for the purposes of assembling his anthology, he chooses to resort to accepting 'the definition offered by the filmmakers: a film (or video) by and about Chicanos [where] the word "by" is taken to mean that the writer, producer, or director is Chicano' (Noriega 1992: xix). He then goes on to confess the limitations of his choice:

Such a move is admittedly more "strategic" than definitive, especially since it implies certain essential markers of biology, culture, and politics, and may therefore serve to silence some even as it seeks a voice for others. Nonetheless, a need remains to consider the domain of discourse for Chicano filmmakers and video artists. (Noriega 1992: xix)

Offering a theoretical advance on Noriega's stance with regard to the 'by' category, Rosa Linda Fregoso, in her introduction to *The Bronze Screen*, starts by noting that 'the racial "authenticity" membership-test continues unabated in the current "second wave" of Chicano nationalism, often reaching absurd proportions' (Fregoso 1993: xviii). She then goes on to offer her own preferred alternative to this 'racial "authenticity" membership-test' by arguing that 'the problem is resolved by de-emphasizing the biological claims to authenticity, yet accentuating its productive quality. In this respect, Chicano refers to a space where subjectivity is produced' (Fregoso 1993: xix). While such a solution has potential, even a critic as theoretically astute as Fregoso has, on occasion, had difficulty in adhering to such a principle.

Thus, while there are theoretical arguments that manage to de-essentialise the ‘by’ category, they are hard to apply systematically. Furthermore, the ‘by’ requirement still keeps being invoked as the ultimate defining category, even though the ‘about’ and the ‘for’ categories have, in reality, not yet been entirely discarded. It is the case that, even though for many a film can still be classed as Chicano with an Anglo-American director such as Robert Young just so long as significant input in the creation of the film in terms of producer, scriptwriter, actors, cameramen/women are ‘Raza’, the fact of a non-Chicana/o director alone will attract some criticism since Chicana/o film critics will argue that the film is subsequently not really ‘for’ or properly ‘about’ Chicanas/os – not sufficiently destined for their gaze and not sufficiently pro- (both ‘about’ and ‘for’) their cause.

Ultimately, however, if the ‘for’ (as it overlaps with the ‘about’) can be the right kind of ‘for’ – not a condescending ‘Euro-American’ ‘for’ which actually serves to send a message which keeps Chicanas/os and/or Latinas/os in their place (as I would contend was the case with *El Norte* [1983], despite the input of Chicano director Gregory Nava), but a more positive, empowering, oppositional, mobile sort of ‘for’ – the ethnic background of the director might be ignored. (This is exactly where William Anthony Nericcio locates the ‘borders’ of what he calls ‘proto-Chicana/o cinema’ in his study of Orson Wells’s *A Touch of Evil* (1958) – the lovingly-explored question is essentially the extent to which Wells is ‘for’ the Chicano community and the answer is highly complex [Nericcio 2007: 39-80].) But will this ever happen? Can an Anglo/Euro-American/even British director ever be admitted as the creator of the right kind of ‘for’ by the Chicano community itself or will essentialist definitions of ‘Raza’ and Chicano identity forever preclude such a thing?

The emergence of the phenomenon loosely referred to as ‘Chicano cinema’ came about in the 1970s as a result of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and the desire to right the wrongs of negative, stereotypical images of Chicanas/os that had until then proliferated in Hollywood, alongside the extremely low participation rates of Chicanas/os within the industry.⁹ It is thus hardly surprising that Euro-American directorship (no matter how independent and responsible/supportive, and no matter how mitigated by other Chicana/o ‘members of the team’)

⁹ See ‘Part One: Representation and Resistance’ in Noriega’s *Chicanos and Film* (1992) which contains 6 articles concerning Chicanas/os and or Latinas/os and Hollywood (including an early version of Nericcio’s work on *A Touch of Evil*, plus articles by José E. Limón and Charles Ramírez Berg). See also Ramírez Berg’s monograph (2002), as well as books by Clara E. Rodríguez (1997; 2004). For a good summary of Hollywood’s representation of Latinos as a whole, see also Davis (2007: 208-15).

should be deemed suspect by the Chicano community. Nevertheless, one most notorious Euro-American production actually stands as one of the earliest forerunners of Chicano cinema as understood by Chicanas/os: *Salt of the Earth* (1954) made by the blacklisted ‘communist’ directors/producers/ scriptwriters, Herbert Biberman (director, Russian Jewish descent), Paul Jarrico (producer, Russian Jewish) and Michael Wilson (scriptwriter, Anglo-Californian). The film concerns a successful strike at a zinc mine in Bayard, New Mexico, and the confrontation between Anglo-American bosses and predominantly (but not exclusively) Mexican-American workers. It is based on real events and includes non-professional actors/members of the community in its redramatisation of said events. (It also has a female narrator and includes an emancipatory message regarding gender politics in the Chicano community.) In McCarthy-era USA its production was impeded in so far as was possible and its exhibition was banned. (The same cannot be said for any other US movie!)

So what does this film do that means that it is acceptable to the Chicano community? In the first place, one should note that the message is radically oppositional. However, the key is that, despite the non-Chicana/o filmmakers, the Chicano community of Bayard were consulted with extensively in open meetings during the production of the film and their responses were worked back into the screenplay thus ensuring that it represents their point of view as they would wish it to be seen. (Allegedly the script was read/heard and responded to by over 400 community members [Lorence 1999: 60].) Many of them also were given the chance to re-enact their own struggle for the camera once the script was confirmed. In so doing it does not purport to ‘speak for’ the community, but to allow that community a vehicle through which to ‘speak for itself’. It is akin to the process of creation of good ‘testimonial’ writing or the role that Third World feminists have defined for themselves. While the film has received some criticism from the Chicano community (for romanticising events, for stereotyping characters, and for having an incomplete grasp of Chicano history, in so far as it presents the strike as a ‘one-off’ rather than simply part of Chicanas/os’ on-going struggle against discrimination [Lorence 1999: 60]), the local community endorsed the movie as their own (both ‘about’ and ‘for’ them) and, according to Biberman, he was also asked to help promote the film in Los Angeles by members of the Chicano community there (Lorence 1999: 197-98).¹⁰

¹⁰ Lorence does sound a note of caution here, since we only have Biberman’s account to go by. However, Gary D. Keller signals the film as an important part of Chicano film history (Keller 1985: 34-35), and Rosa Linda Fregoso

Skipping ahead a few decades, from the mid-1990s onwards there have been a number of feature films that are by Anglo/Euro-American (and also British) directors and most notably ones who usually work outside of Hollywood and are renowned for their responsible, oppositional and/or social realist filmmaking credentials. These films include: *Mi vida loca / My Crazy Life* (Allison Anders, 1994), *Bread and Roses* (Ken Loach, 2000) and *Quinceañera* (Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, 2006) (marketed in the UK as *Echo Park LA*). Many of these films, despite their British and/or Anglo-American directors, involved non-professional actors/members of the Chicano community and consultation with said community as a way of overcoming the ‘non-Chicano’ ‘by’ in terms of direction and filmmaking team as a whole. But how do these directors and their films fare with Chicana/o film critics and/or the wider Chicano film-going public? Can they be discussed with respect to the extent to which they are ‘about’ and/or ‘for’ Chicanas/os without resorting to below-the-belt essentialist critiques of the director based on their non-Chicano ethnicities? In order to try to answer some of these questions, I intend to concentrate on the film for which the greatest amount of material on its reception by the Chicano community is currently most readily available – Anders’s *Mi vida loca*.

3) *Mi vida loca / My Crazy Life*

Anders is an Anglo-American filmmaker from Kentucky and her subjects are usually related to women’s issues. Prior to *Mi vida loca* (1994) she made *Gas, Food Lodging* (1992), concerning the lives of white ‘trailer trash’ girls in Texas – there is a hint in this film of her interest in Mexican/Chicano culture as one of the girls escapes her humdrum life by watching invented Golden Age Mexican melodramas. Anders lived in LA’s Echo Park neighbourhood in the 1970s and 1980s (for a period of c.10 years) and made quite some effort to get to know the local homegirls – some of the main actresses in *Mi vida loca* are real homegirls whom she befriended.¹¹ Anders also consulted extensively with other members of the Echo Park gang community, inviting them to comment on matters such as dialogue, *mise-en-scène*, behaviour, music and style.

In *Mi vida loca* Anders is aiming to represent a realistic portrait of Chicana homegirls’ lives, hence the attention to detail, although the various plotlines are more clearly and deliberately

calls it ‘the best feature film to date about Chicanas and Chicanos’ (Fregoso 1995: 36); some praise indeed from this most critical of Chicana/o film critics.

¹¹ Anders even ended up becoming a surrogate parent to one of the homegirls’ children after the death of his mother.

melodramatic.¹² The film ‘is structured as a series of interconnected vignettes, each one narrated in voice-over by a different person’ (López McAlister 1994). Key plotlines include the relationship of two of the girls (Sad Girl and Mousie) who end up having babies fathered by the same gang member, Ernesto; as well as the story of Ernesto’s lowrider truck and the conflict it supposedly generated not only because of his devotion of time and resources to it rather than his children, but also because it was coveted by a rival gang leader, El Durán. There are also two more minor narrative threads. The first concerns ex-felon Giggles, her attempts to forge a better life for herself and her daughter, as well as her attempts to raise consciousness among the younger girl gang members. The second concerns the ‘travesty’, in gang terms, of Sad Girl’s sister – La Blue Eyes – and her romantic involvement with rival gang leader El Durán while the latter is in prison. The message of the film is clearly feminist, with its main focus being directed towards the gender relations between Chicana homegirls and their position vis-à-vis the male gang members.

In general *Mi vida loca* has met with a favourable critical reception from a feminist point of view but a negative one from a Chicana/o point of view, and an enduringly ambivalent reaction from those who write as both Chicana and feminist.¹³ Thus feminist critics such as Linda López McAlister have praised the film substantially for avoiding trite and unrealistic narrative closure – ‘one of the wholly admirable things about Anders’s screenplay is how she resists tying things up in neat little packages’ –, for being ‘informative, honest, and, as far as I can tell, quite a realistic dramatization of the lives of young women such as these in the LA barrios’, and for treating the theme of the girls’ lives with ‘respect’. López McAlister’s only substantive criticism is ‘the absence of the older women in the community; we see fathers but no mothers’ (López McAlister 1994).

On the other hand, strongly Chicana/o-identified critics tend to reject *Mi vida loca* for a variety of reasons relating to its representation of Chicano culture. Teresa L. Jillson and José J.

¹² This combination of docudrama and melodrama is, in my view, one of key areas where the film comes unstuck, not because melodrama is a fast-track to failure (indeed, the resonance with Latin American preferences in storytelling – especially *telenovelas* – could make it particularly pertinent as a mode for framing a Chicana girl-gang story; furthermore, exaggerated style is what Luis Valdez’s Pachuco singled out as the ‘essence’ of Chicano identity in *Zoot Suit*), but because the melodrama and docudrama modes counteract each other – you cannot simultaneously narrate something as true to the last detail even if it appears ‘larger than life’ and as stylised in the mode of melodrama.

¹³ The film has also received criticism, often quite negative, from mainstream Euro-American critics, particularly for its portrayal of hopelessness among Chicano youth. Such criticisms are generally cited and then efficiently dispatched by the Chicana/o critics that I will be discussing in what follows as part of their strategy to focus explicitly on what they find problematic from a Chicana/o perspective in Anders’s work.

Barrera offer some praise of the film for normalising the lifeways of Chicana homegirls as it presents them to a mainstream audience, but criticise it for simultaneously erasing the specificity of Chicano barrio life: '[The film] walks the line between portrayal of a universalizing – read erasure of difference – “normalcy”, which brings in the mainstream audience, and that of more specific cultural attitudes, history and social structures tied to the Chicano community' (Jillson and Barrera 1998: 198).¹⁴ Domino Renée Pérez, has also criticised the film for its failure to show positive representations of Chicanas: 'The majority of female characters featured in Anders's film are negative stereotypes, painting a grim picture of Chicanas' (Pérez 2003: 238).

The maximum example of the enduringly ambivalent reaction from a Chicana feminist critic is to be found in the series of articles/parts of chapters dealing with *Mi vida loca* that have been published by Rosa Linda Fregoso (Fregoso 1995, 1999, and 2003). To take but one example of these responses in detail, in her first brief article on the subject, Fregoso praises the film, as López McAlister did, for its attention to detail and for its gender politics, qualifying it as 'the best mainstream film on Chicano gangs' and observing that 'its gender politics are great' (Fregoso 1995: 36). Fregoso also notes the lengths Anders went to obtain almost ethnographic accuracy through consultation with the community concerned (in precisely the same way that the directors of *Salt of the Earth* went about the matter – and Fregoso notes that *Salt of the Earth* is apparently one of Anders's favourite films [Fregoso 1995: 36-37]). However, Fregoso also criticises Anders for attending so carefully to (superficial) detail while simultaneously not taking on board the same homegirls' comments regarding the plot – the plot is 'unverisimilar' even if the dialogue and other features are very close to reality.

Fregoso's most substantial criticisms, which coincide with those of a group of Oakland homegirls who watched the film at its première and whose reactions she cites, boil down to this:

- 1, Homegirls don't get pregnant from the same guy, they have more respect than that;
- 2, A homeboy does not obsess over a lowrider truck at the expense of his kids;
- 3, Rival gangs fight over turf, never over a car. (Fregoso 1995: 37)

While some of these criticisms may be due to relatively minor omissions in Anders's contextualisation of the actions of her characters (such that some plotlines appear rather petty in terms of motivation), the available sociological literature on Chicana/o gang culture quickly

¹⁴ De la Garza defines this kind of approach as the 'complementary' mode of contemporary (Anglo-) American filmmaking on Mexican/Chicano topics which tends to take the antagonism out of such relations, observing the phenomenon at work in films such as Loach's *Bread and Roses* (De la Garza, 2006: 100-16).

reveals how fragile the statements cited above really are.¹⁵ To suggest, as Fregoso does, that these plotlines in themselves provide evidence of Anders's imposition of her own Anglo-American values on the characters and a lack of understanding of what 'respect' means for the Locas reads as overly defensive at the very least.

The point of challenging the criticisms levelled by Fregoso and others at the film is not a defence of Anders's film at all costs, nor is it motivated by an archly conservative desire to see Chicana/o gang members represented as petty-minded and unprincipled 'lowlife'. Rather, the question is: Why and how are these criticisms being made? What discourses do they rely on and what do they aim to achieve? Fregoso explicitly clarifies that she is not hankering after positive (even idealistic) representations of Chicana homegirls, as per the criticisms of the film made by some Euro-American mainstream film critics, or even by Domino Renée Pérez cited earlier. And while she alleges that her argument rests on the fact that Anders captures the 'form' but not the 'substance' of Chicana homegirls' lives (Fregoso 1999: 37), I would argue that the key to analysing her argument also lies in the 'form' in which she expresses herself, rather than the 'substance' of her criticisms.

My issue here is that these criticisms of Anders's film – that it is too heavily imbued with Anders's personal life and values and thus misunderstands the Chicanas who are its subject – are specifically framed as 'because she's not Chicana she doesn't understand what motivates us', or as Fregoso puts it in the prominent first sentence of her *Cineaste* review, 'What happens when you wrap a white girl's story in brown girl's drapes?' (Fregoso 1995: 36). And while Fregoso might claim that the biological essentialism of the 'racial "authenticity" membership-test' can be dodged by focusing on 'the space where subjectivity is produced' (Fregoso 1993: xix), when she chooses so prominently to express herself in terms of 'white' and 'brown' (rather than Anglo/Euro-American and Chicana/o), the inference has to be that she is ostracising Anders on the basis of her ethnic otherness, drawing 'the color line', even when she claims that, 'In principle, I don't have a problem with whites making films about Chicanas' (Fregoso 1995: 36). Indeed, the choice of the term 'white' to describe Anders – and 'brown' to denote Chicana/o –

¹⁵ Although too vast a body of literature to analyse in any detail in the context of this article, my sources for information on Chicana/o gang behaviour and attitudes include sociological studies such as John C. Quicker's *Homegirls: Characterizing Chicana Gangs* (1983), Mary G. Harris's *Cholas: Latino Girls and Gangs* (1988), Joan W. Moore's *Going Down to the Barrio: Homeboys and Homegirls in Change* (1991), Marie "Keta" Miranda's *Homegirls in the Public Sphere* (2003) and Norma Mendoza-Denton's *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs* (2008), as well as Reynaldo Berrios and *Mi Vida Loca Magazine's* more eclectic volume, *Cholo Style: Homies, Homegirls and La Raza* (2006). For low riding see Denise Michelle Sandoval's 'Cruising Through Low Rider Culture: Chicana/o Identity in the Marketing of *Low Rider Magazine*' (2003).

means that, no matter how long Anders might cohabit in Echo Park with homegirls, and no matter what past experiences she might have of being a welfare mother herself (experiences/spaces which might produce the right kind of subjectivity she needs to perform Chicana homegirl identity), she can never be allowed in by the ‘border guards of (Chicano) identity’, for that identity is still seen to reside, at least in part, in biological claims to a certain ethnicity.

To return briefly to the other examples of the rejection of the film from a specifically Chicano perspective cited earlier, once again closer examination reveals that the bottom-line in the construction of these critics’ arguments for why Anders fails to represent Chicano specificity properly is the good-old ‘racial “authenticity” membership-test’. Pérez sums up her argument by stating that, ‘While this *Anglo* filmmaker does make a feminist statement in reference to female agency, she neglects the opportunity to capitalize on Chicanas in positive positions of self-empowerment’ (Pérez 2003: 238; my italics), furthermore polarising the identity politics at stake by identifying herself as part of the Chicana ‘us’, and the gang members as Anders’s ‘one-time Echo Park neighbors’ (236). Jillson and Barrera’s critique is more tempered and/or ambivalent, depending on one’s point of view, but it still ends up drawing similar conclusions to those cited above based on the film’s non-Chicano background. While it starts off by claiming that, given the high level of Chicana/o involvement in the making of the film, ‘this film is Chicano from its inception’ (Jillson and Barrera 1998: 197) and while it stoically omits any reference to Anders’s ethnicity itself, it concludes by identifying the film as a ‘production *by and for* HBO’ (Jillson and Barrera 1998: 199; my italics), and leaves the reader to impute that the criticisms that have been made of the film regarding its representation of Chicanas/os have their origins in the ethnic otherness of the film’s production and target audience.

Although only one of the analyses of the film cited above focuses in a slightly round-about on the rightful categorisation of *Mi vida loca* as ‘Chicano cinema’ or not, given the debates regarding Anders’s right and ability to represent Chicana girl gang members, such Chicana/o film critics as Fregoso, Pérez and Jillson and Barrera would clearly never concede that the film be included in a ‘Chicano film’ category. Furthermore, as we have seen, their rejection of the film from a Chicano perspective cannot be entirely disassociated from an essentialist conceptualisation of the director’s ethnicity and cultural background.

4) Ongoing ‘Discursive Turf Wars’¹⁶

Fregoso has now published several different versions of her initial review of *Mi vida loca* analysed above – an ironic testament, if ever there was one, to how central the film has been to her work on the representation of Chicana subjectivity over the ten years following the film’s release.¹⁷ In general, in the more recent and more developed articles concerning Anders’s film, Fregoso has been much more positive in her criticism of the film, praising it particularly for showing *cholas* making the streets their own. Nevertheless, she still includes comments concerning the fact that the film is too imbued with Anders’s personal life, while simultaneously underscoring the fact that Anders is a ‘white’ director, even though these asides are entirely tangential to the main focus of her argument (Fregoso 2003: 97, 100). Thus the temptation to criticise Anders on the basis of her ethnicity and related cultural values, to apply the ‘racial “authenticity” membership-test’ continues, even in the work of a scholar who is in all other respects just about the most astute and influential film critic working in the field.

Two other recent critical readings of / references to *Mi vida loca* serve as a pertinent epilogue to the ongoing ‘discursive turf wars’ that are waged over this film, its director and her right to represent Chicano culture. The first ostensibly offers a way out of the traps of essentialist critiques, but ultimately also succumbs to the need to criticise, albeit defensively, on the basis of the ethnicity of the director. The second reveals, most interestingly, the only critique of the film so far that does not fall into this trap.

The film’s most positive treatment to date appears in Susan Dever’s study of melodrama in Mexican and US cinema made in large part by female directors (*Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas: From Post-Revolutionary Mexico to fin de siglo Mexamérica* [2003]). Here Dever skilfully overcomes or simply ignores all of the standard criticisms of the film as detailed above (its use of melodrama is recouped; its inclusion of the wider Chicano community and family structures is emphasised [Dever 2003: 125-65]). Furthermore, she explicitly defends the film against any hint of racial essentialism deployed in the work of Chicana/o film critics, as well as in

¹⁶ I borrow the term ‘discursive turf wars’ from Susan Dever’s study of *Mi vida loca* in her *Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas* (2003: 128).

¹⁷ Fregoso 1999 and Fregoso 2003. Since the 2003 chapter is simply a more thoroughly referenced version of the 1999 article, all subsequent analysis will be based on this document. Apparently, Fregoso initially reviewed the film in a very positive light for National Public Radio’s ‘Latino USA’ programme in summer 1994 (Fregoso 2003: 189, n. 19), before publishing her rather more damning *Cineaste* article the following year after taking stock of the initial wave of critical responses to the film, both positive and negative, and by both Chicana/o and mainstream Euro-American critics.

that of mainstream Euro-American critics such as *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Kevin Thomas who also think that only ‘ethnic and minority filmmakers’ can make films about ‘their own people’ (Dever 2003: 164). Instead Dever argues for Anders’s espousing a kind of ‘cultural citizenship’ based on shared spaces and experiences rather than laying a claim to an impossible essentialist ‘cultural authenticity’ (Dever 2003: 165).

Nevertheless, despite Dever’s cogent dismissal of those who would have recourse to ethnic essentialism in their criticisms of Anders’s work, she still does not manage to move entirely beyond the terms of such discourse. Although presented in a very self-aware manner, in the book’s introduction Dever still feels a need to identify both herself and Anders as *white*, working-class feminists and to explicitly work through what this means for their ability to represent the lives of non-white subjects, focusing in particular on how their intimacy and common experiences with the community in question helps to give them the right to comment as insider/outside (Dever 2003: 35-41). While this tactic makes a clear case for a non-essentialist understanding of ‘cultural citizenship’, and while honest examination of the privilege accorded the Euro-American gaze is much to be appreciated, the terms ‘white’ and ‘brown’, and the requirement to identify as one or the other, are still too prominent in the debate for ethnically essentialist arguments to be completely forgotten (Dever 2003: 38).

Finally, Marie “Keta” Miranda’s study of the same Oakland homegirls cited by Fregoso above¹⁸ reiterates the criticisms of the film that Fregoso attributes to the girls, specifically with respect to the reasons why homegirls fight each other. As reported by Miranda, the girls were generally very pleased to see themselves represented on the big screen, and their criticisms were occasioned more by a desire to see the complexity of their motives represented accurately – instead they found themselves too harnessed to a plot that wanted to explore the divisiveness of patriarchal culture, and see them purely in relation to male gang members, rather than examine their experience of group solidarity or the sheer diversity of their reasons for getting involved in fights. Most interestingly, however, when discussing the post-première question-and-answer session with Anders at which the girls were present, Miranda observes that ‘When other members of the audience were critical of Anders – as an outsider, a Euro-American, representing Latina

¹⁸ Miranda was a research student at University of California-Santa Cruz and the Oakland homegirls were more properly the subject of her thesis. Fregoso met them and heard reports of their reactions to Anders’s film during the course of Miranda’s research (Fregoso 2003: 189, n. 21; and Miranda 2003: 115-16).

youth – the Latina teenagers didn't seem to side with [questions that] tended to emphasize Anders' outsider position in the Latino community' (Miranda 2003: 2).

It would be an overstatement to try to use this response to the film as a way of subdividing the subalternity of the Chicano community and contesting Smith and Guarnizo's arguments regarding 'transnationalism from below' as outlined in the introduction to this article. That is to say, the Oakland homegirls' response to *Mi vida loca* could not be seen as ultimate proof that the more subaltern sectors of a subaltern transnational community are less prone to articulating ethnic essentialist exclusions than the, by now, educated, middle-class sector that makes up the ranks of Chicana/o academics and journalists. Nevertheless, the girls' disinterest in criticising Anders on the basis of her ethnicity does offer a sobering and valuable alternative to so much of the academic discourse devoted to the subject. And perhaps some hope that Smith and Guarnizo's rather downbeat assessment of the discourse on identity produced by subaltern transnational groups might not be the whole story.

5) Conclusion – From Imagined Borders to Policed Borders

In his reflective piece on the development of 'Chicano cinema', 'Imagined Borders: Locating Chicano Cinema in America/América', Chon A. Noriega observes how the generally accepted 'first Chicano film' *I Am Joaquin* (dir. Luis Valdez, 1969, based on the poem by Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales) 'contributed to the idea of a "Chicano cinema" that operated within clearly marked borders (for community, for identity) that were defined by the exigencies of the Chicano civil rights movement' (Noriega 1996: 17), and laments the way that other contemporary Chicano-directed 'experimental films with their interracial, cross-cultural, and transcendental concerns' were exempted from inclusion within the 'Chicano Cinema' rubric. Writing this retrospective article in the mid-1990s, he also comments that 'Still "Chicano cinema" persists as a quasi-national category within international film festivals in Latin American and Europe' (Noriega 1996: 17) – attendant essentialisms in the definition go without saying.

It is no figment of the imagination, then, that 'Chicano cinema' continues to be a category that, in order to exist, is found to be in need of a border patrol that seems to fly in the face of so much of what is, with the exception of Smith and Guarnizo's work, traditionally argued for and advocated within the fields of border and transnational studies. Yet this tendency to erect and maintain borders around (cultural) national categories of cinema is perhaps too much of a

straitjacket in the contemporary filmmaking climate. As Ann Marie Stock has commented of similar tendencies in the field of Latin American film criticism, 'A critical activity intent on policing the borders of Latin American Cinema is destined to dwell in the past and to marginalize current film-making practices. [...] To continue to define Latin American Cinema narrowly, insisting upon the criterion of authenticity, may very well bring about the demise of the critical object' (Stock 2006: 163).

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Deconstructive Humour: Subverting Mexican and Chicano Stereotypes in *Un Día Sin Mexicanos* (Sergio Arau 2004)

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1) Introduction

For a long time, US cinema developed almost unshakeable stereotypes of Latino ‘otherness’, with characters stigmatised, according to Charles Ramírez Berg, in a “pageant of six basic stereotypes: *el bandido*, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the Latin lover, and the dark lady” (2002: 66). Indeed, in a survey of US films featuring Latinos, Mexicans and Chicanos up to the 1980s, early activist-filmmaker Jesús Salvador Treviño revealed even then the prevalence of “a succession of abusive stereotypes and denigrating distortions” (1985: 14).¹ Moreover, Mexican Americans (specifically those of Mexican heritage born in the US) have occupied each of those positions arguably more commonly than most other protagonists of Latin American origin. Filmmakers in Mexico, meanwhile, have treated Mexican Americans largely as misfits who belong nowhere, or have ignored them and their experience completely.² This essay examines the interrogation and deconstruction of the stereotypes of Mexican (and, where appropriate, Chicano) identity as they appear in Sergio Arau’s popular debut feature, *Un Día Sin Mexicanos/A Day Without Mexicans* (Mexico/USA/Spain, 2004), situating it within the context of a growing Chicano population in the U.S. and a high level of immigration from Mexico itself.³

The film, first made as a “mockumentary” short that had been released in 1998, was a hit in both Mexico and in the US, where it was seen by four million spectators.⁴ Intended as a production that would spark a debate on a topic that its director felt had been overlooked, this

¹ Jesús Salvador Treviño was one of the earliest proponents of a distinct Chicano cinema, which focused on the use of film to promote ethnic political awareness and self-representation, a deliberate antidote to Hollywood of the 1960s and ‘70s. His documentary *Yo Soy Chicano* (1972) was a key work of that movement which celebrated and drew attention to Mexican American identity.

² For example, *El Infierno* (Luis Estrada, 2010) in which the main character gets deported from the US and becomes embroiled in a life of narco-crime.

³ To be clear, “Chicano” is the self-identifying ethnic label coined by political activists of the 1960s and ‘70s, referring to Americans of Mexican descent. As Meier and Rivera explain, the term ‘had a somewhat pejorative connotation in the first half of [the twentieth century], but it has been taken by many young Americans of Mexican descent as a badge of pride since World War II.’ (1972: xiv) While most of the ‘disappeared’ characters in this film are in fact immigrant Mexicans (therefore NOT Chicanos), there is at least one Chicano character (the son of Mary Jo and Roberto) and a question mark is raised over the identity of several others, including Lila, who *believes* she is of Mexican heritage but turns out to be have been born to an Armenian couple.

⁴ The film was number 1 in the Mexican Box Office in 2004, and no 52 in the US (where it was released commercially three months earlier). It was made with a budget estimated at \$1.5 million, and by the end of November of that year had grossed \$4 million on the commercial release circuit. It won awards at three of the major film festivals in Latin America, including for screenplay and editing.

film reveals the image of the Mexican (and, more broadly, the Latino/Hispanic migrant in the US), as a social issue, at the same time as being a source of cultural enrichment and economic necessity for the US generally and for California in particular. Although it is widely documented, including on the DVD special features as well as in the range of interviews he gave at the time of the film's release, that the director was motivated by very serious political events, his work was dismissed by some reviewers as little more than obvious caricature and farce rather than as a serious critique of the Mexican immigrant experience.⁵

This essay argues that humour in the form of satire, caricature and parody is deployed quite effectively as a subversive tool by a Mexican director working in the US with a team of cast and crew from both countries to undermine long-held preconceptions of Mexican identity. It further contends that the politics of racism and resistance that are so often aligned with this experience are inscribed in its narrative form. For example, and as outlined in more detail below, particular discomfort is created for certain characters with whom the viewer may at first identify through the gradual revelation to them that many of the people with whom they live, work, sleep and socialise have family ties to Mexico (or other parts of Latin America). Their ignorance is certainly humorous at first as the emphasis is placed on the misapprehensions and prejudices of certain foolish individuals. However, as the revelations of who has disappeared intensify, and the dramatic impact of their absences becomes more widespread, so too the tone of the film shifts to reinforce the injustice of a system that fails to recognise both the specific identity of a certain group and their fundamental value to the so-called "American" way of life.

This essay further proposes that the hybrid form of comedy drama adopted here – which in places takes the specific form of the distinctively postmodern genre of mockumentary that was the approach adopted by the shorter version – works particularly well as a medium through which to explore and tear apart issues of such deep social concern.⁶ Arau is not alone

⁵ The motivations for the director and screenwriting team included the introduction of anti-immigration legislation in California in 1994, after which reported incidents of racism became more frequent. It is acknowledged by some that part of the film's legacy includes serving as one of the acknowledged inspirations for the national "Day Without Immigrants" of 1 May 2006. The "Day Without Immigrants" took the form of national marches that coincided with International Workers Day. It was triggered by the proposals, in 2005, contained within the Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act which appeared to create particular difficulty for Latino communities from Mexico. For, as Moreno and Brunner outline in their history of the development of a Latino identity, measures included "the erection of 700 miles of fence between US and Mexico, a reduction in the number of green cards offered annually by the US government, and increased penalties for employing or housing illegal workers." (2010: 226)

⁶ Armida De la Garza has already outlined very fluently the effective qualities of the mockumentary approach in her essay of 2009 that explores the interplay between national, supranational and post-national identities, as well as between form and content, in the short film that Arau developed into his debut feature. This project focuses more on the increasingly hybrid nature of the feature length version in terms of genre, and emphasises the notion

in taking this multi-dimensional approach to deal with themes of identity in the contemporary Latino context: other popular comedy dramas made at a similar time include *Real Women have Curves* (Patricia Cardoso, 2002), an appealing coming-of-age tale about a first-generation Mexican American growing up Los Angeles; *Tortilla Soup* (María Ripoll, 2001), about the search for fulfilment outside the family circle of four Mexican American sisters; and even *Spy Kids* (Robert Rodriguez, 2001) which also deals with the mysterious disappearance of several of its key characters. However, it is the aspects of parody and mock-realism that Arau foregrounds that place his film apart and which, I propose, allows it to explore those ambivalent, liminal Third spaces that Homi K. Bhabha has spoken of as being at once threatening and intensely liberating. In so doing, it encourages the viewer to rethink questions of social agency and national affiliation in the context of an increasingly complex Mexican American identity, or rather, as Bhabha puts it to “elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (1995: 209).

2) *Un Día Sin Mexicanos* as Countercinema

The basic premise of *Un Día Sin Mexicanos* is simple enough: Californians awake one foggy morning to find that all the “Mexican immigrants” – workers, spouses and business owners, including those who were born in the US itself – have disappeared.⁷ Cars have been abandoned in the street and food has been left sizzling in pans. Characters we do see, and whose responses to these disappearances we track include the mother of a little boy (Mexican American) who is also the wife of a rock musician (Mexican) who was preparing for a comeback tour. The viewer is also introduced to the State Senator whose housemaid doesn’t arrive for work, and a landowner whose produce is in danger of becoming overripe if his Mexican workers don’t turn up to harvest it as they have done every other day. The thick fog cuts off communication beyond state lines, including physical travel across borders, thereby isolating the remaining non-Hispanic Californians and leaving them dependent upon each other for everyday survival. Various character sketches presented in fragmentary narrative form allow for a range of ideological stances to be aired – from the explicitly racist views of the right-wing Senator and the anti-immigration activist, to the farmer who genuinely values

of hybridity itself as site of dislocation, as a potent ‘Third Space’ and as starting pointing for new formulations of identity, drawing additionally on the work of Homi K. Bhabha.

⁷ As De la Garza points out, the term “Mexicans” used in the film’s title and in much of its dialogue, stands metonymically for all immigrants, whether recently arrived or born in the US and of Hispanic descent, including Chicanos. (2009: 123) I attempt to make that deliberate conflation clear throughout this essay by using the range of terms for Latin American migrants in the US: Chicano/Latino/Hispanic.

the work ethic of his Mexican fruit-pickers and whose supervisor José becomes the poster face of the campaign to find the “disappeared”. Despite offering a range of responses, it is quickly made clear that the film aims to position its viewer explicitly to take the side of the immigrant Other (whether recently arrived or American of Mexican descent), largely by creating potent caricatures out of those who would rather be without them, whatever their own racial or ethnic identity.

The director’s reputation for politically motivated satire had already been established before he launched this film project; Arau, working with his partner, Yareli Arizmendi, as co-screenwriter, was commissioned to create a short in the first instance by Chicago’s Mexican Fine Arts Centre Museum. The first project was released in 1998 and was followed up by Arau and Arizmendi with the longer comedy drama version that developed many of the characters and situations from the short, while retaining the elements of “false documentary” that had been particularly distinctive and well received. Indeed, the feature was granted funding before the script was even written due to the success of the short and its satirical take on a contemporary topic. Moreover, the promotional campaign for the feature drew heavily on the aspect of spoof, using a poster to coincide with the film’s release date that included the tagline: “On May 14th there will be no Mexicans in California”, clearly designed to stir up controversy, public debate, and visibility for the film itself. According to Henry Puente, in his study of the promotion and distribution of US Latino Films, the billboard had to be relocated several times after complaints from the public were received. This act of repeated poster relocation became a dramatic performance in itself that received media coverage from Fox News, CNN and several Spanish-language outlets (2011: 151-2) that stirred further controversy. Inevitably, the “scandal” attracted increased traffic to the film’s official website, the viewing of which would provide little reassurance to visitors due to the ambiguity of its presentation and the questionable portrayal of its some of its main ‘characters’ as if real people. Compounding the controversy and confusion further was a specific element of the initial campaign that saw the distribution of 100,000 copies of a fake newspaper that reported on the Mexican “disappearances”.

In terms of reception in the US, the film was most successful in Southern Californian areas dominated by Latino (and, specifically, Chicano) communities and less well-liked amongst non-Latino communities, particularly outside Southern California (2011: 157-8)⁸ where the film was less vigorously promoted and where its themes and approach might have

⁸ On its debut in mid-May 2004, the film earned a Box Office gross of \$619,000 on 55 screens in Southern California.

been less appreciated. This, we might surmise, serves to reinforce the notion that Arau and his team set out to devise a refreshing antidote to those Hollywood projects that persist in representing Mexicans in a negative or superficial light, and provides a contemporary spin on the low budget documentary countercinema projects of the 1960s and '70s that focused more explicitly – and earnestly – on educating its audiences about the Chicano experience, often attached to a civil rights movement agenda. On the other hand, even the brief box office analysis makes clear that its impact beyond the Hispanic communities in the US was likely to have been minimal.

Up to the time of making this film, Arau was best known either as son of the Mexican cultural icon Alfonso,⁹ or as provocative political cartoonist, acclaimed visual artist and satirical musician who formed award-winning *Botellita De Jerez* in 1983, a group that fused humour and Mexican traditional music with the contemporary sounds of Hispanic rock. With a burgeoning reputation as a politically and socially committed short film-maker, he turned his attention to feature film-making as a form through which to attract a wider audience to the art and politics of the immigrant Mexican and Mexican American experience. While his work makes his political intentions clear in and of itself, this interpretation is confirmed by the director's comments in interviews he gave at the time of the film's release about the concerns that inspired him to make the feature project, namely his anger at the introduction of the aforementioned anti-immigration law in 1994 after which he felt that "el racismo arreció y los californianos no latinos hasta se enfurecían de oír hablar español" (Smith 2004). Moreover, his decision to submit the film for screening at the New Latin American Cinema Festival in Havana (December 2004), the birthplace and still the centre of the revolutionary cinema of Latin America, signalled his intent to spark politically motivated debate about a topic of fundamental concern. In so doing, and even though his aesthetic approach is quite different, he would appear to have plenty in common with the filmmakers of the Chicano Movement who, as Catherine Leen points out, "shared a [...] goal in their efforts both to represent Chicano life and to overturn years of negative stereotyping of Chicanos in film" (2004: 2).¹⁰

⁹ Alfonso Arau, writer, actor, director and classically trained dancer, came to international prominence with his Academy Award nominated hit *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (1991), having already made and appeared in a number of important Mexican feature and documentary films.

¹⁰ These filmmakers of the early Chicano movement were themselves strongly influenced by the models and theories that were fundamental to Latin American revolutionary cinema of the 1950s and '60s.

3) “Day”/s of Action

Before elaborating further on the distinctive features of those stereotypes as they appear and are undermined by Arau’s film, it seems pertinent to set out the political context of the film’s inspiration in some detail so as to grasp more fully the gravity of its intent, and the different ways this may be interpreted by the viewer. Moreover, it is hoped that this may allow us to understand both the specific and the general approach to thematisation at play here and, adapting a framework elaborated by Mette Hjort, to examine how a theme may be both perennial and topical all at once. That is to say, that the theme of “disappearance” may work on one level “across historical and cultural boundaries” (2000: 106), as well as on a more localised level by drawing on memories of landmark events that may be recalled and recognised only by a specific cultural group or set of interrelated groups.

We know from interviews given by the director that those specific landmark events relate to the history and impact of migration by Mexicans across the border to the US, particularly after the introduction of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1987, the unintended consequences of which included an increase in Mexican immigration to the US, both legal and illegal. As Timothy Henderson points out, by 2000:

once the shock of IRCA dissipated [...] there were four times as many Mexicans living in the United States as there had been prior to the passage of the IRCA. By that time, Hispanics had become the nation’s largest minority. (2011: 125)

Inevitably, throughout the 1990s, these immigrants were scapegoated as those responsible for causing the collapse of a rather fragile Mexican prosperity, and those in California, particularly Los Angeles County, were the most frequent targets as their arrival in large numbers in such a short space of time changed the demographic of the area completely. Street riots broke out as a result of ethnic tensions in Spring 1992, and right-wing politicians took advantage of the climate of fear and suspicion. Most significantly, in 1994 Governor Pete Wilson, while running for re-election in California, included as a key tenet of his campaign an initiative called Proposition 187, intended as a radical solution to the state’s problems in that it would allow for the legitimate denial of all social services to undocumented immigrants.¹¹ Thanks in part to appeals by civil rights groups that the initiative was unconstitutional, Proposition 187 failed, having been approved by voters but ultimately rejected by the courts, but its impact left its trace on the psyche of many of those caught up in the political turmoil of the mid 1990s, including the director of the film under discussion here.

¹¹ As noted by Henderson, Proposition 187 would not have made it an explicit crime to hire undocumented workers, or to penalise them for violating any of the statutes of the IRCA. (2011: 128)

Indeed, while *Un Día* is the filmmakers' direct response to a very specific legislative act, its actual premise of "disappearance" draws on a similar day of action – "A Day without Art", when all art institutions in New York were closed down – in commemoration of those who had died of AIDS and in celebration of the place of arts and culture in everyday life by creating an absence of it.¹² The notions of void and denial are fundamental to the impact of actions such as these in that it shows how 'absence can be put into play in the mobilisation and, indeed, creation of political subjects' (in Weber 2011: 216) recalling strategies proposed by Derrida on the generation of subjectivity and agency. In this and several other respects, such public commemorative "Days" differ quite profoundly from the more private and affirmative act proposed by activist Gloria Anzaldúa of *El Día de la Chicana y el Chicano*, a day [2 December] set aside for contemplation of the "racial self" and for acknowledging the "essential dignity" (1987: 110) of the Mexican American people, and yet they share a similar fundamental claim for agency and recognition.¹³

Despite a mixed reception from film critics at the time of its release, Arau's film has been acknowledged as one of the original inspirations for the national marches of 1 May 2006, The Great American Boycott, also known as "A Day without Immigrants", an action triggered by a new proposal, in 2005, of the Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act and as a response to worsening racism in light of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York.¹⁴ However, although the notion of absence was also important to the action of 2006, in that "participants were asked not to attend work or school for the day and to avoid buying or selling any US goods and services of any kind" (Moreno & Brunnemer 2010: 226), the key difference between such real actions and the film's dramatic conceit is that the work of fiction is not centred on the visibility of actual protest, but on the removal of labour coinciding with the disappearance of the workers completely. Those who are marginalised and "invisibilised" by their employers on a daily basis thus make themselves and their contribution visible, and valued, by becoming invisible, and it is important therefore that the film includes scenes that show many of those disappearances as they occur. Again, it is this

¹² See the statement from Arau and Arizmendi on the genesis of the film on the official website for confirmation of this: <http://www adaywithoutamexican.com/index1.htm>.

¹³ The repeated use of the word "disappearances" alludes also to the politically motivated disappearances (presumed assassinations) that have occurred under various dictatorial regimes in Latin America, including Mexico. At one point in the film, the Senator seeking re-election is forced to deny that the government had anything to do with these disappearances of all the Latinos from the State of California.

¹⁴ Although conceived well before the 9/11 attacks, the film was completed and released afterwards and its reception clearly coloured by those events and the subsequent treatment of illegal/undocumented immigrants. As Carol M. Swain has indicated, the "War on Terror" redefined immigration again as a national security issue, conflating "terrorists" with undocumented migrants. More specifically, the attacks also halted the immigration reforms that were promises during interactions between Presidents George W. Bush and Vicente Fox. (Swain 2007: 7)

provocative, conceptual liminal space of in-between-ness, and the interplay between presence and absence, that lie at the heart of the film's impact and takes it into the realm of the political and the postmodern.

4) Missing Links: 'The Latino/a Riddle'

This film is above all an exercise in social satire, parody and subversion; in other words, a site of resistance to hegemonic values. As a politically motivated filmmaker committed to social change, Arau sets out to say something meaningful about the immigrant experience in California, but eschews the more didactic approach of social realism in the belief that humour might provide a more effective and accessible way to address a tough issue through cinema. Taking an auteurist diversion for a moment in terms of tracking this director's "world-view", it is interesting to note that the choice of satire as route to debunk various social and political myths about racial and ethnic identity may be traced back through all his earlier creative work. He and Arizmendi began their artistic collaborations with a stage production dealing with the Free Trade Agreement that was presented as political satire. Moreover, with an early training in journalism, Arau re-established *La Garrapata*, the controversial satirical magazine that had been first established in 1968. Since then, he has also won multiple awards for his satirical political cartoons. Such activities have without doubt made their mark on this feature film project.

The key platform for the satire and parody in the film centres around the TV news programme format, most of the generic and spectatorial conventions of which are turned on their head. In accordance with the main function of parody, that is "to exploit and contest that which came before" (1998: 187), the director (and his screenwriting team) toys with audience expectation of and familiarity with the TV news format in order to redefine the relationship between himself and those spectators he knows are fully aware of the conventions of that popular, everyday form. In doing so, he also involves them in the work of distinguishing between the 'reality' of the film's narrative, and the 'reality' of the news reports within the film. He intertwines the different levels of fiction/reality by, for example, using the news conventions of graphics and informative titles outside of the actual news reports; more profoundly, he brings the story of news reporter Lila Rodriguez, apparently the only "Latino/a" to be spared from "disappearance", out from the fictional newsroom where the

story of the disappeared is being constructed for its audiences to consume, and into the space of the diegesis where the story of the disappeared is being played out.¹⁵

Adding further layers of intertextuality, Arau interjects flashback sequences that use the realist aesthetic of the home movie in order to provide memories of moments of intimacy between family members who have been separated from loved ones from the point of view of those left behind. He also references and interrogates the prevalence and general acceptance of both surveillance culture and reality TV culture and the shared understanding of the conventions of decoding both forms through the diegetic intrusion of a CCTV camera inside Lila's hospital room, the "drama" of which is watched 24/7 by other characters in the film and triggers an array of subsequent plot points. Moreover the Brechtian aesthetic implied by both by the absurdity of Lila's situation (she is referred to on news broadcasts as Santa Lila, and confesses that she feels like a "circus freak") and the deliberate rawness of the video filming in many sequences, all serve to set up a repeated effect of distancing between spectator and character so as to prevent the viewer from empathising with the characters or abandoning themselves to the narrative and thereby missing the political content of the drama.¹⁶

Linda Hutcheon has posited that parody "both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (1987: 17) and indeed with *Un Día*, Arau offers a critique of the apparently derisory and often ill-informed agenda of TV news. In so doing, the director has to assume that his audience holds a shared understanding of the conventions and intentions of the TV news format, and expects that audience to "play continual catch-up" (1991: 80) in terms of piecing together the layers, forcing spectators to try to make sense of the multiple levels of intertextuality, juxtaposition and jibe as they play out on screen. As a result, the film's spectator (domestic and international), steeped in TV news culture, should pick up on the parodic devices and delight in a sense of knowingness, of being able to share the joke with the director, while at the same time becoming the butt of such jokes.¹⁷ For if an intense knowledge of generic conventions is required in order fully to appreciate the parody, part of

¹⁵ Lila is played by Arizmendi, Arau's partner and collaborator, adding a further layer of knowingness for viewers. Many would already be aware of her political views from her previous work; others could easily discover them just through watching the DVD extras that accompanied the film's release which include an interview with Arau and Arizmendi on their motivations for the film.

¹⁶ See Michael Chanan's chapter on documentary filmmaking "After Verité" on this, in particular his discussion of the use of parody in documentaries of the more recent period (2007: 250-254). I suggest here that Arau's mode of representation shares some of their features and is, arguably, all the more effective for it.

¹⁷ Note however that, as Rosa Linda Fregoso points out in her chapter on "Humor as Subversive De-Construction", we should not assume that "the process of encoding particular social and cultural meanings onto images/languages/sound ... correspond[s] neatly with decoding strategies. Viewers may or may not get the point, so the problem of equivocation surfaces." (1993: 51) However, as with the film that she explores, because in Arau's work (this film and all his other outputs) "a comedic mode predominates" *Un Día* "simply cannot be taken literally or at face value." (ibid)

the critique must surely be focused on our own reliance upon and general belief in such problematic forms that shape our perceptions of the everyday world and its protagonists. In short, Arau's film serves both to "mirror and ridicule the supposedly more serious and central dramatic activities" (Mamber 1991: 80) of the TV news report and surveillance culture while at the same time stressing their global reach and universality.

In his work on comedy in radical cinema, Stephen Mamber has argued that "the activities of parody have been directed towards an exploration of the processes of creation", and for him the notion of the "failed artist" (1991: 88) is a key aspect of cinematic parody. Arau's film offers several examples to support this idea which are worthy of exploration so as also to understand more deeply how the political impact of his work is conveyed, and how the stereotypes are undermined. Mexican Roberto Quintana (Eduardo Palomo), one of the first to disappear along with his (Mexican American) son Bobby, is a rock musician past his prime who is intent on reliving the wild life he enjoyed before he and non-Latina wife Mary Jo (Maureen Flannigan) settled down to suburban life. At first glance, he appears to be the epitome of "eroticism, exoticism, tenderness tinged with violence and danger ... [and the] ... dashing and magnetic male Other ... possessor of a primal sexuality" (Ramírez Berg 2002: 76) who believes himself attractive to women far younger than himself. His wife is clearly suspicious about his motives for introducing a very young backing singer to the band he has reformed. This notion of irresistible Mexican magnetism is quickly debunked when Mary Jo points out to the TV news interviewer in the very opening sequence that he would not have run away without his teeth. In case we missed the jibe, shortly afterwards those false teeth are seen detached in a glass of water, and indeed when he mysteriously reappears, one of his first acts is to casually place the teeth back into his mouth in full view of his family and his neighbours. There is a further layer to the debunking of the Latino-lover image at play here in that the actor Palomo (who died suddenly just after this film had been shot) was best known in Mexico as well as amongst Hispanic communities in the US and other parts of Latin America as a highly photogenic star of *telenovelas*, a genre he is understood to have tolerated as a means to move towards more serious work on stage and the big screen in the US but from which he never truly escaped. The deliberately playful attempt to undermine his own TV image serves thus as a poignant act of resistance.

In terms of characterisation, Arau uses broad brush strokes to construct an all-too easily recognisable "type" of Mexican, which also works on wider levels, by also implying Latino, Hispanic, Chicano; even the notion of the "alien" is referenced through the nod to the science fiction genre with the inexplicable invasion of a pink fog, as well as via the dialogue of the

border patrol guards for whom that term is part of everyday parlance.¹⁸ Because the “Mexicans” disappear at an early stage, those brush strokes have to be developed by those left behind who talk about them – including family members, new reporters, landowners and university professors – often directly to the viewer in a deliberate break with the conventions of Hollywood continuity. These non-Latino characters, some of whom are immigrants from other parts of the world, serve as cyphers for common misunderstandings of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans as well as to highlight the absurdity of the power relationships which had left those ethnic groups marginalised to the extent of social, economic and political invisibility before they took control and made themselves physically invisible.

For example, the clueless insensitivity of the Senator’s wife Ellen Abercrombie (Melinda Allen) brings to the fore both the utter reliance some Californians have developed on Latino workers at the same time as showing how there exists a further divide between those who work in the home as domestic servants (and who are hence less “alien”) and those who work behind-the-scenes in restaurants, as street cleaners, and as labourers, generally out of sight. Arguably even more ridiculous and less forgivable in this regard are the supposed “experts” who all claim to have a solution, the most appealing (and controversial) one appearing to be the identification of a Mexican gene that will be used as a vaccine for all non-Mexicans to protect them from the phenomenon of “disappearance”. Their attempts to understand the disappearances are quickly lampooned by highlighting the inadequacy and irrelevance of each. Further, it underlines the absurdity of events set up by the anti-immigration groups to celebrate the disappearances and uses both humour and statistics to emphasise the way US life is held together on macro and micro levels by the Hispanic immigrant workforce, with scenes that show the Senator’s trophy wife’s pathetic, quickly aborted attempts to do the housework, images of uncollected ripened fruit growing putrid in the orchards, and the stand-in weatherman’s realisation that the activity he has belittled for so long is rather more complex than he had understood. Indeed, the only character who speaks with any degree of lucidity about the economic, social and cultural value of the Mexican/Latino/Hispanic migrant is the one who lives on the streets and who is marked out through his demeanour as insane. Thematically, as well as stylistically, then the film functions as a parody. It relocates and violates the myths and stereotypes around identity by taking a wry approach to the theme of social and ethnic difference by demonstrating the incredible complexity of ethnicity itself.

¹⁸ Charles Ramírez Berg presents a detailed and lively critical account of the development of the alien movie and its relationship with the image of the immigrant, in particular the Hispanic migrant, in his chapter “Immigrants, Aliens and Extraterrestrials” in *Latino Images in Film*, pp. 153-182.

In an attempt to acknowledge this complexity, *Un Día* draws attention to what Fregoso has termed the “syncretism of commercial popular culture in the US” (1993: 60), the process of acculturation that continually embeds itself in everyday life in the US due to the complex links arising from the South-to-North migration, through casual references to aspects of Californian daily life that are totally reliant on its relationship with Mexico and yet which are taken for granted – such as the Senator’s favourite “breakfast burrito” which he is denied while the Mexicans are missing. For, as Shohat and Stam have pointed out, “in a multiracial society, the self is inevitably syncretic” (1994: 237), and yet we rarely pause to acknowledge this. Visual gags such as the playing cards featuring Mexican American Hollywood stars (from Cheech Morin to Jimmy Smits) used by the patrol border guards to entertain themselves during breaks, function as political gestures by poking fun at the superficial and nostalgic appropriation of “Otherness”. Through comedy of an increasingly absurd and farcical nature, and with a final image that offers an almost ridiculously utopian vision for cultural politics as “lost” Mexicans are embraced by the border patrol guards who had previously beaten and imprisoned them, the film thus exposes the fragility of the very values on which such myths and stereotypes are based.

5) Conclusion

Ramírez Berg argues that the history of Chicano filmmaking may be thought of as “a series of waves, each lashing out at Hollywood cinema in its own distinct way” (2002: 185). The first comprised of radical oppositional documentaries (1969-76) that found its inspiration in Cuba and had a unifying manifesto aimed at mobilising *La Raza*; the second (1977 to the present day) is, he suggests, still rebellious but more accessible in form and style, including fiction as well as documentary, with some institutional funding; the third wave began in the late 1980s, comprises mainly genre films whose political content “is embedded within the deeper structure of the genre formulas” (2002: 187). While the director of the film under discussion here is Mexican (residing, temporarily, in the US), on his way, perhaps, to becoming Mexican American, his debut feature has certain points in common with the work of those emphatically political Mexican American film-makers. Its accessibility marks it out as a manifestation of the second wave, while its political motivations harks back to the strong mobilising intent of the first wave. Despite, or perhaps because of its cacophony of styles, approaches and tones, the film’s attempt to expose the conditions of oppression of the Mexican people in America, and of Hispanic, Latino and immigrants more generally, is clear.

That clarity, as I hope to have argued in this essay, is largely down to the use of humour as a deconstructive tool to subvert all manner of stereotypes and thereby to force the viewer to think again about certain myths of racial and ethnic identity. Assumptions about all the protagonists are debunked and it is worth noting in these concluding words the features of those two characters, both female, which thread through the entire narrative. Mary Jo, whose voice is the first to be heard, speaking to a news reporter, is initially presented as the dutiful suburban wife and first grade teacher, as a binary counterpoint to her swarthy Mexican husband who she has surely tamed through family life and wholesome values. Her balanced 'normality' is further stressed by the contrast that is set up with her fundamentalist Christian sister who insists that the disappearances are a sign from God of a looming apocalypse, and Mary Jo's outrage at such extreme beliefs position her as a sympathetic character for most viewers. While visual cues are placed in the opening scenes, more explicit queries about this assumption are implied as the narrative progresses by the fact that her daughter has not disappeared, her constant presence uncomfortably suggestive of a different paternity and ethnic identity. It turns out that Mary Jo had been unfaithful to her husband through a one night stand with a neighbour, a revelation that serves to undermine the initial views one may have had about both Mary Jo and Roberto as a couple and as individuals.

Meanwhile, Lila finally discovers that she is not Mexican by birth but Armenian. Again, clues had been presented to the viewer throughout and two other characters are already privy to this knowledge. On air, that is to say, directly to the CCTV camera in Lila's hospital room that is linked to the TV studio for 24 hour a day "reality" broadcast, Aunt Gigi (Caroline Aaron) confesses that Lila's actual mother died when she was very small. Her mother didn't want her to know of her background as, ironically, she wanted her to grow up "all-American". At the point when Lila passionately declares that given her upbringing she feels Mexican anyway, she disappears also, which leads shortly afterwards to the film's upbeat denouement via a quick succession of unexplained "reappearances". Although he may not offer us any really radical formal innovations of the type deployed by the first wave of Mexican American filmmakers, who eschewed hegemonic Hollywood filmic conventions completely, Sergio Arau reconfigures those conventions, turns them in on themselves, and effectively undermines the very ideological premise on which such conventions are based. Giving one of the most significant pieces of concluding dialogue to the hyper-blonde female newscaster who declares that "You belong to the people who taught you the world", the film finally reveals its own purpose by emphasising identity as, at heart, "a deep, horizontal

comradeship” (Anderson 1991: 7) that exists on mutual recognition and shared understandings.

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Masculinities in Robert Rodríguez's *Mexico Trilogy*

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1) Introduction

The aim of this article is to deconstructively unveil and critically discuss the various layers of masculinity and the notion of *machismo* used by Robert Rodríguez in his *Mexico Trilogy*, which comprises the films *El Mariachi* (1992), *Desperado* (1995), and *Once upon a time in Mexico* (2003). For the theoretical framework, I am interested in the interplay of socio-historical concepts of (Latin American) masculinity and the usage of masculine stereotypes in motion pictures, for which Connell's (1995 and 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and Berg's (2002) notions on Latin American stereotypes proved applicable. Connell presents hierarchically organised key categories of masculinity in terms of patriarchal power, starting with hegemonic masculinity which guarantees the continuation of men's dominance over women because it can be perceived as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity)" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832). According to Bradley (2007: 46), this form of identity is what "we refer to as "macho": tough, competitive, self-reliant, controlling, aggressive and fiercely heterosexual." Complicit, marginalized, and subordinate masculinities serve as associated categories, although the main emphasis for the analysis of the selected films will be placed upon hegemonic masculinity. In addition to this, I argue that Connell's typology needs to be enhanced by including more hybrid types of masculinity as a means of resistance to patriarchal masculinity, as hybridity can be considered a means of "strategic reversal of the process of domination" (Bhabha 1994: 112). With reference to Carpenter (2010: 668), I consider "the representation of hegemonic masculinity as a fluid process with changing role boundaries and the absence of a clear-cut dominating male/dominated female gender dichotomy." Rodríguez's trilogy, as I will show, can be seen as a symbolic allegory of Western colonialism, and therefore seen as questioning images of hegemonic masculinity.

As far as masculinity studies are concerned, they are usually considered as complementary to, and not in competition with, Gender Studies and Feminist Theory, though they were comparatively disregarded at their beginnings. This neglect of the other gender ultimately led to the "current academic fascination with masculinity" (Breger 2008: 155), which was encouraged by the second wave of feminism in the mid- 1970s when the first conferences on masculinity took place in 1974 and 1975. Soon after Joan Scott's (1986) article "*Gender: A*

Useful Category of Historical Analysis” was published, many historians started to use gender as a constructive category of analysis with regard to masculinity. Research on this particular topic became increasingly popular, as Paul R. Deslandes’ book review on recent publications demonstrates, in which he emphasises (Deslandes 2011: 189) the late “attempts to privilege the study of emotion and friendship, noting how the bonds forged between men in a variety of contexts could satisfy a broad range of social, cultural, and political demands.” Past scholars have often opted for a sociological perspective on masculinity, for example authors such as Michael Messner (1992), Michael Kimmel (1994), and Harry Brod (1994), among others. Pivotal to this development are the sociological works by Raewyn (Robert) W. Connell, often in joint collaboration with Tim Carrigan (1985), John Lee (1985), and James Messerschmidt (2005). Up until now, Connell’s *Masculinities* (1995) remains a classic reference within the field of masculinity studies, as it provides a theory on the plurality of masculinities, for which reason it will serve as one of the main scientific references used in this study.

However, an essential methodological question arises as to whether the mentioned theories are fully applicable in a Latin American context, or if they only partially fit. Histories of gender and sexuality have formed constituent element of Latin American studies for almost three decades, and have been significantly imperative “to challenging essentialist notions of Latin American difference (backwardness) and narratives of unidirectional change” (Strasser and Tinsman 2010: 84). For historians, this affects studies of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, literary studies of gender and modernization, and labour history. Masculinity is a mutable category and does not possess any “universal standard of manhood that transcends time and place”, because its “codes are socially and culturally constructed” and may alter by age and class, among other factors (Lehfeldt 2008: 464). According to López-Vicuña (2004: 243), “[a] critical revision of discourses on masculinity in Hispanic and Latin American culture is beginning to emerge” by introducing “more nuanced discussions of how different models of masculinity are reproduced and disseminated in Latin American culture.”

I was particularly intrigued by how this topic is dealt with in rather entertaining and, at the box offices, successful films, for we can detect as much useful social criticism, symbolic hints, and cultural allegories as in independent Chicano films. Rodríguez himself, in an interview with Berg, refers to this idea in the same way:

RR: [...] I think that one of the problems is that when Latin filmmakers get that chance to make a film, they try to do too much, and make up for all the movies that were never made before. And then it becomes too preachy. You can be much more subversive, you can be much more sly than that, and get everything you want in there. If you’re just conscientious about it and try to trick people by getting them to watch something

entertaining and show them something else at the same time. Slip it in the genre. (Berg 2002: 270)

Section 2 of my study presents a synopsis of each of the three films of the *Mexico Trilogy* by already considering questions of masculinity, and then they are discussed in greater detail in section 3 before I present my conclusions.

2) The Mexico Trilogy

In each of the three films that constitute Rodríguez's *Mexico Trilogy*, the plot and the leitmotiv remain the same, although changes in appearances and characters occur. In *El Mariachi*, a young musician (Carlos Gallardo) arrives at a small Mexican town in order to find employment as a mariachi. He goes from bar to bar asking for work, but there seems to be no market for traditional Mexican music, which is ironically demonstrated in the first bar scene when the bar owner shows him a machine that replaces an entire music group. Dressed in black and carrying his guitar case, the mariachi resembles Azul (Reinol Martínez), an escaped criminal who carries his guns in a similar guitar case while seeking revenge on Maurice, nicknamed Moco (Peter Marquardt), a white American drug lord. Moco's men mistake the mariachi for Azul and try to kill him, but the innocent Mexican shakes-off his pursuers by, in self-defence, killing several of Moco's hitmen. The mariachi finds shelter at the second bar he visits, which is owned by Dominó (Consuelo Gómez), who helps him to hide in her flat above the bar. He soon falls in love with her, oblivious of the fact that Dominó used to be Moco's lover who had bought her the bar, the flat, and a motorbike that should quickly bring her to his heavily guarded villa on the outskirts of town whenever he wants to see her. When Moco's men finally find the mariachi, they bring him to his villa, but Moco, who is the only one who knows what Azul looks like, realizes the mix-up and sends him back. Meanwhile, Azul, being deprived of his guns because of an accidental case switch, takes Dominó hostage who, unaware of the mariachi's safe return, reveals Moco's address for she fears for the Mariachi's life. Azul and Dominó arrive at Moco's villa, where Moco kills both Azul and Dominó, since he finds out about her feelings for the mariachi. The musician returns to the villa shortly after being told that the woman he loves has been taken there, but upon arrival, he only finds her dead body in front of Moco and his men. The drug lord now cripples the mariachi by shooting his left hand. In an act of rage and revenge, Moco is finally killed by the mariachi, who then leaves the town on Dominó's motorbike, taking with him Azul's guitar case full of guns, Dominó's dog, and her knife. It is a very sad ending as the mariachi has not only lost his love, but also his old life as a musician, and the only means of survival will be to become an outlaw

like those who he despises. Filming took place in Gallardo's hometown, Ciudad Acuña, which was also very well known to Rodríguez, and the independent and low budget character of this film is emphasised by the fact that, for example, all of the actors brought their own wardrobe to the set. Rodríguez and Gallardo had already been familiar faces in Ciudad Acuña, and "[most] of the props had been found or borrowed, and Rodríguez achieved his tracking shots using a wheel-chair "dolly" on loan from the local hospital" (Macor 2010: 155). To hunt and to be hunted, and loss and vengeance are the most important leitmotifs of *El Mariachi*, which will be further developed in the following sequels, and which can be considered important categories of masculinity within the (post)colonial process, as, according to Thakkar (2010: 710),

[hunting] marks the colonizer's identity from the very outset of the colonization process, whereas *being* hunted is the mark of the defeated, the underdog, the downtrodden. But neither of these categories is entirely static or distinct and, as we shall see, the identities of hunter and hunted are gender-coded in ways that are equally shifting."

The sequel *Desperado*, now starring Antonio Banderas as the mariachi, reprises the idea of revenge and mistaken identity. The mariachi arrives in another small Mexican town, looking for Bucho, real name César (Joaquim de Almeida), who he holds responsible for the killing of his late girlfriend, Dominó. In a flashback scene, the audience is taken back to the penultimate scene of *El Mariachi* in which Dominó is killed by Moco and in which the mariachi (Banderas takes Gallardo's role in the flash-back scene) is wounded. This flashback scene is motivated by introducing the topic of justified vengeance while simultaneously exposing the mariachi's pain as he is still haunted by his past. The flashback scene is embedded into a dream sequence that shows the mariachi, accompanied by two other mariachis, singing and playing the guitar in a bar. The opening credits for *Desperado* are shown throughout that dream sequence in which, suddenly, the dead Moco and one of his hitmen appear. This surreal scene is highlighted by different lighting setups and leads to the flashback scene of Dominó's death. Tormented and visibly shaken, the mariachi awakes from this nightmare, by doing so the previous scene's dream character is exposed, and the proper plot begins. After a shooting in a bar, during which he killed many of Bucho's men, the mariachi is badly wounded, but saved by Carolina (Salma Hayek), the owner of a bookstore. Like in *El Mariachi*, he is rescued by a woman, finds shelter at her place, and eventually falls in love with her, not knowing that she was Bucho's lover before. Although explicitly understood as a parallel storyline, *Desperado* differs from its predecessor by emphasising the erotic relationship between the female and male protagonist, which culminates in a love scene that contains a variety of camera shots, ranging from mid-shots to medium close-ups to close-ups. The issue

of mistaken identity manifests itself now in the role of Navajas (Danny Trejo), the knife-throwing assassin sent by Bucho's superiors to kill the mariachi, but Bucho's men erroneously kill Navajas. Realizing this mistake and Carolina's betrayal, Bucho sends his hitmen to kill them both, but they escape. When the mariachi has the opportunity to shoot Bucho from the rooftop, he can see his face and suddenly hesitates to shoot him, incomprehensible for Carolina. Instead of killing the man he was so long after, he reunites with his old friends Campa (Carlos Gallardo, who played the leading role in *El Mariachi*) and Quino (Albert Michel J.) for a final showdown with Bucho's men during which many of the hitmen, but also Campa and Quino, die. In the third-last scene, which bears significant resemblance to the penultimate scene of *El Mariachi*, the couple arrives at Bucho's farm where it is disclosed that Bucho and the mariachi are brothers. Both of them had been ignorant of that fact, the mariachi until he saw Bucho's face from the rooftop, and Bucho until the mariachi's arrival at the farm. The brothers do not want to kill each other, but when Bucho aims to shoot Carolina in revenge, the mariachi kills his own brother. In the final scene, the mariachi is shown walking along a desert road, when Carolina drives by and invites him to join her. He throws away his guitar case full of guns, but quickly returns to pick it up again, explaining "Just in case", which can be understood as a foreshadowing of forthcoming events. It was originally planned that Gallardo would resume the role of the mariachi, but "after an executive reshuffling at Sony/Columbia, he was told, that was no longer an option" (Macor 2010: 175), as the studio wanted to cast a famous actor, such as Antonio Banderas. Though not Mexican, but Spanish, Rodríguez was eventually convinced by this choice, and *Desperado*, now budgeted at just over \$7 million, could be shot in Ciudad Acuña again. The most audible difference in comparison to *El Mariachi* is the switch from Spanish to English as the main film language, which occasionally feels strange, in particular when two characters, who apparently have Spanish as their mother tongue, talk in English, for example, all the conversations between the mariachi and Carolina, or between him and his criminal brother Bucho. Inconsistencies in the logical plot of *Desperado* considered a sequel to *El Mariachi* are noticeable, too, especially Bucho's questionable responsibility for Carolina's death. However, this was intended by Rodríguez, who did not consider *Desperado* a true sequel, nor a remake in English, but something in between. This approach is visible in the end, when the mariachi kills his own brother, as "I [Rodríguez] wanted the mariachi character to kill somebody that would make him *not* want to kill anymore. I needed to end that somehow" (Berg: 2002: 263).

The third entry in the *Mexico Trilogy*, though more complex in characters, action, and subplots, follows the same pattern of vengeance, betrayal, and, in a slightly rudimentary form, mistaken identities. *Once upon a time in Mexico* is composed of many flashbacks, which inform the audience of the mariachi's fate of the past few years. In these flashbacks, we see how the mariachi and Carolina (Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek reprise their roles), confront General Márquez (Gerardo Vigil), a mean and dangerous guerrilla leader, in a bar, where they kill him and his men, at least that is what they think. After some further adventures together, they marry, have a daughter, and seem to live a quiet and happy life in a Mexican village. However, Márquez did not die, and hunts them down, kills Carolina and the child, and leaves the mariachi lusting for vengeance again. His cultural identity of masculinity is shaped by his loss, and he becomes a hero in the village he lives in, appreciated by his fellow villagers as a type of social bandit, comparable to the figure of Zorro:

Zorro's cultural identity is completely in line with his role as a model of resistance. As an outlaw supportive of and admired by the oppressed, Zorro belongs to the category of "social bandits," which includes "persons whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who...are considered by their people as heroes, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation" (Hobsbawm 2000[1969], 20). (Lie 2001: 491)

Although these events are solely told via flashbacks, they are frequently referred to by various characters during the actual plot, which starts with the recruiting of the mariachi by CIA agent Sheldon Sands (Johnny Depp). The mariachi should kill General Márquez who is hired by Mexican drug lord Armando Barillo (Willem Dafoe) to kill the recently elected President of Mexico (Pedro Armendáriz Jr.). The mariachi should not prevent the assassination of the President of Mexico, which is scheduled for the day of the death, *el Día de los Muertos*, one of the highest holidays in Mexico. On the contrary, he is supposed to wait until General Márquez has accomplished his mission, and then satisfy his revenge by killing the General. Sand's goal lays in replacing an honourable national leader, who refuses to cooperate with drug lords and the CIA, with a corrupt one chosen by the CIA. The already familiar topic of loss and vengeance is multiplied in *Once upon a time in Mexico*, as Sands, who is himself a ruthless criminal only having his own profit in mind, tries to use retired FBI agent Jorge Ramírez (Rubén Blades). Years ago, Barillo had murdered Ramírez's partner, and Sands adeptly plays with the latter's feelings of anger to lure him out of retirement so that he would kill Barillo. To monitor Barillo's move, Sands includes the Mexican AFN officer Ajedrez (Eva Mendes), with whom he has a secret love affair, not knowing that Ajedrez is Barillo's daughter who actually spies on Sands and the AFN. Various other subplots enrich the dense web of lies and betrayals in *Once upon a time in Mexico*, such as Barillo's deception by Billy

Chambers (Mickey Rourke) and by Cucuy (Danny Trejo). On the day of the death, the mariachi arrives at the presidential palace pretending to be just a mariachi. He is accompanied by two of his old friends in music and battle, Lorenzo (Enrique Iglesias) and Fideo (Marco Leonardi). He quickly realizes the decency of the recently elected leader and therefore decides to protect the president against any harm. Meanwhile, Barillo and Ajedrez capture Sands, and drill out his eyes before setting him free as a cautionary example and a stern warning to the CIA to never interfere again in Mexican affairs. With the help of a little boy he met before, Sands manages to kill his pursuers and arrives badly wounded at the palace gates. At the end, several showdowns conclude the *Mexico Trilogy*. Sands kills Ajedrez and survives, though crippled as a blind man, whereas Barillo is killed by Ramírez, and General Márquez by the mariachi. The president is saved, and the mariachi walks again along a dusty road, but this time, though still carrying his guitar case full of guns, he proudly wears the Mexican flag around his neck, and continues his walk with a smile on his face.

3) Questions of masculinity

The *Mexico Trilogy*, in particular *El Mariachi*, can be best described as a *mezcla* of two different genres, the so-called Mexican *narcotraficante* film, one of the leading Mexican police genres of the *cine fronterizo* (border films), and the transnational action genre to which Berg (2002: 241) refers to as “warrior adventure film”:

Narratively, *El Mariachi* is in the tradition of a species of the transnational adventure film – the warrior adventure genre – rooted in the Hollywood Western, which has blossomed because of a series of cinematic cross-pollinations between Asia and Hollywood. Principally, the genre includes Hong Kong’s kung fu themes, and Hollywood blockbuster actioners. (Berg 2002: 242)

The protagonist of a warrior adventure film is always a man who is usually skilled in martial arts and/or who possesses extraordinary physical skills. He abides by a code of justice and morality, which is often triggered by the loss of someone beloved or something vital to him. This loss turns him into an avenging angel, who, driven by revenge, seeks comfort in spirituality before the ultimate show-down with his enemy. We can detect these characteristics in all three films, although *Desperado* and *Once upon a time in Mexico* show a stronger tendency towards warrior adventure films than *El Mariachi*. In a way, *El Mariachi* narrates the beginning and the making of such a male hero by simultaneously questioning standard concepts of masculinity. He is a musician, not a martial arts specialist, and in contrast to the other male characters in the film, he has neither a moustache nor distinctive

male features, and offers a more hybrid perspective on masculinity. He is in fact more of an anti-macho. As Berg (1992: 107) succinctly puts it:

Machismo is the name of the mutual agreement between the patriarchal state and the individual male in Mexico. Through it the individual acts out an implicit, socially understood role --*el macho*-- which is empowered and supported by the state. The state in turn is made powerful by the male's identification with and allegiance to it....More than a cultural tradition, then, *machismo* is the ideological fuel driving Mexican society."

El Mariachi redefines this assumption about manhood, as the male protagonist does not drink or smoke (Mariachi: "My voice is my life"), nor is he interested in guns or fights, for which he is ridiculed by both men and women. The bar-tender of the first bar gives him a weird look when he orders "un refresco", as does Dominó upon discovering that he is not a violence seeking criminal. Violence, therefore, becomes "the defining factor in a specific construction of hegemonic masculinity, while non-violence becomes the marker of a subordinate masculinity that is marginalized and ridiculed" (Knight 2010: 692). It is only in the penultimate scene that the mariachi is considered a true man in the eyes of others, and this is because he takes a gun and shoots Moco. The use of violence and the moral code of taking revenge for the loss of a loved one, although this may imply the loss of one's own life (when the Mariachi shoots Moco, all of Moco's men are around and could have easily killed him after the death of their leader), finally gains him respect. As Tompkins already argued, it is not significant "[...] whether a man is a sheriff or an outlaw, a rustler or a rancher, a cattleman or a shepherd, a miner or a gambler. What matters is that he be a *man*" (Tompkins 1992: 17-18).

This change in masculinity is reflected by a rich symbolism, for example the turtle and the scorpion, and is strongly connected to the technique of voice-overs. When the mariachi is introduced in *El Mariachi*, we see an ordinary musician coming along a Mexican road, and by voice-over, he tells us that he is looking for work as a mariachi in the next town. While telling his story, a turtle comes his way and crosses the street. The turtle is of female gender in Spanish, *la tortuga*, and possesses a rich mythology, which ranges from being a creature of both heaven and earth to one of possessing powers of female energies. The animal, as such, is a type of hybrid creature, as its species can be found both on land and in water and the aspect of "crossing borders" becomes evident in this particular scene. The mariachi represents a hybrid masculinity, a masculinity in motion which corresponds to the concept of a borderland because "[gender], mapped on the mind, body, and spirit, "is itself a borderland" (Castañeda 2003: xiii). In a metaphorical way, it equally reflects the geopolitical boundary between Mexico and the United States, that creates hybrid spaces. I will return to this point later.

The symbol of *la tortuga* underlines the anti-macho role of the mariachi, which stands in clear contrast to the symbolism of hegemonic masculinity at the end of the film, when the mariachi straddles Dominó's motor-bike. He drives out of town, carrying with him his lover's bulldog and Azul's guitar case full of guns, telling the audience, again in a voice-over, of his sad misfortune. Though not deliberately choosing this macho role, he has no other choice but to succumb to it in order to survive, for there seems no possibility to cross borders again. In *Desperado*, el mariachi is introduced via a voice-over technique, too, but this time it is an American stranger in a bar in Mexico who tells the story of "the biggest Mexican I have ever seen." This bar is populated by the most stereotypical Mexicans, in a negative sense, which meet Berg's description of popular images of the Mexican: dark, sweaty, unshaven face, antisocial attitude; the "violent, criminal, generally pathological behaviour (he is a bundle of hostility waiting to erupt)" (Berg 2002: 16). This is highlighted by the stranger's ironic remarks about the clients of the "other bar": "real low-lives..., not such high class acts like here...)". We then see Antonio Banderas in the role of the avenging mariachi, who could not be more different in comparison to the musician he once was. The opening credits, as such, start after this first introduction, and we see the mariachi singing in his dream sequence. In one of the following scenes, he is on the dusty road again, walking towards another town. It looks like an almost parallel scene compared to the one in *El Mariachi*, as the male protagonist, dressed in black, carries his guitar case and walks along the road. The difference lays in the fact that we already know that, this time, he is not carrying a guitar, but plenty of guns in his case. The turtle will not appear again, but we spot a warning plate that shows a scorpion, and we later discover that the back of the mariachi's black jacket depicts a scorpion. A scorpion can mean both *el scorpión* and *el alacrán* in Spanish, and is of masculine gender, reinforcing the idea of masculinity. Mythologically speaking, the scorpion is often associated with protection, defence, deathly danger, and solitude, all characteristics linked to masculinity, too. Nevertheless, the mariachi still shows hybrid characteristics of masculinity which are reflected in all three films. Firstly, he still does not drink alcohol (he orders a soda pop in *Desperado* and *Once upon a time in Mexico*), secondly, he cares for a little boy who befriends him and whose life he will save at the end of *Desperado*, and thirdly, he lets himself be seduced by Carolina and decides to share his life with her. Defence and protection are idiosyncratic to the idea of a bulldog which is of masculine gender in Spanish (*el bulldog*), like dog (*el perro*), but Dominó's dog does not live up to our expectations. It is a rather cute, timid, sleepy, and harmless dog, which, also given the occasion, does not defend or attack anybody. It is a symbol of masculine versatility.

Masculinity and fatherhood are a crucial narrative strategy in *Desperado* and, most importantly, *Once upon a time in Mexico*, which proves what Judith Franco (2008: 29) suggests: “In contemporary cinema, the exploration of masculinity is often associated with fatherhood.” In *Desperado*, the mariachi meets a young boy who is used by his unemployed father to be actively involved in drug trafficking. He quickly feels responsible for the innocent boy and tries to keep him away from the drug scene by teaching him how to play guitar. Though not his biological father, he becomes emotionally attached to the boy and even puts the boy’s life before his quest for revenge: the mariachi fights Bucho’s men in a showdown during which the boy is accidentally shot. After having killed his adversaries, the mariachi is supposed to go straight to Bucho for the final climax, but instead he and Carolina bring the boy to a hospital for immediate treatment. It is only then that he can engage in the ultimate confrontation which leads to the killing of Bucho. Back at the hospital, he assumes for one last time his role as a father, figuratively speaking, and is only released from his duties when the real father appears at the hospital. The importance of being a father is even more strongly emphasized in *Once upon a time in Mexico* when we learn that he became a loving husband and father who now teaches his daughter how to play the guitar. In a Latin American context, “[to] be recognized as a full adult, a man must be a father [...]” (Collier 2005: 227). When fatherhood is taken away from him by the brutal murder of his wife and daughter, he is equally deprived of his masculinity, which needs to be restored via bloody revenge.

Another form of masculinity is related to disabilities, of which numerous examples can be found in all three films. I argue that it is due to the disabled body that masculinity can be achieved in its highest sexual expressivity. The mariachi was an ordinary man who questioned standard ways of being male, but became the “big Mexican” after the death of Dominó and the mutilation of his left hand. No longer able to properly play the guitar, he developed his physical fighting and shooting skills as a result of being partially crippled. His loss has already been described as an important driving engine behind his revenge, but it can also be regarded as his gain, too, as his physical and mental change render the mariachi a sexualized object. This can be clearly detected in the portrayal of the male protagonist by Antonio Banderas, and the way he is framed in *Desperado* and *Once upon a time in Mexico*. From extreme close-ups (the “eye”-scene in the beginning of *Desperado*) to long shots (his silhouette on the old church ruin when he plays the guitar in *Once upon a time in Mexico*), he is presented as a physically impressive man which is underlined by the way he walks, how he is dressed, and how he fights. According to Connell (1995: 53) “Masculine gender is (among

other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex.”

A similar case of sexualized masculinity due to mutilation occurs in the case of Sands, who is casually dressed most of the time, including ridiculous shorts and t-shirts with “CIA”-printed on the front. But after being tortured and deprived of his eyes, his former rather average appearance changes into an extraordinary masculinity. Dressed in a black and body tight warrior suit, with black sunglasses covering his empty eye sockets, he suddenly becomes a disabled, but dark vision of masculinity, similar to John Wayne’s in *The Wings of Eagles*: “Wayne came to represent a dark vision of masculinity; it is here that he becomes the Cold Warrior/empire builder who rejects femininity (...)” (Meeuf 2009: 92). Sands rejects femininity in an even irrevocable way: while Ajedrez, his ex-lover who betrayed him, gives him a mocking kiss by asking: “Do you see anything you like?”, he shoots her dead replying: “No.”

The mutilated body as sexual attraction is already noticeable in *Desperado* when the mariachi, badly injured after a fight, is taken care of by Carolina. Although this scene does not dispense with comic amusement (Carolina is completely oblivious of how badly she cleans his wounds, causing the mariachi even more pain), it reflects on the male and mutilated body as something sexually desirable. It is, therefore, not surprising that it is Carolina who finally seduces the mariachi which leads to the only intimate scene of the *Mexican-Trilogy*. All other scenes that show Carolina and the mariachi as a couple focus either on escape and fighting, or on tender family-life, which eventually leads to contingency because “requiring a ‘hard’ masculinity as the standard when defending the nation, yet insisting upon a ‘soft’ masculinity as the foundation of an orderly, responsible home life” (Cohan 1997: xii). Their past “hard masculinity” catches up with them in the character of Márquez, who destroys their family joy by taking advantage of this regained “soft masculinity”.

One form of hegemonic masculinity is reflected in the use of the concept “el chingón/la chingada”, which is detectable in several Spanish dialogues in *Once upon a time in Mexico*. In one scene, for example, Barillo receives piano lessons, and is extremely upset when his piano teacher tells him: “Entonces hay que practicar como la chingada”. As a consequence of this comparison, an allusion to *La Malinche*, colloquially known as *La Chingada*, the piano teacher is killed. The symbol of *La Malinche*, the interpreter, advisor, and lover of Hernán Cortés, who gave birth to one of the first Mestizos during the conquest of Mexico in the 16th century, is of an ambiguous nature in Mexican cultural history. On the one hand, she betrayed her own people by becoming the conqueror’s mistress and confidant, contributing

significantly to the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire. On the other hand, though, she did not choose to be Cortés's lover because she was offered to him as a slave and raped, and it was due to her interpreting skills that Cortés was able to negotiate and to reduce the slaughter. She therefore represents the open wound of Mexico that every male, according to Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*, has to avoid:

The macho's sense of self is founded on the desire for bodily integrity; all threats to this closed, 'intact' or hermetic state, to use Paz's terms, are repelled (31). The violence of colonial invasion of the people and the land is overwritten in sexual terms. Penetration enacts a feminisation that macho bodies must avoid. Paz sees this dynamic as deeply impressed in the Mexican psyche, and formative of its sense of the national. The macho is *chingón*, the one who wounds and penetrates. His aggressiveness assures he is not open (77). (Lewis 2009: 199)

La Malinche's ambivalence remains one of Mexico's unique characteristics and is frequently addressed in literature, music, film, and many other cultural productions:

"What is clear is that for many contemporary Chicano/a writers (male and female) Malinche functions as a multivalent sign of their multiple loyalties – the need for *both* fidelity and betrayal – as cultural translators who must mediate between the U.S. and Mexico, the written and the oral, English and Spanish, a dominant discourse and a "minority" one." (Cutter 2010: 1)

What follows is a clear American-Mexican dichotomy of binary oppositions, such as oppression/submission, strength/weakness, wealth/poverty, exploitation/suffering, masculine/feminine, and master/servant. In Rodríguez's *Mexico Trilogy*, allusion to *La Malinche* and the inherent hegemonic dependency between the United States and Mexico are manifested in the portrayal of the Mexican woman who is rendered an object of desire by symbolising the conflicts within the American-Mexican dichotomy because "she illustrates the tensions and breaks within the prevailing social order of the border" (Sugg 2001: 122). In *El Mariachi*, the Mexican woman Dominó is the object of desire of the American drug lord Mauricio, nicknamed Moco, which means "snot" in English. Moco has provided a living for Dominó by giving her property, a bar, a flat, a motorbike, etc. Although it becomes evident that their "relationship" has cooled down (in several scenes, Moco is seen with an all-obedient lover who fulfils the position of both a servant and a lover), he still considers Dominó as his property, and "[in] the context of colonialism, property is acquired by enterprising civilizers who make valid use of what savages have supposedly neglected" (Wickstrom 2005: 176). He "owns" her and claims his pseudo-contractual rights by calling her on the phone, demanding that she comes to see him straight away. When she refuses, he suspects that his powers over her are fading away, which is explicitly confirmed in the penultimate scene, in which Azul takes Dominó hostage. Realizing that Dominó cares for another Mexican, the mariachi, the

American kills his former lover. Allegorically speaking, Dominó represents one type of *La Malinche*: the Mexican lover of a white Conqueror. However, instead of continuing the interracial relationship of hegemonic dependency and hybridity, Dominó betrays the oppressor by falling in love with the mariachi, one of her own people, which can be considered a return to her cultural roots. It is her death, as a consequence, that triggers the mariachi's lust for vengeance. Dominó must die in order to enable the mariachi to stand up against the dominant drug lord, to kill him, and to change the rules of this hegemonic game. Indeed, she lives up to her name Dominó, who is linked to the famous tile game, originally deriving from the Latin word "dominus" ("lord" or "master"). By helping the mariachi, she provokes a domino effect that finally leads to the killing of the American oppressor Moco. In *Once upon a time in Mexico*, a similar reference to games is detectable in the name Ajedrez. Márquez's secret daughter is CIA agent Sands' object of desire that he believes he controls. In one scene, he is consequently irritated when he discovers that she has changed the lock to her flat in order to keep him out. That notwithstanding, he confides in her as he is the important CIA agent and she is just a Mexican police officer who, according to his worldview, must love him. This train of thought proves wrong, as it is her who betrays him and who plays a false game until checkmate. Although Carolina has never been the sexual object of an American "conqueror" before falling in love with (*Desperado*) and then marrying the mariachi (*Once upon a time in Mexico*), the pattern of betrayal remains the same. In *Desperado*, she was Bucho's former lover and betrayed him for the mariachi, whereas she used to be with Márquez in *Once upon a time in Mexico* before "putting a bullet into his heart". Despite the fact that Bucho and Márquez are Mexicans, Carolina's betrayal can still be understood as a rejection of American imperialism because both men are linked to American oppression: Bucho, because he works for Moco, and Márquez, because he is supported by the CIA to overthrow and to kill the President of Mexico. Etymologically speaking, the name "Carolina" already implies colonialism, as can be seen in the Online Etymology Dictionary: "1663, N. Amer. colony named for King Charles II" (cf.: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Carolina>, accessed 11.3.2012). Nevertheless, her name implies the idea of freedom, too, and her rejection of Bucho and Márquez is a symbol of freedom and of the affirmation of *mexicanidad*. Thus, the symbol of *La Malinche*, in this particular context, needs to be newly interpreted, as she is not, as Jean Franco puts it, "the root of all trouble" (1989: 131-132), but rather the nation: "In Mexican cinema the woman's body (through motherhood or prostitution/sex and violence) constitutes the site where "the nation" is articulated" (Acevedo-Muñoz 2004: 40).

Another important group of masculinities combines effeminate masculinity with female masculinity, and plays a pivotal role as an antithetical construct in the *Mexico Trilogy*. With effeminate masculinity, I mean the female presumed stereotypes, such as obeying, masochist, narcissist, passive, weak, physically inferior, which become the determining and dominating characteristics within a man. Female masculinity, though, incorporates the traditionally male considered characteristics, such as physically strong, active, demanding, sadistic, in charge, etc. (cf. Halberstam 1998). The character of Chambers, for example, shows multiple signs of an effeminate masculinity, as he is portrayed as a very complex personality, carrying his little dog with him at all times, which contributes to his anti-macho appearance. This stands in clear contradiction to the brutal murders he is forced to commit, e.g. the strangulation of Cucuy. However, this apparent antithesis is weakened by the fact that Chambers commits his crimes under pressure because he works for Barillo, a fact that is very much despised by this multi-faceted minor character. He is a passive narcissist who suffers from both being away from the United States and from being obliged to work for Barillo in Mexico. A reluctant masochist, Chambers endures daily humiliations by Barillo, including assignments for atrocious crimes, and on top of it, he has to suppress his growing homesickness, too. It is not explicitly mentioned as to whether he is gay or not, which offers even more possible interpretations as far as his male portrayal is concerned. Passivity, masochism and narcissism are the main specifics of this type of effeminate masculinity, which can be found in many characters of the *Mexico Trilogy*, starting with Moco and his men in *El Mariachi*. In all scenes with Moco, he is shown to possess an impeccable style, always dressed in an elegant white suite, which underlines his “whiteness” in contrast to the dark skinned Mexicans around him. His vanity and narcissist egocentrism is further emphasised in one scene where his lover carefully manicures Moco’s hands. Being a sadist, he takes particular pleasure in lighting his cigar by scratching a match under the ear of one of his most important hitmen. The hitmen themselves can also be considered reluctant masochists, as they allow Moco to do whatever pleases him. This passivity, in the end, guarantees the mariachi’s survival: when he aims for the gun in order to kill Moco, there would have been sufficiently enough time for Moco’s men to kill him, but they do not, on the contrary, they physically distance themselves from their leader and let him be shot by the mariachi. Female masculinities are a constant leitmotiv recognizable already at the beginning of *El Mariachi*, where a woman holds the position of a corrupt prison officer, not to mention Azul’s lovers know how to handle a gun. In *Desperado*, Bucho feels out of control when he cannot find the mariachi. Killing his own men in frustration, he orders his lover to take control of the house because someone competent needs

to do that. This type of narrating the “inadequately or incompetently masculine male” can be understood as “another way of being male that is not dependent on traditional notions of the masculine” (Buchbinder 2008: 234). But the main point of this scene is that Bucho regards a woman as more valuable, more masculine, more active and competent to get a job done in contrast to his hitmen. In *Once upon a time in Mexico*, this aspect is extended in the character of Ajedrez who is physically strong, powerful, and sadistic. As for the main female protagonists, it is above all Carolina who is convincing with her new physical powers and combat fighting skills in *Once upon a time in Mexico*, and her active seduction of the mariachi in *Desperado*. Dominó may appear less masculine in that sense, but she effectively threatens the mariachi with her knife by almost emasculating him. Her strength is not based on domination, but on taking responsibility for her own life, which, according to hooks, can be considered more a “partnership model” than a “dominator model”:

Feminist masculinity presupposes that it is enough for males to be to have value, that they do not have to “do”, to “perform”, to be affirmed and loved. Rather than defining strength as “power over”, feminist masculinity defines strength as one’s capacity to be responsible for self and others.” (hooks 2004: 117)

At the end of *El Mariachi*, it is her knife that he takes with him because it will always remind him of her.

4) Conclusion

Multiple masculinities are detectable in the *Mexico-Trilogy*, and many of these undergo significant changes leading to a plurality of masculinities by unveiling their hybridity. Most of the characters, as has been demonstrated, bear, each for themselves, a variety of masculinities, whether it is effeminate masculinity combined with violent masculinity in the characters of Chambers and Lorenzo, or female masculinity in contrast to hegemonic masculinity, both combined in the character of Carolina. With reference to Cohan and Hark (1995), who have already criticised traditional assumptions on masculinity, such as activity and sadism, which, nevertheless, are very visible in the *Mexico Trilogy*, the concept of hybrid masculinities opens the gates for a broader perception of the male. As Fouz-Hernández (2007: 12) points out, “[a] more critical masculine paradigm will necessarily have to consider men as spectacle-driven, exhibitionist, masochist, passive and narcissist; it will have to consider their masquerade and their bodies.” This has been evident in all three films, starting with *El Mariachi*, where masochism, passivity and narcissism are inherent in the characters of Moco (narcissism) and his men (passivity and masochism in their unbalanced relationship to Moco).

In *Desperado*, the spectacle-driven element is visible in the showdown when the mariachi is fighting Bucho's men together with Campa and Quino, and, as already discussed in section 2, the character of Chambers implies narcissist, passive, and masochist features in *Once upon a time in Mexico*. None of the characters of the *Mexico Trilogy* is, in the field of masculinity, unilaterally structured, on the contrary, many overlapping types of masculinity are inherent in one and the same person. As Carpenter (2010: 669) argues:

The non-static nature of hegemonic masculinity suggests a parallel with another culturally fluid phenomenon, transculturation, which is aimed at challenging and changing existing static cultural dichotomies. Hegemonic masculinity and transculturation incorporate a variety of manifestations of internal and external interactions and are characterized as processes rather than unchanging states."

Hegemonic masculinity manifests itself not only on the external level of men's dominance over women (Moco-Dominó, Bucho/Márquez-Carolina), but is clearly embedded socially as one group of men ascends over all other men (Criminal druglords-decent people, CIA-AFN, Americans-Mexicans). Masculinity, consequently, is a socially related concept that "[...] is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations. To understand masculinity historically, we must study changes in those social relations" (Connell 1995: 29). These social relations are defined by their group belonging and are built on "social representations" (cf. Hinton 2000: 179) and the "fictive we of the nation" (cf. Stam/Shohat 2009: 475), which is highlighted via the questioning of hegemonic masculinities and the introduction of hybrid masculinities. As my analysis of gender-coded symbols (e.g.: la tortuga, el escorpión) and cultural allusions (el chingón/la chingada) has proved, masculinities need to be deconstructed from their local and linguistic contexts in order to reveal both their hegemonic and hybrid masculinities. A universal masculinity does not exist, because "[passing] masculinity [...] off as universal and eternal not only naturalizes and essentializes gender difference but also conceals important relations of domination and power" (Eleftheriotis 1995: 237). This is particularly emphasised in the character of Sands in relation to Hispanic culture. By shooting a torero during a *Corrida*, Sands, who has already developed the habit of killing the local cooks after lunch, has demonstrated his powerful masculinity based on the disrespect of local traditions and on his white superiority. This is of particular interest, as the bullfight, by definition, incorporates the game of power and dominance. Dominating and determining this fight, this Hispanic tradition, from an outside position, symbolizes the hegemonic relationship between the United States and Mexico. The most evident allusion to American interference in local and national affairs of Mexico is given by Sands himself after the torero's collapse: "I am creating a

balance.” As my analysis of the *Mexico Trilogy* has shown, masculine images of Latinos and Anglos, to use Berg’s terminology (Berg 2002: 22), need to be considered in their social and historical context, because they belong to the discourse on Otherness in Mexico and in the United States. The stereotype of the macho is very different in an Anglo context than it is in a Latin-American, and especially Mexican context, because

[macho] is also the quintessential virile image of the post-revolutionary Mexican nation, embodied by the *charro* (cattle rancher), an image widely circulated through film, popular music (*rancheras, mariachi*), performance, sports (rodeo, equestrian), the graphic arts (Jesús de la Helguera’s famously illustrated calendars, for example), and literature.“ (de la Mora 2006: 23)

It is pivotal to pay attention to the fact, that “[beyond] their existence as mental constructs or film images, stereotypes are part of a social conversation that reveals the mainstream’s attitudes about Others” (Berg 2002: 19). I showed how the physical change of the mariachi from *El Mariachi* to *Desperado*, and Sands’s changed appearance in *Once upon a time in Mexico*, contribute to new discourses on the male body and disabilities, skin and sex appeal. But it is in the mariachi’s body, in particular, that we observe a Mexican symbol of resistance against American oppression. As Pérez-Torres (2000: 542) remarks:

Through the *mestizo* body, power – in terms of cultural capital, in terms of social control, in terms of political agency – crosses with ever-present discourses creating and delimiting identity. Racial identity, sexual activity, gender formation, class affiliation, linguistic ability, economic mobility, national citizenship, and political engagement are all delineated by the bodies that move through their networks of signification. These discourses are instrumental in ensuring that power gets distributed and imposed unequally.

Disabled by an Anglo, deprived of his family by a corrupt Mexican working for the CIA, the mariachi stands up against the established order of political hegemony which is symbolised via hegemonic masculinities. While *El Mariachi* and *Desperado* question post-colonial issues rather symbolically and less explicitly, *Once upon a time in Mexico* deals with political issues in the main plot: the planned assassination of the newly elected President of Mexico by the American CIA together with Mexican drug lords. By saving the President and taking revenge on Márquez, the mariachi is free again, thus his freedom is an allegory of Mexican independence. He no longer is a father, neither a husband, but he will always be the son of Mexico, as he declares while rescuing the President: “Soy un hijo de México.”

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The Cinematic Cholo in *Havoc*

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1) Preliminary remarks

For over a century now, ‘the motion-picture industry [...] has functioned as the primary transmitter of racist Latino/a images’ (Castro 2006: 89). The cholo, or Chicano gang member, is a prevalent archetypal figure used to depict Mexican and Mexican American men and youth on the screen.¹ The ‘inarticulate, violent, and pathologically dangerous “bandidos”’ of the silent film era have been transformed into the cholo (Berg 2002: 69). As the reel descendent of the Mexican bandido, the cholo is of questionable character, with few redeeming qualities. Like his predecessor, the cinematic cholo is an abject being (Mora 2011).

In this text, I would like to comment on the role of the cinematic cholo as an abject being within the film *Havoc* (Kopple 2005). In the film, a group of White high school students from the Pacific Palisades, a beach front district of Los Angeles cross paths with the stereotypical cholo in a barrio approximately 25 miles away. In an earlier work (Mora 2011), I identified the cholo characters in *Havoc* as stereotypes. I documented how cholo characters were being depicted by considering their position within the overall film narratives; how they interacted amongst themselves; how they interacted with non-cholo characters; and how cholo characters approached their own cholo identities. Stereotyped characters, reduced to a few distinctive traits, do not develop as the film progresses; rather they are embedded in the narrative in predictable ways. As a result, they stand in sharp contrast to ‘the novelist character, defined by a multiplicity of traits that are only gradually revealed to us through the course of the narrative, a narrative which is hinged on growth or development of the character’ (Dyer 2008: 247). As I argue below, in *Havoc*, the cholo serves as the deviant other, whose personality and character is stunted by neighborhood

¹ The meaning of cholo has changed over the years; yet, it has always referred to abjected individuals. Centuries ago, in Spanish California, it was used as a social class label for Mestizos and Indians “in transition from one culture to another and somewhat marginal to both” (Vigil 1998: 133). Over time, cholo has come to be synonymous with Mexican American and other Latino gang members, mostly in the Southwest. Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers have employed the term cholo as an epithet referencing Mexican and Chicano youth (Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department 1991: 71-73).

pathologies, and stands in contrast to the rich, White youth for whom deviancy is an adolescent rite of passage, not a final destination.

2) First impressions

Havoc opens with the sound of seagulls and a black screen and then we see Allison, a White young woman wearing thin gold hoop earrings framed in the view find of a video camera. Swaying her head side to side and in a sarcastic, sassy tone, she speaks to the camera:

Allison: So you want to know about us? 'Bout kids from the Palisades? [Leans her face into camera shot] That's easy, right? Our parents moved to the ocean...and built walls facing the other way. They...send us to private school. They hire rent-a-cops with uniforms...and make them drive around in little Ford Escorts, see? This sends a powerful message. There's us and there's them...inside the circle and out. We live very sheltered lives.

This monologue—composed of the first words the audience hears—introduces the issue of class and racial divide. Private security forces and walls impose 'a variant of neighborhood 'passport control' on outsiders,' particularly on those profiled as deviant (Davis 1990: 246). The opening credits appear over a shot of the Los Angeles skyline. As the credits continue, we see an aerial shot that moves across Los Angeles, to the east and then to the west, showing Palisades High School, sweeping over the Santa Monica pier, and ending at a seaside parking lot. Then, we see Allison once again framed in the shot of a video camera and directing the following comments to it:

Allison: So we dress gangsta. We talk shit. So what? It's our thing. [Slides off the hood of an older model Impala] See, basically, the thing to remember...is that... well, none of it really matters. We're just teenagers, and we're bored. We are totally... [purposefully backs her buttocks into Toby's crotch as she gyrates, and he responds by gyrating along with her, thrusting his crotch into her]...fuckin'...bored.

As the film progresses, it becomes clear that contrary to Allison's assessment adopting the 'gangsta' persona does matter, as it has life altering consequences for Allison and some of her friends. The videographer, Eric, turns his lens onto Toby, Allison's boyfriend. He is wearing the trappings of the commercially-constructed gangsta look—an ENYCE jacket over a white muscle shirt, three silver (or white gold) chains, one with a dollar sign medallion. In response to a question, Toby rejects his racial and class privileges, with no recognition that the act of rejecting identity is itself a privilege or of how ironic his response is given that the dollar sign medallion around his neck is not aspirational:

Eric: 'How long have you identified with gangsta culture?'

Toby: 'I mean I hate fucking...rich-ass White culture. Shit's fucking wack (lame). You know?' [Allison is in the background drinking from a 40oz beer bottle, a signifier of urban, street culture]

Eric continues his questioning, and Sam, one of Toby's close friends who is wearing a large newspaper boy's hat, oversized button down shirt and black headphones around the neck, joins the conversation, interjects. With attitude and bravado, Sam attempts to reject the wigger label that is used, more often than not disdainfully, to describe White individuals who emulate Black people and embrace cultural practices they perceive to be representative of Black individuals:

Eric: So, are you guys just wiggers, trying to borrow from the Blacks?

Sam: Nah, the whole world jocks (imitates/steals), sonny. It's, like, all the good shit came from Black people.

Eric: Do you like anything White?

Toby: Yeah. Yeah, like my skinny White ass, player.

Sam and his friends, however, are playing with a stereotypical identity they ascribe to urban, working poor Blacks, individuals among the 'them' residing outside the walls of their families' gate communities; a stereotypical identity that reinforces the culture of poverty argument used by conservatives, which argues that poor Black men embrace a culture that promotes deviant behavior. The young men's presentation of self—their attire and use of vernacular (e.g. use of words such as wack, jocks, dawg, nigga, etc.)—borrows from Hip Hop culture, and in doing so exoticizes Black culture. As Roediger explains, 'In the case of wiggers, ...the tendency toward essentializing views of Black culture as male, hard, sexual, and violent are likely more pronounced than was the case in earlier while attraction of rhythm and blues and to soul' (1998: 363). This contemporary appropriation of Black culture is 'a performance, one that allows whites to contain their fears and animosities toward Blacks through rituals...of adoration' (Yousman 2003: 369).

Toby interrupts the interview when a White young man hanging out by another group of cars flips him off. Toby rounds up his male and female friends and they walk toward the young man and his male and female friends. The two groups of youth are framed in a panoramic camera shot walking to the center of the frame. Toby and his friends are called 'little rich bitches,' more insulting words get exchanged. A fight ensues between the two groups after Toby punches the young man that flipped him off, and who he suspects keyed his car. The camera keys in on Toby slamming the young man's head into the ground and Allison fighting a girl. The camera's focus on Toby and the following reveal that Toby's masculine performativity is the hegemonic masculinity, or 'the leading form of

masculinity on show,' which 'is able to regulate thought and action by being able to define what is the norm,' in his social world (Swain 2000: 96). Police sirens are, then, heard. Everyone involved in the melee scatters. Toby, Allison, Sam, and Sam's girlfriend, Emily, drive off in Toby's 1966 powder blue, convertible Impala, a car that is popular among Black and Latino gang members in Southern California and some rap stars. As they escape, all four of them have their hands in a celebratory fashion, signaling the bond that exists between them friends and members of their Palisades gang, 'P.L.C.', the full name of which is never revealed.

The next time we see Toby, Allison, Sam, and Emily in the Impala is in a scene when they are driving around wondering where to go and claiming that their gang, P.L.C., is 'in full effect.' After ruling out the idea of going to Hollywood Boulevard and shooting tourists with paintball guns, Toby decides: 'We're gonna hit up (go to) that ghetto. We headin' east. We holdin' it down on these streets, nigga!'² Sam responds excitedly, '¡Hola, cabrón! We coming for you!' Taken together, Toby's and Sam's comments indicate their equating ghetto with east, and east with Spanish-speaking others. Consequently, their excitement is about traveling to the barrios of eastside of Los Angeles, which is populated mostly by Latinos of Mexican descent. As they travel east, the streets look grimmer, with people doing drugs out in the open, prostitutes at a corner, and gang members idling around. They point it all out, as if on safari, while also verbally acknowledging they are in a geographic area that is alien to them. All the while, we hear The Luniz' song, 'I Got 5 on it,' which foreshadows the drug transaction that will soon take place.

Toby turns onto a dark street and pulls up next to a Black man on a pay phone and a group of cholo standing near him. The Black male never speaks, nor does he interact with the cholos or with Toby and his crew. He is a part of the barrio scenery, one that does not signify barrio. Yet, he is a signifier letting the audience know that White youth have reached 'the ghetto' they sought; that the barrio can be read as the stereotypical ghetto, making the cholo comparable to the Black gangsters films regularly equate with urban ghettos. As Denzin explains, while detailing the reproduction of racial stereotypes in Hollywood cinema, the 'cinematic version of the racial order situates race in ... the barrio,' where White viewers are confronted by 'the subaltern, youthful other' (2005: 473).

² Holding it down = in control of situation and/or location

3) Reconfirmation of the binary construct

Admittedly, the hypermasculinity Hector, the prominent cinematic cholo in *Havoc*, displays with his behavior and words is an aggressive variant of the ‘dominant U.S. masculinity [which] invites men to attack weakness in others and ridicule those already shamed’ in order to enhance their masculine status and acquire the social power that accompanies it (Gardiner 2000: 1259). However, the stereotypical cholo’s hypermasculinity embodies the unthinkable in broader society and thus lacks subjectivity and exists outside of the symbolic and social orders (Kristeva 1982). As a castoff, any abject embodies an identity that is beyond the boundaries of the social. It serves as the not-I against which subjects construct their various identities and define their subjectivities (Butler 1998; Kristeva 1982). In the case of the cholo, he is turned into the abject because his existence and nature offends the imaginary of civilized sociality. He is an abject persona that represents ‘the abject specter of Chicano gangs,’ which many want expelled from society (De Genova 2008: 127). In the end, the cinematic cholo is the not-I used to contrast the growth and civility expected of rich, White youth, and the barrio in which they reside represents the unknown urban perils against which the dominant discourse often contrasts the archetypal serene suburbs populated by White middle-class families—a discursive binary that allows suburbanites to perceive themselves as law-abiding, peaceful individuals. As Butler states:

The abject designates ... precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject. ... This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. (1998: 368)

Allison’s highlights this binary when, after getting Allison of jail, her father demands to know why Allison would even to ‘downtown’ and hang out with ‘crack dealers.’

Similarly explicit in its dichotomy and patterns of exclusion are the final scenes when the film fades from black to a aerial shot showing McArthur Park and the skyline of Los Angeles, which serves as a reminder of the fears Palisades’ parents had about their children venturing to ‘downtown’. Allison once again speaks directly into the camera, but this time without any attitude or bravado. She is no longer playing with identity, no longer ‘buying into’ the ‘gangsta’ persona. She states:

Allison: I don’t know. Shit. I mean, I’m a... kid, basically...with good S.A.T. scores. But you can waste a lot of time buying into stuff like that...crying over some shit you think’s important...for, like, two seconds. I mean, if you give us a moment of... connection...one

true moment...and it's, like, suddenly...we know everything in the world. And that's us. That's all there is to us. So, um...is that a wrap?

Allison seems to recognize that she was foolish for believing that the 'moment of connection' she had with Hector, when he asked that she be his eyes, was genuine and not just him trying to charm her. In addition, she seems to know that she was naïve for not believing that Palisades parents were right in building walls and policing their neighborhood; right in safeguarding their children from those outside their circle, namely the cholos who wreaked havoc in her life and the lives of her rich, White friends. In fact, she has accepted the simple, less exciting life of a 'kid...with good scores' who can become a contributing member of society.

In this sense, she ultimately confirms the static representation of the cholos in *Havoc* and stresses that Hector and his homeboys are nothing more than stereotypes. By the end of the film, the brown, abject cholos have completely revealed their deviant, hypersexual, dangerous, or debaucherous nature. White Allison, on the other hand, evolves and her subjectivity is highlighted by the fact that she can and has stopped experimenting with the deviant behavior she once found enticing. The differing portrayals serve to reiterate raced and classes discourses.

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Language, Space and the Evolving Chicano Family in Nava's *My Family*

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1) Preliminary remarks

My Family (1995) is a film directed by Chicano director Gregory Nava. It was written by Nava and his wife, Anna Thomas, and produced by Thomas¹ The film depicts three generations of a Chicano family living in East Los Angeles and is set in three separate time periods – the 1920s/ 1930s, the late 1950s and the 1980s. The main characters are played by Latino actors from a variety of backgrounds and, given the temporal shifts in the film, most of the family members are played by several actors. According to Rosa Linda Fregoso, Chicano cinema “concerns the emergence of a film culture *by, about, and for* Chicanas and Chicanos” (original emphasis, 1993, xiv).² Although few Chicano films will be all of these things at once, *My Family* arguable fulfils all three criteria – ‘by’, ‘about’ and ‘for’ – even if there is some disagreement concerning the extent to which it is ‘for’ Chicanas/os. The film is part of a larger body of films, increasingly made by Latino filmmakers, that have addressed Latino relations in the United States and ethnic and regional relations along the United States-Mexican border as well as attempted the difficult task of reaching both minority and dominant audiences (Marambio and Tew 2006: 476).

Clearly, unless Chicano cinema is intended as an assertion of difference aimed exclusively at Chicanas/os, it needs to address a dual audience (minority and dominant). This leads to complex, competing impulses that reflect the wider issue of

whether (or how far) the politics of Chicano identity entail a bid for Mexican American inclusion in ‘the American dream,’ or conversely, a radical rejection of its premises (Jankowski quoted in Belgrad 2004: 249).

Belgrad believes that, in cultural terms, the inclusionary impulse translates into a celebration of cultural hybridity that rejects older assimilationist models as well as left-leaning discourse that emphasizes the historical asymmetries and social inequalities that give meaning to cultural difference in favour of a border-zone where identities mix and enrich one another. Nonetheless, as Shohat and Stam point out (1994: 43), a celebration of synthesis and hybridity

¹ Anna Thomas was born in Germany to a Polish family and moved to the United States as a small child (Anna Thomas Tribute Blogspot 2009). Various producers came on board to help complete the project, including Francis Ford Coppola.

² Essentially, this is the position outlined in one of the first articles to argue for a Chicano counter-cinema and the possibility of Chicano self-representation, Jason C. Johansen's 1979 ‘Notes on Chicano Cinema’ (1992 [1979]).

per se risks endorsing the *fait accompli* of colonial violence: in other words historically hybridity is power-laden and asymmetrical. Precisely because of the unequal power relations involved, assimilation can frequently be viewed as treason and accessibility as capitulation provoking members of minority groups to insist on their ‘otherness’. Consequently, much contemporary Chicano cultural production can be seen as cultural negotiation with conflicting impulses towards ‘inclusion’ and ‘otherness’ simultaneously present (Ybarra-Frausto 1991: 147- 48). Through an analysis of its use of language, its representation of space and its representation of family, this article examines how *My Family* negotiates these tensions between accessibility and inaccessibility.

2) Code-switching in *My Family*

As Shohat and Stam note (1994: 191), languages are potent symbols of collective identity and as such frequently mark the boundaries of national and cultural differences. In the abstract, languages do not exist in hierarchies of value but in lived experience languages, in fact, operate within hierarchies of power (Shohat/Stam 1994: 191). Code-switching, which can be defined as “the alternate use of two languages or linguistic varieties within the same utterance or during the same conversation” (Hoffmann 1991: 110), is one response to such hierarchies since it involves retaining use of the vernacular and the associated affirmation of identity, alongside gaining command of the dominant language as a survival strategy. As both the narrator’s voice-over and the dialogue of *My Family* employ linguistic code-switching, it is worth examining how and to what effect this strategy is used in the film.

The film as a whole is a visual representation of a written memoir by the eldest brother of the Sánchez family, Paco. Based on the sheet of paper seen in his typewriter, we can take it that Paco’s ‘book’ is written primarily in English, consistent with the use of English as the dominant code by most Latina/o writers (Torres 207: 77). This leaves open the question of whether or not his parents, José and María can be understood to have spoken mainly in English – for instance, to help their children learn English – only switching to Spanish from time to time, or whether they in fact would have spoken mainly Spanish and the use of English interspersed with Spanish words and phrases is Paco’s strategy to convey to his ‘readers’ the linguistic world in which his parents lived. In the case of the second and third generations of the family, the use of English and Spanish can be seen as a reflection of the linguistic reality of bilingual code-switching by many Chicanos and Latinos. The forms code-switching takes are both intersentential (different sentences within the same conversation

spoken in different languages) and intrasentential (switching between languages within a single sentence). Both intersentential and intrasentential code-switching are used in this film albeit they have somewhat different functions. Intersentential switching is relatively redundant (i.e. it is usually used to ‘repeat’ the Spanish meaning in the English dialogue and *vice versa*), while intrasentential switching relates mainly to expressive functions and includes terms of affection (*carnal/a, hermano/a, hijo, mijo, vato*, etc.), friendly exhortations (*ándale, apúrate*, etc.), insults (*puto, cabrón, pendejo*) and, to a lesser extent, words and phrases used to refer to law enforcement institutions and agencies (*la pinta, la Migra, la placa*) and to Anglo culture (*pinche*). One example is the confrontation between José and Chucho with José saying that “I didn’t raise my children to be *sinvergüenzas*...” and Chucho shouting back “Fuck *la dignidad*. Fuck your struggle...”, when intrasentential code switching signals their extreme anger.

Overall, the use of code-switching draws attention to those segments of the population living between cultures and languages and stresses the fact that the Spanish language is an intrinsic part of Latina/o life and, therefore, of the multilingual reality of the U.S. Although using Spanish can be considered a political act (for example during the proliferation of English-only laws in the U.S.; Torres 2007: 92), in any analysis of accessibility versus inaccessibility it is also useful to examine *how* Spanish is incorporated into the dialogue. A number of the points raised by Lourdes Torres in her discussion of Latino literature are relevant to language use in *My Family*, since she contends that most of the Spanish used in Latina/o fiction is easily understood by a monolingual speaker of English and is in fact included with this monolingual reader in mind (2007: 79). In Chicano literature, code-switching is achieved by using Spanish words whose meaning is obvious from the context (e.g. foods and place names) and words familiar due to their circulation in popular culture (e.g. the Spanish words for members of the family) without any translation, as well as the use of Spanish words in the text followed by an English translation. The film really only uses the first two strategies and rarely provides direct explanations for words (one of the few examples of an English-language explanation involves the Aztec word *Cihuateteo*). In the main, *My Family* employs strategies of redundancy (e.g. by using Spanish words whose meaning is obvious from the context or, as mentioned earlier, repetition of content) and explication (see the subtitling of the scene when José first arrives in L.A. and of the scenes set in Mexico). As in the case of the Chicano literature discussed by Torres, such strategies allow monolingual speakers of English easy access to the film. Despite the potentially positive aspects of this approach – reaching a wider audience – an alternative analysis is that these strategies permit

“the reader [viewer] to sense that s/he is entering the linguistic world of the bilingual Latino/as without having to make any effort” (Torres 2007: 81). Nonetheless, in spite of the use of subtitles and redundancy, the scenes set in Mexico are not subtitled in full (some phrases are omitted) and there are various instances when Spanish-language dialogue is not ‘repeated’ in English. Consequently, while overall the linguistic strategies employed facilitate access to English speakers to accommodate all potential audiences, the use of Spanish also signals the linguistic reality of the central characters and insists on some degree of inaccessibility to non-Spanish speakers.

3) Representations of Space

As a consequence of unequal power relations between the Chicano community and the dominant community, Belgrad argues that Chicano art is “never just about the transgression of boundaries, but also about an awareness of those boundaries” (2004: 251) and so, not surprisingly, the representation of space in the film functions to reference both political and socio-economic boundaries. At the macro level, the film raises the issue of the U.S. border and the increasing focus on policing it, with the implied background of ongoing migration into the U.S. from Mexico and other Latin American countries.³ At the beginning of the film, *El Californio* belongs to a generation who lived in L.A. before it became part of the United States and when José travels from Mexico to join him in the 1920s, the border is not an obstacle. Subsequently, however, it was to be policed with greater intensity and this is reflected in the film when, in the 1930s, María (a U.S. citizen) is illegally deported to Mexico. This deportation is later paralleled by Isabel’s threatened deportation (Isabel is not a U.S. citizen, but her life is in danger if she returns to El Salvador). At the micro level (the city of L.A.), the key image structuring the divisions and boundaries within L.A. and relating them to the city’s dependence on Chicano labour is the image of the bridge between East and West Los Angeles that opens the film.⁴ The voice-over accompanying the second appearance of the bridge (which follows José’s journey from Mexico and his arrival in L.A.) specifies that “no one crosses from the west to go into the barrio.” Subsequently, the bulk of the film is set in East LA. The few scenes set elsewhere relate to characters working in West L.A., to Jimmy in

³ As Nava says in interview, the U.S. is a nation of immigrants but although U.S. society is based on its diversity, the central mainstream is Anglo with resultant potential for culture clash (West 1995).

⁴ It is worth mentioning that the film was released shortly after the 1994 bid to reinforce borders via California Proposition 187 prohibiting undocumented immigrants from receiving health care, public education or other state services. In 1997 Proposition 187 was declared unconstitutional and State of California appeals against this ruling were later withdrawn (see Note 7, Marambio/ Tew 2006: 491).

prison as well as when he collects and marries Isabel, while there are also some more extended scenes set in Mexico (José's and, later, María's journeys). One interpretation of this representation of space is that it denotes the *barrio* as a kind of prison, moreover, one that is subject to official neglect – e.g. the unpaved road, the inferior facilities in the hospital where Isabel dies and the urban decay visible in the scenes portraying Paco living and working in the old family home. In this reading, the dearth of images of access to the wider city, in other words, access to upward mobility challenges the belief that all U.S. citizens have equal access to the American Dream. However, it can also be argued that the decision to focus on the *barrio* operates in more positive ways, re-coding the spatial distinctions in L.A. In the first instance, it brings mainstream viewers, who we have been informed never go there, across the bridge into East L.A. Once 'there', the representation of East L.A. differs markedly both from its usual representation in cinema as a criminalized ghetto and its close association with gang culture in the wider popular perception,⁵ because the chief focus is on the domestic and on the co-existence of different cultural codes. The Sánchez house and garden together represent the family's resourcefulness, adaptability and willingness to embrace a mixing of cultural codes or *mestizaje* (Baugh 2003: 15), evidenced in the manner in which the house and the space around it contain signifiers of both Mexican and U.S. cultures. Indoors, such signifiers include the numerous religious images that adorn the house and the scenes when members of the family watch *I Love Lucy*, with a specific reference in the dialogue to Desi Arnaz (pointedly, the family are watching this assimilated Cuban when Chucho is shot i.e. permanently excluded). Outdoors, the family home acquires a picket fence but corn and beans are grown in the garden, local children play baseball and the second eldest son of the Sánchez family, Chucho, polishes his low-rider and dances the Mambo. Despite this overall emphasis on everyday, domestic life crime is not totally absent. Chucho becomes involved first in selling drugs, and then in a knifing after he is attacked by another *pachuco* on the dance floor.⁶ This dance hall scene is another instance of the mixing of cultural codes within the *barrio* because it combines Mexican visuals (the murals on the wall) with 1950s U.S. pop music on the soundtrack. Prison, too, is portrayed as a reality in the *barrio* since Jimmy does

⁵ In relation to their representation on screen, despite some changes since the 1980s, stereotypical images of Chicanos reach a mass audience much more frequently than do non-stereotypical images (Christine List cited in Baugh 2003: 12). In relation to popular perceptions, Carlos E Cortés describes an incident on a popular television game show to demonstrate how the dominant culture views the Chicano community as synonymous with gangs (1992: pages 94 and 95).

⁶ Though glossed as meaning a gang member by the policemen hunting Chucho, the term *pachuco* refers to at least as much to the subculture (which included clothing styles, tastes in music and modes of speech) developed by young Chicano males in the south western United States. The phenomenon emerged during the 1930s and 1940s and declined in the 1960s.

two stints in jail. However, the narrative specifically links criminal activity and imprisonment to “all the hate, all the rage and all the injustice”, and Jimmy’s initial involvement in crime is specifically linked to having witnessed Chucho’s murder when he was a boy.⁷ His second brush with the law follows Isabel’s death as a result of what he believes is negligence due to her background (“It’s just one spic more or less”). Also, Paco’s voice-over claims quite convincingly that if Jimmy had had more money and less attitude a good lawyer could have got him out of his first custodial sentence. Ultimately, the only real crime the audience witnesses taking place in East L.A. is when the police shoot Chucho without making any effort to arrest, question or charge him, a killing that takes place beneath the bridge between East and West L.A. (making it a signifier of division in this instance). In a further blending of cultural codes, both Chucho’s death and later that of Isabel are overtly linked to mythic Aztec beliefs. Despite being a staunch Catholic, María believes that Chucho, originally saved by a ‘magic’ ritual, is finally claimed by the river spirit and that Isabel becomes one of the *Cihuateteo*, the spirits of women who die in childbirth.⁸

Towards the end of the film, the most assimilated Sánchez son, Guillermo/Memo (who has attended U.C.L.A., lives in West L.A. and now insists on being called William/Bill) brings his Anglo-American fiancée and her parents to visit his family in a symbolic reversal of the usual direction of travel across the bridge. This episode works on two main levels. For one thing, it portrays Memo’s prospective in-laws (and by extension many Anglo-Americans) as ignorant about Memo’s (and Chicanos’) background. It also portrays Memo as having rejected his origins and acts as an indirect reaffirmation of the family’s right to their history and customs. At the same time, an unfavourable comparison between Memo’s future in-laws and another Anglo-American character, Isabel’s employer, Gloria emerges. Whereas Gloria (who can be interpreted as a surrogate for an open-minded audience) is not necessarily knowledgeable about Isabel’s background, she is concerned, willing to learn about El Salvador and to help Isabel stay in the U.S., and she has no hesitation in contradicting her friend’s prejudiced views about Isabel. In contrast, Memo’s future father-in-law focuses on cultural boundaries: “So you folks are all from Mexico, huh?” As viewers will be aware, and as his prospective in-laws ought to know, all the Sánchez children except Chucho were born in L.A. and have never

⁷ The term *cholo* emerged in the 1980s to refer to Chicano youths who adopted a countercultural identity similar to that of the *pachuchos* of an earlier generation. The fact that Jimmy is referred to as a *cholo* emphasizes the lasting impact Chucho’s death had on him.

⁸ In interview, Nava stresses this syncretic relationship between the pre-Columbian and the Catholic in the film and also that the film has an underlying pre-Columbian mythic structure (West 1995).

been to Mexico.⁹ Meanwhile, Memo's attempts to reinterpret the family's stories (including Jimmy's prison sentence and the fact that *El Californio* is buried in the garden) to versions he considers more palatable to his future in-laws, jar because they suggest he is ashamed and expects his family to alter their account of their history. In short, this rather negative portrayal of Memo, his fiancée and her parents serves to promote integration rather than assimilation, and links back to the ambiguous meaning of the bridges which stress the socio-economic division in their *mise-en-scène* of one-way traffic but also invite viewers to overcome the traditional boundaries.

4) The Representation of Family

Three factors are of particular importance in the analysis of the film's representation of family. Firstly, the concept of family is one that has potential to make the film more accessible to a mainstream audience by stressing common ground with the dominant culture. However, it also has potential to be used to assert difference because the Chicano family is a concept that has consistently been claimed by Chicano nationalists as a site of resistance (Fregoso 2003: 74). A third, related, factor is persistent mainstream social science interpretations of the Chicano family that emphasize the negative aspects of machismo as its defining principle and characterize it as pathological.¹⁰ The stereotype of male violence and criminality described in social science literature is linked, moreover, to the more general issue of stereotyping of Latino characters in U.S. cinema, so widespread that a large body of work by Chicano and Latino scholars on film representations of Latinos focuses on negative stereotypes.¹¹ This concern with stereotypes is directly related to issues of power (the extent to which the group represented controls its own representation), and to the burden of representation or the situation whereby:

every subaltern performer/ role is seen as synecdochically summing up a vast but putatively homogenous community. Representations of dominant groups, on the other hand, are seen not as allegorical but as "naturally" diverse (Shohat and Stam 1994: 183).

⁹ At this point, Chucho has been dead for many years but having left Mexico as a baby he would not have remembered ever having been there.

¹⁰ For an overview of social science 'myths' about the Chicano family see Baugh 2003 (especially pages 4-9). Fregoso too discusses how the culture of poverty model was hijacked by U.S. social scientists to stigmatize the lower classes in general and Chicanos and Latinos in particular (2003: 80-84).

¹¹ The first book to be entirely dedicated to Chicano cinema and to the depiction of Chicanos and other Latinos in U.S. and Mexican cinemas, *Chicano Cinema: Research, Reviews, and Resources*, was edited by Gary Keller and included a chapter by him on the image of the Chicano in film (1985). See, also the essays in Part One of the collection edited by Noriega (1992), the chapters in the first two sections of Berg 2002 or Darfen Davis' overview of Hollywood representations of Latinos (2007).

Consequently, stereotypes are not an error of perception but rather a form of social control (Shohat and Stam 1994: 198) which implies that diverse representations of Chicano characters can be interpreted as disruptive of established mechanisms of social control. Despite claims to the contrary in Fregoso's analysis (Chapter 4, 2003), the film's representation of family is diverse and inclusive as opposed to monolithic and exclusive, and it is not predicated on male dominance and female submission.

The family established by José and María conforms to both the Mexican and Anglo-American cultural norms, promoting identification in both main target audiences. However, despite the fact that at different points in the narrative they each articulate traditional views about marriage and family, the portrayal of their marriage clearly transcends the stereotypical representation of the Chicano family. José and María work together to bring up their children and this is reflected in the way they refer to them as *jefe/ jefito* and *jefita* (masculine and feminine versions of 'the boss'). This equality challenges Fregoso's assertion that although *My Family* places María Sánchez at the centre of the narrative, her lack of narrative agency reinforces gender inequality (2003: 77). María is totally committed to her family and, far from being passive and accepting her fate, shows great spirit in returning to them after she is illegally deported to Mexico. José's portrayal, too, diverges from the stereotypical macho Chicano. He works hard to provide for his wife and children, is affectionate towards them and regrets his one authoritarian act (throwing Chucho out for drug dealing). Indeed, the couple's portrayal is quite close to the egalitarian relationship between mother and father that, as early as 1975, Baca Zinn argued underlies the surface of patriarchal rule in Chicano families (1975: 26).¹² Although María and José attempt to pass on traditional Mexican values to their offspring, as they grow to adulthood most of their children adopt values that are at variance with both traditional Mexican values and those of dominant Anglo culture. According to Fregoso the "definiton of familia as central to the cultural identity of Chicana/os as a people is based on excluding many from its fold" (2003: 86). However, in the main, their parents' reactions to their children's non-traditional values reveal an acceptance of difference and a willingness to find a place for everyone within the family. That this is so is illustrated by the fact that, of the six Sánchez children, Irene is the first and ultimately the only one to enter a traditional marriage and establish a traditional family since Isabel's death prevents Jimmy from doing so. By contrast, Paco does not marry and raise a family and there is no indication that he ever has any type of sexual relationship. He also joins the Navy (a homosocial

¹² Baca Zinn's states early in the article that "the passive, submissive, Mexican woman is a creation of social scientists and journalists" (1975: 19)

environment), and when he leaves it opts to risk becoming a writer supplementing his income by working in Irene's restaurant. It is certainly possible to interpret this character as homosexual, in which case it is worth stressing that he is always included in family events and made to feel welcome, because this could be seen as another indication of the family's openness to alternative life styles. Memo, whose career as a lawyer is a source of pride to his parents, rises above the working-class status of his family and this is reflected in his choice of bride. Whatever their feelings about him 'marrying out' because he has assimilated rather than integrated, the family are willing to facilitate him staying in contact and to welcome Memo's fiancée and her parents into their home and even to alter their family stories for his sake.

The characterization of the remaining siblings is more complex and they present their parents with greater challenges. Contrary to Fregoso's contention that "the film downplays the significance of female voices within la familia, depriving women of significant agency" (2003: 75) there are strong female characters in the second generation also and they have an important effect on a male character (for whom it is not a sign of weakness to listen to a woman). Indeed, according to Baugh (2003: 17) these characters initiate/ prefigure an important shift that is more fully realized in *Mi vida loca* (1994) and *Selena* (1997). The first of these characters is Toni, the second eldest sister of the family, who initially rejects the institution of marriage altogether to become a nun. This is because in the 1950s joining a religious order was the only way she could get an education, expand her horizons and avoid assuming the roles of wife and mother (Nava in West 1995). Subsequently, while working as a missionary and political activist in Central America she leaves her order and marries an Anglo-American ex-priest, David. María faints from the shock of this revelation. Despite this, both parents immediately accept the marriage, with María saying not to worry about her and José saying that if it is all right with God, it is all right with them. Like her mother before her, Toni is a strong character and demonstrates this by going against the Church and her parents' values (leaving her order; marrying but not having children) and the U.S. establishment (the immigrants' rights centre; persuading Jimmy to marry Isabel for the good of the cause). She also exercises a beneficial female influence on Jimmy and in so doing initiates the process of his transformation from *cholo* to, eventually, a husband and father. Although he marries Isabel to "use the system to fuck the system" (Toni's words), Jimmy soon finds that she is another feisty female and one who is not willing to play with the institution of marriage (according to the voice-over, Isabel is perhaps the first person not to allow Toni to "boss" her). No matter how Jimmy protests, Isabel continues to return to his apartment and insinuate

herself into his life. Ultimately, in the scene where she prevails on him to dance with her Isabel seduces him and, in a moving love scene, they learn they have both experienced traumatic loss. When Isabel becomes pregnant Jimmy starts to behave more like his own father, José, by getting a job in West L.A. However, Isabel's death precipitates a return to his old lifestyle. Through this character and that of Chucho, the film attempts to redress the systematic depiction of Latinos as drug pushers, gang members, criminals and *pintos* (Baugh 2003: 11). Baugh's study analyses *American Me* (1992) as well as *My Family* on the basis that both films interrogate notions of Chicano masculinity, Chicana femininity and types of family albeit in contrasting ways. He argues that unlike *My Family*, *American Me* equates gang culture in the *barrios* with the dysfunction of the Chicano family in manner that exemplifies contemporary mainstream film (2003).¹³ By contrast, through the characters of Jimmy and Chucho, *My Family* challenges such stereotypes while not eliding the issues of crime and doing time in prison. After Isabel dies, Jimmy intentionally gets sent back to prison, abdicating his responsibilities and abandoning his new-born son to the care of his parents (despite this rejection, his parents remain concerned about him). Meanwhile, the narrative portrays Carlitos as always in trouble. When Jimmy is released from prison José stresses that Carlitos needs his father, not the money Jimmy offers. Belatedly, Jimmy decides he wants to be involved in his son's life, but Carlitos rejects him forcing Jimmy to negotiate his role as father. Fregoso, following Huaco-Nuzum, contends that the film reworks the classic oedipal crisis by emphasizing oedipal conflicts between fathers and sons (José and Chucho; Jimmy and Carlitos) ultimately reinstating patriarchal authority (2003: 75). However, José and Chucho are shown to regret their estrangement, and the manner in which Jimmy addresses his conflict with Carlitos implies that this character negates the traditional pattern of machismo passed from father to son, and that he learns an alternative type of familial leadership from both his father José and his son Carlitos (Baugh 2003: 18). We infer that, in so doing, he has finally broken free of the effects of Chucho's death.

Chucho is the family member who most closely conforms to the stereotypes of macho violence and criminality associated with Chicano males and he is involved in drug dealing and macho stand-offs with rival gangs. Chucho rejects his parents' values (from their tastes in music to their work ethic) and decides that money is all that matters in the U.S., no matter how you get it. Yet despite his being a macho *pachuco*, Chucho's characterization is nuanced and he is shown to have a caring side: his willingness to allow Butch Mejía insult him for his

¹³ Baugh also identifies *Blood in, Blood out: Bound by Honor* (1993) and *Mi vida loca* (1994) as films that offer some negative and stereotypical Chicano representations (2003: 3).

sister's sake on the day of Irene's wedding; the scenes where he teaches a group of children to dance the Mambo; or his final conversation with Jimmy, when he asks after first his mother and then his father, repeating "Tell him ..." but then changes the subject. We never know what he was going to say, but it seems likely he wanted to say that he was sorry or that he loved his father just as, in the very next scene, José says he wishes he could hold Chucho again and forgive him. Moreover, his life is given a positive value by portraying him as having a "special" mythic dimension. When María tells José she is pregnant he replies that it will be a special child because he saw an "angel" in the clouds on the day the baby was conceived. Later, on the journey back from Mexico, Chucho is nearly drowned – an event associated in María's mind with the evil river spirit (the owl/ *buho* she sees is associated in Aztec mythology with death and destruction). Although her baby is saved, María believes his life has been on borrowed time until the river spirit finally claimed him (and, indeed, Chucho hears and sees an owl shortly before he is shot). Near the end of the film, José picks up a photograph of Chucho and becomes pensive. Immediately afterwards José looks at the sky and sees the same "angel" cloud formation he saw when Chucho was conceived. This comforts him and assures the audience that Chucho was special by inscribing him in an alternative reality, that of Mexican spirituality. Consequently, as Baugh argues, "*My Family* not only reveals Chucho as a compassionate member of the Chicano family and community, but also reconfigures the pachuco stereotype" and actually subverts "the stereotypes of the macho male and Chicano family" (2003: 16).

5) Concluding Remarks

Overall, the use of the family as a character in the film provides a point of reference for most potential audiences but, at the same time, the diversity of the characters and the narrative evaluation of their life choices value integration over assimilation, while the allusions to Mexican spirituality insist on some degree of inaccessibility to non-Chicano audiences. Hence the representation of the family replicates the patterns already identified with respect to language use and the representation of space.

On balance, what emerges from this three-fold analysis of *My Family* is that although the film incorporates both elements that emphasize accessibility and inaccessibility it avoids defining the characters by their race and inherited culture at the expense of their individuality, aspirations and talents. Instead, it celebrates what is shared across cultures to promote

integration in preference to either 'nationalist' separatism or complete assimilation into U.S. society.

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“Mirando” *Bread and Roses* (Ken Loach 2000)

Representaciones sociales de la inmigración en los discursos de espectadores¹

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Los medios de comunicación, y el cine en particular, tratan de influir continuamente en la sociedad expuesta a sus mensajes, convirtiéndose en instrumento de primer orden para construir los significados y los valores sociales, a la vez que es un reflejo de los valores de la sociedad en la que existe. De esta manera, este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las representaciones sociales sobre el fenómeno migratorio y las cuestiones laborales en *Bread and Roses* (2000) de Ken Loach. Nuestro interés se centra en la representación del fenómeno de las migraciones, así como la temática laboral, observando cómo se proyectan en el film citado con las estrategias técnicas y discursivas del texto fílmico, interpretando la significación cultural y social del mensaje cinematográfico tanto en lo representado como de lo representado. Se partirá, por tanto, de la “instancia creadora” de la película para comenzar entendiendo la película en el marco de la creación de su director. También se pretende analizar los significados del fenómeno migratorio y de las cuestiones laborales presentes en el film, interiorizados por los receptores (Bourdieu 1987), estudiantes universitarios de diversas nacionalidades. Para ello, tras la visión de *Bread and Roses* en el marco de una asignatura universitaria, “Cine y migraciones”, los espectadores realizarán una sinopsis y responderán a un cuestionario. Se fomentará la generación de ensayos de los estudiantes a partir de la visión de la película, comparándolos con el discurso del director y la sinopsis de la productora. El análisis de estos discursos se hace desde la perspectiva de la teoría de la recepción (Jauss 1976) y utilizando el análisis crítico del discurso², por ser el que más se ajusta a los objetivos de esta investigación.

¹ El presente texto se relaciona con un proyecto de investigación más amplio que se viene desarrollando desde hace cinco años en el Laboratorio de Estudios Interculturales de la Universidad de Granada inicialmente, y ahora en el Instituto de Migraciones. Se inscribe, por una parte, en el desarrollo continuado durante todo este tiempo de una asignatura de libre configuración denominada “Cine y migraciones” y, por otra parte, en el proyecto “Discursos de extranjería en los medios de comunicación andaluces: la construcción discursiva y visual de la nueva Andalucía (TIC-6517)” financiado por el Programa de Proyectos de Excelencia de la Junta de Andalucía, bajo la dirección de Antolín Granados. Además, forma parte de las tesis doctorales de dos de los autores, financiadas por el Ministerio de Educación en el Programa de Formación de Profesorado Universitario, para el caso de Damián Esteban Bretones, y por el Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores en el Programa de la AEI, para el caso de Tamar Abuladze.

² El análisis crítico del discurso es un enfoque que requiere un compromiso social por parte del investigador y se propone mostrar cómo se forman las ideologías y los discursos, y cómo trabajan una vez formados (Wodak y Meyer 2003). Ello será también intención de este trabajo.

1. Análisis de *Bread and Roses*: estudio de la instancia creadora

Consideramos como instancia creadora al director Ken Loach. Aunque todo film es una obra colectiva, una aproximación del contexto histórico y biográfico de todos los participantes en el film se escaparía al marco de este trabajo. Utilizamos la figura del director por ser representativa, y en el caso de Ken Loach es su máximo responsable, sin obviar la importancia de su colaborador-guionista habitual Paul Laverty. Aquí expondremos su pensamiento político y social a la luz de su contexto histórico-biográfico para, seguidamente, analizar su discurso sobre su obra.

1.1. Una aproximación histórico-biográfica: el posicionamiento político de Ken Loach en *Bread and Roses*

Bread and Roses trata de representar la dignidad de la clase trabajadora de un grupo de limpiadoras³ en Los Ángeles, muchas de las cuales son inmigrantes mexicanas sin documentación para la administración estadounidense. El film muestra que la única forma de superar una situación laboral paupérrima (salarios miserables, jornadas extenuantes, sin seguros médicos y sociales, sin contrato y “sin papeles”) es mediante la acción colectiva (la huelga) organizada por el sindicato SEIU-Justicia para los empleados de la limpieza. Con estos elementos el film está en sintonía con el concepto marxista-trotkista de compromiso con la clase trabajadora de toda la obra de Loach, cineasta que apuesta por el cambio social, visibilizando individuos y colectivos obreros como dice uno de los limpiadores de *Bread and Roses*: “Te he contado mi teoría acerca de estos uniformes...Nos hacen invisibles” (Ostria 1994: 36). Loach utiliza el cine como forma de expresar sus ideas y proyectarlas a nuevas audiencias que participen en su idea de cambio y superación social. Igual que los medios de comunicación en general y la televisión en particular pueden ser un instrumento que visibilice la situación de los trabajadores oprimidos como ocurre en la escenas finales de la huelga de *Bread and Roses*, tratando de influir y formar la opinión pública. Este pensamiento político del cineasta inglés está contextualizado tanto por las circunstancias históricas de crisis económica y giro conservador-neoliberal vividas en el Reino Unido, y el resto del mundo, durante la década de los setenta, como por el movimiento cinematográfico inglés conocido por *Free Cinema* que supone un antecedente a la obra de Loach. A la vez, esta obra sirve de transición o conexión entre el *Free Cinema* y otros cineastas sociales ingleses, Stephen Frears o Mike Leigh.

³ Dado que la mayoría de las personas trabajadoras representadas en el film son mujeres, utilizaremos siempre el femenino para referirnos a ellas, independientemente de que algunos de los trabajadores sean varones.

Así, el *Free Cinema* criticó el conservadurismo inglés desde la década de los cincuenta hasta los setenta, apoyando el movimiento obrero desde su cine como revulsivo ante una izquierda inglesa aletargada. Al respecto, Romaguera y Alsina dicen

el *Free Cinema* inglés se originó como una reacción contra las estructuras industriales de su cine contemporáneo, pero también como una rebelión contra actitudes morales conformistas...quedó unido naturalmente al movimiento de los *angry young men*, los así llamados “jóvenes airados”, que expresaron también en la literatura y en el teatro, ideas similares de rebelión e inconformismo, procurando una atención a las realidades colectivas. (Ramoguera y Alsina 1989: 121)

Directores como Lindsay Anderson, cofundador del movimiento en la década de los cincuenta, hicieron visible con un estilo libre aquello que ocultaba la mayoría de la producción cinematográfica británica de esa época, mostraron la cotidianeidad de la clase obrera, su alienación y las contradicciones presentes en la misma. Igualmente, Loach en *Bread and Roses* muestra cómo las clases altas utilizan a puestos medios del mismo origen étnico y social de aquellos que contralan y oprimen, siendo el supervisor guatemalteco Pérez un personaje desagradable, cruel e inhumano, con los empleados que tiene a su cargo, a pesar de compartir la experiencia de la inmigración.

Si el contexto de desarrollo del *Free Cinema* inglés de los cincuenta fue una izquierda apática y un conservadurismo paternalista que añoraba la grandeza del Imperio Británico, el cine de Ken Loach aparece cuando la crisis mundial del año 1973 se desencadena por varios factores apuntados por Hobsbawm (1998): extensión de la industrialización, aumento de la competencia intercapitalista, el descenso de las ganancias y la subida del precio del petróleo. Esto supuso el fin de los “años dorados”, expresión de Hobsbawm para referirse a las tres décadas de crecimiento macroeconómico continuo. Y tuvo como consecuencia un giro conservador y neoliberal en las principales potencias económicas del mundo. Paradigmático es el caso del Reino Unido con la llegada al poder de Margaret Thatcher, desplegando los presupuestos neoliberales del economista Milton Friedman que había experimentado sus principios económicos en el Chile de Pinochet. Algunas de las medidas tomadas por Thatcher para aumentar la productividad solo beneficiaron a la clase alta, obligando a trabajar por sueldo ínfimos a la clase obrera, desmantelando su protección social. Situación que se profundizó con el paso del tiempo en los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, como dice el sindicalista Allen en *Bread and Roses*:

Hace 17 años esa limpiadora ganaba 8:50 la hora más seguro médico, más bajas pagadas, más vacaciones. De acuerdo. Hoy, en 1999, no tenéis convenio sindical. Ganais 5,75 y nada más. En los últimos veinte años le han quitado miles de millones a las comunidades más pobres de esta ciudad.

En este contexto, la obra televisiva (*Days of hope, A question of leaderships*) y la cinematográfica (*Riff-Raff, The navigators*) de Ken Loach se convierte en militante con las causas de la clase obrera que vive en condiciones de precariedad, retratando e historiando su existencia, denunciando los abusos a los que se ven sometidos, exponiendo las contradicciones y criticando algunos aspectos del colectivo obrero (Fuller 1998). Estos temas los sigue abordando como constante hasta su cine presente, sin importarle que tras la caída del muro de Berlín se afirmará por parte de Fukuyama y otros que no existían las ideologías (Díaz Alonso 2004).

La forma de representar estas cuestiones en la obra de Loach tiene como principio “historizar” hechos “reales”, en el sentido que aporta Bertold Brecht:

Historizar es mostrar un acontecimiento o un personaje bajo su luz social, histórica, relativa y transformable. Es revelar los acontecimientos y los hombres bajo su aspecto histórico, efímero, lo cual hace pensar al espectador que su propia realidad es histórica, criticable y transformable, objetivo político que a través de su obra artística persiguen tanto Loach como Brecht. En la dramaturgia brechtiana, historizar consiste en rechazar el representar al hombre en su carácter individual y anecdótico, para exponer la infraestructura sociohistórica que sustenta los conflictos individuales. (Russo y Puente 2007: 5)

Así, los protagonistas de sus films se mueven en contextos históricos indisolubles con ellos, haciendo que la ficción según la dramaturgia teatral brechtiana se convierta en algo épico de carácter histórico, como subraya Pavis (1998). A la base de este teatro épico de Brecht está el distanciamiento que le sirve para lograr objetivos didácticos. Loach no lo pretende, pero su discurso es más didáctico que emotivo, huyendo de la lágrima fácil aunque está presente la emoción. Estos procesos narrativos de representación están presentes en *Bread and Roses*, cuyo argumento está basado en un hecho real y el propio título del film hace referencia a

una consigna popular tomada de la protesta que encabezaron miles de obreras textiles a principios del siglo XX en Massachussets, cuya victoria rotunda en mejoras salariales y sociales, así como el reconocimiento de los sindicatos, llevaron a Loach a realizar la película del mismo título. (Hernández Rubio 2009: 129)

Precisamente, el fondo histórico que sirve como sustrato a los films de Loach hace que esté atento a la realidad social tanto en el Reino Unido como en otros países, sensible a cualquier fenómeno social o acontecimiento que se esté produciendo y tenga como actores principales a colectivos de personas trabajadoras.

1.2 Análisis crítico del discurso: intenciones de Ken Loach

Hacer una película significa exponer material sensible a la luz. La zona sensible que considero especialmente interesante es la relación de las personas con su ambiente; la familia, el trabajo, la clase social. Los elementos dramáticos que más me atraen son esas ganas de luchar para defenderse, para prestar voz a aquello que normalmente está reprimido y el calor de la amistad, de la solidaridad y de la compasión. (Loach en: De Giusti 1999: 7)

Con estas declaraciones Ken Loach expresa cuál es el sentido de su obra cinematográfica: visibilizar y dar voz a los invisibles, retratar la cotidianeidad de gente que quiere deshacerse de la opresión para tomar las riendas de su destino.

Su compromiso es político y social como ha manifestado muchas veces: “Toda película es política, aunque la etiqueta lamentablemente reste espectadores a mis películas” (Sartori 2003:38 De hecho, Loach afirma en repetidas ocasiones su ideología marxista-trotskista:

C'est une question délicate. Si je répons: "Oui, je suis trotskiste", ça sera utilisé contre moi par ceux qui ne comprennent pas le trotskisme. Si je dis non, je trahis des amis et des gens que je connais. Bref, disons que l'on ne peut pas vraiment comprendre une partie de la politique internationale actuelle si l'on ne connaît pas la lutte de trotskistes contre Staline...Le plus grand héritage de Trotski est probablement le mouvement ouvrier⁴. (Ostria 1994: 36)

Siendo su pensamiento coherente con su actividad personal y cinematográfica rechaza la Orden del Imperio Británico, aparejada al título de Sir, que le concedió la reina de Inglaterra:

Ése es un club al que no quiero pertenecer. La mayoría de sus miembros son auténticos villanos sociales. Y para mí las palabras Imperio Británico constituyen un monumento a la explotación y la conquista, algo que detesto y me produce náuseas. No quiero relacionarme con ello en absoluto. (Sartori 2003:38)

El estilo cinematográfico con el que rueda este magma humano utiliza técnicas documentales para dotar de realismo lo que aparece en la pantalla:

Nuestras películas no tienen sorprendentes ángulos de cámara, ni encuadres extraordinarios y originales. Nos interesamos por poner la cámara delante de personas para aprehender su comportamiento y el ritmo de su habla (!) Hay que alcanzar una simplicidad que sea, al mismo tiempo, comunicativa. Al final de la película, no se deberían notar las tensiones que han llevado a esta simplicidad, a esta economía de medios. (De Giusti 1999: 9)

Este realismo impregna también los principios del casting y el método de trabajo con los actores (improvisación, pocos ensayos) y el rodaje. Un ejemplo es la selección de actores

⁴ “Este es un tema delicado. Si digo: ‘Sí, yo soy trotskista’, será utilizado en mi contra por los que no entienden el trotskismo. Si yo digo que no, traicionaré a los amigos y a la gente que conozco. En resumen, decir que realmente no se puede entender algunas de las políticas internacionales actuales si no se conoce la lucha de Trotsky contra Stalin... el mayor legado de Trotsky es probablemente el movimiento obrero” (Traducción de Damián Esteban Bretones)

desconocidos para encarnar a sus protagonistas, entre las cuales destaca la actriz mexicana Pilar Padilla en *Bread and Roses*:

Pilar es muy directa y siempre se sabe lo que está pensando. Tiene un carácter espontáneo y un espíritu lleno de fuerza que resplandece desde su interior. (Filmscouts 2000)

Además de reunir a un grupo de auténticos limpiadores:

...reunimos a un grupo de limpiadores genial, y eso era importante porque la fuerza o la debilidad de una película no sólo depende de los papeles protagonistas individuales, sino de la vitalidad de todo el conjunto. (Filmscouts 2000)

Bread and Roses es la primera película rodada en Estados Unidos por Ken Loach. La idea surgió del guionista con el que colabora desde la década de los noventa, como afirma el director británico: “Paul Laverty tuvo la idea, concebida durante un viaje a EUA” (Filmscouts 2000). Respecto a la inmigración que aparece en el film, Loach indica: “los norteamericanos ricos no tienen ningún problema con los mexicanos ricos” (Filmscouts 2000). Es decir, para Loach la discriminación es por pertenecer a una clase trabajadora u obrera y ese principio estructural de clase explica la discriminación y dominación, como veremos extensamente en el siguiente apartado. De cualquier manera, la película ensalza el papel del sindicalismo, aunque Loach reconozca la paradoja de rodar en un país con unos sindicatos cinematográficos que funcionan como corporaciones:

...pudimos ver el lado positivo del sindicalismo, pero también los peores ejemplos del mismo, que se producen cuando los sindicatos se convierten en asociaciones corporativistas. (Filmscouts 2000).

2. Una experiencia en la producción de discursos receptores de los mensajes fílmicos

En este apartado describiremos el procedimiento del trabajo de campo, denominado por nosotros como “experimento”, por sus características algo peculiares en cuanto al contexto de su realización. El experimento fue ambientado en el aula de una asignatura denominada “Cine y Migraciones” que desde hace cinco años se viene ofreciendo al alumnado de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Granada (España)⁵. Dicha asignatura ofrece la oportunidad de poder participar, interactuar y observar unos procesos propios del visionado, incluyendo la reflexión y el análisis de las películas por parte de los alumnos. De este modo, contamos con una información que ha servido para encaminar la investigación hacia un análisis amplio de los mencionados procesos.

⁵ El trabajo se realizó dentro de la asignatura “Cine y Migraciones” que se imparte como disciplina de “libre configuración específica” en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Granada. Se ha ofrecido por parte del Departamento de Antropología Social desde el curso 2005-06 y se ha impartido por los profesores F. Javier García Castaño y Antolín Granados Martínez.

La situación creada durante y tras la proyección de los filmes nos presentó un cuadro de múltiple diversidad. Por una parte, la creó el discurso transmitido por el producto cinematográfico y, por la otra, la heterogeneidad del alumnado-espectador ya que “la diversidad social y la actividad del espectador [...] se contraponen a una visión monolítica y homogénea del espectador” (Palacio 1995: 85).

Las impresiones y discursos que se produjeron en el auditorio del aula no son fruto de la pasiva visión y deleite de las películas, sino de lo que el famoso teórico del cine David Bordwell (1985) llama la actividad del espectador. El autor sostiene que el cine obliga a su espectador mantenerse activo durante el proceso del visionado del filme, y que se adentre en el proceso imaginativo que las técnicas y convenciones de la narración solicitan para poder establecer hipótesis y conclusiones acerca de imágenes, acciones y el desarrollo del filme. Por consiguiente, los discursos nacidos de esta actividad vertebran nuestra investigación.

2.1 Claves contextuales

Después de unas pequeñas claves impartidas por los profesores de la asignatura sobre el fenómeno de las migraciones (análisis histórico y situaciones actuales junto con las principales teorías) y sobre los medios de comunicación en general y el cine en particular (el cine y su lenguaje fílmico en la construcción social de la realidad de las migraciones), las clases consisten en ver cine y analizar lo visto. El conjunto del alumnado, con una presencia significativa de estudiantes de universidades extranjeras, organizados en pequeños grupos, debe ver una película y prepararla desde las claves instruidas por el profesorado para posteriormente presentarla al conjunto de la clase una vez visionada por todos y todas.

Posiblemente por lo “llamativo” de la materia en el contexto de los estudios universitarios y la propia práctica docente (“ver cine en clase”) este diseño tiene un alto grado de aceptación (50 alumnos y/o alumnas). Este alumnado procede de distintas especialidades y titulaciones y, por lo tanto, de diferentes esferas académicas. Este hecho crea la posibilidad de observar cómo varían las formas y los contenidos de la construcción de los conceptos en personas con diferentes perfiles. Una muestra de la diversidad en los diferentes cursos puede observarse en la Tabla 1, que indica el número de alumnas y alumnos para cada curso académico, el porcentaje de varones y el porcentaje de estudiantes con nacionalidad extranjera, obtenido a partir de las actas de calificaciones de cada curso mencionado.

En el caso de la asignatura para el curso 2010-11, en el que se desarrolla nuestro trabajo de campo, constó de 13 sesiones. En dos sesiones se presentan los estudios que exploran el

fenómeno de las migraciones y los estudios clave de los medios de comunicación y el cine como constructores de diferencias (en ambas se aporta un guía de apoyo bibliográfico). En una sesión se proyecta *East is East (Oriente es Oriente)* de Damien O'Donnell, película británica del año 1999 basada en la obra del actor y guionista británico-paquistaní Ayub Khan-Din. En las siguientes sesiones se proyectan otras diez películas comerciales, españolas y extranjeras, que tienen como tema central el tratamiento de las migraciones, entre ellas *Bread and Roses*.

Tabla 1. DISTRIBUCIÓN DEL ALUMNADO DE LA ASIGNATURA EN LOS DIFERENTES CURSO ACADÉMICOS

Curso	Alumnos	% varones	% extranjeros/as
2005/06	30	50	17
2006/07	18	27	39
2007/08	21	38	48
2008/09	42	29	38
2009/10	39	33	23
2010/11	64	33	32

Fuente: elaboración propia a partir de los datos facilitado por el profesorado de la asignatura

2.2 Producción discursiva

La primera etapa del trabajo consiste en analizar la diversidad cultural que es representada en los discursos fílmicos. Para ello optamos por un conjunto de películas comerciales producidas y/o realizadas en o para el contexto español, o hispánico. La elección se realiza principalmente por las peculiaridades y complejidad del fenómeno migratorio en este espacio y su funcionamiento como un importante escenario de la construcción de la diferencia.

En el segundo paso la investigación se traslada al aula universitaria. Esta parte consiste en examinar el proceso de visionado de las películas y los discursos que puedan provocar éstas en cuanto a su contenido, forma y tendencias ideológicas constituyentes de cada producto cinematográfico en cuanto que son portadores de los discursos. El objetivo del estudio es ver cómo se construye la diferencia y cómo se lee esa construcción de la diferencia. A estas preocupaciones responde la forma del curso que crea una oportunidad única por su “naturalidad del proceso”: los sujetos participantes perciben las construcciones cinematográficas del fenómeno de migraciones y exteriorizan estas percepciones porque deben debatir, analizar y explicar las películas.

Utilizando este planteamiento como base, enfocamos nuestra mirada sobre cuáles son las nuevas construcciones que crea el cine en el público asistente a la asignatura. Podemos analizar las percepciones de lo que cuenta, crea y enuncia un filme, producidas en cada uno de los miembros del auditorio.

2.2.1 Conociendo los perfiles del alumnado

Para el tipo de investigación que preparamos, consideramos fundamental contar con la información básica acerca de los participantes de la asignatura. Con este objetivo diseñamos una ficha para el alumnado que les fue remitida antes del comienzo del curso, con la finalidad de recoger algunos datos clave⁶. Con los datos producidos por la fichas podríamos contextualizar los que se decía sobre las películas visionadas y ello permitiría interpretar los discursos producidos por estas personas.

Las fichas producían información sobre la edad, identidad (especialmente interesante este punto porque puede develar el concepto que puede tener una persona de los términos *cultura e identidad*), preparación y perfil académicos (tratándose de la esfera y no tanto del nivel académico o profesional) y algún trasfondo especial que pueda haber.

De todos los participantes de la asignatura entregaron la ficha 39 personas, de los que 23 fueron españoles y 16 extranjeros (procedentes de diferentes países). Aunque, la mayor diversidad no consistió en sus nacionalidades, sino en otros factores como esferas de interés y conocimiento, edad, ocupación, algunos matices de sus vidas, etc.

La mencionada operación de producción de información mediante las fichas contribuyó a que nuestra observación consiguiera el carácter sincrónico-diacrónico. En los próximos análisis trataremos de trazar la dinámica de la relación entre el contexto de los espectadores (punto de partida), el proceso de la percepción y reflexión acerca de las películas vistas (proceso en transcurso) y el resultado (efecto conseguido) en forma de discursos producidos como consecuencia del consumo de ellas.

2.2.2 Fases del curso

Después de las sesiones introductorias realizadas por el profesorado y ya citadas más arriba, el alumnado visiona en grupo una película concreta y prepara una presentación para el resto de la clase. Para ello, se formaron, por libre elección, grupos de varias (cuatro/cinco) personas para trabajar un filme seleccionado de entre los propuestos. La única regla que había que respetar a la hora de elegir miembros del grupo era mantener en él, en cierta medida, la diversidad presente entre todo el alumnado (se exigía que en el grupo participaran hablantes de lenguas diversas).

⁶ Informando al alumnado en la propia ficha sobre la finalidad, importancia y el tratamiento de datos obtenidos a través de ésta. Proporcionar cualquiera de los datos personales únicamente, y en todo momento, dependió tan sólo en la voluntad de cada una de las personas.

Antes de cada sesión de la película que los mismos participantes del curso presentarían, se mantenían dos reuniones con los investigadores. La finalidad de las reuniones, en primer lugar, fue proporcionar una mínima información necesaria acerca de las técnicas cinematográficas básicas, asesorar al alumnado sobre los temas de las películas concretas y hacer énfasis en ciertos detalles importantes de cada película. En dichas reuniones se observaba y se tomaba nota de las ideas y los conceptos que nacieran durante las reflexiones y discusiones que las alumnas y los alumnos mantenían, tanto en grupos pequeños, como con el auditorio de sus compañeros.

En las reuniones el alumnado veía minuciosamente la película y, posteriormente, indagaba sobre la misma. Se analizaban los detalles del lenguaje del cine (montaje, secuencias, encuadres, música, etc.) y su relación con los mensajes que construyen el discurso de los productos cinematográficos. Más tarde, y como fruto de estos análisis, se elaboraba un dossier⁷ para cada película recogiendo toda la información disponible. Una parte importante del dossier lo constituían tres escenas seleccionadas por el grupo para ofrecérselas al auditorio y generar el debate sobre los temas clave de los filmes en relación con los fenómenos migratorios. Las reuniones del alumnado con el profesorado fueron grabadas con un aviso previo y las grabaciones pasaron a formar parte de la investigación.

Antes del visionado de los filmes en clase, el grupo presentaba los datos producidos y el análisis realizado de cada película que habían preparado con el dossier. Al final de cada visionado se organizaba una discusión/reflexión acerca de la película, entorno y más allá de las escenas seleccionadas, y todo el alumnado tomaba parte en el debate. Posteriormente, el alumnado disponían de siete días para responder en la página Web de la asignatura a las preguntas formuladas por el profesorado, que incluían necesariamente la realización de una sinopsis de la película visionada (debían contar con sus propias palabras la película vista sin poder recurrir a ningún resumen que se hubiera publicado en ningún tipo de soporte).

De todas las películas ofertadas por el profesorado, los grupos del alumnado optaron por las siguientes en el citado curso académico: *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe 1996), *Cartas de Alou* (Montxo Armendáriz 1990), *En la puta vida* (Beatriz Flores Silva 2001), *Flores de otro mundo* (Icía Bolláin 1999), *Habana Blues* (Benito Zambrano 2005), *Pan y Rosas* (Ken Loach 2001), *Princesas* (Fernando León de Aranoa 2005), *Surcos* (José Antonio Nieves Conde 1951), *Taxi* (Carlos Saura 1996), *Un franco, 14 pesetas* (Carlos Iglesias 2006). Nuestro

⁷ El contenido de todos los dossiers tiene un formato más o menos parecido en lo que respecta a partes fundamentales del mismo. Constan de: 1. Ficha técnica; 2. Sinopsis y carteles; 3. Director (y, en algunos casos, guionista); 4. Contexto; 5. Críticas; 6. Comentarios académicos; 7. Tres escenas seleccionadas para el debate; 8. Anexos de algunos documentos de interés sobre el tema.

particular interés en este escrito ocupa el filme *Bread and Roses (Pan y Rosas 2001)* y los resultados producidos tras su proyección.

Las reflexiones, discusiones y valoraciones con las que contamos de los participantes de la asignatura acerca de cada uno de los productos cinematográficos han sido recogidas mediante la grabación de las sesiones. Por otro lado, las respuestas a las preguntas en la Web y los cortos escritos de crítica que los alumnos dejaban en la plataforma de la asignatura, también forman parte de nuestra base de datos.

2.3 Tratamiento y análisis de los discursos

Todo el material obtenido ha sido transcrito y clasificado en ficheros, para ser trabajado posteriormente y preparado para el análisis de discurso. Las transcripciones han sido ordenadas en un fichero Excel en el que por un lado hemos introducido una denominación para cada sujeto (alumnado) y por otro las diferentes variables en las que hemos desagregado tanto la información producida en el perfil de las personas participantes como la producida en los análisis de las películas visionadas. El fichero contiene también información detallada sobre los conceptos clave (emigración, inmigración, etc.) y refleja cómo se caracteriza a los sujetos protagonistas de estos fenómenos de movilidad. Es importante aclarar que con el concepto *migración* nos referimos al fenómeno social que consiste en trasladarse de un área geográfica a otra, “forma parte del comportamiento natural de las sociedades humanas” (Malgesini y Gimenez, 2000: 181), dando énfasis al movimiento, al desplazamiento de grupos humanos e individuos. Por *inmigración* entendemos “el acto de inmigrar, es decir, de entrar a residir temporal o permanentemente en un país distinto” (Malgesini y Gimenez 2000: 239). Tanto María Moliner (2007) como Julio Casares (2000) asocian los verbos “entrar” y “llegar” con la inmigración, a diferencia del término *emigración* que sería “el acto de emigrar, es decir, de dejar el país natal para residir temporal o permanentemente en otro” (Malgesini y Gimenez 2000: 137), aquí el énfasis está en “dejar” o “marcharse”.

La dimensión que analizamos es la representación del fenómeno migratorio en los discursos-sinopsis mediante la presencia de conceptos relacionados con este fenómeno, tanto su presencia textual como de frases relacionadas con ellos. Estos conceptos, en singular y plural, serían los que representan el fenómeno (migración, inmigración, emigración) y los que representan sujetos o grupos protagonistas del fenómeno (migrante, inmigrante, emigrante). Por un lado, describiremos los términos utilizados en dichas sinopsis que se relacionen con la cuestión de las migraciones y, por otro lado, describiremos brevemente la alusiones que estos

estudiantes hace a las cuestiones de la clase trabajadora a las que el film quiere dar tanta importancia.

3. ¿Qué ve el espectador en *Bread and Roses*?⁸

3.1. La cuestión de las migraciones en *Bread and Roses*

*Migración/migrar*⁹ aparece tres veces en tres sinopsis, pero todas las sinopsis hacen mención destacada a esa idea de desplazamiento o traslado, excepto la de una estudiante que no hace ninguna alusión. *Emigración/emigrar* no está presente en ninguna sinopsis textualmente, ni verbos asociados con el acto de emigrar como *dejar* o *marchar* desde el país de origen. *Inmigración/inmigrar* aparece dos veces en dos sinopsis, pero *llegar/llegada* aparece catorce veces en trece sinopsis, y *entrar/entrada* seis veces en cinco sinopsis, o lo que es lo mismo, en dieciocho de las veintinueve sinopsis aparece estos conceptos.¹⁰

Destacaremos que solo hay una sinopsis, el de una estudiante chilena, que no menciona ninguno de estos conceptos ni conceptos asociados al fenómeno migratorio debido a que su discurso se centra en el conflicto laboral que trata el film:

Maya se une al trabajo de limpieza de su hermana en una empresa en California. Su hermana Rosa, tiene dos hijos y vive con un norteamericano enfermo que necesita dinero para operarse. Trabajando conoce a Sam Shapiro, quien trabaja por la defensa los derechos de los trabajadores de limpieza.

En todas las sinopsis de los espectadores (veintinueve sinopsis) este conflicto laboral forma parte central del discurso, tanto de mujeres como de hombres, de todas las nacionalidades

⁸ La sinopsis de *Bread and Roses* realizada por la productora, presentada en el cuadernillo de Filmax Home Video para la edición especial en DVD de *Bread and Roses* (<http://www.filmax.com/fichas/799.htm>) es la siguiente: “Maya y Rosa son dos hermanas mexicanas que trabajan, en condiciones de explotación, como limpiadoras en un edificio de oficinas del centro de Los Angeles. Rosa consigue que la contraten pero Maya a cambio tiene que entregar su primer salario a Pérez un supervisor corrupto que le promete conseguirle los papeles y permisos legales para estar en ese país. Un encuentro con Sam, un apasionado activista norteamericano, cambiará sus vidas. Sam las ayuda a tomar conciencia de su situación laboral, para que emprendan una campaña de lucha por sus derechos. Pero este combate las pone en peligro: pueden perder su trabajo y ser expulsadas del país. Pérez persigue y acosa a los que se reúnen con el sindicalista, llegando a despedir a alguna de ellas. Maya aunque tiene miedo a perder su puesto de trabajo confía en Sam y se une en la lucha. Mientras conoce a un compañero, Rubén, que tiene el sueño de estudiar leyes pero que no dispone del dinero necesario para matricularse. Maya atraca una tienda y lo consigue. Mientras tanto los trabajadores inician actividades de protesta como incursiones en celebraciones de empresa, corte de calles, etc. Finalmente el sindicato y el colectivo de limpieza logra su objetivo pero Maya es detenida por acusación de robo y deportada a su país”. Conviene que el lector o lectora la tenga muy presente a la hora de leer las sinopsis aportadas por los estudiantes universitarios con los que compartimos la película y que, como ya hemos aclarado, se prestaron a realizar diversos comentarios sobre la misma que se analizan en este apartado que aquí comienza.

⁹ Nombre sustantivo, tanto singular como plural, y verbo que representen el mismo fenómeno serán contados como una unidad de variable.

¹⁰ Con respecto a las/los protagonistas de este proceso, tanto en plural como en singular, el resultado es muy semejante: Encontramos *migrante* dos veces en dos sinopsis, *emigrante* no aparece ni una sola vez, e *inmigrante* se menciona diecisiete veces en catorce sinopsis.

representadas. En particular se centran en las condiciones laborales, en las medidas tomadas para su mejora (reuniones, acciones organizadas) y en el tema sindical exponiendo parte de la perspectiva trotskista que tiene el director. Un ejemplo sería este párrafo de la sinopsis de una estudiante alemana:

Todo parece muy bien hasta que aparece un joven estudiante en la oficina del edificio donde trabajan las dos. Cuando Maya está limpiando de repente le encuentra. El parece que ser un joven con ideas parecidas a las suyas, un poco rebelde. Los dos se encontrarán muchas veces más y él le va a mostrar que el jefe les está tratando muy mal, que tendrían derecho a sueldos más altos y además a seguro médico lo cual tampoco reciben. Maya se indigna mucho y quiere cambiar esta situación injusta. Con otros limpiadores organiza encuentros con el estudiante y con su compañera que le ayuda. Se informan sobre sus derechos y piensan en cómo pueden conseguir su sueldo justo sin perder su trabajo.

Esta estudiante española acentúa la temática sindical:

Este hombre se llama Sam y es miembro del sindicato de limpiadores. Él reclama mejores condiciones para sus trabajadores, un seguro médico y la oportunidad de vivir bien. Pero a Rosa, la hermana de Maya, toda esta idea le parece una locura, pues por mal pagado que éste su trabajo, le da de comer y ella no quiere arriesgarse a que la despidan. A pesar de esto, Sam va a la oficina donde trabajan y da una charla a todos los limpiadores, con el fin de que se unan con el sindicato, presionen a los jefes y consigan mejores condiciones de vida.

Igualmente, hay seis sinopsis que no mencionan ni *emigración/inmigración* ni *emigrante/inmigrante*. Se trata de las realizadas por tres mujeres (una española, una alemana y una estadounidense) y tres hombres (dos españoles y un estadounidense). Los seis conocen perfectamente la definición y las diferencias entre emigrante e inmigrante como se puede comprobar en su perfil. Estos estudiantes definen inmigrante como “aquella persona que ha llegado a mi país” o “persona que llega a un cierto lugar (estado) desde su lugar de origen”, emigrante como “aquella que abandona su país de origen” o “persona que sale de su lugar de origen”, migración como “creo que es un fenómeno social implícito en el ser humano” o “un fenómeno propio del ser humano el cual siempre se ha estado desplazando”. Éste es un extracto de una de estas sinopsis: “*Pan y Rosas* es una película acerca de cómo las comunidades más marginadas de Los Ángeles se atreven a enfrentarse con sus jefes contra viento y marea”. Estas sinopsis no parecen destacar las diferencias culturales o de nacionalidad entre los trabajadores, sino lo que importa es el conflicto de clases que disuelve las fronteras culturales. Esto se podría interpretar como perspectiva transcultural donde la inmigración desaparece o se disuelve en la comunidad de trabajadores, para estos espectadores.

Antes hemos mencionado que solo una de las alumnas deja de usar las expresiones *migración* o *traslado*. Sin embargo, existen diferencias notables a la hora de describir la

migración o el desplazamiento de la protagonista en la primera secuencia del film, mientras algunas sinopsis apenas le dedican una frase, como la de este participante (varón estadounidense estudiante de Relaciones Internacionales): “Una joven Mexicana que migra a Estados Unidos”; o como estas estudiantes estadounidenses de Psicología: “Grupo de Latino-Americanos cruzando la frontera desde México a EE.UU” y “Maya viene ilegalmente a los estados unidos de México”. Otras les dedican casi la mitad de la extensión de la sinopsis, cuando en el film ocupa solamente la primera secuencia, como acabamos de mencionar. Éste es el caso de este estudiante español que cursa el último año de la carrera de historia:

Todo comienza con una huida por el campo de forma acelerada por un grupo de personas que consiguen subir a un jeep. Se trata de inmigrantes mexicanos cruzando ilegalmente la frontera de su país hacia Estados Unidos junto a dos “coyotes” o guías que llevan hacia su destino. Esto, además de su detención les puede ocasionar algún que otro disparo en el cuerpo, de ahí la urgencia del cruce. Cuando llegan a Los Ángeles, los familiares de cada inmigrante tienen preparado el dinero que deben dar a los mafiosos por haberlos traído, sin embargo, Rosa (la hermana de Maya, la protagonista) no ha conseguido el suficiente y no dejan que la joven baje del coche.

Parece que la diversidad de nacionalidades del alumnado es directamente proporcional a la cantidad de texto dedicado al paso de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos. Mientras los estudiantes estadounidenses apenas le dedican una frase, el alumno español describe ampliamente esta primera secuencia.

También se observa que los participantes que más extensión le dedican a describir el viaje migratorio realizado por la protagonista, son los que más conceptos asociados con el fenómeno migratorio usan en sus sinopsis. Siguiendo con el estudiante español anterior:

Se trata de inmigrantes mexicanos cruzando ilegalmente la frontera de su país hacia Estados Unidos junto a dos “coyotes” o guías que llevan hacia su destino. Esto, además de su detención les puede ocasionar algún que otro disparo en el cuerpo, de ahí la urgencia del cruce. (...) Tras un primer trabajo de camarera, Rosa consigue que la acepten como limpiadora en unas oficinas junto a ella. Allí todos los limpiadores son inmigrantes y hasta el desagradable encargado, por lo que pronto hace amistad con muchos compañeros.

En este texto se observa que aparece la palabra *ilegalmente*, unida a la situación o proceso migratorio de cruzar la frontera. No es el único caso. La expresión *ilegal* aparece asociada con el fenómeno migratorio, la inmigración, la situación del inmigrante o el inmigrante en sí en trece sinopsis a lo que se suman otros conceptos relacionados como *situación irregular* (una vez), *situación inestable* (una vez), *clandestina/clandestinamente* (dos veces en dos sinopsis), *sin papeles* (dos veces en dos sinopsis). Es decir, de las veintinueve sinopsis analizadas, en dieciocho aparecen algunos de estos términos, ligados al fenómeno migratorio o a sus protagonistas. En diez de ellas se menciona cómo han llegado al país de acogida. Un ejemplo

sería la sinopsis de una estudiante alemana Erasmus en Granada que cursa Filología Hispánica:

La película *Bread and Roses* empieza con una escena en cual vemos a unos mejicanos cruzando la frontera a los EEUU ilegalmente.

Algunas sinopsis reflejan la situación socio-laboral en el país de acogida, como por ejemplo la de una estudiante española de Psicología:

Muchos de los compañeros de Maya son inmigrantes como ella y es por ello por lo que la empresa se aprovecha de su situación (no sólo de "ilegalidad" ya que no todos están como Maya, sino de tratarse de personas modestas cuya salida hacia adelante en sus vidas depende de ese puesto de trabajo por el que se sacrifican a cambio de un mísero sueldo).

Hay tres sinopsis (de dos estudiantes españoles de Antropología, un varón y una mujer, y de un tercer estudiante español de Historia) donde el concepto *ilegal* se asocia al propio *inmigrante*, no a su situación administrativa o de residencia¹¹. Éste es uno de los casos en la sinopsis donde más veces aparece *inmigrante*, asociado al concepto *ilegal*:

Los contratos que hacen al personal están en manos de empresas que bajan y bajan el salario aprovechando que las personas que acceden a esos puestos son, muchos de ellos, inmigrantes ilegales que no se atreven a pedir mejoras salariales, todo lo contrario, muchos de ellos agradecen la oferta de empleo y trabajan hasta la extenuación (...). Maya, junto con otras personas, llega de México como inmigrante ilegal. (...) Allí todos los trabajadores y trabajadoras son inmigrantes (mexicanos, rusos, afroamericanos...) y llevan muchos años en sus puestos de trabajo.

Otra asociación con inmigrante es con el concepto *mafia*. Una estudiante española de Medicina nos lo muestra de la siguiente manera:

Nuestra protagonista llega desde México, y se las ingenia para escapar de lo que parecen ser miembros de una mafia de inmigrantes, demostrando así su ingenio y capacidad para afrontar situaciones difíciles.

La mayoría de los estudiantes que asocian *inmigrante* con *ilegal* son españoles, lo perciben como grupo diferenciado, produciéndose una ruptura con la perspectiva trotskista del director de entender a todos los trabajadores como comunidad. En este sentido, la sinopsis de la estudiante española describe al personaje de Maya como una heroína con capacidades especiales "para afrontar situaciones difíciles". Estas percepciones entran en contradicción con la sinopsis oficial de la productora que no menciona la migración de Maya, destacando su condición de trabajadora y la reivindicación de los derechos laborales del grupo de trabajadores por encima de cualquier otra: "Maya y Rosa son dos hermanas mexicanas que trabajan, en condiciones de explotación, como limpiadoras en un edificio de oficinas del

¹¹ Suponemos que en este punto no es necesario aclarar que los seres humanos no pueden ser "ilegales".

centro de Los Angeles” y “Sam las ayuda a tomar conciencia de su situación laboral, para que emprendan una campaña de lucha por sus derechos”. Pero, a la vez, esta sinopsis oficial correlaciona la condición laboral de los trabajadores con la circunstancia de no tener una situación regular: “Finalmente el sindicato y el colectivo de limpieza logra su objetivo pero Maya es detenida por acusación de robo y deportada a su país”.

Por último, anteriormente destacamos que en dieciocho de las veintinueve sinopsis aparece *inmigración*. En diez de estas dieciocho aparece la palabra *inmigrante* unida a términos como *llegar/llegada/entrar/entrada*. Si sumamos las sinopsis en las que aparece uno u otro concepto, la cifra se incrementa hasta las veintidós sinopsis. En este sentido, podemos añadir, que todos los participantes identifican y nombran el país, la región o ciudad de llegada (Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, California, Los Ángeles). Sin embargo, solo diez identifican el lugar de partida como México y uno como Cuernavaca. Esto significa que la mayoría de los participantes describen las representaciones del fenómeno migratorio de *Bread and Roses* desde la perspectiva de la llegada y la entrada, desde el país de acogida, interiorizando este punto de vista y expresándolo en su discurso.

3.2 La centralidad de las cuestiones laborales en *Bread and Roses*

Respecto a la cuestión laboral, tema central del film según sus autores, todas las sinopsis hablan de trabajadores, o hacen referencia al tipo de trabajo que realizan (limpiadores y limpiadoras):

Tras un primer trabajo de camarera, Rosa consigue que la acepten como limpiadora en unas oficinas junto a ella. Allí todos los limpiadores son inmigrantes y hasta el desagradable encargado, por lo que pronto hace amistad con muchos compañeros.

Dándose cuenta de la condición de trabajadores de estos inmigrantes y exponen en las sinopsis las principales claves de su situación laboral:

Las condiciones del trabajo son malas. El jefe puede despedirse a la gente cuando quiera y sin razón. Trabajan mucho y por poco dinero y no les pagan más cuando trabajan más que 8 horas. No hay asistencia sanitaria.

Solo aparece *inmigrante/emigrante* relacionado con trabajadores en aquellas, que no nombran ni *inmigrante/emigrante* ni *emigración/emigración* (seis sinopsis) y que hemos tratado con anterioridad.

Las palabras “sindical” o “sindicato” aparecen en veinte sinopsis, asociadas a la figura del personaje de Sam, joven estadounidense con actividad sindical, luchando por los derechos de

los trabajadores de la limpieza. Un ejemplo de esto es la sinopsis de una estudiante estadounidense de Antropología Social, especializada en Género:

Un día, mientras que trabajando, Maya conoce a un representante de un sindicato quien ha seleccionado su edificio específicamente como una meta para realizar el proyecto emancipatorio. Sam intenta a convencer los limpiadores a organizarse y colaborar con el sindicato para ganarse los beneficios del seguro médico, vacaciones pagadas, el retiro etc.

Otro ejemplo relacionado con la colectividad de los trabajadores se encuentra en la sinopsis de la misma estudiante estadounidense:

Sin embargo, el riesgo de alinear con el sindicato no está bienvenido por todos, y para empezar la lucha por sus derechos, un consenso colectivo es fundamental. Aunque Maya orquesta las reuniones, el proceso de lograr las demandas es la responsabilidad de la mayoría.

Hay otras ocho sinopsis, que sin nombrar las expresiones *sindicato/sindical/sindicalismo*, utilizan el concepto *activista* o *activismo*, relacionado tanto con la figura del personaje de Sam como con la organización colectiva de los trabajadores. Éste es el caso de la sinopsis de una estudiante alemana, del programa Erasmus, de Filología Española y Comunicación Audiovisual:

Un día Maya conoce a Sam un activista norteamericano que lucha contra estos abusos que comenten los empresarios. El quiere que Maya y sus compañeros se reúnen para luchar con el para mejorar sus condiciones del trabajo. Muchos de ellos creen en Sam y en sus ideas pero también algunos que no porque tienen miedo.

Y de la sinopsis de este estudiante español de Historia:

Este joven activista, pretende organizar a todos los trabajadores del bloque del oficinas, para que de este modo puedan exigir a sus jefes una mejora sustancial de sus contrato laborales.

Tan solo una sinopsis, la de una estudiante alemana, no menciona ninguna expresión acerca de sindicalismo o activismo:

Todo parece muy bien hasta que aparece un joven estudiante en la oficina del edificio donde trabajan las dos. Cuando Maya está limpiando de repente le encuentra. El parece que ser un joven con ideas parecidas a las suyas, un poco rebelde. Los dos se encontrarán muchas veces más y él le va a mostrar que el jefe les está tratando muy mal, que tendrían derecho a sueldos más altos y además a seguro médico lo cual tampoco reciben.

En este caso es muy probable que influye la especialidad/combinación de asignaturas ya que esta estudiante que enuncia el *activismo/sindicalismo* estudia Comunicación Audiovisual, las otras (una también de nacionalidad alemana) no.

También debemos destacar que doce sinopsis recogen la idea sustancial al discurso fílmico de Loach, de que las clases altas utilizan eslabones medios (supervisores, encargados) del

mismo origen étnico y social que aquellas personas que controlan y oprimen. Así el supervisor guatemalteco Pérez es un personaje desagradable, cruel e inhumano con los empleados que tiene a su cargo, a pesar de compartir con ellos la experiencia de la inmigración. Este personaje aparece nombrado por su nombre, como supervisor, jefe o encargado:

Maya se une a su hermana que trabaja como limpiadora en un edificio financiero importante y le pide que le consiga un trabajo en la misma empresa “Ángel Cleaning Company” dirigida por el antipático y cruel jefe Pérez (George López). Pérez se aprovecha de la situación en la que están la mayoría de sus limpiadores explotándolos al máximo.

Pero solo una de estas sinopsis que hacen mención al supervisor, la de un estudiante español del cuarto curso de Matemáticas, lo identifica como alguien del mismo origen que los trabajadores. Aunque no es del todo exacto al ser el personaje guatemalteco e identificarlo como mexicano:

Sam instiga a los empleados a exigir sus derechos como trabajadores, pero el jefe les pilla, Pérez, otro mexicano que abusa de ellos y los trata irrespetuosamente.

Este aspecto se puede interpretar como un retorno a la estructura binaria de los estereotipos (latinoamericanos-norteamericanos), donde los latinoamericanos son percibidos de forma confusa, no precisando bien su origen (guatemalteco o mexicano), o como un todo bajo la denominación de *latinoamericano* como es el caso de las sinopsis de una estudiante española de Antropología Social y Cultural: "una visión de los y las inmigrantes latinoamericanos que llegan a Estados Unidos". Sin olvidar que en todas las sinopsis se exponen las contradicciones del colectivo obrero, reflejo de la internalización de parte de la perspectiva trotskista por los espectadores. Existen también contradicciones como mostrar la denuncia de una trabajadora, Rosa -la hermana de Maya-, a sus compañeros:

Finalmente Rosa traicionará a sus compañeros y a su hermana a cambio de un puesto de supervisora y seguro médico para ella y toda su familia. Como consecuencia Varias personas serán despedidas entre ellas un amigo de Maya que iba a recibir una beca para estudiar y que no estaba metido en las actividades de boicot que han llevado a cabo.

Este tema se une a la precaria situación de estas trabajadoras, protagonistas de la película, a las que se suma su condición de inmigrantes no regularizados o “sin papeles”, subrayando la deportación como posible amenaza a su situación laboral. Lo recoge la sinopsis de una estudiante española de Filosofía:

Esto llevará a Maya a robar en una tienda para conseguir el dinero de su amigo, lo cual le costará la deportación a México tras ser arrestados en el último acto reivindicativo con el que consiguen que se aprueben todas sus peticiones.

O la sinopsis de un estudiante estadounidense de Relaciones Internacionales:

La compañía se rinde a las exigencias de los trabajadores, pero Maya está deportada porque ha robado dinero de una gasolinera para pagar por la educación de Rubén.

Tan sólo cinco sinopsis nombran los grandes sacrificios que han tenido que hacer las protagonistas, comentando esa triple discriminación por la condición de mujer, trabajadora e inmigrante, al mencionar el tema de la prostitución. Estas sinopsis las realizan cinco mujeres estudiantes de diversas nacionalidades y estudios (alemana estudiante de Filología Hispánica y Comunicación Audiovisual, estudiante española de Psicología, estudiante estadounidense de Psicología, estudiante chilena de Dirección Audiovisual, y estadounidense de Ciencia Cognitiva). Veamos dos ejemplos:

Cuando Maya se enfrenta con su hermana sobre la situación, descubre que tenía que ser prostituta en Tijuana para ganar dinero por la familia.

Maya se desilusiona con Rosa quien habló con Pérez de esto pero se sorprende cuando esta le cuenta que tuvo que prostituirse por cinco años para mandarles dinero a la familia, que tuvo que cogerse¹² a Pérez para conseguirle el trabajo y que no sabe quién es el padre de su hija.

Señalaremos que el género de estas estudiantes (mujeres) parece influir en la percepción, estando más sensibilizadas con estas cuestiones sobre la discriminación ligada a la prostitución. Asimismo se trata el tema del intento de violación de la protagonista Maya al principio de la película, que ha sido recogido por dos sinopsis, la de un estudiante español de Historia y una estudiante estadounidense de Ciencia Cognitiva, recogiendo esta última el tema de la prostitución, tratado en el párrafo anterior. Éstos son los dos ejemplos, primero de la sinopsis del estudiante español y segundo de la sinopsis de la estudiante estadounidense:

Ante las amenazas que recibe de los dos hombres Maya deja de forcejear las ventanas y gritar para escapar, mientras que los tipos se echan a suertes quien la va a violar. El “afortunado” la lleva a un apartamento pequeño y mientras se está duchando, ella disimula sus intenciones y se muestra cariñosa hacia él, solo para robarle la ropa y dejarle encerrado y de esa forma poder escapar. Tras lograrlo, llega a casa de su hermana y su familia donde deberá vivir temporalmente mientras no pueda mantenerse sola.

Cuando llegan a Los Ángeles, conocemos a Maya y su hermana, cuando la hermana no puede pagar todo lo que debe a los coyotes. Los hombres denegarle su hermana, llevándola a un hotel, donde tienen planes de violarla. Maya les engaña y se escapa para encontrar su hermana, que ya ha estado viviendo un tiempo en los Estados Unidos con su esposo Americano y dos hijos.

En estas percepciones por parte de los espectadores se observan semejanzas y divergencias con la perspectiva del director y la sinopsis oficial. Del mismo modo, que la nacionalidad, la formación y el género de estos espectadores parecen influir en la percepción del film.

¹² La estudiante chilena utiliza el verbo “cogerse” en su acepción “mantener sexo” o “follar”.

4. Conclusiones

Tras la revisión de las representaciones interiorizadas por los espectadores y comparadas con las intenciones y el pensamiento político de Ken Loach de dar voz y retratar a los grupos de invisibles que quieren deshacerse de su situación de oprimidos, podemos afirmar que muchas de las cuestiones planteadas por el director han sido interiorizadas por los espectadores, consiguiendo el fin didáctico y de sensibilización que pretende el autor, en relación a la situación laboral del grupo de inmigrantes que está representado en la película. Sin embargo, debido a la ambigüedad propia de todo discurso (Foucault 1980), hay ciertos aspectos fundamentales que encuentran resistencia hacia su mensaje. Por ejemplo, destaca el hecho de que algunas sinopsis realizadas por los espectadores dan mucha importancia a los aspectos de la migración presentados en las primeras escenas, cuando en la sinopsis de la productora apenas ocupa dos líneas y cuando las intenciones de Ken Loach sean hacer una película sobre una colectividad de trabajadores y la lucha por sus derechos, desde una perspectiva política-trotskista. Además, destacaríamos aquella sinopsis donde el aspecto migratorio no es mencionado de ninguna forma, además de las seis sinopsis donde, a excepción de la migración de México a los Estados Unidos, describen como temática fundamental aquella que plantea la propia productora: derechos de los trabajadores y conflicto laboral. Pero hasta en las sinopsis más centradas en el grupo de trabajadores y la cuestión laboral, esta visión colectiva aparece de forma ambigua al reconocer que la película cuenta la historia de un colectivo de trabajadores para, a continuación, decir que la protagonista es un individuo, una mujer llamada Maya, no la colectividad de trabajadores de la limpieza que se había enunciado al principio.

Además, si se habla del fenómeno migratorio, no se vuelve necesariamente a las perspectivas desarrolladas en la asignatura. Por una lado, los sinopsis hablan de inmigrantes, pero se les presenta como inmigrados. La mayoría sitúan al inmigrante en el punto de llegada, ya concluida la migración, pero el término “inmigrante”, de uso más corriente y generalizado en nuestros contextos, hace clara referencia a la condición de estigmatización en que se sitúa a este tipo de sujetos. De hecho, algunas sinopsis utilizan “inmigrante” unido a “trabajador” y a unas condiciones sociales y laborales precarias (todas las sinopsis reseñadas), hasta se habla explícitamente de comunidades de marginados. Es decir, se sigue comprobando una relación directa del uso del término *inmigrante* asociado a conceptos de marginación y de exclusión social.

Una segunda cuestión tiene que ver con la decidida manía de nuestras sociedades de situar las migraciones en el plano de la legalidad o no legalidad. El calificar las migraciones o, más

grave aún, a los sujetos que las practican como “ilegales”, no hace sino criminalizar tales prácticas y a quienes las practican y, sobre todo, situar la cuestión en un plano de difícil discusión dado que contiene algo que parece no estar bien. Es verdad, que la sinopsis “oficial” de la película usa tales términos, lo que no hace sino insistir en esta visión perversa del fenómeno. Los propios “espectadores” insisten sobre ella con mayor o menor proximidad a los sujetos o a los fenómenos, que van desde los que sitúan la migración o la situación de “ilegal” a los que califican a las propias personas como “ilegales”, pasando por aquellos que enuncian la migración o la situación como “clandestina” y la situación administrativa con el término “sin papeles”, “irregular”, “inestable”, o los que hablan de “red ilegal” o “traficantes de personas”. A este respecto, en alguna sinopsis se produce el caso de asociar “ilegalidad” tanto a la persona, al “inmigrante”, como a su situación, afirmando que dejaría de ser “ilegal” el individuo si “legaliza” su situación, evidenciándose una confusión y una incoherencia en el uso de esta terminología. Por tanto, estos discursos elaborados por los participantes se sitúan en el plano de lo turbio que parece tener el asunto de migrar.

Por último, nos parece especialmente reseñable el tratamiento conceptual que sobre el fenómeno de las migraciones se hace en las visiones de los “espectadores”. Cómo nombra y a qué se refiere cuando habla de emigración, inmigración o migraciones no sólo es una cuestión nominalista, sino el uso de una terminología permite construir cómo son percibidos y representados los fenómenos sociales. En algunas de las sinopsis expuestas hemos contrastado que no existe confusión sobre el significado de este tipo de expresiones, pero el conjunto de las sinopsis nos muestra un uso muy variado de estos términos para referirse a una “sola” realidad. Donde unos ven inmigración, otros ven emigración y algunos, migraciones. Donde unos ven inmigrantes, otros encuentran emigrantes y no faltan quienes ven migrantes. ¿Qué podemos decir de ello? Sin duda se trata, en primer lugar, de confusiones terminológicas y de falta de rigor en la definición de los fenómenos sociales, pero en segundo lugar y de nuevo, de cómo se representan los fenómenos que estamos tratando.

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BOOK REVIEW

Giovanni di Stefano, Michael Peters (eds.), *Mexico como punto de fuga real o imaginario: El exilio europeo en la víspera de la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, München: Martin Meidenbauer 2011, pp. 314.

The anthology addresses the European Exile in Mexico in the wake of the Second World War. Since most of the work done on the European Exile in Mexico in fact is limited to the national approach, the comparative research is a relatively recent phenomenon. Pioneering in its transnational comparative approach was the anthology of Martin Hielscher named *Fluchtorte Mexiko. Ein Asylland fuer die Literatur* in 1992 that is dedicated to the analysis of the global literary exile to Mexico followed by an anthology by Pablo Yankelevich *México. País refugio* in 2002 that is more historically dominated and includes exile movements beyond Europe as well.¹ The anthology at hand has the ambition of being transnational as well as interdisciplinary.

The book is divided in five parts that makes it easy for the reader to follow the red thread through the book.

The first part, „Mexico as a metaphor and a myth“, is dealing with European artists who in their work use Mexico either in a metaphoric way or draw on the myths of Mexico. The first contribution by Friedrich Schmidt-Welle shows the limitations of the concept of „cross-culture“ in the field of imagology in order to analyze the experiences of Otherness in self-images and „Fremdbildern“ of exiles by replacing it with the concept of „trans-culture“. Taking the Mexico experiences of European intellectuals like Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, André Breton, Antonin Artaud and some German speaking intellectuals, the author tries to show the limits of the criticized concept but does not include a chapter demonstrating the advantages of his improved concept. In the end that leaves the contribution without evidence of the added value of his critic. Giovanni di Stefano, Anne Kraume and Giulia Ingarao focus in their contributions on three variations of how Mexico served as a medium to reflect experiences of European artists and/or how Mexico's culture and history provided inspiration in this process. Di Stefano looks at the libretto of the opera „Montezuma“ of G.A. Borgese and explores how his interpretation of the story of the siege of Tenochtitlan assisted the author to process the violence of World War II. The Italian librettist solved the bloody story of the siege as a compromise between winner and loser and thus suggested a new global

¹ Martin HIELSCHER (ed./1992): *Fluchtort Mexiko*. Hamburg/Zürich: Luchterhand Literaturverlag; Pablo Yankelevich (ed./2002): *México. País refugio*. México: INAH-Plaza y Valdés.

way of understanding and living together in mixed cultures. Krause analyses how the poets Luis Cernuda and Benjamin Peret accommodated old Mexican myths in their poetic work and demonstrates how the „magic“ of Mexico is serving them to find a new balance of myth and poetry. The last chapter by Ingarao explores the development of surrealism in Mexico and the influence of a number of European surrealist artists that came to Mexico City in the 1940s. The author stresses the work of Leonora Carrington with regard to the mystification of Mexican culture. The latter is a theme that is prominent in all contributions of the first part: all authors stress how the work of the exiles in Mexico has contributed greatly to Mexican culture on one hand but also how it contributed to the mystification of Mexican culture. Not being a specialist in that area I am wondering whether the work of Mexican artists like the often cited Frieda Kahlo and Diego Rivera or later even Octavio Paz was more influential in doing so.

The second part „Crossed perspectives“ takes a view on the dialogue between the refugees and their chosen new home, Mexico. The refugees’ perception of Mexico and their impact on national culture is like the editors stressed (p. 12) still a gap in research and, consequently, particularly welcome. While Florian Graefe explores the work of Bodo Uhse and how he dealt with Mexico in his work, Ursula Trappe analyzes the Mexican movies of Luis Buñuel as a vehicle for a new representation of violence that according to her reflected more the harsh Mexican reality with its social contrasts than the adaption of themes from the Mexican cinema. Ursula Tjaden presents the work of the photographer Walter Reuter who focused overwhelmingly on documenting the life of the indigenous population of Mexico quasi as a historian who felt that this world would pass soon enough. Michaela Peters on the other hand describes very interestingly how the rather recent books of Sergio Pitol and Paco Taibo II dealt with the exile community from the Mexican perspective.

The third part is a good example of how the work of historians and literary scholars can ideally complement each other. While the title „Exile as a third space“ seems to summarize very well exile experience as a place in which refugees feel “neither here nor there”, as Susanne Zepp has described it in her article on Max Aub, it is not obvious why it was chosen for a chapter that exclusively deals with the Spanish Republican Exile in Mexico. It opens with the excellent contribution by Carlos Pérez Guerrero who reminds us of the fact that exile was and is a rather unromantic phenomena and thus should not only deal with the group of intellectuals and artists that so far are overwhelmingly researched, especially in terms of the Republican exile in Mexico. He stresses the fact that the Spanish Republican exile as opposed to the myth of its ‘privileged exile’ was in fact not that smooth. He gives the reader an insight

into the fights for survival as well as the fights of the Republicans among each other and thus opens a perspective that the research on Spanish Republican exile has neglected so far. Yasmin Temelli reminds us in her article of the fact that literary research can also include the perspective of the not famous. While naturally the sources of literary scholars usually deal with already published work by someone who at least gained some recognition, Temelli chose newspapers written on board of the first ships bringing Republican refugees over to Mexico and analyses with the methods of the concept of biopolitics how the exiles created a new order on board for the time in between Europe and the arrival in Mexico. Susanne Zepp finally approaches the work of Max Aub with the tools of the concept of memory and demonstrates how Aub imagines Spain as a place that won't be anymore. By recognizing that even with a victorious return to Spain all exiles dreamed of, it would not be the same Spain they had left and fought for, he tried to create Mexico in his work as a vivid and real alternative for the Republicans and wrote against the harmful nostalgia that his contemporaries shared.

The fourth part titled „Echoes of the war in exile“ opens with an article by Franco Savarino who explores Italian emigration and exile and greatly enriches the perspective of European exile in Mexico. The author concentrates on the description of the biographies of four Italians – Ezio Garibaldi, Mario Appelius, Nanni Leone Castelli, and Francesco Frola – and their relation to Italian fascism but misses the chance of opening his text for the dialogue in between his protagonists and Mexico. That leaves two contributions that deal with the exile of Germans in Mexico, one from a historical perspective by Philipp Graf and one from the literary scholarly perspective by Adrian Herrera Fuentes. Both of them chose the German edited newspaper *Freies Deutschland* of the 1940s as the base for their research. The latter critically interrogates how the newspaper served the German political exile community to express their anxieties about the incidents in Germany and its propaganda in Mexico as well as to prove their sympathy and loyalty with Mexico. In this context, Graf demonstrates the dissenting opinion of the political German speaking exile in Mexico with regard to news from the Holocaust. Unfortunately, there is no contribution on the German Jewish exile in Mexico in this chapter on the echoes of war in the Mexican exile.

The fifth and last part finally is titled „Biographies in exile“ and deals in fact only with female biographies while the article of Savarino that concentrates on male biographies is placed in the third part where it does not really belong since the focus of his protagonists is the pre-war period. Why it was not placed in the biographical fifth part and whether the chosen title of the chapter as „Biographies“ wants to hide the fact that there is an entire (and

in fact very welcome) chapter on gender, remains unclear but is as telling as the placing of the gender chapter as the last one in the anthology. It opens with an article by Mechthild Gilzmer on the journalist Lenka Reinerová, the actress Steffie Spira and the feminist Gertrude Düby. Gilzmer points out how these three women developed their creativity in the light of their imprisonment in Europe and how they managed to expand it further in exile. Ulrike Schätze's article confirms this tendency for the actress Brigitte Alexander who originally had set out to become a juvenile judge in Germany but discovered her talents under the pressure of the prosecution as a Jewess and socialist. Just as Steffie Spira she acted in the German exile community but increasingly also for a Mexican audience as well as on radio and TV. Besides that she worked as a translator for theatre plays and thus increasingly took over the role of a cultural mediator between her two worlds. It is a very nice touch that the anthology closes with an autobiographical text by Alexander named "The Return" that deals with exactly this question: "In which of the two worlds do I belong?"

Overall, the anthology opens a broad panorama on various aspects of the European exile in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s. This imparting of knowledge in a magnitude of aspects is its chief merit and at the same time its greatest challenge since it raises the question why so many aspects have been neglected. As a historian I would have appreciated a more equal balance of articles dealing with the experience of 'normal' people who had to face the challenge of exile in Mexico in a different way than the already well known intellectuals and artists that we already have broad knowledge of and that often landed softer. The danger of concentrating on them stresses the notion of the exile of the sensitive thinkers who are at home in the world (in this case in Mexico) that Ian Buruma recently has criticized as "the romance of exile"², which of course has nothing to do with the sombre reality of it. Besides that, the anthology missed the chance to include the exile from other European nations besides the one of mainly Spanish and German speaking refugees to Mexico. Considering that research on the French political exile of the Second World War as well as on the Hungarian and Greek exile in the 20th century already exists, it is a shame not to have it considered in the collection.³ It would have added a broader and more multifaceted perspective on the European Exile on Mexico and at the same time would have managed to reduce the narrow focus on Western Europe while claiming to talk about Europe.

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² Ian BURUMA (2001): 'The romance of exile', en: *The New Republic* (12 Feb 2001), pp. 33–38.

³ Denis ROLLAND (1990): *Vichy et la France libre aux Mexique*. Paris: L'Harmattan; Monika SZENTE-VARGA (2007): *Migración Húngara a México entre 1901 y 1950*. Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla; Gabriel BAEZA ESPEJEL (2006): *Una minoría olvidada*. México D.F.: FCE.

RESEÑA

Anne Huffschmid (2010): *Mexiko – das Land und die Freiheit*. Zürich: Rotpunktverlag, pp. 288.

“Es un libro para mi esposa, que ya no puede viajar. Le permite desplazarse mentalmente”, le oí decir a un anciano que estaba comprando el libro *México. El país y la libertad*, de Anne Huffschmid. Y es eso precisamente lo que nos ofrecen los libros sobre distintos países – también, por ejemplo, sobre Irán o Bolivia – que está publicando el Rotpunktverlag de Zurich: viajar sin desplazarse y llegar a una comprensión profunda y compleja de las particularidades culturales e históricas de los respectivos países. Al elegir a Anne Huffschmid, la editorial ha dado con una conocedora sin par de México, donde ha vivido muchos años como corresponsal de varios periódicos alemanes.

El libro presenta la sociedad mexicana actual como fruto de su historia, especialmente de los acontecimientos en torno a la Independencia y la Revolución, festejados en su Bi-/Centenario en 2010, año de publicación del presente libro. La autora nos ofrece, pues, un acercamiento crítico a, como mínimo, 200 años de historia, que le sirven de base para sus reflexiones y narraciones sobre el presente, sobre los actuales movimientos políticos y discursivos y sobre la vida cotidiana, trátase del D.F. o de remotos pueblos indígenas. Y junto con Anne Huffschmid acompañamos a algún que otro personaje emblemático, famoso o desconocido, en su rutina de cada día. Nunca se pierde de vista que la experiencia de cada uno está vinculada en todo momento al contexto histórico-cultural del país.

Huffschmid se sirve de cinco grandes capítulos para profundizar en distintos trasfondos constitutivos del país. En primer lugar, figuran los movimientos históricos de la Independencia y la Revolución, siempre marcados por una gran violencia. A continuación, se ofrece un análisis detallado y crítico del mestizaje como mito y trauma de una nación, en la que siguen vigentes hasta hoy en día la exclusión y la pobreza de los pueblos indígenas. Otro tema primordial es el machismo como mito estereotipado y realidad actual, teniendo en cuenta también a figuras femeninas tan importantes para la mexicanidad como la Virgen (mestiza) de Guadalupe y la Malinche –amante y traductora de Hernán Cortés–, esta última representante del trauma fundacional de la nación. México D.F. se nos presenta como metrópoli (im)posible y ombligo del país, poblada de inversores, piratas e indios urbanos. Finalmente se nos ofrece una mirada a la mafia moderna, experiencia cotidiana en la Ciudad Juárez –en la frontera con los Estados Unidos–, con sus excesos de violencia. Concluye el

libro con la presentación de algunos famosos personajes a caballo entre dos o varios mundos, cuyos proyectos intelectuales, literarios o artísticos abren vías de reflexión más allá del *topos* de la mexicanidad. Hablamos de Carlos Monsiváis, el más famoso de los cronistas de la vida urbana y crítico de los mitos mexicanos, la artista transnacional Leonora Carrington, la traductora bilingüe Marianne Frenk-Westheim, creadora tanto del Juan Rulfo alemán como del Thomas Mann español, así como la diva neomexicana Lila Downs, sin pasar por alto el nuevo cine mexicano. Complementan el texto un resumen de historia del país y sugerencias de bibliografía complementaria.

Aparte del texto, que posibilita un acercamiento a la vida y la historia de la tan compleja y paradójica cultura mexicana, es sumamente valioso el material gráfico que nos ofrece el libro. Por un lado, encontramos en él una selección de fotografías del Archivo Fotográfico Indígena de San Cristóbal. Fueron realizadas en el marco del “Proyecto Fotografía de Chiapas”, fundado en 1992 por la artista estadounidense Carlota Duarte, quien ofreció tanto cursos de fotografía como el material técnico para posibilitar a no profesionales mayas (o a futuros profesionales) realizar fotografías sin costos personales. Los resultados son en parte documentales, en parte experimentales, y representan escenas de la actualidad cotidiana. Abre la selección la sobria puesta en escena de unas hojas de plátano que se convierten en obra de arte. Nos ofrecen una visión de otro México, más allá de los estereotipos turísticos. Por otro lado, encontramos fotografías en color del reportero fotográfico Víctor Mendiola, integrando su serie “Somnolencias”, que muestra personas de madrugada que están esperando que despierte la megalópolis: somnolientos, orgullosos, provocadores que miran al que los observa.

Este libro no tiene nada de guía de turismo, en el sentido convencional de sobria información recortada sobre la historia y el folclor mexicano, sino que nos ofrece una imagen muy compleja de un país paradójico y un acercamiento a una historia, una política y unas vidas sociales e intelectuales difíciles de representar. Y sin embargo y por esta misma razón, se puede considerar un acompañante ideal para un viaje (mental o real) a México. Mediante este libro, se nos permite sentir lo impregnados que están por los sucesos históricos y los conflictos actuales ciertos lugares, que en parte serían los mismos lugares de interés turístico. Tomemos, por ejemplo, las dos plazas probablemente más conocidas y a primera vista tan opuestas de la Ciudad de México: Tlatelolco y el Zócalo. Leyendo los respectivos capítulos del libro, podemos, por un lado, sentir el silencio apremiante de Tlatelolco, oscilando entre las Tres Culturas participantes en la historia colonial del país –presentes de forma arquitectónica

o arqueológica– y, simultáneamente, conmemorar el trauma nacional de la violencia contra los estudiantes que se manifestaron en 1968. Por otro lado, vivimos, a través de la lectura, el Zócalo en su estado de excepción y como caótico centro urbano pluriétnico, que se eleva asimismo por encima de la cultura precolombina. Viajar por Oaxaca, Chiapas y otras ciudades y regiones mexicanas nos permite también vivir en cierto modo la historia y la vida cotidiana y comprender algo de la complejidad de esta cultura.

De cara a una segunda edición, convendría una revisión más detallada del texto, para evitar la frecuencia de pequeños errores que incomodan la lectura. A pesar de esta desventaja, se trata de un libro de mucho valor, tanto para los que deseen informarse –estudiantes o estudiosos sobre la historia y cultura mexicanas– como para los que, además, estén realizando un viaje por el país. Es decir, para cualquier viaje por México, sea este de índole virtual o real.

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