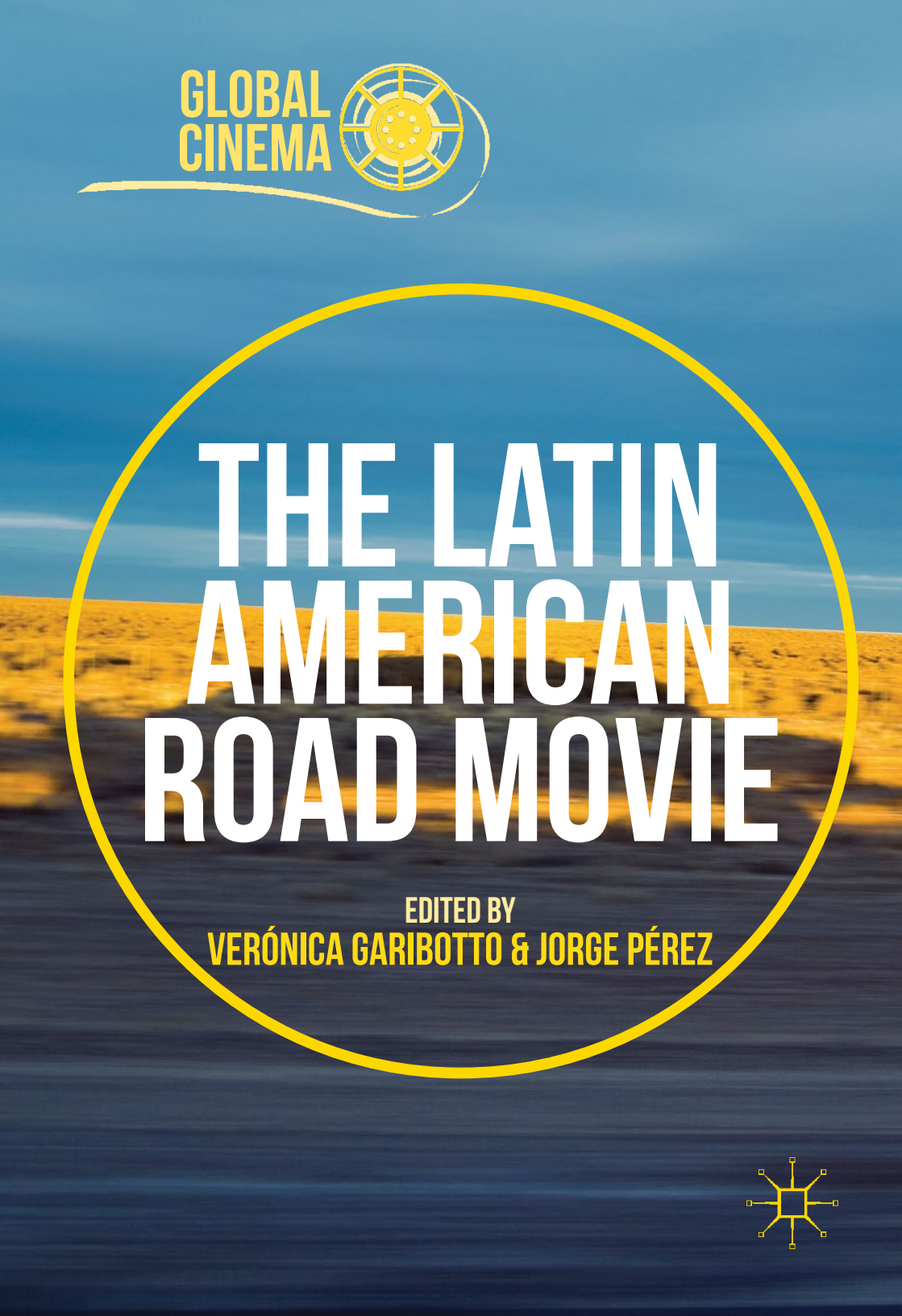
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EDITED BY
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The Latin American Road Movie

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Reconfiguring Precarious Landscapes: The Road Movie in Latin America

Verónica Garibotto and Jorge Pérez

Forty minutes into Walter Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* (2004), the bikers Ernesto Guevara (Gael García Bernal) and Alberto Granados (Rodrigo de la Serna) bump into a herd of cows while traveling an unpaved Chilean road and wreck their already unreliable motorcycle, which they have ironically named *La Poderosa* (the mighty one). An editing cut takes viewers to the back of a truck that transports the protagonists and their broken motorcycle to *Los Angeles*, the nearest town with a repair shop. They share the space with a cow and two indigenous men, a Mapuche father (Juan Maliqueo) and his son (Samuel Cifuentes), who are conversing in Mapudungun. The camera pans to show us Ernesto's fascination with the pair of indigenous men, the first of a number of indigenous peoples they

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will encounter during their journey. A cut to a close-up of the cow's face from Ernesto's point of view is followed by Ernesto's attempt to reciprocate the generosity of the locals who are giving them a ride by offering his expert medical opinion: "That cow's going blind." The son replies with indifference to Ernesto's diagnosis and surprises both Ernesto and the viewers by making a nonchalant observation that is nonetheless replete with social critique: "All she's going to see is shit." Although seemingly inconsequential in the broader context of the film, this brief scene encapsulates several distinctive features that make Latin American road movies unique: the tense relationship of Latin American countries with modernity as epitomized by the precarious infrastructures and the uneven access to motorized vehicles and other modern technological advances; and the use of nonprofessional actors, shooting on location, and natural lighting as neorealist techniques to showcase such tough realities of the region as persistent poverty, class differences, and marginalization of indigenous populations.

The purpose of this volume is precisely to delve into this uniqueness of Latin American road movies in relation to the configuration of the genre in other latitudes. Our object of study are films made by Latin American directors and produced or coproduced by Latin American countries, whose narrative focuses on a journey across, out of, or into Latin America. The key element is that we consider a road movie not just a film about people driving a vehicle, but one that focuses on a journey—irrespective of the means of transportation used—and, in particular, on the impact that journey has on the travelers. The twelve essays by specialists on Latin American cinema traverse diverse cinematic routes and cover extensive geographical landscapes from a common point of departure: The traveling narrative of the road movie and its focus on crossing borders—physical, metaphorical, theoretical—make the genre ideal for re-examining the ideological grounds of national and regional discourses. Road movies have become a huge phenomenon in Latin America, especially since the 1990s. With a corpus of more than 200 films across the region, Latin American road movies have achieved a high profile in the last two decades at major film festivals, and profitable results at the box office, as exemplified by international blockbusters such as *Central do Brasil* (Walter Salles, 1998), *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001), and *Diarios de motocicleta*, among many others.

The Latin American Road Movie: Readings and Genealogies

Despite the proliferation of road movies in Latin America, there are no interpretations of this cultural phenomenon from a comprehensive, regional perspective. Most scholarly articles engage in specific readings of one or two films, especially blockbusters such as the above-mentioned *Y tu mamá también* and *Diarios de motocicleta*.[1] Those few books dedicated to the road movie genre are either limited to examining the phenomenon within one country or to comparing two similar national contexts. In "*On the road" en Argentina*, Agata Drabek analyzes Carlos Sorín's trilogy—*Historias mínimas* (2002), *Bombón, el perro* (2004), *El camino de San Diego* (2006)—to conclude that in that particular country the genre manifests its own distinctive features. The use of nonprofessional actors and the representation of a multicultural yet isolated and melancholic Patagonia allow for a unique variation that is specific to the Argentine tradition. Although several of the articles included in Sara Brandellero's *The Brazilian Road Movie* identify the emergence of a new, postnational cinema that goes beyond the need to discuss local identity and to stage the nation in an authentic fashion, the volume—as its title announces—is still restricted to a national corpus. In the same vein, Natália Pinazza's *Journeys in Argentine and Brazilian Cinema* argues for a perspective that takes into account the "situatedness" of Brazilian and Argentine road movies within a transnational context but relies on a comparative view of the two nations' local histories. According to Pinazza, the succession of populism, militarism, and neoliberalism in the two countries made possible the advent of road films embracing a global aesthetics (1–7). Although these three books have opened the path for an exploration of the genre in Latin America, they do not provide an overarching, regional view. Indeed, as we will see later, such a regional view challenges some of their basic assumptions, such as the use of nonprofessional actors and the representation of a multicultural landscape as an Argentine exception or the negotiation of a global aesthetics as a unique Brazilian feature.

Furthermore, the construction of a Latin American perspective has been hindered by the prompt association between the road movie and the USA—an almost inevitable association ever since David Laderman claimed that the genre was "a dynamic manifestation of [US] American society" (2). Relying on pioneering critics of the US cinematic tradition

such as Laderman, Timothy Corrigan, Steven Cohan, and Ina Rae Hark, Latin Americanists have taken for granted that Latin American road films have adapted US formats. The Mexican *Sin dejar huella* (María Novaro, 2000) and the Ecuadorian *Qué tan lejos* (Tania Hermida, 2006) are seen as variations of such iconic US films as *Easy Rider* (Denis Hopper, 1969), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), and *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) (García Sánchez 1–13; Lindsay 86–89). The two rebellious women in Scott's film are also considered the main source for the configuration of queer and female subjectivities in the Argentine *Tan de repente* (Diego Lerman, 2002), *Cleopatra* (Eduardo Mignona, 2003), and *El niño pez* (Lucía Puenzo, 2009)—a view that, one could further argue, has led to the problematic inclusion of Puenzo's film within the genre (Blanco and Petrus 325–329; Schiffauer 93–122).[2] Alicia's desperate journey to San Pedro de Atacama in search of a job in the Chilean *Alicia en el país* (Esteban Larraín, 2008) and Ignacio's long quest for the musician who passed on to him a cursed accordion in the Colombian *Los viajes del viento* (Ciro Guerra, 2009) are perceived as successors to the extravagant journeys of David Lynch's classics like *Lost Highway* (1997) (Valenzuela 2). In other words, Latin Americanists seem to endorse Cohan and Hark's assertion that "the road movie is, like the musical or the western, a Hollywood genre that catches peculiarly [US] American dreams, tensions, and anxieties, even when imported by the motion picture industries of other nations" (2).

Needless to say, a comparison with the US context can certainly help to unveil cinematic techniques, as seen in some of the close readings included in this volume, such as Ignacio Sánchez Prado's interpretation of the ideological connotations entailed by Mexican citations of *Easy Rider* or Carolina Rueda's examination of the links and differences between *Qué tan lejos* and US road movies that feature women behind the wheel such as *Leaving Normal* (Edward Zwick, 1992) and *Boys on the Side* (Herbert Ross, 1995). However, the widespread assumption that Latin American films are derivative of an original US format fails to notice that the road movie is a hybrid genre whose roots can be traced to other filmic genres and narrative forms. Leslie Dick proposes in *Sight and Sound: A-Z of Cinema* that, rather than a genre in its own terms, the road movie should be seen as a mixture of the film *noir* and the western. The traveler's search for experiences that are unavailable in his or her daily life points to the social critique that is typical of the former and to the sense of adventure that characterizes the latter (22–24).

We can indeed trace back a long history of fictional and nonfictional journeys in Western literature. From Homer's *Odyssey* to Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Western civilization abounds in narratives of mobility and displacement. Whether those stories are related to exile, pilgrimage, migration, or nomadism, they demonstrate that the voyage is a transhistorical, transnational figure driving the act of narration from its very beginnings. In Latin America, travel narratives have been an integral component of regional culture since precolonial times. Displacement and migration made possible the creation of humans, the emergence of distinct languages, and the establishment of cities in the K'iche' foundational narrative *Popol Vuh*. A detailed description of the trajectory from Buenos Aires to Lima guided the literary mapping of Alonso Carrió de la Vandera's 1773 masterpiece *El lazarillo de ciegos caminantes*. Especially between the mid-1700 and the end of the nineteenth century, travel writing was the main source for the production of what Mary Louise Pratt has called a "Eurocentered form of global or planetary consciousness" (4). European scientists and artists like Charles Darwin, Alexander von Humboldt, and Johann Moritz Rugendas affirmed white supremacy while traversing and describing Latin American territories. Moreover, several years before cinema came into existence the narration of journeys across, out of, or into Latin America played a crucial role in the nation-building process. They shaped gender, social, and racial stereotypes, and they were useful in framing national imaginaries as Latin American countries were tracing their physical and geopolitical borders—as seen in canonical narratives still required as school textbooks like Rubén Darío's *Peregrinaciones* (1901), José Hernández's *Martín Fierro* (1872–1879), and José Martí's travel chronicles.

As this long history suggests, the road genre draws from a rich tradition of travel narratives that goes beyond the importation of cultural codes from the USA. Non-filmic narrative manifestations are also part of the "genre memory" (Pérez 12) available to road movie filmmakers. Some of the essays included in this volume further demonstrate that this is the case. In "Recorriendo las Américas," Gilberto Blasini claims that Latin American road movies incorporate elements of action, comedy, adventure, melodrama, and documentary to provide "a cinematic rendering of Latin America as a pan-national entity." Going back to traditions, genres, and forms that had been disregarded or demonized in the preceding decades, road films redefine the notion of popularity in such a way that they both

question and extend 1960s New Latin American Cinema. Blasini examines how the Puerto Rican *El Clown* (Pedro Adorno and Emilio Rodríguez, 2006) establishes an intertextual relationship with a canonical Puerto Rican play, René Marqués's *La carreta* (1953), to reflect upon the romantic gesture of returning to one's roots. According to Blasini, this relationship with other media and genres is also evident in *Viernes social* (Frida Medín and Viveca Vázquez, 1994), a short film of the same country. As part of a dance/performance concert, *Viernes social* does not draw on a cinematic tradition but engages with journey narratives' syntactic and semantic elements—in particular, the organization of stories around short and finite trips as well as the centrality of cars as generic images and narrative devices. In "Lonely Souls," Salvador Oropesa suggests that the Mexican–Brazilian coproduction *Sólo Dios sabe* (Carlos Bolado, 2006) mixes allusions to Garcilaso de la Vega's eclogues, a pre-Raphaelite painting, and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to create an unorthodox Catholicism that renovates some of the key elements underpinning traditional Mexicanness: patriarchal masculinity, the nuclear family, and religion. Through cultural and ideological syncretism, this road film becomes the template for configuring a renewed Mexican identity. Cultural syncretism is also at the center of Carolina Rueda's analysis of *Qué tan lejos*, an Ecuadorian road movie in which US and European conventions meet the Latin American literary and cultural tradition, including philosophical statements by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, experimental film, and the tradition of sociological cinema in Ecuador. By means of this eclectic mixture, the film opens new routes for the potential of Ecuadorian cinema to appeal to national audiences and, thereby, challenge the hegemony of Hollywood products.

These essays show that, rather than a fixed genre with clear national origins, the road movie should be seen as an "artistic site with a fluid circulation of influences" (Pérez 13). As José Andrés Laguna Tapia has compellingly argued, affiliating the road movie with the US cinematic tradition would mistakenly confine a transnational genre to national boundaries. It would also put arbitrary limits to a type of narrative that is precisely defined by its lack of limits (32). It would restrict a genre best defined as an "a-genre" (41), since it is missing the static rules and conventions needed to codify genre as such. Moreover, the uncritical assumption that Latin American films are variations of US conventions neglects the specific features of the road movie in the region and, thereby, reinforces an

ethnocentric, subalternizing perspective that relegates Latin America to the role of provider of raw materials (landscapes to be shot; films to be analyzed) and/or to the role of passive consumer of Anglo-American theoretical approaches. In this sense, existing readings run a risk that, according to Neil Larsen, often emerges when looking at Latin American culture from a US scholarship standpoint: "to continue a covertly imperializing practice of assimilating Latin American culture itself to critical canons that the latter has had no hand in establishing" (189).

In order to avoid this undesired backlash, our book veers from a top-down approach that sees Latin American films as derivative cultural products and engages in what Kathleen Newman has called a "decentering" perspective of world cinema (4). Rather than conceiving of the latter as a static assembly of national cinemas where first-world industries dictate cultural norms, this decentering perspective acknowledges the so-called peripheral cinemas' integral contribution to film history. Cinematic styles are no longer understood as the result of closed nation-centric determinants but of a dynamic dialogue across borders. Instead of passive reflections of a single national culture, films become "contact zones" where transnational flows of cinematic exchange take place (9). These transnational flows are, of course, not always equal in nature. Stating that the global influence of Colombian and Hollywood road movies are on a par would not only be inaccurate but would also mask deep inequalities that should not go unnoticed, including the precarious financial condition of the Colombian film industry. Nor do these transnational flows completely override national frameworks—on which, as we explain in the next section, several Latin American road movies still rely to stage their political critique. In contrast to "global," a term often predicated on the erasure of national boundaries, and as opposed to "international," a notion assuming the homogeneous parity of political systems, the intermediate concept of "transnational" implies, to put it in Nataša Ďurovičová's words, "unevenness and flexibility without necessarily suppressing the idea of the nation" (x). Thus, conceiving of road films as transnational products helps us to move beyond binary notions of dominance and resistance. It allows us to identify how national, regional, and international cultural dynamics come into play in the Latin American mediascape—even more so in the case of genre films, which, as Luisela Alvaray claims, have always constituted "the Esperanto of film language" ("Hybridity" 80).

Latin American Modernity on the Road and in the Spotlight

The Latin American Road Movie offers a transnational perspective that unveils a number of features that speak to particular issues, tensions, and values of Latin American cultures. Perhaps the most noticeable is the films' staging and reconfiguration of collective identities. Instead of the desire for individual liberation typically propelling US road films (Laderman 2; Cohan and Hark 1), the Latin American road movie often alludes to broader economic, historical, and national frameworks. In general, these allusions are embodied in characters that, rather than having their individuality affirmed, are explicitly portrayed as representatives of a larger group—for example, the unemployed migrant in the above-mentioned *Alicia en el país* or the middle-class Jewish worker in the Uruguayan *Whisky* (Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll, 2004). The relationship between these representative characters and the nation does not follow a consistent pattern. In some films, characters embark on a trip longing for inclusion in a national community that has forgotten them. The Venezuelan *El chico que miente* (Marité Ugás, 2011), for example, tells the story of a poverty-stricken boy who travels across the Venezuelan coast in search of his mother. Yet, as he visits different towns and meets a variety of Venezuelans (white, indigenous, Afro-descendants, etc.), his ultimate goal veers from finding his biological mother to finding his own place within his motherland. In other films, characters are looking to escape a national culture that they find oppressive. Instead of a desire for national belonging, they seem to be driven by an antinational impulse, like Santi (Jason Day) in the Peruvian *Máncora* (Ricardo de Montreuil, 2008), who leaves Lima to find refuge in a northern beach resort crowded with international surfers. For Santi, hitting the road means embracing a global world, best represented by his two fellow travelers: his Spanish stepsister and her Americanized partner. Breaking away from Peruvian culture proves, however, an impossible desire: Not only does the triangular relationship not work, but national culture, epitomized in César Vallejo's classic poem "Los heraldos negros," never ceases to haunt the protagonist.

Latin American road movies hence appear to be the perfect example to support Fredric Jameson's widely discussed reading that "[t]hird-world texts, even those which are seemingly private…necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public*

third-world culture and society" ("Third-World" 69, emphasis in the original). The poverty-stricken boy in *El chico que miente*, the unemployed migrant in *Alicia en el país*, and most of the other characters on the Latin American road embody this embattled situation. Their private struggle can be interpreted as a cypher of a much larger, collective plight within the nation. Joanna Page rightly warns, however, that the relationship between individual and collective experience is far from being "straightforward allegorical," especially because most recent films are lacking the utopian impulse to re-establish collective identity (*Crisis* 196). Likewise, Jens Andermann notices that several post-1990s films "exhaust the allegorical repertoire of the road movie" (*New Argentine* 75). They neither allow for readings that open up the space for a national revolution, as it happened in the Third Cinema movement of the 1960s, nor hint toward utopian reconfigurations of the national space, as did 1980s post-dictatorship films. Based on a redeployment of typical elements of the road movie genre, such as forward movement and expressive naturalism, these films—best represented by Lisandro Alonso's *Los muertos* (2004) and *Liverpool* (2008)—preclude the possibility of forging empathy and solidarity with the viewer. Rather than standing as a figure for futurity, they act as sites of mourning for experiences of loss, solitude, and historical defeat. In this sense, contemporary road movies come closer to what Jameson later calls "post-generic genre films": self-referential genre films that act out their own commodification, thus allegorizing the impossibility of accounting for the social totality (*Geopolitical*, 5). While we certainly agree with Page and Andermann's demands for a more complex account of filmic allegory, we believe that the essays in this book point to a very distinct feature in regional cinema: In Latin American road movies, characters are caught in the middle of conflicts and tensions that go beyond individual disenchantment and that speak to (e.g. allegorize) larger national issues—even when, as in Alonso's films, they allegorize the impossibility of a national allegory.

Indeed, Ignacio Sánchez Prado's essay offers a cogent example of how the staging of national allegories has diachronically changed yet remains a relevant starting point for film interpretation. In "Journey to the Ruins of Modernity," Sánchez Prado builds on an interpretation of *Y tu mamá también* as a keen allegory of a neoliberal Mexico facing its disjointed present to focus on *Euforia* (Alfonso Corona, 2009) and *40 días* (Juan Carlos Martín, 2008). In both movies, Sánchez Prado argues, the trope of the journey allows for a navigation of the depths of the neoliberal catastrophe,

either by staging, as in *Euforia*, an impossible romance between two characters that embody irreconcilable ideological stances or, as in *40 días,* by charting an uneasy cartography of regional integration. Going against the conventional trope of the road trip as a journey to the interior of either the self or the nation, these films confront the viewer with the profound ideological and aesthetic crisis brought forward by the neoliberal era.

Besides illuminating the Mexican context, Sánchez Prado's reading hints at a broader explanation of the boom of Latin American road movies in the last three decades. Making economics "the one and undisputed protagonist" (Martín-Barbero 6), most 1990s Latin American governments—Cuba being the most conspicuous exception—saw in globalization, foreign investment, free trade, and deregulation of market and workplace the keys to national growth—a view that eventually resulted in the largest economic crisis in the region's history. The noticeable emergence of the Latin American road movie is doubly related to this historical juncture. On the one hand, road films have served as vehicles for socioeconomic critique. Whether celebrating, resisting, or conforming to neoliberal values, they have staged a regional landscape that contrasts with the neoliberal discourse of progress, wealth, and success. As opposed to the officially fantasized super-modern, hyper-technological present, filmic journeys have unveiled the emptiness behind the promise of progress and modernization. Contrary to the optimistic rhetoric of most administrations, they have revealed a Latin America that, instead of advancing toward global capitalism, remains at a standstill. If travel writing was crucial for mapping national boundaries and advancing modern ideals during the nineteenth-century nation-building process, the road movie has helped to re-chart those boundaries and to play up the dark side of modernity in the wake of the neoliberal crisis.

On the other hand, the contemporary boom of the road movie is in large part related to major changes in the film industry also sparked by neoliberalism. In the mid-1990s, the Motion Picture Association (MPA), an organization composed of the biggest Hollywood studios, opened offices in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. The MPA fostered international coproduction and took advantage of deregulatory and free trade policies to widely distribute its films. In Spain, private companies like Wanda, Tornasol, Sogetel, and Lola Films, followed by the media conglomerate Telefónica in 2000, invested billions in transatlantic coproductions. Moreover, in 1997, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and

Venezuela formed Ibermedia, an institution that aimed to promote distribution and exhibition of Ibero-American films and to sponsor filmmakers' training and exchange. In addition, cheaper technologies like digital video, which surged due to economic policies favoring importation, triggered a significant rise in production. This rise went parallel to an unprecedented professionalization of the regional film scene: the establishment of film schools, the creation of specialized magazines, and the opening or re-opening of film venues and festivals such as the Festival de Mar del Plata in Argentina; the Festival Internacional de Cine de Guadalajara in Mexico; and the Mercosur Film Market funded by Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, and Peru. Furthermore, despite official discourses against state intervention and the overall budget cuts in education and culture, new laws for film development were sanctioned in Argentina (1995), Brazil (1991 and 1993), Peru (1994), Mexico (1992, 1999, 2001), Chile (2004), Colombia (2003), and Venezuela (1993, 2006). In some cases, as in Argentina, these laws increased taxes on screenings, video rentals, and television broadcasts of domestic films and redirected those funds to national film institutions. In other cases, as in Brazil and Colombia, they allowed individuals and corporations to receive tax exemptions in order to sponsor cultural endeavors. In Mexico, these laws first privatized companies and eliminated protectionist measures but later raised taxes put on film tickets and required theaters to dedicate a percentage of their screens to national cinema in order to incentivize production. Albeit in different forms, these laws resulted in an overall growth of the regional film industry from the mid-1990s on. *Y tu mamá también*, *Central do Brasil, Sin dejar huella*, and *Diarios de Motocicleta* are paradigmatic examples of these new financing and distribution strategies. These films are also telling of the paradoxical nature of post-1990s Latin American road movies: On the one hand, neoliberalism was in large part behind their success. On the other, neoliberalism was their main target.[3]

Nadia Lie's article further develops this paradoxical stance toward modernity. Building on Vivian Schelling's classification of processes of modernity in Latin America, Lie proposes that there are three (interrelated and overlapping) types of road films in the region. First, there are "counter-conquest road movies" that trace continental journeys to invert the historical route of the conquest. Walter Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* and Fernando Solanas's *El viaje* (1992) are examples of this trend, as they evoke journeys of conquest to challenge hero-like characters, stress the ongoing struggle of indigenous populations, and establish an explicit

distance from the image of the road as a realm of freedom and self-discovery. Second, there is another strand that sheds a critical light on developmental as well as revolutionary projects. Films like the Brazilian *Iracema* (Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna, 1974), the Chilean *Huacho* (Alejandro Fernández Almendras, 2009), and the Cuban *Guantanamera* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, 1995) subvert the notion of mobility as an ideological trope for progress in their respective nations. Finally, a third set of road movies like *La jaula de oro* (Diego Quemada-Díez, 2013) and *Sin nombre* (Cary Fukunaga, 2007) focuses on movements across national borders. Their experiential mode of narration allows the audience to delve into the difficult journeys of refugees and undocumented migrants.

The fact that the road movie has offered a privileged lens through which to scrutinize the shortcomings of the region's development is far from surprising. As it has already been theorized, the genre has established from its very beginnings a tight connection with modernity (Laderman 13; Cohan and Hark 3). Not only do road movies rely on a modern artistic medium and on modern means of transportation but also, in their staging of forward movement, "arouse our desire for modernity" (Orgeron 2). This desire becomes evident in the genre's modern iconography. Cars and their motorized variants—motorcycles, trucks—highways, open roads and expanding horizons, road motels and diners, gas stations and rest areas, and spectacular traveling and aerial shots are some of the usual suspects that devotees of the genre expect to find in the visual lexicon of a road movie. Although a good number of Latin American road movies certainly exhibit the same stock of iconic fixtures, it is also true that they are, iconographically speaking, quite idiosyncratic. Take the mode of transportation, the crown jewel of the road movie's semantic configuration as a genre. While in the US road movies it is more often than not a privately owned vehicle—mainly cars, but also motorcycles—that emblematizes automobile modernity (Corrigan 144–146; Laderman 13), in Latin America, travelers often opt for—or are bound to use—collective and frequently public forms of transportation such as crowded trucks, as in *Mi socio* (Paolo Agazzi, 1982) and *El camino de San Diego*; trains, as in *El cielito* (María Victoria Menis, 2004), *La tragedia de Macario* (Pablo Véliz, 2005), and *Viva Cuba* (Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti, 2005); and buses, as in *Cassandra* (Inés de Oliveira Cézar, 2012), *Central do Brasil*, *Qué tan lejos*, and *Una novia errante* (Ana Katz, 2007). Other times, the motorized means of transportation is absent, for the outright lack of resources

compels the characters in motion to hitchhike or travel on bicycle, as in the Brazilian *O caminho das nuvens* (Vicente Amorim, 2003), or on foot. This is the case of the Bolivian classic *Vuelve Sebastiana* (Jorge Ruiz, 1953) and parts of the trip in Carlos Sorín's *Historias mínimas* and *El camino de San Diego*. Latin American road movies thus lack the fascination with the motorized form of transportation that is typical of US and even European road movies, in which the vehicle almost becomes a character, and viewers come to expect "special close-ups of the car's machinery 'working' to race down the road" (Laderman 18). The allure of the automobile in US road movies typically serves to articulate the modern values of individual freedom and mobility that are central to foundational myths of the USA as a nation (Cohan and Rae Hark 1; Orgeron 3). By contrast, whichever form of transport is used in Latin America road movies, it is customarily relevant only for its functionality.

The frequency with which Latin American travelers employ a non-individual form of transportation significantly affects the experience of travel, since characters are at the mercy of truck drivers who are willing to give them a free or cheap ride—*Desierto Sur* (Shawn Garry, 2007), *Liverpool*, *Mi socio*—or constrained by the fixed schedules and arranged stops of public transportation. Also, travelers lack the freedom to trace their own routes, take road detours, accelerate, or slow the pace. This lack of control over the means of transportation becomes an inconvenience in quite a few instances in which the travelers miss their bus because they take too much time in a road stop, as in the Brazilian *Central do Brasil* and the Chilean *Desierto Sur*. The silver lining to these accidentally long road stops is that they typically lead to fascinating plot twists. At times, these unanticipated twists are caused by unforeseen circumstances such as breakdowns in the vehicles that interrupt the road trips, as in the Argentine *Cleopatra*, *Diarios de motocicleta*, and *Familia rodante* (Pablo Trapero, 2004), in the Mexican–Brazilian coproduction, *Sólo Dios sabe*, and in the Cuban *Guantanamera*, *Lista de espera* (Juan Carlos Tabío, 2000), and *Miel para Oshún* (Humberto Solás, 2001). Roadblocks causing extra-long interludes often take on metaphorical meanings. In the Dominican *Al sur de la inocencia* (Héctor Valdez, 2014), two high-class, light-skinned step siblings flee to the South of the Dominican Republic to get away from a family scandal of political corruption that has gone public. During their road trip, they come into contact with an unknown reality for them—in racial and class terms—that helps them find their caring side and mature. Interestingly, though, the journey gets constantly disrupted, first because

the travelers accidentally lock themselves out of the car; then, because their car gets broken into and most of their valuables stolen. The truncated mobility in this road trip seems to metaphorically signpost the hindrances to social mobility in the Dominican Republic. The journey is just a rite of passage for the protagonists, who momentarily mingle with the Dominican "other" until they are ready to return to their privileged existence. Vicky Unruh expands on this issue of truncated mobility in her essay "The Power of Running on Empty," which tackles the difficulty of any self-propelled road trip in the aforementioned Cuban road movies. Unruh argues, however, that, far from paralyzing mobility, these films reveal simultaneously conservative impulses—conserving resources and revolutionary values—and progressive or critical ones that question those cultural givens. Cuban road movies expose fissures in the revolutionary project: in the rhetoric of solidarity, hard work, and future fulfillment. But they also explore alternative or refashioned material and human energy sources as fixes for past mistakes and current ruptures.

Heterogeneous Territories: Mapping Class, Race, Gender, and Sexuality

Unlike the white, middle-class man or the adventurous heterosexual couple that typically hit the road in Hollywood (Cohan and Hark 8), in Latin America, most characters belong to social groups that have historically been marginalized or excluded from national imaginaries. Unemployed subjects and peasants share the road with black, mestizo, and indigenous peoples. These shared itineraries disclose the heterogeneous territories at the heart of Latin American nations, often challenging conventional views on class, race, and ethnicity—as seen, for example, in Carlos Sorín's *El camino de San Diego* or in Pablo Trapero's *Nacido y criado* (2006), two movies that make visible the social diversity traditionally erased from Argentine discourse. Laderman notices that heterogeneity also permeates what he calls the "1990s multicultural road movie" (177): US films representing a "multiplicity of multicultural drivers" (177), especially women, gays, and people of color. We could however say that, despite probably sharing a similar impulse, most Latin American road movies go beyond "embracing a [postmodern] multicultural perspective" (179) to stress the unequal and often violent coexistence of heterogeneous groups and cultures.

Padilla and Estrada's chapters explore how these heterogeneous territories exceed national borders. Drawing on Arturo Arias and Claudia Milian's theorizations on the coloniality of diaspora, Padilla claims that *Sin nombre* and its predecessor *El Norte* (Gregory Nava, El Norte 1983) bring to the fore a strategic mapping of "Central American non-belonging": an exclusionary state of being on the basis of race, class, gender, and/or sexuality. As the films suggest, for many Central Americans this non-belonging remains a constant both in their country of origin and in the USA, where it is further maintained by discriminatory immigration laws. Although in "Maya Identity and Border Crossings," Alicia Estrada agrees with Padilla that *El Norte* documents the hard conditions of Central American migrants, she argues that this film joins *La jaula de oro* in reproducing dominant racial discourses on Maya youth. These movies, Estrada asserts, incorporate and situate Maya voices at the center, yet, maintain a *ladino* Latino/American frame—for example, an ideology of racial superiority that makes *mestizos* view themselves closer to an ideal of progress and decency than indigenous peoples. The films analyzed in these two essays could be seen as representatives of what Laura Podalsky calls "transnationalized social problem films": films that zoom in from scenes of mass suffering such as genocide and civil wars to track specific characters with the main goal of calling on audiences to act as compassionate global citizens (128). As Podalsky explains, the promotion of these global human bonds has been criticized for reinscribing differential power relations and reaffirming the moral superiority of the compassionate—a critique in line with Estrada's interpretation of the cinematic representation of Maya identity. Yet these films could also be seen as performers of transnational "communities of sentiment," as they encourage the audience to feel through (rather than feel for) others (Podalsky 129). Moved in unexpected ways to unexpected places, viewers are confronted with new affects emerging from alternative cultural formations and previously unknown sociohistorical contexts. Whether reinforcing unequal relationships or configuring new feelings, we could say that these films, to borrow Padilla's concept, strategically map Latino/America as a heterogeneous territory of non-belonging.

Latin American road movies have not questioned gender and sexual asymmetries ingrained in social structures in the same way as the racial, ethnic, and class-related ones. To be fair, these uneven gender and sexuality-based dynamics match a generic trend on a global scale. Scholars

have pointed out the masculinist and heteronormative edge of the genre in Hollywood (Cohan and Rae Hark, Corrigan, Laderman, Mark Williams) as well as in European road movies (Mazierska and Rascaroli, Pérez), especially until the 1990s. Although Latin American road movies have generally focused on the adventures of the heterosexual male, they have also placed women behind the wheel, and a number of Latin American women directors have delivered compelling road movies.[4] Since several of our contributors examine road trips that feature female travelers, sometimes as the only protagonists of the road adventure (Cosentino, Piedras, Rueda, Tompkins), one might take this as a promising sign that Latin American road movies are overcoming these blind spots related to gender and sexuality. However, in "Configuring Desire," Olivia Cosentino reaches a pessimistic conclusion about this prospect by analyzing two Mexican youth road films, *Por la libre* (Juan Carlos de Llaca, 2001) and *Viaje redondo* (Gerardo Tort, 2009). Cosentino scrutinizes the expression and resultant suppression of incestuous and queer desire in these two films. She highlights the figurative (and paradoxical) stagnancy that characterizes the Mexican youth road film. *Por la libre* prioritizes the traditional nuclear family while *Viaje redondo* rejects queer desire as nothing more than a longing for heterosexuality.[5] The Mexican youth road film masquerades as a progressive exploration of Mexican youth, but in reality it is conservative and heteronormative in nature. Both films as well as the blockbuster *Y tu mamá también* present endings that align with a traditional conceptualization of the social order.

Regional Techniques and Local Iconographies

The sense of closeness to the—at times harsh—realities of the region explains why so many Latin American road movies bring into play techniques related to neorealist and documentary filmmaking. These include long takes, shooting on location, an emphasis on the poor and the working class, using nonprofessional actors, and natural lighting. Scholars have attributed this trend to the lingering influence of the so-called New Latin American Cinema, and of the *Cinema Novo* in the particular context of Brazil (Aldana 359; Brandellero, *Brazilian* xxiii; da Cunha 71; Rouanet 136; Tompkins, *Experimental* 104), even if that legacy is revisited without the utopian ambition that informed the projects of revolutionary filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s.[6] As Joanna Page has noted, contemporary renderings of neorealism tend to be carried out "under a postmodern,

reflexive lens," which entails certain doses of both nostalgia and skepticism about the social and political function of art (*Crisis* 35). Likewise, contemporary hybridizations of fiction and documentary typically consist of "minimalist, observational techniques that convey something of the messy, inconsequential quality of everyday life in an era that lacks conviction of the possibility of radical political change" ("Introduction" 5). Latin American filmmakers mix the conventions of the road movie with neorealist and documentary techniques to bear witness to important issues such as the dismal effects of neoliberalism, the persistence of class divisions and widespread poverty, and the insufficient coverage of the welfare system in the region, yet they do so without intending to offer a political manifesto.

In fact, unlike the somewhat ideologically uniform practices of the 1960s New Latin American Cinema, it would be futile to try to look for a consistent ideological pattern in their use of neorealist techniques. The polyvalent meanings associated with, or better yet, activated by the almost ubiquitous panoramic shots of desolate landscapes (in the Andean Plateau, the Brazilian Highlands, or the Argentine Patagonia) in recent Latin American road movies are a case in point. Some road films romanticize rural spaces as repositories of national identity so that the journeys that the films narrate appear as attempts to map the territory of the nation and search for its distinctiveness. For example, in the Brazilian *Central do Brasil*, which Deborah Shaw describes as "a fairytale romance" that promotes an escape from the corrupted and dehumanizing city and a "happy return to rural origins" (*Contemporary Cinema* 160), and in *Dos filhos de Francisco* (Breno Silveira, 2005), the road trip takes the protagonists to an idealized *sertão* region, whose poverty and social problems are depicted through rose-colored lenses or, in the case of the latter, simply elided (Signorelli 109–110). These films seem to revisit the national allegorical framework that *Cinema Novo* articulated around the politicized rural interior as a space of resistance to the failures of the modernization process, even if lacking the revolutionary potential attached to the original framework and offering, as Lúcia Nagib argues, a conservative solution that reveals the impossibility of re-enacting the national project (42). A very different depiction of the *sertão* emerges in *Ó Ceu de Suely* (Karim Aïnouz, 2006) and *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo* (Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes, 2009), where the Brazilian rural northeast is a dry, infertile land in which women have to work as sex workers to survive. In her chapter, Sara Brandellero examines how the latter film revisits the iconic

landscapes of northeastern Brazil through the experience of a journey that is both physical displacement and an intertextual remapping of the Brazilian cinematic tradition. *Viajo porque preciso*, Brandellero argues, explores the potentialities of the landscape of the *sertão* and, in so doing, charts a departure from a perspective centered on the nation toward a broader transnational focus.

Argentine road movies display equally conflicting visions of the Patagonia. Eduardo Mignogna's *Cleopatra*, presents the vast region as a place outside the constraining tentacles of urban materialism, a liberating place where the two protagonists find their inner selves, while the Patagonian south that comes into sight in *El cielito* is as poor and violent as the urban slums. A third set of road films, best represented by Carlos Sorín's *Historias mínimas* and *Bombón, el perro*, portray what Joanna Page calls "a hybridized rural society, besieged almost to the same extent as the city by aggressive global trade practices" (*Crisis* 112). Broadly speaking, the main point we can extrapolate from these differing representations is that in many Latin American road movies, landscapes are presented through comparable neorealist techniques yet they prompt a wide range of meanings and emotions that might be hard to pin down in only one direction. Although, as mentioned earlier, the allegorical paradigm of the Latin American cinema of the 1960s and 1970s seems exhausted, contemporary road movies re-signify landscapes with competing valences across the political spectrum, thus compelling viewers not to overlook them as mere background.

The infiltration of neorealist and documentary techniques into fictional Latin American cinema is so prominent that it has been theorized, for example, as a staple feature of the so-called new Argentine cinema (Aguilar 176; Andermann, *New Argentine* xii; Aprea 41; Page, *Crisis* 34–42). This is not, however, an anomaly of the region's film industries, but rather a global trend since the 1990s, which Michael Chanan terms "neo-neorealism" ("The Space" 12) and Joanna Page "citations of neo-realism" (*Crisis* 34). It is important, Chanan further contends, to avoid the trap of regarding these aesthetic experiments between fiction and nonfiction as a new praxis or as derivative of the innovations achieved in the filmmaking practices of Europe and the USA, just as the present volume disputes that Latin American road movies are merely spin-offs of the articulations of the genre elsewhere. In fact, Chanan concludes that Latin America has been as productive in terms of film experimentation and cross-generic ventures between fiction and documentary "as the countries of the metropolis," if

not more in some cases ("The Space" 22). Cynthia Tompkins looks into one cogent example of this in her essay "Inscription and Subversion." Tompkins shows how Inés de Oliveira Cézar's *Cassandra* inscribes and subverts the generic conventions of the road movie, the female bildungsroman and even neorealism. While the road trip favors character development and female independence, the protagonist, a journalist whose job is to denounce the deforestation that deprives indigenous peoples of their ancestral lands in the Argentine northeast, does not turn out to be a successful journalist, since she becomes aware of the limitations of language and representation. Documentary-style interviews with indigenous people offer no easy truths, but rather complicate the clear-cut divisions between indigenous and creoles, between first peoples and the urban underclass. Her poetic chronicles and her subjective pictures do not fit the style of the magazine that commissioned them and cannot be consumed as "news." So, cultural critique in this film is represented narratively, and the deictic pointers typical of neorealism are ambiguous, since the exact locations of the indigenous communities are omitted. Instead of the expected overt political messages denouncing the plight of indigenous peoples, *Cassandra* makes us to reflect upon the limitations of objective representation as well as the unfeasibility of speaking for the subaltern.

Notably, the interactions between fictional road movies and documentary in contemporary Latin American cinema are not unidirectional but symbiotic. Perhaps, then, Brazilian road movie guru Walter Salles was not exaggerating when he asserted in his "Notes for a Theory of the Road Movie" that the "road movie may well be the film genre that lends itself most naturally to this blurring of boundaries" (70). In this sense, we can identify a riveting sub-genre that could be termed "docu-road movies;" that is, documentaries that are enriched by incursions of visual techniques emblematic of fictional road movies. A sound example of these incursions is *Cocalero* (2006), an Argentina–Bolivia production directed by the Ecuadorian Alejandro Landes that follows the indigenous presidential candidate Evo Morales in his campaign around the country prior to being appointed president of Bolivia for the first time. What is compelling about this documentary is that, like a fictional road movie, it focuses on character development and constructs a rather complex portrait of Evo Morales, including his inner desires and anxieties, his virtues and insecurities, as a person on a journey to find his place in society. In so doing, the film collapses what for Michael Chanan is the main difference between fiction and documentary: addressing the viewer as a private individual—fiction—versus

addressing him or her "as citizen, as a member of the social collective, as putative participant in the public sphere" in the case of the documentary (*The Politics* 16). Interestingly, in appealing to the viewer's public subjectivity, *Cocalero* does not expect spectators to worship Morales's persona in propagandistic fashion, but rather shows the importance of the grassroots efforts of organized indigenous communities and, particularly, of female indigenous activists, for the rise of Movement for Socialism. José Andrés Laguna claims that in *Cocalero*, it is not the individual but a collective social class thus far negated and displaced that travels toward the core of the system. The title refers not to the person, Morales, but to the social movement, to a nation that has been on the move since colonial times to find its proper place (256–58). The success story of social mobility that Evo Morales stands for—from *cocalero* to president—is the story of most Bolivians, a story of migration and endless displacements.

The Bolivian "docu-road movie," then, cannot be understood in relation to a Hollywood genre format, but in the context of internal migration, the rise of indigenous movements, and the decentralization of power in contemporary Bolivia. Moreover, it needs to be put in dialogue with a long-standing tradition of Bolivian cinema that reflects upon the crucial relevance of migration and displacement in the construction of the current configuration of the Bolivian plurinational state (Laguna 12). In "The Contemporary Documentary Road Movie in Latin America," Pablo Piedras explores in depth innovative facets of the "docu-road movie" in other Latin American contexts. He studies the representation of displacement and mobility in contemporary documentaries influenced by the road movie genre in terms of iconography, narrative patterns, and visual cues. While offering a wide range of examples, Piedras provides in the second part of his essay detailed analyses of three first person documentaries made by female directors: *The Illusion*, *Diario de uma busca* e *Hija*. Piedras analyzes how nonfiction cinema has employed conventions of the road movie to put in flux issues of identity—personal and collective—and memory with a distinctive focus on gender. He argues that Latin American women's directors have found in contemporary first person documentaries a cogent genre to articulate a strong female agency and face issues such as their relationship with conflictive paternal figures.

A word about the case studies selected for inclusion is in order. Although the limited space of a volume does not allow for a comprehensive inclusion of all countries and film industries within the Latin American region, we purposely reached out to collaborators who could offer perspectives from

contexts as wide-ranging as possible. The volume thus includes analyses of road movies from the continent's leading film industries—Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico—as well as examples from latitudes such as Central America, Ecuador, Chile, and Puerto Rico that rarely factor in scholarly discussions about Latin American cinema, let alone in the still scarce inquiries about the road movie genre. Even so, as it happens in projects of this nature that explore cultural production of a whole continent, the reader will inevitably find underrepresented countries. To partially compensate for these omissions, we have done our utmost to illustrate our claims in this introduction with examples of road movies made in countries that our contributors did not address. We want to clarify that we are not driven by an opportunistic aspiration to fill a quota; rather, our goal is to showcase for English-language readers the richness and diversity of road movies in the Latin American region. By the same token, we strived to seek contributions that would offer a balance between high-profile road movies—both in terms of commercial success and/or critical reception—and others that are less known in international circles.

Notes

1. See, for example, Acevedo-Muñoz; Bermúdez Barrios; Bueno; Carte; Cavalcanti Tedesco; De Ferrari; Díaz; Duno-Gottberg; Fernández; Gibbs; Lindsay; Sampaio; Thornton; Oropesa, "Proxemics"; Claire Williams.
2. Although Lala (Inés Efron) and la Guayi (Mariela Vitale), the two protagonists of *El niño pez,* flee to la Guayi's native Paraguay at the end of the film, journeys are not a main component—let alone *the* main component—of the narrative. We thus believe that what has led to the categorization of *El niño pez* as a road movie is the widespread prompt association between the cinematic representation of traveling and Hollywood.
3. For further details on the Latin American film industry after the 1990s, see Alvaray, "National"; Aprea; Falicov; García-Canclini; Rêgo and Rocha; Sánchez Prado, *Screening*; Shaw, *Contemporary Latin American*; Suárez.
4. Among the Latin American road movies directed by women filmmakers, are the Argentine *El cielito* (María Victoria Menis 2004), *Una novia errante* (Ana Katz), and *Cassandra* (Inés de Oliveira Cézar), the Brazilian *Caroneiros* (Martina Rupp 2007) and *O Sol Nos Meus Olhos* (Flora Dias and Juruna Mallon 2013), the Chilean *De jueves a domingo* (Dominga Sotomayor 2012) and *Turistas* (Alicia Scherson 2009), the Ecuadorian *Qué tan lejos* (Tania Hermida), the Venezuelan *El chico que miente* (Marité Ugás), and the Mexican *Sin dejar huella* (María Novaro). Notably, as Pablo Piedras explores

in his essay for this volume, Latin American women's directors have produced a number of fascinating documentaries that borrow conventions of the road movie: *Papá Iván* (María Inés Roqué, Argentina-México 2000), *Reynalda del Carmen, mi mamá y yo* (Lorena Giachino, Chile 2006), *Secretos de lucha* (Maiana Bidegain, Francia-Uruguay 2007), *El telón de azúcar* (Camila Guzmán Urzúa, Francia-Chile 2007), *Familia tipo* (Cecilia Priego, Argentina 2009), *El edificio de los chilenos* (Macarena Aguiló, Chile 2010), *The Illusion* (Susana Barriga, Cuba 2008), *Diario de uma busca* (Flávia Castro, Brasil 2010) e *Hija* (María Paz González, Chile 2011).

5. The Argentine *Tan de repente* (Diego Lerman) offers a much more daring queer-infused road story. See Bermúdez Barrios for an examination of the politics of lesbian representation in this film.
6. For further details on the aesthetics and politics of the 1960s and 1970s New Latin American cinema, see Chanan, *Twenty-five Years*; Downing; Gabriel; Guneratne and Dissanayake; Pick; Pines and Willemen; Solanas and Getino.

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PART I

Latin American Modernity on the Road and in the Spotlight

CHAPTER 2

Revisiting Modernity Through the Latin American Road Movie

Nadia Lie

Latin American cinema has produced an impressive number of road movies in the last two decades (Wood ix; Torres 9). This productivity is part of a worldwide interest in the genre, with road movies appearing in countries as diverse as Iran (*Taste of Cherry*, Abbas Kiarostami, 1997), Taiwan (*My Blueberry Nights*, Wong Kar-Wai, 2007), Germany (*Auf der anderen Seite*, Fatih Akin, 2007), Finland (*Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana*, Aki Kaurismäki, 1994), and Belgium (*Eldorado*, Bouli Lanners, 2008). Not surprisingly, scholarship has started to revise the once generally assumed North-Americanness of the genre (Orgeron 6) and important studies have appeared on European (Mazierska and Rascaroli), Spanish (Pérez), French-language (Archer; Gott and Schiltz), Brazilian (Brandellero) and Argentine–Brazilian (Pinazza) road movies, as well as on interculturality in the road movie genre in general (Moser; Orgeron). In this context, the question arises as to what Latin American road movies have to offer in this international concert. Are Latin American road movies any different from road movies made in other parts of the world, or do they show the same topics and procedures as road movies elsewhere?

A major obstacle to tackling these questions is the sheer diversity of the genre in Latin America. Road movies have started to appear not only in

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national film industries that are traditionally key references for Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba), but also in countries such as Ecuador (*Qué tan lejos*, Tania Hermida, 2006), Chile (*De jueves a domingo*, Dominga Sotomayor, 2012), Costa Rica (*A ojos cerrados*, Hernán Jiménez, 2010), Colombia (*Retratos en un mar de mentiras*, Carlos Gaviria, 2010), Uruguay (*El último tren*, Diego Arsuaga, 2002),and Venezuela (*El chico que miente*, Marité Ugás, 2010). As an intrinsically hybrid genre (Sargeant and Watson 6), the road movie moreover easily combines with other genres, such as the documentary (e.g. *Hija*, María Paz González, 2011), the melodrama (e.g. *La misma luna*, Patricia Riggen, 2007), the film noir (e.g. *Terra estrangeira*, Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas, 1996), or the sex comedy (e.g. *Y tu mamá también*, Alfonso Cuarón, 2001). The possibilities are infinite and the same goes for the topics dealt with: from migration (*Los tres entierros de Melquiades Estrada*, writ. Guillermo Arriaga; dir. Tommy Lee Jones, 2005) to drug trafficking (*Pescador*, Sebastián Cordero, 2011), from gender issues (*Tan de repente*, Diego Lerman, 2002) to gangsterhood (*Sin Nombre*, Cary Fukunaga, 2009), from unemployment (*Bombón, el perro,* Carlos Sorín, 2004) to tourism (*Turistas*, Alicia Scherson, 2006). This begs the question as to how to trace a coherent path through such a rich, but also labyrinthine world.

In this essay, I attempt to chart the Latin American road movie by proposing one particular path through the ample body of works available: its reflection on modernity. This is certainly not the only way in which the road movie can be approached, nor is it my intention to suggest that modernity is the prime concern of absolutely every road movie in the world. The universality of the road as a metaphor for "the course of life" (Laderman 2), for instance, has yielded important road movies in different countries and different decades, opening up the genre to more philosophical meditations on life and death. *La Strada* (Federico Fellini, 1954) and *Wild Strawberries* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) are noteworthy examples in the European tradition, to which one might add, for Latin America, films such as *Japón* (Carlos Reygadas, 2002), *Los muertos* (Lisandro Alonso, 2004), or *Lake Tahoe* (Fernando Eimbcke, 2008). Nevertheless, international scholarship on the genre has invariably presented the road movie's intimate relationship with modernity as a key characteristic (Cohan and Hark 3; Laderman 13; Moser 8; Orgeron 2, 48). But here another question arises: What exactly is meant by this idea of modernity in the context of the road movie?

A first way in which the terms are associated is a very obvious one: Road movies rely on modern means of transportation—particularly the car and the motorcycle—, which implies that they take place in modern times.[1] A quick glance at a sample of Latin American road movies suggests the problematic character of this assertion, with protagonists using means of transportation as diverse as the canoe (*Los Muertos*), the donkey (*Los viajes del viento,* Ciro Guerra, 2009), or the bicycle (*Miel para Oshún*, Humberto Solás, 2001). However, they do live in times in which more modern means of transportation exist, and this already provides a clue to a possibly alternative framing of modernity. In *Los viajes del viento*, for instance, the journey by donkey is made in the late 1960s, something which is explicitly indicated in the film itself. A conquest film like *Cabeza de Vaca* (Nicolás Echevarría, 1991), on the contrary, is not a road movie because it depicts the historical wanderings of a conquistador in the sixteenth century. Conceiving modernity as "automobile modernity" (Laderman 13) and adopting it as the historical framing of road movie stories also helps distinguish them within the larger family of travel narratives, which ranges from literary classics such as the *Odyssey* or *Candide* (Laderman 6–13) to the Western as cinematic forerunner (Bertelsen). Even though these influences are certainly acknowledged, road movies tend to contain an explicit meditation on technology (Laderman 18), which makes them different from most of their literary and cinematic predecessors.[2]

A second way in which road movies and modernity are associated is through the figure of movement and mobility, presented as a distinctive feature not only of road movies, but also and more importantly of modernity itself.[3] In this context, mention is made of the manner in which road movie narratives transport us to other countries, in the same way in which film in general transports us to another world: Locomotion and mediamotion coincide (Moser 14). But also, in a more sociological sense, modernity is associated with forms of living that imply a less stable relationship between the individual and his place, something which can result in a positive sense given to movement as a liberating means to "tear oneself loose from" a place (which Moser calls "déprise" [14]), as well as in a negative one, evoking unrootedness and aimless wandering.[4] In this context, road movies are generally seen as ambivalent reflections on modernity: On the one hand they "tap into as well as arouse our desire for modernity, our desire to be perceived as moving (and quickly as that)" (Orgeron 2), but on the other hand, they tend to prolong "the cinema's perennial though rarely discussed skepticism of modernity and its social costs" (Orgeron 2).

Finally, modernity is sometimes related to a modernist aesthetics, marked by a foregrounding of innovative and experimental techniques in road movies (Laderman 2). This might explain why the art house circuit, generally reluctant to work with genres because of their association with commercial mainstream cinema, has nevertheless shown a remarkable interest in the specific genre of the road movie. Many Latin American road movies have received subsidies from European-based foundations, such as Fonds Sud and Hubert Bals, which points at the transnational quality of their production in Latin America (Smith). However, the genre is certainly not exclusive to this circuit, as international box office hits such as *Diarios de motocicleta* (Walter Salles, 2004) or *Y tu mamá también* demonstrate.

In my own discussion of the Latin American road movie, I will adopt the idea that road movies are situated in times when modern means of transportation exist and acknowledge the fact, demonstrated by others (Tompkins 91–135), that they often deploy an experimental aesthetics. However, my predominant focus on modernity is the second one, which decodes mobility as a metaphorical representation of modernity as a societal condition. If it is true, as Orgeron argues, that "road movies continue to examine the roots of modernity" (48), how exactly does this take shape in Latin America? The question becomes all the more important if the following is taken into account:

> Latin America has a specific way of being in modernity. Latin American modernity is not exactly the same as European modernity; it is a mixture, a hybrid, a product of a process of mediation which has its own trajectory; it is neither purely endogenous nor entirely imposed from without, and some call it subordinate or peripheral. (Larrain 6)

This "peripheral" quality is acknowledged as a specific trait of Latin American modernity in several publications (Schelling 1; Domingues ix), and explains why many scholars in Latin American studies adopt a very critical attitude toward the phenomenon of modernity and the power dynamic they believe it entails. Concording with Enrique Dussel (48), for instance, Jean Franco asserts that "the Spanish conquest of the Americas was an event that inaugurated modernity" (5). Her book —significantly called *Cruel Modernity*— traces a narrative that directly leads from the conquest to contemporary forms of violence on the continent, holding that, in the case of Latin America, "the pressures of modernization and the lure of modernity lead states to kill" (2). Other scholars conceive of Latin

American modernity in a more positive way: as a project aiming at "equal freedom" (Domingues 2), rooted in a tradition of Enlightenment (Shelling 4; Larrain 13), and finding its first expression in the process of independence and nation-building during the nineteenth century. The difference in views also extends to the contemporary period which, according to the critical voices on the topic, illustrates the centuries-old tendency of modernity to eliminate those "alien" to it (Franco) or simply exclude them from globalization's supposedly universal benefits (García Canclini); whereas others consider the increased democratization of Latin American societies as an indication that modernity—in spite of many difficulties—is since the 1990s "on the move" (Domingues 34; Larrain 174).

Within the scope of this article, it is impossible to do justice to this large and complex debate, let alone to take issue with it. Rather, I want to assess the way in which Latin American road movies articulate the so-called "specificity" of the continent's experience of modernity through the road movie idiom. In order to do so, I will take my clue from Vivian Schelling's chronological classification of processes of modernity in Latin America as related to (a) the "discovery" of a "New World" and Enlightenment; (b) social movements of emancipation at the beginning of the twentieth century; and (c) ideologies of developmentalism and neoliberalism from the second part of the twentieth century onward (Schelling 4–7). In line with this classification, I will discuss three sets of films. The first set engages with colonial journeys of discovery and exploration and describes travels through the continent. The second one sheds a critical light on developmental as well as revolutionary projects in Latin America while adopting a national focus. Finally, the third one relates movement to processes of expulsion from global economy, brought forward by the pressures of globalization and neoliberalism. In each of these sets, I will assess the function of the road movie idiom with respect to the particular instances of modernity that Shelling has singled out for Latin America. At the same time, however, it is clear that Latin American cinema is increasingly part of a decentered form of world cinema (Ďuroviĉová and Newman), which prevents us from tracing clear-cut boundaries between what counts as "Latin American" and what does not. Modernity is a worldwide phenomenon, and several problems depicted in Latin American road movies—such as divorce (*De jueves a Dominga Sotomayor, 2012*), abortion (*Turistas, Alicia Scherson, 2006*), or unrootedness (*Música Campesina*, Alberto Fuguet, 2011)—might equally appear elsewhere. Nevertheless, in view of the international debate on the genre, an attempt at a systematic walk

through the wild forest of Latin American road movies might yield a useful map for further explorations.

Journeys of Discovery: Meeting Latin America's Others

The first set of films describes travels leading through several countries of Latin America. Because of their continental scope, these films inevitably engage with former tales of exploration and discovery, harking back to early modernity initiated by the Spanish conquest of the continent (Dussel). Based on the historical travel notebooks by Ernesto Guevara and Alberto Granado, *Diarios de motocicleta* serves as a prime example, taking us all the way from Argentina to Venezuela. Right from the start, the film symbolically evokes the journeys of conquest by depicting two young men infused with adventurous spirit and eager to discover a Latin America they only know from books. Theirs is an exploratory mode: an attitude inclined toward actively discovering the reality of the continent, which—through the road movies' inherent association of mediamotion and locomotion—automatically involves the cinematic viewer as well. Their self-proclaimed love for the road and method of improvisation, and their use of a fancy motorcycle moreover cast the journey in the mold of the Kerouacian road narrative, based on the novel *On the road*, and prefiguring in this way Walter Salles's well-known eponymous adaptation of the book in 2012.

The journey's relationship to the motif of conquest, however, is also challenged right from the start by the anti-hero-like quality of the protagonists: They nearly get run over by a bus while still saying goodbye to their friends and family and shortly afterward they end in a muddy brook after losing an amicable race with two gauchos on horseback. Once their motorcycle definitively breaks down in Chile, the two buddies are obliged to pursue their journey on foot.[5] From drivers, they become walkers, and this significantly impacts on their relationship with the continent. In accordance with the frequent association between walking and thinking,[6] the film shows how their minds open up to reflection on what they see. Moreover, the road itself no longer appears as an area open to imaginary conquests on horseback or motorcycle, but rather reveals its Bakhtinian quality as a space of social encounters:

> In the novel, encounters normally take place 'on the road', as an occasional meeting place. It is on 'the main road' where the trajectories of many people belonging to different classes, situations, religions, nationalities and ages cross at the same spatio-temporal point of intersection. There, people who are normally separated from each other by social hierarchy or by place, can meet, and all kinds of contrasts can come to light, different destinies can clash or become entangled.[7] (Bakthine 384–385; translation mine)

This social dimension manifests itself for the first time in the Atacama desert, when the two buddies meet a Chilean couple on its way to the Anaconda mining area. The difficult situation in which this homeless couple finds itself makes Guevara (Gael García Bernal) and Granado (Rodrigo de la Serna) painfully aware of their privileged position as travelers for leisure (Sadlier 158). Here, Salles's road movie takes an explicit distance from Kerouac's presentation of the road as a realm of freedom and self-discovery. In subsequent scenes, shot in documentary style, the Bakthinian aspect of the road is further articulated with respect to the indigenous population. Centering on their miserable living conditions through several interview-like conversations, the film prepares for a sharp contrast with the indigenous people's former position of power as members of the Inca Empire, projected onto the archeological site of Machu Picchu. Besides establishing a tragic contrast between past and present, a parallel is suggested between the original dispossession of land by the so-called Spanish invaders ("los invasores españoles," Guevara in the film), and the ongoing struggle for land by the indigenous population. In this context, the road not only appears as a zone of social encounter, but also as a space running through a divided land.

An even more explicit denunciation of the conquest can be found in Fernando Solanas's *El viaje*, a travel film released in the symbolic year 1992, 500 years after Columbus's arrival to Latin America. The teenager Martín Nunca (Walter Quiroz)—whose name refers to the hero of liberation José de San Martín—undertakes a search for his father, and his bicycle takes him from Ushuaia to Mexico. His personal quest of identity quickly gives way to a journey of discovery of a continent he hardly knew before. Similar to what happens in *Diarios de Motocicleta*, the route operates as a meeting place, providing encounters with real, but also allegorical figures, such as "Américo Inconcluso" (Kiko Mendive), who stand for the continent's centuries-old history of violence. The tone of this film is more political and didactic than the one in *Diarios de motocicleta* (Shaw

"Representing"; Tal), and the image of America is ethnically more diverse, but the indigenous population once again occupies a pivotal position in the film's narrative, with the conquest being explicitly condemned as a terrible genocide, the monstrosity of which still awaits recognition.[8] The remarkable analogy of the scenes shot on Machu Picchu in the two films—with several verbal and visual echoes (Williams)—suggests a deliberate tribute on behalf of Salles toward Solanas's earlier film, as a possible forerunner of this counter-conquest road movie. In both cases, the encounter with the indigenous population leads to an explicit condemnation of the conquest, and sets in a process of personal transformation of the protagonists, which will be completed at the end of the film.

A somewhat different pattern can be found in *Amigomío* (1995), a film by German-Argentine film director Jeanine Meerapfel, leading us from Buenos Aires to Quito, in Ecuador. This road movie features a divorced father (Daniel Kuzniecka) and his nine-year-old son, nicknamed "Amigomío" (Diego Mesaglío), who flee Argentina in the 1970s after the boy's mother has disappeared and has most likely been killed by the military dictatorship. Their journey takes place by bus, train, and on foot and confronts them with a generalized state of disarray on the continent, marked by child abduction, armed struggle, corruption, and dictatorship. The film diverges from the aforementioned by inscribing this state of affairs into a universal history of violence and deterritorialization, with explicit reference to the Holocaust. At the same time, *Amigomío* is connected to the other travel films through its depiction of the road as a meeting place, especially with the indigenous population. Here as well, the conquest is presented in a negative light, as an act of destruction that took place because of an inability to cope with cultural difference. The counter-conquest aspect is also suggested by the geographical orientation of the journey: from South to North—an inversion of the historical route of the conquest. It shares this characteristic with the two previous travel films. Compared to them, however, the counter-conquest dimension of this film is not clearly articulated, probably because of its universalist focus on the problem of modernity.

One final observation should be made. For obvious reasons (budget, logistical obstacles[9]), continental road movies are rather small in number, and their specific contribution to the debate on modernity at first sight seems reduced to an important, though rather peculiar, aspect: the conquest. However, as films triggering a more general reflection on the issue of legitimate ownership of land, they are directly connected to other road

movies, such as *Retratos en un mar de mentiras* (Carlos Gaviria, 2010), devoted to the problem of the "desplazados" (the victims of violent land dispossession in Colombia), or *Árido Movie* (Lírio Ferreira, 2005), a Brazilian road movie which refers to a history of feudalism and wealthy landlords.

Changing the Path of the Nation: Progress and Revolution

A second set of films presents a national take on modernity as a process linked to nation-building and national identity. The relationship between road movies and nationhood is traditionally strong, with landscapes and routes often appearing as symbolic figurations of the nation's body and veins, and several clues encouraging a national-allegorical interpretation of the film (Klinger; Noble 141). Movement, in this context, can suggest the nation's willingness to "move forward and make progress," but equally convey the idea that a country is undergoing major changes, producing the kind of crisis situation that some scholars hold to be beneficial to the appearance of road movies (Cohan and Hark 2).[10]

A critical take on mobility as an ideological trope for progress, imposed through dictatorship, is offered by the Brazilian docudrama *Iracema* (Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna, 1974), an early but poignant example of a Latin American road movie. The main character's name, Iracema, refers to a foundational Brazilian literary classic by José de Alencar (1865) which, together with the name of an occasional buddy, Tião Brasil Grande (Uncle Great Brazil), allows for an allegorical reading of the film (Xavier 248). Iracema (Edna de Cássia) is a 15-year-old girl, literally emerging out of the Amazon forest of which extended parts are shown to be burned to the ground in order to make way for a highway across Brazil. Shortly after her first appearance at the beginning of the film, Iracema becomes a prostitute and vagabond, invited and discarded at will by a truck driver (Paulo César Peréio) who is alternately kind and cruel to her, but eventually abandons her in the most cynical way. The centrality of the road in this film—the Trans-Amazonian Highway—is directly related to an ideology of developmentalism as imposed by military rule, because it was supposed to represent one of the "wonders" of the so-called *milagre brasileiro* (Brazilian miracle) during the years in which the most widely publicized slogan of the regime was: "This is a country that moves forward" (*este é um país que*

vai para a frente). However, through the figure of Iracema, who ends up sick and toothless in a brothel after a "trajectory of self-destruction which leads to nowhere" (Vieira 204) on the very same road that was to bring progress, the film denounces the high cost of this project on a human and ecological level.

A more recent example of how the road can symbolize a nation's modernity as a site of exclusion, is *Huacho* (Alejandro Fernández Almendras, 2009), a Chilean docudrama showing us the daily whereabouts of a poor, rural family, living in the countryside just outside of Santiago. Part of the film is devoted to the grandmother, who tries to help her family make ends meet by preparing cheese and selling it along the highway to Santiago. While the elderly woman endures the sun and the wind all day long, sitting on a primitive bench and jumping up whenever a car stops to hastily offer her goods, most drivers in their comfortable, fancy cars just pass by ignoring her, or briefly stop, yet then decline her offer, protesting that the price is too high. For once, we are not on the road, but looking at it from the margins, waiting for modernity to come by and throw us a piece of its wealth.[11]

Two already classic examples of the genre in Latin America show how the road movie can be put to work for critical reflection on a revolutionary process that subtends national identity: *Guantanamera* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, 1995) and *Y tu mamá también*. Both share a distancing mode of narration, based on humor, allegory, and the presence of an anonymous external narrator. Though imageries of movement and revolution normally go hand in hand—as one sees in the road movie documentary *Pancho Villa aquí y allí* (Matías Gueilburt and Paco Ignacio Taibo II, 2008)—the institutionalization of a revolutionary process can also lead to its opposite: stagnation. This is the issue implicitly dealt with in *Guantanamera*, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's last film, made in collaboration with Juan Carlos Tabío, and shot during the so-called Special Period in the beginning of the 1990s, when the disappearance of the socialist bloc threw the Cuban Revolution into a deep crisis. The film focuses on Adolfo (Carlos Cruz) and his wife Georgina (Mirta Ibarra), who accompany the body of Georgina's deceased aunt from Guantánamo to Havana, where she is to be buried. The journey by taxi leads us right across the island, from the East to the West, and this symbolically rehearses the original route of the Cuban Revolution, which started with the guerrilla movement in the Sierra Maestra, and then spread to the capital. Another clue to allegory is the film's title, an evident reference to the most famous

musical icon of Cuban identity inside and outside of its borders.[12] In the film, the song takes on its original function of the 1940s[13] by fostering an anonymous singing narrator who integrates his comments on the events in the musical format. Moreover, in the first minutes of the film, an anonymous voice jokingly states: "This wasn't made up, this happened for real." The playfulness with the distinction between fiction and reality does not directly refer to the fictional narrative, which assumes the form of a romantic comedy, but to the background of this story, which consists of documentary shots of a country in crisis. Political slogans exhorting the population to choose between "socialism or death," empty state restaurants and bars, and a general shortage of gas and transportation, indirectly underscore the privileged position of the people sitting in the taxi, which they owe to Adolfo's high rank in the funerary administration. Adolfo's hidden agenda, as it soon turns out, is to achieve promotion by demonstrating the feasibility of a special plan of transportation, which is supposed to save gas in times of austerity. He represents opportunism in the face of death, as well as ideological blindness: when his wife observes that his plan will finally cost the country the same, he replies that on paper it will look different, and adds: "you know how important figures and appearances are in this country."[14]

The film is articulated around the growing tension between Adolfo, who becomes obsessed with his plan, and his repressed wife, who gradually recovers her desire for life and leaves her husband. While for her the road is still the space of encounters (noticeably with her future lover), for Adolfo it appears as the exact opposite: as a place of missed encounters with reality. Occupying the front seat, he continuously keeps his eyes firmly fixed on his papers, hiding behind his thick glasses, and listening to the radio bulletins that invariably sing the praise of an agricultural policy whose failure is dramatically shown along the road: Only the black market enables the passengers to find food and vegetables during their trip. This film, then, provides an ironic twist on Bakthine by showing how the road might just as well function as a place of missed encounters, in this case by a dogmatic character who refuses to see a reality in crisis and a desire for change. Change is encoded in a positive way, as mobility, and the road movie attempts to re-inject the imagery of movement in a revolution that has become stuck in empty rhetoric.

Criticism of an institutionalized revolution can also be found in Mexico's most famous road movie: *Y tu mamá también*.[15] This film by Alfonso Cuarón describes a trip to the Mexican coast by two teenagers (Gael García and Diego Luna) from the capital and their Spanish guest.

Her family name—Cortés—as well as the names of the two teenagers—Zapata and Tenoch—obviously point in the direction of allegory, although one might doubt its seriousness. A certain playfulness marks the film throughout as a deliberate strategy to keep it at a safe distance from the overtly political Latin American cinema that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and no longer appealed to Cuarón's generation. Moreover, the allegorical dimension briefly returns in the end, when the anonymous narrator informs us about the fact that the break-up between the two friends coincides with a landslide in Mexican politics: After 70 years of uninterrupted government, the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) loses the elections. The analogy suggests a close connection between the two teenagers and the former class in power, which is rendered even more explicit by their self-declared identity as "charolastras." Though their manifesto attaches the word to a lifestyle based on sex, another explanation the film significantly derives is from "charola"—the metal card granting a form of impunity to high officials and their family members. Rather than specifically pointing at the PRI, then, the charola suggestively stands for a set of privileges enjoyed by those in power. The self-centered world view of the two teenagers, who indulge in their hedonistic life of sex and drugs, reflects the short-sightedness of an elite who claims to represent the country as a whole, but in fact corresponds to a limited group only. This short-sightedness is once again foregrounded during the trip, with the filmmaker including several shots of the Other Mexico—rural, indigenous—that the two teenagers ignore or prefer to ignore (Noble 141). When Tenoch (Diego Luna), for instance, passes by the place of birth of his nanny, he realizes he has never been there, but never asks the car to stop. The use of an anonymous narrator helps expand the zone of the "not perceived" to the one of the "not told": The boys' friendship implies censorship of a whole set of intimate stories they feel might threaten their bond.[16] In this way, the road once more becomes a place of missed encounters with reality and an illustration of the dangers of not seeing. In the end, the friendship between the two boys dissolves, just like the marriage between Adolfo and Georgina came to an end.

Global Expulsions: From Non-Place to Non-Person

A third set of films adopts a global scope, focusing on movements across borders. Here we find refugees and undocumented immigrants, trying to find a better place in a new country. The exploratory and distancing modes

of narration which we described in the previous parts of this article are here replaced by an experiential mode, geared to what has been called a form of thana-travel (Lindsay 105). These journeys, indeed, tend to be full of hardships and danger, and are undertaken only because the point of destination contains the promise of a better life. Being on the road, then, is not a pleasurable experience, but quite the opposite: a necessary step through hell in order to get to a safe place. This different kind of relationship with the road reminds the spectator of an older kind of road movie in US. cinema, as exemplified by *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940). There as well a family attempts to find a better life by traveling from the East to the West in a car. Along the road, they discover the symptoms of a country in crisis. In Latin American road movies on migration, however, such travel is even more dangerous, the road exchanging its universal meaning as a symbol of life for one of death and survival.

The experiential mode of narration these films imply allows us to literally experience, in a cinematic way, what it means to be on such a difficult journey. An important motif is the loss of the few friends or relatives with whom one travels. This results in a feeling of loneliness, combined with a permanent sense of vulnerability: Unprotected by law, the undocumented immigrants are hunted by both the border patrol officers and all kinds of criminal groups. These "homo sacer" (Agamben) travel in and on vehicles that appear as tragic "non places" (Augé): areas of total anonymity, in which relationships cannot be established. This once more distinguishes them from earlier examples of US road movies in which the road was linked to danger, such as *You only live once* (Fritz Lang, 1937), *They live by night* (Nicholas Ray, 1948), or the already mentioned *The Grapes of Wrath*. In these cases, the road still allowed for a sense of solidarity between those on the run. In contemporary road movies, on the contrary, the road has more tragically become a "non place," which turns travelers into non-persons.

This immediately brings us to the example of Cary Fukunaga's *Sin Nombre*. Focusing on a group of normally anonymous travelers, the film describes the notoriously dangerous journeys on the roof of *La Bestia* (The Beast), a name indicating a series of cargo trains that are used by migrants from Central America and Mexico to travel to the USA. The journey implies jumping on and off several trains, sitting on the roof of a train without any shelter, and running the risk of being assaulted, robbed, raped, or simply falling off the roof while asleep. The film contains two story lines, one articulated around Sayra (Paulina Gaitán) and her

Honduran family, who try to make it to New Jersey where a relative lives. We first see them walk for days until they reach La Bombilla, Mexico's southernmost railway station, where the area is controlled by the Salvatrucha, a local gang with transnational connections. Once Sayra gets on the train, she meets Willy (Edgar Flores), a former gang member on the run, who will become her buddy. In this sense, the road (or indeed the rails) fosters an encounter, but the trip will evolve along the line of loss. After Willy himself has lost his girlfriend (to the gang, who murders her by accident), Sayra will gradually lose her relatives during the journey, and finally Willy as well. He is shot by a young gang member when he is trying to reach the other side of the border. Of all migrants whose tracks we follow in the film, Sayra is the only one to make it to the point of destination, but the cost is extremely high and one cannot be certain if her future life will be a happy one. The shots of La Bombilla, with many people waiting at night, deliberately bring to mind images of trains departing for concentration camps during World War II. Also, the only shot of Willy and Sayra suggesting the ability to move forward is the one in which we see them sitting in a car and driving. However, as it soon turns out, this movement is imaginary, because the car is being transported by a truck and in fact serves as a temporary hiding place.

La jaula de oro (2013) by Diego Quemada-Díez is even more explicit in the idea that the journey brings no significant improvement. The main character Juan (Brandon López) lives in a hovel in Zona 13, Guatemala. He departs with two friends, a girl, Sara (Karen Martínez Pineda)—who tries to protect herself from rape by dressing up as a boy—and a friend, Samuel (Carlos Chajon), who is a kind of garbage collector at the garbage heap just outside the city. On the road, they meet Chauk (Rodolfo Domínguez), an indigenous boy from Chiapas who only speaks Tzotzil, and travels with them, though not everyone is happy with this. Instances of ethnic discrimination highlight the diversity of the immigrants as a group, but eventually a friendship will develop between Chauk and Juan. Similar to *Sin Nombre*, however, only one of the characters will be able to make it. In the end, we see Juan performing his first job in the USA, carried out in a kind of industrial non-space in which people, unrecognizably dressed in white uniforms and in complete silence, cut meat. Juan's job consists of collecting the waste of the meat after all workers have left, in complete solitude. The image of garbage and waste then opens and closes this film, pointing at the unwanted surplus of the wealth produced by modernity, which has to be eliminated from sight as soon as possible. In

this context, one might think of Bauman's poignant association between migrants and refugees and "human waste": "The production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted humans (the 'excessive' and 'redundant,' that is the population of those who either could not or were not desired to be recognized or allowed to stay) is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity" (5).

Particularly strong is the way in which *La Jaula de Oro* makes us experience the tragic loss of beloved ones under the form of the disappearance: Sara, the girl who had dressed up as a boy is unmasked and kidnapped by a criminal gang. Once she is taken away from Juan and Chauk, of whom she had become a close friend, we never hear from her anymore. Her disappearance in the story is paralleled with a disappearance in the film, which leaves us wondering what happened to her. The importance of the motif of the disappeared, who forms another human toll of this migration journey, besides death and casualties, is announced from the start when the film shows a wall with poster pictures of people who have disappeared in the region. The fact that they were undocumented and generally disappeared outside their country of origin makes it almost impossible to trace them.

Roads to Modernity: Between Reality and Aspiration

The approach to the Latin American road movie from the perspective of modernity has revealed three specific ways in which the road can become a site for critical reflection: as a place of social encounters with the Other, as a zone of missed encounters, and as a non-place, turning people into non-persons. In the three cases as well, mobility has taken on specific connotations. In the continental journeys, mobility refers to movement as a symbolic form of spatial conquest, reminiscent of the genre's kinship with the Western. At the same time, the pernicious effects of the conquest are denounced with respect to the indigenous population, as Latin America's quintessential others, which the road allows us to meet. In the second case, mobility is linked to ideologies of progress, whose exclusionary character is criticized. But it can also refer to revolutionary movements, which should not become stifled when reality strikes back, nor should ignore or deny what actually happens on the road. In the final set of films, mobility turns out to be a desperate movement to an often illusionary place, performed by people representing the "human waste" of modernity on a global scale.

In all three cases, Latin American road movies predominantly articulate their view on specific experiences of modernity in a critical fashion, thereby joining the genre's "international cinematic conversation about the human price of modernity" (Orgeron 8). At the same time, Latin American road movies show that modernity is a much more complex and diversified process than the one described in traditional road movie scholarship. For one thing, the aimless wanderer, which road movie specialists hold to be characteristic of the road movie, is extremely rare in Latin American road movies. Rather, we find motivated journeys, undertaken by people with specific goals. Though these travels have very different outcomes (from new lives to deaths), the sheer fact that movement tends to be motivated suggests that modernity is not uniformly represented as a hopeless and doomed project. Rather, the point of view from which the criticism of modern projects is formulated in these films reminds us of the affirmative appraisals of modernity, not as a historical reality to be contemplated, but as an "incomplete project or set of aspirations" (Schelling 2). If we accept Domingues's presentation of modernity as "equal freedom" (2), for instance, we could say that *Diarios de motocicleta*'s inclusive sense of Latin American citizenship, as expressed in Guevara's final speech about the mestizo race, strongly relates to the first term of Domingues's expression—equality—while *Guantanamera*'s plea for openness in the Cuban revolution—both in economic and in ideological terms—relates to the second notion: freedom. Rather than taking sides in the complex debate on modernity, as sketched in the introduction to my essay, Latin American road movies bring into dialogue both affirmative and critical appraisals of the phenomenon. Their criticism of actual experiences of modernity makes visible the hidden costs of modernization in Latin American societies, in all its cruelty, but the very possibility of this criticism presupposes notions of equality, freedom, and justice that animate modernity as a project rooted in a tradition of Enlightenment.

Notes

1. "… road movies articulate the quest motif in the 'increasingly mechanized' framework of *automobile modernity*" (Laderman 13; my emphasis); "*The significance of technology* in the road movie … has as much to do with representing modernity, its historical achievements as well as its social problems, as it does with reiterating masculinist fantasies of escape and liberation" (Cohan & Hark 3; my emphasis); "le road movie doit son exis-

tence à la constellation d'un véhicule [the automobile, NL] et d'un média [film, NL]" (Moser 14).

2. At the same time, road movies may share many characteristics with contemporary road novels, as is demonstrated by Jorge Pérez for the case of Spain.
3. "Une caractéristique générale de la modernité est sa mobilité (Moser 9); "Modernity, which is metaphorically linked in these films to modernity" (Orgeron 48).
4. "Driving aimlessly and wandering are late-model cinematic responses to modernity…" (Orgeron 7).
5. "The self-referential and rather comic treatment of the motorcycle shows that it has a different agenda in this film from that of traditional Hollywood road movies that present the means of transport as an object of speed. The problems with the motorcycle undermine their position as 'conquistadores,' as Ernesto puts it, which allows the two young men to interact with locals in most of the places they go, offering commentary on the different cultures and people in Latin America" (Pinazza 106).
6. "Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord" (Solnit 5).
7. "Dans le roman, les rencontres se font, habituellement, 'en route', lieu de choix des contacts fortuits. Sur 'la grande route' se croisent au même point d'intersection spatio-temporel les voies d'une quantité de personnes appartenant à toutes les classes, situations, religions, nationalités et âges. Là peuvent se rencontrer par hasard des gens normalement séparés par une hiérarchie sociale, ou par l'espace, et peuvent naître toutes sortes de contrastes, se heurter ou s'emmêler diverses destinées" (Bakthine 384–385; my translation).
8. The film has been praised for making this point, but criticized for its sexism (see Shaw "Representing").
9. "The filming of *The Voyage* [*El viaje*] was a marathon. We travelled over 50,000 kilometers, took over 50 planes, boats, carrying over 800 kilos of equipment. In 16 weeks and 5 countries, we visited cities and places from pre-colonial sites like Machupichu, Maya ruins in Yucatán, and the Serra Pelada gold mine in Brazil" (Horacio González quoted in Shaw "Representing" 110).
10. One finds a similar situation in Spain: "…this genre [the road movie narrative] attests to the economic and technological modernization of Spain, while putting the very idea of Spain in flux" (Pérez 27).
11. On the exclusionary character of Chilean roads in the context of neoliberalism, see Trumper & Tomic.

12. The story of the different versions of the popular Cuban song *Guantanamera* is explained in Maya Roy (134–136). For our purpose, the following is especially relevant: "The American folk singer Pete Seeger liked the song well enough to adapt it to his own style. All this happened in the period of protests against the Vietnam War and the heyday of folk ballads. The tune and the lyrics became popular and their apotheosis occurred one June evening in 1963, at a concert in New York City's Carnegie Hall. This is how *La Guantanamera*, improvised one evening at a party in Guantánamo (by Herminio García Wilson), became known the world over" (Roy 136). For a more detailed analysis of the film, see Rodríguez-Mangal (on allegory), and Lie (on the road movie aspect).
13. "Radio CMQ … created, in 1939, a broadcast titled *El Suceso del Día* (The Event of the Day), in which Joseíto Fernández and another singer, La Calandria, commented on the news in décimas" (Roy 136).
14. All quotations in this essay have been translated into English by the author.
15. Though we analyze the film here as "Mexican," we should not forget that Cuarón belongs to a new generation of transnational film directors in Latin America, who use genre as "an entry pass into the global distribution circuits" (Shaw, "Cuarón" 183). For an analysis of the film from this transnational perspective—which according to Shaw implies a softening of its political discourse—see Shaw "Cuarón".
16. These stories—told by the anonymous narrator—range from Tenoch's dislike of Julio's (supposedly less clean) toilet to repressed memories of allegations of fraud against Tenoch's father, and acts of sexual betrayal with each other's girlfriends.

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CHAPTER 3

Journey to the Ruins of Modernity: *Euforia* and *40 días*

Ignacio M. Sánchez-Prado

The road film is one of those genres within a cinematic tradition that continually produces works, even if at times they do not register in the critical radar. Nonetheless, it typically embodies the symptoms of a society conflicting with itself. This was most certainly the case of Mexico in the early 2000s, where the turmoil of neoliberal reforms and the dreams of a democratic transition found a fitting representation in a road film: *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001). Cuarón's film was a particularly keen cipher of a society growing into yet another project of modernity and facing its disjointed present. The two young protagonists were members of the middle and upper classes that the neoliberal project sought to privilege and interpellate. They traverse their desires as the spectators of their trip become confronted with the tense inequalities that underlie Mexico's modernity, mostly through a voice-over that exists completely outside of the characters' world. In the special features of the Criterion Collection edition, Slavoj Žižek points out a parallel between the bitter ending of the film, in which Tenoch (Diego Luna) and Julio (Gael García Bernal) exit adolescence toward a maturity that cancels the joy of their journey and the historical route of Mexico's politics at the time. Following

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this allegory, the film presents a process that transforms the joyful mobilization of Mexico's citizenry into the bitterness of becoming a mature democracy once the encounter with the Real obliterates the democratic fantasy. One could even further this insight by suggesting that the bitterness comes from what the journey accomplishes: a traversing through the symbolic and imaginary orders of neoliberal Mexico, embodied in the fiction of the two young boys growing up, to the confrontation of the Real, of their desire, and of the society that surrounds them. The traumatic channeling of their homosexual desire in the Real results in a retreat to the fantasy of their normalized heterosexual, neoliberal future: Just like their homosexual encounter resulted from their temporary escape of social norms, their return to heteronormative masculinity, at the expense of their friendship, is accompanied by their thorough acceptance of their "social place" at the end of the film (Julio as a biology student in a public university; Tenoch as an economics student in a private one). Many readings of the film emphasize in one way or the other its contrived nature, whether in its touristic view of Mexico (Finnegan 29), the normalized heterosexuality of a purportedly "class-less" society (Acevedo-Muñoz 47), or the very use of historical figures to name the characters in the film (Sánchez Prado 191; Kroll 39–40). In fact, as Matthew Flisfeder suggests, Luisa (Maribel Verdú), the Spanish woman who accompanies the boys in their journey, "disrupts the Symbolic order" (126) as her presence ultimately brings back the Real of homosexual desire (and, following Žižek, of the repressed social) into the Symbolic. Viewed in these terms, after a decade in which Mexico has further progressed into a neoliberal nightmare of increasing social violence and economic inequality, the iconic nature of the road trip in *Y tu mamá también* is precisely the allegory that allowed viewers to fully traverse the fantasy and enjoyment embedded in neoliberal Mexico, as represented by Julio and Tenoch's carefree masculinity. The journey ultimately forces us into a brutal return of the Real, the different manifestations of defeat already manifesting themselves at the heart of the modernization project of Mexican late capitalism.

The two films I will study in the following pages—*Euforia* (Alfonso Corona, 2009) and *40 días* (Juan Carlos Martín, 2008)—constitute, in my view, a further step in the relationship between Mexican road cinema and modernization in the neoliberal era. *Euforia* tells the story of a washed-out former rock star, Pat Corcoran (Humberto Zurita), who, after a failed concert, embarks on a road trip with a young waitress, Ana (Ana Serradilla), herself in search of her grandfather in the city of Querétaro. The plot is

centered on Pat's attempt to reconnect with Max (Ernesto Yáñez), a former member of his band's posse. Instead of embracing Pat, Max attempts to kill him in retaliation for their past differences, until Ana injures Max and leaves him for dead. The injury spurs Max to chase the road-tripping pair in order to kill the two of them. While the film sounds like a *thriller,* it is in fact a slow-paced road film focused on Pat's frustrated search for himself and for any kind of affective or sexual relationship with Ana. *40 días* recounts the interactions and conversations of three artists—filmmaker Andrés (Héctor Arredondo), poet Pato (Andrés Almeida), and actress Ecuador (Laura Sáenz)—during a road trip from Mexico City to New York and back to California. All three characters embark on the trip to escape diverse personal failures: Andrés's girlfriend María left him to go to India, Pato is consumed by depression and alcoholism, and Ecuador failed to be cast in a role. The trip also highlights a peculiar love triangle between them: Andrés wants Ecuador, while Pato is in love with Andrés. One could indeed claim that this is a variant of the triangular structure of desire seen in other road films like *Y tu mamá también*.[1]

In both movies, the road genre is used not only to narrativize the failure of both personal development and national modernization, as Cuarón does, but to use the trope of the journey to fully navigate the depths of the neoliberal catastrophe and the ruins it left behind. *Euforia* is a journey to the interior of Mexico, fully predicated on the failure of the past and the impossibility to come to terms with the present, while *40 días* is a journey to the USA that exposes the pitfalls of capitalist modernization. In their expeditions, respectively inside and out of Mexico, both films raise the question of thinking through the ideologies and affects of a modernization project, neoliberalism, which manifests itself through its ghosts and ruins. I do not claim that these films represent the only or the most important form of the road movie in contemporary Mexican cinema. As a matter of fact, the genre has fully existed both at the core and the margins of contemporary cinema in the country.[2] What makes *Euforia* and *40 días* films of particular critical interest is their attempt to render intensely radical versions of contemporary ruination and their investment in traveling through distinct but analogous forms of historical and personal defeat. They are not films that achieved any precise kind of success: Their commercial run was discreet at best, and they did not receive much attention by critics and reviewers. However, even in their formal and commercial restrictions, both films point toward relevant representational limits in existing paradigms of contemporary Mexican cinema, which I will attempt to discuss in what follows.

As a cinematic product, *Euforia* is the site of confluence of a very unexpected combination of talent: Director Alfonso Corona is a sporadic filmmaker, who produces a highly idiosyncratic movie once a decade; Humberto Zurita is a former *telenovela* and film star from the 1980s and 1990s, who remains active in independent films like this one; and Ana Serradilla is one of the most popular young actresses in commercial cinema of the late 2000s. Taken together, these three figures represent three distinct paradigms of Mexican cinema. Corona belongs to a generation of authorial filmmakers whose careers were foiled by the financial and aesthetic limitations the industry faced in the 1980s.[3] Zurita developed, like many actors of his generation, a career that alternated between roles under film directors who managed to withstand the industry's crisis (most notably Felipe Cazals) and work in the country's iconic television industry. Serradilla belongs to a group of female actors (which include Ana Claudia Talancón, Ana de la Reguera, and Martha Higareda) who have built a career on Mexico's commercial industry, particularly in films that belong to a distinct paradigm to the authorial cinema attempted by both Corona and Zurita. Plagued by a pretentious and contrived script, the film's main limitation comes precisely from the lack of chemistry between the acting paradigms represented by Zurita and Serradilla. The former delivers Pat's explanatory lines with a highly enunciated speech that clearly comes from dialogue-heavy *telenovelas* and social films, while Serradilla clearly performs through the exposure of her body and of her facial expression, as she has done in both romantic comedies and sexually charged independent films.[4]

Beyond its technical limitations, the awkward position occupied by *Euforia* within aesthetic and institutional paradigms of Mexican cinema renders visible the very impossibility of the allegory behind the film's road trip. Symbolically, the unbreachable generational divide between Zurita and Serradilla mirrors the affective abyss that divides their characters. Pat is trapped in the old glory of his rock music career, which is fading away as he is on the verge of being replaced as the lead singer of his own band. Meanwhile, Ana is a drifting young woman in search of her roots and of her future. By placing them in the road, *Euforia* shows a fundamental contrast between Pat's fidelity to the traditions of counterculture rendered irrelevant by neoliberal contemporaneity and Ana's search for a normative familial structure (she is looking for her grandfather). The impossibility of their romance is not only a matter of age difference, but also of the very ideologies that they choose for their respective subjectivation processes. In

a bizarre plot twist, during a point of their journey, Ana falls in love with a priest (Francisco Cardoso), who unwittingly seduces with his idealistic commitment to social service, and who decides to leave the priesthood for her. The choice of the priest as an object of desire over the former rock star is telling: Ana chooses to stake her future not in the seduction of a counterculture that may resist the normative present, but in a hypernormativization provided by the stability of the proper social values embodied by the young priest.

Like *Y tu mamá también* and many other canonical Mexican road films, the protagonists' journey takes them from the dismal present of a decadent Mexico City to the promising return to the origins offered by the country's interior, the *provincia*. Emily Hind suggests that, in *Y tu mamá también*, *provincia* functions as the "obliging fulfillment of Mexico City residents' desires" (41). Hind locates Cuarón's film and other road movies in the context of a paradigm of spatial representation that allows directors to create "a national metaphor largely directed at Mexico-City-based audience without more careful detailing of a specific, grounded *provincia* and its unique customs" (43). Hind's analysis points to the idea of Mexico's interior as a fantasy-space that allows for the preservation of the symbolic order of neoliberal Mexican culture by casting *provincia* as a site methodically imagined through the ideological expectations and desires of Mexico City's commercial film audience. I would take this point even further in relation to *Euforia*: The film's critical stance emerges precisely from its gradual undoing of the semiotic economy of the city-*provincia* imaginary. Mexico City is clearly a ruined place for both Pat and Ana. Pat's failure is directly tied to diverse inhospitable locations—such as the bar where his band's concert becomes foiled by low attendance and by Pat's fight with a patron. Instead of being a place in which Pat's countercultural story may conclude in a clear redemption on the basis of his creative talent, he instead initiates his journey to find atonement, through a purported reconciliation with Max, who embodies a reminder of the sins of his past. Ana's own errant itinerary led her to Mexico City after failing to succeed in San Francisco. In Mexico City, she is a waitress in a strip club, where the constant sexual harassment of patrons and her boyfriend's abuse (she meets Pat when he tries and fails to help defend Ana from the assault) signal a city predicated by violence. *Provincia,* however, is equally a site of ruin and failure. Max's almost cartoonish anger toward Pat leads him to an assassination attempt that Ana must foil by trying to kill him (Ana and Pat leave Max for dead, but they later find out he survived the attack). When Pat

and Ana seek her grandfather, they encounter a brief utopian space in her family origins, but they must leave precisely to protect Ana, who is barred from her utopian redemption because she saved Pat's life.

In the tension between Mexico City and *provincia*, *Euforia* operates through an always already foreclosed allegory, manifested in Ana's unwillingness to have sex with Pat and the consequent failure of the formation of the couple that would guarantee redemption or the emergence of a new social order. Instead, the film's only utopia is in the past of both characters, which is presented as irreversibly lost. As Jorge Ayala Blanco insistently argues in his review of the film, the fundamental topic is what he calls "la justeza de la decadencia" ("the fairness of decadence"),[5] which in his account manifests across the film: constant but unverifiable references to the past, an inconsequential plot sequence with no sense of closure or urgency, the self-deceit and megalomania of the character and the ultimate "disolvencia" ("fading") of every element of the film (64–69). In his reiteration of this trope, Ayala Blanco illuminates the fact that the texture of the film is contrary to the road movie's spirit of discovery and joy. If anything, even if *Y tu mamá también* concludes with the protagonists' failure, we can nonetheless see, as spectators, the joyful utopia of undisciplined bodies in their unbound affect and desire. In *Euforia*, the joyful past is always inaccessible: We only see a couple of blurry VHS tapes showing Pat and his band in his glory days, while Ana's pre-Mexico City past is never shown. The possibility of enacting joy and desire in the present is always barred. This is obvious in Ana's consistent refusal to have sex with Pat, and becomes even more palpable in the awkward sex scene between Ana and the priest, in which their mutual seduction is decidedly unsexy, and their encounter concludes in his premature ejaculation and her tender mocking of his insufficient masculinity. Even the fraternal spaces of male friendship are foreclosed: We witness both the complete decline of Pat's friendship with his manager (Fernando Luján) and the inability to restore his friendship with Max. The ruin of the present is precisely seen in Corona's deployment of the road movie trope, devoid of any kind of allegorical sense or affective performance. The rebellious genealogy of the genre is thoroughly hollowed out in *Euforia* to manifest the thorough absurdity of the present.

An important precedent to *Euforia* is the film *En el aire* (Juan Carlos de Llaca, 1995). *En el aire*'s protagonist Alberto (Daniel Giménez Cacho) is a DJ in a rock nostalgia radio station, which is about to close due to the pressures of its corporate parent company. The film is predicated on Alberto's use of the last breath of the ethos of the 1960s and 1970s,

represented in his past through his participation in a hippie commune and his involvement with guerrilla movements, to resist its neoliberal erasure.[6] The way in which Alberto and Pat address the relationship between past and present is telling in the context of my discussion. In Alberto, a character from a mid-1990s film, his nostalgia is a principled objection to an imminent defeat of the values of his generation in the face of neoliberal pressure, which, in turn, does not supersede the ideals of the lost past. The rock and roll era is activated as a symbol of a political and ideological stance whose nature is incompatible with the present of late capitalism. Conversely, Pat, in a film from the late 2000s, is only able to reactivate the past as a place of pure narcissist validation. His nostalgia is based on the memory of his commercial success and of his sexual prowess. While Alberto's relationship with his love interest Laura (Dolores Heredia) is a symbol of that past, and is thoroughly represented within the framework of their ideological values, Pat's desire for Ana is nothing but a failed quest to be the rock star of the past, mirroring his agent's failed attempts to reunite the band and become famous once again. The transition of the past from a repository of values and site of resistance in *En el aire* to a place and time that must be overcome (as seen in De Llaca's own road film *Por la libre* [2000] and *Y tu mamá también*) further evolves in the late 2000s into a cinema that understands the past as a simple memory of a lost self-identity in *Euforia*. I contend that this telling trajectory illustrates well the role of both the road movie and nostalgia in the cinematic engagement during Mexico's neoliberal era.

Early 1990s films like *Danzón* (María Novaro, 1991) and *En el aire* consistently revisited the tension between the past as a repository of both traditional and countercultural values and the erosion of those value-systems in the neoliberal process (Sánchez Prado 31–37), while the movies of the early 2000s work a tension between the idea of overcoming certain forms of the past (like the Spanish legacy of the protagonists' grandfather in *Por la libre*) and the regulation of the present desires of youth.[7] *Euforia* represents the idea that both past glory and present desires are nothing but illusions and that acting upon them produces a tragically empty result. At the end of Pat's journey, he achieves neither the sense of heroic resistance of the rock counterculture nor the present redemption or, at least, resignation that reaffirms the neoliberal order in *Y tu mamá también*. The film's complete lack of conclusion achieves a radical gesture: the thorough hollowing of the road movie trope as a journey to the interior of either the self or the nation.

As a film strictly contemporary to *Euforia*, *40 días* performs a similar gesture of deconstruction of both discovery and allegory within the form of the Mexican road film. Its target is different: the journey to the outside, to the world, intersecting the road movie into logics of postnationalism and globalization. In these terms, *40 días* belongs to a subgenre of road films in which the journey explores the territories constructed by contemporary political and economic assemblages of nations and regions. This has manifested itself in various global sites, including the Mercosur countries, where, as Natália Pinazza shows, one can observe both integration of the regional film industries (22–27) and the particular use of the road movie to grapple the tensions between nation and region in Brazilian and Argentine films (125–126). One can see similar cases in France, where a boom of "transnational road films" has been observed in the last few years (Archer 147–168), or in Spain, where the country's integration into the European Union and its consciousness as an emerging global nation was also reflected in the genre (Pérez). In *40 días*, the protagonists traverse Mexico and the USA during the last years of the presidency of George W. Bush, showing the effects of deindustrialization and of Hurricane Katrina in their diverse stops. By virtue of this, the film clearly locates itself as a post-NAFTA film, reflecting directly upon the effects of the regional social integration between Mexico and the USA. Just like its counterparts in the European Union and Mercosur, *40 días* directly charts a cartography constructed upon the tension between the impact that regional integration has in the subjectivity and ideology of its protagonists and the resistances posed both by their own subjectivity and their Mexican origin.

In the mid-1990s, cultural critic Roger Bartra coined the concept of the "post-Mexican condition" to describe the cultural and identitarian displacements brought forward by the decline of twentieth-century Mexican nationalism and the emergence of an Americanized consciousness in the early stages of North American integration (44–50). Bartra's notion captured an identity crisis that was interpreted at the time as a possibility to dislodge the authoritarian uses of Mexican national identity that consecrated the political power of the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI), which had ruled Mexico for nearly seven decades. Many Mexican films have questioned this potential. The most notable is undoubtedly *Sin dejar huella* (María Novaro, 2000), which narrates the journey of two female protagonists from the USA–Mexico border to the Yucatán peninsula as they are chased by both drug dealers and the federal

police. Different readings of the film (Oropesa 100–05; MacLaird 172–74; Lindsay; Steele) show the way in which the film is predicated in a distrust of the USA and its culture and in the nostalgic—although at times failed—attempt to resist it through the remnants of national identity and the assertion of female solidarity. Like most of Novaro's films, *Sin dejar huella* poses Mexicanness as an archive that may hold the key to resist the neoliberal process, in a similar vein to rock counterculture in *En el aire*. In this sense, *40 días*, like *Euforia*, represents a more critical response to the social and cultural ideologies of neoliberal and anti-neoliberal culture of the 1990s by attempting to grapple with the consequences of a long-standing process of neoliberalization through a cinematic language that no longer posits nostalgic stances on ideology or subjectivity. If anything, one can say that *40 días* is more properly a post-Mexican film, not because it carries within itself any kind of dislodging of nationalist authoritarianism, but due to its presentation of a world where the Mexican nation no longer even registers as a concern. While Pato, Ecuador, and Andrés all mention in passing the contrasts between the countries on either side of the border, the way in which they navigate the USA and Mexico without any particular friction between both spaces points toward an imaginary in which the distinction is no longer liberating but merely accepted as such. In doing this, the film cleverly avoids representational ideologies that would require it to assert any kind of preference for one country over the other, which in turn allows *40 días* to focus on the defeat of the North American integration promise at large. This is particularly clear in the scene where Pato refers to the Statue of Liberty as "that hypocrite statue" and, in general, his rejection of New York as "Babylon or Sodom." Andrés's early defense of the USA prior to the road trip is based on the idea of understanding the dynamic of empires, something that echoes his own acculturation (via his passport) with the country. In fact, the trip to the USA was not the original intention of their journey. Initially they planned to travel to the town of Real del Monte, a mining town in central Mexico, to look for peyote, and the trip northward materialized from there.

A relevant piece of information about *40 días* is that the screenwriter Pablo Soler Frost, an important fiction writer, wrote a novel entitled *Yerba americana* based on his own script. In other words, the film is not an adaptation of the novel, but, rather, both works derive from Soler Frost's script. Paul Goldberg points out in his thorough reading of the novel that it closely follows many elements of contemporary travel writing and that

its title emphasizes (in a way in which the film's title does not) two significant links of Mexico to the USA: marijuana culture which traces back to the mid-century and the recent process of Americanization (18–20). While Goldberg's focus on travel writing and the tourist gaze is productive to read both the novel and the film, I think that the concrete aesthetic choices that Martín made—sidelining the script and perhaps motivating Soler Frost to write the novel—render *40 días* a text with an even more ambiguous stance to American modernization than the novel produces. Rather than focusing on the script, Martín heavily relies on Miguel López's aestheticist cinematography, so the film gravitates strongly on its visual vignettes. The highly visual nature of the film (which include the use of hand-held cameras, discontinuous montage, lush cinematography, and complex use of angles and video formats) is partly due to the fact that the three protagonists are remarkably underdeveloped, something that critics have raised about the novel itself (Beltrán Félix). Due to this imbalance between weak character development and sophisticated cinematography, the film manages to resist the allegorical gesture that would make the protagonists stand in for any kind of symbolism regarding the nation or society. This is sustained, early on in the film, by the emphatic representation of their class status (they are traveling in a Mercedes Benz) and the use of cross-cut editing to alternate their departure and a military parade, emphasizing their departure from the country's political and symbolic center. The ideological reluctance of the script—Soler Frost is a conservative Catholic writer who would not side either with the type of Mexican nationalism favored by Novaro or with an optimistic Americanized alternative—is delivered by the cinematography as a continuous narrative in which the contemporary is an interruption of any kind of reflective gesture. We see, for instance, a conversation between Andrés and Pato foregrounded by a massive, and noisy, refinery in Louisiana, or a highly emotional fight between Ecuador and Pato delivered amidst a noisy bar in New York City. The formal tension between script and cinematography, thus, results in a film in which the noises and symbolic violence of the present drown any possible narrative surrounding the characters' journey.

In many ways, *40 días* is an erudite film, full of cultural references to literature, art, and other forms of cinema. It is therefore not surprising that its claim to the road genre is in itself shaped by cultural referentiality and by a highly self-aware sense of exercising the genre. If one thinks of David Laderman's account of the genre, for instance, the countercultural tones of the road film (17) are clearly manifested in the trio's search for

peyote, while the idea of the journey as "an aimless, forlorn, and somewhat bitter direction" (19) defines well the itinerary of the film's plot. But this referentiality manifests further in *40 días*, through direct citations of two road films. In one scene, as Ecuador, Andrés, and Pato drive their Mercedes, two white men in a pickup truck drive them off the road, and yell at them to go home. This moment is reminiscent of the well-known scene in *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) in which two men in a pickup truck attack bikers Wyatt (Peter Fonda) and Billy (Dennis Hopper). Beyond the obvious fact that *40 días* translates the intolerance against rebellion in *Easy Rider* to the question of anti-immigrant sentiment, the very direct citation to another disenchanted take on the American dream is telling. As Christopher D. Morris argues, this type of citation—which he describes as "reflexive intertextuality"—allows road films to "concede that they are setting out on previously travelled or cinematic itineraries" (161). It is crucial therefore to consider that *40 días* reflexively inserts itself in the tradition of the genre precisely to mark its representation both semantically and ideologically. A second reference, to Sissy Spacek's character in *The Straight Story* (David Lynch, 1999), confirms this point. Lynch's film is a journey through the USA by an old man, Alvin Straight (Richard Farnsworth), who traverses the USA in a lawnmower. While the film has a superficially uplifting message (it was produced by Disney after all), the absurdity of the trip is patent. Žižek has pointed out that, compared to the larger than life and violent characters of Lynch's other movies, Alvin looks normal, and therein lies the horror of his story: "What is the ridiculous perversity of figures like Bobby Peru in *Wild at Heart* [1990] or Frank in *Blue Velvet* [2002] compared to deciding to cross the US central plane on a lawnmower to visit a dying relative?" (*Less* 331). In making direct reference to Lynch's movie in the characters' dialogue, *40 días* is recreating a similar gesture. It does not require the larger than life perversity of *Euforia*'s Max (a character whose violent hate toward Pat is thoroughly Lynchean) or the perversity of Ana's gesture of seducing a priest. It is the mere absurdity of traveling against the backdrop of the ruins of the present that configures the critical gesture of the film's gaze. In bracketing its canon of road cinema from Hopper to Lynch, *40 días* claims to itself the critical stance that allows it to undermine the American dream, but it does so from the perspective of a country, Mexico, where the adoption of such a dream was belated. Consequently, the contemplation of the ruins of Hurricane Katrina or the violence of the rednecks is nothing but the contemplation of a dream that was always already foiled.

A very important referent in the reading of *40 días* may be found in German director Wim Wenders's "Road Trilogy": *Alice in der Städten* (*Alice in the Cities*, 1974), *Falsche Bewegung* (*Wrong Move*, 1975), and *Im Lauf der Zeit* (*Kings of the Road [In the Course of Time]*, 1976). In a telling essay on *Easy Rider*, Wenders raises a crucial point regarding Hopper's film that clearly impacts the *ethos* of a film such as *40 días*. According to Wenders, *Easy Rider* "is political because it is beautiful: because the country that the two huge motor-bikes drive through is beautiful; because the images that the film gives of this country are beautiful and peaceful" (33). Wenders's assertion is that the meaning of *Easy Rider* resides not in the plot, but in its gaze, in its ability to construct images of space with a high degree of reflexivity. Or, as Wenders himself puts it, he admired the way in which watching the movie made life feel as a film (38). The primacy of image over plot in *40 días* most definitely echoes this idea and provides an important contrast with *Euforia* and other road films. The projection of an aestheticized cinematic gaze on the North American landscape (much like Wenders does for New York in *Alice*) allows for a particular political gesture: the denaturalization of the US referent in itself. In the 1970s Wenders was chiefly known for his inclination toward a peculiar form of Americana which, as Robert Phillip Kolker and Peter Beicken discuss, was a response to "a state of historical amnesia" in Germany, defined by "a past too frightful to remember and a present offering the means to forget" (29). Therefore, Wenders's road films, like other contemporary work in Germany, "had to invent images, to develop representations for a past and a present that resisted the very work they were overtaking" (29). Wenders thus searches, in Kolker and Beicken's account, "for memory, or at least a representation for memory that more adequately expresses the *longing* for memory, the desire for place, history and ways to see it—for forms of expression that would themselves create a desire in his audience to see and understand" (36). I would suggest that *40 días* emerges from an analogous preoccupation. Unlike *Euforia*, firmly rooted in a past that is all too heavy, Martín's film operates from a specific form of amnesia, informed by a complete disinterest in the past. Symbols of the past (like the aforementioned Statue of Liberty or the colonial architecture in Mexico) are generally disempowered by the film's gaze. In fact, the most aestheticized image of the film is the overbearing shot of the refinery, bustling with activity and indifferent to the existence of the main characters. Similarly, the present is symbolically as empty as the devastated New Orleans wards that bear nothing but the ruins of the city's abandoned houses.

From this perspective, *40 días* builds an aesthetic vision of the USA that radicalizes the procedures that Kolker and Beicken identify in Wenders. But it does so from a position of further (one is tempted to say postmodern) denaturalization of the American referent. In his deconstructionist reading of US road films, Christopher Morris points out that the genre creates an artificial experience of depth that is in fact based on a "world made up of circulating signs with arbitrary referents" (156). Morris's point is not so much the "simulacrum" (*á la* Baudrillard) character that he identifies in the America represented by road films. Rather, he says that a fundamental trait of the genre, from some of its early iterations onward, is to create a reflexive experience of that, rather than creating any kind of identity, the characters reach no autonomy but are "defined by the arbitrary signs of the media" (160). In other words, what Morris seems to suggest in a deconstructive key is that the reality effect of the subject formation in road cinema occurs "only inside this larger, Derridean postal network of televisual signs" (160). Road films (and this is the case in Wenders, in Martin, or, as Morris suggests, in *Easy Rider* and *Thelma and Louise* [Ridley Scott, 1991]) selectively pick up denaturalized signs and symbols of America's cultural history and space, which in turn allows for the creation of ideological density in the characters and, consequently, a viable subjective experience for spectators and interpreters. It is not my interest to claim Morris's Derridean stance. His concept of reflexivity, however, provides a fundamental insight for a film so self-aware of its cinematic character. *40 días*'s deployment of empty signs of the neoliberal North American experience is not corresponded by any kind of dense subjective experience. The characters share with Wenders's protagonists what Roger Bromley calls, *á propos* of the German director's road trilogy, "emotional illiteracy" (28). Bromley underscores the contrast of the city spaces in Wenders (from New York in *Alice* to the American-inflected Hamburg in *Wrong Move* to the overwhelming sounds of ships and harbors in the trilogy at large) with the marginal role of emotions and relationships in the films (28). While the film sketches relationships between Pato, Andrés, and Ecuador, their interaction is firmly devoid of any kind of psychological depth and development, leaving us, as it often happens in Wenders, with a succession of scenes in which minimal character communication and minimalistic plots are typically drowned by open shots of the space, background noise, or claustrophobic atmospheres.

The foreign gaze that filmmakers like Wenders or Martín exercise in the traditions of Americana embodied by the road film are intimately related

to the particular global capitalist assemblages constructed around the economic and symbolic primacy of the USA from the 1960s onward. Silvestra Marinello convincingly argues that Wenders "consistently poses the question of immanence in terms of an 'Americanized' world contaminated by images and other products of consumerist society… --a world where Hollywood film constitutes a sort of universal memory" (165). Therefore, the denaturalization of images is most definitely part of the foreign gaze enacted by *Alice in der Städten* or *40 días*. In the context of late 2000s Mexico, Martín's cinematic eye, framed by Mario López's virtuosistic cinematography, delivers a critique of the "contamination by images" and of the "universal memory" described by Marinello. It does so not by evading the simulacrum character of America critiqued by Morris. Instead, it alternatively deploys the US imagery as citation (as discussed before vis-á-vis *Easy Rider* and *The Straight Story*) and ruin. Dylan Trigg argues that, in the context of post-Industrial societies, "the ruin is peculiar in that it attracts an estranged 'timescape.' Unlike the impression of temporal autonomy in the city-site, the ruin foresees the future of decline while retaining the disused aspects of the past" (133). This description fits well with the aesthetics that manifest in Martín's depiction of New Orleans. The housing projects devastated by Katrina, the ruins that the protagonists visit in their journey, foresee the decline of the neoliberal project in North America at large, while showing a devastated imagery that nostalgically casts the American dream of the single house. This is the point where Martín departs away from Wenders. While Wenders's mode of the road film finds in American culture a certain liberating respite from the weight of European past, in *40 días* the very failure of this liberating hope—embodied in the notion of the "post-Mexican condition" discussed above—populates the entire imagination of the film. The fact that all three characters belong to failed members of the "creative class" stereotype,[8] in which the social aspirations of the neoliberal elite are staked, further illustrates this failure. One can indeed describe *40 días* as the failed attempt of Americanized subjects in contemporary Mexico to find any kind of redemption in the return to a space of origin (the USA, American culture) that has already collapsed.

Frederick Aldama has pointed out that the American sites visited by the characters—"arid wastelands, bleak industrial landscapes, a Navajo reservation and cities that include post-Katrina New Orleans"—contrast with the protagonists' "angst-ridden, middle-class status" and their search for "self-awakening" as they "drink, get high, recite poetry, and pause to con-

template life and death" against the backdrop of neoliberal ruination (61–62). One could even take Aldama's point further and contend that the film may in fact be a reversal of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, since bourgeois Mexican subjects counter the expected illumination of the trip to a "primitive" country South of the Border by themselves finding a savage postcapitalism in the North. In any case, Aldama thusly reads the film's sophisticated cinematography as an "attempt to break up the straightforward realism with random sequences filtered through the subjective, grainy, overexposed viewpoint of a handheld video camera operated by Andrés" (62). I share Aldama's assessment of the existence of a spiritual ambiance in the film, as well as his critique of the contrived nature of the contradiction he described. I would nonetheless expand upon them by saying that just like *Euforia*'s own inability to construct a redemption story, *40 días* configures the very impossibility of the spiritual and discovery journey described by Aldama. This impossibility functions precisely by shedding light on the pitfalls of identity and self-discovery as symbols of the pitfalls of modernity and modernization itself. Andreas Huyssen suggestively describes the ruin as "an architectonic cipher for temporal and spatial doubts that modernity always harbored about itself" (23). The disconnect, described by Aldama, between the three characters' middle-class angst and self-discovery and ruinous landscape is not unlike the disconnect between the protagonists' joyful sexuality and the contradictory Mexico in *Y tu mamá también*. The difference is that, while Cuarón provides audiences an explanatory voice-over to mediate the traumatic gap between Mexico and the character's subjectivity, Martín avoids this ironic distance. The affective use of cinematic form in *40 días* overrides the emotional register of the plot, but it nonetheless conveys the traumatic aspect of the "temporal and spatial doubts" of the neoliberal project of modernity in an unmediated way. In Huyssen's account, the role that ruins play is for the construction of a "theory of modernity that wants to be more than the triumphalism of progress and democratization, or the longing for past greatness" (21–22). *40 días* is a film historically located in the defeat and disenchantment of the promises of "progress and democratization" that informed the "post-Mexican condition" in particular and the so-called "transition to democracy" (which refers to the decline and electoral defeat of the PRI). In these terms, the aesthetic of ruins that defines *40 días* overwhelms the plot and the characters precisely because the Mexican contemporary condition interpellated by its discourse is, to use Huyssen's words, "conscious of the darker side of modernity" (22).

Euforia and *40 días*, in their formal traits and pitfalls, daringly take the ideologies and aesthetics of crisis and self-discovery embodied in the road genre to the ulterior consequences brought forward by the neoliberal era. The films enact the ways in which different forms of countercultural and creative subjectivation tied to Americanized modernity and postmodernity (the rock star, the creative professional, the actor, the poet) confront the devastation of the present that their quest for individuality seeks to elude. Sarah Brouillette suggests that the "creative class" is an "imagined creative subject [that] is the fruit of the progress of modernization, of the spread of self-reflexivity and freedom" (35–36). The failure of self-realization and self-redemption and the ruins of the present that define both films bring back the specter of the doubts regarding the discourse of modernity in which notions of individual freedom and creative success are predicated. In this, *Euforia* and, especially, *40 días* are among the most direct attempts in contemporary Mexican cinema to subvert the myths and ideologies of neoliberalism from within. Corona and Martín claim road films' history of representing melancholy, cultural amnesia, societal defeat, and cultural crisis. The films allow us to rethink the road genre in Mexico beyond other important manifestations as a language centered in one of the crucial tasks of contemporary Mexican cinema: the imagination of ideologies and aesthetics beyond the neoliberal frameworks that have informed it for the last three decades.

Notes

1. I thank Olivia Cosentino for pointing this out to me. Cosentino's suggestions on the relationship between *40 días* and the US road genre were also very useful in my analysis. I also owe her the reference to Laderman.
2. For a discussion of the most canonical films in the genre, see Oropesa; Fernández. A relevant study on the "youth road film," which is another path pursued by the genre after *Y tu mamá también* in Mexico, see Olivia Cosentino's text in the present volume.
3. For a study of this period, see Pelayo.
4. For notable examples of the actors' work which provide a larger context to these assertions, readers may see Zurita in Felipe Cazals's films *Bajo la metralla* (1983) and *El tres de copas* (1986) and his most famous *telenovela*, *El derecho de nacer* (1981). Serradilla's most relevant roles are in the romantic comedy *Cansada de besar sapos* (Jorge Colón, 2006), the sexually-charged independent film *Eros una vez María* (Jesús Magaña Vázquez, 2007), and the television series *Drenaje profundo* (2010).

5. The term *justeza* in Spanish carries a double meaning that the English translation only partially conveys: being just and being exact and precise.
6. For a reading of *En el aire* focused on this point, see Sánchez Prado 117–20.
7. Oropesa (105–108) discusses the Spanish legacy in *Por la libre* while Cosentino works on the issue of domestication of the youth bodies in the present volume.
8. In here I use Richard Florida's well-known concept, which describes the existence of a middle-class whose privilege stems not from traditional middle-class labor, but from successful participation in the knowledge economy, based on the ability to be defined by creativity widely understood. See Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. For a discussion of this social type in contemporary Mexican cinema, see Sánchez Prado 89–104.

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CHAPTER 4

The Power of Running on Empty: On the Road in Post-Soviet Cuba

Vicky Unruh

An image in Juan Carlos Tabío's film *Lista de espera* (*Waiting List,* 2000) underscores the central paradox of the contemporary Cuban road movie. In a bus terminal midway between Havana and Santiago de Cuba, passengers stranded by buses that never come pile into the station's own rickety bus that the station-master has repaired to meet the shortage. As they take their seats and joyously shout "¡Arranca, arranca!" (Start it! Start it!),[1] the film jump-cuts to the outside front of the bus where we see the vehicle and passengers lurch forward into a full stop. Two more jump-cuts deliver arresting images: oil spilling out first from the exhaust pipe and then from underneath the front of the bus. This sequence of an abrupt downward fuel loss contradicts the conventional media image of the oil strike, with fuel gushing up from the ground, and points to a remarkable feature of the small ensemble of Cuban road movies that appeared between 1995 and 2005. Although the road movie experienced incarnations in Europe, Latin America, and Australia, film scholars commonly locate the genre's consolidation in the USA post-World War II era of abundant oil, the expanding car culture of suburban growth, and a proliferating interstate highway system with its allure of the open road.[2] The Cuban road

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movie, by contrast, appeared at the very moment when the country suffered a catastrophic economic crisis marked by the abrupt disappearance of its subsidized oil with the end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of Soviet economic support from Cuba.

Post-revolutionary Cuban film-making flourished through the innovative Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas (ICAIC) founded in 1959. But *Guantanamera* (1995), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, is the first Cuban road film feature. *Guantanamera* was followed in 2000 by *Lista de espera*, which might best be described as a would-be road movie stalled for repairs; *Miel para Oshún* (*Honey for Oshún*, 2001), directed by Humberto Solás; and *Viva Cuba* (2005), directed by Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti. These films appeared in the epoch officially designated in 1991 as the Special Period in Times of Peace and conventionally regarded to have ended around 2005. These years witnessed acute shortages in petroleum and consumer goods; daily struggles for basic sustenance; and a crisis in transport systems, infrastructure maintenance, and trade for essentials.

In this context, one might surmise that the Cuban road movie simply highlights a gaping absence—like the vanishing fuel oil in *Lista de espera*—a dearth of resources. Patricia Yaeger notes that, in the classic American road novel, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, "characters rarely experience the material world as an impediment" (106), and, similarly, the endless horizon of US road films implies an absolute freedom to move. Michael Ziser notes that oil "in the classic scenario flows to the surface almost of its own accord, gushing out in all directions and proposing an entirely different relation among labor, consumption, and the body" (126). As an "infrastructural context for cultural production," Ziser adds, "oil is aesthetically and ideologically excessive" (321). In contrast, Cuban road films posit the arduous challenge of any self-propelled road trip in a country where all resources are scant, all transportation modes unreliable, and serial setbacks hyperbolize the genre's conventions: breakdowns; changes in carriers and destinations; food or sleep deprivation; and traveler conflicts.

But far from paralyzing mobility, the visual trope of oil draining from an exhaust pipe in *Lista de espera* catalyzes a beehive of human activity. This and the comparable generative power of energy shortages in other Cuban road films suggest the interpretive value of tracing the energy conduits that organize the material world in these films and the structures of feeling and cultural values enacted through these channels. Yaeger argues that bringing the lens of energy to cultural works in which "fuel sources

hover in the background" can reveal the text's "tissue of contradictions" (310). Cuba's energy-based economic crisis of the Special Period witnessed a parallel crisis in cultural authority and knowledge, a critical recalibration of utopian revolutionary ideology, particularly its promise of an ever-receding future. Even with twists, turns, and reversals, the road film trajectory is future-oriented, a narrative propulsion dependent on prime-moving energy: material, corporal, psychic, social, or ideological. It makes sense, then, that the road movie appeared in Cuba when a material and ideological crisis had brought much of everyday life to a halt, obscuring the path to the future. Road movie theorists have observed that the genre lends itself to the "repeated positioning of conservative values and rebellious desires" in an "often uncomfortable …dialectic" (Cohan and Hark 3).[3] In this dialectic, the Cuban road movie reveals simultaneously conservative impulses—conserving resources and revolutionary values—and progressive or critical ones that question those cultural givens. Cuban road movies expose fissures in the revolutionary project: in the rhetoric of solidarity, hard work, and future fulfillment. But they also explore alternative or refashioned material and human energy sources as fixes for past mistakes and current ruptures.

As embodiments of the oil inscribed in modern mobility, the depleted fuel lines undergirding the Cuban road movie point to a critical reconstitution of cultural knowledge that plays out in each of these films. In appropriating J.K. Wright's term "geosophy" for a geography of knowledge, mobility theorist Tim Cresswell highlights connections between geographical movement and the social construction of "deep knowledges" that organize worldviews, as the geographical imaginations situated in particular individuals expand to manifest the social or political (21). These knowledges, Cresswell argues, "play a deep and abiding structuring role in the world we live in" and such imagined divisions of space constitute social constructs (22).[4] Considered in this context, we may regard the drivers, navigators, or guides in Cuban road films, who are not necessarily the central protagonists, as the films' "geosophers," characters who play key roles as trackers of the cultural knowledge necessary for navigating Cuba in its precarious present. These characters negotiate the journeys' gaps, the pauses inscribed in road stops, breakdowns, or setbacks that, as Christopher Morris observes, interrupt the narrative flow of all road movies and enact the genre's propensity for self-reflexivity (28–29). In Cuban films, these pauses encourage spectators to reflect critically on the cultural and ideological assumptions exposed by the journey.

A Communion of Fuel-Sharing: *Guantanamera*

In the satirical *Guantanamera*, the last film directed (in this case co-directed) by the revered Gutiérrez Alea (aka Titón), the fuel shortage itself is the paradoxical prime mover of a cross-country road trip, a province-by-province relay to transport the body of the elderly singer Yoyita (Conchita Brando) from the town of Guantánamo where she dies, back to Havana to be buried. After 50 years away, the internationally celebrated Yoyita returns to Guantánamo to be honored, reuniting with her 40-something niece Gina (Mirta Ibarra) and with the brass musician Cándido (Raúl Eguren), her adolescent love. As they rekindle their passion, Yoyita expires in Cándido's arms. In the baroque scheme for Yoyita's funeral cortege relay back to Havana, in order to share fuel-costs by region, the casket is transferred to a different hearse at each stop. This plan is concocted by Gina's husband Adolfo (Carlos Cruz), an authority-fawning bureaucrat, fallen from official favor into the position of national funeral director. The simultaneous cross-country journey of two cargo-truck-drivers, Mariano (Jorge Perugorría) and Ramón (Pedro Fernández) intersects periodically with the cortege of Yoyita's mourners: Gina, Cándido, and Adolfo, led by their savvy chauffer Tony (Luis Alberto García). Improvisational verses of the 1928 Joseíto Fernández song *Guantanamera* supplement the continuity images propelling the caravan along the road: the hearse du jour, the car of mourners, and the truck.

Coincidentally, the womanizing truck-driver, Mariano, was once the adoring university student of Gina, who taught political economy but stopped because she couldn't adhere to party dogma. Through on-the-road crossings, the two rekindle their long-ago incipient romance, and by the journey's end, Mariano has cast off his womanizing and Gina decides to leave the misogynistic Adolfo and accept a job hosting a radio program for youth. During the cross-island trek, the old man Cándido has repeated visions of a little white girl whom we eventually learn is Ikú, the Yoruba Afro-Cuban death deity. As the travelers near Havana (and Cándido nears his own demise at Yoyita's funeral-home wake), a voice-over narration (José Antonio Rodríguez) accompanies images of the road-traveling vehicles, crumbling graves, and an extended deluge. The supreme creator Olófin, the voice explains, neglected to create death, and the stagnation of immortality drained the energy from his creation. As a remedy, Olófin sends Ikú (Suset Pérez Malberti) to lead old folks to the cemetery, as rain gives way to sunshine.[5] When what mourners believe is Yoyita's casket

finally reaches the largest Havana cemetery, now accompanied by Cándido's, Adolfo climbs on a ladder and begins a funeral oration evocative of a state political rally. The exasperated mourners disperse, Ikú offers her hand to Adolfo stranded on the ladder, and Gina and Mariano ride off on his bicycle.

I've proposed elsewhere that, in the context of the idealized teacher-student relationship of the post-revolutionary literacy campaigns at the heart of Che Guevara's class-bridging ideal of the New Man, *Guantanamera* remodels revolutionary pedagogy through a national romance between teacher Gina and student Mariano.[6] This implies that, liberated from a fossilized bureaucracy, these ideals might still energize Cuba's journey to the future. But if we follow *Guantanamera*'s fuel sources as a road movie, the film also questions whether such ideological recycling can suffice.[7] When Adolfo explains his road-relay gas saving plan to co-workers he invokes the socialist ideal of sharing. The problem for which Adolfo's scheme is a putative solution is what to do if somebody dies away from home. Who pays for the gas required to return for burial where one has lived? If each province provides the car and fuel to transport the deceased across its own territory, the mission will be accomplished, or as Adolfo proposes "¿Y si nos repartimos el cuerpo entre todos?" (And what if we divide up the body amongst us all?) For those familiar with Titón's repertoire these words may evoke his renowned *La última cena* (1976). Here a Cuban slave owner (Nelson Villagra) tries to evangelize his slaves by casting them as disciples in a Holy Week reenactment of the Last Supper, teaching them about transubstantiation, a metaphor of re-generation if ever there was one. But transposed into a socialist fuel-sharing plan organized around a corpse, *Guantanamera* implies that this particular act of communion may be non-productive. Mid-journey, the trained political economist Gina gently informs her husband that no matter who provides it, the fuel to drive from Guantánamo to Havana is the same: no gas is conserved, no new fuel created. Sharing the gas and transport, a socialist principle taken to parodic extremes, is equated with sharing a cadaver, the literal embodiment of something that, like the superannuated revolutionary generation described in the Olófin myth, has outlived its time.

In contrast to Adolfo's fuel-rationing rehash, *Guantanamera* offers alternative energies and economies through more modest, small-scale enterprises that actually propel the travelers to their destinations. Here the guides—the funeral party chauffer Tony and, to a lesser degree, the head truck-driver Ramón—are the film's de facto kings of the road, the

geosophers whose knowledge of the terrain is taken for granted. Tony is the conduit to frequent sightings of the Special Period's informal economy, visible during the film's self-reflective road-stop pauses that encourage Cuban viewers to link the comedy to their own situation. These include the primacy of *fulas* (US dollars) for exchange of which Tony has a ready supply; the black-market circulation of the prime-moving energy source—food—that Tony transfers (along with the casket) at each relay stop; a clandestine family-run roadside *paladar* (restaurant, still illegal at the time) to which Tony directs his passengers; and tourists led by a freshly trained guide in a provincial city. Ride-sharing peppers the cross-country trek, as the truck-drivers take on hordes of hitchhikers stranded by the crisis and the mourners take on a woman in labor and deliver the baby in the car. In the province-by-province relay, the film reiterates this juxtaposition of death and life, of the no-longer functional with renewable energy in images of loading from one hearse to another, not just caskets but also a cornucopia of bananas, garlic, rice, oranges, and other consumables.

The film offers Tony's deep knowledge of the economic terrain as a more viable response to the island's fuel-linked shortages than Adolfo's knee-jerk re-enactment of state-imposed shared sacrifice. Underscoring state inefficiency, Yoyita's casket is inadvertently switched with another during the relay and viewers know the casket eventually buried in her grave contains somebody else's body.[8] Moreover, Tony and ordinary citizens are portrayed as more inclined toward actual socialist communion through generosity contrasted with Adolfo's self-promoting scheme and inclination to jump rest-stop food lines. Tony's geosophy as a road guide and as the only mulatto in the funeral cortege is also linked to the critical wisdom Afro-Cuban culture deployed in the voice-over story of Olófin and Ikú. The lead truck-driver, Ramón carries a talisman of this culture on his eighteen-wheeler. Along with the death-girl Ikú, who shepherds the elderly toward their journey's end, the driver guides Tony and Ramón track *Guantanamera's* geography of knowledge.

If viable vehicles and gasoline are in scant supply in *Guantanamera*, the film implies that recoverable cultural knowledge and human energy are available for perpetual re-generation. Even with Ikú in the wings, the film underscores that it can take a very long time for Cubans, unlike their oil-dependent vehicles, to run out of steam, as a an elderly woman (Assenech Rodríguez) at a road-stop grieves the unexpected passing of her dynamic 109-year-old grandfather. Shortages notwithstanding, *Guantanamera*'s travelers reach their destinations as their de facto road trip—not the one

concocted by the bureaucrat Adolfo but the one that actually unfolds—undercuts the monolithic primacy of oil. In this vein, *Lista de espera*, the film with my opening image of oil pouring from an exhaust pipe, reimagines the available resources in a possible post-petroleum era and ties them to the challenges facing a nation suddenly uncoupled from its fuel lines.

Priming the Pump of the Rest-Stop: *Lista de espera*

Directed by Juan Carlos Tabío, Alea's co-director in *Guantanamera*, *Lista de espera*, is peppered with allusions to Titón's repertoire, a tribute to Tabío's by-then-deceased mentor to whom the film is dedicated.[9] But *Lista*, a romantic comedy and would-be road movie, may also be read as *Guantanamera*'s sequel, in an unlaunched journey that explores alternatives to a road-driven future. If typical road films are marked by the pauses of rest stops or breakdowns, *Lista* showcases the pause itself, embodied in the act of waiting signaled in its title. This "list"—of those forced to wait—evokes the slow-moving lines through which Cubans obtain goods and services and the existential condition of a life on hold. The image of stasis is common in the Special Period, for example in the unproductive, workplace day-dreaming in Zoe Valdés's novel *La nada cotidiana* (1992), and in the repetitive roller-blading along Havana's *malecón* in the closing scene of Fernando Pérez's film *La vida es silbar* (1996). In *Lista,* by contrast, passengers stranded in a rural bus terminal pursue getaways from apparent immobility, first through a conventional vehicular escape. After the station's own rickety bus grinds to a fuel-gushing halt, the stationmaster, Fernández (Noel García), declares the terminal closed and urges passengers to leave. But a young engineer, Emilio (Vladimir Cruz), traveling to work on his father's rural farm because his Havana education has yielded no job, calls on all to stay and seek solutions. Aided by Rolando (Jorge Perugorría), a comic trickster feigning blindness to gain priority on the list, the passengers locate the problem in the fuel pump's steel pin. An *apagón* (power outage) in the station forces the group to postpone the search for a substitute pin until daylight, as they all bed down for a night in the *terminal*. What unfolds at daybreak constitutes much of the film's plot and eventually turns out to have been a collective dream that ends when makeshift transportation finally arrives. Initially the passengers search for a substitute fuel-pump pin, a metaphoric search for oil. Rolando actually has such a steel piece, drops it in the grass, and summons some children to look there; in the ensuing squabble, the pin is tossed into the

adjacent sea. From this point on, the group seems to forget about fixing the bus, abandoning their search for an oil-driven exit in favor of improvisational collaborations that address the energy shortage within the *terminal* itself.

Rehabbing the *terminal* into a community re-routes socialist teamwork ideals toward conservation or recycling, recuperating local knowledge, and mining individual talent. These alternate energy sources include a mulatto woman's knowledge of nutritional and medicinal plants; passengers' under-used training in carpentry, engineering, plumbing, and remodeling; and the untapped capacities of others as librarians or artists. Moreover, the characters' intense activity in transforming the *terminal* sabotages the immobility implicit in a sudden fuel loss, a broken-down vehicle, a frustrated road trip, or in Cuba's Special Period itself.[10] In teasing out the vital mobility of staying put, the film subverts the long-standing dichotomy in Cuba's post-revolutionary imagination embodied in the existential dilemma—exacerbated in the Special Period—of leaving or staying. *Lista* locates this dilemma in Jacqueline (Tahimi Alvariño), a Havana-bound character meeting her Spaniard fiancé to depart for Spain but who is instantly attracted to the engineer Emilio and whose romance with him weaves through the collective dream. Hitting the road—that is, leaving Cuba—was officially equated in the early post-revolutionary period, of course, with betrayal, an abandonment of the Revolution long inscribed in the derogatory epithet *gusano* (maggot, despicable). Successive waves of politically or economically motivated departures nuanced this rhetoric over time, and, as Désirée Díaz traces, emigration allusions pepper Cuban films of the1990s. *Lista* offers two moments for such choosing: the first is when the station-master tells them all to leave and most opt to stay and tackle the transportation problem, and the second unfolds toward the end of the dream when the characters have transformed the *terminal* into a vibrant community recharged toward present challenges. Thus, when a bus arrives and almost nobody wants to leave, Jacqueline voices the indecision inscribed in the *terminal*'s liminal position between arriving and departing, poised in the dream-sequence's third space of staying put. "Yo quiero irme pero también quiero quedarme" (I want to go but I also want to stay) she remarks, and when her fiancé arrives, she begins to leave but then opts to stay. Eventually she awakens from the collective dream when all take to the road at the film's end.

As *Lista*'s inversion of the road movie relocates character mobility in the defiant act of staying put, the lone passenger resisting Emilio's call is a

state bureaucrat. Outraged by ad hoc citizen trouble-shooting, he marches off with his family and hitches multiple rides on a mission to seek official opprobrium for the *terminal* doings. *Lista* alternates scenes of the *terminal* community's inventive rehabbing with those of the bureaucrat's road trip to bring law and order back to the station. *Lista's* only actual road trip, then, highlights the wheel-spinning immobility of official responses to problems, akin to Adolfo's fuel-sharing plan in *Guantanamera*, solutions anchored in hard-and-fast rules and lacking citizen input or initiative.

With no central road trip and no designated chauffer, *Lista* locates its geosophy, its deep knowledge of the *terminal's* own traversable terrain, in the collective cognition of its stalled travelers, a resource ready for the tapping. But the film's de facto guides for its liberating odyssey in staying put are Emilio, the optimistic engineer, and the blind-man poser Rolando. Incarnating the Revolution's original designated beneficiary—the rural youth receiving a university education in Havana—Emilio sounds the initial refusal to travel. But Rolando, who knows how to fix the bus, catalyzes the plot when he hides the pins that could fix the fuel pump and engages the passengers in the search that unfolds in their alternative journey. Rolando's motives seem to be largely creative—to stimulate invention—as he encourages ingenuity in others. In this sense, Rolando serves as the film's internal director who sets the dream sequence in motion, the pause-within-the-pause that constitutes *Lista*'s critical inversion of road movie rhetoric. Rolando's own performative substance—he decides when to assume or abandon the blind-man role—and his extensive knowledge of films he cites in reflecting on events in *Lista* render him the navigator of the *terminal* rest-stop's extended pause. This dream sequence pause constitutes the film's self-reflection on the critical power of recycling—in art and life—from multiple sources filtered through one's own invention. With frequent intertextual winks at Cuban and international films, *Lista* itself embodies what its characters produce by pooling resources and knowledge: the hodge-podge *ajiaco* of "langosta a la terminal" (lobster a la terminal) lunch feast celebration.[11]

Although *Lista* privileges human energy and know-how over the dependence on international oil that stalls its travelers, the film does not advocate isolation in solving Cuba's problems or even favor those who stay over those who, like Jacqueline, eventually leave. Rather the station's interstitial space—the reflective mid-journey pause—tracks the inventive ground of refusing an either/or word-view. Similarly, at the same time that the Cuban state negotiated post-Soviet oil-purchase agreements,

Cubans not only stepped up the oil search on the island but also, like *Lista's* stranded passengers, sought local approaches to the energy crisis. As its overt search for oil recedes, *Lista*'s communal venture, in fact, evokes parallels with Faith Morgan's *The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil* (2006). This film documents Cuba's response to the Special Period oil crisis through the reduction of carbon emissions via such alternative transportation as ubiquitous Chinese bicycles; the replacement of energy-wasting appliances and lightbulbs with efficient ones; the distribution of solar energy panels; and the promotion of small-scale urban and organic gardening using bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers instead of large-scale, fossil fuel-dependent agriculture. In *Lista,* contrasting with the passengers' inventive responses to their oil crisis, Jacqueline's Spanish fiancé, Antonio (Antonio Valero), drives a gas-guzzling sport utility vehicle (SUV). But his serial arrivals to the *terminal*, within and outside of the dream, point to more than the inevitable incursions of foreign oil. Antonio's interventions in *Lista*'s story also evoke the increasing need for the ICAIC to collaborate internationally, resulting in films that, while recycling inherited models, spin tales designed to meet international audience expectations of Cuban culture and still reverberate locally. But even as *Lista* instantiates Cuba's entanglement with oil-era global economies, the stranded passengers' response to oil's sudden disappearance and the film's abrupt inversion of a film genre anchored in that era suggest that inhabitants of an eventual post-fossil fuel planet might learn something from Cuba's energy crisis.

The Pot-Holes of Driving Backwards: *Miel para Oshún*

Even more so than *Guantanamera*, *Lista de espera* highlights the substitution of fossil fuels with human energy and creativity and showcases the arduous bodily labor this exchange requires of Cubans. Although banking on the sustainability of that resource in contrast to oil, *Lista* also exhibits thinly masked concerns about its reliability and endless supply. The oil pouring from the broken bus's exhaust pipe, after all, is a metaphor not only for scarcity but also of avoidable squandering, as wasted fuel stands in for a possible misdirected expenditure of human energy. We should recall here that in *Guantanamera* no gas has actually been saved through the human work exacted by Adolfo's fuel-sharing plan. This image of

squandering suggests an underlying anxiety in both films that human energy, even more than oil, may be a terrible thing to waste. The Cuban road movie, in fact, gestures at pre-empting this waste in part by bridging energy-draining divisions among Cubans themselves, for example, between generations in *Guantanamera* or between those who want to leave in *Lista*, and those who choose to stay.

Miel para Oshún takes up this concern in a quest for reconciliation between Cuban Americans returning to the island and Cubans who stayed behind. Set in the Special Period, *Miel* tells the story of Roberto (Jorge Perugorría), a Latin American literature professor, who after three decades in the USA, returns to Cuba to find his mother, Carmen (Adela Legrá). The film opening alternates images of Roberto's arrival in the Martí International Airport with flashbacks of his chaotic departure—along with other Cubans—shortly after the Revolution: an eight-year old, crying for his mother and rushed by his father onto a departing boat. Roberto, we learn, grew up believing his father's account that his mother refused to join them. Driven by a desire to reconnect with his Cuban identity and to learn why his mother abandoned him, Roberto seeks answers from Pilar (Isabel Santos), a cousin beloved in childhood. She shatters his version of family history, telling him that his father kidnapped him against Carmen's will, that she suffered a breakdown from the loss, and that his father's family lost track of Carmen because they had never approved of his match with a lower-class woman.

A Havana-based search yields clues from news clips, from a photograph depicting Roberto's parents as a young couple, from the vision of a practitioner of Afro-Cuban *santería* (María Esther Monteluz), and from reports she once taught in Camagüey. Armed with this data, Roberto and Pilar, accompanied by the taxi driver Antonio (Mario Limonta), undertake a seemingly endless road trip in search of Carmen. After countless dead-ends, break-downs, internal discord, and vehicular changes (car, truck, bus, bicycles, animal-drawn carts, and foot), the trio eventually finds Carmen's home in the far-eastern town Baracoa. Here they learn that Carmen is out helping others—she cares for anyone in need—and they await her return on a small boat. As Carmen reaches the river shore, she and Roberto fall into each other's arms and Carmen cries "¡Mi hijo, mi hijo, ahora puedo morir en paz!" (My son, my son, now I can die in peace!). As the film ends, the camera pulls away, framing the mother-son embrace in the river landscape.

A key feature in *Miel*'s conclusion is the portrayal of Carmen's brief scene by 62-year-old Adela Legrás, the actress who played the young Lucía in part three of Solás's own landmark 1968 film *Lucía*, a classic of post-revolutionary Cuban cinema. Legrás's Lucía incarnates the Revolution's beneficiaries and Cuban identity as imagined in the heady 1960s: a mulata *guajira* whose life improves through work for an agricultural cooperative and literacy instruction she receives from a young Havana teacher.[12] As Carmen in *Miel*, Legrás wears the identical clothing and hat she wore in the final scenes of *Lucía*. This image confirms for Cuban audiences that *Miel*'s road trip is a journey to reclaim the past, reuniting not only Roberto with his mother—a reconciliation between Cubans on and off the island—but also viewers with the (now lost) revolutionary idealism embodied in Solás's early work. Through Roberto's re-acquaintance odyssey with island Cubans, *Miel*, as do *Guantanamera* and *Lista*, reiterates proverbial revolutionary solidarity via the countless people who provide rides, information, shelter, and sustenance for the characters' road trip through scarcity.

But *Miel* gets mired in the past, an impossible journey embodying the very loss of material or ideological fuel that other Cuban road films drive to surmount and that paradoxically energizes their trips. Viewers may note surface similarities between *Miel* and *Guantanamera*: a savvy mulatto taxi driver turned cross-country chauffer; rest-stop eateries with little food; a pregnant hitchhiker whose baby is delivered en route; and a journey from almost one end of the island to the other. But the two films traverse opposite directions—*Guantanamera* from Guantánamo to Havana and *Miel* from Havana to Baracoa—underscoring inverse temporal trajectories as well. Following the brief encounter with the past in Yoyita's return to her hometown, *Guantanamera*'s road trip is future-oriented, yielding the road to a new generation energized to revise residual revolutionary principles directed toward present realities. In contrast, the passengers in *Miel* re-map only the past as they retrace Carmen's lost steps. Even though their original guide, Antonio, leads them through serial vehicle changes, he does not control the geography of knowledge, the geosophy required for characters to reach their destination. The Havana *santera* discerns in a trance Roberto's necessary destination—where the waters of Oshún and Yemayá meet—a geographical point whose deciphering into concrete geography (where the Miel river meets the sea) requires knowledge of Afro-Cuban referents. But translating the *santera's* prophecy into a

workable map to the past requires plumbing the fragmented memories of elderly characters the trio meets along the way. Pilar finds and interviews these people, typically portrayed as humble rural folk, evocative like Legrá's Carmen, of the Revolution's original designated beneficiaries. When all else fails—from fossil fuel-driven transport to the physical and psychic energy of human travelers on foot—only such aging repositories of knowledge, the film implies, and the lost ideals they embody can propel this journey.

In the film's recuperation of Afro-Cuban myth, Antonio's mulatto status does count for something, as close to the journey's end, he helps render the *santera's* vision into a concrete location. But the film's reification of Afro-Cuban knowledge in its quest for the resource of a reunified people points to cul-de-sacs in its own larger journey. The frequent appearance of Afro-Cuban referents in Cuban films and fiction of the post-Soviet era is in no way limited to road films and some link it to international audience expectations for Cuban cultural production.[13] Moreover, although this phenomenon reenacts a cultural trope for Cuban identity dating back to the intellectual culture of the 1920s, *Miel*'s deployment of such allusions is marked by an eschewal of incisive critique that characterizes the film as a whole. The unexamined stereotyping of Antonio as a trickster male mulatto—with no related allusion to the Revolution's possible shortcomings in meeting its goal of abolishing racism in Cuba and no mention of the role of race in the post-Soviet resurgence of class differences like those originally separating Roberto's parents—constitute missed opportunities in a twenty-first-century film that casts a mulatto woman as the embodiment of the Revolution and "authentic" Cubanness.[14] Similarly, *Miel* dilutes its larger self-reflective potential to a clichéd message-marked statement about mistakes of the past when Pilar and Roberto decide they must avoid those made by their parents' generation who, even so, "did the best that they could."

The film's blanketing waves of nostalgia undercut this scene's cursory stab at a critical take on Cuban post-revolutionary history as well as the rectification gesture in casting a returning Cuban-American as its protagonist. This overbearing nostalgia also dilutes the road movie's generic capacity for critique. Morris, as I've noted, locates this capacity in the road movie's narrative pauses, the unexpected stops that offer opportunities for character or audience reflection. Thus the breaks in *Guantanamera's* cross-country trek juxtapose Special Period conditions with the dogma

parroted by Adolfo the bureaucrat, contrasts enveloped in ironic humor. And *Lista*, as I've argued, consists of an extended, dynamic pause, which is also saturated with humor that highlights gaps between ideals and reality to adjust revolutionary principles to a contemporary energy crisis. Although *Miel* also showcases material shortages in its rest-stops, few pauses are humorous and most are saturated with longing and loss, punctuated by sad music or tears. While nostalgia, as Svetlana Boym argues, can be reflexive, critical and prospective, imagining a future that takes responsibility for the past (xvi), it can also be simply reproductive, stressing a "trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home" and viewing itself "as truth and tradition" (xviii).

The reproductively nostalgic pauses in *Miel's* road trip constitute dwelling places of loss, where the traveling trio's members reveal their individual wounds. Within a best-case Marxist scenario, such group-based confessions aim to be productively critical and self-critical. But these exchanges in *Miel* stage competitions over who has lost the most. For example, when Roberto breaks down in public in a small town and proclaims to onlookers that leaving Cuba stripped his identity, Antonio steps forward to detail his own hard life. Interestingly, the film portrays only Roberto's loss as the product of history's mistakes (by those who chose to leave Cuba) and, as Diana Sarabia observes, the film fails to overcome the long-standing official stereotype of exiles as the Revolution's biggest losers (159–164). Pilar's and Antonio's losses—of romance, of children—are generally cast as more personal than political, although Pilar's self-censorship as an avant-garde painter whose work met with official disdain may point to the limited expressive possibilities open to Solás's film itself. But once *Miel* transports its road travelers to their destination in the past, it offers no hint of where they will go next. Although they're periodically recharged by new information necessary to keep going, the long journey enervates the trio, draining their energy in a slow-motion version of oil pouring from the exhaust pipe in *Lista*. *Miel*'s ending suggests that, reunited with the lost sons of exile, Carmen' revolutionary generation might die in peace. But having exhausted their resources to find their lost origins, what remains for that generation's children and grandchildren? Where is the momentum to catapult them back to their futures in present-day Cuba? Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti takes up these questions in the road trip of two contemporary Cuban children, *Viva Cuba*.

The End of the Road (Movie)? *Viva Cuba*

If *Guantanamera*'s road trip bridges generational divides and *Miel* seeks the same between island Cubans and exiles, *Viva Cuba* seeks to heal re-emergent class divisions against the backdrop of increased remittances to island Cubans. The film locates this inequality in its two Havana child protagonists. Jorgito (Jorge Milo) and Malú (Malú Tarrau Broche) are best friends, although his mother (Luisa María Jiménez Rodríguez) insultingly attributes "the face of a bourgeois" to hers and Malú's mom (Larisa Vega Alamar) forbids her to play with the son of people so lacking in "status." Alternating images of the children's homes (hers has a crucifix in the entry, his a picture of Fidel) and possessions (his meager, hers plentiful) reinforce the divide exemplified in Malú's mother's reliance on support from the foreign husband who awaits her outside Cuba and Jorgito's father's itinerant labor that requires his mother to handle child rearing largely alone. In contrast to the animosity between their mothers, the film's opening scenes construct strong bonds between Jorgito and Malú in neighborhood play and at school, culminating when they bury notes to each other in a time-capsule box, to be opened in 2030.

The death of Malú's grandmother (Sara Cabrera) disrupts this idyll. Malú's mother announces they will now leave the country and sends a letter to Malú's father (Abel Rodríguez)—the lighthouse keeper in Maisí at a far eastern point on the island—requesting permission to take Malú out of Cuba. Facing the consequent loss of their friendship, the children set out secretly for Maisí to dissuade him from signing. They carry backpacks with minimal clothing and food, favorite photos, a compass and map, and the meager contents of Malú's piggy bank that pay only to cross the bay from Regla to Central Havana. As their frantic families unite in the search for their children, the pair travels across Cuba and repeatedly escapes pursuit, by sneaking onto a train and a bus, hitching rides in vehicles ranging from vintage American cars to ox-drawn wagons, and—in the film's longest scenes—walking off-road. As they near their destination, the mothers and Jorgito's father (Albertico Pujols Acosta)—aided by a national law enforcers and media—close in on them. Thus when they do find Malú's father—who lifts her up in a long embrace—he has already signed the permission for her mother to take Malú abroad. In a slow-motion scene where the adults degenerate into soundless arguments, Jorgito and Malú grab hands, run to the end of the lighthouse point, and face the open sea in an embrace, as the ocean spray envelops them.[15]

Although ostensibly set in the Special Period and although both mothers grumble about conditions ("Esto se hunde" [This is sinking], Malú's mother complains early on), *Viva* focuses far less on actual material scarcity than other Cuban road movies. The pair's journey is disrupted not by vehicle breakdowns but by their flight from pursuit by the adults who would separate them. In fact, *Viva*'s trains, planes, and automobiles (and even a pleasure boat off Varadero beach) seem to be running just fine. Thus when they figure out the children's destination, the parents simply get on a plane and fly to Maisí. *Viva*'s more upbeat ambiance—most conflictive scenes are humorous—may derive from La Colmenita children's theater that helped produce it, the fact that children constitute one target audience, and its appearance at the end of the Special Period. But akin to *Lista*, *Viva*'s energy crisis highlights Cuba's *human* resources, creative improvisation in their deployment, and the possible price of their waste. A scene in which the children flee pursuit, in fact, juxtaposes wasted fuel oil with the squandering of primary resources embodied in a society's children: as the pair flees a school performance where they've been identified as interlopers, they're enveloped by clouds of burning oil emanating from an old pickup rumbling down the street.

Until near their journey's end, *Viva*'s road travelers have no designated guides, although as Anne Marie Stock points out, Elegguá, the Afro-Cuban deity to whom the film is dedicated, accompanies the pair (154). But the film locates its actual geosophy—the geography of knowledge mined and developed through their trip—in the improvisational energy of the children's own wits, as they elude escape with on-the-spot stories and disguises, and the power of the friendship that keeps them moving.[16] They lose their map at their first stop, Jorgito's compass offers only rudimentary orientation, and they cannot ask directions from those providing rides because they must feign to know exactly where they're going, toward parents awaiting just ahead. Except for Malú's prior trips to Varadero and Jorgito's family origins in Camagüey, the pair, who spend much of their journey in rural settings, traverse a countryside virtually unknown to them in the first Cuban feature film, as Stock points out, to offer such extensive panoramas of specific Cuban locations (159), an apprenticeship in living in the land that sustains the traveling children. But what eventually drains the pair's necessary energy for the cross-country trek is their progressive bickering: only as they've ceased collaborating do they whine about hunger and thirst. To underscore the point, the film juxtaposes scenes of the

children's disintegrating alliance with images of the bonds forged back in Havana by their previously feuding mothers.

At this juncture, Jorgito and Malú encounter and raid the hillside tent of a camping stranger (Pavel García Valdés), a young Che Guevara look-alike, whose motorcycle evokes the 2004 Walter Salles biopic *Motorcycle Diaries*, itself a friendship-based, coming-of-political-age road movie. After a report on his portable radio reveals who they are and after hearing their first true account of their trip, the stranger delivers the film's pedagogic punch line as he tells the children that only their friendship got them so far and only it can propel them to their destination.[17] The stranger's identity as a spelunker exploring Cuba's caves and wildlife reinforces the film's linkage between a coming-of-age road trip and the acquisition of deeper knowledge of local resources: geographical, material, historical, ideological. In Havana school scenes, the children and their peers repeat in unison the words that typically open Cuban school-days: "Pioneros por el comunismo: ¡Seremos como el Che!" ("Pioneers for communism: We will be like Che!"). And when Malú first meets the stranger, she lies that they are "pioneros exploradores" (exploring pioneers) lost from their group, a reference to the urban Cuban middle-school experience of immersion in rural life, a long-term legacy of the 1961 literacy encounters between young Havana volunteers and rural students of all ages. But in casting the Che-like spelunker as the guide who reminds the two children from different class backgrounds that their collaboration is essential to completing their journey, the film re-channels the revolutionary ideal of cross-class understanding into a contemporary Cuba witnessing re-emergent inequalities.

Like other Cuban road movies, then, *Viva* seeks solutions to its material and ideological energy crisis by reconnecting with ostensibly updated revolutionary ideals, even if refracted through a critical lens. But by focusing on the energy and ingenuity of children as a primary resource, *Viva,* unlike *Miel*, orients its road trip toward the future. The children's burial of a time-capsule pledging their friendship into 2030 establishes this direction, and a decidedly updated Che-figure provides the definitive lift to their journey's end where they face not their past but an unknown future. This contrast with *Miel*'s ending—where Roberto embraces a woman who literally bodies forth the past—parallels *Viva*'s lower-grade nostalgia.[18] *Viva*'s most nostalgic scene is on the Varadero beach by night where Malú remembers her grandmother. But the majority of the trip's self-reflective

pauses focus on the present problem of eluding pursuit to reach their destination. In contrast to *Miel*'s characters mourning the past, Jorgito and Malú dwell on a potential future loss, dedicating their energy to preempting it, a kind of prospective, critical nostalgia in Boym's terms. Moreover, the final scene's placement of them in the foreground—facing the ocean in an embrace, with the adults, including Che, blurred in a gathering behind them—clarifies that whatever lies ahead belongs to them, not their predecessors.

This closing scene of the final offering in Cuba's road film cycle displays a surprising fact about Cuba's version of the genre. By ending at the literal end of the road—one can neither drive nor walk beyond Punta Maisí—*Viva* is the only road movie to highlight the obvious fact that Cuba is an island. Because *Viva* is the last in its Special Period cycle, it could be tempting to oversimplify this dead-end as a signal of that ending or to recur to the conventional metaphoric link between islands and isolation marked by an ocean boundary. But in the context of the Special Period's energy crisis, *Viva*'s productive attention to internal explorations for resources—geographic and ideological—embodied in the landscape-combing children and the spelunker guide offers other possibilities. The film's freeze-frame ending of two children caught between the dueling parents who can't agree on their future and the open ocean ahead also evokes the final shot of François Truffaut's 1959 classic, *The 400 Blows,* whose child protagonist fleeing his life on the streets ends up on the ocean's edge of an uncertain future. Similarly, *Viva Cuba*'s closing frame of its resourceful, dynamic, but fleeing children constitutes a compelling question mark. In her account of economic change in post-Soviet Cuba, sociologist Susan Eckstein notes that for all the successful state reforms in response to the crisis, "the government proved unable to make full use of its healthy and (highly) educated work force" (190). Similarly, for all the human vitality tapped as the primary energy source in response to the crisis propelling Cuba's Special Period road movies, they still leave us with trained engineers driving trucks like Mariano or repairing water fountains like Emilio; a political economy professor like Gina hosting a radio program; a trained artist like Pilar rehabbing crumbling Havana buildings, and scores of citizens sharing labors of basic sustenance for which they are untrained. *Viva Cuba*'s final scene projects the uncertain viability of this scenario beyond its own time frame: two children have marshaled the power to propel themselves across an island for the right to a shared future in Cuba only to reach an impasse. Where will they—and all the renewable energy they generate—now go?

Notes

1. All translations of Spanish quotations are my own.
2. For an introduction to the US road film, see Corrigan (Chap. 5); Chap. 1 of Laderman's *Driving Visions*; and Cohan and Hark's Introduction. On the European road movie, see Mazierska and Rascaroli who, Pérez points out, problematize the US origins of the genre (Pérez 22–23).
3. Cohan and Hark draw this distinction from Laderman's "What a Trip," later developed in *Driving Visions.*
4. Cresswell offers the conventional division between private and public space, for example, as a social construct manifested through the geographical imagination (22).
5. See Otero on Yoruba mythology in *Guantanamera.*
6. See Unruh.
7. In her cogent reading of *Guantanamera* as a national allegory, Rodríguez-Mangual sees the road movie element as merely the surface story, a point with which my own reading disagrees.
8. Adolfo's bureaucratic rigidity has evoked comparisons with Titón's *La muerte de un burócrata* (1966), for example, Schroeder (125).
9. *Lista* is based on Arturo Arango's 1995 short story of the same title; Arango co-authored the screenplay.
10. In reading *Lista*'s "staying put" as subversive counter mobility enacted through the road movie self-reflective pause, I'm diverging from Stone's view of the film as an "elegiac, melancholic fable" (135) in his thoughtful attention to the film's account of "killing time."
11. Fernando Ortiz first posed the hybrid *ajiaco* stew as a trope of Cubanness in 1940, expanded more recently by Pérez Firmat.
12. Expanding on D'Lugo, Saavedra underscores *Miel*'s enactment of the long-standing representational link between mulata women, especially mothers, and Cuban nationhood, initially suggested of course in Cirilo Villaverde's foundational Cuban fiction, *Cecilia Valdés* (1881). On *Miel*'s mother link, see also Ramsdell.
13. As detailed by Martínez-Echazábal, prior to the 1990s, the focus on Afro-Cuban culture also marked post-revolutionary film-making, consistent with the state's project of incorporating Afro-Cubans into the Revolution. But others note its use in the Special Period for marketing Cuban culture in negotiation with international audience expectations (see Knauer), a phenomenon paradoxically paralleled by the continuing scant presence of Afro-Cuban actors in Cuban film or the stereotyping of their limited roles (see Fernandes 82–83).
14. Sarabia notes the film's failure to address the Revolution's "unresolved racial conflicts" specifically in Pilar's reference to the difference between Roberto's parents as one of class rather than race (155).

15. Stock's is the most extensive study of *Viva Cuba*; drawing on Corrigan, she links its road movie structure to the children's coming-of-age story that "invites a reflection…on Cuban identity" (156–157).
16. Stock details director Cremata Malberti's parallel improvisations in producing the first post-revolutionary Cuban feature film made independently of the ICAIC (152–153).
17. Friendship as a core value in *Viva* evokes parallels with De Ferrari's concept of the "friendship plot" in post-Soviet Cuban fiction (primarily among male intellectuals), which she explores as an ideological trap. De Ferrari argues that in this fiction "the revolutionary social contract mimics the structure and values of male friendship. Feeding off the same values of loyalty and fraternity, masculine friendship seems blind to the moral traps structurally imbedded in revolutionary rhetoric, thus paralyzing a mostly male intellectual class" (24). (See also her Chap. 2, "The Friendship Plot"). In this vein, the spelunker in *Viva*, who enunciates friendship as a core value, might be considered the film's male intellectual, and the impasse reached by the children as the friendship plot's ideological trap. However, although it lies beyond my focus here, it could be interesting to explore whether the cross-gender friendship in *Viva*—in which the children sometimes reverse traditional gender roles—implicitly undermines the epoch's standard friendship plot and thus circumvents the trap posited by De Ferrari, intimating different values.
18. Here I differ with Seminet's reading of the film as a "nostalgic representation of Cuban identity" (189).

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PART II

The Latin American Road Movie: Readings and Genealogies

CHAPTER 5

Recorriendo las Américas: Cars, Roads, and Latin American Cinema

Gilberto Blasini

Road movies have become an attractive film genre that allows filmmakers to provide a cinematic rendering—often quite critical as well as literal—of the realities of their nations and, in some cases, of Latin America as a pan-national entity.[1] The genre's syntactical foundation on the journey structure, however, takes these cinematic renderings beyond the plane of basic recording of socio-geographical settings (e.g., these films are not just travelogues) and into the domain of more complex and engaging narratives that incorporate elements of action, comedy, adventure, melodrama, and documentary, among other genres and modes. It is indeed the mixture of these diverse elements and modalities what has allowed road movies to thrive as a genre that can successfully travel the often-treacherous path of continuing the larger political project of earlier eras of Latin American cinema—if albeit in a very different and distinct way—while adapting to the broad economic and aesthetic demands of contemporary global cinema (particularly in terms of becoming popular and profitable with audiences due to these films' ability to engage and entertain them).

Important road movies have been produced in Latin America at least since the 1960s. Fernando Birri's *Los inundados* (1962), Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna's *Iracema, Uma Transa Amazônica* (1975), and

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Carlos Diegues's *Bye bye Brasil* (1980) stand out as three major examples. Yet, the noticeable increase in the number of Latin American road movies that have appeared since the early 1990s evidences the burgeoning trend of the genre's appeal and marketability.[2] Given the genre's strong emphasis on location shooting and, consequently, on the depiction of actual geographical places and cultural spaces, I wonder if Latin American road movies form a part of what Fredric Jameson denominated, in the early 1990s, "the packaging of specifically Third-World international or festival films in national, cultural, and one is tempted to say, tourist-friendly ways, in which it is the fact of a brand new locale and unprecedented national provenance that is stressed and marketed" (119). Although a tone of cynicism and paternalism pervades Jameson's statement in the larger context of his essay, his assertion points to the still critical way in which the rendering of filmic texts into commodities through the representation of national specificities does not necessarily preclude how, at the same time, these texts engender complex and politically pertinent significations about the specific cultures from which they emerge. As Néstor García Canclini states in his book *Citizens and Consumers*, "a great part of current artistic production still expresses national iconographic traditions [and] as such, the visual arts, literature, radio and film remain sources of nationalist imaginaries, providing scenarios in which the signs of regional identity are consecrated and communicated" (91). Consequently, road movies generically proffer the organizing structures for the filmic construction of national and regional particularities while powerfully invoking some of modernity's primary experiences: the perceptual transformation of time and space as well as the generation of subjectivities enabled by motorized transportation.

This essay provides an overview of the ways in which Latin American filmmakers have reconfigured the road movie genre to address national and regional concerns. A general reassessment of the driving impetus behind some of the region's key cinematic theories will serve as a foundation for examining recurrent themes, issues, and filmic tactics in Latin American road movies. The final part of the essay will consider the ways in which the road movie genre has found articulation in Puerto Rican cinematic practices. I will examine how the feature film *El Clown* (Pedro Adorno and Emilio Rodríguez, 2006) dialogically engages with the syntax and the semantics of road movies, especially through the concept of automobility. I will also briefly consider the short experimental film *Viernes social* (Frida Medín and Viveca Vázquez, 1994) in order to provide a

counterpoint to *El Clown*'s ideological view of Puerto Rican automobility. Before turning to these two films, it will be necessary to provide a brief overview of how the road movie genre has become visible in Latin American cinematic practices.

In the conclusion to his book *Magical Reels*, John King suggests that since "cinema emerged as a modern and popular medium," both the concept of "modern" and "popular" have always "required close inspection" to apprehend the particular configurations that cinema has taken in Latin America (245). The query of the modern can be historically understood in part through the struggle of many Latin American filmmakers with the question of how to embrace cinema and make it, as much as possible, into an "indigenous" cultural form when cinema represents yet another "foreign" importation from the countries that, through centuries of colonization and imperialism, have caused the most detrimental material and social damage to the whole continent. During the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, this quandary found articulation through the theoretical work of artists like Glauber Rocha, Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino, Julio García Espinosa, and Jorge Sanjinés, among many others. In general, these filmmakers/theorists advocated for dramatic changes that sought to distance their work from any cinematic system that followed the precepts of either commercially driven filmmaking (epitomized by Hollywood) or "art for art's sake's" projects (mainly in the style of European auteur cinema). Instead, they called for embracing radical and experimental practices that allowed for alternative ways of constructing national realities through the experience of cinema and, consequently, of thinking and being in the world. These practices posited cinema as a dynamic cultural arena where audiences could come into contact with different versions of history and society. Ideally, these versions would allow viewers to reflect critically upon their lives and their material situations in such a way that they would become active participants in changing their social circumstances.

Initially, these politically progressive projects focused mainly around the constitution of national cinemas; yet, they subsequently transformed into a pan-continental movement that came to be known by the end of the 1960s as the New Latin American Cinema. For more than a decade, this movement transformed the Latin American cinematic landscape with all its cultural vitality, artistic invigoration, and political utopianism. However, by the 1980s, many directors and artists acknowledged the need to make films that were less dogmatic and more accessible and engaging to audiences. In many ways, this acknowledgment meant redefining the notion of

"popular" by going back to filmic traditions, genres, and forms that had been disregarded or demonized in the two preceding decades. For example, Fernando Birri revised his manifesto "Cinema and Underdevelopment," by explaining that films not only needed to be critical, realist, and nationalist, but they also needed to foreground a narrative practice that would make films more attractive to audiences. In his words, "the narrative construction has a much greater power of communication, and can embrace a much wider horizon" (96). This emphasis on narrative cinema would add to the three previous characteristics that of "the popular" which would help "to interpret, express and communicate with the people" (Birri 96).

The changes that New Latin American Cinema underwent during the 1980s exemplify B. Ruby Rich's argument that "each political moment demands a specific aesthetic strategy" (278). In "An/Other View of New Latin American Cinema," Rich reassesses the status of this movement during the 1980s, and she observes that films turned "away from the epic toward the chronicle, a record of time in which no particular events occur but in which the extraordinary nature of the everyday is allowed to surface" (281). She further states that these films

> mark a shift from "exteriority" to "interiority." In place of the explicitly and predictably political, at the level of labor or agrarian struggles or mass mobilization, we often find an attention to the implicitly political, at the level of banality, fantasy and desire, and a corresponding shift in aesthetic strategies. (281)

At stake in Rich's revisionist project is an overt agenda of re-gendering the New Latin American Cinema. Her emphasis on interiority, the chronicle, and fantasy go along with her examination of a number of female directors such as María Luisa Bemberg, Susana Amaral, and Busi Cortés. Leaving aside Rich's feminist gesture for a moment, I want to call attention to the way in which her historical reassessment brings to the fore a notion of individualism. She argues that 1980s New Latin American Cinema films "advance a reclaiming of the individual" whose expression "is not a privatized one at all but very much social, political and public" (281). This new approach "that can put on the screen the interior world of [people]" further emphasizes that "character, identity, empathy, and, most important, a sense of personal agency, now are of equal importance to political evolution" (281–282).

I want to revise Rich's ideas in the context of Birri's assertion about returning to a notion of the popular, particularly through the communicability of narrative, in order to talk about the configuration of the road movie genre in Latin America. A productive way of understanding this genre in the Latin American context is through a dialogue of the two poles that Rich proposes in her essay; for example, between "exteriority" and "interiority," "epic" and "chronicle," "extraordinary events," and "everyday life." This kind of dialogue allows for apprehending the way in which road movies articulate their ideological concerns through two axes of narrative signification: one that emerges out of characters and their subjectivities, and the other that materializes out of the diegetic voyage itself.[3]

Characters become the focal point of textual processes that simultaneously construct and question individual agency, experience, and desire in these films. This insight into the characters' "interiority" is often times facilitated through the use of motorized vehicles such as cars. As Jean Baudrillard suggests, the car is "an abode, but an exceptional one; it is a closed realm of intimacy, but one released from the constraints that usually apply to the intimacy of home, one endowed with a formal freedom of great intensity and a dizzying functionality" (67). He further adds that "home means a regressive attachment to domestic relationships and habits, whereas the intimacy of the car arises from an accelerated space-time metabolism" (67). However, since Latin American road movies do not feature cars as their exclusive mode of transportation, these films allow for the diegetic formation of different degrees of "interiority"/"intimacy" that provide diverse perspectives related to questions of the individual as well as the larger social context that frames him/her. For example, in Walter Salles's *Central do Brasil* (1998) Dora (Fernanda Montenegro) and Josué (Vinicius de Oliveira) travel from Rio de Janeiro to Juazerio do Norte in a bus. The text successfully conveys the closeness between these characters within a larger social milieu that is narratively represented through a public transportation vehicle.

At the same time, and not necessarily in opposition to this tactic, the recording of the landscapes traversed through the different journeys allows for the constitution of an external vision that makes possible narrative progression. More important, this external vision renders places into historical spaces that capture the social and political geographies of the depicted countries, along with their local specificities. As a result, Latin American road movies engage with Michel de Certeau's notion of "space"

(versus "place"). In his words, "Space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it….In short, space is a practiced place" (117). In this way, road movies produce a cinematic elaboration of Latin America that simultaneously fictionalizes and documents the social and cultural state of diverse constituents of this geopolitical area. Two films that exemplify these dual narrative levels are *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001) and *El viaje* (Fernando E. Solanas, 1992).

In Cuarón's film, Luisa (Maribel Verdú), Tenoch (Diego Luna), and Julio (Gael García) drive through different communities without necessarily noticing the social realities of their surroundings. Rather than using these characters as a linkage, the diegesis draws audiences to these events and places on their own. That is, either the film spends time showing the people and places that the main characters ignore, or the voice-over narration makes sure to comment on what goes on outside of the car. By and large, Luisa, Tenoch, and Julio are too enraptured in their own schemes and desires to take the time to engage with the outside world. This lack of engagement, however, relates to how the film asks audiences to understand discourses about class entitlement for Luisa and Tenoch, and masculine privilege for Tenoch and Julio.

Solanas's *El viaje* cinematically enhances Martín Nunca's physical presence at certain locations such as Tierra del Fuego, Buenos Aires, and the Colombia/Panama border with sequences constructed through still animation. These sequences retell historical events related to the places and countries that Martín (Walter Quiroz) visits (e.g., a shipwreck that led to cannibalism, the battle against the British, and the US bombing of a Panamanian town in 1989). In this way, audiences become witnesses of historical episodes often distorted or ignored by official history in a way that is somewhat independent of the character of Martín. The connection to his subjectivity is visualized through still animation, which, audiences know, come from the oral recounting of allegorical figures like Tito el Esperanzador (Carlos Carella) and Américo Inconcluso (Kiko Mendive) as well as the illustrations that Martín's father, Nicolás (Marc Berman), has drawn for his artistic graphic books about Latin America.

Road movies provide their characters—as well as viewers—with alternatives not only to their ways of life, but also to their understanding of their social location in larger national and regional arenas. The use of a motorized vehicle—be it a car, motorcycle, or a mobile home—enables the possibility both of encountering places and people hitherto unknown and of

phenomenologically experiencing speed and its transformations of space and time through a contemporary subjectivity based upon automotive technology. In the translation of this genre into Latin America, this automotive subjectivity loses its centrality. In fact, it can be argued that by and large, characters in Latin American road movies can only have a partial and contradictory relationship to motorized vehicles. In fact, what Latin American road movies bring to the fore is a disjuncture between (automotive) technology and subjectivity. This disjunction functions in part to show how Latin American culture continues to be at odds with modernity.

The experience of traveling on the roads of Latin America in a motorized vehicle implores an examination of modernity's manifestation on this terrain. In other words, since road movies imply technology both through the standardization of routes and the need for a motorized vehicle as a mode of transportation, the question arises: How do the freeway and the automobile constitute conflicting locations for the articulation of subjectivities that simultaneously invoke notions of modernity—and even postmodernity—in countries still struggling to build solid infrastructures? For example, *Bye bye Brasil* uses the narrative structure of the road movie to critique teleological notions of progress as well as of material and technological development by presenting the rampant poverty extant in Brazil's rural areas as well as in the margins of the country's capital, Brasilia. For its part, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's *Guantanamera* (1995) constructs its plot through a road trip that functions as the source for critiquing governmental bureaucracy and the impoverished material conditions of Cuba under *el período especial en tiempos de paz* (the Special Period).[4] In addition, the film's road trip becomes an ironic and self-reflexive structure that unmasks how the "normalized" notion of traveling in a motorized vehicle implies a certain kind of economic and technological privilege, given the island's scarcity of fuel and automobiles during the 1990s.

This questioning of modernity through road movies shouldn't necessarily be taken as a romantic gesture that either negates or demonizes the place of technology in contemporary Latin American societies. Instead, these films provide audiences with a critical perspective of the uneven material development that makes it difficult for the normalization of discourses about techno-subjectivities and car culture in the different countries in the continent. For example, the experimental documentary *El camino de las hormigas* (Rafael Marziano Tinoco, El camino de las

hormigas 1993) explores the quality of life in Venezuela, particularly in terms of the everyday difficulties that people face in a highly developed contemporary metropolitan landscape such as Caracas. Interestingly, the first glimpse that audiences get of this city is through a sequence divided into eight short scenes from the viewpoint of people who are driving different motorized vehicles (cars, buses, motorcycles). Their perspectives demonstrate different social locations (mainly but not exclusively) in terms of class standing that, to an extent, go hand in hand with their specific modes of transportation. The first scene comes from the point of view of a man whose dialogue revolves around how to get ahead in business. In his view, it all comes down to attitude and appearance. Significant for this project is the fact that he states, "Tienes que estar mosca todo el tiempo, ¿no? Por eso, si no tienes carro vales como un mojón de perro en la calle." ("You've gotta keep sharp all the time. That's why without a car, you're just like dogshit on the road").

In Walter Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* (2004), while traversing on foot the Atacama Desert in Chile, Ernesto (Gael García Bernal) and Alberto (Rodrigo de la Serna) meet a couple of communists who are on the road both to find work and to escape from the police who's persecuting them for their political beliefs. When the woman asks Ernesto and Alberto why they travel, Ernesto answers, "Viajamos por viajar." ("We travel just to travel.") After realizing how perplexed the communist couple is at this response, the facial expressions of both Ernesto and Alberto reveal a sense of guilt over their advantageous social position, which allows them to roam around for pleasure and learning rather than out of material need or political discrimination. Indeed, this specific moment brings to the fore an ideological critique of the notion of traveling which is so central to road movie narratives. In the Latin American context, embarking on a road trip as an act of leisure often invokes privileged social positions often related to class, race, and gender.

One of the main characters in Carlos Sorín's *Historias mínimas* (2002) is Roberto (Javier Lombardo), a salesman whose marriage is ruined because of the constant car traveling required by his work. At one point, Roberto tells his passenger, an old man named Justo Benedictis (Antonio Benedictis), who had run over a man with his car in spite of having his driver license revoked, "En esta época sobrevive el que tiene capacidad de improvisación." ("In these times, those who can improvise are the ones who survive.") I read this quote extratextually to think about the possibility of how the appropriation of the road movie genre into the Latin

American context responds to an improvisational tactic of cultural survival since the 1990s. The genre's narrative organization around journeys allow for textual constructions that are malleable enough to incorporate numerous tones, themes, elements, and styles that make these films appealing to audiences across the board.

The genre's malleability and its appeal brings to mind García Canclini's anthropological study about viewing practices in Mexico during the 1990s, that reveals some of the different tastes present in contemporary audiences. In addition, the textual construction of road movies cinematically particularizes places and locations. This particularization permits audiences to get acquainted with and experience the distinct cultural geographies of different countries (and in some cases, several of them). Furthermore, these films also engage in questions of politics, if albeit in a distinct way to previous Latin American films. Either through the characters' interactions with the places they visit or through the documentary-like observational parts of the diegesis, audiences need to come to terms with the social complexities extant in Latin America. In this way, road movies become an example of what Luisela Alvarary has identified as a transnational practice in Latin American cinema that has been on the rise since the 1990s. In her words, "filmmakers in Latin America are considering elements of genre—or a combination thereof—as shortcuts to tell autochthonous stories. And producers are using cross over genres to appeal to wider audiences" (69).

By and large, road movies as a film genre have blossomed in countries that have had more established film industries and cinematic traditions such as France, Germany, and the USA, as well as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico in the context of Latin America. The lack of a fully formed film industry along with the historical discontinuity and haphazardness of film production in Puerto Rico (even if it has increased significantly during the past 20 years) might be partly why genre films such as road movies have not flourished on the island.[5] However, Great Britain also lacks a strong road culture/road movie tradition, as Susan Picken explains in "Highways, By-ways and Lay-bys: The Great British Road Movies" (223). In her essay, Picken makes an interesting assertion that might also be applicable to Puerto Rico. She asserts that the lack of a road movie tradition is connected to Britain's particular geographical configuration. In her words, it is a "small island dominated by an abundance of water," which makes it impossible to escape "the limitations of geography: sooner or later one hits the edge of the world, the end of the road, the sea" (222). On the one

hand, Picken's position establishes a very literal relationship between cinema and geography without necessarily taking into consideration the way in which the manipulation of time and space is integral to the film experience. In fact, there are at least a couple of very prominent road movies where audiences can barely see the road (if at all): Jon Jost's *Frameup* (1993, USA) and Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together* (1997). On the other hand, Picken's ideas are relevant for the context of Puerto Rico given how small the island is geographically speaking. A similar analogy might be applied to other Latin American islands like Cuba. However, Cuba's precarious material conditions in terms of roads and motorized vehicles ironically helped in the production of two successful road movies, *Guantanamera* and *Miel para Oshún* (Humberto Solás, 2001). Both films show how the island's unstable infrastructural conditions during the 1990s made getting around in motorized vehicles—mostly for necessity and in some rare instances for leisure—an expensive endeavor. In fact, both texts comment on how motorized transportation became a profitable enterprise within a new informal economy based on US currency.

In "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," Rick Altman states that "we need to recognize that not all genre films relate to their genre in the same way or to the same extent. By simultaneously accepting semantic and syntactic notions of genre we avail ourselves of a possible way to deal critically with differing levels of genericity" (184). As a result, it is imperative to consider how specific films create particular dialogues between a genre's semantic elements (i.e., the narrative building blocks—a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets, etc.) and its syntactic ones (e.g., the structures into which these narrative elements are inserted) (Altman 183). For road movies, these dialogues manifest through the journey as well as the places and forms of transportation that allow for it to happen. When the mode of transportation is motorized, road movies articulate a contemporary subjectivity based upon automotive technology. I would like to propose that each film's narrative creates versions and variations of subjectivities and worldviews that are connected to what is known as automobility.

In general, the concept of automobility provides an encompassing historical and theoretical framework for approaching the complex systems that have been developing since the first quarter of the twentieth century not only between people and automobiles/motorized technologies, but also with the environment (both the natural as well as the socially constructed one) and other interconnected social and economic institutions

(road developers, car manufacturers, oil refineries and suppliers, etc.). As Mike Featherstone explains, "the term automobility works off the combinations of autonomy and mobility. In its broadest sense we can think of many automobilities—modes of autonomous, self-directed movement" (1). Key here is the idea of how motorized technology allows for the interconnection of an individual's personal history with larger social, cultural, and economic discourses and structures in such a way that it allows for the emergence of a particular technologically inflected (but not determined) subjectivity.

I am interested in the way in which automobility connects with national discourses, thus providing a more specific iteration of the phenomenological experience that a film might invoke through its narrative. As Tim Edensor argues in his essay, "Automobility and National Identity," the action of driving and/or riding on motorized vehicles can be understood as part of a national identity that "is primarily constituted out of the proliferating signifiers of the nation and the everyday habits and routines which instill a sense of being in a national place" (101). Thus, the markers of what can be called a national automobility can be found in the material particularities and behavioral idiosyncrasies associated with driving motorized vehicles in a specific country.[6]

Automobility brings to the fore the paradoxical ways in which cars and roads have become highly visible yet normalized elements in many countries' quotidian life. This paradox becomes conspicuously significant in small countries like Puerto Rico. The island's small geographical boundaries (with an overall area of 3515 square miles; 100 miles long by 35 miles wide) bestow cars and highways with meanings that seldom signify escape, distraction, and freedom. According to 2011 data from the Census Bureau, Puerto Rico has some of the worst commutes in the USA. As Vickie Elmers reports, "Nearly 14% of Puerto Ricans spend at least two hours each weekday commuting to and from work. Only three states—New York, New Jersey, and Maryland—have higher portions of residents with commutes that long." Poor urban planning, inadequate public transportation, and a gradual increase in the amount of motorized vehicles (even when the overall population has decreased in recent years) account for the traffic jams that cause long commuting times.[7]

By focusing on automobility and its many elements, cultural artifacts like film allow audiences to engage directly and indirectly with these discourses as they relate to notions of Puerto Ricanness, if albeit in aesthetically specularized ways. Interestingly, discourses of automobility have

appeared in a number of Puerto Rican literary works, such as "Cuento en camino" by Ana Lydia Vega (*Falsas crónicas del sur*, 1991), "Mataperros" by Rafael Franco Steeves (*Alaska*, 2007) and *Diario de una puta humilde* by David Caleb Acevedo (2012). However, no text captures the pervasiveness of automobility in everyday life like Luis Rafael Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (1975).[8]

The insanity of a late afternoon traffic jam in San Juan's metropolitan area functions as the metaphor for unraveling the conflicting and contradictory ways in which characters from different social groups interact (or not) with one another. Benny, the upper-class spoiled young man whose parents have given him everything material, constitutes the most hyperbolic characterization of an automotive subjectivity run amok. Sánchez's description makes this characterization quite evident:

> Broken culvert, signal out of order, blinker, electric gate, speed checked by Vascar system, hill, divided highway ends, slow, school zone, slippery when wet, curve, bump, detour, men working, pedestrian crossing, pavement ends, road under construction, 25 MPH, merge, speed limit forty miles per hour, do not enter, no left turn, no right turn, no U-turn, student driver, the Highway Department regrets the inconvenience. (57–58)[9]

Gregory Rabassa explains that Benny "is in love with his Ferrari, a material thing and an extension of his very being, making him a sort of narcissist if not simply a hedonist… The car has the beauty and physical prowess that he lacks and there is a reassuring transfer of his drives" (Rabassa v). In the novel, Benny's fixation with sports cars and speed signify not only an excess associated with his upper-class upbringing, but also a material and symbolic privilege available only to very few in 1970s Puerto Rican society. In addition, Benny's disdain toward everything Puerto Rican (a position also shared by his mother, Graciela Alcántara) further complicates the novel's construction of class (and race) privilege. As a result, Benny's alienating vanity and his indifference to others (exemplified by his lack of remorse for running over and killing el Nene, the son of la China Hereje) directly links him to a sense both of upper-class righteousness and of anti-Puerto Ricanness.

In the cinematic realm, *El Clown* also interconnects its main character to a notion of automobility that specifically relates to particular Puerto Rican social and political positions. However, its main character doesn't exactly resemble Sánchez's Benny. The film tells the story of Xavier del

Monte (Israel Lugo), a small town clown and circus performer who, following a sudden impulse, leaves everything familiar and familial behind and ventures into a new life in the island's capital. After initial struggles, he fortuitously lands an ad campaign for a hot dog brand and becomes a media celebrity, the Hot Dog Clown. His newfound fame affords him a lifestyle of luxury and excess that alienates him from his family and friends. By the end, Xavier realizes that he needs to get away from the big city and go back to his humble roots as a circus performer. In order to do this, he stages a ploy that permits him to get out of his contract as the Hot Dog Clown.

In narratives constructed around journeys, the road provides a means of cultural, historical, and political signification by concretely situating and opening up the temporal as well as the spatial boundaries of the social imaginary. Multiple kinds of interactions and dialogues take place on the road allowing people to engage in complex encounters with both the Self and the Other. Because the road becomes the heterogeneous arena for the negotiation of diverse ideas, beliefs, feelings, and experiences, characters can interrogate both their own visions of the world and the elements that have been informing it and the visions of the others in order to revisit and reinvent their identities. These changes correspond to the metaphor that Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as "the road as the course of a life" (244).

The film uses a series of juxtapositions to explain the changes in the course of Xavier's life: rural versus urban, small town (Guayama) versus capital city (San Juan), circus versus television, ensemble versus star, and collective work versus individual entrepreneurialism, among others. For the most part, the film upholds morally and politically the first term in each of these binaries. In other words, *El Clown* glorifies the myth that a better quality of life exists for those who live in a communal, and family-centered, countryside setting away from the cruel and callous metropolitan areas where individualism, hedonism, and materialism rule. What interests me is how the road movie syntax—for example, the physical movement that allows Xavier to interact with other characters and situations that are different/foreign to him—becomes the narrative structure for this moral and political upholding. However, the film's syntax is not organized around one (finite) journey but several movements back and forth between the interior of the island and its capital. In this way, *El Clown* demystifies the journey as a predominantly extraordinary event and brings it into the realm of everyday life.

The road to San Juan is constructed as a seductive yet damaging path to perdition. This construction establishes an intertextual relationship between *El Clown* and another canonical Puerto Rican dramatic text, René Marqués's *La carreta* (1952). The play depicts a family of rural peasants during the early 1950s who moves from the countryside to the capital, and then to New York City in search of financial prosperity. As these characters move away from rural area and into the island's main city (and subsequently to the USA), they encounter dismay, suffering, corruption, and perversion. In the end, after the tragic death of one of its members, the surviving family members decide to return to Puerto Rico to regain their identity and dignity. Significantly, the title of the play emphasizes these characters' link to an oxcart. This rustic mode of transportation was integral to the world of agrarian life but not to the rapidly modernized and industrialized Puerto Rican society of the 1950s.

El Clown provides a comparable romantic gesture about returning to one's roots and a modest way of life. By the end of the film, Xavier decides to leave San Juan and his corporate gig behind and rejoin the small town circus that is now collectively owned by all of its members. Furthermore, the film also establishes a link between Xavier and his mode of transportation in order to chart the main character's ideological transformation. In the first half of *El Clown*, the vehicle that Xavier drives is an old, beat up Toyota Corolla 1.8. As the film's publicity material below makes evident, this car is symbolically associated with Xavier, more specifically with his small town clown persona known as Flacotroco.

This association relates to a traditional road movie trope where the motorized vehicle becomes an extension—often times a sort of hybrid—of the main character(s). It also provides further links to the notion of automobility. For example, Xavier is fixing his old car when he realizes that opportunities beyond the circus might be available to him. Tomate (Marcos Mazo), the eldest and most experienced clown, informs Xavier that a woman had been impressed with his performance as Facotroco and had expressed interest in having him audition for a TV commercial. Twice Tomate refers to this female character, Perla (Cathy Vigo), by describing her car—which is both "fancy" and "classy." In this way, Perla's social standing as a professional woman from the island's capital takes shape through the allusion to the type of car that she drives. That night, Xavier impulsively departs the circus (still in his clown outfit) without saying goodbye to his friends. He drives away to pursue his luck in San Juan. His departure is dramatically visualized through an extended sequence that

emphasizes several points of view from inside Xavier's moving car. Interestingly, the opening credits start rolling as a view from the car's back windshield shows the circus fading away in the background. The simultaneity of the diegetic action (the main character driving his old automobile) and the non-diegetic information (the rolling of the credits) creates a cinematic version of automobility (see Fig. 5.1). As a result, *El Clown* invokes the road movie genre through its syntax and semantics.

Along with charting the flight from the circus and the life that it represents, this sequence also depicts the differences between the town of Guayama—as Xavier drives around its town square—and San Juan—exemplified by bright amusement park rides from a big fair (see Fig. 5.2). These differences are important because the film wants to convey that Xavier feels out of place in the capital, especially through scenes that show him driving around the city. In addition, Xavier arrives late to the audition because his car was giving him problems (see Fig. 5.3). Xavier lands the

Fig. 5.1 Rolling of the credits in *El Clown* (Pedro Adorno and Emilio Rodríguez, 2006)

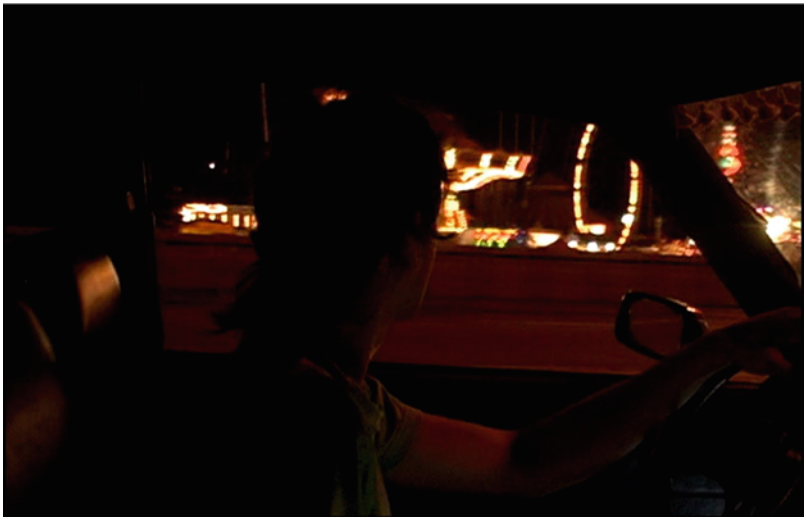

Fig. 5.2 Xavier del Monte (Israel Lugo) watches the lights from an amusement park in San Juan in the film *El Clown*

Fig. 5.3 Xavier (El Clown) is having mechanical problems with his old Toyota Corolla 1.8

leading role in an important advertising campaign that allows him to start living luxuriously. His newly found economic affluence marks a significant change from what he had available before as a small town clown. One of the first things that he does is to get a brand new car. To his friends and colleagues from the circus, the new vehicle clearly represents not only that Xavier has changed, but also that he is in the process of selling out both artistically and morally. Thus, Xavier's new motorized acquisition is apprehended as an example of how the automobile "defines the lifestyle of the consumer society" (Kornish and Mericle ix).

In many ways, cars (or any other motorized vehicle) and highways have historically become important signifiers of the processes of modernization and industrialization. The film proposes an ambivalent stance toward these processes and their outcomes through the narrative value of cars, among other things. The film ends with the revelation that Xavier has staged his own death with the help of his close friends from the circus. The narrative never clearly clarifies how this death takes place (and the film makes it clear that both the Hot Dog Clown and its performer have died according to a TV reporter). Yet, the fact that Xavier drives away from the circus while drunk suggests the possibility of an automobile accident. Although an accident is never shown, the narrative evocatively plays with this possibility, partly due to the historical connection between motorized vehicles and calamity. As Peter Wollen argues in his study of car culture, "Inevitably, cars are associated with death, not simply because of crashes but, in more general terms, because of the possibility of crashes, the possibility of loss of control and even loss of life" (14).

The film's final scene has Flacotroco and his two best friends from the Circaribe Circus laughing at the camera after having buried the Hot Dog Clown. Their reaction could be read as rejection of lifestyles that are not part of the small town/circus worldview. Although potentially noble and intriguing, this ending brings up questions about the feasibility of this political stance in contemporary Puerto Rican society. Given how small and interconnected Puerto Ricans are in the island, it is difficult for a town or a community to remove itself from the transformations that modernization and industrialization have brought to the island—exemplified mostly by the business of public relations, the medium of television, and the entrepreneurial desire to find a lucrative job. Furthermore, any venture that depends on spectators for its revenues—including a communally owned alternative circus—is part of a capitalist system that is predicated upon the commodification of audiences not only for its existence, but also

for its long-term survival. In fact, the film *El Clown* itself exemplifies an artistic product whose viability hinges on its distribution and exhibition to the largest possible number of viewers, inside and outside Puerto Rico. As a result, the text's Manichean view of Puerto Rican society and culture goes against the way in which media artifacts like films function in the globalized present.[10]

For its part, *Viernes social* proposes more exhilarating and inventive ideas about contemporary Puerto Rican subjectivities in relation to automobility. The first image boldly highlights the experimental short's intention to explore the interrelationship between automobility and gender, specifically femaleness. The film's title is part of a drawing of mountainous scenery visually divided into two parts by a road's centerline and a traffic light. The mountains clearly resemble a woman's breasts. Rather than establishing an essentialist and problematic equivalence between women and nature, the opening image alludes to women's direct participation in the island's driving landscapes and practices. In other words, *Viernes social* shows that women are central agents in the constant transformation of Puerto Rico into a dynamic space where automobility opens up the possibility of participating in the island's public sphere.

The short film depicts six women on their way to getting together for the ritual known as *viernes social*—the celebration of the end of the workweek and the beginning of the weekend. Part of this ritual is established through each woman's interrelationship with her car. Yet, these characters are not determined through their vehicles. The film suggests that cars allow their owners more access to a sense of independence and personal potentiality within Puerto Rico's quotidian life. The sense of individuality and idiosyncrasy emerges in part from the way in which each woman engages with her automobile. This engagement is visualized through different actions: taking care of the car, utilizing the automobile's security and entertainment features, using the steering wheel as an impromptu musical instrument, and even incorporating the vehicle in a dance choreography. In addition, the film deliberately emphasizes how these women have made the car into their "exceptional abode"—to invoke Baudrillard's concept—through the different accouterments displayed and the music that they play. Each woman's individuality gradually progresses into a larger female community. This progression is first suggested through some of the women's stops to use public phones during their easygoing rides (potentially to communicate with each other). By the last part of the short, the six women have come together in an open public space to be with one

Fig. 5.4 Final choreography in *Viernes Social* (Frida Medín and Viveca Vázquez, 1994)

another and express themselves, both separately and collectively, through a choreography that incorporates their cars (see Fig. 5.4).

Viernes social suggests that there are ways for women in Puerto Rico to resignify both cars and social arenas like the public sphere that have been traditionally codified as "male." As a result, the film incorporates discourses of automobility to rethink the island's material and symbolic structures of power. In addition, each woman's individual ride can be understood as a different and celebratory way of apprehending the act of driving. This action is linked both to everyday life, and to pleasurable automobile experiences that can allow people to escape their dreadful daily routines. In *Viernes social* rides do not take the form of the extraordinary long journeys often depicted in many road movies; however, they are invested with ludic qualities that nevertheless make these trips special and unique. In this way, the short film allows viewers to experience, in a mediated way, how leisure should become an essential part of experiencing automobility.

Viernes social's intriguing points about gender and automobility did not reach the same kind of wide audiences as *El Clown*. The short film was part of Vázquez's dance/performance concert *Mamagüela* (1994).[11]

As a result, the people who saw the spectacle had not specifically gone out to watch a film. It is necessary to talk about audiences because the development and success of genres depend on how filmgoers accept and recognize them as distinct film categories. When it comes to Puerto Rican cinema, audiences have not encountered films that follow the more usual iterations of the road movie genre—at least as it has taken shape in other countries. Instead, what they have seen are films that engage with the genre's syntactic and semantic elements—in particular, the organization of stories around short and finite trips, as well as the centrality of cars as generic images and narrative devices.[12]

The 2008 documentary *Isla chatarra* (Karen Rossi) asserts that Puerto Rico is "the country with the most paved roads within its territory in the world." In addition, the documentary explains that "every month, there are approximately 15,000 new and used cars coming into the country." Maybe the overabundance of cars and roads in such a small geographical area creates a claustrophobic cultural situation that cannot be encompassed by road movies' generic verisimilitude. In other words, in Puerto Rico it is almost impossible to find the escape, diversion and freedom on the road that most typical road movies use as their mythological foundation. There will always be too many vehicles on Puerto Rican streets and highways reminding us that there is nowhere else to go beyond the island's circumscribed geography.[13] Yet, that doesn't mean that Puerto Rican filmmakers should give up on exploring the possibilities of the road movie genre since the travels of the imagination that cinema invents for its followers know no boundaries.

Notes

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Parts of this project were presented at several academic conferences: Latin American Studies Association, Memories of Modernity, Puerto Rican Studies Association, and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. In addition, I was able to rehearse some of my ideas in a different language

and for a different audience through a couple of columns that I contributed to the Puerto Rican online project called *80 grados*: http://www.80grados.net/.

2. In *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*, Laura Podalsky argues that the popularity of Lain American road movies "might be attributed to their appropriation of a genre long understood as quintessentially 'American' with its attendant emotional scripts that align the viewer with the personal epiphanies of the protagonist(s) during their travels" (123).
3. This kind of dialogue can also be traced in other contemporary Latin American films that are not necessarily or cannot be clearly defined as road movies, for example, *La niña santa* (Lucrecia Martel, 2004), and *Lake Tahoe* (Fernando Eimbcke, 2008).
4. During the 1990s, Cuba experienced an extended economic crisis mainly due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was one of the island's main financial supporters. This period was characterized, among other things, by scarcity of primary goods, food rationing, and a limited use of cars.
5. Francisco González Miranda explains that in the eleven years period between 2001 and 2012, 27 feature films were produced in Puerto Rico both for theatrical and video distribution.
6. As Tim Edensor explains, "The linkages between automobility and national identity are multiple, including state regulation; the geographies of 'roadscapes'; driving practices, styles, and cultural activities carried out in cars; the auto service industries; types of journeys; the range of representation which center upon cars; everyday discourse; the economic importance of the symbolic motor industry; and the affordances of vehicles and roads" (103).
7. According to data from The World Bank, in 2015 there were 661 motor vehicles per 1,000 people in Puerto Rico (compared to 782 motor vehicles per 1,000 people in the USA). The World Bank, International Road Federation, *World Development Indicators: Traffic and Congestion*, 2014.
8. Gregory Rabassa translated Sánchez's novel under the title *Macho Camacho's Beat* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive P, 2001). The cover of the English translation emphasizes the novel's engagement with Puerto Rican automobility through its artistic depiction of the island's typical traffic congestions.
9. The original text in Spanish reads as follows: "y el curso de mi Ferrari no puede importunarse con un frenazo aquí, otro allá. Tubería rota, semáforo roto, semáforo intermitente, vigilante electrónico, velocidad comprobada por sistema Vascar, cuesta, termina la carretera dividida, reduzca la velocidad, zona escolar, resbala mojado, curva, lomo, detour, hombres trabajando, cruce de peatones, fin del pavimento, carretera en construcción, 25

MPH, confluencia, velocidad máxima cuarenta millas por hora, no entre, no vire a la izquierda, no vire a la derecha, no vire en U, aprendiz al volante, lamentamos los inconvenientes que la Autoridad de Carreteras le ocasiona" (161–162).

10. It is also possible to read the film's ending in relation to Flacotroco's trickery. By staging the death of the Hot Dog Clown, Xavier is able to get out of his contract with the public relations company and return to the small town circus.
11. For more information about Vázquez's *oeuvre*, see: *Coreografía del error: CONDUCTA de Viveca Vázquez*. San Juan: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico, 2013.
12. According to Steve Neale, generic images provide "sets of labels, terms, and expectations that…characterize the genre as a whole" (160).
13. Given Puerto Rico's current financial crisis, I wonder if local filmmakers will take advantage of the island's geographical limitations like *Guantanamera* and *Miel para Oshún* did in the case of Cuba during the 1990s.

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CHAPTER 6

Lonely Souls in *Sólo Dios Sabe* by Carlos Bolado: Pastoralism and Syncretic Spirituality in Times of Crisis

Salvador Oropesa

In his study of twenty-first-century Mexican cinema, Frederick Luis Aldama argues that most Mexican movies fall into the categories of either *refritos* or *buena onda*. With the term *refrito*, Aldama refers to contemporary commercial films that "rely on ready-made conventions and clichés to trigger only a rather limited set of emotions in their audiences" (90). Devoid of a unique filmic style, most of these films are not properly anchored in their time–space coordinates and, therefore, fail to provide a coherent narrative. *Buena onda* films do not depart from formulaic patterns and instead carry with them a certain auteur aura that caters to a left-leaning, middle class and educated international audience (100–101). However, they share with pastiche-like *refritos* the fact that they never draw spectators outside of their comfort zone (90). Among the *buena onda* films, Aldama mentions international blockbusters such as Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001) and *Children of Men* (2006), and Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006). Though ethically well intentioned, these films offer only superficial sociopolitical commentary to

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satisfy international audiences. For Aldama, this leads to a weakening of politically committed filmmaking and, moreover, to the end of any profound exploration of the particular realities of contemporary Mexico. Ignacio Sánchez Prado has also argued that political discourse in Mexican cinema has gradually lost importance, since film production has transformed to adapt to the pressures of international markets. But for him this internationalization of Mexican cinema does not lead to a complete erasure of the preoccupation with Mexican national identity or with political critique. Sánchez Prado attributes the rise of global auteurs such as Cuarón, González Iñárritu, and Guillermo del Toro to their effective integration of cinematic codes that resonate well in the global circuits of the industry along with their delivery of an accurate sense of "localized expression" (157). Part of that is a concern with sociopolitical critique, even if this critique does not come in the form of the 1960s Third Cinema, but rather by exposing "the systemic failure of the Mexican State in preserving the spaces of modernity enjoyed by the new moviegoing audience" in the neoliberal period (108).

In this essay, I propose to consider the upsurge of the road movie genre in Mexico against the backdrop of this shifting scenario of the Mexican film industry delineated by Aldama and Sánchez Prado. Although traditionally identified with the mobility of the postwar American society, the road movie has become a genre enjoyed by transnational audiences and, thus, a suitable vehicle to reflect on shifting local, national, and regional realities while still appealing to global viewers. By reflecting, performing, and sometimes questioning the principles and repercussions of the post-1988 neoliberal transformation of the country, the road movie has become a trademark genre, to examine what Sánchez Prado aptly calls "the neoliberal gaze" of contemporary Mexican cinema (105). In the next brief section, I will describe how some of the main achievements of the road genre in recent years in Mexico explore the anxieties over the crisis of democracy and the role of the nation-state in the era of neoliberalism. In the rest of the essay, I will focus on the film *Sólo Dios sabe* (Carlos Bolado, 2006) as a cogent example of a *buena onda* movie that pleases and seduces the spectator with its transnational stars, road movie iconography, and a conventional heterosexual love story to convey its ideological matrix. I will show how Bolado uses this film to reinstate some of the core elements of traditional Mexican identity—above all, patriarchal masculinity and a syncretic form of Catholicism—that seem to have left society without stable references as a result of Mexico's neoliberal transformation.

The Neoliberal Nation-State on the Road

The well-crafted Mexican road movies *Sin dejar huella* (María Novaro, 2000) and *Y tu mamá también* successfully challenged the obsolete model of the homogeneous nation-state the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) schizophrenically redesigned between the administrations of Luis Echeverría (1970–76) and the Miguel de la Madrid (1982–88). In barely 20 years, PRI moved Mexico from a self-conscious "Third World" model, part of the non-allied movement following the leadership of countries like India and Egypt, to a neoliberal free-market economy. Both models paradoxically shared a strong belief in the centrality of the nation-state, resilient nationalism, and a strategic survival of monopolies. Mexico evolved in two decades from autarkic tendencies to NAFTA and OECD membership in 1994. Both films suggested that the pact between the economic and political elites and the middle class had been broken. This pact was a PRI fantasy that we can trace back to *Nueva grandeza mexicana* (1947) by Salvador Novo, the blueprint of Mexican modernity as well as a road chronicle of Mexico City. Its two protagonists, the narrator and his provincial friend from Monterrey, keep on moving, mostly by bus and car. They share the kinetic quality of movies in general and road movies in particular. They visit restaurants, museums, theaters, markets, and gardens as they stroll through the city. Quite literally, they represent a nation in motion. At the cinematic level, *Nosotros los pobres* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1947) and its sequel *Ustedes los ricos* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1948) epitomize this social pact. The protagonist of both films, Pepe el Toro (Pedro Infante), accepts and embodies the predominant values in the name of all Mexicans.[1] Cuarón challenged this illusion of homogeneity at the core of the liberal definition of the modern nation-state by bringing queer desire to the forefront of his movie and, thereby, by probing the heteronormative ideal sustaining Mexican society (Oropesa). María Novaro's film contested the myth of the border that fuels certain narratives of Mexican economic growth and the prevalence of patriarchy in society. *Sin dejar huella* offered spectators a socioeconomic utopia based on the touristic exploitation of the Riviera Maya and on the solidarity among women, thus subverting male-centric versions of national identity (Soliño).

These two road movies addressed the anxieties about the progressive failure of the democratic institutions and about the inability of the nation-state to create a master narrative to define Mexicanness. This is the reason why the extradiegetic narrator of *Y tu mamá también* explains to the

spectator the vicissitudes of ordinary Mexicans, including marginalized indigenous populations, while the main protagonists are oblivious to them. Similarly, the subjective camera in *Sin dejar huella* shows the spectator the devastating effects of floods and the militarization of Mexican roads. These two movies revived and popularized the road movie genre in Mexico, as attested by the plethora of titles that followed them: *Por la libre* (Juan Carlos Llaca, 2000), *Amor xtremo* (Chava Cartas, 2006), *Bienvenido paisano* (Rafael Villaseñor, 2006), *Voy a explotar* (Gerardo Naranjo, 2008), *Sin nombre* (Cary Fukunaga, 2009) *Viaje redondo* (Gerardo Tort, 2009), *A tiro de piedra* (Sebastián Hiriart, 2010), *Vete más lejos Alicia* (Elisa Miller, 2010), *Road to Juárez* (David de León, 2013), *Viento aparte* (Alejandro Gerber Bicecci, 2014), *Seguir viviendo* (Alejandra Sánchez, 2014), and *600 millas* (Gabriel Ripstein, 2014), to name only a few. They also established valid parameters for the genre to explore the positive transformations as well as some of the limitations of the nation-state in its neoliberal phase: the ethnic, regional, and class diversity of Mexico and the socioeconomic asymmetries still related to that diversity; the incessantly evolving concept of family; and certain shortcomings of modernity—underemployment, drug trafficking, and state violence. Last, but certainly not least, these two films initiated a stylistic trend that would become a signature element of Mexican road movies, and of most of the *buena onda* films conceptualized by Aldama: stylistic shots of a variety of Mexican landscapes, using impeccable, National Geographic-style cinematography to impress transnational audiences.

Lonely Souls Hit the Road

Sólo Dios sabe (Carlos Bolado, 2006) is a Mexico-Brazil coproduction that tries to attract international audiences not only by co-opting the global appeal of the road movie syntax but also by relying on the popularity of its two transnational stars, Diego Luna and Alice Braga. Luna was already a global road movie star, thanks to his role in *Y tu mamá también*; Braga became known with the Brazilian hit *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002). These two films launched their subsequent international careers.[2] In *Sólo Dios sabe* Bolado casts them as two lonely souls who meet by chance and take a road trip that will change their lives.[3] The two protagonists are successful and educated professionals whose careers nonetheless fail to provide fulfillment. Damián (Diego Luna) is a reporter

for the progressive *La Jornada*, one of the largest Mexican newspapers and maybe the most influential from a cultural point of view, with collaborators such as Elena Poniatowska. Dolores (Alice Braga) is a lecturer or a graduate student from Brazil who teaches contemporary Latin American art at San Diego State University. We see her lecturing at SDSU, in English, on two Mexican-American artists, Tatiana Parcero (1967–) and Erika Harrsch (1970–), who are, according to her, followers of the Cuban-American performance artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985). The movie introduces Damián and Dolores as competent professionals so that the importance of their careers can be erased as soon as they meet and fall in love.

We will soon learn that they are drawn together because of the emptiness surrounding both of their lives. In Dolores's case, her frustration comes from the disappointing affair she is having with a married man, Jonathan (José María Yazpik), a Chicano professor. We see them having sex in Jonathan's office and, following a traditional plot established since the realist novel in the nineteenth century, viewers should expect that the woman who acts upon her desire and has a sexual affair with a married man will be harshly punished (Martín Gaite 72). Dolores's adultery is sterile, lacking any subversive value and eroticism; it is just Dolores under the yoke of patriarchy.[4] The editing of the sex scene uses references to Christmas and a picture of Jonathan's family in the background to symbolically censure the sex act. As Dolores reaches her climax, extreme close ups of each eye and of her face have the effect of distancing the spectator from her. Saddened because Jonathan will spend Christmas with his family, Dolores agrees to go to Tijuana with some friends to have a good time dancing and drinking. That is where she meets Damián. While Dolores dances with her friends, Damián, in a cliché image of Mexican popular music, literature, and cinema, drowns his sorrows in tequila while staring at her. Drunkenness is indeed a staple of Mexican cinema. According to Carlos Monsiváis (referring to Pedro Infante):

> Un recordatorio: la embriaguez es un elemento primordial en la filmografía de Infante. Hace las veces, según la perspicacia de la época, de emergente del inconsciente, de convocatoria irresistible a decir la verdad, de escenario donde algunos actos reprobables, si son auténticos, obtienen la aprobación. Y son tres sus motivos centrales: la venganza de la ingrata "que trató de abandonarme"; las vicisitudes del dogma: "La familia es el único tema de nuestras vidas", y las ganas de fiesta. (206)

> A reminder: drunkenness is a key element in Infante's cinematography. It fulfills different roles at different moments in time: it shows the unconscious of the character, his irresistible desire to tell the truth, and the stage where reprehensible acts are approved if they are authentic. There are three reasons for drunkenness: the revenge on the ungrateful woman "who tried to abandon me," the dogma of family, the only topic of our lives, and the desire for partying (my translation).

We learn that Damián is drinking because he is getting over a toxic romantic relationship. A shot of his cellphone screen shows that he has purposely missed thirteen calls, most likely from his ex-girlfriend.

A prior scene in the parking lot of the Tijuana club foreshadows that both characters are destined to meet. Dolores arrives with her friends and they try to park in the spot at the precise moment that Damián is crossing it. Without an editing cut, Damián continues advancing toward the camera until his image completely obscures the car. This key scene not only suggests that their fates will soon coincide—as in their visual consolidation in the parking lot shot—but also identifies Damián as the true protagonist of the movie. The narrative device that triggers their meeting is that Dolores has her passport stolen from the car and cannot return to the USA without going to the Brazilian embassy in Mexico City to get a new passport. Because she is sexually harassed at the bus station, she requests a ride from Damián, who had given her a business card at the club the night before, and who just completed an assignment at the border and is on his way back by car to Mexico City. The passport is just a MacGuffin, a device to set the plot in motion. As Monsiváis puts it masterfully in the aforementioned quote, the dogma is full of vicissitudes; life is presented as a collection of random acts that only God can decipher, as the title of the movie indicates. With that uncertainty, the protagonists—and the viewers—hit the open road.

Pastoralism and Spiritual Renewal

From the moment the two protagonists hit the road, *Sólo Dios sabe* follows the conventional plot that, according to David Bordwell, characterizes contemporary cinema by intermingling two stories: a heterosexual love story and a complex second conflict (*Minding* 115, *Way* 42). In this case, this second conflict is the progressive weakening of traditional elements that sustained national narratives in modern Mexico—patriarchal

masculinity, the nuclear family, and Catholicism—which the film will try to restore. As the movie progresses, viewers realize that the nuclear family is a key element under siege in this fictional world. Both protagonists have lost a family member (Damián's mother and Dolores's father), and the implication is that this loss is partly responsible for the emptiness in their lives. This will change during the road trip from Tijuana to Mexico City, and later when they reunite in Brazil, as they will grow close to form a family unit that, reminiscent of foundational Latin American fictions, allegorically restores the missing (national) order in the aftermath of neoliberal shift—both in Mexico and Brazil. Related to that, the trip will be full of spiritual implications, as the characters develop a personalized, syncretic religion that helps them endure the emptiness they felt in the individualistic and materialistic society in which they lived.

Damián and Dolores live in two oppressive metropolises (Damián in Mexico City and Dolores in San Diego and Sao Paulo). Their sudden contact with nature will bring authenticity to their lives, once they embrace the pastoral ideal of true love. As David Laderman explains, pastoralism is a recurrent motif of the road movie. The yearning to escape confining urban centers goes hand in hand with "a compulsion to rediscover nature and taste the unpredictable wilderness" (18). Pastoral nature is in harmony with the lovers. Once they leave their jobs behind, they become like the mythical shepherds of bucolic animist literature and their main worry will be love and the search for truth. They become mythical creatures subject to the vicissitudes of metamorphosis. The beautiful scenery and the attractiveness of the protagonists establish the bucolic stage upon which they will play out their lives. The cinematography of Federico Barbabosa emphasizes natural beauty: gorges, volcanos, rivers, the desert, the skyline, and people of all ages and races. In the orthodox logic of the road genre, this outer beauty corresponds with the inner beauty of their souls.

Dolores and Damián begin their trip on Revolución Street in Tijuana, and a real revolution is about to begin in their lives. They meet at a restaurant, and an old lady, a street vendor, is selling prayer cards. Damián buys *Nuestra Señora del Rayo* (our lady of Thunders) and Dolores chooses el *Ánima Sola* (the Lonely Soul). Our lady of Thunders is a Mexican icon from Guadalajara that brings an omen, a destiny, and true friendship to those who pray to her. Let us not forget that at this point Damián's job has become irrelevant and from now on his only tasks are pursuing love and mourning of the loss of his mother, just like in the Renaissance eclogues.

Damián and Dolores become shepherds in a postmodern pastoral scenery. Therefore, they will receive the omen, destiny, and true friendship promised in their prayer cards. In this case, it is more like an oracle. Dolores's soul, like that of *el ánima sola*, will be redeemed from the purgatory in which she is imprisoned. This is the most important part of the movie because the protagonists return ideologically to the beginning of the conquest of the New Spain, at the peak of Platonic animism in Spain when Garcilaso de la Vega was writing his eclogues.[5]

The movie establishes Dolores as a soul in the process of liberation. The reason why Damián does not buy the same card as Dolores does is because he already has the same one on his altar in his apartment in Mexico City. He is another soul in the process of liberation. Once these lonely souls go forth together into the world, harmony will be restored and nature will show its perfection. For example, the rivers will flow as in the poetry of Garcilaso. But when they return to civilization, Mexico City, the focus will change to the pain of bereavement, again echoing Garcilaso's eclogues. During the road trip, though, Dolores and Daniel become loving shepherds. As in the cultural tradition inaugurated by the eclogues, they will be two private lives in the public space of the cinema. The epitome of the harmony between lovers and nature is that Dolores will get pregnant even though she was supposed to be sterile. The lovers play in the flowing waters of the river beneath the volcano Paricutín, and several hours later, after the fiesta, they make love in the rain.

The road trip in *Sólo Dios sabe* is loaded with preindustrial iconography to make the pastoral setting visible and viable. As Devin Orgeron contends, although the road movie tends to commend forward motion, this celebration is sometimes "a self-consciously tragic cover for a desire to roll history back, to return to a pre-technological, mythically innocent moment" (31). At a timeless *taquería,* Dolores and Damián eat corn tortilla tacos of carne asada and drink *pulque*[6] instead of the spurious cocktails of the Tijuana club. In Michoacán, they dance at the *moros y cristianos* (Moors and Christians) festivities in honor of Saint James. They swim in a wild river, and Dolores covers herself with a *rebozo* bought by her *galán*, just as Dolores del Río did in an Indio Fernández movie.[7] They sleep at an old hotel without any modern amenities, except that for breakfast you can have Nescafé with a dash of cocaine, the breakfast of truck drivers. It is a Mexico without gas stations, Oxxo convenience stores, hotel chains, or Walmarts. They mostly meet people who practice ancestral traditions or who live in backwardness. These people never achieve any narrative

significance; they serve as mere background to embody preindustrial and pretechnological innocence.

Once the two main characters have been associated with traditional Catholic imagery, it is the car's turn. Damián and Dolores have to traverse the *La Rumorosa* (The Murmuring) highway to drive from Tijuana to Sonoyta and begin making their way south to Mexico City. At the top of La Rumorosa, Damián blesses his car, a gold Plymouth Valiant convertible. He sprinkles blessed water on the car and opens a small portable altar with the image of Saint Christopher, the giant who, according to tradition, helped baby Jesus to cross a dangerous river. As I mentioned before, moving water is a leitmotif of the movie. The credits open with a young Dolores floating on a flowing river like Ophelia in the pre-Raphaelite painting by John Everett Millais (Kiefer 18–19). In the description of Ophelia's death in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare stresses the presence of shepherds, those who give names to the elements of the pastoral setting, and the mermaid resemblance that the body of Ophelia acquires (Act IV, scene 7, 165–82).

The blessing of the car is an important part of the movie because Damián opens himself up in front of Dolores, a feminist scholar, as a person of faith, a syncretic Mexican Catholic who mixes pre-Hispanic traditions and the Catholicism of the viceroyalty. This is important because it is an unorthodox Catholicism full of medieval remnants. Thanks to the influence of Damián, Dolores will also pursue her religious soul and will try to make sense of the recurring dream of her body floating in the running waters of a river. She will visit her nanny in Salvador (Bahia), will be initiated in *candomblé* and will discover that her great-grandmother was of African descent. She is not a mestizo subject, but a mulatta. Dolores moves from being a feminist scholar to becoming a bucolic shepherdess, Ophelia, a nymph, and Yemayá (the god mother associated with water and the protector of pregnant women). She will acquire in herself a plethora of female essentialisms, thus connecting with a long-standing cultural tradition. In this sense, let us remember that Hamlet calls Ophelia "nymph" during the nunnery scene (Act III, scene I, 89–90). The amalgam of beautiful souls of pastoral was already present in *Hamlet* (1599–1602) as well as in Garcilaso's third eclogue (1533).

La Rumorosa and the volcano Paricutín represent sacred places the traveler must revere and overcome to succeed in the trip of life. Like Death Valley in such Hollywood movies as John Ford westerns and the quintessential road movie, *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), La Rumorosa and

Paricutín are two icons of the Mexican landscape. The first one is a terrifying mountain pass scattered with the wrecks of hundreds of car chassis. Like a Mesoamerican god (or goddess), La Rumorosa, which is a feminine name in Spanish, seems to demand the sacrifice of modern cars to let the chosen ones cross through her. La Rumorosa is placed in mythical Aztlán, where according to tradition Mexicas began their pilgrimage in search of an eagle devouring a snake on a nopal. We see the cars through Dolores's eyes, long shot frames, and extreme long shot frames. She appears to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the tragedy and begins to understand the ritual Damián is performing. Through this montage from different distances and angles, Dolores—and the transnational viewers who are the intended target audience—begin to discover Mexico.

The role of Dolores is to move from a feminist scholar to a mother; from the lover of a married man to a true, essential woman, at peace with her ancestral heritage; from sterility to fertility. Also, much like Ophelia or Elisa in Garcilaso's first eclogue, she goes from life to death because she is ignorant of her fate. This aspect unfolds even at the expense of reversing some of the road genre's primary signifiers: getting behind the wheel as an emblem of agency. During the road trip, Damián lets Dolores drive. Viewers see her basking in happiness as she accepts because she has the illusion that she is in control of her destiny. However, the real protagonist of *Sólo Dios sabe* is Damián, just as in the eclogues the protagonists are the male shepherds. Damián is a contemporary version of Pedro Infante, as he represents idealized middle-class/popular values that characterize the moral principles of the common people.

As so often happens in road movies, the shared space of the automobile creates an intimacy between the travelers that will develop as acute sexual tension during the hotel scene. Damián rents a room with only one bed, even though the hotel is practically empty. When Damián uses the bathroom Dolores spies on him and checks his wallet to find a prayer card of Saint Christopher, protector of travelers; a Cruz Azul soccer team season pass; and a picture of his ex-girlfriend.[8] There is an awkward shot when Dolores is changing into a comfortable T-shirt for sleep. Damián turns around to give her some privacy, but the camera allows the spectator to see Dolores's breasts in the mirror. This is followed by a scene in which both protagonists share the bed until they fall asleep. A zenithal shot shows their physical proximity, which, given that they are not a couple yet, reinforces their uncomfortable situation. Dolores awakens in the middle of the night and realizes Damián is missing. She looks for him and finds him

sleeping on the floor, the offer that he had made to act as a gentleman when they entered the room and Dolores rejected. Now we see Dolores's subjective view as she scans Damián's body; he is shirtless, and he has unzipped his pants to be more comfortable. Dolores admires his torso all the way down to his boxers. This time the camera reverses gender roles as the woman admires the man's body.

The dingy motel that just barely meets the travelers' need to rest is one of the many elements of road movie iconography that Bolado incorporates to reshape the quest motif that drives this journey within the framework of automotive modernity. As soon as Damián and Dolores leave the motel in the morning, a jump cut takes us from an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe hanging in the hotel cafeteria to the dangling Virgen de Guadalupe Damián has hung on the rear view mirror of his car. According to David Laderman, the frequent use of frame compositions that include rear view mirrors has several narrative and stylistic functions in road movies. First of all, it serves to provide the driver's point of view. Also, these framing techniques typically take on a reflexive function, underlining "the crucial act of looking and seeing while driving" as well as calling attention to the very presence of the camera. Furthermore, these mirror shots help "visualize aesthetically the theme of self-exploration as a projection of self through space" (16). In the particular scene I am describing, Damián puts his cowboy hat on and checks himself in this mirror. Though it seems he is doing so to flirt with Dolores, the reflection device also serves to project the main protagonist onto the car and into the territory they are traversing, thus further anchoring this film in the aesthetic of the road movie.

Another staple of road movies present in *Sólo Dios sabe* is the "campfire scene" in which the characters spend the night in the wilderness. The Plymouth overheats, and they have to stop in a small town in Michoacán so that Damián can put water in the radiator. As it happens throughout the movie, water is used as a symbol of the natural flow of life and the allure of the organic as opposed to the constraints of modernity and urban civilization—enhanced by the car breakdown, the literal failure of the modern machine—on these two characters. But there is more to the symbolic meaning of the water in this segment of the film. Dolores leads Damián to her natural habitat, the river. Let us not forget the recurring Ophelia flashback of a young Dolores floating in the water, almost like a nymph. They both get wet in a playful mood and Dolores starts seducing Damián. They talk and Damián surprises Dolores when he tells her that he is an admirer of the works of Ana Mendieta. This is farfetched but

plausible because Mendieta worked in Mexico and Damián works in a high brow newspaper. At this point Dolores asks Damian to create a silhouette of her in the sand in the style of Mendieta. After this scene they go back to town and immerse themselves in the festivities of Saint James; the religious fiesta is a liminal time where they can stop the time of modernity, so to speak, with its confining teleological dimension and become themselves by the grace of nature. At this point they are no longer a journalist and a graduate student, but two lonely and beautiful souls ready to become one.

When Damián and Dolores join the procession honoring Saint James and the festival of the "moros y cristianos"—an anachronistic re-enactment of a medieval historical event of the Iberian Peninsula—they immerse themselves in an ancestral tradition and a sanctified, nontemporal space. With this festival, the local people of Michoacán commemorate the fight of the Iberian kingdoms against the moors, who in the festival represent the others and, ironically, themselves; the Christian victory is the assumption of their own defeat to the impulse of the Christian civilization but also the birth of a new identity that is accepted not as a mirror image of the Spaniard but as a new syncretic self. Damián and Dolores join the procession not as mere tourists, but rather as sudden members of a community of believers who do not question the dogma. Instead, they embrace it, dance to the music, drink the sacred drink—the *pulque*—and Dolores wears the *rebozo* of the local women.

After the festivities, they watch the fireworks (associated with sex at least since Alfred Hitchcock created this metaphor in *To catch a Thief* in 1955), and start making love passionately on top of the car.[9] This is another staple of road movies, the *ménage a trois* in which the protagonists make love sheltered, caressed, and protected by the car. The scene is conventionally shot by moving from crane shot of the protagonists and to slowly getting closer and closer to the lovers until we reach a close up of their erotic ecstasies while the rain, another form of natural moving water, cleanses and baptizes them in the new syncretic religion they have embraced during the Saint James festivities. The action cuts to the interior of the car, where they are trying to dry themselves, get warm, and reflect on what they have done. In reality, there is not much to reflect. After their physical union, their souls have become blissfully one or separate in sorrow. Dolores' name in Spanish means "sorrow," and when Damián asks her if she is Lola, a nickname associated with eroticism, she denies it and claims her spiritually infused name, Dolores.

This love scene is very different from the meaningless and sterile one with the professor that opened the film. Dolores and Damián do not know it yet, but the saint and the sacred volcano and nature performed the promised miracle: The sterile Dolores is pregnant and eventually will give birth to a member of the cosmic race, as theorized by José Vasconcelos in *La raza cósmica* (1925), a beautiful European/Mexica/African girl, daughter of the Americas.[10] According to Devin Orgeron, the campfire scene "serves not only as a break in the kineticism of travel, but also to establish the connection to home that is so important to all road movies" (66). In this case, it fills the vacancy of a true home. Damián's apartment is not exactly full of life except for one big cockroach that intends to share the bed with the lovers, and the house of Dolores's mother is a luxurious minimalist, but cold, space inhabited by a heartless woman. The apartment of Dolores's grandmother exposes her to the rituals of *candomblé* like the sacred stones but also to the void of her absence after her death. The romantic union of Damián and Dolores achieves cosmic dimensions in the narrative. Just as Petrarch and Garcilaso made their romance languages harmonic with nature during the Renaissance, Bolado used Spanish and Portuguese as equal languages, languages of their cultures and religions, languages of flowing waters. Along these lines, the end of the movie is a fluvial trip. Damián and his daughter are going to scatter a wreath of flowers and a picture of Dolores into the waters of Bahia, meaning that the nymph Dolores returns to her origin in a candomblé ceremony to her mother Yemayá.

Conclusion

Sólo Dios sabe is a paradigmatic example of the increasing "cultural internationalization" of contemporary Mexican cinema (Sánchez Prado 157). In the wake of neoliberalism, the Mexican film industry has had to redefine itself in relation to the flow of capital—both economic and symbolic—that circulates on a global scale. Mexican cinema has had to find a way to carve out a niche within the competitive and asymmetrical networks of the transnational film industry. But, as Sánchez Prado convincingly argues, the most successful products of this neoliberal era of Mexican cinema do not seek to erase the preoccupation with the national context, but rather to resituate it in a complex negotiation with global cultural elements. Bolado's film should be ultimately understood along these lines. The characters in this film are set in motion to search for liberation of their sorrows

and existential frustrations. Interestingly, they find that liberation not only through love, but also, and most strikingly, through a syncretic form of spirituality that is offered as the only solution to restore order in the neoliberal era. Syncretic Catholicism brings together the two lonely souls in an essentialist unity that reinstates traditional gender roles: the central role of the caring patriarch and a modern nymph who merges with nature once she has fulfilled her maternal role. The film renovates some of the key elements underpinning traditional Mexicanness—patriarchal masculinity, the nuclear family, and Catholicism—and thus uses the road movie as a generic template for a search for a renewed national identity. Aldama might be right: *Buena onda* movies do not take the spectator out of his or her comfort zone; instead, *Sólo Dios sabe* borrows elements of the Renaissance eclogue and the spiritual roots of the neoliberal nation-state to take us on a tour of pastoral beauty, bliss, and sorrow.

Notes

1. Pedro Infante, in his role of Pepe el Toro, is considered the epitome of Mexicanness, although he was not the only one fulfilling this role. Indio Fernández, Jorge Negrete, Cantinflas, Dolores del Río, and Sara García also played the same role.
2. Interestingly, Braga and Luna have recently met again in the Hollywood blockbuster *Elysium* (2013) directed by Neill Blomkamp, a 115 million USD (imdb estimate) science fiction movie.
3. This is not Bolado's first venture into the road movie. His debut as a feature-film director came with the excellent *Bajo California: El límite del tiempo* (1998), which was honored with Ariel Awards, including best film, best editing, and best actor.
4. I understand that the adulterer is Jonathan and that Dolores is unmarried, but in the patriarchal logic of melodrama she will be blamed and punished with death. Jonathan will just be forgotten.
5. Garcilaso de la Vega (1501–1536) was a poet-soldier famous for adapting the themes and poetic techniques of the Italian Rennaissance into Spain.
6. *Pulque* is a fermented alcoholic beverage traditional in Central Mexico. It dates back to the Mesoamerican period, when it was a sacred beverage that signified class status.
7. A *rebozo* is a long garment that women have worn in Mexico since at least the early Colonial period. It provides warmth to their bodies, and it can be made of cotton, wool, rayon, or silk.
8. A *capitalino* can be a fan of three soccer teams: América, associated with the upper class; UNAM, the university team; and Cruz Azul, a middle-

class/working-class team. A Cruz Azul fan is typically cast as a down-to-earth person.

9. This is not the only homage to Hitchcock in the movie. The floating body of Dolores evokes that of Madeleine/Judie in *Vertigo* (1958), in itself a reference to a famous John Everett Millais painting (Kiefer 25).
10. By Mexica, I mean a member of any of the ethnic groups that lived in Mexico before Hernán Cortés.

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CHAPTER 7

Tania Hermida's *Qué tan lejos*: Bending Conventions on the Road to Cuenca

Carolina Rueda

Since the 1990s, filmmakers from different Latin American countries have been taking risks, distancing themselves from using films as political texts, and experimenting with genres such as the road movie, science fiction, action, and suspense. Genre films exist and continue to proliferate in Latin America despite possible underestimation of or criticism against them, which relates, in one way or another, to a rejection of the genre aesthetics of Hollywood's commercial cinema, often seen as artificial and/or formulaic.

The history of Ecuadorian cinema strays little from this changing scenario. In the twentieth century, Ecuadorian cinema was rather unstable. It developed slowly, with, for the most part, fiction and documentaries that addressed historical and sociological topics, or introspective expositions on families, memories, and tradition, with limited distribution and attendance, while the presence of Hollywood blockbusters continued to grow. Near the turn of the century, however, with the release in 1999 of Sebastián Cordero's very successful film *Ratas, Ratones y Rateros*, a new trend in Ecuadorian films marked a shift toward representations of urban complexities like those in Cordero's film and the ones that surfaced soon after in the equally successful Mexican film *Amores perros* (Alejandro Gónzalez

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Iñárritu, 2000) and the Brazilian film *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002). After the founding in 2006 of the *Consejo Nacional de Cinematografía* (National Cinematography Council), which opened up financing possibilities for film development in Ecuador, the production of films that addressed topics relative to the middle class, urban subjects, and youth and female sensibilities increased substantially.[1]

Film director Tania Hermida contributed to this change by introducing the road movie genre into the Ecuadorian film scenario with her film *Qué tan lejos* (2006). An interesting aspect of this film is the fusion of different trends and traditions to which Hermida neither commits, nor fully opposes. Two premises lend a special hybrid quality to this film. On the one hand, it incorporates many of the distinctive visual characteristics of the classic road movie genre, while also including specificities and concerns of a sociopolitical nature not often seen in classic road movies. On the other hand, social issues and politics are not central to the film. By limiting the use of these topics, recurrent and important in the filmography of Ecuador (and Latin America in general), while experimenting with genre, *Qué tan lejos* displayed new cinematic potentials and qualities for filmmaking in Ecuador, which, without a doubt, drew the attention of local and international audiences.[2] In this sense, Hermida's film is doubly innovative. As Timothy Corrigan suggests, *fusion* is a consequence of the instability of the genre: "Since there never could be a film that represents the pure or classical genre … especially with the generic pastiches of contemporary movies (the blending of sci-fi, romance, and the western as one film, for instance) … genre seems invariably to overdetermine, mimic, repeat, and shuffle its structures [and] cannot be ritualized according to a single transhistorical pattern" (138). The instability that results from fusing or combining styles, trends, and traditions that Corrigan describes becomes the distinctive quality in Hermida's film.

Qué tan lejos tells the story of Tristeza (Cecilia Vallejo) and Esperanza (Tania Martínez), two middle-class women in their twenties who meet on a bus before starting a journey from Quito to Cuenca. Their reasons for traveling are rather different: Esperanza, a Spaniard, *hopes*[3] to see the stereotypical beauty of Ecuador as described by other European travelers and in travel guides. Tristeza, a *Quiteña*,[4] needs to get to Cuenca as fast as possible to stop her former boyfriend Daniel from marrying another woman. The film shows the two women as they hop on and off a series of moving vehicles on their way through rural Ecuador, slowly becoming friends and discovering their ideological differences. Esperanza, the older

of the two, is detached, unconcerned, and able to adjust to obstacles and unexpected events with enjoyment and curiosity. Unlike Esperanza, Tristeza is serious and complex. During the journey she discusses some of her country's social and political problems and also engages in heated arguments with her Spanish companion about fundamental differences between Spain and Latin America. The event that advances the narrative is a strike initiated by a group of indigenous men and women, interrupting the flow of vehicles on the road that connect Quito with Cuenca. As they travel, Hermida posits a contradiction between the natural beauty of the country, which is what Esperanza sees, and the reality of the country, in part responsible for Tristeza's *sadness*[5] and critical stance. In the final scenes, after joining two men (Jesús María Borrero Márquez and, later, Juan Andrés Ponce León), the two female travelers arrive in Cuenca, and despite the frustration of Tristeza's initial plan, the film ends with a bittersweet reflection about friendship and the paradoxes of life as a *sad* (Tristeza) and *hopeful* (Esperanza) journey.

The film begins with an image of Esperanza arriving at the Quito airport from Spain. An off-camera voice describes who she is, where she comes from, and gives specific details about her personal life:

> Esperanza del Carmen Sánchez Cruz, born in Barcelona on May 11th 1979. Daughter of Cándido and Gracia, veterinary and telephone operator, respectively, both of Andalusian descent. Weight at birth: four kilos. Age of first period: twelve. Relevant family pathologies: her grandmother was diabetic; her father suffered from chronic depression and died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-one. Known best to her friends as Espe, her grandparents used to call her Baby, and her father, Carmenza.[6]

Initially, the viewer is given the image of Esperanza as a self-assured, fearless woman who is thrilled with her experience in the foreign country. However, the off-camera voice exposes her private life, and the personal information given makes her appear different, even vulnerable and insecure. This narrative device—an omniscient female narrator who knows more about the character than she seems to know about herself—is used several times in the film to describe other characters and locations, unifying the film's episodic structure. From this point on, Esperanza's actions and comments will be mediated by what the audience already knows about her life. This type of all-knowing narrator, not uncommon in Latin American cinema, played a prominent role in Alfonso Cuarón's

coming-of-age Mexican road movie *Y tu mamá también* (2001). In this film, the voice-over interrupts the action several times, and, as described by Roberto Forns-Broggi, "provides information about the past, accentuates aspects of the present, and anticipates the future, what surpasses the tale itself" (170).[7] It also reveals specific details about the teenage protagonists Julio (Gael García Bernal) and Tenoch (Diego Luna), about their families, their girlfriends, and details that these self-centered adolescents don't know about each other or about their country. The narrator describes the rural/migrant Mexican poor, enabling the audience to accurately place the two characters within the Mexican class structure. As in *Qué tan lejos*, the voice-over lets the audience "know more," which simultaneously makes the characters much more vulnerable.[8]

An extradiegetic narrator that provides information about the characters or complements parts of the story has been quite common in films from Argentina.[9] Regarding Argentine road movies, in *Historias extraordinarias* (Mariano Llinás, 2009) the voice-over device becomes central to the narrative, deconstructing events that take place and even "thinking" for the viewer or guiding him or her toward a particular point of view. In *Cassandra* (Inés de Oliveira Cézar, 2012), the voices of two different narrators—the female protagonist (a journalist traveling through the Chaco region in northern Argentina to report on the precarious situation of isolated indigenous communities) and an omniscient male narrator—alternate throughout the film. The female voice describes her own difficulties while traveling, and the male voice analyzes her circumstances and her ultimate disappearance. In *Qué tan lejos*, the voice-over also introduces the viewer to Tristeza, the other female protagonist. We find out that her name is María Teresa Hernández Larréa, that she was born in 1982, and that she goes to college in Quito. We learn that she calls herself Tristeza, a self-selected name that fully concurs with her gloomy and complex personality. This characteristic becomes evident at the beginning of the film when she obsessively writes and erases three different versions of a letter to her former boyfriend, Daniel. The voice-over in *Qué tan lejos* is descriptive, cold, and undetached. Its scarce appearance sets a tone of melancholy but doesn't participate in any other way or guide the narrative toward a given perspective, as it does in *Y tu mamá también*. As detailed by Caetlin Benson-Allott, in this film the narrator, or rather, off-camera reporter "seems to follow Julio and Tenoch's road trip as an organizing narrative structure, almost a frame tale, through which he can investigate the political and economic context that makes their trip possible" (5).

As mentioned in the introduction of this essay, in *Qué tan lejos*—unlike *Y tu mamá también* in which the presence of an analytical and politically engaged off-camera narrator suggests that politics are at the center of the narrative—these matters are neither absent nor central to the story. In Hermida's film, the presence of political commentary is determined by the very quotidian experiences of the characters, sometimes influenced by their nationality, social status, and race. After Esperanza arrives in a taxi at her hotel in Quito, an argument ignites between her and the taxi driver exhibiting his deep resentment toward Esperanza's country. His strongly voiced animosity even refers back to the Conquest of the New World by the Spaniards and suggests his bitterness about what he considers a perpetual form of colonization. When the Spanish woman refuses to pay the outrageously costly taxi ride, the driver assaults her verbally: "Theft is what my brother gets paid for collecting broccoli. As my uncle used to say, we need to be careful with you, the Spaniards. You people took all the Incas' riches and now you come back with a 'big shot' attitude" (Hermida).[10] This incident is the first in a series of lively encounters between the characters that show differences in opinion about subjects regarding Latin America and Spain. Later, Tristeza confronts her Spanish companion with a negative commentary about conquistador Francisco Pizarro, only to be interrupted by a bartender (one of their random acquaintances) who references more current acts of corruption in Latin America involving presidents, bankers, and banana plantation owners, followed by a very scrambled commentary about race: "Some of us who call ourselves Indians aren't real Indians; some who say we're not Indians, are actually; some who say we're not black would like to be black. Those of us who are half this, half that, don't know how to answer when we're asked what we are" (Hermida).[11]

This mixture of individual viewpoints that prompts lively discussions, connections, and disconnections adds a special dynamism to the story. For the most part, the discussions occur in the context of Tristeza's reflexive personality, which is constantly revealed, as if the natural sites that she knows so well inspire the most profound and worrisome thoughts about her country's struggles, while Esperanza seems joyful and occupied only with taking photos and videos of Ecuadorian landmarks. Through Tristeza, the viewer becomes informed about certain struggles of the Ecuadorian people since colonial times. She refers to the county's instability as a consequence of a number of revolutions that took place during the nineteenth century and to laws created by military dictators in the twentieth century

that favored privileged families while marginalizing large sectors of the population. While she believes that the progressive sectors of society are striving to make positive changes in the areas of transportation, historic memory, and tourism, her recusancy speaks of her frustration with the governmental corruption that obstruct the development of such projects.

There is a certain resonance between Tristeza's character and the characters in late-1960's classic road movies in which movement signified rebellion, autonomy, and the desire to move away from mainstream, middle-class precepts.[12] And, a sentiment similar to the existential loss and social critique of those films is also present in *Qué tan lejos* in the character of this partially rebellious bourgeois woman. Tristeza is highly influenced by her middle-class upbringing, which she wholeheartedly rejects, thus the journey from Quito to Cuenca functions as a kind of self "Declaration of Independence." The Ecuadorian woman uses the journey to get away from her bourgeois family and to vent her deepest frustrations, which are expressed through her interest in politics and through her curiosity about current events. Early in the film, while riding on a truck with a couple of journalists who are headed to an area of conflict related to the aforementioned indigenous strike, Tristeza enquires about this confrontation and is told that the people are demonstrating against a new Plan Colombia policy that will mean increased US intervention in Ecuador.[13] The following dialogue discloses Tristeza's antipathy, not for the neighboring country, but for US intervention policies in Latin America.

> *Tristeza*. Under the pretext of combating drug trafficking they [the US Army] were practically living here permanently.
>
> *Esperanza*. The Colombians?
>
> *Tristeza*. No, the Colombians would be fine. The Americans.
>
> *Esperanza*. And are you in favor or against this?
>
> *Tristeza*. Of what?
>
> *Esperanza*. Plan Colombia … the Americans?
>
> *Tristeza*. I am against everything[14]

This dialogue ends with a pessimistic commentary that emphasizes Tristeza's conflictive personality and shows the viewer that above all, this is a road movie about the Ecuadorian woman, her present circumstances,

and the dynamics of her journey to Cuenca in the company of her Spanish acquaintance.

Although Esperanza's sole agenda seems to be to enjoy her exploration of Ecuador, the Spanish woman's presence, specifically her foreignness, is crucial to the film's narrative. A similar setting is seen in Jim Jarmusch's road movie *Stranger than Paradise* (1984), in which Eva, a Hungarian woman (Eszter Balint), goes to the USA to stay with her cousin Willie (John Lurie). Eventually Eva, Willie, and his friend Eddie (Richard Edson) travel together from Cleveland to Florida. Bennet Schaber's observation about Eva's foreignness, signifying neither marginality nor alienation, but provoking the convulsions, ecstasies, and chances of communication (38) fully applies to the Spanish character in *Qué tan lejos.* It could be said that in this film the viewer enjoys, much more than Tristeza, the presence of her foreign companion, whose rather frivolous remarks provoke the animated dialogues and turbulent discussions that tend to exasperate the much more complex Ecuadorian woman. Esperanza's newfound, romanticized version of Latin America's indigenous people ("I flip with that colorful market. Indigenous people are so amazing! They're incredible!"[15]) especially infuriates Tristeza. Finally, to a photograph taken by Esperanza in the wax museum of Quito showing some of the leaders of the Independence from Spain, Tristeza responds with a cynical "ah, those murdered by the Spaniards?",[16] which once and for all defeats the joyful Spanish traveler.

Hermida's film also introduces fundamental differences of personality and interests between the travelers through intertextual references to Latin American literature, in particular the Latin American Baroque. While Esperanza reads a travel guide for tourists, Tristeza occupies herself with reading *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*, the famous text written by Mexican literature Nobel Prize Octavio Paz on the life and oeuvre of the Latin American poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. More skeptical than curious, Esperanza reads out loud from this text, "Her grandfather's books opened the doors to a world which neither her mother nor her sisters could enter: a man's world" (79 qtd. in Hermida).[17] This reference to Paz's study of this major Hispanic Baroque literary figure becomes relevant in the context of Tristeza's passion for literary, philosophical, and historical subjects. Although there are no intertextual references in the film to the classic literary works that describe the road story's basic narrative formula—Homer's *Odyssey* or Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*—a series of references to *Don Quixote*, Miguel de Cervantes's classic of

Renaissance literature travel adventure, become pertinent, especially considering Esperanza's provenance and the presence of many *quixotesque* and Sancho Panza-like discussions between the travelers. At one point, when the Spanish woman and their new companion Jesús (Pancho Aguirre) end up riding horses (another source of mobility in the film) Jesús says out loud: "Freedom, Sancho, is the most precious gift given to men by the heavens" (984 qtd. in Hermida).[18] This reference to Cervantes's famous tale of romantic quest calls to mind the hero in his seventeenth-century "road story," a detached dreamer who, inspired by his readings of romances and chapbooks, turned his desires into actions. These are personality features that in *Qué tan lejos* Jesús impersonates. As Esperanza and Jesús speed along on horseback in a scene that highlights the Ecuadorian landscape, his *quixotesque* inflections become intense descriptions of the sense of freedom this riding experience provokes.

In fact, the combination freedom/mobility/landscape is quite common in road movies in which women have the leading role. Often in these films, the landscape can become a figurative backdrop for women's desires, emotions, and personal struggles. Hermida stated that she wanted to tell a road story in Ecuador where the geography would determine what happens.[19] Indeed, the exaltation of the two women travelers in conjunction with the landscape predominates in *Qué tan lejos.* Tristeza's feelings about herself and her country are heightened while on the road and Ecuadorian landmarks such as the snow-peaked volcanoes and vibrant cultivated prairies usually visited by tourists are seen subjectively through Esperanza's eyes. The camera fluctuates between objective and subjective images taken from inside the vehicles in which the women travel advancing down curvy roads that traverse the mountainous Ecuadorian territory. The film grammar "accompanies" the characters as they move from place to place emphasizing the immediacy of their experience. The portrayal of the landscape in this film as well as the relationship between the protagonists resemble other road movies about women in which a great part of the appeal relates to the depiction of a magnificent landscape. In *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), for example, vibrant sights are presented from beginning to end of the two women's journey. In both of these films, the overpowering expressiveness of the land denotes a "feel good" effect that, at times, seems to outshine the story. In *Leaving Normal* (Edward Zwick, 1992), another road film about women, special importance is given to the landscape. The camera captures picturesque hills and dazing river and mountain views, which relate directly to the sense of "normality" that the

film initially wants to depict. *Boys on the Side* (Herbert Ross, 1995) also invites the viewer to visually experience the picturesque landmarks that Holly (Drew Barrymore)—like Esperanza in *Qué tan lejos*—discovers and describes, as if advertising them for a tourist guide.

The female characters in these road movies about women show other curious similarities. Tristeza and Robin (Mary-Louise Parker) from *Boys on the Side*, resemble each other in many ways, as do the relationships that slowly develop these two young women and their older traveling mates Esperanza and Jane (Whoopi Goldberg). In particular, Tristeza and Robin, both in their early twenties, are extremely anxious and emotionally distressed about their love lives; while for Esperanza and Jane, both in their late twenties/early thirties, their romantic life seems less important. As in *Qué tan lejos*, in *Leaving Normal* the two female travelers meet by chance and soon the viewer becomes aware of their major personality differences. Once again, the older character by the name of Darly (Christine Lahti) is more experienced and adventurous, and the younger by the name of Marianne (Meg Tilly) shows lack of confidence and disappointment about her life. While traveling together, their conversations fluctuate between past experiences, their present circumstances, and details about their itinerary and destination. In these three road movies about women, the older companion, certainly more experienced and self-assured, seems to be willing to adapt and even modify her own journey to help the younger traveler arrive at her destination. This paradigm recalls the urtext of the female road movie, *Thelma and Louise*, in which the older companion repeatedly adapts to the younger's wishes, even at the time of the two women's sacrifice at the end of the film.

In the road movies addressed above, which involve women travelers, men with different roles—lovers, husbands, traveling partners—are tangential to the universe of the narratives. Although these men by no means resemble the types found in classic road movies and novels (e.g. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Badlands*, *On the Road*) in which women are kept silenced and/or strapped to the passenger seat, the male characters continue to influence the women's lives and traveling experiences. Her former boyfriend is the reason for Tristeza's journey; Marianne's guilt at leaving her abusive husband haunts her for a long while; and Thelma's (Geena Davis) one-night stand with J.D. (Brad Pitt) becomes a key factor in the film's infamous ending. Despite some similarities, however, many features differentiate *Qué tan lejos* from the three road movies from the USA mentioned above. While this film makes various references to

sociopolitical matters that affect Ecuador, the US films for the most part only address issues that affect the characters personally. In *Leaving Normal*, nothing but her personal life concerns Marianne: her husband's abuse at home does not seem to be a strong enough reason for her to reflect upon the societal constructions that instigate this kind of behavior. In contrast, the Ecuadorian film clearly shows Tristeza's wish to "save" her former boyfriend Daniel from marrying a middle-class woman from the traditional city of Cuenca, and from an institution that, in her opinion, is no less than a perverse trap. When asked if she would like to marry Daniel, she responds firmly that he should marry no one. Tristeza's personality is much more complex than Marianne's. She would be happy salvaging her relationship with Daniel, the "longhaired backpacking biologist," that was "captured" by a "typical green-eyed woman from Cuenca who works in a bank, goes to church, and paints her nails to find a husband" (Hermida),[20] but most importantly she wishes to contribute to the rupture of the traditional middle-class principles that she rejects. While Tristeza explains this situation to her companions in a small town cafe, the vendor happily watches one of those typical Latin American soap operas that tend to reaffirm the traditional roles of men and women in society. In principle, this scene would seem to emphasize the difference between Tristeza's views and the conservative environment representative of small towns in rural Latin America. Interestingly, Tristeza's obsession with losing Daniel, which, in the end, seems to be a major fear, as well as her later judgmental remarks about Juan Andrés (Fausto Miño)—another sporadic acquaintance—flirting with Esperanza, shows a traditional and mistrustful standpoint with regard to male's attitudes about women that contradicts her progressive discourse. Esperanza's refutation of Tristeza's suspicious remarks demonstrates that only her is truly and openly liberal about her role as a woman in contemporary society.

Despite all the differences between the two women, they continue traveling together and at one point, along with their male companion Jesús, they arrive at the intersection between two roads in the middle of a bleak terrain. At this time, Tristeza has to decide if she continues toward Cuenca to stop Daniel's wedding or allows herself a shift in direction, which could bring new ventures. An ellipsis in the film informs us of her decision: while riding on a bus toward a beach away from Cuenca, romantic music accompanies the scene while nostalgic Tristeza looks out the window. This particular moment, once again references her contradictions regarding society. Being "against everything" and rejecting bourgeois values has

taken its toll on her, and frequently she seems upset at being left out from the society she rejects. Toward the end of the film, the travelers board the bus that finally takes them to Cuenca. As in many classic road movies, at first the viewer is charmed with scenic views of the land, and subsequently an obstacle, in this case a flat tire, delays the travelers' arrival at their destination. Over again, Tristeza finds a moment to brood about her life: "Why can't my stories ever have a happy ending?" And receives the following enlightening response from Jesús: "Happy endings depend on the place in the sentence where you place the period" (Hermida).[21] At their arrival at Cuenca, the omniscient narrator makes his final appearance to give the viewer information about this Ecuadorian town. Tristeza has lost interest in stopping Daniel's wedding and prefers to walk away with her new Spanish friend. Both characters seem to understand that if something seemed to be lost at first, something was gained along the way. After all, what turned out to be important was the journey itself.

Generally speaking, there is a poetic quality to landscapes, roads, different forms of transportation, and isolated towns, which many times are central to the road movie genre's *mise en scene*. In *Qué tan lejos* the poetic quality is determined by the Ecuadorian landmarks captured by the camera: snow-peaked volcanoes, pastures, peasants herding animals, narrow roads that traverse extensive portions of farmland, and small towns that seem almost uninhabited. These remote and apparently vacant towns could be suggesting the idea that Ecuador is a country from which people want to part or the overwhelming migration out of Ecuador in the twenty-first century. Later films, such as *Rabia* (Sebastián Cordero, 2007), *Prometeo deportado* (Fernando Mieles, 2009), and *Zuquillo Express* (Carl West, 2010), focused on this topic, emphasizing the conditions of Ecuadorians who have left the country looking for opportunities elsewhere, especially in Spain and the USA. *Qué tan lejos*, however, does not develop this topic as in the aforementioned films, which, as Anna Andrianova points out, clearly show "different facets of this phenomenon: from people-smuggling and adjusting to a new country, to dying abroad." The remote and empty towns in *Qué tan lejos* only suggest the migration issue, while they seem to be proper backdrops for Tristeza's personal battles and signifiers of this movie's *mise en scene*.

Today, genre films are an important part of contemporary Latin American cinema, and since its release in 2006, *Qué tan lejos* became an important film within the cinema of Ecuador. Its hybrid nature is what makes this road movie distinctive. On the one hand, the film maintains

much of the atmosphere and many of the features of the classic road movie: the depiction of the landscape, the numerous vehicles used by the characters to travel roads and paths, the quarrels between characters, and the obstacles and unexpected situations that imply unpredictability on the road. Regarding the latter, Walter Salles, director of the road movies *Central Station* (1998) and *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), annotates about the narrative of such films: "if it snows, incorporate snow, if it rains, incorporate rain" (68). In *Qué tan lejos*, as Hermida mentioned, many unforeseen situations and people they encountered while filming became a part of the story. On the other hand, with the characters' constant disagreements, as well as with the presence in the film of the indigenous strike that slows down their journey, the story becomes fully localized and partially politicized. From this perspective, the hybrid nature of the film calls for criticism. Political issues are indicated yet not developed since they are addressed from the perspective of two fairly uninformed characters: a bourgeois young woman who is interested—although not actively engaged—in actions to help solve some of her country's problems, but ultimately is more preoccupied with her personal troubles, and a Spanish traveler interested only in visiting touristic sites. Thus, the strike protesting the Plan Colombia policies is only mentioned, not developed, a mere excuse or obstacle to move the story forward. However, another perspective, such as Helena Santos's, implies the validity of *Qué tan lejos* as a film that

> can do the same or more towards criticism than the blatant alarmist virulence of denunciation films: political and economic issues are present in the film, including commentaries regarding depopulation and social tensions, but these are not the protagonists' main concerns. (160)[22]

Despite the possible controversy and criticisms regarding the vacuity of the sociopolitical issues left undeveloped in the film, it is possible to say that Hermida's film challenged former cinematic conventions and moved forward with the incursion onto genre, contributing to forging the new direction taken by Ecuadorian cinema after 2006. This film belongs to the list of Latin American genre films with international appeal that continues to diversify in many directions. In particular, the road movie genre continues to evolve in Latin American cinema showing local specificities while maintaining its characteristic of mobility as a metaphor of rebellion. The idea of restlessness and adjustability is fitting within current times of

change and transition. Latin American storytellers continue to adjust to the newer generations that seek to part away from older models and that are challenging the public with topics that represent the conditions of transnationalism and diversity of the contemporary world.

Notes

1. Examples of Ecuadorian films from 2006 forward containing these topics are: *Esas no son penas* (Daniel Andrade and Anahí Hoeneisen, 2006), *Cuando me toque a mí* (Víctor Arregui, 2008), *Impulso* (Mateo Herrera, 2009), *Rabia* (Sebastián Cordero, 2009), *Mejor no hablar de ciertas cosas* (Javier Andrade, 2012), *Sin otoño, sin primavera* (Iván Mora Manzano, 2013), *No robarás a menos que sea necesario* (Viviana Cordero, 2013), *La llamada* (David Nieto Wenzell, 2013).
2. The film drew record local audiences (a total of 220,000 spectators, surpassed only by Camilo Luzuriaga's *La Tigra* in 1990, which drew 250,000 spectators) and had great international success, garnering rave reviews, and several awards and nominations.
3. Esperanza, the name of the Spanish character, translates as *Hope*. The name is allegorical and becomes pertinent in the context of the story. Esperanza hopes to enjoy her journey through Ecuador and she hopes to be able to travel and record with her video camera the "exotic" places she has seen in postcards.
4. This is the name given to women from Quito, the capital city of Ecuador.
5. Tristeza, the self-selected name of the Ecuadorian character, translates as *Sadness*. Like Esperanza's, her name is allegorical. She is a non-conformist with a melancholic personality expressed in the context of her failed relationship with her former boyfriend Daniel and her concerns for her country. Tristeza's somber character is in clear contrast to Esperanza's trustful nature.
6. My translation of the Spanish original: "Esperanza del Carmen Sánchez Cruz, inscrita en el registro civil de Barcelona el 11 de mayo de 1979, hija de Cándido y Gracia, veterinario y telefonista de origen andaluz. Peso al nacer: 4 kilos. Edad del primer sangrado: 12 años recién cumplidos. Patologías familiares importantes: abuela materna diabética; padre con crisis depresivas agudas, fallecido de infarto del miocardio a los 61 años. Conocida entre sus amigos como Espe. Sus abuelos le llamaban la Nena y su padre Carmenza."
7. My translation of the Spanish original: "brinda detalles sobre el pasado, subraya aspectos del presente y también anticipa el futuro, el más allá del relato."

8. The voice-over idea for *Y tu mamá también*, as annotated by Cuarón, originated from a similar device used by Jean-Luc Godard in his films from the 1960s. This experiment, which seemed radical at the time, was used by the filmmaker to contest French cinema's "tradition of quality," and Hollywood's longtime conventionality. Specifically, in *Masculine-Feminine* (1966) Godard gives agenda to the characters extradiegetically through voice-over lines in the form of slogans, and in *Band of Outsiders* (1964) the voice-over interrupts the narrative to describe the characters' disinterest and loneliness.
9. Examples of twenty-first century Argentine films that use this device are: *Esperando al mesías* (Daniel Burman, 2000), *El abrazo partido* (Daniel Burman, 2004), *Próxima salida* (Nicolás Tuozzo, 2004), *El aura* (Fabián Bielinsky, 2005), *La mujer sin cabeza* (Lucrecia Martel, 2008), *El secreto de sus ojos* (Juan José Campanella, 2009), *Medianeras* (Gustavo Taretto, 2011), to name just a few.
10. My translation of the Spanish original: "Robo es lo que le pagan a mi hermano por recoger brócoli todo el año. Bien decía mi tío que hay que tener cuidado con ustedes los españoles. Ya se fueron llevando pues todo el tesoro de los Incas y ahora vienen hechos los muy muy."
11. My translation of the Spanish original: "Los que decimos que somos indios, no todos somos indios; los que decimos que no somos indios, a veces sí somos; los que decimos que no somos negros, a veces queremos ser negros. Los que somos medio indios, medio negros o medio algo, no sabemos ni qué decir cuando nos preguntan qué somos."
12. See Katie Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television*. (2).
13. The US military and diplomatic strategy known as Plan Colombia, was originally conceived between 1998 and 1999 to combat drug cartels in the Colombian territory. However, the drastic anti-narcotic strategies, such as aerial fumigation to eradicate coca production, affected many of the legally planted crops in Colombia as well as in neighboring countries. Human rights groups from Ecuador have condemned the Plan Colombia claiming that their country is the most affected by what has been called "the balloon effect," associated with coca-eradicating strategies. In March 2001, the CEDHU (*Ecumenical Human Rights Commission of* Ecuador) released a report titled "Plan Colombia and its Consequences in Ecuador" in which they describe the historical background of the Colombian conflict since the end of the nineteenth century, and the increasing expansion of violence over the entire region involving guerrilla groups, paramilitary, and military forces. The report highlights the consequences of the conflict in Colombia and neighboring countries: extreme poverty, displacement, destruction of crops, abuse of power, and ultimately death. See Sarah Holsen, José Egas,

and Laura Glynn "Plan Colombia—Definition and funding": http://www.derechos.net/cedhu/plancolombia/PLANCOLOMBIAINGLES.html. Also see *The Economist*: "Fear", "Collateral" and "Plan Colombia"; and Ronald J. Morgan "Ecuadorian Human Rights."

14. My translation of the Spanish original:

    Tristeza. Claro. ¿no ves que con ese pretexto de las drogas los "manes" estaban prácticamente instalados acá?

    Esperanza. ¿Los colombianos?

    Tristeza. No, los colombianos sería fresco. Los gringos.

    Esperanza. ¿Y tú estás a favor o en contra?

    Tristeza. ¿De qué?

    Esperanza. Pues del Plan, del paro, los gringos, no sé.

    Tristeza. Yo estoy en contra de todo.

15. My translation of the Spanish original: "Es que yo flipo con ese mercado lleno de colores, tía. Es que los indígenas molan,…Son alucinantes."
16. My translation of the Spanish original: "Ah, ¿los asesinados por los españoles?"
17. Margaret Sayers Peden's translation of Paz's original text: "Los libros del abuelo le abrieron las puertas a un mundo distinto. Un mundo al que no podían entrar ni su madre ni sus otras hermanas; un mundo masculino" (117).
18. My translation of Jesus' commentary in *Qué tan lejos*: "La libertad, Sancho, es el más precioso don que a los hombres dieron los cielos." The original entry in *Don Quijote de la Mancha* reads: "La libertad, Sancho, es uno de los más preciosos dones que a los hombres dieron los cielos" (984).
19. DVD audio commentary.
20. My translation of the Spanish original: "típica cuencana ojiverde que trabaja en un banco, va a misa y se pinta las uñas hasta conseguir marido."
21. My translation of the Spanish original: "No sé por qué a mí nunca me puede tocar una historia con final feliz." "Es que los finales felices dependen de donde pongas el punto final."
22. My translation of the Spanish original: "consigue aportar tanta o mayor carga crítica que la reflejada con virulencia tremendista en los films de denuncia: la situación política y económica están ahí, incluyendo los comentarios sobre la despoblación y las tensiones sociales, pero no son las principales preocupaciones de las protagonistas."

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PART III

Heterogeneous Territories: Mapping Class, Race, Gender, and Sexuality

CHAPTER 8

Central American Non-belonging: Reading 'El Norte' in Cary Fukunaga's *Sin nombre*

Yajaira M. Padilla

The first feature film to introduce US audiences to the plight of undocumented Central American migrants who had fled civil wars during the 1970s and 1990s was Gregory Nava's epic *El Norte* (1983). The poetically tragic story of Mayan siblings, Enrique (David Villalpando) and Rosa (Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez) Xuncax, related a Central American migratory experience that, in addition to forced flight, was characterized by dangerous crossings through Mexico and an alienating existence in the promised land of "the North" where immigrants like themselves were quickly subsumed within the ranks of an exploitable and invisible labor force. In spite of being dubbed by critics an art film, *El Norte* achieved considerable success at the box office and garnered an Oscar nomination for best screenplay (Gregory Nava, Anna Thomas). Famed movie critic Roger Ebert likened *El Norte* to American cinema great *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940), and praised it for being "the first film to approach the subject of 'undocumented workers' solely through their eyes" (n. pag.).

Much of the scholarship on *El Norte* has followed in step, illuminating the film's engagement with this greater US/Latin American immigrant reality, albeit through a wide array of conceptual approximations.[1] Posited as a migratory epic, some scholars have explored the narrative resonances

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between the film and classic texts of antiquity or have examined the trials of the protagonists within the vein of the mythic hero's journey (Brakel; Drake; Santander). Others have viewed the film as an avenue for exploring the "borderization" and "re-Latinization" of the Los Angeles metropolis (Forjas; Zilberg, "*Falling Down*"). Notably, few of these studies dwell substantially on the film's critical possibilities in regards to what might be conceived of more broadly as an emergent US Central American experience, one that has taken shape in more salient ways in the little over 30 years since *El Norte* first premiered.[2] Nor do they dwell on the film's potential as a road movie despite key resonances between its narrative structure/plot and this genre. Here, I aim to do both, showing how contemplating *El Norte*—and relatedly Cary Fukunaga's more contemporary film, *Sin nombre* (2009)—as a road movie, allows for a better understanding of how the film addresses and, as I contend, constitutes a pivotal marker of key aspects of the US Central American experience.

The Central American refugee crisis drastically increased the relatively small number of Central Americans that resided in the USA, laying the foundation for the thriving communities of US Central Americans that exist today. Such communities have continued to expand with each subsequent wave of migration from the isthmus, making Central Americans the second largest immigrant group from Latin America after Mexicans (Brown and Patten n. pag.).[3] Markedly, and despite having established roots in the USA, these communities continue to have large numbers of foreign-born members and equally significant rates of undocumented individuals. Among Salvadorans alone, six out of ten are foreign born, with approximately two-thirds having arrived after 1990, and only three out of ten are US citizens (Brown and Patten, "Hispanics of Salvadoran Origin" n. pag.). Regarding immigration status, estimates from 2009 reveal that approximately 46% of Salvadoran, 60% of Guatemalan, and 68% of Honduran immigrants are undocumented (Brick et al. 5).[4] These same groups likewise saw a dramatic increase in their unauthorized members from 2009 to 2012, and currently represent 15% of the overall unauthorized population in the USA (Passel and D'Vera Cohn n. pag.).

Figures such as these underscore the existence of many US Central Americans as what Loren Landau terms the "alien within" (219). Despite living among "us," contributing significantly to the economy and to the well-being of the privileged classes through their labor, they are denied access to legal and civic rights, and, relatedly, the possibility of socioeconomic upward mobility and acceptance, largely due to their foreignness

and "illegality." Moreover, and making this predicament all the more dire, many of these same individuals also contend with psychological scars accrued decades back in their war-torn homelands and increasingly so during their northbound journeys. While traveling through Mexico, a route labeled "the world's most dangerous journey" by Amnesty International, Central American migrants are not only susceptible to the physical dangers associated with riding atop of the "trains of death," but also to any number of violent assaults and harassment by criminal gangs, organized drug syndicates, and corrupt state and federal officials (n. pag.). And, because these same migrants move across more than just political and geographic boundaries, meaning they also "traverse social planes of race, class, and gender relations," indigenous peoples, unaccompanied minors, and women, are most at risk (Rodríguez 83).

Revisiting *El Norte* in light of this US Central American experience is a salient enterprise that complicates our knowledge of emergent Latino groups in the USA, while also underscoring the limits and inherent contradictions of US discourses of legal and cultural citizenship. Admittedly, the film does have its limitations as Alicia Estrada poignantly notes in her contribution to this same volume. The Maya identity brought to bear in the film via Enrique and Rosa's portrayal is indeed permeated by cultural stereotypes that reaffirm European and colonialist paradigms with regard to the indigenous (3). Nevertheless, in making these Maya siblings the protagonists of the story, the film does centralize the struggles of this marginalized sector within Central America's social and racial hierarchy. It likewise draws attention to a pivotal moment in the genesis of US Central American communities and the legal, social, and economic battles they continue to face. Most importantly, the film captures a dimension of the US Central American experience that cannot be completely gauged or accessed through migratory profiles and data, yet permeates almost every aspect of it, that of non-belonging. This term and concept, one that I will define in more detail in what follows, registers the ways in which Central Americans come to be and are construed, both in a material and imaginary sense, as Others in the USA. In so doing, it also raises issues and questions related to American citizenry, subjectivity, and national identity.

Because I am making the claim, however, that this sense of non-belonging is characteristic of a greater US Central American experience beyond that captured in *El Norte*, in this essay I likewise explore this notion in relation to Cary Fukunaga's 2009 film, *Sin nombre*. What might be considered a revamping of Nava's epic, this film also engages the topic

of Central American transmigration through Mexico and features two young protagonists, a Honduran girl named Sayra (Paulina Gaitán), who, along with her uncle and estranged father, is attempting to make her way to the USA, and Willy (Edgar Flores)—a.k.a. "el Casper"—, a Mexican teenager fleeing from his former gang who becomes Sayra's protector while en route. Yet, rather than undertake a straightforward comparative analysis of both films, I posit *El Norte* as a working paradigm of Central American non-belonging against which to read the critical interventions *Sin nombre* affords with regard to the same. As such, I limit my discussion of *El Norte* to the film's culminating scene and most emphatic expression of non-belonging: Rosa's death.

Conceiving of both of these films within the purview of the road movie helps to elucidate the means by which they articulate Central American non-belonging. Aside from films about undocumented youth migration, *El Norte* and *Sin nombre* can also be read as road movies, albeit ones that, in keeping with Laura Senio Blair's observations, significantly rework this genre typically associate with Hollywood.[5] Rather than the "American highway," the originating point of the journeys undertaken in these films is down south (119). Similarly, those who undertake such journeys are not "outlaws" or "misfits" but rather naïve and innocent youths whose dire socioeconomic or political situations in their home countries have left them little alternative but to migrate (120).[6] Such reconfigurations, according to Blair, call attention to the often invisible experiences of undocumented and unaccompanied minors, including "the literal and metaphorical borders" these youths must cross as they journey to "find a place or sense of home and belonging" (119, 120). In the process, these films also underscore the non-belonging of these individuals.

These films also depart from the traditional road movie in terms of the nature, goals, and means of the quest they narrate. Within the Hollywood tradition, the road, as Jorge Pérez notes, "symbolizes 'American-ness'" and "is taken as a pervasive image of the American Dream" (127). The quest at hand for the protagonists in *El Norte* and *Sin nombre* is, first and foremost, to get to the USA where, those who do make it, like Enrique and Rosa, sadly discover they are not privy to the American Dream. They must carry out their search for "America" while being deemed "illegal" outcasts. And, although their journeys do lead to a new discovery of self it is often at the painful cost of any prior sense of identity and belonging: their sociocultural and national origins as well as familial ties.

Relatedly, the mobility of these protagonists is not conditioned by the freedom to move or a sense of personal liberation. They lack the economic resources to access cars or motorcycles, quintessential means of travel in the road movie. Instead, they are mostly relegated to being passive passengers, using menial and illicit public forms of transportation where their undocumented status and devalued sociocultural origins are re-inscribed. While traveling via bus through Mexico, for example, Enrique and Rosa are referred to by a fellow Mexican passenger as *indios malditos* (damned Indians). Similarly, in *Sin nombre*, Sayra and Willy are forced to travel atop of freight trains.

Still, despite these commonalities, *Sin nombre* does differ from *El Norte* in significant ways. Rather than civil conflict, the youths depicted are fleeing the violence of poverty and gang life that is symptomatic of what T.J. Demos calls "crisis globalization," an era "defined by the increasingly unequal command of resources by the privileged few occupying elite corporate multi-national and governmental positions" (xiii). *Sin nombre* also unsettles several pillars of Nava's film, one of the most important being that to *not* belong is to be completely devoid of any agency, as exemplified throughout Enrique and Rosa's journey and reiterated by their tragic ending. In Fukunaga's film, Central American migrants and those who are Central Americanized (e.g. Mexican members of the *Mara Salvatrucha*) fashion and enact alternate means of belonging that contest their exclusionary status from both the Mexican nation-state and that of the USA. Despite being limited, these bonds provide agency to and, in some cases, ensure the survival of those individuals who forge and sustain them. Thus, even as it affirms the notion of Central American non-belonging articulated in *El Norte*, *Sin nombre* also challenges and transforms it.

Mapping Central American Non-belonging Across Borders

Few who have seen *El Norte* will forget one of the film's most heartbreaking scenes, the one in which Rosa dies after having succumbed to the typhus she contracted while crossing through a rat-infested sewage tunnel to get to the USA. Lying in an unlit hospital room with her brother at her side, Rosa engages Enrique in an emotional exchange that recalls their journey as outcasts and reiterates the film's arching critical commentary. Rosa begins by lamenting their lack of freedom as undocumented workers in the USA under the constant threat of *la migra*. Rosa's declaration

"no somos libres" also evokes the similar circumstances that forced her and Enrique to flee Guatemala. As indigenous peoples, there too they comprised an exploitable labor force whose attempts for greater agency were met with violence from the state. Implicit in Rosa's declaration is the "presume[d] articulation between political repression in Guatemala and the plight of undocumented Latino immigrants" Nava strives for in the film (Fregoso 106). It is thus no coincidence that this conversation between Rosa and Enrique also unfolds in the shadows, as this is where they have been relegated to exist since embarking on their travels. Following Enrique's reply affirming her claims, Rosa continues lamenting that they cannot find a home to settle. These dim observations render a strategic mapping of Central American non-belonging across national and political borders.

Rosa and Enrique's trajectory speaks to this very notion, with each leg of their journey serving to re-inscribe their marginality. Being Mayans made them enemies of the state in their war-torn homeland. Mexico, a country of transit, was not only poor but also similarly unwelcoming of Central Americans and *indios*. And, in the USA, they were confronted with the sad realization that the American Dream they so vehemently sought was just that, a dream that was out of reach for disenfranchised peoples like them who were, once again, seen as *brazos* or arms for labor.

It is the pronounced nature and, to a certain extent, inescapability of this state of being that the term "non-belonging" is meant to linguistically underscore. After all, the prefix "non" does not connote the possibility of reversal or undoing, rather it stresses a straightforward negation or lack of that which is being specified.[7] At the same time, this term also evokes the aspirations for belonging in the USA by which US Central Americans and those yet to arrive attempt to stave off their persistent marginalization. In *El Norte*, as well as in numerous recent documentaries about Central American transmigration through Mexico,[8] the ideal of the "American dream," understood as a claim to and hope for belonging, occupies a central place in migrant imaginaries. As all these cinematic productions reveal, for undocumented Central Americans risking their lives to get to the USA achieving economic success by American standards is equated not only with financial security for themselves and their families, but also the acquisition of social currency as Americans.

Such hopes for belonging are linked to deeply seated discourses of immigration and nation in the USA, which are rendered problematic by the reality and presence of these same (im)migrants. In her analysis of

Time magazine's 1985 special issue, *Immigrants: The Changing Face of America*, Lauren Berlant maintains that the seemingly pro-immigrant discourse that permeates the issue functions as "a central technology for the reproduction of patriotic nationalism" (195). It does so "not just because the immigrant is seen as without a nation or resources and thus as deserving of pity or contempt, but because the immigrant is defined as *someone who desires America*" (italics in the original, 195). Given this logic, America (emblematic of its democratic ideals) is upheld as a nation to be loved and coveted by immigrants, who, if good to America, will be loved in return (196). At the heart of such affective constructions of the immigrant as a desiring subject and, by the same token, of America as an object of desire, are notions of belonging. The ideal immigrant is one whose love for America drives her to want to eschew her foreignness in order to be American, who wishes to become "one of us." As Berlant also notes, however, such sentiments are laced with nativist anxieties about being economically and culturally overrun by foreign Others (196). Wanting to belong, then, can be a double-edge sword for immigrants. If your desire is too great (meaning, there are too many of you) and/or that desire is not reciprocated (meaning, you are not the right kind of immigrant), then you are rendered a threat to those who do belong.

In the same way that Rosa's words register her and Enrique's pervasive exclusion, they also betray her desire to belong. As Rosa Linda Fregoso suggests, in *El Norte* a distinct contrast exists between Enrique and Rosa in terms of gendered subjectivity. Of the two, it is Rosa who most embodies the "allegorical Maya-Quiche Indian" and, on account of her gender, carries the burden of culturally reproducing and maintaining her people's traditions (110). This distinction upholds the traditional Western binary that posits men within the realm of the rational and culture, while women are relegated to the world of nature and the unknown or mysterious (110). This problematic representation of Rosa also underscores her symbolization as both the heart of the Maya-Quiche home and the Guatemalan nation, which in the film is rendered in a similarly idyllic and strangely exotic way (Fregoso 106). It is for this reason that the film seems to suggest that Rosa's sense of displacement in the USA is more intense than that of her brother's, and why her last thoughts are preoccupied with their inability to find a place to call home.

Having this cartography of non-belonging enacted by Rosa is key, however, for, as Héctor Tobar notes, hers is "the point of view of the colonized 'nativ[e]'," one that challenges the dominant gaze of Anglo,

English-speaking protagonists who generally relate such "universal (and ongoing) human drama[s]" (n. pag.). Rosa's mapping thus also calls attention to the larger systems of power that have given way to such systemic exclusion. Arturo Arias and Claudia Milian signal such systems, that of the "coloniality of power," as conceptualized by Aníbal Quijano and, relatedly, what they proffer as the "coloniality of diaspora" (Arias and Milian). According to Quijano, the "coloniality of power" is a system of dominance rooted in the social classification and integration of colonized subjects on the basis of race under European colonial rule. This means of social codification, which ensured the subjugation and othering of the colonized, provided the foundation for future paradigms and relations of power as history continued to evolve. It likewise inflected upon other norms of social categorization such as nationality and ethnicity. As such, and despite the end of European colonialism, Quijano argues that the Eurocentric model of coloniality of power continued to and still does dominate and operate ("Colonialidad").

Drawing on this concept, Arias and Milian contend that the violent abjection of Central Americans in the USA is not only largely due to the coloniality of power but also what they term the "coloniality of diaspora," a system in which "ethnoracial and historical traits bind people to a colonizing past" (471). In other words, colonized peoples whose marginalization is a product of the coloniality of power, such as Central Americans, carry such stratification with them into their new diasporic realities where, as I would add, it is further compounded by the socioeconomic and political alienation arising from their undocumented and/or foreign status, as well as the geopolitical positioning of their countries of origin within the neoliberal world order. Indeed, Rosa's lamentations are suggestive of this enduring colonial state. Despite having physically crossed geographic borders, they never stopped being *indios* from Guatemala nor escaped their caste-like conditions.

Ultimately, Enrique and Rosa's quest to get to the USA and journey to become Americans does not end with them finding a new home or sense of belonging. In *El Norte*, and, as will be seen more fully in *Sin nombre*, the road and the final destination are the very sites of the continuous reinscription of hegemonic norms and not a liberation from them. Thus, and despite their best efforts to leave behind "their seemingly static cultural tradition[s]" so as to be able to successfully cross into American culture and into modernity (Estrada 5), Enrique and Rosa's immigrant desire to belong remains unrequited by an American nation that rejects them like Guatemala.

Forging Belonging Within the Margins

In *Sin nombre* a similar notion of Central American non-belonging is brought to the fore, etched in the backdrop of a more recent history of northbound Central American undocumented migration. Like *El Norte*, the film received significant critical acclaim, winning the prize for directing and cinematography, as well as a nomination for the "Grand Jury Prize," at the Sundance Film Festival, where it premiered in 2009. The Broadcast Film Critics Association also nominated it for a "Critics Choice Award" for Best Foreign Film in 2010. Fukunaga, like Nava, intended to underscore the connective threads between the realities of Latin American immigration and the American way of life in his film. As quoted in an article by Dennis Lim for the *New York Times*, *Sin nombre* is, according to Fukunaga, "a North American story," that reminds Americans that the plight of immigrants is not as far removed as they would like to believe and, in terms of the US large Latino work force, "obviously has an impact here every day" ("At the Border" n. pag.). What is notable about Fukunaga's claim and makes his "North American story" standout, however, is that unlike many films about Latin American immigration to the USA, including *El Norte*, this story does not unfold primarily in the latter, rather on Mexican terrain, adding a significant layer to the portrayal of the Central American disenfranchisement it focalizes. It is not only the USA that is unequivocally associated with an oppressive "North," but also a Mexican nation that post 9/11 has become the USA's "gatekeeper" and enforcer of its discriminatory immigration policies.

Although the film's protagonists, Sayra and Willy, are not indigenous, nor running from repressive military forces, their non-belonging is, in many respects, just as pronounced as that of Enrique and Rosa. As a young Honduran woman of poor means and limited education, Sayra's future is bleak, a notion made explicit in her first appearance on screen. Sitting atop of her rooftop in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Sayra stares out into the vast expanse of the shantytown in which she lives, while her uncle Orlando confirms the fact that there is "nothing" there for her. Sayra's father, who left when she was three, is waiting below with her grandmother, finalizing plans to take her and Orlando back with him to the USA where his new family awaits. Although unstated in the film, his return is presumably a consequence of having been deported. His reappearance and Sayra's estrangement and reluctance to go with him draws attention to the collapse of the family unit as a consequence of forced migration within the current neoliberal paradigm.

Willy's marginalization is a result of external mediating factors and family disintegration as well. In the film's opening shot, Willy is alone in his room, in Tapachulas, Chiapas, staring at a wall-size mural of forest trees whose leaves have turned bright yellow. As in the scene of Sayra that follows, Willy is cast from the onset as a solitary figure whose place in the world is uncertain. Other than his cousin Benito (Kristyan Ferrer)—a.k.a. "Smiley"—, Willy's biological family is nonexistent in the film. The only claim to family or belonging that Willy has is his gang affiliation to the *Mara Salvatrucha* or MS-13. As he gets up to leave, the camera pans out to a medium shot of Willy's back revealing a large tattoo of the gang's initials "MS." This introductory scene fades into a dark background from which emerges the film's title, implying an imminent connection between Willy's character and the greater significance of the title's words, that of not having a name or possessing an identity. Willy's conceptualization as such, coupled with his gang member status, signals him as undesirable and expendable to the Mexican nation and to the USA, as Sayra. Perhaps, even more so.

Belonging to a youth gang renders Willy the ultimate outsider, as such groups are typically demonized within public policy and sensationalistic mass media discourses. Indeed, sensationalistic renderings of the *Mara Salvatrucha* have led to its categorization as "the world's most dangerous gang."[9] As a member of this particular gang, however, Willy is also the bearer of Central American non-belonging. As scholars have argued, the emergence of the "transnational gang crises," which the *Mara* epitomizes, is rooted in a neoliberalism that champions individualism, open markets, and free flow of goods across borders, yet paradoxically upholds the use of multinational security measures aimed at policing and restricting the flow of peoples deemed undesirable, including undocumented migrants and gang youth.[10] Gang prevention efforts in the USA premised on the targeting and deportation of gang youth (initially concentrating on Salvadorans) since the early 1990s, ignore the fact that for many of these youths who emigrated to the USA at an early age and spent most of their lives in the USA, El Salvador is a foreign country that offers little in terms of their successful reintegration into society. This is largely due to the country's weakened political and social infrastructure following its recent civil war and the implementation of neoliberal economic policies. Joint ventures by US, Mexican, and Central American federal enforcement agencies aimed at eradicating the "problem" through zero-tolerance policies likewise offer an alternative for these youths, turning them, as Elana Zilberg con-

tends, into a new class of refugee ("Inter-American Ethnography" 497). It is the weight of this oft-overlooked context that Willy literally and figuratively carries on his back. Many of the Salvadoran youths initially deported from the USA for "waging war" on the streets of Los Angeles were themselves refugees who had fled from the violence of civil conflict, having, in some cases, been recruited into the *guerrilla* or armed forces. For those who were and have been deported since then, and who seek an alternative to the gang life as well as their dire socioeconomic predicament and targeting by Salvadoran authorities, undocumented migration is the only option.

Film critics such as Manohla Dargis have rightfully noted that the film fails to explicitly address this larger *Mara* history, resulting in a facile representation of the gang along with an overt sentimentalizing of Willy's character ("Desperate Lives" n. pag.). Yet, within the scope of the broader argument I have been making regarding Central American non-belonging, the very inclusion of the *Mara*'s subplot by way of Willy in a complementary fashion to that of Sayra's is already a necessary allusion to this greater context. What is more, Willy's standing as a de facto Central American also contrasts the predominant Mexicanization of Central American migrants in films such as *El Norte* as well in immigration debates in the USA where all immigrants from Latin America who cross into the country are rendered Mexican. This erasure of Central Americans adds to their state of non-belonging in that denies their identity. Willy's representation speaks to, but also inverts this process of negation, thereby fruitfully complicating Sayra's embodiment of Central American disenfranchisement as an undocumented young Honduran female. Hence, although reminiscent of the teenage outlaw or rebel, Willy's character is one that embodies so much more than the social anxiety of youthful and privileged white males behind the wheel in American road films.

Sayra and Willy's fortuitous encounter, however, sets the stage for an unlikely bond between them that provides each respite from their non-belonging and allows them to contest it. While riding the cargo trains, the leader of the local *clicka*, Lil' Mago (Tenoch Huerta), spots Sayra, intent on sexually assaulting her. Willy kills Lil'Mago before this can happen. His actions spurred not so much by his resolve to save Sayra as by his anger toward Lil' Mago who, has just murdered Willy's girlfriend, Marta Marlen (Diana García), while attempting to also rape her. Both for Sayra and Willy, this encounter marks a moment of consciousness that challenges the notions of belonging and kinship they hold. The downward gaze of the

camera that magnifies Lil'Mago's dominance over Sayra and the rest of the migrants on the train, reveals the tenuous nature of her blood ties. As Sayra turns to her father and uncle, they shrink away from her. In this moment of desertion that emphasizes anew Sayra's estrangement with her father, the ideals of security and loyalty that are the bedrock of the institution of family are rendered null and void.

For Willy, a similar turning point is at hand. As Monica Brown effectively argues in her analysis of gang youth in Latino/a literature, urban gangs operate as "counter nations" which "simultaneously mirror and expose some of the most oppressive facets of dominant culture's construction of nation" (xvii). For instance, such gangs emulate the ideals of citizenship that they are excluded from or not privy to, asserting a code of loyalty and honor, while insisting on dichotomies of difference ("us" vs. "them") that are also central to notions of national belonging. These same ideas are evident in *Sin nombre*, particularly in Benito's initiation scene, where he is made to kill a rival gang member in order to prove his allegiance to the *Mara*. Notably, this rite of passage takes place just outside the gang's hangout, a rundown house overcrowded with women and infants suggesting that, in addition to its role as a surrogate nation the *Mara* also operates as a surrogate family for its members. As this rite of passage likewise shows, such belonging comes at a high price and, as Willy personally learned, is privy to abuses of power and betrayals. In choosing to kill Lil'Mago and vindicating Marta Marlen, Willy violates the fraternal order of the gang, becoming a fugitive from his onetime "family."

That this encounter and internal displacement of both characters with regard to their respective families should take place on board of the train is significant. Commonly referred to as *la Bestia* (the Beast) or the "trains of death," the cargo trains are sites of both literal and social death. As is underscored by the demise of Sayra's father later in the film, many migrants fall to their death or are seriously injured while attempting to get on or off the moving trains or, worse yet, trying to evade the *Mara* or immigration officials. Adding to this is the dehumanization suffered by migrants who are reduced to commodities for would be predators such as drug cartels, corrupt officials, and gang members who view them as a source of income. The status of these migrants as a form of commodified labor bound for the USA echoes this same idea. As noted previously, this site of travel and the road taken does not constitute a liberated space or experience for Sayra

and Willy, but rather one that serves to re-inscribe their marginality and paradoxically sociocultural and economic confinement.

Yet, it is precisely on board of the train and in this moment in which their state of destitution is most heightened that both characters acquire a new awareness that fuels the agency they enact on their behalves later in the film. For Sayra, this means her conscious resolve to befriend Willy and, ultimately, abandon her blood relatives to follow him; a decision of her choosing, unlike the undocumented migration imposed on her by circumstance and her father's authority. Suspecting that Benito, who has witnessed Willy's actions, will tell the gang what he has done, Willy opts to remain on the fringes of the migrant community that surrounds him. After Sayra provides him with food and introduces herself, Willy responds in kind by revealing his true name rather than insisting on his gang moniker "Casper." Willy's revelation marks his distancing from the gang, but also what will be his new role as Sayra's protector. Not exactly a "friendly ghost," Willy is the "devil" destined to deliver Sayra to the USA as her neighbor doña Leonor prophesied. In throwing her lot in with Willy, Sayra not only exercises one of the few forms of agency available to her but also unknowingly secures her survival.

Willy's means of exerting agency is not as rewarding, but does allow for his personal redemption. In the final scenes of the film, the *Mara*, who has been trailing Willy, finally catches up to him at the edge of what is presumably the Rio Grande. Ironically, it is Benito, whose initiation into the gang was facilitated by Willy, who fires the lethal first shot. Willy's death is an outcome the film anticipates with the autumnal scenery in Willy's room and the allusion to the title in the beginning. Indeed, the last image of Willy is of his body, floating face down in the river, an anonymous being no one will claim or miss, as the tranquil scenery turns crimson with the sunset. Prior to dying, however, Willy secures Sayra's safe passage across the river. Using his guarded digital camera as payment for the *balsero*, Willy insists Sayra cross first, aware that the *Mara* is near. These last efforts with regard to Sayra's well-being are a culmination of the actions set in motion by Willy's killing of Lil'Mago. Despite the fact that the latter was not initially intended to safeguard Sayra, throughout Willy's physical and emotional journey, they become re-inscribed with that meaning and purpose. It is in this way that Willy exercises the only agency left to him as an outcast of society and the *Mara*, by ensuring Sayra's passage into a new country and life at the expense of his own.

Non-belonging as Contestation

Central American non-belonging is a concept whose critical possibilities lie in its ability to underscore the very processes and structures of power that render US Central Americans, particularly undocumented immigrants, undesirable citizen subjects in all of the geopolitical spaces they occupy. It likewise underscores the limits of American ideals of citizenry and nationhood. Reading *El Norte* and *Sin nombre* as road films, albeit ones that significantly differ from the traditional standard of this genre, rather than as strictly narratives of migration allows for a better contemplation of this concept. As *El Norte* suggests through the failed quest of Enrique and Rosa to find a "home," Central American non-belonging is shown to be a pervasive state of being rooted in a long history of colonial rule and migratory displacements. Enrique and Rosa are confronted with the reality of their non-belonging again and again, but most tragically in the USA, upon realizing that the American Dream they seek is an ideal they are meant to facilitate for others, not live themselves. They are, in essence, relegated to being perpetual outsiders with no real hope of being embraced anew by society at the close of their physical and emotional northbound journeys.

Sin nombre wrestles with the same questions regarding the limits of American belonging for Central Americans, yet from a differing territorial and ideological standpoint, that of the Mexican borderlands where both Sayra and Willy are rendered of inconsequence to Mexico and, by implication, the USA. Notably, neither Sayra nor Willy ascribe to the ideal of the "American dream," their lives being, in many ways, predicated on the lack of it. Willy's death, which has been foretold in a manner similar to Rosa's, affirms the fact that for gang youth like him there is no alternative. And, even though Sayra does "make it," she faces an uncertain future in the USA as an undocumented immigrant. Thus, in *Sin nombre* it is not the quest, but more so the journey that evinces their state of non-belonging. Being on the road is a dystopic enterprise that paradoxically marks the many ways in which these two individuals are not free.

Yet, as much as the road is the site of the continuous re-inscription of Sayra's and Willy's non-belonging, it is also where Sayra and Willy forge a bond and enact forms of agency that allow for their emotional and, in Sayra's case, physical survival. In so doing, they challenge their perceived expendability and criminality as undocumented migrants from Central America and "problem youth," suggesting that even as "people without a

name," they can still effect change and hold some sway, however minor, over their lives. As such, the greater intervention of *Sin nombre* is how it draws attention to the possibilities that Central American non-belonging holds for contemplating US Central American and migrant endeavors to forge alternate means of belonging and enact agency in the face of continuous exclusion and disempowerment.

Notes

1. Exceptions to this include studies such as those by Mario Barrera that discuss the formal aspects of the film within the context of Latino Cinema and that of David Rosen, which explores *El Norte*'s relative success as an independent film. Rosa Linda Fregoso departs from the aforementioned views, reflecting on the issue of gendered subjectivity in the film as part of a discussion of the limited representation of Chicanas in Chicana/o films. Alicia Estrada's contribution to this volume also adopts an alternate approach, exploring the problematic rendering of Maya identity in the film resulting from what she refers to as Nava's *ladino* lens.
2. "US Central American experience" is a phrase that encompasses the various histories of migration to the USA, as well as heterogeneous processes of ethnic and cultural integration into US society, of the diverse peoples from all parts of Central America. However, for the purposes of this discussion and reasons that will become clearer, here I employ the phrase in reference to a set of defining experiences and characteristics linked to the three major populations of Central Americans in the USA: Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans. As the 2013 American Community Survey reveals, these groups comprise almost 85 % of the overall US Central American population.
3. See "Table 7: Nativity, by Detailed Hispanic Origin 2012."
4. As a significant point of comparison, the percentage of unauthorized Mexican immigrants was a comparable 62% (Brick et al. 5). The Mexican immigrant population, however, is almost four times greater than that of Central Americans, what makes the rates of undocumented individuals in Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran communities all the more staggering.
5. Senio Blair's article centers specifically on *Sin nombre* and Patricia Riggen's *La misma luna* (2008). Although it does not encompass *El Norte*, much of the observations made by Blair with regard to Fukanaga's and Riggen's films are also applicable to *El Norte*.
6. In making this claim, Senio Blair is primarily focusing on Sayra's character in *Sin nombre*. Willy's character, as the ensuing discussion shows, compli-

cates this idea, as he is somewhat of an antihero who is neither ingenuous nor harmless.

7. The systematic exclusion of Central Americans has been discussed by scholars in analogous terms such as "invisibility," "excess," and "abjection." See, for example, Chaps. 9 and 10 of Arias's *Taking their Word* and his article "Central American-Americans: Invisibility, Power and Representation in the US Latino World"; also, Milian, and the article "US Central Americans: Representations, Agency, and Communities" co-authored by Arias and Milian. I am indebted to all of these discussions for helping me to further develop this notion of Central American non-belonging.
8. *Asalto al sueño*, *De nadie*, *Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary*, *La vida en la vía*, *Which Way Home*, *María en tierra de nadie*, and *La Bestia*.
9. This is the title of the exposé on MS-13 by National Geographic that aired as part of its *Explorer* documentary series in 2006.
10. See especially Zilberg's *Space of Detention*, as well as DeCesare and Vásquez.

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CHAPTER 9

Decolonizing Maya Border Crossings in *El Norte* and *La Jaula de Oro*

Alicia Ivonne Estrada

During the past five decades Latino/American cinematographers in the USA and Mexico have produced hundreds of films on the two nations' historically violent border.[1] In the early 1980s, *El Norte* (Gregory Nava, 1983) pioneered these efforts by becoming the first film in the border cinema genre to situate young Mayas as protagonists in the perilous journey to the USA. *El Norte* was released during a period when the Maya diaspora started to steadily grow. As James Loucky and Marlyn M. Moors have observed, by the 1980s about 10,000 Mayas resided in Los Angeles (214). In the three decades since *El Norte* first appeared on screen, Maya immigration has dramatically increased. For instance, Eduardo Jiménez Mayo notes that current data suggests there are approximately 500,000 Maya immigrants living and working in the USA (34). However, Jiménez Mayo cautions that official data on this population "is either absent or sketchy" (34). This is because the US census's representation of Guatemalans as a homogenous national group erases the existence, contributions, and experiences of the Maya diaspora. Yet, films like *El Norte* made these Maya immigration waves and demographic shifts in US cities such as Los Angeles, visible to Latino/American audiences.

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In "Central American Non-Belonging: Reading 'El Norte' in Cary Fukunaga's *Sin nombre*," which also appears in this anthology, Yajaira M. Padilla states that *El Norte* marked "a pivotal moment in the genesis of US Central American communities as well as foreground[ed] many of the related socioeconomic and political struggles that these communities continue to endure." Additionally, cultural studies scholars in their analyses on *El Norte* note the important contributions the film makes by visually constructing the plight of Central Americans to the USA during the region's Civil War period (Zilberg; Santander; Drake). These studies also highlight the ways the film illustrates the protagonists' perpetual search for the American Dream as well as their failed assimilation to American culture and society (Brakel; Padilla in this volume). Others read *El Norte* as a modern reconstruction of the Maya mythic hero-twin story taken from the *Popol Wuj* and embodied by the film's protagonists Rosa and Enrique (Brakel 166). Arthur Brakel, in particular, suggests that in this modern "epic gone tragically awry" the Maya immigrants not only lose their "authentic Indian identity," but also never fully become American. These diverse critical readings of *El Norte* highlight its pivotal place in Latino/American cinema.

It is in this context that I examine the ways the experiences and identity of Maya immigrant youth are framed in *El Norte* and in the more recent *La jaula de oro* (2013) by Diego Quemada-Díez.[2] Although most articles written on *La jaula de oro* have been in the form of newspaper reviews, the numerous awards and recognitions it has received indicate that the film will likely share a similar canonical place with *El Norte*. This is partially because of *La jaula de oro*'s groundbreaking effort to include a nonprofessional Maya actor in one of the starting roles. While there is a thirty-year gap between them, these are the only two Latino/American films at the moment that situate the experiences of Maya youth at the center of the immigration journey to the USA.[3] These films effectively make evident the links between the displacement of Mayas and the sociopolitical conditions that impacted the isthmus in the Civil War and postwar periods. These visible sociohistorical contexts challenge official discourses that often erase the connections between US foreign policies and interventions in the isthmus with those migratory movements. *El Norte* and *La jaula de oro* place the forced immigration of young Maya subjects on the big screen during two periods in which there is a surge and, subsequently a backlash on Central American and Mexican immigration to the USA.

In my analysis, I build on Freya Schiwy's notion of "border cinema." Schiwy employs the concept to examine *mestizo* cinematographic productions in the Andes. The border in Schiwy's framework is a reference to the ideological crossings created by *mestizo* filmmakers who "fused Quechua-Aymara social organization with Marxist class-analysis and critique of neo-imperialism" (75). For Schiwy border cinema visually linked indigenous social practices with leftist Marxist philosophy. Yet, these *mestizo* directors "did not hand over the camera to members of the mining [Quechua and Aymara] communities" they filmed (75). In other words, while the Andean *mestizo* filmmakers denounced class exploitation and neo-imperialism as well as incorporated Quechua-Aymara voices, the films maintained a *mestizo indigenista* lens, which tended to privilege Western sociopolitical thought.[4]

Similarly, the various border crossings in *El Norte* and *La jaula de oro* are not only social and spatial, but also ideological and cultural. The films expand the historical struggles of Latino/American immigrants at the US/Mexican border to include the ethno-cultural borders indigenous immigrants cross. At the same time, they incorporate and situate Maya voices at the center, but maintain a *ladino indigenista* frame.[5] In their movements within and between the border as well as their use of the road movie genre formulae, the films further reinforce this *ladino indigenista* border crossing narrative. They are border films because they center on the border crossing journey and end once the protagonists reach the USA. Simultaneously, they are road movies, because in their immigration journey the protagonists travel through roads that have racial, ethnic, and social implications. Like road movies, the films center on "a journey and on the impact and transformation of the journey on the travelers" (Pérez 13). Additionally, the films evoke several typical road movie characteristics like the protagonists' "mobile refuge from social circumstances," their movement from rural to urban spaces and the use of bold traveling shots that challenge passive reception (Laderman 1–5, 35). These two films, like road movies, tend to often reproduce "a certain exoticism regarding race…[and often] idealize 'primitive' cultures" (Laderman 21).

For this reason, I suggest, that *El Norte* and *La jaula de oro* are border crossing films, because of the narrative frame they employ as well as their movement within the border and road movie genres. I argue that we need to critically examine the ways these foundational films construct the Maya immigration journey to the USA. Though the films are well intentioned, because they situate Maya immigrant experiences as central, they continue

to employ a *ladino indigenista* framework that is grounded on varied articulations of internalized colonial lenses. Consequently, the reproduction of these static views on Maya identities and culture demonstrate the need to interrogate the types of Latino/American immigrant stories created and the ways they visualize the genesis of indigenous and Central American diasporas in the USA. I begin the analysis of the films by examining the ways Maya identity is imaged and framed. In particular, I point out how these constructions continue to reproduce a form of visual *indigenismo* historically evident in nonindigenous Latin/American narratives. This *indigenista* narrative is visually reasserted through the use of road movie elements that exoticize and romanticize Maya culture and identity. Then, I analyze how the films frame the protagonists' social, spatial and ideological crossings as they journey to *el norte*. I further examine how they construct Maya gender identities and dynamics and the ways in which the films reinforce colonial patriarchal frameworks by reenacting a masculinist perspective that is often central to border crossings films and road movies. My conclusion highlights the need to decolonize the Latino/American cinematographic lens as they visually construct Maya immigrant stories. I contend that maintaining these restricted images on Maya subjects reinscribe internalized colonial legacies as well as power relations and, in doing so, construct homogeneous Latino/American identities and histories.

Framing Maya Identity

Gregory Nava's *El Norte* traces the horrific conditions in which a Maya brother and sister fleeing the Guatemalan Civil War in the 1980s immigrate, as the title suggests, north to the USA.[6] In the film, the non-Maya Mexican actors David Villalpando (Enrique) and Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez (Rosa) periodically speak in K'iche'.[7] Though their K'iche' pronunciation is often incorrect, the film still pioneered efforts in the border cinema and road movie genres in its incorporation of Maya languages. These groundbreaking endeavors gave *El Norte* an important place within Latino and US cinematic productions, since, according to Hugo N. Santander, the film has been cataloged as an "American Classic" by the US library of congress.

While *El Norte* became an emblematic film for Latinos in the USA, the movie was not widely distributed in Mexico. In contrast, Diego Quemada-Díez's *La jaula de oro* received a number of excellent reviews by prominent Mexican cultural magazines and newspapers like *La Jornada*.[8] Unlike

El Norte, which used *ladino* Mexican actors to play the Maya Guatemalan siblings, *La jaula de oro* breaks the practice of nonindigenous actors playing indigenous roles through the casting of Rodolfo Domínguez Gómez, a young Maya-Tzotzil actor from Chiapas, Mexico. In 2014, Domínguez Gómez received the prestigious *Premio Ariel*, the Mexican Academy's Film Award, for his role as Chauk.[9] In *La jaula de oro*, Maya-Tzotzil is spoken by Domínguez Gómez's character. The film traces the experiences of three young immigrants, Sara (Karen Martínez), Juan (Brandon López), and Samuel (Carlos Chajon), who begin their journey amidst the extreme poverty and violence of postwar Guatemala. When the minors cross the Guatemalan/Mexican border they encounter a young Maya-Tzotzil by name of Chauk, who independently joins the three friends as they journey to *el norte*.

The film's title, *La jaula de oro*, follows the tradition of Mexican border cinema from the 1930 to 1990s, which employed popular *corridos* for their titles (Ricalde 195). The song "La jaula de oro" was written by Enrique Franco in 1983 and released by the popular *norteño* group *Los Tigres del Norte* in 1984.[10] The *corrido* tells the story of a Mexican immigrant living and working in the USA. Far from living the "American dream" the man expresses nostalgia for his beloved Mexico. He experiences heartbreak as his children become more "American" and refuse to speak Spanish. The *corrido*'s dystopia foreshadows the film's characters broken "American dream" and their foreseeable isolation from USA as well as Mexican and Guatemalan societies.

Aside from some varying narrative strategies employed in *El Norte* and *La jaula de oro*, they both incorporate Maya languages as a way of characterizing the plight of indigenous immigrants. In *El Norte*, the sporadic use of K'iche' is subtitled, while in *La jaula de oro* it is not. The approach used in *La jaula de oro* stresses the isolation experienced by Chauk, the Maya-Tzotzil protagonist. The separation occurs with the other main characters in the film and the non-Tzotzil speaking audience. Similarly, they evoke road movie elements through a focus on the sociopolitical conditions that force the protagonists' movement from their homeland to the USA as well as the tendency to exoticize the Maya characters.

Despite *El Norte* and *La jaula de oro*'s progressive attempts to make these varied forms of social marginalization visible, their homogenization of Maya identity reproduces colonial legacies that erase indigenous cultural and socioeconomic diversities. This tension in the films between mobilizing awareness around immigrant struggles and the formulaic

representations of indigenous peoples is evident in the ways the Maya protagonists are "weighted down by the one-dimensional 'meaning' [ascribed] to their racial otherness." (Laderman 218). In this way, the films maintain what Stuart Hall calls European "regimes of representation" in their stereotyped construction of Maya culture and identity (232). These representations of indigenous culture are visible in the ways the Maya characters are portrayed as simple, humble, ethical, and innately connected to the natural environment.

In *La jaula de oro*, we are introduced to Chauk when the three Guatemalan minors, Sara, Juan, and Samuel, enter Mexico. Sitting around a lake waiting to hear the arrival of *la Bestia* (the Beast), the deadly train that thousands of Central American immigrants take in their journey to the USA, the three Guatemalans observe Chauk emerge from an area with endless green foliage. In typical road movie style, a long shot introduces Chauk as he walks toward the lake and the three young Guatemalan immigrants. This visual technique sets a critical distance, which will not be changed throughout the film, between the nonindigenous protagonists and Chauk. When the Maya protagonist reaches the lake he greets the Guatemalans in Tzotzil, which the *ladino* immigrants do not speak. As opposed to the other characters that impatiently sit waiting for the train (a symbol of modernity), Chauk amiably walks barefoot to the lake and fills his recycled bottle with water. This visual juxtaposition between the Maya and non-Maya characters stresses Chauk's unquestionable profound and unmediated connection to the natural environment that surrounds them. The relationship that is developed between Chauk and Sara further highlights his connection to nature as well as his profound simplicity. In Chauk's efforts to communicate with Sara, he imparts words in Tzotzil. The vocabulary exchange between both characters is often in reference to nature and its extension to the human body. For instance, Chauk teaches Sara how to say "tree, cobweb, nose, eyes, ears, and heart." Other action terms, which might be useful for the protagonists' collective survival, are not exchanged. Chauk's linguistic practice becomes another way of highlighting his Otherness, since the words shared with Sara point to a limited vocabulary that is mainly grounded on a natural (primitive) world. Hence, considering that it is also through language that ideas are transmitted, the linguistic lessons Chauk shares with Sara stress a dichotomy between the more developed Spanish spoken by *ladinos* and the presumed unchanged Maya culture. The divergence marks Maya culture as unable to express a range of desires as well as inept in encountering the challenges of the

"modern world." In this way, the images of the *ladino* protagonists become more Western and the Maya more "indio." This form of ethnocultural divergence emphasizes the *ladino* characters' distinction from indigenous cultures while simultaneously marking their likeness to Europeans. Additionally, the close-ups of Sara and Chauk surrounded by vast green spaces suggest an idealization of nature much like cultural studies critic Jorge Pérez notes occurs in American road movies, where the "pastoral ideal" is a recurring trope (29).

Moreover, Chauk's interactions with Sara often serve to illustrate the Maya character's innate wisdom as well as his gentle, brave, and honest feelings. His sentiments are differentiated from those of Juan, Sara's *ladino* boyfriend. For instance, when Sara does not return Chauk's amorous feelings, he feels betrayed and disappears for the night. The next morning, Sara finds Chauk sleeping alone on top of a tree surrounded by sugarcane fields. The long camera lens used for this image not only highlights Chauk's alienation from his *ladino* counterparts, but also his primitiveness. This is because the scene insinuates that in his most vulnerable state Chauk's only response is to return and visually become part of the natural world. Consequently, the film's construction of Maya culture as non-modern reinforces an evolutionary model where what is Western is marked as "civilized…[and] is made the more enlightened" (Contreras 19).

The ideological implications of these scenes are encapsulated in a photograph the young immigrants take of Chauk posing with a presumed Native American headdress, a carved cane and set against the backdrop of a natural snow-filled landscape. While Sara and Samuel pose with national symbols in their hands (the US and Guatemalan flags), Juan poses as a cowboy with a gold gun pointed at the camera. His cowboy persona evokes a prominent marker of the border and road movie genres as well as reaffirms his Westernized *ladino* identity and power. In analogous fashion to *La jaula de oro*, the opening scenes in *El Norte* closely connect the Maya community and the protagonists to the natural environment. The first scenes where Arturo and Enrique Xuncax appear are close-ups of the modest leather sandals that wrap their thick dark brown callous feet. The symbolic image of callous bare feet emphasizes the characters' socioeconomic subordination. At the same time, the length of the close-ups suggests an intimate link between the characters and the land they labor. The association made in the film between the natural world and the Xuncax men is further reinscribed by Rosa's character. In the film's opening scenes, Rosa appears in a nearby river hand washing clothes. The scene's

wide frame situates her as part of the larger natural landscape. The image of Rosa hand washing clothes emerges again when she attempts to reconnect with her Maya cultural tradition, which is presumably linked to nature, in the USA. In this way, the films construct Maya identity in one-dimensional images that emphasize the seemingly natural, simplistic, rural, and innocent aspects of indigenous people and their culture.

Screening Maya Border Crossings

In *El Norte*, Rosa and Enrique's journey to the USA is framed as a necessity in their survival of the Guatemalan genocide. Chauk's movement on the road to *el norte*, however, is never made clear. *La jaula de oro*'s ambiguity around the Maya protagonist's immigration further highlights his Otherness. Unlike Rosa and Enrique, and Chauk's *ladino* traveling companions, he has no personal history, nor clearly articulated dreams and desires. Yet, in both films the Maya protagonists' movement on the road to *el norte* is marked by continuous culture clashes between their native bodies and what the films represent as Westernized social spaces. Robert Stam and Freya Schiwy's remind us that images about native bodies in Western media have historically tended to "derive their power to shock from the premise that 'natives' must be quaint and allochronic, that 'real' Indians don't carry camcorders" (Stam 326 qtd. in Shiwy 1), nor use toilets, washing machines, live and work in urban centers, or embrace and interact with any element of modernity. This is particularly evident in the Maya protagonists' naïve reactions to urban settings and dynamics. In this way, the films display two dominant road movies thematic traits: (1) an emphasis on the protagonists' movement from rural to urban modern spaces, and (2) the crossing of non-familiar cultural borders. Thus, the road in both films does not symbolize a place of freedom, but one that will challenge the Maya protagonists to survive in *ladino* spaces as they enter modernity.

In both *La jaula de oro* and *El Norte*, the protagonists' Mayaness mark their multiple lacks that range from extremely deprived material conditions to knowledge of *ladino* national culture and history. Postcolonial studies scholar Walter Mignolo notes that these presumed "lacks" become central in the construction of images that Other indigenous peoples, since they have historically been employed by Europeans to build their own (civilized) identity. It is from the context of these presumed lacks that the Maya protagonists' move away from their ethno-cultural communities as

they enter urban and modern spaces. Thus, in order for them to reach the USA their rite of passage entails surviving the varied *ladino* social and cultural crossroads they encounter. These crossings take place through their interactions with other *ladino* immigrants as well as with *coyotes* (smugglers), gang members, Mexican police, and immigration authorities. The films often illustrate the protagonists engaging in a process of de-Mayanization in which their "nativeness" is replaced by postulated *ladino* cultural traits.

In *El Norte*, the Maya siblings prepare to cross the Guatemalan/Mexican border by learning to transverse Mexican *ladino* cultural spaces. Before their departure, Enrique meets with Don Ramón (Rodolfo de Alexandre), an old Guatemalan *ladino* farmer who in his youth immigrated to the USA. Keeping with road movie elements, Don Ramón seems to embody the old sage represented by Native Americans in classic US road movies like *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991) and *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994). The old Guatemalan farmer wisely and comically imparts transformative lessons to Enrique as he initiates the journey to the USA. For example, Don Ramón advises the siblings to say they are from Oaxaca, a predominately indigenous region in Mexico. In doing so, his instructions point to the homogenization of indigenous identity by *ladino* authorities across Latino/America. Thus, Don Ramón's lessons also serve to foreshow the cultural borders the siblings will encounter and need to survive in Mexico and the USA.

Though the film illustrates the often comical and wretched difficulties the siblings experience as they attempt to cross Mexican *ladino* cultural and social borders, they are ultimately able to do it. The marker of success is, of course, the siblings' ability to literally cross the US/Mexican border. Once in the USA, and like in Mexico, they must learn to traverse American cultural spaces. Before crossing the US/Mexican border, Rosa and Enrique are obliged to sell their mother's ancestral necklace. This scene precedes the film's climax when Don Raimundo Gutiérrez instructs Rosa and Enrique to crawl in a rat-infested drainage tunnel that links the USA and Mexico. Symbolically the selling of the necklace coupled with the darkness of the drainage tunnel marks the beginning of the new US social and cultural spaces they will need to cross.

Once in the USA, the visual juxtaposition between the siblings' rural background and their new urban surroundings is created through mythical flashbacks Rosa experiences. In these flashbacks Rosa often appears wearing traditional Maya clothing, which clashes with close-ups of her

Westernized clothing and image in Los Angeles. The siblings' workspaces further stress their process of de-Mayanization and the loss of their presumed "authentic Central American Indian identities" (Brakel 166). For instance, at the upscale restaurant where Enrique works he wears a dark tuxedo, while Rosa learns to use a washing machine (as opposed to hand washing clothes in the river). These work characteristics visually mark the siblings' movement into modernity and away from their rural ("primitive") background. And though, as Yajaira Padilla notes, the siblings are never fully able to assimilate to the US culture, I read the film as suggesting that the protagonists are on the road to become Latinos in the USA. Hence, their Mayaness is lost and replaced by a Western (*ladino*) Latino identity.

Contrary to Rosa and Enrique Xuncax, who learn to traverse *ladino* Mexican and Latino cultural borders, Chauk, in *La jaula de oro*, is never able to cross them alone. In her analysis of black characters in US road movies, cultural critic Sharon Willis observes that even when blacks have mobility they are usually accompanied by white, Western, protagonists (304). The inability of subaltern characters to move as well as cross social, spatial, and cultural borders independently and without a Western companion is reinscribed in *La jaula de oro*. When Samuel, Sara and Juan are captured by Mexican immigration officials and deported to their native Guatemala, Chauk is also sent back. Unable to speak Spanish, or prove his Mexican citizenship, Juan speaks for Chauk telling Mexican immigration authorities: "*Ese indio es guatemalteco* (That Indian is Guatemalan)." Though the film highlights, through Juan's use of the derogatory "indio," the homogenization of indigenous identity as well as the racism spouted by *ladinos* across Mexico and Guatemala, Chauk's silence strips him from any form of agency. In this way, the film constructs an Other that is unceasingly victimized not just by the *ladino* socialpolitical structures that produce his subalternity, but also by his inability to speak, or act, on his behalf. This simultaneously situates the *ladino* protagonists, Juan and Sara, as (mis)leading Chauk as they journey to the USA. Initially, Sara aids Chauk in crossing the varied forms of social, cultural, and spatial borders they encounter. However, when gang members, who violently rob immigrants on *la Bestia*, abduct Sara, Chauk is left without her compassion as well as her ability to translate and guide him. Though both Chauk and Juan fight with gang members to save Sara, they fail, and never see her again. Injured, but alive, it is Chauk who heals and brings Juan back to life by using medicinal plants found in their surroundings. Thus, implying that Chauk,

unlike the other *ladino* travelers, possesses supernatural knowledge and powers that are able to physically and to some extend spiritually heal Juan's injuries. As the two continue in their journey to the USA, Juan takes Sara's place and becomes Chauk's cultural translator. Throughout the journey the Maya protagonist is unable to learn Spanish and frequently needs his *ladino* counterpart to translate and speak on his behalf. The only Spanish Chauk learns in his journey is the word *hermano* (brother), which Juan quickly rejects. In many ways, the film implies that it is also Chauk's failure to cross Westernized cultural and social borders, which impedes him from ultimately reaching the USA.

Once Juan and Chauk reach the US/Mexican border, a minuteman shoots Chauk. From a critical distance, this scene at the US/Mexican border and the invisible minuteman that kills Chauk, allude to Western frontier expansionism that attempted to eradicate Native Americans in the USA. In the film, the annihilation is successful, since the Maya protagonist dies attempting to cross that historically violent border. Running for his life Juan is unable to save Chauk and leaves his dead body alone in the middle of the vast desert. His decision to continue and leave Chauk further highlights the significant distance between the protagonists. At the same time, an extreme long shot provides the last image of Chauk as a lifeless body consumed by the desert landscape. In this way, Chauk's isolation as well as his Otherness is further reinforced by the image. As the film concludes, from the four minors that dreamt of entering the USA, it is only Juan who succeeds.

Gendering Maya Immigration Journeys

La jaula de oro and *El Norte* reframe strict Latino/American gender roles through the casting of female characters—Sara/Osvaldo and Rosa Xuncax—in these predominately male border and road movie narratives. The films make visible the varied struggles, such as rape and abduction, that Central American women immigrants face as they journey to the USA. In *La jaula de oro*, this is particularly evident through Sara, who from the beginning attempts to transgress those masculine spaces by becoming Osvaldo. Her opening scene evokes classic road movie techniques as she looks at her reflection transform in the mirror. In the scene, Sara cuts her hair and bandages her breasts as a cautionary effort to evade the violence directed at immigrant women by Mexican officials, gangs, and smugglers. Yet, in the middle of their journey, gang members abduct

Sara, who is never seen again by her companions. Thus, her gender transgression seems futile against the rampant violent male spaces they are forced to cross before reaching the USA. While Rosa Xuncax, in *El Norte*, does not face the same form of violence Sara encounters, Rosa must join her brother's journey because, as she reminds him "*¿Acaso no matan a las mujeres y hombres acá?* (Don't they also kill women and men here?)." Her assertion serves to make apparent the Guatemalan genocide the siblings escape and Rosa's initial attempt in challenging the family's patriarchal structure. Similar to Sara, Rosa also transforms her image before embarking on the road to *el norte* by changing her Maya traditional clothing for a more Westernized dress.

These gender transgressions, however, are eclipsed by the ethnocultural dichotomy constructed in the films between the alleged traditional Maya protagonists and their modern *ladino* counterparts. The racial dichotomy illustrated in the films upholds a colonial patriarchal lens that reinforces gender binary (male/female) identities. Specifically, the films frame Maya gender identities within nineteenth-century Christian patriarchal notions of provider and caretaker. These gender conceptualizations also erase indigenous sexual identities and desires, since in the films they are often portrayed as asexual, or lacking sexual intimacy. In this way, *La jaula de oro* and *El Norte* cast the Maya protagonists within colonial patriarchal imaginaries.

Historian Susan Berger explains that in Guatemala the "symbolic codes sanctioned by the Catholic Church and by Civil laws [have] meant that men should protect and provide for their women and that women, in turn, should obey and serve men" (Berger 20–21). In *El Norte*, Maya gender roles and dynamics are depicted in similar symbolic codes as those described by Susan Berger. From the film's opening scenes, Rosa and her mother, Lupe Xuncax (Alicia del Lago), embody the Christian notions of female passivity and humility. Lupe's relationship with Arturo Xuncax (Ernesto Gómez Cruz), the family's patriarch, is depicted by strict binary gender roles. The family's dark dining room, which is mystically lit by numerous candles, reinforces the Christian patriarchal elements in the film. In what seems to be Arturo Xuncax's last supper before he leaves the house to meet with other Maya *campesinos*, Lupe, suspecting his foreseeable death, anxiously attempts to stop him. In an effort to ease his mother's concerns, Enrique, as the male son, speaks to his father on her behalf. Yet, Arturo responds by explaining to Enrique that "*Tu mamá sabe comó es el* [sic] *costumbre*" (Your mother knows our tradition).

Arturo's statement inscribes Maya gender and community relations under a patriarchal framework where Maya men not only provide, but also defend their family and community. His reference to *el costumbre* fashions Maya culture as rooted in a patriarchal structure that is analogous to Western Christian gender binaries.

After his father's death, Enrique attempts to follow the elder Xuncax's footsteps as provider and protector of the surviving family. This is why, once in the USA, when Enrique is given the opportunity to take a new position as foreman in Chicago, which would pay more and provide a green card, he declines and stays in Los Angeles with Rosa. In doing so, the film emphasizes the importance of family to the Maya characters and the enactment of binary gender roles. Though the film suggests possible gender transgressions through Rosa Xuncax's character, it is limited to the protagonist's decision to join her brother in their journey to the USA. The film's emphasis on Rosa's attire, the Maya *traje*, her mother's necklace as well as the black shawl she wears throughout the journey, mark her responsibility as holder of Maya culture and tradition. This act, that Susan Wiebe Draker describes as "removing and replacing pieces" of her identity further marks Rosa's "nativeness" and role as holder of Maya tradition (Draker 93). Similarly, citing cultural critic Rosalinda Fregoso, Yajaira Padilla notes that "it is Rosa who most embodies the 'allegorical Maya-Quiche Indian' and, on account of her gender, carries the burden of culturally reproducing her people's traditions." Additionally, in her analysis of Colombian video makers, Freya Schiwy notes that the colonial patriarchal gaze is often reconstructed and projected on the screen through the " idealized vision of women as community-bound caretakers of culture and social memory" (123). Though Rosa physically leaves her native San Pedro, she, more than Enrique, continues to return through her visions and dreams. The film also shows Rosa's community-bound characteristics as she attempts to return home by hand washing clothing in the Beverly Hills home she cleans. At the same time, Rosa's tragic death symbolizes the impossibility of her gender transgressions. Likewise, her death marks the end of Enrique's Maya family and also metaphorically the links Rosa provided to his culture.

The reconstruction and projection of a Christian colonial patriarchal structure is also visible in the role ascribed to Rosa and Enrique's *padrinos* (godparents). Once Arturo is killed and Lupe is taken by the Guatemalan military, the siblings' *padrinos* assume their paternal responsibilities. In this way, the non-Maya *padrinos* further model a Western patriarchal

structure for Rosa and Enrique. In effect, it is the *padrinos* that help save Enrique's life. The siblings not only learn about the USA through their *madrina*'s *Good Housekeeping* magazine collection, but also embark in her dream. It is the *madrina* who cares for the siblings by providing them with the cultural and economic capital needed for their journey to *el norte*. A journey that will result in Rosa's inevitable death, and one that will cement Enrique's place as the family's patriarch.

In the USA, Rosa and Enrique are metaphorically baptized with new non-Maya *padrinos*, who model Western gender roles for them. At her first job in a downtown Los Angeles sweatshop, Rosa meets Nacha (Lupe Ontiveros), a savvy *ladina* Mexican immigrant. Their connection is further solidified when Nacha, much like Rosa's Guatemalan *madrina* protected them from the military, saves her from getting caught and deported by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Additionally, it is through Nacha that Rosa learns to dress and act like an "American" (Latina) woman. After escaping the INS raid, at a small café, Rosa innocently observes Nacha applying makeup. The close-ups of the women looking at each other as they apply makeup reinforce their intimate bond. Hence, when Nacha tenderly tells Rosa that without makeup "*pareces india*" (you look like an Indian), the racist implications of the statement are sanitized and defused. Moreover, the cosmetics Nacha uses on Rosa, literally and metaphorically reinscribe her body with Western symbols of modernity and femininity. Enthusiastically, Nacha introduces Rosa to other symbols of American (Latina) modernity like fashion trends and credit at *Sears*.

Enrique, now the patriarch of the Xuncax family, reminds Rosa of her responsibility as holder of Maya culture and tradition. Laughing at Rosa's new adopted Westernized femininity, Enrique tells her "*Pareces payaso*" (You look like a clown). Yet, in a similar scene, when Enrique arrives to their small well-lit apartment wearing a black bowtie, slacks and vest, both siblings celebrate his new "American" image, because it symbolically marks his promotion at work. Like Rosa, Enrique's *padrino* is Jorge (Enrique Castillo), an undocumented worker from Chihuahua, Mexico. Through Jorge's support and encouragement Enrique excels in his work duties and, similar to Rosa, is able to escape an Immigration and Naturalization Service raid. At the same time, it is Jorge, who suggests to Enrique that Latino/American immigrants are part of the same family and, in doing so, erases different ethnic, national identities, and histories. Thus, both Nacha

and Jorge further model and inscribe the Xuncax siblings within Western Christian binary gender roles that reproduce colonial lenses.

Unlike Rosa and Enrique, Chauk's family, or community, is never visible in the film. He emerges from the vast green landscape of the Guatemalan/Mexican border and dies in the extensive dry desert on the US/Mexican border. In this way, Chauk's connection to the natural environment and to his *ladino* companions informs his gender identity. In the film, Chauk's physical appearances as well as his masculinity are continuously juxtaposed with his *ladino* counterpart. For instance, often the characters are visually framed next, or across, from each other without a shirt. The close-ups of their shirtless upper bodies further reinforces the juxtaposition between Juan's lighter skin tone and Chauk's darker skin. Similarly, from the film's opening scenes Juan not only embodies a *ladino* hyper masculinity, through the cowboy boots and clothes he wears, but also asserts himself as the group's leader. Although, both Sara and Juan often serve as Chauk's guide and cultural translator, Juan carries the money, views maps and provides the others with instructions on the road. Likewise, when the protagonists are robbed and left with no money, or food, Juan steals a chicken that eventually feeds the three minors. Though Juan is incapable of killing the chicken, he does provide the group with a meal. His hyper masculine character contrasts Chauk's more feminized gender identity. Chauk, not the *ladinos* Sara or Juan, embodies the presumed ancestral knowledge and sensibility to kill the chicken. Speaking to the chicken in Maya-Tzotzil, Chauk quietly kills it and returns the fowl to Juan, the group's leader and provider. This scene, like in another where Chauk heals Juan after gang members beat them, feminizes his colonized Maya body.

At the same time, Chauk's innate connection to the natural environment closely links his body to the land, which is constructed as feminine and vulnerable. Freya Schiwy notes that European men have constructed a self that is "not only in opposition to women but also to colonized (or postcolonial) men, represented as effeminate or as part of an irrational nature. Nature itself is bound up with tropes of femininity and opposed to civilization" (111). This casting of Maya masculinity is reinforced through Chauk's failed attempt at intimacy with Sara. Her decision to spend the night with Juan symbolically privileges his *ladino* masculine gaze and desires. The long shot of a solitary Chauk sleeping on a tree surrounded by the vastness of sugarcane fields reinforces his presumed innate connection to nature and by extension his effeminate gender identity. The reframing of these colonial tropes and patriarchal imaginings further mark the

Maya protagonist's Otherness. In *La jaula de oro*, the binaries created reproduce male/female gender identities and reaffirm a Western masculine subjectivity. Framed similar to Central American masculinist revolutionary narratives, the film situates Juan, the young *ladino* minor, not only as the sole protagonist who reaches the USA, but also the only one who attempted to lead the feminized members of the group in their journey. Ultimately, both *La jaula de oro* and *El Norte* reproduce gender binaries and privilege a Western male lens. This is because Juan and Enrique, the sole survivors, symbolically embody Western masculine traits. Consequently, the closing shots in each of the films are close-ups of the male protagonists, Juan and Enrique, standing, working and surrounded by other male bodies. The feminine, or feminized, characters in the films die in the process of crossing the US/Mexican border, or once they arrive to the USA.[11] In this way, the films reenact the border and road movie genres' typical masculinist perspective as well as reproduce a cinematic gaze and narrative that maintains patriarchal colonial lenses.

Decolonizing the Latino/American Lens

While *La jaula de oro* and *El Norte* vividly illustrate the varied social and national borders that the young protagonists are forced to cross, the films also maintain a Western gaze that construct a fixed subalternized Maya identity. This is made evident through the juxtaposition of images between what is fashioned in the films as *ladino* and modern with what the West has historically constructed as indigenous people's premodern cultural characteristics. These ethnic and cultural dichotomies employed in the films inform as well as recreate static colonial and patriarchal gender binaries.

Additionally, as Freya Schiwy observes in her analysis of Andean *mestizo indigenista* filmmakers, though they "sought to give voice to the people," they also "… maintained the role of the modern intellectual that enlightens and guides the people" (76). Similar to the Andean filmmakers Schiwy studies, the Latino/American films examined aim at giving voice to the struggles faced by Maya immigrants as they journey to *el norte*. However, the films are limited by the restricted ways in which the Maya immigrant voices and stories are framed on the screen. This is particularly evident in the incorporation of border and road movie elements, which seem to ultimately facilitate the reproduction of internalized patriarchal colonial gazes. Thus, the critical examination of these films intends at opening up a dialogue and awareness on the need to decolonize the framing of these

Latino/American immigration stories. In doing so, it also observes the need to create spaces for Mayas to frame, visualize, and tell their immigration experiences and (hi)stories. By telling and framing their own immigration stories, Maya filmmakers can potentially contribute to other ways of reimaging as well as constructing Latino/American (hi)stories and identities that emphasize and visually illustrate its heterogeneity.

Notes

1. I use the term Latino/American to highlight the connections and disconnections between Latina/o and Latin American culture. Much like the border, the slash between Latino/American unites and splits both cultural spaces and identities.
2. Gregory Nava was born and raised in San Diego, California. He is of Mexican descent. Diego Quemada-Díez was born in Spain. He immigrated to the USA in the 1990s and then moved to Mexico, where he currently resides.
3. Other films and documentaries focus primarily on the experiences of Maya immigrants in the USA. See for example, *Mayan Voices, American Lives* (Olivia Carrescia, 1994); *Discovering Dominga* (Patricia Flynn, 2002); *The Short Life of José Antonio Gutiérrez* (Heidi Specogna, 2006); *Brother Towns, Pueblos Hermanos* (Charles D. Thompson, 2010); *AbUSed: The Postville Raid* (Luis Argueta, 2011); *Abrazos* (Luis Argueta, 2014).
4. The *indigenista* tradition prevailed in Latin American countries with large indigenous populations like Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Peru. The height of the *indigenista* tradition was between 1910 and 1930s, when mainly *ladino* writers and artists attempted to address the "Indian problem" in their work by portraying indigenous communities in sympathetic, but often paternalistic and exotic representations.
5. I employ *ladino*, and not *mestizo*, because the latter is not as used in Guatemala. I define *ladino* identity, like it is understood in Guatemala, as the negation of indigeneity (Bastos and Camus). Anthropologist Charles Hale also explains that "people who identify as ladino generally have absorbed an ideology of racial superiority in relation to Indians: viewing themselves as closer to an ideal of progress, decency, and all things modern, in contrast to Indians, who are regrettably and almost irredeemably backward" (4). Hale further notes that while most *ladinos* in Guatemala today reject racism, they continue to maintain and desire racial privileges (19).
6. I have also examined *El Norte* in relation to US grassroots solidarity groups and their screening of Central American resistance movements in "*A'Co Nuq'*: Maya Women in Post-1996 Guatemalan Cinematic Productions." <http://istmo.denison.edu/n13/articulos/women.html≥.

7. Enrique was David Villalpando's breakout role. After *El Norte*, he went on to write several well-known popular Mexican television shows as for example, *Cero en conducta*; *La casa de la risa*; *La escuelita VIP*; *Par de Ases*; '*Fábrica de Risas* y *Al ritmo de la noche*. In *Cero en conducta* (aired on Televisa) and *La escuelita VIP* (Televisa), he portrays professor Virolo. These two popular Mexican comedy shows typically include vulgar caricatures of indigenous people, where they often appear as rural, ignorant, and violent. Like Villalpando, Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez's breakout role was playing Rosa in *El Norte*. She has appeared in numerous films in Mexico and in *telenovelas* as well as Nava's *Bordertown* (2006), which is based on the *Ciudad Juárez* femicides.
8. See for example, Carlos Bonfil's review in *La Jornada* <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/05/11/opinion/a07a1esp> and Jorge Caballero's <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/05/07/espectaculos/a09n1esp>, among others.
9. The film was nominated in fourteen categories and won a total of nine awards. Some of the awards included Best Picture, Best Actor (Brandon López), Sound, Original Music, Original Screenplay, Photography, Editing, and Supporting Actor (Rodolfo Domínguez Gómez). <http://www.m-x.com.mx/2014-05-28/la-jaula-de-oro-gana-nueve-premios-ariel-incluido-el-de-mejor-pelicula-amat-escalante-el-de-mejor-director/≥.
10. Three years after the song's release, Sergio Véjar produced a film by the same title in 1987. The film featured well-known Mexican actors like Mario Almada and focused on the Mexican immigration to the USA in the 1980s.
11. Examples of Central American masculinist writings include Otto Rene Castillo, Mario Payeras, and Omar Cabezas, among others.

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CHAPTER 10

Configuring Desire and Social Order in the Contemporary Mexican Youth Road Film

Olivia Cosentino

Films about young people have become a salient trend and a crucial focal point of twenty-first century Mexican cinema. Notably these youth films[1] are produced and directed by adults who often, but not always, project their visions of adolescence onto the narratives, forming the young protagonists into a symbol of society. Historian Luisa Passerini traces the roots of configuring the symbol of youth as a dualistic threat and hope back to 1950s Italy and America. She explains, "[t]he idea of youth became overdetermined, absorbing all the problems of society. Youth and its symbols crystallized social anxieties … and became a model for the future, both threat and hope" (316). Cultural production all over the world half a century later still relies on youth to express optimism and fear about the future. Youth films often exacerbate social anxieties by showing rebellious youth and then quelling their disorder to try to control the uncontrollable. It is common to see youth films merge with road movies because traveling the open road extends unprecedented amounts of freedom to youth, and often makes for stories filled with adventure and entertainment. Given the narrative possibilities, it is notable that few youth

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road films exist in the Hollywood corpus. This subgenre is untouched by Timothy Shary, the most well-known scholar of Hollywood youth cinema, most likely due to the scarcity of the Hollywood youth road film. Senio Blair, in the only article on youth films/road films in the Latin American canon, argues that the child migrant road film allows for the subversion and transformation of traditional norms of the road film and makes visible the "literal and metaphorical borders" that undocumented immigrants must cross to survive (119). We note, however, the huge difference between a migration necessary to survival and a road trip taken for pleasure, or by choice. Not even the recent approaches to Mexican youth cinema treat this subgenre, including Laura Podalsky's foundational article ("The Young") and her monograph (*The politics*), which separates chapters on "contemporary youth" and "migrant feelings," Sánchez Prado ("Interrupting Innocence"), MacLaird (*Aesthetics*), who even dedicates a chapter to "Independence and Innovation: Indie Film and the Youth Market," Aldama (*Mex-Ciné*) and Smith (*Mexican Screen*).

I claim the genre of youth road film merits study in the Mexican canon because of the integral role it played in elevating the Mexican film industry to the global playing field after receiving widespread recognition for Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001). My chapter fills the gap in scholarship on the Mexican youth road film with the examination of *Por la libre* (Juan Carlos de Llaca, 2000), a precursor to *Y tu mamá también*, and *Viaje redondo* (Gerardo Tort, 2009), a film that more fully realizes the queer undertones expressed in *Y tu mamá también*. According to Emily Hind, *Por la libre* was seen by 1,390,000 spectators and earned 38 million pesos over the course of its run in Mexican theaters (110). *Viaje redondo*, on the other hand, seems to have banked upon the success of *Y tu mamá también*, as its budget was around 1.8 million pesos (IMDB), but its box office receipts only totaled 95,742 pesos (Box Office Mojo). Both of the films feature prominent young stars—Osvaldo Benavides and Ana de la Reguera, star of *Ladies' Night* (Gabriela Tagliavini, 2003), both of whom are still active in their careers, and Cassandra Ciangherotti, who recently played the leading role in *Las horas contigo* (Catalina Aguilar Mastretta, 2015). *Por la libre* and *Viaje redondo* seem to lack depth due to stereotypical constructions of characters and plot. This could be attributed to the fact that the filmmakers have worked mostly in television. Tort has directed two historical series and a few made-for-TV movies and documentaries while de Llaca is known for directing over 150 episodes of the popular telenovelas, *Libre para amarte* and *Código postal*. Television is a medium

whose brevity necessitates formulaic manufacturing of plot. However, I believe that looking at the films' engagements with desire and the social order allows for a productive reading. Through the narrative structure of the road trip, the films present spaces of freedom where youth articulate and act upon their desires. Both films are ideologically concerned with the preservation of social order (and traditional Mexicanness) as they relate to desire and expressions of social and class differences in youth. I will not be talking about *Y tu mamá también* here because it has already been widely discussed by critics.[2] Rather, I use this chapter to explore how the Mexican youth road film allows for new social norms to be rehearsed and then channels, dismisses and/or transforms the emergent youthful desires as a means of maintaining social order, perpetuating traditional heteronormative behavior and didactically disciplining the new generations of Mexican youth, on and off screen.

Navigating Desire and Social Order

I will first discuss the link between desire and social order because of its influence on the ideologically conservative conclusions of each film. David Orgeron highlights a metacriticism that ties film to social order when he writes that "[c]inema's perennial critique of mechanized motion as a highly attractive, thoroughly modern *threat* to the accepted 'order of things' begins, with cinema itself" (13, emphasis in original). Orgeron refers not only to the road film here, but also to the dangerous and disruptive potentialities of film as a medium; its enchanting ability to disturb established societal norms. The road film in particular is tied to the movement of society and social order as it emblematically captures the forward motion of its protagonists as they travel along the road. Desire is what fundamentally propels the subjects to an end. In the case of the Mexican youth road film, the space of the road allots the protagonists the momentary freedom to circumvent the rigidity of social order to explore disruptive desires, even though it is nondisruptive desires that instigate the road trip.

In *The Real Gaze,* Todd McGowan politicizes the interactions between desire and social order in cinema. For McGowan, "the very existence of desire indicates the subject's dissatisfaction with the social order," giving desire the quality of "incipient radicality" (79). He locates the origin of this desire within the subject itself, born as a result of "a being's subjection to social demands" (McGowan 79). Upon entering the social order, the subject is actively confronted by social demands and thus friction occurs

when practices, customs, laws, or even traditions conflict with the subject's desire. McGowan posits that "desire always seeks an additional something that the social order cannot provide," intensifying the already strained connection between desire and the social order (80). Operating in the space of lack, desire begins to compete with and oppugn the social order. A paradoxical characteristic of the social order is that it privileges both the past and the future, elevating the importance of the status quo of social relations (namely the paradigm of the traditional, heterosexual family) for the benefit of a secure future, a point that is crucial to understanding films like *Y tu mamá también* and *Viaje redondo* where queer desire is expressed.

Lee Edelman's brilliant treatment of queer theory and the death drive in *No Future* provides another key insight into my argument about desire and the social order. Edelman characterizes queer desire as threatening to social order because it resists family formation and opposes the cult of the Child. *No Future* examines the notion of reproductive futurism and society's dedication to "the Child," not an actual historical subject, but rather a discursive figure, a "fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention" (3). Society's obsession with "the Child" marks and perpetuates compulsory heteronormativity, inherently reinforcing fixed structures of identity, all with the justification of protecting the future for the Child to come. Queer desires threaten the actualization of this vision of future that bases itself on heteronormativity. Thus, the queer becomes "the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance … to every social structure or form," an obstacle in the path of oppressive social order (4). Society inculpates queerness for its lack of procreation: if there is no baby, the consequence is no future and blame falls upon the sterile desires that are only understood as self-serving pleasure. Queer desire disrupts the social order because of the future that it proposes.

Futuristic undertones fit well with the mobility of the road film because it symbolizes the country's active movement toward progress, easily allowing for the construction of national allegories like we will see in the films here. The subsequent sections analyze *Por la libre* and *Viaje redondo*'s negotiations with disruptive desire, ultimately denying the formation of relationships that conflict with the social order, bringing the protagonists back to a core of heteronormativity and social order. McGowan and Edelman provide two theoretical points of departure that are pertinent to this analysis: first, as we will see in *Por la libre*, the subject's desire forms through conflict with the social order. And second, queer desire is vilified for opposing traditional formations of family and heterosexual identity in *Viaje redondo*.

Displays of Social Difference and Desire in *Por la libre*

Por la libre tells the story of two cousins, Rocco (Osvaldo Benavides) and Rodrigo (Rodrigo Cachero), who hit the road to fulfill their grandfather's (Xavier Massé) last request to have his ashes scattered in Acapulco, a bequest ignored by the cousins' fathers, Luis (Alejandro Tommasi) and Rodrigo Jr. (Otto Sirgo). In Acapulco, they meet up with their grandfather's old friend Felipe (Héctor Ortega) and decide to stay at Hotel La Perla, run by Perla (Gina Morett) and her daughter, María (Ana de la Reguera). Rocco is immediately attracted to María, and following the advice of his grandfather to find a real girlfriend, he asks María out, and that night they sleep together. In an unexpected plot twist, Rocco discovers that Perla and María are the secret second family of his grandfather, meaning that both he and María have unknowingly committed incest. Salvador Oropesa calls this film "a relevant cultural text," but claims that it "lacks the complexity"[3] of *Y tu mamá también* and *Sin dejar huella* (María Novaro, 2000) (105). Oropesa's claim, however, does not fully consider the national allegory manifested by the crucial subtext of desire and social order that gives *Por la libre* its depth. Oropesa makes good points when he juxtaposes the grandfather's two families—the criollo "first" family and the "second" mestizo family—but this criollo versus mestizo set-up leads him to a confusing conclusion about the incest that occurs between Rocco and María, namely that the film approves of their relationship because it represents the "true mestizo condition" and not "the imposed mestizo ideal of revolutionary nationalism" (108). The film was released at a crucial moment in Mexican history: October 2000, months after the electoral loss of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the political party that had ruled Mexico for the previous seventy-one years. The fall of the PRI, a veritable symbol of Mexican tradition, was not entirely unwelcome by citizens, yet it left the country with questions about Mexico's future. *Por la libre* parallels a family[4] and a nation struggling with generational transitions; moving into a "new" Mexico while still attempting to maintain the "old" traditional family values that support the social order. In the analysis that follows, I posit that the narrative struggles with viewing old Mexico as unquestionably good and new Mexico as intrinsically bad, leading the film to problematize the validity of the social order.

Por la libre creates recognizable differences and contrasts Rocco, who embodies a new, globalized Mexico, and Rodrigo, who is emblematic of the old, traditional Mexico. Incidentally, the diametric young men share their grandfather's name (Rodrigo Carnicero), but one uses the nickname Rocco while the other prefers Rodrigo. Their appearances alone indicate the film's designations of modern and traditional: shaggy, unkempt Rocco wears casual sweaters and untucked shirts and has an eyebrow piercing while clean cut Rodrigo is well-groomed in crisp button-ups and a cross necklace, a symbol of his devotion to Catholicism. The first scene of the film presents Rocco's divergences from society and his cousin. We are given a series of close-ups: feet walking together in the street, the lighting of a match, then a curious shot of the two boys' reflections mirrored upside down in a puddle. Rocco holds a joint of marijuana in his mouth as his friend Roña[5] (Emilio Cortés) cups his hand around the match and leans toward Rocco, creating an intimate moment and suggesting the pair's homosocial relationship. The camera jumps from the puddle to framing the pair in a tight close-up as they walk and talk about Rocco's mother who Rocco caught having an affair. Rocco pauses as the pair stare offscreen right and we are presented with an eyeline match of two young women walking, the only slow-motion shot in the film. Roña says, "Ouch!" in a voice that indicates pleasure and Rocco replies, "Ehhhh… más o menos (So, so.)" Rocco's expression turns pained and he looks straight up at the sky, an action that can be read as his frustration and/or dissatisfaction with women.[6] This temporal disruption calls attention to Rocco's preference for a close relationship with his male friend (he also has an intimate goodbye with Roña before the trip) rather than a woman, a desire that falls out of order with the social order. Rodrigo and his blonde girlfriend Irina (Alexia Witt) pull up in a car alongside Rocco and Roña, paralleling the relationships (traditional heterosexual vs. new and emergent homosocial). Rodrigo sees that Rocco is smoking and asks, "¿Tan temprano? (This early?)" Rocco offers him the joint, "Sí, ¿no gustas? (Yeah, you want some?)" Rodrigo smiles and says, "No, gracias. ¿Quieren un ride? (No, thanks. Want a ride?)" Rocco imitates Rodrigo's response, "No, gracias (No, thanks)," symbolically rejecting each other's lifestyles.

The following scene reveals Rocco's dangerous desires and shows the grandfather's interventions in Rocco and even Rodrigo's desires. Rocco bursts into the private room to discover his grandfather, a doctor by trade, examining Rodrigo's genitals, a moment that renders visible the intimacy between grandfather and grandsons. The grandfather tells Rodrigo that it

is only a minor infection and adds slyly, "Dejas descansar la mano (Give the hand a rest)," suggesting that Rodrigo quit masturbating. *Por la libre* only includes a quick reference to masturbation in terms of medical discourse because, as Thomas W. Laqueur writes, "[m]odern masturbation is profane … [i]t is that part of human sexual life where potentially unlimited pleasure meets social restraint" (13). *Por la libre* curbs Rodrigo's masturbatory desires to the point that only their implied aftereffects appear onscreen. The film codes Rodrigo's desire for self-pleasure as selfish, even physically harmful, and disciplines these desires through the grandfather's disapproval. Contrasted with the explicit pool scene in *Y tu mamá también*, which includes overt images of Julio (Gael García Bernal) and Tenoch's (Diego Luna) poolside ejaculations, we see *Por la libre*'s conservatism in its treatment of masturbation.

Rocco's birthday present to his grandfather is his first published article entitled "Amor virtual (Virtual love)," an essay that embodies Rocco's emergent and dangerous desires. *Por la libre* gives the audience striking asynchronous image and sound. Rocco's voice reads the article aloud as the camera presents a close-up of his grandfather's hand holding a ticking pocket watch, emphasizing the temporal collision of new, disruptive ideas in a traditional setting. This same watch is inherited by Rocco after his grandfather's death, symbolizing the traditional lifestyle the grandfather hopes to impart upon his modern-minded grandson. Rocco reads:

> En tiempos modernos de realidades virtuosas, tenemos por fin la solución a nuestros eternos deseos del orgasmo infinito, viviendo con violencia la estética a cada momento del placer y tratando de encontrar lo que no sabemos … sería como comprar un departamento, en vez de rentarlo, con la seguridad de que ella nunca se iría con tu mejor amigo. Si la condición natural de ser humano es la soledad, como afirman los existencialistas, entonces el amor virtual es la solución para las generaciones enajenadas del presente.
>
> (Times of virtuous reality have finally brought the eternal desire for infinite orgasm, as we live through every instant of pleasure trying to find what we don't know … It's like buying an apartment instead of renting it and you can be sure she will never run off with your best friend.[7] If man's natural state is solitude, as the Existentialists claim, then virtual love is the solution for today's alienated generations.)

His grandfather frowns, "Pero … ¿máquinas en vez de mujeres? (But … machines instead of women?)" Not expecting criticism from his respected patriarch, Rocco is crushed by his grandfather's reaction. The grandfather

tells Rocco to find a real girlfriend, planting the necessity to adhere to the social order. According to the grandfather, love cannot be virtual for a man because it is interconnected with the desire of a real woman. In perhaps the most important lines of the film, the grandfather claims that "el amor no es el deseo del otro, no. Es el deseo del deseo del otro. Y eso solo lo tienes con alguien de carne y huesos. (Love isn't wanting another, no. It's wanting another to want you. And it has to be a real human being.)" Rocco's ideas of virtual love must be disciplined because a purely virtual relationship, like queer desire, cannot lead to family formation. Founded entirely upon fulfilling a present desire for pleasure, *Por la libre* codes virtual love and masturbation as "sterile, narcissistic enjoyments" that prevent the development of real heterosexual relationships necessary to the continuation of traditional society (Edelman 13). I find it productive to consider Edelman's theories here because like queerness, Rocco and Rodrigo's desires for virtual love and masturbation are tempered because neither are future or family driven and they dissent from the social order.

A moment during the road trip affirms the old/new divide between the cousins. Rodrigo throws Rocco's joint out of the car window and Rocco runs after it. In retaliation, Rocco throws out the car insurance, a symbol of the institutional social order, and Rodrigo stops the car to retrieve it. A conversation facilitated by the shared space of the car and the boredom of driving further demarcates the cousins and their modern/traditional attitudes about life. Modern, open-minded Rocco is fascinated with the burial rituals of the indigenous peoples of Mozambique while Rodrigo scoffs at it, affirming an old Mexico worldview, overly concerned with nationalism and the preservation of Mexicanness. Rocco says, "[e]llos creen que los muertos manipulan el destino de los vivos (They believe that the dead manipulate the destiny of the living)." I contend that McGowan's understanding of Lacan ("[d]esire emerges through the loss of the object" and this "loss as constitutive for both desire itself and subjectivity") explain this nod to the influence that the deceased grandfather will continue to have over Rocco's desires and decisions (81). The loss of his respected grandfather, a person who Rocco wishes to emulate, impacts the configuration of his desires and I argue that Rocco's rejection of virtual love is directly connected to the lack he feels.

Por la libre attributes the transformation of Rocco's desires (he stops smoking pot and sleeps with a real woman) to the loss of his grandfather, a lack that is constantly made visible by the presence of the urn that holds the grandfather's ashes. In Hotel La Perla, Rocco lays down on the bed to

watch television as María stands on a chair to change a light bulb. Rocco's eyes slide up María's body as the narrator of the nature show says, "Lo más importante para estos seres es procrear y procrear (The most important thing for them is to procreate and procreate)," referring to the sexually active rabbits, but also insinuating Rocco's attraction to María. I view this pointed and rather unsexy sexualization of María as *Por la libre*'s attempts to ground Maria's allure in her ability to fulfill the role of a procreating, heterosexual partner. When Rodrigo suggests that Rocco invite María out, he holds up the urn, drops his voice to a lower register and mimics the grandfather, "Búscate una novia, ¡joder! (Find yourself a girlfriend, dammit!)" Rocco is propelled by the words of his grandfather to pursue María. He approaches María at the front desk, tells her that he and Rodrigo are going out to a club and asks, "Es mejor entrar en pareja, ¿no? (It's best to go with someone, right?)" María nods and Rocco frowns, "Es que … no tengo pareja (It's just that, I don't have a date)." María accepts Rocco's invitation and they go to club Baby'O, because in the diegetic world of *Por la libre,* everything from television programming to bar naming is ingrained with reproductive futurism. After almost losing the urn in the club, Rocco leaves in a rush, followed by María, who seeks to comfort him. In a series of quick shots, *Por la libre* emphasizes the transformation of Rocco's desire for marijuana into his desire for María. Rocco accidentally drops his joint outside of the club, the camera cuts to a medium shot of María, then a medium shot of Rocco, followed by a close-up of the abandoned joint in the puddle (triggering the spectator to think back to the puddle at the beginning of the film that reflected Rocco's homosocial relationship with Roña). Rocco and María consummate their relationship in the hotel during a lengthy montage of intertwined bodies (emphasizing the "carne y huesos" of the relationship) that culminates in a shot of the urn reflecting the final act of intercourse. The reflection in the urn insinuates the triangularity of desire—the absence of his grandfather sparks Rocco's desire to participate in a non-virtual relationship, which leads him to sex with his grandfather's daughter—although both the audience and protagonists are still unaware of the incest.

It is crucial that the realization of Rocco's desires takes place in Acapulco, the home of their grandfather's second family, because it allows *Por la libre* to contest the soundness of the social order through the revelation of the grandfather's transgressive desires. McGowan tells us that desire unfailingly looks for "the additional something that the social order cannot provide," illustrated by the grandfather's loving, but illicit

relationship with Perla (80). Earlier in the film, the grandfather states that he and Rocco's deceased grandmother slept next to each other for fifty-one years despite having nothing in common. The requirement to maintain a loveless marriage with his first wife is the "subjection to social demands" that McGowan claims is the genesis of desire within the subject (79). Rocco finds his desire in the same place as his grandfather—in the second family in Acapulco—but unlike his grandfather's desire, Rocco's relationship with María is incestuous, coding it as conflictive with the social order.[8] Even though Rocco's desire for virtual love has been successfully disciplined into a desire for a real woman, the presence of incest does not fully eliminate the disruptive nature of Rocco's new desires. The film is ambiguous about the future of Rocco and María's relationship. Although Rocco clearly recognizes their blood relation by giving María his grandfather's pocket watch, the couple still shares a passionate kiss afterwards. *Por la libre* strains against the narrative containment and is unable to fully ameliorate Rocco's desires into cohering with the social order because the film questions the value of tradition and the Mexican social order. It ends with one last salute to the social order by symbolically gathering the potential hope for the future of Mexico (Rocco, Rodrigo, María, and Pureza) and putting to rest the person at the root of familial disorder and disruption, the grandfather. As the young people say their goodbyes, Pureza (Pilar Mata) tells the ashes of her father that she is pregnant (and assumedly getting married), conforming to her father's wishes that she begin her own family.

Por la libre posits that the selfish, modern desires of virtual love, masturbation, and solitude cannot exist within a social order that is perpetuated by traditional, heterosexual nuclear families. McGowan explains that desire reflects what the social order cannot fulfill and in this, we see the conflict between desire, love, (in)fidelity, and the social order. There is no guarantee that normalized, heterosexual relationships within the social order of a new, globalized Mexico will provide love or even prevent infidelity, meaning that subjects are impelled to search outside of the social order to fulfill their desires. As patriarch, the grandfather's behavior should be normalized, but his obscenity escapes normalization as a means of creating doubt in the all-powerful social order.[9] *Por la libre* suggests that in a post-PRI Mexico, social order and tradition are not what they used to be. Using the allegorical forward motion of the youth road film, it presents a confused and ambiguous vision of Mexico's future. The title of the film refers to the cousins' decision to go by way of the free highway instead of

the tolled road, but we can also read it as Mexico's choice to oust the PRI and enter the new millennium freely with a clean slate.

Displays of Class Difference and Queer Desire in *Viaje redondo*

Another youth road film concerned with desire and social difference, *Viaje redondo,* complements *Por la libre* because both films project a conservative and heteronormative conceptualization of Mexican youth. The national allegory is more subtle in *Viaje redondo,* contrasting two young women (both around age 18), the working class, traditional Mexican, Lucía (Teresa Ruiz), and the higher class, globalized Mexican, Fernanda (Cassandra Ciangherotti). Curly haired, voluptuous Lucía is a single mother from Acapulco and her working class status is emphasized through an establishing shot in the humble salon where she works. Lucía travels by bus, whereas Fernanda drives a car, symbolic of the privilege that comes from being upper-middle/upper class. An only child hailing from Mexico City, Fernanda is a free spirit and has the financial freedom to be part of the creative class. She is an avid photographer and a self-proclaimed "alternative artist." Fernanda does yoga, speaks English, and does not seem to have a job or attend a university, though it is clear that she could afford an education. Fernanda is physically distinct from Lucía—she has lighter skin, a short pixie cut, and a boyishly lean body, diverging from the traditional stereotype of the curvy, sensual Latin American woman. Lucía is a Catholic and prays to the Virgin before embarking on her trip, while Fernanda subscribes to a foreign spirituality and is concerned with her yin and yang, echoing the entrance of global culture into Mexico in the new millennium. *Viaje redondo* was released in 2009, the same year in which Mexico City legalized same-sex marriage and LGBT adoptions. This film echoes traditional Mexican society's hesitancy to accept queer desire on the grounds of maintaining social order. Using the classed females, the film assigns the cosmopolitan and foreign-oriented Fernanda the role of queer dissenter and corrupter of traditional Lucía.

Beyond the exaggerated class differences, the film locates Lucía and Fernanda's similarities in their heterosexual desires. Both are propelled on a journey to Saltillo in order to find their (ex)boyfriends. Especially in Lucía's case, there is a certain degree of fantasy surrounding the status of their relationships. In the opening salon scene, Lucía's gay best friend Toto (Octavio Castro) tells her that she needs a man and should be

realistic—Huicho (Iván González) has only sent her a single postcard and has probably already found another girlfriend. Lucía protests that Huicho still loves her and has not written because he is busy working. Fernanda is similarly preoccupied with Mario (Fernando Sansores); the first images in the establishing shot in Fernanda's home consist of a collage of photos of Mario's face. It is only after the camera focuses on the images of Mario that Fernanda appears. Fernanda's life coach (Catalina López) encourages her to confront Mario so that she can let him go.

Fernanda and Lucía cross paths at a gas station, a plot device that immediately conjures scenes from *Sin dejar huella*, a Mexican road film featuring Aitana Sánchez-Gijón and Tiaré Scanda, actresses significantly older than Ruiz and Ciangherotti, who merge their road trips after meeting at a gas station. *Viaje redondo* incidentally was cowritten by Beatríz Novaro, younger sister of María Novaro, director of *Sin dejar huella*. Of course, the feminine road trip also brings to mind both *Thelma and Louis* (Ridley Scott, 1991) and *Crossroads* (Tamra Davis, 2002), Hollywood road films that emphasize the female solidarity that is also shown in *Viaje redondo*. Fernanda accuses Lucía of stealing her wallet and the resulting confrontation causes Lucía to miss her bus. An attractive male truck driver, Flavio (Felipe de Lara), offers Lucía a ride to Saltillo, but she refuses, a decision that calls viewers' attention to the gendered danger of accepting a ride from a stranger and to Lucía's street smarts. A few minutes later, Lucía accepts a ride from Fernanda and their journey together begins. Noted by film scholars Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, the space of "the front seat of a vehicle" quickly facilitates "intimacy" between the protagonists and is a device that allows close relationships to form (8). As they drive, Lucía and Fernanda tell each other fantasies of heteronormativity illustrated by intermittent flashbacks. Both claim to be going to Saltillo to get married. The film flashes back three years to Lucía's *quinceañera* when Huicho proposes onstage in front of her family and everyone cheers with happiness. Fernanda tells Lucía about the bar where Mario spontaneously asked her to marry him. The young women are so earnest in their lies that they readily believe their meeting is a happy coincidence.

The truth about the young women's fantasies comes out in a series of modified flashbacks. Fernanda remembers a time she and Mario were having sex in her room. Mario teasingly calls her "flaquita (skinny)," but Fernanda takes great offense, telling Mario that if he is not satisfied, he should date all the curvy girls and all the skinny girls. Mario takes Fernanda seriously and begins to date all of her friends in retaliation. The film returns

to Fernanda's proposal flashback and shows the real memory: Mario enters the loud bar, kisses Fernanda and then kisses her friend. Lucía revises her flashback as well, showing that in a hidden corner at her *quinceañera*, Huicho unceremoniously takes Lucía's virginity against a wall as she protests that he is going to damage her elaborate pink dress. The setting of the *quinceañera* works to establish Lucía as representative of traditional Mexico because the celebration of a young woman's fifteenth birthday is a long-held Mexican rite of passage.

It is the pivotal hotel scene that allows queer desires to surface, but instantly curbs them and transforms them into heterosexually based desires. Neither of the women is actually engaged and neither of their male partners anticipates their arrival. Lucía admits to Fernanda that the sexual encounter at her *quinceañera* produced a child that she was forced to leave behind in Acapulco. To lift her spirits, Lucía asks Fernanda to teach her to belly dance and the two begin dancing in front of the mirror. Fernanda compliments Lucía's breasts and much to Fernanda's surprise, Lucía resents her large, uneven breasts along with the scar from her c-section, aftermath from her pregnancy. Fernanda goads Lucía into showing her breasts, pulling Lucía's shirt over her head when she hesitates in doing it herself. Fernanda reassures Lucía that her breasts are even and the "alternative artist" decides to draw designs on Lucía's body. Lucía hesitantly reciprocates. The film presents the actions as juvenile, explorative, and innocent, like something young teens might do at a sleepover, but it edges into erotic territory. As Lucía examines the mermaid that spans from her back to stomach, Fernanda grabs Lucía for a kiss. Lucía pulls away and declares, "Somos mujeres… está mal (We are women… it's wrong)" She self-consciously covers her breasts and says, "Eres lesbiana (You're a lesbian)." Fernanda looks amused and laughs, "Claro que no (Of course not)" and explains, "No sé. Nomás tenía ganas de darte un beso. Me gustas (I don't know, nothing more… I just felt like kissing you. I like you)." The conversation quickly transforms Fernanda's potential queer desires into heterosexual desires. Fernanda laments that nobody likes her and sadly asks, "¿Tú crees que sí le gusto a Mario? (Do you think Mario likes me?)" and Lucía replies, "Claro que sí (Of course)," diverting the desire from herself to Mario. The women climb into bed and spoon, exhibiting the greatest degree of homosocial intimacy in the film, yet the dialogue bases it in heterosexual fantasy. Fernanda tells Lucía to close her eyes and imagine that she is in bed with Niels (Emiliano Molina), the attractive German that Lucía kissed during their trip. After the women

take turns pretending to be Niels, Flavio, and Mario, Fernanda kisses Lucía and this time both of the women actively engage in the kiss. The image abruptly fades to black.

This film operates in lack in terms of narrative, style, and form because of its attempted defense of the social order. *Viaje redondo* literally cuts away to blackness to avoid showing true queer intimacy. Unlike *Y tu mamá también*, which is full of explicit scenes of sexual intercourse, *Viaje redondo* is much less radical. The hotel scene could have been visually and ideologically transgressive, but the film chose not to include a full-on sex scene despite latent homoerotic desires. It is precisely this lack that allows the film to continue to preserve the social order. The camera returns from blackness (a visualization of the lack) with a gratuitous pan of the young women's naked bodies, sexualizing the female body instead of their lesbian interaction.

The formation of queer desire in *Viaje redondo* is predicated by failed heterosexuality, that is, the young women's unsuccessful attempts to maintain heterosexual relationships. Lucía whispers that she is afraid to be alone and Fernanda follows this up by admitting that she misses Mario. To complement Edelman's understanding of the privileging of heterosexual relations (and the defamation of queer desire), we turn to Judith Butler who explains that "compulsory heterosexuality" always "sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that 'being' lesbian is always a kind of miming" ("Gender Performance" 722). The consequence, as Butler writes in *Bodies that Matter*, is that "heterosexual desire is always true, and lesbian desire is always and only a mask and forever false" (86). The film constructs Fernanda's lesbian desires as a mask for her genuine desire to be reunited with Mario. Her desire is founded, like Lacan and McGowan theorize it, in lack; Fernanda longs for the intimacy provided by her absent heterosexual partner. I would argue that this transformation of Fernanda's desire (tracing its origins to heterosexual lack) denigrates the validity, or even possibility, of queer desire. *Viaje redondo* proposes Fernanda's experimentation with queer desire as a digression from the path of social order, something that could only happen in a peripheral, removed space (the hotel), set apart from the road to Saltillo.

After their tame encounter, *Viaje redondo* purifies the young women and turns them into didactic megaphones promoting the all-important future in a shower scene. Fernanda asks Lucía what it feels like to have a child. Lucía smiles, "Es lo mejor del mundo. Ya lo sabrás cuando tú tengas

uno (It's the best thing ever. You'll see when you have one)." Fernanda frowns and again laments that she misses Mario. The film reaffirms through a seemingly nervous repetition that Fernanda actually desires Mario. I read this reiteration as an attempt to perpetuate "compulsory heterosexuality," which requires "endless repetition" to "naturalize itself" (Butler, "Imitation" 723). To explain Fernanda's connection to Lucía, *Viaje redondo* proposes that her desire is actually identification (e.g. "wanting to be someone" vs. "wanting to have someone") (Butler, "Gender" 726). The film claims that Fernanda does not desire Lucía, she simply wants to be Lucía because she is a mother, hence her admiration for Lucía's large breasts and curvy body. Butler claims that this "mutually exclusive opposition" of "identification and desire" only "serves a heterosexual matrix" (726). Heteronormative logic posits that Fernanda cannot simultaneously desire Lucía and identify with her. If she wants to be a mother (e.g. through a relationship with Mario), she must renounce her sexual desires for Lucía. The ink runs off their bodies into the shower drain, eliminating any evidence of their lesbian experience. Queer desire is coded as an epidermal layer of subjectivity, a superficial impulse that can be washed away at will to allow the subject to return to their true heterosexual state.

As shown in *Por la libre*, endings are essential to the understanding of the ideology of youth road films. Fernanda and Lucía part ways and live out similar lives, though the film reinforces the stratification of social classes (*Y tu mamá también* also concludes asserting the class differences of Julio and Tenoch by way of narration.) Through a sequence of cross-cutting, Fernanda reunites with Mario on the steps of the University of Saltillo, an inherently privileged space, while Lucía gets off the bus, walks down a dirt road and falls into the arms of her rancher boyfriend, Huicho. The intimate interactions between the heterosexual couples want to convince the viewer that their relationships will rematerialize and the women will return to the social order. However, the brevity and clumsiness of these reunions raises questions—what actually happens after the film fades to black? Even the dialogue between the reunited couples is silenced by a cumbia, the film's theme song entitled "Los caminos de la vida (The Ways of Life)." *Viaje redondo* purposefully ends without showing the future of these relationships in order to render invisible the problems of heterosexuality, resorting to a lack of visuals and dialogue to support the social order.

Viaje redondo breaks away from the traditional ideology of the queer road film. Writing about *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991), film scholar Robert Lang explains that "[i]f the average queer road movie

is not quite so ambitious in its vision … it shares at least some of this questing belief in happiness, in a liberation of desire, in the totally sexed body, in the powerful reality of queer love" (346). A relevant comparison to *My Own Private Idaho* is the Argentine youth road film, *Tan de repente* (Diego Lerman, 2002), where the road trip facilitates the actualization of queer desire among young women and even gives the spectator an uncut, lesbian sex scene. In *Viaje redondo*, there is no liberation of desire, only a disciplining and channeling, inherently denying the possibility of queer love and desire. The film is ultimately homophobic and, as suggested by the title ("Round Trip"), it arrives back in the same place of social normalcy without providing any radical forward motion.

Moving Toward a Future

The contemporary Mexican youth road film is not as progressive as it pretends to be with the incorporation of desires that diverge from dominant paradigms. Rather, the genre indoctrinates viewers with a very specific worldview that clings to the defense of social order and the conservation of Mexicanness. The choice to make a road film into a youth road film gives filmmakers a way to talk about the future of the nation and to project a vision of society that supports the social order. The endings in *Por la libre* and *Viaje redondo* mark a break from the generic conventions of the road movie that "often attempts to preserve and reiterate the rebellious spirit of its initial departure" (Laderman 37). In the Mexican youth road film, the flame of rebellion is extinguished and the subsequent returns to social order are celebrated. Despite being dismissed by critics as inconsequential, *Por la libre* and *Viaje redondo* are paradigmatic of the role that Mexican cinema plays in social normalization, reaching beyond the screen to shape and discipline national audiences. The Mexican youth road film is and will continue to be an essential genre for filmmakers to present future-focused national visions and for critics as a zeitgeist of the interactions of youthful desire with social order in the Mexican nation.

Notes

1. I acknowledge the ambiguity of the term "youth film." For me, a "youth film" focuses on a "young" protagonist between the ages of 12–25. I expand Shary's established age range for "youth" (12–20) because, unlike Shary,

I include later adolescent, postsecondary experiences in my definition. I do not use "youth film" to mean a film made by young people.

2. Sánchez Prado configures *Y tu mamá también* historically, pointing to it as an "iconic" example of the "second reinvention" of Mexican cinema in the age of post-NAFTA (*Screening* 82). Saldaña-Portillo reads the film in the context of NAFTA, claiming that it is a national allegory for "the changing nature of Mexican sovereignty, subaltern positionality, and colonial fantasy" during a period of neoliberalism (751). Acevedo-Muñoz's article highlights the de-mythification process of societal contradictions that *Y tu mamá también* as a "counterepic" reveals and also close reads the revisionist tendencies of the representation of women and class (40). Following the lead of Paul Julian Smith, Finnegan frames her reading of *Y tu mamá también* on the tensions of meditating both the global and the local in Cuarón's representations of Mexico. I also note Álvaro A. Fernández's article on the road film in Mexico that explores how *Y tu mamá también* specifically functions as a road film through the theoretical framework of Bakhtin's "chronotope."
3. Fernández briefly mentions *Por la libre*, but only to categorize it in a group of Mexican road films that are "menos desafortunados pero con poca trascendencia estética o comercial (less unfortunate, but with little aesthetic or commercial importance)" (189).
4. Zavala Scherer and Hernández claim that families can be represented with more complexity when removed from the conventional melodrama and moved to the genre of road film.
5. I note that the nickname Roña has negative connotations, meaning an itch or illness (related to dirtiness/filth) that does not go away. This is fitting because Roña ties Rocco to a delinquent (and socially disruptive) lifestyle that has no foreseeable change without outside intervention (e.g.: from the grandfather).
6. This is also predicated by the absence of Rocco's mother and his broken nuclear family.
7. It is clear that Rocco has been marked by the infidelity of his mother, as his proposal assures that a virtual girlfriend would never cheat. In this way, *Por la libre* suggests that Rocco's divergent desires are perhaps a self-protecting measure incited by his broken nuclear family.
8. Rocco and Rodrigo find out that they are related to María and Perla when they visit their home in search of the missing ashes of their grandfather. When they see pictures of their grandfather on the walls, both boys are disgusted, the music turns to that of a horror film and they immediately come to the unpleasant conclusion that Rocco had sex with his aunt. María and Perla return to the room and María stakes her claim to the ashes, affirming the blood relation.

9. Despite being the repository of traditional "Mexican" family values, the grandfather is an exiled Catalan, another demarcation of the tension in his patriarchal role of maintaining social order.

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PART IV

Regional Techniques and Local Iconographies

CHAPTER 11

The Contemporary Documentary Road Movie in Latin America: Issues on Mobility, Displacement, and Autobiography

Pablo Piedras

Film genres have been historically defined in accordance with the territory of fiction, what used to be called "plot cinema." In other words, melodrama, comedies, or westerns, in their different versions, are all discursive constructions mainly associated with fiction, which have both concretized and evolved throughout time. Although it is not the goal of this chapter to elaborate on genre theory, I would like to suggest from the beginning that, as Rick Altman has mentioned (*Los géneros*), within cinema, as opposed to what happens in literature, genres carry out different tasks that connect the three basic components of the cinematic event: production, distribution, and consumption. This means that genres have historically played a central role in the commercialization and standardization of cinema as a product equally tied to mass culture and to the cultural industry. Genres usually define the economic conditions of a film's production and this effect spreads through different components of indexing (e.g., paratextual elements, such as press books, press releases, and articles in entertainment magazines) and through the fields of distribution and exhibition.

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This somewhat obvious statement turns out to be fundamental here because in terms of industry, distribution, and, above all, audiences, documentary cinema has been a territory apart from that of fiction.[1] Thus, the examination of the relationship between the road movie and the documentary needs to be contextualized and historicized.

First, if one considers documentary and fiction to be different practices, it could be argued that one of the first documentary trends that developed quickly was the travelogue. As John Grierson suggests (qtd. in Sussex 29), travelogues (typically western narratives about exploration and knowledge) could be considered the first chapter in the history of documentary practice. We see here that one of the central narrative elements of the road movie genre, such as the displacement or the setting off on journey, has an early point of intersection with narratives about real life. We can also notice that a visual aspect related to the road movie, namely the placement of the camera on a vehicle (usually an automobile) and the resulting propensity for tracking shots within the filmic syntax, was already present in early cinema.[2]

Second, there is a widespread tendency in the documentary cinema of the last decades toward the employment of generic models traditionally associated with fiction. The adoption of certain codes of film noir or melodrama has become a frequent procedure in Latin American documentary since the 1990s. Therefore, the connections with the road movie could also be considered within the framework of this wider process of hybridization and exchange between territories of institutionally differentiated historical representation.[3] In the case of road movies, it is worth noting that the inscription of certain iconic, narrative, and plot components provide a fluidity specific to documentary films, which does not necessarily include the latter in the territory of fiction. For example, in a work such as *Sherman's March* (Ross McElwee, 1986)—a celebrated antecedent of the documentary road movie—the trip of the director through Georgia and the Carolinas assembles the main character's encounters with lovers from his past and, on a historical level, a reflection on General Sherman's march during the American Civil War. Although the love anecdotes and the trip's mise-en-scène has fictional resonances, the film's communicational strategy (its elements of paratextual indexing as a documentary), the emphasis on the filmmaker's experiences, and the stress on historical references to North America's past place *Sherman's March* in the field of non-fiction.

The inclusion of the narrative character of genres traditionally associated to fiction is linked, in any case, to the specific way in which certain contemporary documentaries establish relationships with reality and with the spectator. In this point, I agree with Carl Plantinga when he points out that:

> Narrative is a fundamental mode of explanation with roots in the human need to represent events and history to others. Narrative history may employ many of the techniques common to fictional narratives to maintain interest, arouse suspense, or create, delay the fulfillment of, or fulfill expectations. Nonetheless, narrative *itself* is neither inherently fictional nor nonfictional. (*Rhetoric* 104)

Therefore, the emphasis on a narrative construction that appeals to elements of cinematic genres is based on the need to engage the spectator with stories that, as I will point out later, do not always stand out for their exceptional nature. In other words, in the new documentaries the spectator does not necessarily learn about a relevant, legitimized subject in the public sphere. For this reason, it is necessary to establish an understanding that allows for his or her engagement with the narration on other levels (emotional, sensorial, narrative) that deviate from *epistephilia*—a pleasure derived from knowing the real world and one of the main characteristics that Bill Nichols has assigned to the relationship between the audience and documentary film (Nichols et al., *La representación*).

In light of the relationship described above, I anticipate my hypothesis: in Latin American documentary, there has been a progressive permeation of the generic codes of the road movie that connect with its emphasis on mobility and displacement (written into the narrative, plot, and visual devices). This permeation began in the 1990s but had its moment of greatest expressive power at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[4] I am referring to films which, in many cases, feature filmmakers in leading roles and which explore both intimate and public history, assembling narratives that engage with the multiple forms of the trips through spaces that are significant to both personal and collective memory. In addition to revitalizing documentary aesthetics within a region that, during the 1980s and part of the 1990s, was characterized by a profusion of talking heads in works of a more testimonial character,[5] these films synchronize new forms of subjective interpellation concerning issues of identity, memory, and gender.

These manifestations of the road movie have at least two main defining attributes that attest to the specific characteristics of this phenomenon in Latin America. On the one hand, as I have already mentioned, they establish a dialogue with a genre that originated in fictional cinema. On the other hand, although, cinematically speaking the road movie is usually associated with Anglo-Saxon culture (in particular with Hollywood), in the Latin American historical and social context the genre acquires diverse perspectives with specific cultural implications.[6] As David Laderman mentions in his theoretical approach to the road movie, many authors have considered this genre an emblem of American counterculture, where established systems (social, political, cultural, family) are questioned from individual or subversive positions and where the road becomes a symbol of the quest for freedom and independence. The author points out that at the core of the genre there is a "tension between rebellion and conformity" (*Driving* 20).[7] This element contributes to a conservative subtext which is also typical of road movies that, for example, "retain a traditional sexist hierarchy that privileges the white heterosexual male, in terms of narrative and visual point of view" (20). I maintain that the regional and representational features that characterize the emergence of the road movie within Latin American documentary are precisely the inverse of the genre's canonical definition: the films account for a deep need to reconstitute legacies as well as social, community, and family ties. Furthermore, in Latin American autobiographical narratives, women are the ones who mainly mobilize this kind of investigation.

Autobiography—and the multiple subgenres it is made up of (private journals, self-portraits, letters, travel journals, confessions, memoirs)—has become a remarkable productive matrix over the last few years, not only in the fields of literature and cinema, but also in drama[8] and the visual arts.[9] From a documentary cinema theory perspective, the encounter with autobiography has been considered the catalyst for several aesthetic and epistemic contemporary transformations. Of the multiple studies dedicated to the subject,[10] I would like to go back to Michael Renov's suggestion[11] because it specifically connects with the focus of this article. He claims that the incorporation of autobiographical features into the system of documentary cinema deeply impacted its aesthetic and narrative structures and its worldviews. Renov's four theses are extremely eloquent: (a) the concept of autobiography reinvents the canonical concept of documentary, (b) cinematic autobiography is not something completely new, (c) cinematic autobiography has multiple formats, and (d) autobiographical practice incorporates and synthesizes the political. The general arguments

behind these assertions indicate that autobiography intersects with non-fiction cinema in the 1960s and disrupts the "epistemological glory" of documentary discourse. It could be argued that autobiography injects a certain factual skepticism and subjective uncertainties into the solid territory of documentary, which destroys all conceptions of verifiable knowledge and logical reasoning. According to Renov, "private truths, inner realities have come to be the business of documentary as much as public proclamations" ("First-person" 42). From a Foucauldian perspective, the author claims that in the contemporary world, organized around institutions that control, discipline, and restrict the subject, autobiography is a means of resisting control and allows for a fairer construction of one's own identity. In this way, Renov affirms the inherently political nature of some autobiographical expressions against those who accuse the genre of being "self-absorbed and solipsistic, outside of agency, incapable of encompassing or elucidating the social field" ("First-person" 47).

In order to describe the vast and heterogeneous body of Latin American documentaries which dialogue with the road movie, I draw on the work of Devin Orgeron. According to Orgeron, from its early stages onward, the genre has demonstrated a tendency toward stability and community, or, in my own view, social reconstruction after the multiple social traumas suffered in Latin America over the last few decades. With this idea in mind, I will first briefly examine certain documentaries that are part of this trend but that don't necessarily adopt autobiographical narrative practice: *El diablo nunca duerme* (Lourdes Portillo, 1994), *Return to Bolivia* (Mariano Raffo, 2008), and *Pachamama* (Erik Rocha, 2008). Later, I will focus on what I consider to be the most productive component of the road movie: its hybridization with audiovisual enunciations that state a strong authorial subjectivity by women filmmakers who confront their family past and, above all, the paternal figure. I will analyze this hybridization in *The Illusion* (Susana Barriga, 2008), *Diario de uma busca* (Flávia Castro, 2010), and *Hija* (María Paz González, 2011).

The Trip, the Road Movie, and the Reconstruction of Sociocultural Bonds

At first, it might seem forced, and maybe capricious, to propose the existence of a documentary road movie in Latin America. But if we widen our analytical scope and take into consideration the frequent use of typical elements of the genre in a group of documentaries from the last few

decades, it is possible to argue that the development of the documentary road movie helps to elucidate the innovative ways in which the new non-fiction cinema of the twenty-first century, returns to earlier problems of the documentary tradition in Latin America: the denunciation of underdevelopment and the cultural and political dependence on Europe and the USA, political persecution, repression during the dictatorships and State terrorism, testimonials on corporate subjugation during late capitalism, and so on. Furthermore, the development of the documentary road movie helps to see how this new non-fiction cinema promotes issues that did not fit within the agenda of the political documentary of the 1960s and 1970s: filial complaints within activists' family circles, the quest for cultural, ethnic and religious roots, the questioning of sexual and gender identity, and the problems that emerged around migration caused by economic factors and political exiles.

Since the late 1990s, documentary filmmakers have brought these and other issues to the forefront, organizing their audiovisual narratives around the motif of the trip, showing situations of mobility and displacement that suggest intertextual relationships with the road movie. A good starting point is the pioneer film by Lourdes Portillo, *El diablo nunca duerme* (The Devil Never Sleeps), in which the Chicana filmmaker goes back to Mexico to investigate the circumstances around her uncle Oscar's death and delves into a number of issues typical of Mexican culture: distrust against the one who has left the homeland and decides to come back, rejection of divergent sexual identities, class discrimination within family circles, political and police corruption, and so on. The director plays the role of an investigator from a first-person perspective and visits different areas in the north of Mexico looking for truths which, instead of being disclosed, become further obscured with each movement and with each interaction with new witnesses and with the victim's family.

Taking a chronological leap forward, *Return to Bolivia* looks at the story of a Bolivian family who emigrated from their home country eight years prior to the main narrative, settled in the Liniers neighborhood (Buenos Aires, Argentina) and opened a produce shop. The Quispe family (David Quispe, Janeth Cuiza, Brian Quispe Cuiza, Camila Quispe Cuiza, Jhoselyn Quispe Cuiza) decides to return to Bolivia in order to employ Bolivian friends and family to work in their business. Through different encounters and unexpected events that they experience during different stops they make (San Salvador de Jujuy, Villazón) on the way to their final destination (Cantón Capunata), one of the road movie's central elements

is recovered: the road always provides an opportunity for learning and for unexpected encounters. However, in this particular case, the genre is inevitably shaped by Latin America's own characteristics and, specifically, those of the Bolivian community. In this way, the iconic car, which represents independence and self-determination in the canonical road movie, is replaced by public transportation, which the Quispe family uses in each stage of their return journey from the city to the countryside. The illegal bus and the train dominate the camera's observation of the northern mountainous landscape. It is only when the journey is coming to an end and no public transportation reaches the remote area where their family lives that the car (a taxi, not their own vehicle) comes onto the scene for a few ephemeral seconds.

Pachamama goes even deeper into the territory of what I have called documentary road movie. With the objective of capturing the people and geographies that he encounters during an 8,700 miles journey that takes him through Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia, one of the children of the mythical Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha ventures deep into the jaws of a Latin American territory in transformation. The iconography of the car climbing up various natural landscapes, the recurrence of tracking shots filmed by Rocha with his camera, the unpredictability of the meetings along the road, and the blurring of the point of arrival deliberately evoke the imaginary of the road movie. However, the desired (and achieved) effect is the inverse of what is usually expected. Individual independence is replaced by the construction of a political and affective collectivity (of the Latin American people and their particular bond with the land). The typical modernity of the highways, the transportation and the cities, contrasts with the rural landscape, the precariousness of the roads, and the appearance of regional towns. The expected conflicts between road buddies are replaced by intercultural dialogues that, while also pointing at differences, emphasize those areas of continuity that allow for the assertion of a common identity and of a shared worldview. *Pachamama* is ultimately a film that synchronizes the region's historical moment and the political–ideological convergence of its left-wing governments.[12]

The characteristics of the road movie and the travel documentary appear with several modulations in these three examples. As I have already argued, however, there is a point of convergence: in Latin America, the genre does not precisely underline individual freedom, rebellion against the status quo, or a celebratory look at the benefits of western

modernization. Instead, it stresses the attempts to rebuild community bonds and recover those cultural and social roots that had dissipated as a result of forced migrations and successive economic crises. The journey, the walking and the movement aim to reconstruct bonds of solidarity among people, and to find the basis from which to rethink individual and collective identities.

Documentary Road Movie, Autobiography, and Female Agency

When analyzing the prosperous union between cinema and autobiography, Alain Bergala observes that, first, within the audiovisual world, paired with a growing normalization of production and broadcasting, new forms of freedom have arisen which include discourses of non-fiction. Second, he points to the emergence of new shooting and reproduction technologies that come progressively closer to achieving the old dream of a *caméra-stylo*.[13] Third, certain "societal discomfort" would explain the need for self-expression that some individuals experience when they can't find a suitable space to process their identity within the traditional structures of symbolic reference (family, work world, class society) (27–28). In any case, according to the author, every autobiographical filming "is more or less part of an acting strategy from the filmmaker" (29) in order to modify both his or her own life and the environment.

In first person documentary films, mobility has allowed for unexpected encounters, relationships, and contacts with the *other* that disrupt the filmmaker's gaze and experience. Therefore, mobility must also be understood as an impulse from the *self* to talk and express personal preoccupations through a displacement onto the territory of other subjectivities. The proliferation of documentaries in which directors–protagonists undertake some kind of journey, and the territorial, cultural, and social mobility that this implies, highlights the issues resulting from the intersubjective meeting between the filmmaker and the *other*. In this way, contemporary documentary, while suggesting new ways of approaching a cultural, social, religious, or ethnic *other*, returns to earlier forms of ethnographies that provided methods to observe and analyze cultural practices of diverse individuals and human groups.[14]

Michael Renov talks about "domestic ethnographies" when referring to documentary practices from a similar approach. According to Renov, domestic ethnography is a form "of autobiographical practice that couples

self-interrogation with ethnography's concern for the documentation of the lives of others. But the Other in this instance is a family member who serves less as a source of disinterested social scientific research than as a mirror or foil for the self" (*The Subject* 216). This concept helps to explain the principal framework through which expression is achieved in a significant streak of the Latin American road movie, always keeping in mind that the road movie is an elastic genre. This is evidenced within the films themselves in the form of iconographic, plot, and narrative convergences, appropriations, and intertextualities.

The following documentaries are all directed by women and take the form of first person autobiographies that address the stories of their parents from a daughter perspective: *Papá Iván* (María Inés Roqué, 2000), *Reinalda del Carmen, mi mamá y yo* (Lorena Giachino, 2006), *Secretos de lucha* (Maiana Bidegain, 2007), *El telón de azúcar* (Camila Guzmán Urzúa, 2007), *Familia tipo* (Cecilia Priego, 2009), *El edificio de los chilenos* (Macarena Aguiló, 2010), as well as the three already mentioned films on which I will focus.[15] In all of them, the journey (or displacement in a wider sense) is both the central device used to rethink the family past and the visual motif through which the narrative is organized.

The Illusion, *Diario de uma busca,* and *Hija* show the different modulations through which documentary film (in this case autobiographical) dialogues with the road movie. From a fresh perspective, these films return to certain topics of the traditional Latin American documentary (political murders, exiles, migrations caused by economic crisis, etc.) and, at the same time, use some of the characteristics of the journey and the road movie to reconstruct deteriorated filial bonds as a socio-aesthetic strategy to reflect upon their own personal identities.

In the short film *The Illusion*, for example, Susana Barriga visits her father in London, a city where he had come two decades earlier as a Cuban exile. A peculiarity of this film is that, defying the rules of any travel film or road movie, it calls the rules of visibility of the cinematic image into question. This is evident from the first sequence in which the filmmaker's voiceover says, "Sometimes I try to remember his face and I go back to this picture, the only one I have of him." Within the visual series, however, it is only possible to identify the figure of a slim man, with beret, standing several feet away from the camera lens, with an unreachable face. From the beginning and throughout the film, the shots in which what is shown can be clearly identified are both scarce and fragmentary. This results from the camera being located in strange, nonconventional places, as the director

films some of the routes of her London trip and the conversation in her father's apartment without specifying that the camera is on. Besides the ethical problems involved in the filmmaker's decision, the film reproduces through this audiovisual mechanism, the distress, pain, and fear in Susana Barriga's confessional voiceover. Blocking transparent access to the register of external movement enhances the manifestation of the affective means which mobilized the trip and the reunion with her father. The dissociation between image and sound is the strategy that emphasizes opacity as opposed to transparency. If we examine the film as a whole, there are two spaces that stand out: the London Underground and the father's house. Traditionally, the house and the means of transportation are dialogical axes in tension with one another and establish frameworks for road movie narratives. Susana Barriga chooses a peculiar strategy: although she captures direct sound and images from those spaces (with some interventions of her voiceover added in postproduction), it is almost impossible to associate the source of sound to the few intelligible figures that the image presents.

In her analysis of *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003),[16] Ana Amado claims that representation in this film is organized around a disconnection between image and sound that originates in filmic modernity, particularly in the so-called "memory filmmakers" of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras. The scholar indicates that this disconnection, albeit usually tied to the relationship between words and images, also works within other territories, "the close and the distant, the familiar and the strange, the city and the countryside" (186, my translation). What I argue with regard to *The Illusion* can be understood parallel to what Amado argues regarding *Los rubios.* Barriga's film also keeps the bond between father and daughter in a conflict zone (because the father, distrustful, refuses to welcome her and throws her out of the house), and therefore the first attempt to meet and reconstruct the relationship between father and daughter is frustrated. In conclusion, the disconnection between image and sound, and the persistently oblique, out of focus, and intentional "carelessness" of shot composition is more of a formal invention that expresses the state of crisis and instability of the party responsible for enunciation than a lack of expertise in the construction of images.

Using the structure of a journey, *Diario de uma busca* retraces the trajectory of Brazil's political history during the 1960s and 1970s in a complex articulation between the filmmaker's personal memory and specific

"prosthesis" that supports it: letters, family pictures, newspaper clippings, testimonies, documents, and so on. Castro's father, Armando Celso de Castro, was a journalist and political activist engaged in the revolutionary movements of that time. In a (not so) strange coincidence with the previously described first sequence of *The Illusion*, Flávia Castro's voiceover says from the beginning: "my father died in Porto Alegre, in October of 1984 in mysterious circumstances…, he was 41 years old" and a few seconds later, self-consciously, she adds "it sounds like the synopsis of a Z class crime movie, completely unbelievable." Just a few minutes later, the film's title appears printed over the windshield of a car, an obvious index of the possible relationship between the road movie and the memory exercise that is being suggested. Although the crime film genre hovers over the narrative (the documentary tries to determine the real facts linked to the father's death), I believe that a particular modulation of the road movie is the principal organizer of the film's visual and narrative terms. The director, along with her brother (and partially with her mother), reconstructs the trajectory of displacements that marked the past of her family life, intimately associated with the ups and downs of Latin American politics. Flávia visits the locations and people that are significant to her memory: Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Panama, Belgium, France, Venezuela, and again Brazil. Through her movements, she reconstructs the world of ideas and affections with which her father identified and juxtaposes the different records of the past (her own memory, her father's letters, testimonies from family members and militant peers) in a narrative that cinematically recovers the paradoxes of remembrance. While personal memory is expressed statically through rigorous fixed shots of the present appearance of significant past locations, the letters left by the father, now read by the son's voice off (Flávia's brother, João Paulo Castro, Joca, her travel companion or *buddie*), are visually supported by tracking shots that, in present time, show roads, highways, and streets of the visited countries. These urban landscapes, seen through the windscreen from inside the car, are quite uniform. Very few specific features allow the viewer to distinguish them. Unlike what usually happens in road movies, these spaces—albeit belonging to different countries—are equally strange and deprived of scenic beauty. The reading of the father's letters, the car movement, and the static urban memory spaces allow the filmmaker to invert the common idea of memory being an open, dynamic process and of the written word as a reliable source of history. This creates tension between her memories and her father's ideas. Physical movement and territorial displacement

turn out to be a means of revisiting and circulating a personal memory that is at risk of becoming fossilized, and a history that requires new voices (and new sources) to be re-told. In Brazil, as in other Latin American countries, the dictatorships and State terrorism have scarred not only the past but also the present in which the children of missing and murdered political prisoners try to continue their lives. Therefore, the omnipresence of the biological family is a clear indicator that in Latin American documentaries, the impulse toward rebellion, typical of some road movies, has developed into a dialogical and conflictive relationship with hegemonic views of the past and is in urgent need of family reconstitution.

Within the trajectory of autobiographical documentaries associated with the road movie that I have described, *Hija* is certainly the one that is most easily identifiable with the usual characteristics of the genre. Following the iconographic and narrative structure of the road movie, María Paz González and her mother set out on a road trip in order to discover González's family origins and untie some of the inherited stories about her identity. The mother was abandoned by her biological family and adopted by another one that named her Eliana (the name given by the biological mother was Elisa). Later on, after the mother conceived her own daughter (María Paz) she broke up with the father and, to keep up appearances in town, she gave her daughter the last name González and created an apocryphal story about her father (the real name of the filmmaker's father was Emerson Bernardo Saavedra Jerez).

Hija is a documentary that builds its relationships with reality and with the past through a representational model full of reflexivity and performativity.[17] The presence of the film crew is explicit throughout the movie, the protocols of negotiation between the director and the characters are exposed in front of the camera and the hesitations and concerns about production's vicissitudes are a key subject of the narration. The articulation of these two qualities is captured by a narration enunciated in the present time, veering from the typical resources that non-fiction film uses to talk about the past: archives (film, photography, and sound) and testimonies. Going beyond the possible lack of these components, María Paz González chooses to build a narrative in which the absence of archives works as a symptom of a family history that refuses to reveal its agenda. The scarce revelations obtained bring about new unanswered questions. To put it simply, how can we trust documents from the past when even the names—one of the few certainties we can count on—have proved to be false? Eliana, María Paz's mother, was "renamed" by her adoptive family

but doesn't appear with her "original" name in public records; the filmmaker's last name, González, was in turn invented by her mother. In this regard, the documentary's persistent focus on performative strategies is a way of creating new acts of nomination through narration, except that this time the authority on nomination has shifted from the *others* to the *self*. It is as if the protagonists were saying: "if all names are invented, then I prefer to choose my own."[18]

María Paz González film shows the always conflictive and unsolved relationship between the road movie and the family as an institution. In the first sequence, the director asks her mother to draw whatever she remembers from the shape of the house where she was born. In the second sequence, the filmmaker tries to call her biological father (Manuel Rodríguez), not just to meet him but, above all, to invite him to take part in the film. Both sequences are symptomatic, on two different levels, of the way in which María Paz González faces the doubts about her identity and her acts of remembrance. On the one hand, the evidence and the need for filmic representation prevail over the reality that she is supposedly trying to discover (the shape of the house and the father). That is to say, the aesthetic character of the documentary is more relevant than the revelations it could provide. On the other hand, the (present) mother and the (absent) father are the two poles that structure the beginning of the film and that motivate the beginning and end of the journey. These two sequences that work as a prologue (followed by another one in which María Paz prepares for the trip together with her mother) are followed by the title of the documentary, *Hija* (daughter), surrounded by a concentration of sound and imagery typical of the road movie: the perspective view of the road with a slight vanishing point to the left shows the car that will be used by mother and daughter (authentic film buddies) to travel through a large portion of the Chilean territory, from Temuco to Antofagasta. The soundtrack that will systematically burst into the film is made of guitar arpeggios reminiscent of folk music. Unlike *Diario de uma busca,* the most significant shots do not come from the inside to the outside of the car (as subjective shots of the driver and the passenger); what happens is precisely the opposite: in several shots we can see the Beat through the wavy Chilean roads in establishing shots in which the car seems to be the real protagonist and the landscape is shown in fullness. As opposed to the homogeneity of visual landscape in the Brazilian film, here the Chilean geography shows its multiple aspects: desert, mountain, plain land, beach. In fact, this preeminence of the vehicle is explicitly evoked by some men at a gas station in the fol-

lowing dialogue: "This is the main star," says one of them. "Who?" the other asks. "The Beat. That's the star. She is the one being filmed."

Finally, after discoveries—the mother's biological sister—and frustrations—the disturbing scene in which the biological father asks his abandoned daughter over the phone for a sum of money as a condition to reunite—the conclusion of the trip finds mother and daughter together in the beaches of La Serena. In the final scene, the camera is in the back seat of the standstill Beat. Through the windshield we can see the figures of both protagonists who later return to the car. One more time María Paz González says, in English, "We finished. It's all over."

Conclusion

The article has demonstrated how the codes of the road movie are expressed in Latin American documentary within the framework of narratives characterized by the travel motif: the trip in pursuit of reencounters, the trip as remembrance, the trip in search of heritage and stories that provide new elements to rethink identities—collective identities, in the examples discussed at the beginning, and individual identities, in the last three films analyzed. In autobiographical works, mobility and displacement—narrative, visual, and thematic constructive principles of these documentaries—are an expression of a renewed female agency to narrate the personal, family, and sometimes public history from their own perspective. As the filmmakers tell us autobiographically how their parents' life choices conditioned their destiny through lack of affection or omissions in the narration of the past, the documentaries become a socio-aesthetic practice of reparation and, above all, of empowerment. The daughters are now able to organize narratives in which identity is an object of reflection and questioning. The three films, however, present the trips as open narratives, in which knowledge is not acquired at the final destination but in motion. It is not a coincidence that in these works, the initial goals (reencountering the father or discovering some kind of truth about him) are not achieved and remain unresolved. We could indeed say that the documentary and the road movie in Latin America gain their specificity in becoming tools for reparation and for identity and memory reconstruction. These identities and memories should be read both individually and collectively. As Renov has compellingly argued ("First-person"), although autobiographical films are sparked by subjective concerns, these

concerns are always linked to situations and experiences shared by larger social and cultural formations.

Notes

1. Many pages have been written on film theory in order to define some kind of "essence" of documentary cinema. In my opinion, those attempted definitions that base their arguments purely on textual parameters have been unsuccessful. If there is any difference between fiction and documentary, this must be conceptualized within the framework of communicational strategies, of spectatorship expectations, and of institutional contexts of production and reception. For a summary of these debates and a current definition of these strange objects we still call "documentaries" (in open resistance to the concept of non-fiction), see, among others, Plantinga ("Documentary") and Chanan.
2. See the article by Andrea Cuarterolo about the first travelogues in Latin America during the silent period.
3. See, for example, Jean-Claude Bernardet's analysis of film noir in *33* (Kiko Goifman, 2002); Mariana Baltar's article on the uses of the melodramatic imagination in *Peones* (Eduardo Coutinho, 1994); and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano's article about the intertextual aspects of family melodrama in *The Devil Never Sleeps/ El diablo nunca duerme* (Lourdes Portillo, 1996).
4. I analyzed this process adopting the concept of "mobile turn" for documentary cinema following the category suggested by Mimi Scheller and John Urry in the framework of geography and society studies. In the same text, I suggested a sort of historical periodization about documentary cinema and mobility in Latin America. See Piedras "The mobility."
5. See, among others, *El hombre cuando es hombre* (Valeria Sarmiento, 1982), *Buenos Aires: crónicas villeras* (Carmen Guarini y Marcelo Céspedes, 1986), *Santa Marta-Duas Semanas no Morro* (Eduardo Coutinho, 1987), and *Cazadores de utopías* (David Blaustein, 1995).
6. Latin American film historian Paulo Antonio Paranaguá points to the necessary boundaries that must be traced when identifying and analyzing how the genres that come from central cinemas have been appropriated by peripheral cinemas, in this case, that of Latin America. According to Paranaguá, there is a constant struggle between originality and imitation that is conditioned by the region's cultural contexts. This means that, for example, a Hollywood prototypical maternal melodrama like *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937) could hardly be compared with maternal melodramas such as *Puerta cerrada* (Luis Saslavsky, 1939) or *Las abandonadas* (Emilio Fernández, 1944).

7. It is worth noting that some analysts like Devin Orgeron believe instead that the genre is defined, from its inception, by a deep ambition of stability and community to which contemporary cinema would be returning. Maybe this article is, among other things, a demonstration of his theoretical proposals.
8. As has occurred in the audiovisual field, over the last two decades, the productivity of works of the *self* in Argentinean drama has grown exponentially. Vivi Tellas for example, coordinated *Proyecto Museos* (1995–2000), a project composed of fifteen theatrical plays, and later continued her investigations of autobiography with *Ciclo Biodrama: sobre la vida de las personas* (2002 to date). Other playwrights, such as Alejandro Tantanian, Lola Arias, and Mariana Obersztern have also dabbled in the territory of biodrama, documentary drama, and autobiographical drama. For a more comprehensive study of these artistic expressions, see: Trastoy and Sagaseta.
9. Ana María Guasch makes an interdisciplinary study of a group of autobiographical manifestations in the field of the contemporary visual arts, focusing on productions by On Kawara, Mary Kally, Hanne Darboven, Sol LeWitt, and Cindy Sherman. See Guasch.
10. In addition to individual essays about directors, it is worth mentioning the detailed studies by Lane and Martín Gutiérrez.
11. Renov's article, entitled "First-person films. Some theses on self-inscription," does not demarcate very deeply between the concepts of "documentary in first person" and "autobiographical documentary." For Renov, the autobiographical is a wider and more changeable concept that includes multiple self-inscriptions. It is worth noting that his views are usually based on American or European documentaries associated with the avant-garde (see *The Subject*).
12. Two relevant facts within this new Latin Americanist political outlook are worth mentioning: the IV Summit of the Americas—remembering the historical rejection to the Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas (ALCA) and the sentence "ALCA al carajo" (Fuck ALCA) enacted by Hugo Chávez—and the declaration, constitution, and implementation of UNASUR (South American Nations Union, 2004–2011)
13. This term comes from the original statement, in 1948, by the French filmmaker and critic Alexandre Astruc.
14. Nancy Lutkehaus and Jenny Cool see two trends in contemporary documentary that aim at subverting the approach and models of representation of *others* in the ethnographic tradition. The first is linked to strategies of self-representation in which the cultural *other* that is usually the object of the filmmakers' representation becomes the producer of his own image, disrupting the power relationships between the subject and the object of representation. This trend is associated mainly with the multiple initiatives

of indigenous video in which, through partnerships with anthropologists or independently, communities produce audiovisual materials as a means of political and cultural action. According to the authors, these practices "alter the social distance between the observer and the observed" (127). The second trend explores contemporary societies crossing national boundaries in pursuit of a persistence of identity within a transnational culture. In these films, the documentation of social actors seeks to trespass the limits of a unique culture or community with the goal of understanding different forms of transnational circulation of people and goods (128–129).

15. The term "postmemory" has been proposed from memory studies to characterize these types of narratives (see Hirsch). Laia Quilez prefers the concept of second generation in her examination of Argentinean documentaries about the military dictatorship made by children of disappeared political prisoners.
16. This is another autobiographical documentary in which a daughter of disappeared political prisoners, through a series of complex narrative and performative devices, questions her identity in relation with the figure of her parents and recent history.
17. I adopt a notion of performativity that combines the ideas of Stella Bruzzi and Bill Nichols. According to the latter, the modality of performative representation tries to divert the spectator's attention from the referential aspects of documentary discourse, promotes the subjective features of traditionally objective discourses, and focuses on its evocative qualities more than on its representationality. The former returns to theories of authors such as Judith Butler and John Austin and thinks that performative utterances describe at the same time that they execute an action.
18. For a comparative analysis of *Hija* and *Familia tipo* in relation to the problem of mobility, the subject of the journey and the codes of the road movie, see Lie and Piedras, "Identidad".

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CHAPTER 12

The Contemporary Brazilian Road Movie: Remapping National Journeys on Screen in *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo*

Sara Brandellero

Road films have appeared prominently in recent Brazilian cinema, reflecting a trend manifest in contemporary Latin America and also evident in Europe (Everett 165). Within the growth in production of Brazilian cinema since the mid-1990s, known as the *Retomada*, and the current boom,[1] a considerable number of movies have notably been road films (Pinazza 1). Indeed, since the turn of the new millennium, for instance, Brazilian cinema has seen the release of acclaimed productions including Karim Aïnouz's *O ceu de Suely* (2006) and his more recent *Praia do futuro* (2014), as well as his *Cinema, aspirinas e urubus* (2005), co-directed with Marcelo Gomes, *Estrada para Ythaca* (Pedro Diogenes, Guto Parente, Luiz Pretti, 2010), *Além da estrada* (Charly Braun, 2010), *Colegas* (Marcelo Galvão, 2012), *Pachamama* (Eryk Rocha, 2007), *Um passaporte húngaro* (Sandra Kogut, 2011), *2 filhos de Francisco* (Breno Silveira, 2005), and his *À beira do caminho* (2012), *Àrido Movie* (Lírio Ferreira, 2006), *Anjos do sol* (Rudi Lagemann, 2006), *Hotel Atlântico* (Suzana Amaral, 2009), *Eles voltam* (Marcelo Lordello, 2012), among others.

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Mindful of this trend, this chapter will discuss the fiction-documentary hybrid co-directed by Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes entitled *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo* (2009),[2] a road movie which, I will argue, revisits the iconic landscapes of north-eastern Brazil, a recurring motif in Brazilian cinematic history, through the experience of a journey that is both a physical displacement and an intertextual remapping of the Brazilian cinematic tradition. In approaching this real and metaphoric journey, I take as one of my points of departure for discussion critic Ivana Bentes's appraisal of contemporary Brazilian cinema's revisitation of the two key settings of the Cinema Novo movement's political struggle on screen—the *sertão* (hinterland) and the urban *favelas* (shantytowns). In a well-known discussion of the topic, Bentes noted the "lack of political perspectives" (122) of contemporary productions in relation to Cinema Novo, arguing that the projection of poverty on screen had become aestheticized and the political potentiality of the rural and urban landscapes, lost (122).[3] If, in line with Bentes's argument, the cinema of the so-called *Retomada* and beyond has widely been juxtaposed to the politically and socially engaged Cinema Novo of the 1960s and seen as lacking the former's political intent, *Viajo porque preciso* seems to acknowledge such juxtaposition with the ultimate aim of proposing a cinematic shift to political cinema. Through the exploration of the potentialities of the landscape of the *sertão*, which, as Luiz Zanin Oricchio argues, "has become a space—a physical, imaginary and symbolic space—where the country's contradictions are expressed with the maximum intensity and impact" ("The *sertão*" 140), the film charts a departure from a perspective centered on the nation toward a broader transnational focus. From a space of national allegories, as studied by Ismail Xavier in relation to Cinema Novo, the movie echoes a trend widely noted in relation to contemporary production (42).[4] I will also contend that the film proposes a further step: from a human-centered perspective to one which, at this time of environmental crisis, points to the urgency for a post-human engagement. Important in the discussion will be the film's treatment of the landscape of North-East Brazil, and I will take cultural geographer John Wylie's definition of landscape as something that is "a perceiving-with, that *with which* we see, the creative tension of self and the world" (217). Within this perspective, I will consider how the film explores the potentiality of cinematic landscape according to Martin Lefebvre's conceptualizations, as filmic space not marginal or merely intended to support plot or character development. Lefebvre states: "The distinction between *setting* and *landscape*, one might say, is

one of pictorial economy: as long as natural space in a work is subservient to characters, events and action, as long as its function is to provide space for them, the work is not properly speaking a *landscape*" ("On Landscapes" 64, emphasis in the original).[5]

Lefebvre draws attention to narrative cinema's ability to lead to a contemplation of spaces beyond their mere functionality to events—through a variety of stylistic devices such as music, the slowing down of movement, and extension of shot duration, among others—freeing spaces from the condition of mere backdrop to the action and drawing us closer to them. When the potentiality of spaces to instigate thought beyond their role in the events emerges, a sense of interconnectedness with the world around us and its life-cycles is strengthened, thus becoming the expression of a lived experience, or what Lefebvre defines as "landscape as dwelling" ("On Landscapes" 76).

Dovetailed with the film's exploration of the "landscape as dwelling" are its intertextual dialogues with the cinematic tradition. Indeed, through references to filmic representations of the region, some of which have acquired iconic status in Brazilian cinema, *Viajo porque preciso* seems to explore the historicity of the land as defined by Fernand Braudel when he noted that: "Landscapes and panoramas are not simply realities of the present but also, in large measure, survivals from the past. Long-lost horizons are redrawn and recreated for us through what we see"(qtd. in Bruno 12).

The Road Movie, the Nation, and Beyond

Wendy Everett noted the road movie genre's fluid and open-ended character, in which the journey acquires a metaphoric dimension of search and discovery and which allows its protagonists to experience processes of development and transformation (167). Beyond this focus on personal development, Everett highlighted the road movie's political potential: "At the same time, it is a form whose inherent flexibility makes it ideally suited to the exploration of complex social tensions and concerns" (167). The potential for the discussion of social concerns helps explain its appeal in Latin America, something highlighted by director Walter Salles, himself repeatedly drawn to the genre, when he stated: "It's not by accident that so many of the films coming out of Latin America are road movies, because the road movie allows you to capture not only a character being transformed, but a country, in motion, that's being redefined" (qtd. in Dennison 186).[6]

Thus, the synergy between mobility in film and the quest motif—be it within the sphere of individual, community, or national experiences—has ensured the road movie genre's enduring popularity and it has been a productive channel of reflection on national issues in Brazil's cinema, its widely noted projection of the nation, and its critique on screen. On this note, Davi Arrigucci Jr has poignantly highlighted how Brazilian cinema has traditionally tapped into the Brazilian people's collective essence and been a central medium for documenting the country's history (qtd. in Nagib xi). Indeed, the centrality of questions of national concern in the development of Brazil's cinema has led critics Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison to speak of Brazilian filmmakers' "primordial desire to place the nation on screen" (3).

In an echo to this point and defending the importance of a national film industry for the country, during a speech in the Senate in 2000, director Carlos Diegues stated: "If Brazil cannot produce its own image and occupy a few screens with the image, Brazilians will become living archaeological mysteries, unknown both to others and to themselves" (qtd. in Shaw and Dennison 3). The preoccupation vented by Diegues reflects the embeddedness of the national issue within fictional and documentary outputs, evident also in a substantial body of road movies, in which journeys often transcend the experience of individual characters and provide the framework for broader socio-cultural and political enquiries within national borders and in transnational frameworks.

A transnational context is one explored, for instance, by the documentary road movie *Pachamama* (Eryk Rocha, 2007), which follows the journey undertaken by the director with the purpose of "understanding Brazil," as he tells us in voice-over at the film's incipit, at the start of his cross-border exploration of the South American subcontinent, focusing on the plight of impoverished populations of the border zones between Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru. Set against the backdrop of current policies geared to tightening Latin American integration, Eryk Rocha's political agenda in this movie is clear right from the outset, as shots taken from the moving vehicle heading out of Rio de Janeiro toward the Peruvian border, on a downcast rainy January day, capture a roadside McDonald's and other images of a globalized world of multinational business and western imperialism intercalated by views of suburban favelas, supported by the audio commentary provided by a radio news bulletin that reminds us of the daily violence caused by unresolved historical social contradictions.

If the socio-political intent behind Eryk Rocha's journey is immediately apparent and clearly draws on the political concerns articulated in the Cinema Novo of the 1960s—in an openly transnational perspective—a more subtle, yet, equally powerful engagement is articulated in the journey in *Viajo porque preciso*—within national borders in the *sertão* of north-eastern Brazil—and the international transit implied in the film's dénouement. In its dovetailing of fiction and documentary, *Viajo porque preciso* follows the travels of a thirty-five-year-old geologist called José Renato, played by Irandhir Santos, who has been sent to study and map out the land in preparation for a planned re-channeling of the main waterway of the region, referred to in the film by the name of *Rio das Almas* (River of Souls). José Renato never physically appears on screen but we follow his story through his off-camera account of his month-long journey. In road movie style, his random thoughts and comments on his experiences and what he sees along the way are interspersed with short conversations and exchanges elicited from his roadside encounters. We soon learn that José Renato's journey also coincides with the break-up of his marriage to his "Galega," a botanist who also never appears in person but whose memory is often invoked by experiences en route.[7] By introducing a geologist as protagonist of the film, the relationship between the human and the landscape is established as one of the movie's central concerns and takes on an additional metaphoric dimension, soon becoming crucial to understanding the film's dialogue with the history of the North-East on screen. As the lay of the land becomes a cinematic archive, gradually uncovered, we might be reminded of Simon Schama's thinking on landscape, when he observed: "Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (6–7).

Remapping the *Sertão*

Timothy Corrigan has drawn attention to the road movie genre's exploration of space which, he states, is "usually familiar land that has somehow become unfamiliar: the road and the country may be known, but something has made it foreign" (147). Arguably, in *Viajo porque preciso*, one of the levels at which this experience of defamiliarization is articulated is through a sustained dialogue with the Brazilian cinematic tradition. I wish to focus specifically on its clear allusions to the film adaptation of Graciliano Ramos's 1938 novel *Vidas secas* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963) and

Bye bye Brasil (Carlos Diegues, 1980).[8] Like *Viajo porque preciso*, both of these iconic productions are road films and both explore the spaces of the north-eastern *sertão* to political ends. In the case of *Vidas secas*, the plight of the north-eastern peasants, played out against the uncompromising harshness of the *sertão*, becomes the material representation of Brazil's century-old history of social neglect, translated onto the screen through what Glauber Rocha, one of the exponents of the Cinema Novo movement, would define as an "aesthetics of hunger" (68). In his manifesto for the movement, Rocha famously referred to its ugly and sad films in which the experience of hunger (understood both as physical, lived experience and as historical social, political injustice, and deprivation) translated into forms of cultural expression defined by violence (thematic and aesthetic), the only justifiable idiom for political cinema (70). In the later film *Bye bye Brasil*, the *sertão* appears within the context of the country's experience of dictatorial rule, at the start of a journey of a group of traveling artists, who go by the name of Caravana Rolidei. In this journey the road is deployed to debunk the discourse of development and progress promoted by Brazil's military regime (1964–1985).

The contention here is that the traced journeys in both these films articulate a political discourse that is picked up and developed in Aïnouz and Gomes's road movie, exploring the potential that the genre provides as a "ready space for exploration of the tensions and crises of the historical moment during which it is produced" (Cohan and Rae Hark 2). In this cinematic dialogue instigated through the road, the journey as collective experience in both *Vidas secas* and *Bye bye Brasil* becomes a more clearly individual one in *Viajo porque preciso*, centered on the personal turmoils of the protagonist José Renato.

Identifying a trend in contemporary production, Isis Sadek's study of the experience of displacement in Brazilian cinema has highlighted the construction of "intimate spatialities" that move beyond the "national framework" that defined 1960s political cinema (72).[9] Similarly, studies and reviews of *Viajo porque preciso* have drawn attention to its departure from the Cinema Novo's treatment of the north-eastern landscape as a space of political and social struggles within the context of the construction of a national identity on screen. Jens Andermann noted how the film denies landscape the potential to instigate an ethical awakening in the viewers, as they are presented with the rural spaces of the North-East revolutionary, thus contrasting the use of rural landscapes in the political cinema of the 1960s and 1970s (59).

In a similar vein, film critic and director Kleber Mendonça Filho commented that if Brazilian cinema has traditionally favored representations of the *sertão* as a platform to articulate political discourses directed at Brazil's grave problems with poverty and inequality, Gomes and Aïnouz seem to forgo this in order to deploy the open spaces of the barren interior as "terreno intimista e pessoal" (intimate and personal terrain) (n. pag).[10]

Building on this reading, I wish to consider how such projection of the North-East as a "terreno intimista e pessoal" is articulated through a deliberate dialogue with earlier cinematic representations of the region (principally the Cinema Novo) and how the journey thus constitutes a metaphorical remapping of the North-East in relation to earlier representations.

Land, Movement, and Memory

What the unsuspecting viewer of *Viajo porque preciso* would not necessarily know is that this film began life as documentary footage on North-East Brazil which dates back to 1999, when Aïnouz and Gomes spent forty days recording their travels around the *sertão*, which subsequently resulted in a 2004 short film entitled *Sertão de acrílico azul piscina*.[11] The short film became one of five documentaries of the Brasil 3×4 series, awarded the Rumos Cinema e Video prize 2003–4, a project aimed to show the diversity and contrasts within the country (Veiga 38). Combining a variety of formats from 35 to 16 mm, digital, super-8, and still photographs, the twenty-six-minute short film is made up of a patchwork of sequences—in mostly unidentifiable locations both rural and urban in the *sertão*, in a lyrical perambulation of the region seen for the most part from a subjective camera viewpoint.

The footage was later reworked into the 2009 feature *Viajo porque preciso*, this time structured around the narrative voice of the new fictional geologist, José Renato, through whom the previous footage undergoes a re-interpretation. Roberta Veiga describes the creation of this new protagonist as "filho de uma terceira camada de relação dos diretores com aquele lugar" (product of a third layer in the relation of the directors with that place) (Veiga 38), referring to the different moments of engagement of the directors with the familiar landscape of the north-eastern hinterland, from their original journey to the production of the short and then feature film. Yet, José Renato also embodies a process of mnemonic recovery. Indeed, in the reworking of old material in which he is inscribed, we

might see a form of found footage filmmaking defined by Catherine Russell in her book *Experimental Ethnography: the Work of Film in the Age of Video* as an "aesthetic of ruins" (238). Elaborating on this point, Russell noted: "Its intertextuality is always also an allegory of history, a montage of memory traces, by which the filmmaker engages with the past through recall, retrieval, and recycling" (238). In Aïnouz and Gomes's short and feature films, the journey narrative provides an important figurative structural framework for their engagement with cultural history in relation to representations of the North-East. I contend that there is a shift in focus provided by the newly assembled material toward environmental concerns that are not obvious in the footage of the earlier short film.

Brazilian cultural historian Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr.'s well-known study on representations of the North-East has contended that as a cultural region the North-East was "invented" around a cluster of stereotypical images—such as poverty, drought, the *cangaço* (banditry), among them—traditionally associated with this vast geographical space, so that its heterogeneous character has been reductively portrayed through a few recurring homogenizing representations (25). Reading *Viajo porque preciso* in light of Albuquerque's discussion on the north-eastern region allows us to see that precisely the film's fragmented, hybrid structure serves to reinforce the deconstruction of stereotypical, monolithic views of the North-East. The road movie is, then, both a journey of self-discovery for the protagonist and a re-discovery of a region and revision of a cinematic tradition through which it has traditionally been framed.

With this in mind, I wish to consider briefly *Sertão de acrílico*, given that a direct reference to the Cinema Novo classic, *Vidas secas*, appears to be intended in its opening sequence. Here, a black screen fades into a long take originating from inside a moving vehicle, opening onto a winding tarmacked road that tapers off into a dry north-eastern landscape (see Fig. 12.1). The initial piercing, high-pitched, uninterrupted chord that supports the shot in its ten opening seconds shifts into a slow, electro-acoustic arrangement, seemingly wishing to recall an old western-film setting, and certainly suggesting a definite shift in mood from the initial tension in relation to the spaces beyond the moving vehicle. There seems to be a deliberate quoting here, both in composition and sound, of the iconic opening establishing shot of Nelson Pereira dos Santos's adaptation, now by way of a debunking of the earlier film's "aesthetics of hunger" articulated on *Sertão acrílico*'s use of color and musical commentary to the scene. Moreover, it adopts a road movie stylistic device by which, as

Fig. 12.1 Road tapering off into a dry north-eastern landscape in *Sertão de acrílico azul piscina* (Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes, 2004)

Corrigan reminds us, "the camera adopts the framed perspective of the vehicle itself" (146). The point of view is, on this occasion, of the subject in movement, rather than the static, authoritative perspective of the establishing shot in the Cinema Novo classic, in which the family of dispossessed *sertanejos* (north-eastern peasants) emerges from the distant horizon and slowly approaches the camera fixed onto the bare landscape. Such perspectival and aesthetic shift is also conveyed through Aïnouz and Gomes's intriguing choice of title, which invites the viewers to relinquish established visions of the *sertão*.

In the re-edited footage of *Viajo porque preciso*'s opening sequence, the camera's mobility from within the vehicle is maintained and it is soon supported by the voice-over narration of the off-screen driver, who begins his journey by detailing in methodical and deadpan delivery the work equipment he is carrying on his fieldwork. The subjective camera looks out onto the road ahead from inside the windscreen, with the vehicle's metal frame partly obstructing the view beyond. The uneasiness of the driver vis-à-vis the rural world around him, suggested by such framing, is reinforced early on when the film's opening mobile view is cut abruptly to a static shot in one of the driver's roadside stops. Here, a long take of a field and a

rundown hut nestled beyond the highway—with the car's side-door frame conspicuously cutting across the screen—suggests the emotional detachment that marks José's relationship with his surroundings. It also underscores the tension between culture and wilderness that David Laderman highlighted as one of the motifs often explored by road movies: "cultural isolation with vestiges [like the car itself] of that culture" (15). Besides, the scene is purposely self-reflective given that the audience is, in the first instance, left with the impression that they are viewing a still photograph and only the subtle movement of the grass undulating in the wind and some flying birds reminds them that they are in fact experiencing a moving image.

Such deliberate tension between mobility and stasis leaves the viewers in little doubt that the aesthetics of movement traditionally associated with the road movie genre are deliberately eschewed in favor of a slow movie aesthetic, in which a sense of suspended time is reproduced, encouraging a contemplation of the landscape (Jaffe 3–6).[12] The directors have revealed they wished José Renato's tone to change over the course of the film, from an assertive, determined voice, reflecting his position as middle-class geologist enjoying a stable, orderly life, to one of increasing disorganization (Mendonça Filho n. pag).

So why introduce a new narrative layer in the form of a geologist into this hybrid of fiction and documentary? It could be argued that the scientist on the move becomes a metaphor for the disintegration of certainties and his development from a detached, calculating, scientific approach toward the land fades into a sense of connection and a sense of reliance toward it. Half way into his journey, José Renato questions the wisdom of the construction of the canal that he has been tasked to provide the groundwork for. The canal, he states, would imply displacement of families and entire communities and have negative impact on the landscape. Such a perspective contrasts José Renato's outlook at the outset of his journey, when he repeatedly comments on the monotony of the landscape, reflecting his own dejected state. The view of an early shot from within the vehicle, half blocked up by the back of the truck in front and part of the roadside vegetation and landscape beyond, conveys his disconnection and his disengagement from the land. In fact, the perspective appears out of synch with that of someone supposedly sitting in the driving seat, thus in effect conveying a psychological process rather than the perceptions of the human eye, which Tiago de Luca has argued is one of the film's recurring and defining features (20).

Fig. 12.2 Mattress drying on the bare ground after a night of lovemaking in *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo* (Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes, 2009)

As the film progresses, his glazed look onto the landscape is replaced by a keen eye for a multilayered, kaleidoscopic view of the North-East that eludes the monochrome vision of poverty and violence. At the same time, José Renato's interactions with locals increase; he records conversations and anecdotes from daily lives. As an example of such a shift, I wish to refer to the image of the patterned mattress that catches José Renato's eye once he comes across a small family business of mattress makers. A relatively long take captures the mattress which José Renato informs us is drying on the bare ground after a night of lovemaking. The textures and colors of the composition complicate the stereotypical vision of the *sertão* suggested by the background—a bare tree rising within a harsh, barren landscape—arguably a visual quote from *Vidas secas* (see Fig. 12.2). Indeed, one might suggest it is also a deliberate allusion to the famous "cama de couro" (leather-slats bed) that Sinhá Vitória's character in Graciliano Ramos's homonymous novel dreams of and that never materializes, as a sign of the novel's (and subsequent adaptation's) dystopian visions.

Beyond *Viajo porque preciso*'s quoting of *Vidas secas*, its allusions to *Bye bye Brasil* suggest an additional shift in perspective in relation to the

Fig. 12.3 Deserted streets and abandoned market squares in *Viajo porque preciso* (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009)

landscape. This is apparent in the closing sequences of Aïnouz and Gomes's film, in which footage of a river crossing toward a small cluster of traditional north-eastern buildings calls to mind the opening shots of Diegues's classic road movie. It soon becomes clear that indeed we are retracing the locations of the earlier film through a series of shots of the small town of Piranhas (located in the Brazilian state of Alagoas and a renowned historical site). José Renato informs the viewers in voice-over that this is the spot where the Rio das Almas will be diverted, resulting in the submerging and disappearance of the entire town. Shots of deserted streets and abandoned market squares eerily convey the sense of a place on the verge of disappearing (see Fig. 12.3). The opening sequence of *Bye bye Brasil*, with shots of a small town buzzing on market day—with stalls selling traditional products such as earthenware pots and natural remedies, *cordel* poetry, and so on—could not have provided a more contrasting montage to the ghost-like atmosphere conveyed in Aïnouz and Gomes's montage. In Diegues's film, it is in Piranhas that we first meet the traveling circus Caravana Rolidei whose travel around the country we subsequently follow, as the traveling artists try to make a living in a rapidly modernizing Brazil, increasingly affected by foreign, global interests. Piranhas's cluster of traditional architecture symbolized an "authentic" image of north-eastern

interior still mostly untouched by modernization and globalization—a romanticized vision to a certain degree.

Poignantly, in Aïnouz and Gomes's deliberate quoting of *Bye bye Brasil*, the emphasis is much more clearly on the catastrophic consequences of human drastic intervention on the landscape and the environment. Thus, we may understand why José Renato's closing words, as he reaches the end of his journey, articulate his wish to reconnect with life and he visualizes this possibility in a scene of human approximation with the natural world. It is telling that he should state this once he has left his vehicle (symbol of modernity and culture as opposed to wilderness, as Laderman reminded us) and climbed the steep steps leading up to a small tower (and former lighthouse) perched at the top of a hill overlooking the town. If, according to Corrigan "the road invariably represents the inscription of a superior (usually patriarchal) perspective that keeps the protagonist from wandering into dangerous unmarked space" (144), José Renato's stepping outside of it seems to signal his definitive choice for a different order. The famous plaque we find at the end of José Renato's journey, captured by the now hand-held camera of the protagonist on foot, in a further step toward the conflation of the nature–culture binary, shows a dedication of the Brazilians of the nineteenth century to the generations of the twentieth century, emphasizing the scene's prophetic weight.[13]

Once there, as José Renato films the town below and maps the lay of the land before it is drastically tampered with, he states that he wishes he were in Acapulco (significantly not in Brazil) alongside the famous cliff-divers who jump from high up into the sea below. A cut takes us to a series of shots that capture the intrepid divers against a pristine rocky seascape (see Fig. 12.4). This is a display of extreme attunement with the workings of the natural world, given that profound knowledge of the movement of the waves and sea water level is needed for the divers to succeed in their potentially death-defying enterprise. As the shots in Acapulco begin, José Renato explicitly tells us he is not there, clearly establishing the closing scene's symbolism in terms of expression of a particular lived experience or "landscape as dwelling," to recall Lefebvre's formulations.

Thus, to conclude we might refer back to Kleber Mendonca Filho's comment on the film's treatment of landscape as "terreno intimista e pessoal." It seems that within this portrayal of the landscape we find a revision of established cultural representations of the North-East and significant dialogues with Brazil's cinematic tradition. Furthermore, the film points to new approaches to our relationship with the nonhuman world, which

Fig. 12.4 Diver against a pristine rocky seascape in Acapulco. A shot in *Viajo porque preciso* (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009)

resonate well beyond regional and national boundaries. The relationship between the geologist and the botanist remains unresolved, but its unraveling leads to the former's clearer understanding of his limitations. In this respect, we might recall Corrigan's observations in relation to the road movie genre, which seem pertinent to the crisis articulated in this contemporary Brazilian road film: "One reason the road movie has remained a culturally central genre today may be because the oil and energy crisis in the world reflects the much larger historical and cultural crisis in which traditional images of male identity and significance have also become generic debris" (153).

Notes

1. "Retomada" is the name given to the revival of Brazilian cinema, which occurred from 1995, following the introduction of fiscal incentives among other measures after the bleak years of the Collor administration, in which support for cinema and other arts was slashed. See, for example, Luiz Zanin Oricchio, *Cinema de novo*.
2. In further references, the film will be referred to simply as *Viajo porque preciso*.

3. Other critics discussing the issue are Luiz Zanin Oricchio ("The *sertão*), and, more recently, Isis Sadek.
4. See also Stephanie Dennison.
5. See also Martin Lefebvre's "Between".
6. From the Newsweek article "Latino Invasion" by Sean Smith. 30 Nov 2004.
7. José Renato refers to his wife by the epithet of "galega," literally meaning someone from the Spanish region of Galicia, but which is used, especially in North-East Brazil, in relation to someone blond or fair-haired/skinned.
8. I use the term "defamiliarization" according to the conceptualizations of the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky.
9. Sadek studies the subversive potential provided by female displacement in the films *Eu, tu, eles* (Me, You, Them, dir. Andrucha Waddington, 2000) and *O céu de Suely* (Suely in the Sky, dir. Karim Aïnouz, 2007).
10. This and further translations from Portuguese are mine unless otherwise stated.
11. Henceforth referred to as *Sertão de acrílico*.
12. For a study of the slow movie genre, see Ira Jaffe, *Slow Movies*.
13. The plaque literally reads: "From the people of the 19th century to the people of the 20th century." Significantly, the plaque was also referenced in the closing titles of *Bye bye Brasil*, where the film is dedicated to the Brazilians of the twenty-first century.

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CHAPTER 13

Inscription and Subversion of the Road Movie in Inés de Oliveira Cézar's *Cassandra* (2012)

Cynthia Tompkins

According to David Laderman, "the driving force propelling most road movies … is an embrace of the journey as a means of cultural critique" (1). Indeed, it is the implicit socioeconomic commentary of Walter Salles's *Central do Brasil* (1998) that contributed to the development of the genre in Latin American cinema. Other significant productions include Mexican director María Novaro's *Sin dejar huella* (2000), which fleshes out a *Thelma and Louise* plot by underscoring ubiquitous machismo, violence, and (police) corruption, while it allows for character development and female independence. Along these lines, Brazilian director Vicente Amorím's *O caminho das nuvens* (2003) registers the difficulties encountered by a man and his family on a 1984-mile bicycle ride from the State of Paraíba to Rio de Janeiro in search of a job. The penchant for cultural critique is epitomized in Salles's *Diarios de motocicleta* (2004), which depicts Ernesto (Che) Guevara's growing awareness of the pervasiveness of gross economic inequity that leads him to become a firebrand revolutionary. Argentine director Pablo Trapero's road film, *Familia rodante*

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(2004), narrows down the typical social critique to a clash of family members' ideologies during a three-day journey to a relative's wedding in the claustrophobic environment of a small recreational vehicle. The road movie also structures Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001), which underscores the huge economic disparity in Mexican society witnessed by the characters from the comfort of their car, where the friction comes from the two teenagers' competition for the attention of their female companion, their different social class, and their shared homophobia. Though faithful to the genre's cultural critique, Marcelo Gomes's *Cinema, aspirinas, e urubus* (2005) marks the inception of the subgenre of period road films, as it focuses on the misadventures of a German selling aspirin in the Brazilian northeast during World War II. Whereas all of Carlos Sorín's films follow the conventions of the genre, the light-hearted humor of *El camino de San Diego* (2006) is undercut by an ironic denunciation of the overriding effects of the economic crisis following three decades of neoliberal policies in Argentina.[1]

Inés de Oliveira Cézar's film, *Cassandra* (2012), intertwines a Greek myth, indigenous cultures, and the mores of contemporary Argentina.[2] Yet, *Cassandra* inscribes and subverts the generic convention of cultural critique because Oliveira Cézar depicts the deplorable living conditions endured by first peoples yet avoids politicizing the issue. As I show in this article, the development of the screenplay registers this double movement of inscription and subversion.[3] The movie begins with a male voice-over that states "2010, Cassandra graduates with a degree in literature and becomes a journalist … Her first assignment is to write an article on El Impenetrable, a remote area in the Argentine northeast." As the camera pans over Cassandra, played by Agustina Muñoz, the voice-over alludes to the problem of representation, since "she is convinced that chronicles hold the secret that short stories and history attempt to explain and that photography lies because real time does not stop."[4] Then, the initial voice-over shifts to a dialogue. As the camera focuses on social science books, the spectator becomes aware of the fact that the shot takes place at an office, while Cassandra interviews an unnamed specialist about the crisis at El Impenetrable. He summarizes the situation: "thousands and thousands of small farmers have been displaced in Chaco due to the expansion of soy plantations and of lumber companies. There is deforestation.... The development model imposed on … the original inhabitants of those territories forces them into destitution." The voice-over points to a real social situation in the afilmic world. As Lilian Joensen and Stella Semino note, the

production of soybeans in Argentina has expanded from 9500 hectares (23,465 acres) in the early 1970s, to 5.9 million in 1996, 10.3 million in 2000–2001, and 14.1 million (34.8 million acres) in 2003–2004 (7). According to Walter Pengue, during the 1990s, transgenic crops such as soybean, maize, and cotton spread beyond the Pampas to highly biodiverse areas, opening a new agricultural border in regions like the Yungas, Great Chaco, and the Mesopotamian Forest (314). This huge supranational "United Republic of Soya [is] ruled by corporations, so national boundaries become irrelevant" (Joensen and Semino 8). The new agricultural model exerted a powerful impact on land ownership. In 1993, the Argentine government declared that 200,000 producers would have to quit farming, especially in units of less than 200 hectares (494 acres) because they could not afford the massive machines used for the direct drilling technique that GM soybeans require (Pengue 314). As a consequence, many farmers had to sell their land to "sowing pools," investor groups that brought in their own employees (Pengue 314). In addition to the massive exodus from the countryside and to malnutrition and hunger, the consequences of growing genetically modified crops include ecological devastation: nutrient depletion, soil structure degradation, potential desertification, and loss of species (Joensen and Semino 5; Pengue 314).

Returning to the discussion of Oliveira Cézar's film, the following scene takes place at the editorial office. The hostile undercurrent toward Cassandra is suggested by the way one colleague questions the conditions of her assignment and the other one dismisses her as an intern. The editor intervenes, stating that Cassandra is a "contributor." It is at that point that the audience establishes a connection between the voice-over heard from the beginning of the movie and its source, the editor. The following sequence is introduced by the male voice-over, who states that as a "temp" Cassandra prefers to work at places where people come and go, such as a bar. It is there that the editor discusses the need to keep to the magazine's format in order to avoid him having to cut down her text. The next sequence, which also takes place at the bar, shows Cassandra reading a newspaper. Suddenly, Edgardo Cozarinsky—a cult Argentine filmmaker and writer—makes a cameo appearance as he shows surprise at seeing someone actually reading a newspaper.[5] In the next sequence, which also takes place at the bar, Cassandra attempts to convince her interlocutor that the Spaniards genuinely believed that they were saving indigenous peoples by converting them to Christianity. His skepticism is obvious as he compares the conquest to "breaking someone's legs in order to fix them and

thereby prove that they are no longer the same." The next shot shows Cozarinsky once again. As he addresses Cassandra, he counterpoints the lasting impact of poetry, which lures readers into thinking, interpreting, and feeling, with the "perishable" nature of journalism. He makes his point by way of a story on Rosa Molina, an emaciated indigenous woman, whose picture at the feet of the Redeemer in the cathedral of Resistencia appeared in the media repeatedly as an indictment of state policies. Yet, after a few days she was no longer "news," so her death was barely mentioned. Presciently, and foreshadowing Cassandra's fate, Cozarinsky refers to Molina's smile as the kind of grace of those beyond physical existence.

Back at home Cassandra packs her bags while the voice-over registers her actions:

> Cassandra writes a premonitory note. An evil boy is born in a Toba tribe. His mother, worried, seeks guidance from the chieftain. The healers attempt to cure him, but the child runs away desperately. They pursue him, so he cuts through the long thorns of the *cardón*, while he shoots darts at them until he dies from exhaustion. On the following morning, a thorny plant—the *vinal*—emerges from the boy's body. The note continues, but there is no indication that the editor actually read it.[6]

The voice-over's statement is quite paradoxical, coming as it is from the editor. The next sequence takes place at the editorial office. It involves a conversation between the editor, whom Argentine audiences might recognize as Alan Pauls—a well-known contemporary actor and writer—and Cassandra.[7] As he warns her about people's unwillingness to be interviewed, he tells her that Truman Capote would share personal information to get his interlocutor to open up. After reviewing editorial requirements, including the need to be "objective," he gives Cassandra a copy of Clarice Lispector's chronicles. The editor's admiration for the Brazilian author's work, despite being unable to understand it, foreshadows his relationship with Cassandra. To the extent that Cassandra is unhappy at the editorial office, Inés de Oliveira Cézar follows the conventions of the road movie since, "frustrated, often desperate characters light … out for something better, someplace else. Thus the road movie celebrates subversion as a literal venturing out of society" (Laderman 2). Furthermore, insofar as Cassandra leaves the world she knows to write about the plight of first peoples, the film adheres to the generic convention of aiming "beyond the borders of cultural familiarity, seeking the unfamiliar for revelation, or at least, the thrill of the unknown" (Laderman 1–2).

As Cassandra takes the bus, the camera focuses on her face framed by the window. The alternation of day and night suggests the considerable length of the journey. Finally, Cassandra arrives at Castelli. The camera pans taking Cassandra in as she mingles with a broad array of people. Cassandra's voice-over states: "Picket at Castelli. The very first time that Wichís, Tobas and Criollos form a coalition to protest."[8] As she mills around, her voice-over records that the people have been there for two weeks to "confront the government that has patronized them for centuries." Celia, who agrees to talk to Cassandra says: "We want them to support … our projects, so that we don't need help in the future. We ask for tools to be free." The camera follows Cassandra as she walks toward a circle of men, where a Wichí delegate demands the land and the tools promised by the government. The camera pans back to Celia, who remarks that owning the land would allow the children to remain in the community, instead of begging or chasing false expectations in the city. Oliveira Cézar includes several scenes in which Cassandra is interviewing someone, as a journalist would. Bill Nichols defines sequences like these as participatory documentary modes, since the "filmmaker [and in this case the actress too] participates in shaping what happens before the camera: interviews are a prime example" (*Introduction* 151). Yet, on numerous occasions, Oliveira Cézar has the camera pan over indigenous peoples, especially when they are immersed in everyday life activities. These sequences appear to follow the conventions of observational documentaries. According to Julianne Burton, these tend to focus on the behavior of subjects within social formations (families, institutions, communities) at moments of historical or personal crisis. Burton notes that technically there is a general predominance of synchronous sound and long takes. While the interaction between observer and observed is kept to a minimum, the mode provides a sense of impartiality, which results from the intimate detail and texture of the lived experience (4). Yet, with the exception of the dialogue with Celia and the words of the delegate, Cassandra's voice-over is overheard during the sequence, so there is a time warp. The assumption is that we hear the report that Cassandra sends after the fact. Yet, the images correspond to the time they were recorded as she was walking among the demonstrators camping at the picket line.

Then the voice-over notes that Cassandra has arrived at Castelli, the gateway to El Impenetrable, where she meets Javier, of Polish descent but born and raised in Chaco, who drives her to Nueva Pompeya. While the male voice-over refers to the next leg of the journey, Javier discusses the

effect of pesticides on the village, as well as reports of contamination of the water. Their dialogue includes the impact of logging on El Impenetrable.[9] At nightfall, he suggests they stop to listen to the sounds of the forest. On the following day, Javier introduces her to a community leader, who laments that the aboriginal union appears to be powerless. While Cassandra stares at the barefoot children in the winter cold her voice-over wonders: "What can be done? Why were they displaced? Is the land the root of the problem or is it them? Their gods? Their skin? Their hair?" Shocked at their living conditions Cassandra tapes her impressions against the background of the river, thus naturalizing the voice-over as part of her assignment. She considers: "Where do I want to publish this article? Do I want someone to like it? Who?"

In the next sequence Cassandra visits a hospital. Her voice-over refers to the rumor that malnourished indigenous children have been interned, but she is not allowed to see them. She concludes that, like many others, the hospital smells of disinfectant, people waiting patiently, anguish, and abandonment. At that point, Cassandra's voice-over admits that, "she is not the right person for the assignment." The male voice-over returns, pointing out that Cassandra sent a message to the editor before leaving for the Toba communities. Juxtaposed against the image of Cassandra asleep in a bus, the male voice-over appears to read her message, "there are things I cannot describe. I cannot expose myself to that violence." And Cassandra's voice-over interjects, "The problem is not words but phrases. These images cannot be described. I feel embarrassed." The next section counterpoints a shot of the puzzled editor, in Buenos Aires, with one of Cassandra taking pictures at the Toba community. Against a background of adobe walls, primitive wooden dwellings, roaming chickens, and children playing ball, Cassandra interviews a woman carrying a toddler. She inquires about access to the hospital, social organization, and living conditions. She learns that the leader is at Castelli and that they depend on state subsidies.

Cassandra walks off and registers at a rather seedy hotel. A local offers her a drink, as an excuse to interrogate her. The dialogue, which appears to conceal rather than provide information, is spooky. On the following morning Cassandra asks a Toba woman surrounded by three children, one of them in arms, whether she gave birth at home or at the hospital. The woman tells her that she had a miscarriage when the midwife, who happened to be her grandmother, was called in to help.

The male voice-over returns, as Cassandra tapes her second article about the extreme poverty and the slum-like conditions endured by the Toba community at Villa Bermejito. The male voice-over concludes: "evicted from their habitat, living in barren lands, they can only hunt snakes, bugs, insects, so they hunt welfare plans." As the male voice-over ponders about the uselessness of finding fault, a shot of Cassandra traveling by bus is set against one of the editor-in-chief discussing her work with the female journalist. Later, he asks Cassandra not to become emotionally involved, to act as a radar. In the meantime, Cassandra is shown inside a car. The driver is elided, as he is when she travels to Villa [Río] Bermejito.[10] Thus, instead of showing the driver's point of view (Laderman 16), the frame includes the passenger's view of the front windshield and side window, suggesting Cassandra's limited control and independence. While the references to Castelli, Nueva Pompeya, and Villa Bermejito anchor the text, the exact locations of the Toba and Wichí communities are elided, as are the deictics in most interactions.

In the next section, the camera focuses on a whitewashed house, while we hear the murmur of an indigenous language. As the camera provides a close-up of an older woman, we presume that the sound represents an exchange between the interviewee and a translator, yet we are surprised to hear the woman speak Spanish. The conversation goes around in circles. Cassandra inquires about their customs, gods, and religion. The woman replies that the church is missing a wall. She adds that she doesn't know the Mayor, so the assumption is that she is not looking for a handout. Cassandra asks about offerings to their god, and whether or not the church has images, but the woman chokes and falls silent.

Against the backdrop of the river, Cassandra records her next assignment. She factors in the effect of indiscriminate logging, malnutrition, contamination of the water, cultural extermination, and discrimination, on Toba and Wichí communities, concluding, "the Toba at Bermejito are spare in their words. Their voice seems to travel inward…. Wichís are more isolated." She wonders how children cope with the cold: while they have no socks, she is wearing three pairs. Cassandra articulates and understands the community members' rejection of outsiders because they are used to seeing reporters arrive, do nothing, and leave. She is poignantly aware of her alienation. Still in Villa Bermejito she meets a blonde twenty-three-year-old engineer who directs the construction of a huge hospital, despite the constant deferments in the delivery of construction material and the lack of water. Applying the Capote strategy, Cassandra says that

she doesn't dye her hair because her eyebrows are dark. The engineer reciprocates by casting doubts about the completion of the hospital. Paradoxically, Cassandra's voice-over is juxtaposed against the above dialogue. In silence, she returns to the hotel, leafs through childhood pictures and anthropological shots of indigenous peoples. She leaves in a vehicle, which could be Javier's truck, yet once again the driver is elided. Afterwards, she walks around town and meets the delegate of the community. She is surprised to learn about the presence of political parties. The conversation about lost indigenous leadership traditions introduces the 1924 massacre of Napalpí and its traumatic effect on the community's social imaginary.[11]

Once again, the male voice-over intervenes, "Cassandra sends the editor another note. She writes, 'in a state of grace, human beauty appears, energy, not to be used, but to be lived, feeling that one exists, utter lucidity, levity.' "[12] This text echoes Clarice Lispector's chronicle:

> the tranquil happiness which radiates from people and things is enhanced by a lucidity which can only be described as light, because in a state of grace everything is so very, very bright … And there is a physical bliss which cannot be compared to anything. The body is transformed into a gift. And one feels it is a gift because one is experiencing at source the unmistakable good fortune of material existence. (Lispector 24 trans. by Pontiero)

Lispector's "estado de graça" (state of grace) alludes to the bodily experience of the blessing of the shared nature of material existence. Insofar as people and things breathe and exhale a shared shimmering glow of energy, Cassandra's words acknowledge her materiality and thus her connection with nature. Stacy Alaimo poignantly speaks to this interrelation: "Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlies the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment' " (2). These references prepare the viewer to become aware of the humanoid features of the *cardón* and foreshadow the protagonist's presumed metamorphosis into a *vinal*.

While the camera focuses on the editor in Buenos Aires, the male voice-over notes that he writes, presumably over email, asking her to stop reading Lispector, and adds, "Cassandra, the incredible. I wasn't wrong about the assignment; I was wrong about everything else. Please return." The camera shifts back to the Argentine northeast, showing Cassandra

taking stock of the conditions first peoples endure. Then the camera follows Cassandra, who walks into the forest barely visible in the bluish light, and takes off her sweater. The strangeness of this moonlit shot, which underscores her odd behavior, follows the conventions of road movies, which represent cultural critique "cinematically, in terms of innovative traveling camera work, montage, and soundtrack" (Laderman 2).

The next sequence takes place in Buenos Aires, as the editor shares his frustration about the material Cassandra sends, because it cannot be published as is and its originality is lost when it is edited to meet the publication's guidelines. He also shares his concern about the young woman's silence. As he stares at picture frames of a cloud of dust blending the dirt road with the sky, the editor comments on the subjective nature of the shot, which would be perfect in a museum of modern art. Puzzled by the 150 images of *cardones*, the editor muses about her fascination with the anthropomorphic cactus. As he watches the pictures, a deafening undefined sound suggests that there is something else, something mysterious, and he concludes, "It's her trip."

In contrast to the cinematic construction of realism resulting from the Hollywood formula of the illusion of an invisible camera (and point of view), in Oliveira Cézar's film, the illusion of realism is interrupted by interspersed references to perceptions conveyed through poetic language and subjective photographs. Up north, as dusk turns into night, Cassandra walks to the empty bus stop and goes into a bar. There she smokes, has a beer, and dances while she plays pool. A while later Cassandra walks out into the night, following the brightly lit road, leaving her belongings behind. While Cassandra's disappearance into the night renders the journey open-ended, Oliveira Cézar follows the conventions of the road movie by having the protagonist "light out for something better, someplace else" (Laderman 2). Then, the editor's voice-over states that Cassandra sent a final note, which he reads aloud:

> To be a stranger. The sheer anonymity of people and things draws them close, accentuates their similarities, and renders them peaceful. To be a park where people go to breathe. I don't need them to talk. They need not say anything. The powerful effect of moonlight elides all but the main traces, which become both close and distant.

He adds that she includes a quote by Argentine poet alejandra Pizarnik, "rebellion: to stare at a rose until your sight is pulverized."[13] After waiting

in vain for an answer, the editor travels up north to find her. He talks to a few people, including the delegate she interviewed, to no avail. He leafs through the volume of Lispector's chronicles he had given Cassandra and comes across a loose page with the legend of the *vinal*. The editor wonders if she ventured further in. The indigenous leader thinks that she may have gone to see the communities at Villa Bermejito or Nueva Pompeya, so the editor toys with the idea of following her. He finds her agenda, walks by the same bus stop and into the same bar, with the auditory background of a female voice-over speaking in an indigenous language. The editor reads her notes, including the references to the *vinal* and the *cardón*. He follows her tracks, registers at the hotel, takes her room, and finds her childhood pictures and a gold chain. The last section shows a vehicle traveling in the night, while the editor's voice-over attests to being the author of the chronicle, and admits having a recurrent dream about Cassandra becoming a *vinal*. The film closes with another admission. In order to cope with her absence, the editor tries to think of Cassandra as a figment of his imagination.

Since the road trip favors character development, we would expect Cassandra to turn into a successful journalist. Yet, in accordance to her namesake in the Greek myth, who has the power of prophecy but is cursed by not being believed,[14] Cassandra's messages increasingly focus on the failure of language, foreshadowing the denouement. The impact of the substandard living conditions leads to an exploration of the first peoples' original and largely forgotten beliefs, since their grandparents were assimilated into Christian Evangelical religions. Oliveira Cézar comes close to endowing her protagonist, the outsider, the apparently white woman, with the power to discover the archive. Yet, Cassandra's references to her dark eyebrows intimate a connection with aboriginal peoples, which grows as she experiences a state of grace, spends the night under the effect of moonlight, and culminates with the transcendence of vision alluded to by Pizarnik. In sum, her subjective pictures of landscapes chart her inward journey.

Following the conventions of the road movie, Oliveira Cézar's film allows for navigating different cultural and geographical environments to render a narrative representation of cultural critique by way of "an open-ended, rambling plot structure" (Laderman 2). Indeed, the deictic pointers are vague in *Cassandra*. Attuned to the meandering nature of the road movie, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's notion of the time-image is organized around the open possibilities offered by a voyage. In both cases,

the journey allows for exploring different social organizations, and the episodic nature of the voyage leads to a condemnation of the traditional plot. In sum, the aleatory appearance of the journey emphasizes the dispersive nature of reality. Finally, since the protagonist records reality, both the road movie and the time-image focus on the situation itself (Deleuze *Cinema 1* 211). The link between the economic crisis and neorealism became *de rigueur* regarding most of the Latin American films shot in the 1990s, since many were made in non-standard formats, and most were shot on location, with non-professional actors (Bernardes et al. 10).[15] Like other directors of the New Argentine Cinema, Oliveira Cézar follows the conventions of neorealism, yet she includes professional actors such as Agustina Muñoz, who appeared in all of her movies. Others are in-between, fulfilling their role as actors and yet reinforcing the reality effect. Whereas Alan Pauls and Edgardo Cozarinsky are well-known writers, the former is an established actor and the latter makes a cameo appearance.

Deleuze goes beyond the time-image by suggesting that the goal of neorealism was not to extend perceptions into actions, but rather to connect them to thought. Thus, neorealism is associated with a buildup of optical and later sound situations, which differ from those of traditional realism in that they are not anchored in a setting that presupposes an action, but rather in "any space whatever," that is, in disconnected bits of space. Consequently, the protagonist is entranced with a vision instead of being engaged in an action. As the visual description replaces the motor action, the situation becomes suffused with indeterminacy, and whether it is imaginary or not becomes irrelevant (*Cinema 2* 1–7). As we have mentioned, Oliveira Cézar inscribes and subverts neorealist conventions insofar as she both shoots on location, yet succeeds in enshrouding the physical location in indeterminacy. In other words, the shots of indigenous peoples seem to be registered in, "any space whatever" of the Argentine northeast. The feeling of "any space whatever" is underscored by the reference to the 150 pictures of cactus.

Similarly, the fact that the account is offered in retrospect by the voice-over of the editor, leads us to infer that the sections of Cassandra's voice-over belong to the past, as recorded in her articles or messages. Moreover, the editor may be reconstructing her images in his imagination. In other words, we are not privy to Cassandra's perspective, especially regarding climactic experiences alluded to by the reference to Lispector's state of grace, or regarding transcendental ones as suggested by the reference to Pizarnik's words about pulverizing sight by staring at a rose, which speak

to the protagonist's experience in the moonlight, as well as the visions that allow for becoming aware of her material nature and ultimately transcending her individuality and rationality as another being in nature. Paradoxically, the realist framework of the movie ultimately turns the ending into something even more eerie, insofar as it precludes showing/accepting the protagonist's entrancement and eventual transformation. While the character develops, in accordance to the expectations of the road film, her development as transcendence cannot be portrayed in a realistic setting.

Oliveira Cézar's references to the removal of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, the slum-like conditions they are forced into living, the effects of deforestation, the fatal effects of pesticide, the contamination of the water, and malnutrition are ultimately canceled by the ambiguous ending, which shores up the dignity and spirituality of indigenous peoples, hopeless as they are in the face of multinationals such as Monsanto, which condemn them to survive under unsanitary substandard conditions leading to illnesses, deformities, and early death.[16] Cassandra's initial search for an essentialized worldview is undermined by the indigenous-mestizo continuum. Clear-cut definitions are blurred further because Toba and Wichí people are being forced off their ancestral lands into shantytowns that resemble those that cordon off large urban areas. Moreover, the poverty that ensues from their forced displacement makes them dependent on welfare, so class and political identities further undermine the ethnic factor. Moreover, Cassandra's initial search for a religious worldview is marred by the history of forced assimilation, as evidenced by the references to the conversion to Evangelism in the previous generation. However, first peoples refuse to share their beliefs, so their worldview remains a mystery outside of the community. Thus, the slippage between indigenous peoples, rural workers, and the underclass paradoxically refers to the Other within at the same time that it precludes the possibility of speaking for the subaltern.[17] In sum, Oliveira Cézar's film inscribes and subverts the generic conventions of the road movie. On the one hand, as a poetic intervention at a critical juncture, *Cassandra* allows for social critique by underscoring the continued symbolic and material violence against first peoples in Argentina. On the other, cultural critique is represented narratively and the deictic pointers typical of neorealism are ambiguous, since the exact locations of the indigenous communities are omitted. Instead of the expected overt political messages denouncing the plight of indigenous peoples, *Cassandra* makes us reflect upon the limitations of objective representation as well as the unfeasibility of speaking for the subaltern.

Notes

1. For further discussion of Latin American road movies see Tompkins 89–135.
2. Oliveira Cézar's first movie *Cómo pasan las horas* (*The Hours Go By*) (2005), underscores the endless repetition of ritual as it embodies the function of film as sculpting time. Her second film, *Extranjera* (*Foreigner*) (2007), offers a free rendition of Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, as it explores the willingness of a community to sacrifice a young woman and her acceptance of such fate, in the hopes that it will contribute to the common good. Following the interrelation between a Greek tragedy and current events, *El recuento de los daños* (*The Recount of the Damages*) (2010) delves into the unconscious, in a powerful contemporary rendition of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* as it harks back to the disappearance of dissenters and the appropriation of babies born in captivity during the period of Argentine state terrorism (1976–1983). For in-depth discussion of Oliveira Cézar's movies, see Tompkins 139–145; 186–205.
3. For the time being, *Cassandra* can be found at IMDb (Internet Movie Database).
4. Despite the fact that the film is dubbed, all translations are my own.
5. Edgardo Cozarinsky (1939–), an Argentine writer and filmmaker of Ukranian descent, is the author of ten collections of short stories, essays, and memories. He has penned six novels. *Lejos de dónde* (*Far From Where*, 2009) was awarded the first prize by the Argentine Academy of Letters for novels written during the 2008–2010 period. His filmography includes shorts and feature films, of which the most notable might be *Ronda nocturna* (2005).
6. There are many versions of this Toba legend. According to one, a Guaraní child was manifestly evil and cruel to the inhabitants of the forest. When the sorcerers tried to exorcise the devil (Añahan) out of him, the child shot poisoned darts and killed some of his pursuers. Furious, the whole tribe chased him as he apparently slid by the long thorns of the *cardones* that deterred the others. On the next morning, the *vinal*, a new tree, appeared presumably from the remains of the exhausted child. The *vinal*, a thorny tree that branches out and reaches several meters high, as malicious as the child, does not allow any vegetation other than the *cardón*, a Saguaro like cactus, to grow beneath it. See http://lospiesobrelatierra.blogspot.com/2011/11/leyendas-tobas.html.
7. Alan Pauls (1959–) is an Argentine writer, literary critic and filmmaker, and actor. He collaborated in the screenplay of *Vidas privadas* (*Private Lives*, 2001) with Fito Páez and in *Los rubios* (*The Blondes*, 2003) with Albertina Carri.

8. The Great Chaco region (shared between Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay) is home to several groups of First Peoples. The "Mataco" or "Wichí," live on the banks of the rivers Pilcomayo and Bermejo. The term Wichí, which means "people" in their language, was chosen to counteract the term "Mataco," which was used derogatively by other neighboring groups ("Criollos," "Pilagás," and "Tobas") (Rodríguez Mir 151–52). While the "Wichí" belong to the Mataco-Mataguayo linguistic group, the "Toba" and the "Pilagá" belong to the Guaycurú linguistic family (Lanza 109). The "Pilagá" inhabit the center of Formosa. The Center-Western "Toba," who are located in the Argentine provinces of Formosa and Salta, have been in contact with Anglican Missionaries since the beginnings of the twentieth century, when they founded a religious mission "El Toba" in 1930. The Center-Eastern "Toba" live in the provinces of Chaco and Formosa (Lanza 109). The term "Criollo," which dates from the Colonial Period, originated in Spain to refer to those born in Latin America from Spanish parents, as well as their issue. Despite their ancestors, "Criollos" were deprived of social, legal, and political rights that Spaniards migrating to America enjoyed (Rodríguez Mir 151–52).
9. Darío Aranda notes that the Ley de Bosques (Forest Law) was passed in November 2007, yet since that date to the end of 2013, nineteen billion square meters were deforested to cultivate soybean, mainly in the Argentine provinces of Santiago del Estero, Salta, Formosa, and Chaco. In August, 2015, Wichí communities of San José de Chuchuy, Laguna de Chuchuy, Chaguaral, and El Duraznillo prevented bulldozing the last remaining native forest in the province of Salta. In September, they wrote Governor Juan Manuel Urtubey, citing the Forest Law as well as Law 26,160 that forbids evicting native peoples and orders surveying the lands instead, requesting that he withdraw logging permits, to no avail.
10. Villa Bermejito appears in Argentine maps as Villa Río Bermejito. The Bermejo changed its course, so the diminutive refers to the original riverbed, along which remnants of the river run alternating with sections in which it goes underground.
11. In order to end a strike that prevented the harvest of cotton, 200 Toba and Mocoví people were atrociously mutilated by armed civilians and policemen. Backed by the fire of an army airplane, they completely destroyed the Quom (Toba) village in Napalpí, province de Chaco on July 19, 1924 (Gordillo and Hirsch 13).
12. "Estado de graça" was originally published in the Saturday edition of the *Jornal do Brasil* on 6 April, 1968. Lispector's son Paulo Gurgel Valente collected the chronicles published between August 1967 and December 1973 in a posthumous collection titled *A descoberta do mundo* (1984). See "Estado de graça-trecho" (91–93).

13. Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–1972), another Argentine cult figure, authored eight collections of dark, anguished poetry and a prose work, *La condesa sangrienta,* before taking her own life.
14. According to Aeschylus's *Agamemnon,* Cassandra, who foresees the Trojan War, is taken as a concubine by King Agamnenon of Mycenae. Upon his return, both of them are murdered by the king's wife, Clytemnestra, who was having an affair with Aegisthus.
15. Substandard shooting formats include 16 mm, black and white, digital video, Beta or SuperVHS (Bernardes et al. 10). On the dire conditions for new film directors in the 1990s, see Gonzalo Aguilar (15–16). See Joanna Page (33–38) and Jens Andermann (1–92) for further details on neorealism in New Argentine Cinema.
16. Unfortunately, the death of a Quom (Toba) child due to malnutrition and TB was all over the news on 7 January, 2015. The constant harassment of Quom people ranging from bullets at night to unexplained deaths in order to move them off the land continues. For pictures of the effects of Monsanto's products see "Argentina: the Country that Monsanto Poisoned." See also Qaim and Trexler.
17. On why the subaltern cannot speak, see Spivak.

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