Through Our Immigrant Eyes: Point of View and the (Re)definitions of Citizenship in Hispanic and Sinophone Literature and Film of Migration

by

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ABSTRACT

We live in a historical period that has been named "the age of migration," an epoch characterized by uncanny interconnectedness and an extended virtue of mobility, where everyone is or at least has the potential to become a migrant (Nail 14). We all move, but not all movements are the same. Some can, using a passport or the benefits granted by legal and cultural subjectivity, move in a (relatively) accessible manner; but for others, movement is impossible, unwanted, or perceived as a threat. In other words, migrant mobility carries meaning and reflects different power dynamics.

In his book *The Figure of the Migrant*, the American philosopher Thomas Nail addresses this linkage between migrancy, movement, and power through the lens of kinopolitics (politics of movement). He analyzes the movement's history and how the notion has been imbued with negative connotations in political theory and practice. Nail denounces the false idea on which many migrant policies are based. While some people move, others remain static. For Nail, the opposite is true. Everybody moves, and thus, movement is neither good nor bad. What matters is how people move. While Nail offers an innovative framework to answer this pivotal question, he dangerously overlooks histories of racialization that influence perceptions of migrant mobility.

Here, precisely, lies the central focus of this dissertation. I agree with Nail that all migrants move and are often subjected to manifold expulsions. However, as he notes, the way they move is different. *Through Our Immigrant Eyes* explores filmic and novelistic representations of different kinds of migrant mobility. The title of this dissertation refers to how the narrators of the novels *Crows* and *La Mara* and the camera lens of the films *Eve and the Fire Horse*, *A Silent Love*, *Take Out*, and *A Better Life* "see" migrant mobility and its associated

cultural discourses. These accounts explore Chinese and Hispanic cultural imaginaries that shape understandings of (non-)belonging, citizenship, identity, and border crossing. By focusing on the more nuanced version of migrant mobility presented in these works, I argue for an alternative paradigm through which we can understand specific sociocultural constructions and imaginaries of migrants and their movement. In this sense, comparing Hispanic and Sinophone narratives of migration and the juxtaposition of two seemingly disparate mobility cultures offers intriguing possibilities for analysis that seek to answer the following questions: how do migrants move and why? If the meanings assigned to migrant mobility are culturally designed, does that mean that the cultural imaginaries of migrant mobility significantly vary from one culture to another? If so, how much? And how can this inform our definition and understanding of migration as a universal category? What kind of migrant mobility gets represented in the selected corpus and why? How do these migration narratives deal with legal (non-)belonging? And how do these narratives illustrate processes of (non-)citizenship production? These questions are important to ask both from a cultural studies and a narrative perspective. In addition, my work examines how the formal strategies used in these films and novels legitimize or defy those ideals. I argue that the texts discussed in this study accentuate different aspects of transnational migrant mobility. By relying on manifold points of view, the written and visual narratives discussed here emphasize distinct social tensions that shed light on how migrants' movement, legal personae and related spatial imaginaries are culturally designed. Each distinctive use of point of view relies on different culturally imagined versions of (non)citizenship that are defined and redefined to challenge or reinforce "sedentary" ethics, privileging stasis over mobility.

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INTRODUCTION

> The nobodies: the sons of no one, / the owners of nothing. / The nobodies: treated as no one. […] / Who are not, even when they are. […]/ Who have no name, but rather a number. / Who don't appear in world history books, / but rather in the police pages of the local press.
>
> Eduardo Galeano

I. The Age of Migration & the Comparative Method

Although the poem "Los nadie" ("The Nobodies"), by the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, was composed in the first half of the twentieth century, its words still feel relevant, brutally honest, and even ironic today. We live in a historical period named "the age of migration," an epoch characterized by uncanny interconnectedness and an extended virtue of mobility, where everyone is or at least has the potential to become a migrant (Nail 14). We all move, but not all movements are the same. Some can, using a passport or the benefits granted by legal and cultural subjectivity, move in a (relatively) accessible manner; but for others, movement is impossible, unwanted, or perceived as a threat. In other words, migrant mobility carries meaning and reflects different power dynamics.

In his book *The Figure of the Migrant*, the American philosopher Thomas Nail addresses this linkage between migrancy, movement, and power through the lens of kinopolitics (politics of movement). He analyzes the movement's history and how the notion has been imbued with negative connotations in political theory and practice. Accordingly, movement has been constructed as an inferior social practice in which only those who do not belong to a territory or community engage. With an innovative theoretical framework that looks at "flows and junctions" and "regimes of circulation" instead of "fixed subjects and objects" and "states and institutions," Nail denounces the false idea on which many migrant policies are based. While

some people move, others remain static. For Nail, the opposite is true: everybody moves, and thus, movement is neither good nor bad; what matters is how people move. Drawing upon the Marxist theory of primitive accumulation, Nail analyzes the processes of social dispossession migrants are subjected to and the processes of social expansion that results from the expulsion of different types of migrant figures. In an interview with Zachary Thomas Settle, the philosopher explains: "the nomad is the name of the migrant expelled from the territory, the barbarian is the name of the migrant expelled from political status or citizenship, the vagabond is the name of the migrant expelled from the juridical order, and the proletariat is the name of the migrant expelled from the control over the economic process. Each has its moment of historical emergence, and each continues to coexist in the present and gives us a helpful framework for understanding contemporary migration" (Kinopolitics and the Figure of the Migrant).

With this classification, Nail offers an innovative framework to answer the pivotal question of how migrants move but, by standardizing and compartmentalizing migrant movement under four specific categories, he dangerously overlooks histories of racialization that influence perceptions of migrant mobility. A Mexican migrant does not move in the same way a Chinese migrant does, not even if they happen to move in the same geographical space or try to belong to the same community. In some contexts, one may be more welcome than the other due to their economic or social status, education, gender, or perceived adaptation capacity. Likewise, they may interpret the social norms of their receiving communities in different terms, usually through the lens of cultural specificity. This process illustrates one of the characteristics of contemporary migration, according to Park: "the peaceful penetration of migrating individuals" (886), which not always involves a displacement of one group by another but which always affects a receiving community.

Here, precisely, lies the central focus of this dissertation. I agree with Nail that all migrants move and are often subjected to manifold expulsions. However, as he notes, the way they move is different. *Through Our Immigrant Eyes* explores filmic and novelistic representations of different kinds of migrant mobility. The title of this dissertation refers to how the narrators of the novels *Crows* and *La Mara* and the camera lens of the films *Eve and the Fire Horse*, *A Silent Love*, *Take Out*, and *A Better Life* "see" migrant mobility and its associated cultural discourses. These accounts explore Chinese and Hispanic cultural imaginaries that shape understandings of (non-)belonging, citizenship, identity, and border crossing. But, contrary to the all-encompassing and universalizing classification of migrant mobility that Nail proposes, the works analyzed in this dissertation problematize the issue of migrant mobility by drawing on the intersection of notions such as race, national origin, religion, legal status, social class, and gender. By focusing on the more nuanced version of migrant mobility presented in these works, I argue for an alternative paradigm through which we can understand specific sociocultural constructions and imaginaries of migrants and their movement. In this sense, comparing Hispanic and Sinophone narratives of migration and the juxtaposition of two seemingly disparate mobility cultures offers intriguing possibilities for analysis that seek to answer the following questions: how do migrants move and why? Do they have control of their mobility? If the meanings assigned to migrant mobility are culturally designed, does that mean that the cultural imaginaries of migrant mobility significantly vary from one culture to another? If so, how much? And how can this inform our definition and understanding of migration as a universal category?

The migrant experiences explored in this dissertation and referred to by their macro structure – an immigrant protagonist, usually unassimilated and with great expectations, arrives in a new world and faces inevitable tribulations that lead to a change – typically play out closely

to the notions of social coercion and the pressures that life as a nomad brings (Boelhower 4). From stories about migrants who start a perilous journey to those about migrants who have reached their country of destination or those who must return to their place of origin, these visual and written narratives rely to a significant extent on movements taking place within spaces closely surveyed by legal and political discourses.

This narrative emphasis on controlled mobility is associated with historical environments where the state apparatus requires surveying strategies to consolidate power. It is not a coincidence that one of the main features of the contemporary world is precisely international migration. The twenty first century is an age of border crossing, mobility, surveillance, and movement control. Never in history has mobility been easier and more accessible than in the present, thanks to the emergence of new and more efficient transport and communication technologies. The hypermobility so characteristic of this era has afforded people the ability to forge social and economic ties in more than one society at any given time. This condition of transnational divided loyalties is then seen as a threat to the cohesion of the nation-state, which requires an unambiguous pledge of allegiance from those who aspire to belong to the receiving community (Castle, Haas, and Miller xxii).

This dissertation represents different types of transnational migrant mobility and their associated regimes. Analyzing these imaginaries produces significant new insights regarding the cultural history of movement control, legal discourses of (non-)citizenship sanctioning that movement, and the criticism of their cultural ramifications. However, the link between the three should be seen as something other than an effort to study formal strategies or repeating themes. Instead, I aim to explore how migration cultural products engage with legal discourses allowing or impeding mobility. I seek to analyze how this interaction produces cultural interpretations of

movement control. In these imaginaries, the notion of citizenship becomes pivotal for being one of the main migrant mobility's discursive and legal regulators.

For this dissertation, citizenship is defined as membership in a political community that "signifies diverse modes of social being and status" of individuals with the right to territorial security and the right to vote (Bosniak 317). The validation of the citizen requires the existence of its opposite: the non-citizen. Bosniak distinguishes several categories of non-citizenship on which the analysis of my dissertation is based: a lesser-grade member of a political community with a deficit of rights and a subject to the state's exclusion power and expulsion power who nevertheless can exercise a democratic voice in formal and informal ways (324).

The British human geographer Tim Cresswell is one scholar who has reflected explicitly on the nexus between mobility and citizenship. In his 2009 essay "The Prosthetic Citizen: New Geographies of Citizenship," Cresswell explores how the citizen as a figure that entails rights is defined by mobility. Because he argues that citizenship and rights are based on the division of public and private, citizens distinguish themselves from one another by inhabiting a national public space and by contrasting themselves in paradoxical relation to "alien mobilities." For example, an American citizen requires the presence of the non-citizen or the immigrant and their deviant mobility, which both valorizes and threatens the notion of citizenship and American liberal democracy. The figure of the immigrant validates democratic values through model behaviour and success stories of acculturation that open the door to idealized citizenship or super citizen. But this exact figure becomes problematic when, through less-than-ideal conduct, it threatens to tear down those values upheld by the citizen. The citizen, argues Cresswell, depends on contradictory geographical imaginaries. It defines subjects with rights who belong to a particular space or nation-state and who are entitled to free movement. The paradox emerges

because “as well as defining a form of sedentarist identity based on a mapping onto a fixed place, the citizen is also defined by their mobility – the right and ability to move both within national space and across national borders” (264). Writing at spatial and legal coordinates where movement control can be particularly intense, Cresswell associates the figure of the citizen with the development of infrastructures that monitor and classify different types of mobility as liberating or threatening.

These entanglements between discourse and migration are hardly undocumented: cultural studies, film, and literary scholars around the globe have probed the protocols of migrant writing and cinema – “accents” or stylistic similarities present in films created by diasporic filmmakers (Naficy 6); works written by authors belonging to more than one culture and participating in more than one literary system (Connel, King, and White x); works produced in a historical era of migration; works dealing with the topic of tradition as opposed to modernity, and the country of destination as opposed to the country of origin (Rofheart ix); texts with a set of themes and topics whose purpose is to rehumanize migrants (Mannik 2-5); narratives of never-ending travels (Ballesteros 5) – exploring how literary and filmic cultures of migration change and adapt to changes. To varying degrees, scholars such as Nicolás Kanellos, Fredik Olsson, Lily Wong, and Kenny Ng chronicle stylistic and epistemological shifts in how cultural (non-)belonging and (sub-)humanity relate to the idea of (im)mobility. Yet, discussions about how migrant fiction and cinema legitimize or challenge existing power dynamics between migrants and their receiving communities by considering legal discourses sanctioning (non-)belonging seem to have been taken for granted, particularly in scholarship dealing with Latin American and Chinese cultural products about migration.

Unlike approaches that analyze sociocultural understandings of migration in isolation, this dissertation reads along the notion of citizenship to nuance and emphasize cultural ideals of legality and illegality related not only to migrants' ability to move but also to their national origin and place in the receiving society or community. In addition, my work examines how the formal strategies used in these films and novels legitimize or defy those ideals. I argue that the texts discussed in this study accentuate different aspects of transnational migrant mobility. By relying on manifold points of view, these written and visual narratives emphasize distinct social tensions that shed light on how migrants' movements, legal personae, and related spatial imaginaries are culturally designed. Each distinctive use of point of view relies on different culturally imagined versions of (non-) citizenship that are defined and redefined to challenge or reinforce "sedentary" ethics, privileging stasis over mobility.

This dissertation also deals with the comparative analysis of films and novels on migration, written and spoken in Spanish and Chinese. It combines two seemingly disconnected cultural, social, literary, and visual discursive worlds to find narrative patterns that may arise, or not, from comparing two distinctive yet interrelated ways of imagining migrant mobility.

That kind of comparison may raise a certain degree of suspicion in the reader: "It's like comparing apples and oranges," the skeptics may say to indicate the impossibility of comparison. After all, the narratives to be analyzed here do not seem to share any qualities but the theme, and they are not part of what has become the golden standard for comparative studies in the anglosphere: historical relations through a contact network (Thornber 112–122; Shih 430-437).

An important methodological aspect of this dissertation concerns the comparison of "incomparable" visual and written narratives and migration patterns of two cultures without apparent contact. Some scholars have claimed that such methodological approximation brings

forward the entanglements between power imbalances. For instance, in her well-known series of lectures, *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak predicted the demise of Comparative Literature as a discipline. Her main argument relies on the realization that, as of 2000, most academic programs in Comparative Literature in the United States focused on "Europe and the extracurricular Orient," failing to stick to the principles shielded by the discipline's claim of an inclusive worldwide scope. At the same time, programs in area studies—African Studies, Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, and so on—declined in importance in the perceived end of the Cold War. If they could find points in common, area studies and Comparative Literature could illuminate each other. Comparative Literature has much to gain from the tools employed in area studies: language, institutional alliances, academic rigour, and also the skill to learn to think conceptually about things that are better understood through the close reading of texts. For their part, area studies, Spivak believes, should learn to approach "the language of the other not only as a 'field' language" (9) but about others. Here language is critical, as it would be what unites both disciplines. If they engaged with each other's disciplines, scholars in area studies and Comparative Literature would illuminate each other, as area scholars would learn languages outside the conventional and restrictive scope of area studies, while comparatists would be exposed to languages "with literary depth rather than only social scientific fluency" (106).

Spivack's critique against Comparative Literature only seems appropriate, as it contests the cultural hegemony of American English and favours the varied cadences of different languages and linguistic expertise. In this last sense, I think that my training in Latin American Studies and Chinese Studies puts me in an advantageous position to pursue the kind of comparative study proposed in this dissertation and suggest an answer to a burning question:

how can the comparison of seemingly (in)comparable (Hispanic and Sinophone) migration visual and written narratives inform the study of cultural imaginaries of migrant mobility? [1]

Comparing these two migrant cultural traditions, I propose, involves comparing two distinct understandings and ways of experiencing mobility. Both illustrate the problems of adaptation that migrants must face in their new cultural environments and depict social and cultural differences that receiving communities may or may not accept but do these things from differing points of view. Herein lies the value of this type of comparison: in the Sinophone sphere, the study of migrant mobility imaginaries is relatively new. Compared with Latin America, Sinophone cultural discourses of migration are a marginal area of research, although it has been attracting more scholarly interest in recent years. No doubt, cultural imaginaries of migrant mobility gained their specific symbolic meaning in Latin American studies because of their social and political relevance: migration flows from Latin America to the US have been ongoing since the nineteenth century, and the border between Mexico and the US is arguably the most transited in the world. This reality, as Nicolás Kanellos points out, has shaped the Latino/Hispanic vision of the world, especially for those who have migrated to the US (7). In other words, migrancy has become an essential part of "being in the world hispanically," an identity category that the Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel proposes as an attempt to place the historically grounded experience of Latin Americans on the global stage. By discussing five worlds from which Hispanics have historically emerged, Dussel revises the universal category of the human and combines it with the irreducible category of "difference" to create a new group identity based on the notion of diversity (109).

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[1]Here I rely on the work by Anne-Marie Fortier who approaches the study of migration "not simply as a fact—as the physical movement of people, resulting from global capitalism, political forces and conflicts, or climactic disasters—but as an imagining which is mobilised and deployed in ways that are structured by desires and anxieties."

When considering the comparative study of migration narratives from the Hispanic and Sinophone spheres, Dussel's understanding of diversity proves helpful. It not only takes into consideration historical specificity, but also challenges Western epistemological and discursive hegemony. With this notion, Dussel tries to develop a transmodern understanding of identity that purges it from its Eurocentric vocation. By transmodern, Dussel refers to a decolonial project where universal culture can overcome the Eurocentric and colonizing tendencies that came with modernism. Instead of deciphering the world from the point of view of European modernity, Dussel argues for a multiplicity of critical responses that decolonize the assumptions of that same modernity by relying on the perspective of peripheral cultures. This dissertation builds on Dussel's comparative hermeneutic horizon to establish a south-south horizontal dialogue to understand how migrant mobility is imagined by two diverse cultural imaginaries.

Through such comparative and diversifying analysis, I also seek to challenge what Rey Chow calls an old model of Chineseness: a complex ethnic and identity category that "draws imaginary boundaries between China and the rest of the world" (6) and that is usually invoked in the form of Chinese specificity. By establishing transnational networks of relationality, the study of migration geographies and cultural imaginaries has become one of the research fields that directly challenge, according to Chow, the old model of area studies embraced as a political strategy during the Cold War by high learning institutions in the US. Engaging in the comparative study of Hispanic and Sinophone migration narratives' diversity brings interpretative horizons that extend the boundaries set by specific fields.

That effort is nothing new, but it has gained traction in recent years. In 2017, for example, *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* published a special issue, "Between Asia and Latin America: New Transpacific Perspectives." Similarly, in 2022 the Latin American Studies

Association organized the first continental congress, *Rethinking Trans-Pacific Ties: Asia and Latin America*, to explore the different exchanges between Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Yet, most interventions in the collection and the congress dealt with representation and understanding of what it means to be Asian in Latin America.

My dissertation proposes a different kind of dialogue. It compares two seemingly incomparable cultural migration traditions and focuses on works produced in Spanish and Chinese. *Through Our Immigrant Eyes* explores the public debates on different conceptions of migrant mobility related to citizenship, set in the US, Canada, Guatemala/Mexico, and Singapore. The grounds for the comparison of these settings are manifold. The US, Canada, and Singapore share advantageous geopolitical positions and several traits that come with those positions, including economic status that turns them into destination countries or "the promised land" for migrants. While Mexico and Guatemala do not share these characteristics, they are narratively constructed as transit places that posit a series of challenges migrants face before arriving in the US, their destination. Partly following their advantageous positions and economic power, the US, Canada, and Singapore also share a history of institutionalized migration. Besides these factors, the public discourses of threat that circulate within the national communities and that result from the uncontrolled mobility of migrants offer another ground for comparison.

The characters of these imaginaries and their associated discursive contexts significantly differ from work to work, and have been chosen with this in mind. All the narratives discussed here reflect the challenges migrants face when they seek to belong to the communities that receive them. Interestingly, some works explore the issue by focusing on the perspective of communities culturally dissimilar to that of migrants. Others do the opposite; they strive to

represent migrant belonging by illustrating how migrants relate to communities that are culturally closer to their own. One of my objectives in this dissertation is to see if the chosen cultural imaginaries correspond to public discourses that see migration as a threat to native cultures. Rapoport et al. point out that this is an "intuitive assumption. It relies on the idea that "values and attitudes are embedded in people and therefore carried with and spread through them" (1). In this last sense, I hope this dissertation functions as an alternative archive that registers migrants' cultural imagination about the kind of values and attitudes that they carry and how they are accepted or rejected by receiving communities.

This dissertation covers the works of six writers and filmmakers of various backgrounds: the Chinese Canadian director Julia Kwan, the Argentine Canadian director Federico Hidalgo, the Mexican American director Chris Weitz, the American director Sean Baker and the Taiwanese director Shih Ching Tsou, the Mexican writer Rafael Ramírez Heredia, and the Chinese writer Jiu Dan. While migration is a firsthand experience for many, it is more of an empirical observation for others. Some migrated when they were young, others were more mature, and others accompanied migrants in their struggles. Some of them explore cultural differences, and others examine cultural similarities. But all of them have a distinct way of imagining the transnational movement of migrants in the Hispanic and Sinophone cultural spheres.

II. Global Hispanic & Sinophone Migration Narratives

The amount of scholarly works about cultural imaginaries of migrant mobility in the Hispanic and Sinophone spheres is significantly disproportionate. Scholarly works in English that analyze migration cultural products in Chinese are scarce. For its part, the issue of Latin American migration to other places, and specifically to the United States, has been treated in markedly

different ways by each national cinema and literature throughout the Latin American world. Therefore, it is no wonder that the scholarship dealing with the topic is vast and more established than its Chinese counterpart. In both spheres, however, most approaches to the cultural representation of migrant mobility deal mainly with the analysis of intersectional categories, the notion of the journey, or processes of identity formation. The following survey of scholarship aims to demonstrate how scholarly exploration of migration literature and film in the Hispanic and Sinophone spheres can actually inform and complement each other by opening new avenues of comparison between both traditions.

Interestingly, one of the main preoccupations of scholars dealing with migration cultural products in the Hispanic sphere has to do with defining migrant literature as a genre. Among these works, some focus on exploring the characteristics of cultural products of migration and try to differentiate them from other works that deal with the notion of exile. For literary scholars such as Pauline Berlage, migration literature is a genre that escapes any easy intent of categorization. That is especially true in the case of works by Latin American writers who write in Spanish from other places in the world, particularly Spain. The literature on migration, as Berlage points out, includes a vast corpus covering various themes such as subalternity, rootlessness, and success at an individual and collective level. For Berlage, literary works that deal with migration contrast at least two cultures by reflecting on "glocal" identities. Thematically speaking, this literature deals with identity as related to globalization. The form of migration literature is characterized by its use of multiple styles, discourses, perspectives, and languages. Linguistic and cultural hybridity that hides behind lexical and cultural references is an essential defining characteristic of this kind of literature. From this standpoint, migration literature, at least in the Hispanic world, can be seen as a transatlantic and transpacific literary

production located in postcolonial cultural interactions that cannot be labelled as ethnic literature and refuses to be enclosed by the limiting borders of a defined style, form, or literary genre associated with a specific country or region (Berlage 167-183).

In the same vein, Fredrik Olsson identifies what he considers the archetypal structure of migration narratives detailing the journey of undocumented immigrants to the United States. Through the theoretical lens of postcolonialism and intersectionality, he examines the individual and collective configurations of the migrant subject, the expulsion of migrants from their places of origin, and their desired inclusion in the promised land, in eight contemporary Latin American novels on illegal migration to the US. According to Olsson, displacement, as represented in these novels, implies a series of intersectional transformations: those affected by other categories such as national identity, gender, social class, religion, sexuality, and language. Thus, displacement is a geographical and internal journey characterized by four interrelated phases: anticipation, crossing, contact, and contrast. Utopian expectation refers to the anticipation and idealized image of the US that the migrant holds. Crossing describes the literary representation of the journey toward the North. The act of travelling is seen as a rite of passage, with mythical dimensions, that will transform the identity of the subject that migrates or travels. The third phase deals with the representation of intercultural contact between undocumented Latin American migrants and the new American social space they inhabit. Finally, the contrast stage implies a comparative revaluation of the values of a familiar and old world against which new migratory experiences are assessed (Olsson 1-15).

Latin American films about migration seem to share topics that worry migrant writers. Through the exploration of film narratives of migration from different Hispanic countries, including Spain, Costa Rica, Mexico, Uruguay, and Argentina, Thomas Deveny, in

Contemporary Migration in Hispanic Cinema, identifies the usage of determined tropes and narrative strategies, among which are a persistent narrative structure with three main phases, an irregular immigrant as the protagonist, and a 3D (dirty, difficult, and dangerous) employment type. The three essential components of the films, whether implicit or explicit, refer to the premigration that triggers the decision to depart one's homeland, the journey or crossing, and the life of the immigrant in the new land" (Deveny 6). He also identifies unlawful migration as a crucial film trope, given that the majority of migrants depicted in these films are irregular; although most are not described as criminals, they are in breach of administrative rules. Other recurring themes are the representation of the other, the construction and reconstruction of individual identity, and social and cultural contextualization (stereotypes, rejection, acceptance, change) that occur for the person who decides to migrate and the receiving community (Deveny 9).

The contesting and revolutionary nature of filmic representations of migration is explored in the collection *Telling Migrant Stories: Latin American Diaspora in Documentary Film,* edited by Esteban Loustaunau and Lauren Shaw. In their introduction, Loustaunau and Shaw, based on an understanding of mobile migrant bodies as political figures of our times, recognize the empowering potential of documentary films about migration. As reflections of the issues that societies nowadays face, the documentary tradition of Latin America portrays "flows of people across borders, their journeys, their strategies of adaptation and cultural preservation, their agency in the face of policies and legal systems that attempt to render them powerless" (2). Thus, documentary film is an educational, persuasive, and alternative technology with the power to "preserve culture, instill values, and share experiences" (2). Since it merges the narrative strategies of storytelling, visual, and auditory media with basic themes such as "displacement,

adjustment and cross-cultural tensions," documentary film is an act of resistance that challenges the supremacy of dominant discourses that try to silence the voices of Latin American migrants. Given the capacity of documentary to merge activism and art, it is an ideal narrative medium through which displaced subjects, struggling to reconstruct their individual and collective identity, "learn to articulate new meanings of recognition and belonging through cultural practices, religious rituals, and political and social activism rooted in individual and collective subjectivities" (Loustaunau and Shaw 5).

Unsurprisingly, a majority of critical works on migration in the Latin American world focus on the case of Mexico, and not without reason. Given the close historical and geographical relation between Mexico and the United States, and the continuous migratory flows ever since Mexico lost in 1848 what is today the American Southwest, cultural productions chronicling the undocumented migration experience of Mexicans – both those who crossed the border and those who were crossed by it – living in the USA have continuously archived the experiences of Mexican immigrants and their descendants. In his seminal work on Hispanic immigrant literature in the USA, Nicolas Kanellos characterizes Latino literature, mainly Mexican, in the US as a transnational phenomenon reflecting the notion of border crossing that may have originated from oral lore. Kanellos distinguishes between three types of Latino migrant literature: native (Chicano literature in English), immigrant (migrant literature in Spanish), and exile (written in Spanish by displaced writers). The literature of immigrants narrates the experiences of refugees that come to the promised land, America, to improve their lives. This kind of literature often portrays their disillusionment when they face what they perceive as the ills of American society: oppression of the working class, racism, dehumanization, and capitalism that tries to erode the identity and values of Hispanic cultures. This Spanish-language literature on migration is

fervently nationalistic, challenges the myth of the American dream, and tries to protect immigrants' rights by speaking against discrimination. Hispanic immigrant authors usually try to warn others of the dangers of the promised land or express their wish to go back to the homeland. By contrast, the literature written in English by the descendants of immigrants (native texts) is characterized by a sense of belonging to the US. It is a product of cultural synthesis and hybridization, and it addresses themes such as the identitarian crisis, language and culture, and the race-class-gender community. Finally, literature written by exiles is part of an elite culture that relates only to the homeland and does not exhibit or support cultural change. Its themes include political injustice and authoritarianism (Kanellos 3-4). Interestingly, these studies of migration as a literary genre do not directly address point of view. Though my dissertation is not a narratological study of point of view in migration narratives, it aims to use the notion as a methodological tool to analyze the different cultural representation of migrant mobility.

In the Chinese sphere, these understandings of the representational qualities of migrant mobility appear linked to the notion of the border. While some scholarly explorations engage with the representations of internal migration, the one that happens inside the nation-state, others focus on studying the portrayal of migrants that participate in transnational networks of circulation.

One such transnational scholar is Kenny Ng. In *The Migrant Voice: The Politics of Writing Home Between the Sinophone and Anglophone Worlds,* Ng explores the points of contact that linguistic journeys unveil. By examining the works of Bai Xianyong, Nie Hualing, and Ha Jin, he discusses the double allegiance of migrant writers to both the Chinese and American cultural worlds and how these writers create a globalized literary space of expression rooted in linguistic variety. For Ng, these writers have yet to fit the national literary canons with which

their works engage, and in this lies their value. The literary productions by these migrant writers highlight the importance of language and linguistic variations precisely because they create a global and multicultural space of interactions where a diverse version of Chineseness can have a place. As a result, these writers construct a new understanding of home and belonging based on global literary alliances and a multiplicity of linguistic expressions.

Another work that problematizes Chineseness and transnational encounters is Lily Wong's *Transpacific Attachments: Sex Work, Media Networks, and Affective Histories of Chineseness.* In her book, Wong explores the history and representation of deviant Chinese sexualized bodies and analyses Chineseness as a signifier that capriciously sticks to them. According to Wong, rather than being an ethnic or racial category, Chineseness is an affective construction or product of social understandings and interactions with different non-normative corporalities. By exploring the affective history of Chineseness, she underscores its importance in creating a diasporic cohesive consciousness rooted in the idea of China as a motherland and the existence of a unique Chinese cultural construct.

B.C. Bernards, another transnational scholar, analyzes the patterns of expulsion or migratory movements, absorptions, and localizations of a group of Chinese nationals that recognized in the South Seas a promise of a better life, or "a pioneering frontier of opportunity and potential upward mobility" (viii). In his work *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature*, Bernards explains that the narratives produced by a group of Chinese immigrants are characterized by the use of the South Sea (Nanyang) as a geographical indicator and cohesive element of their experiences. The Nanyang metaphor bridges the literary traditions of a region with interwoven histories of colonialism and postcolonial relations.

A second group of scholars, whose work explores Chinese cultural products of migration, emphasize the study of migrant mobility with subcultural divides. For instance, in his work *Migrant Laborer Subcultures in Recent Chinese Literature: A Communicative Perspective,* Philip Williams identifies a subcultural divide problem in China: a rural subculture embodied in the figure of the migrant or *mangliu,* defined as "one who roves blindly about [in search of employment]" (153), is perhaps an example of one the most dramatic subcultural differentiations in the world. The existence of this subcultural boundary is possible thanks to the Chinese anxiety about spatial belonging. The marked differences between long-time local urban populations and rural migrant labourers that come from the outside determine the signifiers of ancestral and more recent attachments and processes of integration to a place. As part of an alternative roving culture, migrants go through a longer and more complicated process of assimilation into the local receiving subcultural community than the one their counterparts in the West experience. This may be the product of a Chinese concept of identity that privileges the "seniority of the family's residence in a given locale" (159) over Western ethnic or racial differentiations. Similarly, in *Writing Beijing: Urban Spaces and Cultural Imaginations in Contemporary Chinese Literature and Films,* Yiran Zheng reflects on the relationship between movement, belonging, and place with an emphasis on the city of Beijing and the rituals of its inhabitants (locals and immigrants) as depicted in cultural productions. The most relevant section for this dissertation is the one that discusses the literature on the military compound, a space in Beijing inhabited by immigrants from other parts of China. As part of a subculture in the urban space of the capital city of China, the residents of the military compound are culturally different from the Beijing-born population. Culinary and behavioural habits and a distinctive way of speaking distinguish the immigrants living at the military compound from the local Beijingers inhabiting the hutong (ancestral

residential spaces). Ultimately, asserts Zheng, the spatial isolation and belief that the military compound represented a more advanced culture making it hard for the immigrants to assimilate into the local Beijing culture.

Some other works add a gendered dimension to the analysis of subcultural divides. In her dissertation *Life on the Move: Women's Migration and Re/making in Contemporary Chinese and Sinophone Literature and Film*, Hsin-Chin Hsieh connects the trope of home to the movement of feminine bodies. She sees home as a fluid concept through which women can mould their gender roles and become proletariat "agents of homemaking" that suffer or participate in a shift from rootlessness to rootedness. From this perspective, home, location, intimacy, and economic development are intimately interrelated notions, and women's mobility is a way of resisting patriarchal discourses of domination and marginalization. In such a context, a locally produced version of home, establishes the author, is a unique approach to adaptation to a new environment and a way through which the co-existence of multiple cultures and identities can be negotiated. Similarly, Arianne Gaetano's *Rural Woman and Modernity in Globalizing China: Seeing Jia Zhangke's The World* analyzes the depiction of immigrant women in Jia Zhangke's movie *The World*. The film, Gaetano explains, functions as a discursive device that reflects on the issues that globalization and modernity have brought with them to China. For Gaetano, women migrant workers, as portrayed in *The World*, are bodies that, under the void promises of modernity, aspire to acquire freedom of movement but, due to the constraints imposed by spatial immobility and "new neoliberal regimes of value" (32), cannot attain the desired state of unrestricted movement. At the heart of such a way of representing women lies an essentialist construction of gender according to which women are sexualized objects rather than subjects of history. From her

perspective, *The World* fails to articulate a compelling critique against gender-biased representations, and in turn, it continues perpetuating this mode of social inequality.

Some Latin American Studies scholars are also concerned about migrant mobility and subcultural divides but from the point of view of universalization and erasure. In *Rewriting the Mexican Immigrant Narrative: Situating Indigeneity in Maya Women's Stories,* through an analysis of two testimonials by Mayan migrants, M.B. Castellanos traces indigenous narratives of migration and explores how the notion of indigeneity, an intersectional category that shapes and is shaped by indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, is used as a narrative strategy to challenge dominant discourses of race, gender, and class and the grand narratives of Latino stories of migration that erase the indigenous experience. The archetypal Latino migration story tends to be understood as a mythical journey with multiple stages: migrants cannot remain at home anymore, so they are forced to start an arduous journey that will bring them to the promised land, where they will be ultimately assimilated. As the myth of immigrant America renders invisible the genocide of American Indians, the deportation of Mexican Americans who were citizens, or the rejection of Japanese and German immigrants during WWII, these Latino universalizing narratives, with such a prescriptive pattern, turn indigeneity into a "marker, a reference point and renders indigeneity invisible" (130). Using the tropes of fortitude, flight (survival strategy), and liberation (Mayan notion of personhood and a homegrown understanding of feminism), the narratives of second-generation indigenous migrants challenge the dominant status quo by disrupting universalizing immigration stories and incorporating indigenous strategies of resistance.

This literature review reveals a critical scholarly trend: most recent and seminal works focusing on exploring both Latin American and Chinese cultural products of migration build on

identarian or intersectional issues. Though my dissertation does not wholly dismiss such approximations, it will emphasize the things and actions that may influence the process of identity formation but are not strictly speaking its constituents. My objective, eventually, is to bring to critical attention how and why migrant mobility is perceived in the Hispanic and Sinophone spheres. Ultimately, I seek to compare these two literary and filmic traditions to determine the kind of narrative patterns and critiques that may arise or not from two "diversal" ways of looking at migrant mobility. In this last sense, instead of primarily focusing on the migrant experience, as many of the authors reviewed in this survey do, my dissertation emphasizes how that experience is conditioned by sociocultural perceptions of migrants and their movement.

III. Through our Immigrant Eyes: Identity & Point of View

> I was appalled at the way Latino migrants, even five years ago - and it has gotten exponentially worse since then - were characterized within that public discourse. At worst, we perceive them as an invading mob of resource-draining criminals, and at best, a sort of helpless, impoverished, faceless brown mass, clamoring for help at our doorstep. We seldom think of them as our fellow human beings. People with the agency to make their own decisions, people who can contribute to their own bright futures, and to ours, as so many generations of oft-reviled immigrants have done before them.
>
> Jeanine Cummins

> This differs from a typical story of some Chinese making it in a foreign land after striving hard. The China girls depicted in this book are a different lot. They regard Singapore as a promising land. For them, gaining a foothold here and going on to secure permanent residency are an obsession for which they are game for anything and everything, including selling their bodies. In the end, they find their Singapore dream in a shambles.
>
> Jiu Dan

These two citations, nineteen years apart, come from two writers of the past twenty years who have controversially dealt with migration: Jeanine Cummins, author of *American Dirt,* and Jiu

Dan, author of *Crows*. Both detail why and how they decided to write stories about the migrant experience, from different cultural discourses and social contexts. Cummins here uses a first-person collective narrative voice, and Jiu uses third-person narration. The former recurs to a subjective narration, while the latter uses an objective one. Despite its seemingly empathetic tone, Cummins' passage quoted above incisively distinguishes between the self and the other, whereas Jiu's assumes the position of a detached observer but feels a bit more intimate. Cummins is a non-migrant, self-identified as a white American citizen who conveniently started to claim Puerto Rican descent once her controversial novel about Mexican immigrants was about to be released (De León "American Dirt and Cancel Culture"). Jiu is a Chinese citizen who immigrated to Singapore as an international student. Even though, on paper, both narratives are structurally different, they ignited similar heated discussions around stereotyping and (mis)representation. Both authors ended up cementing their ill reputation due to the perspectives they adopted to tell migrant stories and the indignation this caused in specific audiences.

The public outcry toward Cummins' book came from multiple fronts, but especially from the Mexican/Mexican American/Chicanx community; the critics of Jiu Dan's book were mainly male Singaporean and Chinese intellectuals and immigrant Chinese women in Singapore and Mainland China. Mexican and Chicanx scholars criticized Cummins' novel, considering it an affront to the Mexican identity, for its caricatures of Mexican immigrants and its attempts to make the immigration phenomenon more palatable for the white gaze. Similarly, students from mainland China accused Jiu Dan of sensationalism, arguing that her portrayal of Chinese women as dragon ladies, capable of doing anything for a Singaporean permanent residence, was inaccurate, degrading, and pernicious.

One of the fiercest critics of Cummins' novel, the Chicanx writer Myriam Gurba, brings to light other equally important and politically sensitive issues. In "Pendeja, You Ain't Steinbeck: My Bronca with Fake-Ass Social Justice Literature," Gurba recounts how her "negative" review of *American Dirt* was rejected by her publisher, who was expecting a more redeeming commentary. The problem with this exchange should be immediately apparent. The same publishing industry that denied a woman of colour the opportunity to voice her opinion about a poorly written narrative endorsed the work of a white woman who rebranded herself as Latinx by claiming Puerto Rican heritage to justify identarian usurpation. Gurba compares the feeling of awkwardness stemming from her reading of "Dirt" and all that the book represents to a chapter in her own life:

> I walked in on my roommate dressed from head to toe in my clothes. It astonished and disturbed me to find this fellow undergrad in front of our dorm room mirror, pretending to be… me. Suddenly aware of my presence, she made eye contact with me through the reflection. Unsure of what to do, I left. We never discussed the event.
>
> She returned my clothes to the closet, but her choice to wear them as a costume had altered them. I couldn't wear them anymore. They smelled of my roommate. Seams were torn.
>
> My roommate and I weren't the same size.
>
> (Gurba, Pendeja, You Ain't Steinbeck)

Gurba uses this story to allegorize the most shocking detail of the entire Cummins controversy. Like her roommate, Cummins dared to wear an ill-fitting Mexican costume to a public party "celebrated" in honour of brown immigrants, to which only white people were invited. The message is clear. More than merely writing a provocative narrative that raised or confronted political issues, Cummins affirms her allegiance to the white gaze by avoiding divisive and uncomfortable conversations and simplifying the immigration phenomenon to an absurd degree.

The discomfort predicated in Gurba's story can also serve as a parable to understand Jiu Dan and her *Crows* scandal. While she may not have chosen to wear a culturally inappropriate costume, she wore one that some other women still considered wrong, and the Chinese government decided to censure her. Not in vain, critics and other Chinese migrant women called Jiu Dan a "prostitute writer" who only documented her own experience and not those of other migrant women; they claimed that prostitutes know prostitutes. However, despite all the uproar, and unlike what happened to Cummins, Jiu Dan found some allies within the community she was allegedly misrepresenting.

Alongside critical and censuring voices from China and Singapore, another group of women confirmed the reality of certain situations told in Jiu Dan's "quasi-ethnographic" novel. For instance, Sisi, a Chinese nightclub hostess, arrived in Singapore from China as an international student, and she decided to engage in sex work to make money, go back to China and buy a house. Yet, details like this were overshadowed by public indignation.

(Mis)representation follows different paths in Cummins' and Jiu Dan's cases. Though both rely on stereotypes, one seems to be using those stereotypes to oversimplify the immigration phenomenon in the US and tell white audiences what they want to hear, while the other seems to have unearthed a topic nobody wants to discuss in China or Singapore. The costumes of Cummins and Jiu Dan are still ill-fitting and different, but both reveal complex issues. One shows a process of industry-encouraged asymmetrical cultural and racial appropriation, and the other a symmetrical act of probably unintended agency removal. Perhaps most importantly, both lead us to ask the same crucial question: who has the right to tell what story?

That question does not have, of course, a definitive or satisfying answer. If we consider that literature and film are fictional, then anyone should be able to write about anything, and no one should have to take offence to what is written. However, as Marxist criticism has warned us, cultural products also have the potential to legitimize asymmetrical power dynamics and inequality. As a result of such a liminal position of cultural products, scholars and writers advocate for creative freedom under the presumption that doing otherwise would promote censorship. Yet, some others insist that writers and filmmakers should tell stories about their backgrounds—an already subversive practice in a white-dominated editorial and filmic market. The founders of the creative writing course and later manual "Writing the Other," Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward, have devised an alternative that is worth considering: they suggest writers and critics should focus more on the "how" rather than the "who." From this perspective, whether Cummins is a non-migrant white woman or Jiu Dan is a prostitute writer would not matter much. What matters is whether they can or cannot accurately represent the migrant experience from the perspective of migrants themselves.

Some authors discussed in this dissertation only share a cultural background with the migrants they strive to represent. Others have had the opportunity to live in the flesh, the experience of migrancy and displacement. This study examines how Hispanic and Chinese authors and filmmakers have addressed issues relevant to migrant identities or practices and how individuals try to create meaningful lives in a foreign land. The works examined here all explore characters coming to accept or reject different cultural traditions as part of their background. Some works present problems of identity as characters' quirks to be made fun of, while others explore the same identitarian issues from a more serious point of view, such as using smells to indicate adherence to a specific social class or relying on physical descriptions to identify the

national origin of certain characters. However, all these works present identity problems as narrative perspectives to be validated. At their roots, these narratives accept that identity is a condition that describes how immigrants make sense of their shared social, cultural, and economic conditions in slightly different ways. Using point of view as an analytical tool, my objective is to examine whether dissimilar narrative perspectives support different ideological positions that strive to explore how migrants move and seek to belong to a community.

When we talk about narrative and identitarian points of view in migrant fiction and film, a question that naturally arises is: what does it mean to see the world as a migrant or through the eyes of a migrant in a fictional setting? I argue here that it means using a specific perspective with a particular intention. Point of view is a literary and filmic device that offers the necessary theoretical and narrative rigour for this kind of endeavour precisely because the notion of point of view concerns how a story is told. It tries to convince us that a particular scene, its characters, and meaning “all move together in a dynamic pattern that we can believe in apart from the author’s personality” (Gordon & Tate 437). It is also a pair of eyes or angle of vision that guides readers/viewers through the fictional world and shapes their perception of characters, dialogues, actions, and events (Chatman 152). In its complexity, point of view can take different artful and subtle forms that range from the type of setting used in a narrative, the spatial relationship between the characters and setting, to words, expressions, and images that subvert expectations or standard ways of understanding the world.

One of the purposes of this study is to understand how points of view help us read the notion of citizenship in a set of migration narratives to try to answer the following questions: how do narrators communicate an ideology about legally sanctioned (not) belonging? What point of view do they want audiences to adopt? How do they use rhetorical and cinematographic

techniques, characters, and plots to persuade readers to accept their message and adopt their evaluative perspective? As Douglas Pye states, “point of view matters because language is no longer seen as straightforward; narration is inherently partial, offering not access to truth but to a perspective or to a range of perspectives on events, in extreme cases becoming obviously subjective or even systematically unreliable” (3). This dissertation will examine the reliability of migration narratives to determine how they can illustrate the cultural design of migrants’ legal personae and of their movement. Although this dissertation does not pretend to be a theoretical approximation to the point of view, it does intend to study how the notion can be applied to broaden our understanding of migration stories’ narrative and ideological composition.

Point of view is a rhetorical device with a complex history. What started as the notion of a vanishing point in perspective soon extended its meaning to a mental position or attitude embraced by different interest groups or individuals and ultimately “embodied the modern sense that individual point of view shapes our sense of reality” (Pye 3). In this last sense, point of view in narrative and film describes relationships between subjects, looking positions, value systems, spatial stances, moments of telling, speech patterns, and access to information or control of the narrative flow. However, this has not always been the case. One of the first American critics to study point of view was Percy Lubbock, champion of Henry James. In *The Craft of Fiction*, published in 1921, Lubbock describes point of view merely as a compositional technique or “the relation in which the narrator stands to the story” (251). This understanding was similar to those of other American scholars of the 1920s and 1930s. According to the narratologist American school, an unidentified voice or speaker, limited or omniscient, was a chief feature of the uses of the term. In the *Dictionary of World Literature*, Manuel Komroff defines viewpoint as the

"relation in which the narrator stands to the story, considered by many critics to govern the method and character of the work" (616).

In his article "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," Norman Friedman builds his argument around the notion of point of view as an author, character, or unidentified presence that talks to the reader from a specific position, and that regulates the access to narrative information (1168). Meanwhile, Carolyn Gordon and Allen Tate regard point of view as the authority in charge of convincing the reader that what they are telling is plausible, and which depends on one of four methods to imagine the fictional world: first-person narrator, omniscient narrator, concealed narrator, and central intelligence. These understandings of point of view divert from other uses of the term. As film theorist Douglas Pye notes, point of view is a highly complicated notion associated with both the source of a narrative and rhetorical choices that have broader implications—"particular ways of narrating coming to embody particular epistemological and ontological assumptions" (3).

In *A Poetics of Composition*, Russian structuralist Boris Uspensky presents a definition of point of view that offers greater flexibility than those of the American school. One reason is that the Russian school, particularly Uspensky, looks for compositional techniques rather than narration/narrator types, thus avoiding the assumption that every narrative results from a single voice. Uspensky's discussion of point of view is designed to facilitate our understanding of what happens in fictional migration narratives, both written and visual. In the migration texts analyzed in this dissertation, authors employ many compositional perspectives, even in a single paragraph or scene.

Uspensky's fundamental assumption is that we should distinguish four planes of point of view in literature: the ideological, the phraseological, the spatial-temporal, and the

psychological. These exact dimensions can be applied to film analysis; Pye follows Uspensky in proposing four planes of filmic point of view: the ideological axis, the evaluative axis, the spatial and temporal axis, and the cognitive axis.

The first of these, the plane or axis of ideology, is concerned with the question "whose point of view does the author assume when he evaluates and perceives ideologically the world which he describes" (Uspensky 8). Uspensky admits that this level of point of view is the most resistant to formalization because it depends on “intuitive understanding.” Nevertheless, he chooses to include it to demonstrate its importance in the composition of a narrative. Uspensky explains what he means by ideology: it is not “the author’s world in general, but only the viewpoint which he adopts for the organization of the narrative in a particular work” (11). Thus, the ideological plane includes a text's evaluations, norms, and beliefs, which can appear at the surface or structural levels. Pye borrows Uspensky’s definition and applies it to an axis of visual representation dealing with categories or “systems of thought” that find expression in a film world. These systems are a “prerequisite for communication,” for a culture almost imperceptibly imbues a work with linguistic and social elements and gender and moral codes that must be deciphered and articulated by the critic (Pye 11).

Based on Uspensky’s ideological level, we can infer that Cummins’ implied narrator is revealed in terms of her evaluative system and from her own (not the migrants’) point of view. The narrator of the fragment pretends to function as a vehicle of other migrants’ points of view but without success. The inclusive third-person narrator “we” ideologically separates her from the subject she pretends to speak for and posits her in a position of discursive power along with the white audiences she identifies with. The “inclusive we” is a poor rhetorical intent to highlight, reproduce, and perpetuate the vices in the public discourse about migration. From the

onset, it is clear where the narrator's alliances lie and how they will impact the telling of a migrant story. Meanwhile, Jiu Dan's implied narrator takes the stance of a distanced and disengaged observer who, nonetheless, displays a certain kind of judgment. The third-person narrator does not partake in the narrative action, but she still presents a perspective on her characters. Primarily, she identifies and confronts two types of migrant Chinese women and two kinds of labour. In the first group, she includes women who presumably do manual or intellectual labour and who, according to the value system of the narrative, seem to rank higher on the scale of honorability. In the second group, she includes women who perform affective/sexual labour and who, according to the same value system, are worthy of condemnation. Whether this is an ironic statement or a genuine criticism voiced by the implied author remains open to contestation, and it is an issue that will require delving into an analysis of characters and narrators' verbal patterns.

Uspensky and Pye propose to analyze speech patterns in a phraseological and evaluative mode of view. Here Uspensky's discussion is intricate and rich in examples. A phraseological point of view involves shifts of point of view or "contaminations" at the level of speech between the narrator and a character. A character may be given certain identifiable speech traits that subsequently "infect" or merge into the narrator's narration or discourse, thus provoking a shift to that character's point of view. As a result, the audience begins to experience the narrative action from that character's perspective, even when the character is not the actual narrator. Pye does not elaborate on the phraseological plane of point of view, because the critical category better suits the analysis of works mediated exclusively through verbal language. Instead, he expands on Uspensky's understanding of the point of view as polyphonic. This is the different positions from which characters make judgments and the "wealth of knowledge and experience

derived both from our lives and from other fictions, including systems of value which may or may not coincide with those implied by the work" (Pye 11). These evaluative positions can be simple and single, or be arranged in a hierarchy where characters subordinate their evaluations to a dominant perspective. They can also take the form of contending appraisals that are impossible to synthesize and thus force the audience to hold conflicting positions. For example, one of the migration films to be examined in this dissertation, *Eve and the Fire Horse* by Julia Kwan, offers several visual signals that execute a shift from viewing a scene from the perspective of the narrator or main character of the film, an eight-year-old Chinese Canadian girl named Eve, to viewing it through the eyes of other characters, such as Eve's sister or her parents. Point of view is at this film's most complex expression on its evaluative axis. Although there is a clear separation of ethical perspectives regarding cultural belonging, those value systems cannot be rigidly categorized as negative or positive. As a result, the spectator is invited to endorse all these perspectives, as if the film wanted to imitate one of the core values at the heart of Canadian multiculturalism. However, these perspectives can also be influenced by the position of characters in the frame or their fictional world.

On the third plane, the spatiotemporal, Uspensky connects the point of view in literature and other visual media: "In visual art we speak about the transferal of real, multi-dimensional space onto the two-dimensional surface of a painting; the key orientation point here is the artist's position. In literature, the same is achieved by the verbally established spatial and temporal relations of the describing subject (the author) to the described event" (57). By this, Uspensky means that there are some instances in which the narrator's point of view more or less specifies the coordinates from which the narrative is being told and perceived. In written narratives, a narrator may adopt the spatial stance of a character and move with the character throughout the

narration: “If the character enters a room, the narrator describes the room; if a character goes out into the street, the narrator describes the street” (58). In such a case, the narrative is experienced from the perspective of that character, and also adopts that character’s perceptual framework. However, a narrator may be more flexible within or outside a narrated and perceived scene. The narrator may take a “bird’s-eye” perspective to survey the narrative action or be within a scene without actively participating in the action. In this last sense, Uspensky's spatiotemporal level correlates to that used in film. Pye argues that the spatiotemporal axis in film refers to the spectator's position concerning the characters and the film world. Every shot intervenes in the definition of this position, by establishing relationships with one another and between what is seen on screen and the soundtrack. For instance, in Federico Hidalgo’s migration film *A Silent Love*, the position of the characters in the frame helps establish their place in the narrative and forces the viewer to see the world through their eyes. Two shots/frames are juxtaposed with single shots/frames to emphasize the position of a particular character as an outsider. This status of non-belonging becomes even more evident when the viewer notices that the characters sharing the space of a two-shot also share physical characteristics and cultural backgrounds. In this case, the positioning of the characters in the frame parallels the information revealed and concealed by the narrative itself: one of the characters is a migrant who does not belong to the screen space shared only by members of the same local culture.

It is precisely the last plane of point of view that, according to Uspensky, is elaborated through human consciousness and perception. There are two basic ways in which the narrator may use human consciousness. In the first mode, the narrator takes the position of an outside observer; their knowledge of the fictional world is restricted by what can be observed. In the second mode, the narrator delves into the psychology or consciousness of a character and

describes all the occurrences of the narrative exactly as that character experiences them. In cinema, this category, which Pye calls the cognitive axis, refers to the control and flow of narrative information, which can result in one or a combination of three narrative approaches: the spectators know more than the characters; the spectators know as much as the characters; or the spectators know less than the characters. At some point in a film, audiences may be given privileged access to certain kinds of information, while the narrative prevents that from happening in some other circumstances. *La Mara* by Rafael Ramírez Heredia is an example of the use of psychological/cognitive point of view. In the novel, an omniscient narrator who functions as a prophetic voice invites the reader to experience the world through the different consciousnesses of its multiple characters. The audience's access to narrative information and the private lives and feelings of the characters is derived from objective descriptions given by a third-person narrator, and a multiplicity of inferences based on ways to manipulate the language and indicate social class, such as the use of certain types of mexicanisms, gualtematequisms, or hondurisms.

Despite the taxonomic division discussed above, it is more precise to say that point of view is a multilayered category whose strata usually overlap and inform each other. It is also important to note that even though point of view concerns itself with the study of narratives, this dissertation is about structure as much as it is about meaning. My analysis of point of view in migration narratives gives consideration to interpretation because one of the main issues at the heart of this work is establishing how point of view as a particular mode of writing or "looking at" a fictional world helps to generate, strengthen, and modify meaning. Much of this dissertation explores how specific uses of point of view shape narratives but are also shaped by their social contexts. I decided to conduct a comparative analysis of Hispanic and Sinophone migration

narratives to trace how cultural discourses of (il)legality may affect (or not) the construction of point of view and its associated meanings.

IV. "Looking at" Migrant Mobility

To flesh out these ideas, this dissertation is divided into three chapters, each exploring the entanglements between mobility, (non)citizenship and point of view in their different but overlapping variants. Chapter 1, "Cultural Collisions: Symbols & The Multicultural Citizen in *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love,*" focuses on the analysis of two films set in multicultural Canada: *Eve and the Fire Horse* by Julia Kwan, and *A Silent Love* by Federico Hidalgo. In this chapter, I explore how the point of view of shadow citizens and denizens seems to mock and challenge the values at the core of multicultural discourses, revealing the contradictions behind the notion of multicultural citizenship.

Migration narratives set in the US that discuss the position of non-citizens who engage predominantly in manual labour are prominent among the genre. Chapter 2, "Intertextuality, Expectancy & (Dis)comfort: Informal Citizenship in *A Better Life* and *Take Out*," discusses how the films *Take Out* by Sean Baker and Shih Ching Tso and *A Beautiful Life* by Chris Weitz manipulate their narratives and use formal strategies to bolster the agency of racialized noncitizens and destabilize the notions of universalizing humanness and legal citizenship, by establishing intertextual dialogues and subverting generic expectations.

Finally, Chapter 3, "For the Sake of Status: Sex Work and the Anti-citizen in *Crows* and *La Mara*," explores how the novels *La Mara* by Rafael Ramirez Heredia and *Crows* by Jiu Dan shed light on the active involvement of migration infrastructures in the process of producing non-citizens in social contexts where race should not be an issue. In these cases, the production of the non-citizen highlights a subtle type of social anxiety: the need to define the non-citizen as

correlative and opposed to the citizen. In this context, the figure of the sex worker is crucial: she appears to carve out the contours between citizenship and non-citizenship, and defines the markers of the otherness of migrants whose mobility appears threatening, not because of their race but because of their class and gender.

Ultimately, this dissertation aims to uncover the narrative intricacy of migration patterns from "the point of view" of citizenship and mediate between two differing mobility cultures, overlapping symbolic systems that include language, culture, race, and law. The capricious relationship between the signifier and the signified characterizes these symbolic systems. This dissertation seeks to decode the proposed narratives by establishing bridges that connect cultures, languages, and meanings.

CHAPTER I.
Cultural Collisions: Symbols & the Multicultural Citizen in *Eve and the Fire Horse* & *A Silent Love*

Eve and the Fire Horse (Julia Kwan, 2005) and *A Silent Love* (Federico Hidalgo, 2004) have been interpreted as, respectively, a visual confrontation between ethnic minorities and religious traditions (Humphries-Brooks 793-806) and an exploration of language and its importance in defining somebody's identity (Hidalgo 1-11). But they are also migration/diaspora films, coming-of-age/green-card romance stories, and visual narratives that make social commentaries about cultural hybridity. Their narrative structure could be described as simple and formulaic: *Eve and the Fire Horse* tells the story of a little girl with a fertile and vivid imagination who wants to change her family's fate in Canada in the 1960s and early 1970s; *A Silent Love,* set in Montreal, is the story of a beautiful and mysterious commoner who marries a foreign prince that comes to rescue her from her loneliness. However, not acknowledging these films' technical sophistication and interpretive potential would be unjust to them, and probably to other stories with similar plots. The films are fraught with difficulties, most of which arise from shades of meaning that supplement vague cultural references, hidden behind meta-filmic commentaries, vivid allusions, inviting camera movements, reproduced evocative musical tones, and intervening in punctilious *mise-en-scènes*. As the saying goes, *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* are all about small details.

Closely reading these details, I argue that the films combine various visual and narrative strategies to exhibit structural and stylistic complexity. What I regard as the main thematic concerns—citizenship, speech, and sight--- are of considerable interest. What are, perhaps, more interesting are the peculiar strategies these films use to convey their messages. In this chapter, I shall attempt to uncover the concrete operations of the notion of point of view related to

racialized citizenship and denizenship (status of a person who inhabits a place but does not have the same rights as a citizen). I shall examine some of their broader implications.

I argue that *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* use multilayered points of view to demonstrate the difficulties and challenges behind intercultural communication. I also propose that the point of view of a multicultural flawed citizen/denizen is characterized by a sense of tension produced by the collision of several points of view opposed to that of their own. To achieve this, the films use narrative and imaging strategies such as cultural iconography, defamiliarization, and what I call cognitive metaphors: images representing intellectual capacity that, since the times of Plato and Aristotle, have been held in great esteem: sight and speech. Such iconography and inquisitive way of seeing comment on the complexities of cultural (mis)communication and say something meaningful about the excitement and trauma of life as an immigrant in Canada. In addition, they mimic the status of the characters in the film world as flawed or racialized citizens and denizens, by depicting them as imperfect but cognitively capable and in need of cementing their alliances with their "new" communities. They subvert the doings of exoticization: a type of gaze that reduces migrants to specific stereotypical roles or diminishing traits and that seems destined to be reiterated many times over.

How does a flawed citizen/denizen with a Mexican/Chinese cultural background see, understand, and experience their world? How do the film world's other inhabitants (full citizens) see and influence them? How do the films invite the audience to see the world through the eyes of racialized citizens and denizens, and to decipher symbols, metaphors, and allusions, through camera movements and other cinematic storytelling strategies? This chapter may be seen as trying to answer these questions.

I. Children, Mail Order Brides & the Denizen

From Vancouver and Montreal come two films about migrant mobility or the migrant interpretation of human mobility. *A Silent Love* (2004), winner of the award for Best Screen Play at the Brooklyn International Film Festival and the Miami Latin Film Festival, is the first Canadian release by the production company and film distributor Atopia. The film, directed by the Argentinian Canadian filmmaker Federico Hidalgo and co-written by Hidalgo himself and Paulina Robles, tells the story of a young Mexican woman's search to understand love and navigate life's challenges as a migrant in Montreal. Through the cinematography, the film looks to the physical universe, the city space, for an explanation, a transmutation, or at least an encompassing of how a young woman moves in a physical and cultural landscape that sometimes can be unwelcoming of difference. In this, the film reflects on transnational mobility and multiculturalism, and explores complex notions that include the deepness of the migrant experience, the hybridity of Quebecois culture, and the treatment of ethnicity concerning other categories, such as gender and class.

That is also the case with *Eve and the Fire Horse*, distributed by Mongrel Media and produced by Yves J. Ma, Erick Paulsson, and Shan Tam. Winner of a Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and the Claude Jutra Award for the best feature film by a first-time director, the film, directed by Canadian filmmaker Julia Kwan, tells the story of Eve Eng (Phoebe Jojo Kut), an imaginative nine-year-old Chinese girl from Vancouver who thinks that when everybody is asleep, gods gather in her living room to socialize, and goddesses dance together throughout the night. She also thinks her father owes his bad luck to his crooked fingers, her uncle owes his good luck to his round face, and her deceased grandma is reincarnated in a goldfish. She clearly explains the latter fact to her grade 4 class, to avoid any misunderstanding

or undesired outcome: “you should always be good to your goldfish, because you never know if it was somebody’s grandma once.”

These are some of Eve’s beliefs resulting from her age, cultural upbringing, and title “fire horse” (an inauspicious sign in the Chinese zodiac and main female character of several popular tales and legends). For Eve, imagining impossible scenarios, establishing belief alliances, negotiating different ways of looking at the world, and coping with family misfortune occupy her time. Because she is the daughter of a couple of Chinese immigrants having recently arrived in Canada in the 1970s, with a strong attachment to her family’s culture of origin, she has tougher life experiences than other children, including her older sister Karena (Hollie Lo).

This narrative may sound familiar, and it is. In *Eve and the Fire Horse*, we hear echoes of other voices, more specifically of films dealing with child trauma, such as Jacques Doillon’s *Ponette* (France, 1996) or with the struggles between the child and social institutions, such as François Truffaut’s *400 Blows* (France, 1959). However, the story of Eve lends a distinction from Chinese tradition to its commonplace elements. As she tries to make sense of a contradictory, unkind, and menacing world, we see how Eve sees, or would like to see, more specifically through the lens of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, two basic Chinese religious and philosophical concepts. Among these two, inauspicious omens hold special places in Eve’s visions, as they are intimately related to her condition as the daughter of newly arrived Chinese immigrants to Canada, or what I call a racialized citizen. For example, *Eve and the Fire Horse* emphasizes the foreignness of Eve’s point of view through symbols of cultural relevance that oppose and sometimes even contest the local ways of looking at the world. The clash between those foreign and local ways of seeing creates a tense atmosphere that comments on the difficulties hiding behind intercultural communication. Thus, the movie’s perspective relies on

migrant psychology as much as on determined geographic, cultural, and spatial markers. Befitting its perspective, *Eve and the Fire Horse* is either photographed from the little girl's point of view, even her precise eye level, or we see objective close-ups of her dreamy face together with full shots that feature Eve interacting with other characters. In any event, she is rarely excluded from the frame, which is understandable given the film's intent to portray the emotional and cultural landscape of migrant childhood.

Our first view of Eve aptly occurs in the film's opening sequence, which starts with the puzzling image of an apple tree. Before panning suddenly to the right, the camera remains static for around 5 seconds, just enough time to ensure that the tree we just saw will linger in our minds afterwards. With this focusing effort, is the camera suggesting that the apple tree will play a relevant role in the story we are about to watch? Most probably, yes. Otherwise, the puzzling image would not have made it to the film's opening sequence, a part traditionally used to foreshadow conflict or give crucial contextual information to understand the rest of the narrative. This holds especially true for *Eve and the Fire Horse*, where we cannot afford to miss any detail. The focalization camera work of this first shot, then, is decisive because, from this moment on, the main events in the film will revolve around the apple tree and its symbolic power.

While the shot of the tree prepares us for a mystical encounter, the camera gradually reveals the film's protagonist, Eve Eng, and her older sister, Karena, who are playing a hand-clapping game next to the tree. The public display of sisterhood counterpoints the reverential and terrible aura of the apple tree, which announces conflict: a shadow of misfortune that will hover over most of the events in the film.

In *Eve and the Fire Horse*, apple trees owe their reverential and calamitous nature to both Chinese and Judeo-Christian cultural traditions. Where Chinese tradition sees them as magnets

of peace, Christians interpret them as containers of divine knowledge not available to mortals. In China, if something happens to the tree, something happens to the peace it irradiates. In the Christian West, there are also dire consequences for those who dare to desacralize apple trees. Relying on the Chinese understanding of the world, Eve attributes her mother's miscarriage to cutting the apple tree. By metonymic association, the audience connects Eve and the apple tree with the Biblical story of humanity's temptation and sin. According to the Bible story, humanity fell from God's grace due to the insatiable appetites of a woman named Eve, like our protagonist, who wanted more than she was offered and ate an apple from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It does not matter with which of the two traditions we sympathize more. In both, apple trees can be weapons of calamity; but, most importantly, both stories show that apple trees are signifiers to which we ascribe different affordances. More than simply an image of narrative relevance, the apple tree comments on the complexities of language and epistemology. To put it in cinematographic terms, the meanings assigned to certain images suggests that this opening shot of *Eve and the Fire Horse* depends on what the American film critic Annette Insdorf playfully calls "eyedentity," when the eye of the camera "imitates" ways of looking at the world that offer insight into who the characters are and how they perceive their reality (73).

In the multicultural context of the film, this openness of meaning or "eyedentities" open the door to cultural clashes and conflicts, which will find their perfect vessel in the sororal relationship between Eve and her older sister Karena. The editing of the opening sequence subtly announces this kind of conflict: abruptly panning to the right, the camera stops focusing on the apple tree and brings the two Eng sisters to the center of the frame. They are facing each other while playing a hand clapping game. As if mimicking the intervals of their game, the camera jumps from one girl to the other in a rhythmical, "ritual," and continuous fashion. By bringing

together the shots of the tree and the Eng sisters, the opening sequence invites the viewer into active participation with the film: the camera makes sure to subtly foretell the conflicts at the heart of the movie, between local and foreign perspectives, different ways and senses of belonging, religious beliefs, and cultures. Apart from establishing these connections, the camera also ensures that the viewer knows right from the start that this movie will be about migrant children and not about their migrant parents.

Accordingly, we begin in the Eng's family garden. Eve is planting the seeds from which a new tree, meant to replace the apple tree her mom cut down, will grow: "If you break a tree, you break a baby. But if you plant a seed," she says. From her words, we can safely imply that she wants to undo the serious mistake her mom made, but we will never know for sure. Before she can finish the sentence to give us a definitive answer, her classmate and neighbour, Sally, interrupts her to ask "What are you doing?" Eve answers, "I'm helping my mom." "Is it true that your mom chopped down the apple tree?" continues Sally. "She did," says Eve. "Why?" asks Sally. "It's a Chinese secret," says Eve. "I'm serious, why didn't she hire a lumberjack or something?" insists Sally. "Everyone in China chops down their own tree, that's just the way they do it," explains Eve. "We're not in China," clarifies Sally.

What are we to make from this formidable scene? First of all, in a film defined in large part by the tension between local and foreign points of view, it seems one of the most instructive moments. In fact, the scene could be cut without damaging the flow of the narrative, and here precisely lies its usefulness. The planting of the seeds, Eve's words, and the conversation between the girls could be omitted, and we would still have enough information to follow the plot with ease, with this exception: without the "uncomfortable" conversation between the girls, we may not be made sufficiently aware that Eve's ethnicity influences how others see her.

The camera work, the framing, and the *mise-en-scène* metaphorically speak on this issue. A wooden fence acts as a physical barrier between two spaces but also between two conditions. In the upper part of the frame, we see Sally, who pokes her body over the fence to get a better look at Eve. Eve lies on the other side of the fence. As she is necessarily kneeling, Eve must look at Sally from below. The image invites a reflection: one cannot but feel that their innocent interaction is simultaneously a power struggle between two different and opposing ways of seeing. The camera tilts up and down, alternating between the girls, reinforces that perception. Compositionally, Sally is in a higher position in relation to Eve. Thanks to the tilting camera, her point of view holds more power than Eve's: Sally looks from above and is looked at from below.

Figure 1. Eve planting a tree in Eve and the Fire Horse

Figure 2. Sally looking at Eve in Eve and the Fire Horse

The first time I saw the scene, this struck me as strange. Why on earth, I wondered, would a film that privileges the point of view of an ethnically Chinese girl so clearly diminish the power of her point of view? Yet this, clearly, turns out to be the point: there is belittling because the relationship between local and “foreign” points of view is always asymmetrical. If there is asymmetry, one deals with conflict and the collision of incompatible ways of understanding and looking at the world. The belittling of Eve’s perspective arises precisely from the impossibility of reconciliation between the points of view of different peripheral community members. Neither

Eve nor Sally is one's typical idealized image of a Canadian as a white, (upper) middle-class Christian. Eve is the daughter of Chinese immigrants. She stands out "behaviourally" and physically. Meanwhile, Sally is described as a PWT, or "poor white trash," who suffers bullying at school despite her "endemic looks" of blond hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. But this "shared" strangeness does not necessarily make them closer to each other; quite the opposite. Being rejected by some classmates does not automatically make Sally more open and accepting. Her perspective always aligns with that of characters that sympathize with sedentarist ethics (Cresswell 25), those that privilege stasis over mobility: multicultural full citizens.

The designation of a multicultural full citizen may seem a bit odd and unnecessary. For some, one either *is* a citizen or is not. But to assume that all the members of a state equally belong to the national community is to miss the whole picture. As Canada's history shows, "being a citizen" (or not) is not all there is, especially when discussing the thorny relationship between multiculturalism, visible minorities, and idealized citizens.

The history of visible minorities in Canada is intricate and contentious. Canada began recognizing the contributions of visible minorities to Canadian society in the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. The notion of the Canadian nation, then, once symbolically and culturally built on British political and legal thinking, and where only the cultural expressions of the English-speaking population were deemed valuable, began to move toward the recognition of ethnic differences as pivotal to preserve "Canada's character and integrity" (Brosseau & Dewing 2.1). With the post-war increase in immigration, Ottawa started to rethink the status of ethnic groups and immigrants. In 1967, it officially ended its discrimination law and introduced the points system to rank migrants according to their work, skills, education, language ability, and family connections. All these reforms would culminate in the adoption of

multiculturalism in 1971, which was built on the fostering of multicultural identity, the promotion of exchanges between cultural groups, and the full involvement of ethnic minorities in the public life of the nation (Dirks, "Immigration Policy in Canada"). However, this new political philosophy was controversial among white settlers from the beginning. Sixty-one percent of Canadians in 1977 felt that migration levels were too high, while most had ambiguous attitudes regarding accepting religious differences. As David Seljak remarks, during that time, to be an ideal or good Canadian citizen meant that one had to be Christian (9). What this suggests, then, is that having Canadian citizenship does not guarantee full membership in a community.

If Sally and Eve are among the unwanted, as neither of them have Christianity as their religion and the two are in a precarious economic situation (Sally more than Eve), one wonders why Sally's point of view necessarily emerges victorious from the "power" struggles, all while establishing community bonds with ideal citizens like the girls' gang who go to Sunday school. The answer seems to lie in her appearance and worldview. Sally, with her blond hair, fair skin, and blue eyes, "looks" Canadian, and she also "thinks" Canadian, even if that merely implies the idea of hiring a lumberjack to chop down a tree just like any other Canadian (not Chinese) would do. She is the kind of Canadian that people see represented on screen and with whom they relate the essence of being authentically from Canada, in racial terms. By the same token, Eve's Asian looks and the secretive and incomprehensible nature of her beliefs makes it difficult for Christian ideal citizens to empathize with her more "exotic" point of view.

An alternative perspective to that of Eve is explored in Federico Hidalgo's *A Silent Love*, whose narrative is slender and, on its surface, simple. A young Mexican woman, Gladys (Vanessa Bauche), moves to Montreal to marry Canadian film university professor Norman Green (Noel Burton). That day, at the beginning of the story, he prepares to travel to Mexico

City, where he will meet for the first time his future wife, a Mexican secondary school teacher and mail order bride named Gladys. That is hardly a spoiler, and neither the travel nor the marriage is the main event in *A Silent Love*. Unlike other love stories that end on a happy note with the protagonists getting married, this one is rather about what happens behind the closed doors of the "happily ever after," right after Norman and Gladys tie the knot.

Following the green card romance genre conventions, Gladys moves to Canada with Norman. However, in a twist of events, she decides to bring along her mother, the mature but alluring Fernanda (Susanna Salazar), who involuntarily finds herself positioned as a homewrecker. As more than one literary and cinematic story has warned us, this love triangle never ends well, and Norman, Gladys, and Fernanda could not be the exceptions to that rule.

A Silent Love shows the slow spiralling of Gladys' and Norman's marriage, whose sentimental basis, as the title suggests, is shrouded in silence. That is probably the clearest symptom of the malady afflicting their relationship: the impossibility of communicating despite their commonalities and because of cultural differences and generational gaps. To enhance the impact of this lack of sound or "communication," *A Silent Love* uses defamiliarization and other formal techniques such as the inclusion of intertitles more proper of silent film, outlandish images that describe the emotional state of the characters, non-diegetic musical patterns, meta-cinematic references, the position of the characters in the frame, and narrative cues. The most significant among the latter are Norman's extremely silent personality and Gladys' obsession with speech and language.

These two ways of experiencing the world originate incessant tensions throughout the film that sees male and female points of view, as well as those of a full citizen and a racialized denizen, fighting to prevail over each other in a territory characterized by the adoption of

multiculturalism *à la Quebecois*. In 1981, under the government of Premier René Lévesque, the Parti Quebecois formally rejected the federal multicultural policy, and in its place, proposed a policy of "cultural convergence" that was characterized as "[m]any ways of being a Quebecer" (Gilbert 25). Its goal was to "ensure the maintenance and development of cultural communities and their specificities, make French-speaking Quebecers aware of the contribution of cultural communities to our common heritage and finally promote the integration of cultural communities in Quebec society and especially in sectors where they are particularly underrepresented" (Gilbert 25).

Some critics of the policy argue that the made-in-Quebec model resembles federal multiculturalism, and it was only suggested to differentiate Quebec from the rest of Canada. However, for others, Quebecois interculturalism sets itself apart by prioritizing the issue of language above all. In the words of Martin Patriquin, "interculturalism is a 'moral contract' between immigrants and Quebec society, in which both the host culture and new cultures are encouraged to exchange and participate—*en français, bien sûr*" (Just what does Quebec's official answer to multiculturalism entail?). Unlike multiculturalism, where differences are sacred, interculturalism emphasizes the common link between all Quebecers, native-born or otherwise: the French language. Indeed, Montreal, in all its complexity, is the ideal background for a story about intercultural love.

The opening and establishing shot of *A Silent Love* could be interpreted in various ways: a postcard, a photograph, or a hyperrealist painting of Montreal. Its visual versatility stems from its magnificent composition. Two brick walls frame the image, giving profundity to an urban scenery and emphasizing the most important compositional elements in the upper right intersection: a pair of light brown colonial apartment buildings located on L'Esplanade, part of

Le Plateau Mont Royal borough in Montreal. The state of these dominant structures suggests that they have been renovated and are now the landmarks of a place affected by gentrification.

Figure 3. L' Esplanade in Montreal from A Silent Love

This piece of seemingly inconsequential information is a nod to one of the character's backgrounds: Norman, the story's male protagonist, lives in this special Montreal *quartier* (neighbourhood). One only needs to delve into the city's history to realize what this implies. In 1792 settlers started to move into *Le Plateau,* then dominated by large houses and sumptuous gardens owned by bourgeois English-speaking families. With rapid development, the quartier opened its doors to working-class families; in subsequent years, it stayed true to this welcoming spirit. During the Second World War, *Le Plateau* received many war refugees and stopped doing so well into the second half of the twentieth century. From then on, the quartier became famous for its cultural diversity and bohemian nature. It was probably the latter that attracted the interest of investors, and by the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, *Le Plateau* was renovated and subsequently gentrified. The families living there for decades could not keep up with the rising prices of the quartier and moved out. A new group of French-speaking upper middle-class families arrived in *Le Plateau* and made it their home. Norman, a professor of film, could have been among those newly arrived, or he could be a long-time resident. Either way, his presence in the quartier speaks volumes about his privileged socioeconomic status.

The opening shot serves another purpose: to highlight the insurmountable gap between here and there, between he and she, and between us and them. The ordered symmetrical forms of the shot, and its perfectly neat surroundings sharply contrast with the more modest and "chaotic" looks of the establishing shot of Gladys' house in Mexico. The tremendous disparity can also be articulated in terms of socioeconomic status: Gladys is from an unprivileged background and has recently lost her job, while Norman is a well-to-do university professor living in an affluent neighbourhood in Montreal. She speaks Spanish; he speaks English. Most importantly, perhaps, at least at the beginning of the film, neither of them speaks a word of French, the "local" language of Montreal. If this does not put them in a similar position of migrancy, it does at least make them partners in crime: they are both part of the linguistic "minority" of non-French speakers, but they do not seem to be capable of using this apparent similarity as a pillar to sustain their relationship. On the contrary, this paradox serves to amplify the tensions between their opposing perspectives: older generation vs. younger generation, traditional vs. modern, male vs. female, white vs. brown, Canadian vs. Mexican, and local vs. foreign.

These tensions are first made apparent in a scene featuring Norman, Gladys, and Norman's ex-girlfriend, Joyce. It was an afternoon like any other. His office door was left open, just a shy crack. Inside, Norman is sitting in front of his desk. He stares off into space while listening attentively to Joyce's (Lisette Guertin) recriminations: "It's grotesque. Do you even love this girl? I suppose it's somehow all my fault." "No, no. People should be responsible. How could it be?" answers Norman. "Don't be an adolescent," says Joyce. "You should be happy for me," continues Norman. "Why didn't you come to me? for advice. Aren't we friends? You are so self-absorbed and foolish," declares Joyce. The door opens in a hurry. It is Gladys, who has finished her classes early and decided to pay a visit to her husband. Joyce and Norman jump out

of their seats: "Heyyyyyy, how was your conversation class? What did you talk about?" Norman cautiously asks her. "The quiet revolution, the *revolution tranquille*," says Gladys. "That is Joyce Phelps, my colleague," Norman replies. "I wanted to welcome you," exclaims Joyce as she shakes Gladys' hand. "Please call me if you or your mother need anything," she finishes, and hands Gladys a business card. "Ok. Thank you. Goodbye," answers Gladys.

What is ironic about this scene is the uncomfortable interaction between the characters and the audacious reference to Quebec's Quiet Revolution. It all started with a hockey game like no other and a hockey player like no other. That is what history says. Maurice Richard, known as the Rocket, was, for many, the best player of his era. He was the soul of the Montreal Canadiens and the hope of the French-speaking Quebecois. His victories and his defeats were equally felt by the people. As Michael Farber notes, many fans found Richard's suspension by NHL president Clarence Campbell for violent behaviour harder to accept. French-speaking hockey fans, who hoped the Canadiens would take the Stanley Cup to Montreal that season, saw the act as an affront. The waters heated up and reached their boiling point during the Detroit Red Wings and Les Canadiens game. A Canadiens fan attacked Campbell, and a riot broke out that would make it into the history books as "Richard's riot." It was the first expression of Quebecois nationalism that set the stage for the "Quiet Revolution," a period of Quebec's history characterized by major changes and several reforms meant to secularize and modernize the province. One of its most important legacies was the fervent nationalistic sentiment that would encourage Quebecers to seek independence.

The "urgent" need for displaying nationalistic pride injects irony into this reference. Who needs to display pride and seek independence: Norman or Gladys? As Joyce points out, Norman is too foolish but not proud; he does not start his journey of self-discovery, with a divorce from

Gladys to court her mother, until later in the film, when he figures out his love for Fernanda. On the other hand, Gladys is in a different situation: she *is* prideful and *talks* too much. The film relies on her obsession with speech and communication to present her evolution and journey of self-discovery. To sustain the metaphor of the quiet (or not-so-quiet) revolution, one could take this scene as the prelude of Gladys' realization about the hardships of belonging and intercultural communication.

Gladys, despite her naïve looks, is a perspicacious woman. She does not need many signals to grasp that the third wheel in the room is not Joyce but herself. The hyper-focusing medium shots and the switching of focus between Norman and Joyce on the one hand and Gladys on the other seem to comment on the awareness of the latter: Norman and Joyce belong together, both in Gladys' mind and according to the eye of the camera.

Figure 4. Gladys enters Norma's Office from A Silent Love

That is why they share the frame. They speak English, they can communicate effectively with each other, and they are Canadians who look alike: they are blond, white, and blue-eyed. Meanwhile, Gladys stands on her own, at the center of the frame, opposite Norman and Joyce. When she is isolated from them, her differences become too palpable to ignore. She is a brunette, with black hair and black eyes. She does not speak English, nor does she "belong" in Canada. In other words, she is out of place, and she owes part of this misplacement to her nationality, cultural upbringing, ethnicity, and, perhaps most importantly, to her status as a racialized

denizen, and one that, through her controversial place in Canada's migration history, rubs salt in a wound: she is a mail-order bride.

The status of mail-order brides in Canada has always been part of a legal gray area that has left the doors open to violence and abuse. The purpose of the mail-order-bride economy is to sell foreign brides, often from countries in the global south and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to men from countries in the global north. Often, the relationships that such business transactions promote are asymmetrical. As one scene at the beginning of the film suggests, mail-order brides are constantly objectivized by a male gaze. The scene in question opens with a computer screen on which we can see a webpage of an agency that connects Canadian men with Mexican women. Norman is looking at the profile of Gladys, a "28-year-old primary school teacher who would like to continue her studies and create a happy home for a happy man," in a catalogue. The mail-order bride catalogue, asserts Ara Wilson in her anthropological study *American Catalogs of Asian Brides*, is a cultural text designed to filter the otherness of foreign brides to make them presentable to the Western male gaze. The representations of foreign female bodies are documents with orientalist tendencies that exploit the affective fantasies of the West about foreign female bodies as "exotic, enigmatic, submissive and erotic." The profile description of the bride also plays an essential role in this cultural filtering process. Hobbies, beliefs, and values are often adapted to the expectations of the Western customer. Religion, for instance, is rarely mentioned. The occupations of the brides always respect traditional gendered divisions of labour. Therefore, among brides' profiles, it is not uncommon to find secretaries, teachers, and students, as these professions speak to Western males about the readability of women for wifely duties (Wilson 114-125).

Usually, the consumer-husband and the bride are married outside of Canada. According to the *Immigration and Protection of Refugee Act*, after proving the legitimacy of the marriage, the brides become permanent residents of Canada, albeit subjected to various loss of status procedures. If the consumer-husband cannot prove the validity of the marriage, the bride can be deported. This regulation, as Marie-Claire Belleau points out, has led to abuses by consumer husbands, who can easily threaten their brides with deportation if they do not comply with their wishes or complain about the way they are treated (95). Punishment, then, is exclusively reserved to brides, while abusive husbands are rarely subjected to any penalty.

From a legal and cultural perspective, Gladys is in a vulnerable position. Although the film never mentions her migration status, several clues indicate that she is a permanent resident (denizen) susceptible to possibly losing her status if Norman deems it convenient or necessary. The scene cited at the beginning of this section could also exemplify the status gap that separates an unprivileged and stigmatized denizen/mail-order bride like Gladys from citizens with a more privileged legal status and whose perspective holds power, like Norman and Joyce. Yet, the scene is also crucial for Gladys' development as a character, for it is at this precise moment that she will start questioning her relationship with Norman more consciously, both how she sees him and how she, as an immigrant, sees herself and the world around her.

II. Local('s) Perspectives & Identity Struggles

Despite the power that both Eve's and Glady's perspectives hold in the films, the construction of their identities seems to be constantly defined and redefined by the points of view of other characters. For example, although formally privileged through eye-level shots, Eve's point of view is dismissed by full citizens as "other than" and never as "similar to" ours. What is more, she is constantly objectified by other full citizens' gaze. In a critical scene in her classroom, for

example, we see Eve presenting to her classmates objects that are important to her as a Chinese Canadian girl. The scene starts with a medium shot of Eve holding a version of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead,* compiled and edited by Erik Paulsson. Right below the book are four porcelain figures of three Daoist goddesses, with Guanyin in the middle. The image is accompanied by Eve's customary and didactic explanatory tone: "This is the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It tells you what happens after you die. You could be reborn as anything. So, you should always be nice to your goldfish, because you never know if it was somebody's grandma once." A close-up shot casts the attention of the viewer to the goddesses, who, according to Eve, come alive and dance when everyone is asleep. The camera immediately cuts off to show a mirror through which the spectator can see one of the goddesses dancing to an operatic melody and a painting with a horse hanging on the wall. The camera returns to Eve's classroom to reveal the faces of some of her classmates, listening attentively but impassively to what she is saying. The scene ends with a shot of Eve's teacher clapping while labelling the customs of Eve's country as "exotic." Behind Eve and her teacher is a board with a pangram on the left side, a sentence that includes every letter in the alphabet, "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy doggy," and a series of instructions, "1. Prepare, 2. Step up, 3. Speak clearly, 4. Share, 5. Respect, 6. Thank you," written in white chalk on the right.

This scene presents a flagrant disconnection between what is implied by the *mise-en-scène* (what we can see), and the actions of the diegetic world (what is implied). While the pangram and the rules for respectful interaction and participation advocate the "total" embracement and admittance of alternative epistemologies, the (un)emotional responses of the film world's full citizens seem to be suggesting quite the opposite. Impassive faces and

condemnatory judgments all seem to imply the same: Eve's classroom is not as inclusive, accepting, or respectful as the audience visually perceives it to be.

Several other symbols in the scene are worth considering when thinking about inclusion and acceptance of the "other." Objects such as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the figurines, and the fire horse painting, for example, may serve to disguise some interpretive orientations. The book and some of the figures can be threatening, especially when they are, almost by design, intended to be evocative of other worlds and forms of knowing. Unrecognizable concepts such as reincarnation, and non-normative spiritual behaviours such as "idolatry," point to the abandonment of safe epistemological and familiar territories in favour of the strange. Indeed, in the West, religion has been one of the principal schools of otherization, as it provides alternative elements to national identities and nationalisms. Religion constitutes, in different contexts, elements of inclusion and exclusion drawing real or symbolic boundaries of Otherness. One of the most enduring patterns of conceiving and constructing otherness is perhaps generated by the relationship of different religions, such as Judaism and Christianity. For both historical and theological reasons, Christianity must have a set of theories and characteristics that distinguish it from Judaism, and vice versa. Such models of otherization (otherness by exclusion) have remained persistent in Western societies' social orders, where "otherness is not conceived in terms of mutuality and reciprocity but in terms of singularity. It is a model in which difference is cast in terms of negation and the denial of the other. It is a model that says, 'me not you,' or 'us, not them.' In its most extreme form, it says, 'for me to live, you must die'" (Green 20).

In *Eve and the Fire Horse*, the significance of religious belief in defining foreign identities is abundantly evident from how the objects included in the shot of Eve's classroom help the film effectively capture the double exteriority or otherness of Eve: a bicultural child who

struggles to embrace the culture and beliefs of her parents and those of her receiving community. However, the film is careful in portraying otherness as a generalized condition with many causes. Eve, as a child protagonist, is a character who is trying to understand and make sense of the world around her. She has a certain degree of independence when experiencing the world, yet she still struggles to belong. She is a social other, who is part of an ethnic minority; a linguistic other who, apart from English, also speaks Cantonese; a religious other, who believes in reincarnation, Daoist fairies, and Buddha; and an economic other who belongs to a working-class family. Due to all these hurdles, Eve has a hard time integrating herself into the white Christian religious community to which she seeks to belong. The distinction that the film makes between Christians and others is essential for the formation of a communal identity of locals and serves to strengthen the inner coherence of that group.

The film also emphasizes Eve's otherness through a mirror with an inauspicious reflection, an open invitation for the viewer to reflect on Eve's identity construction. There is something mystic about mirrors, a supernatural quality that grants them access to the innermost parts of the self. Infants, argues Lacan, attain self-realization by seeing their reflection in the mirror. The child, whose notions of the subject are yet to be formed, encounters an image in the mirror and identifies with it. At the same time, they distinguish it as an image of themselves and, therefore, "other" than themselves. Thus, for Lacan, the mirror stage is an early instance of our misapprehension of "the subject," an encounter that produces a simultaneous sense of the self and the other. Indeed, it seems no coincidence that mirrors and mirroring appear in instances in which they surprise the one who looks in. Typically, there is some discrepancy between the actual image that any onlooker can see and some interior self that comes from the protagonist asking *who am I?* The question is related to identity formation and conflict in the heat of the

mirror imagery. T. S. Kord writes of the preponderance of mirrors in horror cinema: in the *Ring* films, for example, mirrors stand as metaphors for the inability of the visual image to express objective and dependable reality. Mirrors show images removed from reality and blur the lines between what is supposed to be there and what is not (such as misleading reflections) and between what is not supposed to be there, and is (such as ghosts). Accordingly, mirrors tell us how indistinguishable fantasy and reality can sometimes be (Kord 148). Similarly, Kathleen Woodward refers to the central place mirrors occupy in literary representations and identifications of the aged body, and the horror at the recognition the onlooker experiences (104). What these examples have in common with the example found in *Eve and the Fire Horse* is that a view in the mirror dramatizes a recognition of an alternative reality or different part of the self. Thus, the protagonists are usually left in a state of shock after realizing that what they witness in the mirror corresponds to a different version of themselves or the events happening around them. Coincidental though it may be, the context of identity formation and identifying the self/other is an appropriate frame for the mirror incident.

In *Eve and the Fire Horse,* the mirror is a marvel of detail. It functions as *a mise-en-abime*, a reflection of the nature of the self. It is also placed to allow us to see sides of the scene to which we would not otherwise have access. *Eve and the Fire Horse* invites us to access Eve's inner world, but not by showing us her image in the mirror, at least not literally. Instead, we see an image that we have learned to associate with her, through ritualized repetition and metonymy: the fire horse. As the title suggests, Eve and the fire horse cannot be separated or treated, for most of the film, as individual entities. They are one and the same. Therefore, what the image of the fire horse may be referring to are those fragments of Eve's self that make her unique and distinguishes her from others. That includes her epistemology, her tireless journey of self-

acceptance, discovery, and restitution, and her seemingly endless struggles. Whether sought or come upon accidentally, a view in a mirror is instantaneous, not a gradual process over time; the unexpected difference reflected in the mirror, a trope – as well as a crucial incident – expressing identity disruption or formation. In the film, the mirror has this function: the clarity and precision of the reflection shown in the mirror, its painstaking delineation, seems to be designed to rival the precision with which Eve's otherness is reproduced throughout the film. The mirror also offers a reflection of our own roles as viewers of the scene, as it can condense within itself, in reverse, almost the entire field of vision of what is presented on screen. Close examination of the mirror enables the viewer to see the fire horse, a figure whose presence is constant in the film. The mirror incorporates and intertwines the positions of the observed (the fire horse) and the observer (the audience). The audience ends up identifying with the fire horse reflection they see first in the mirror, and then on screen. In this case, the mirror is also an analogue for a penetrating gaze that seeks to explore and understand what is around.

Indeed, the shot of the mirror and that of the classroom imply that Eve's world is not what it seems. Although it visually appeals to the migrant as welcoming, it semantically conditions the migrant's membership and imposes expectations of performance rooted in visibility. One of the premises upon which citizenship is built is, in fact, mutual recognition between the members of a community, and between the community and its members. In the film, this membership needs to be demonstrated by the embracing of shared and decipherable religious symbols and narratives, such as the doctrines taught by the Catholic church. Without that kind of compromise, migrant characters like Eve are excluded from the community to which they seek to belong.

This process of exclusion presented in the film is reminiscent of a history of migration in need of revision. There was a time in Canada in general, and Vancouver more specifically, when Chinese migrants were not welcomed. They were not allowed to live outside Chinatown, or to swim in public swimming pools. They had to sit in back rows of theatres and could only work in farms, and their businesses were attacked during the Vancouver anti-Asian riots. These discriminatory practices reached their highest point in 1923, when Canada implemented the Exclusion Act: a series of policies that prevented Chinese nationals, except for students, merchants, diplomats, and those born in Canada, from immigrating to or entering the country.

Jordan Paterson's documentary *From C to C: Chinese Canadian Stories of Migration* chronicles this dark period in Canadian history by contrasting the (hi)stories of Chinese migrants and their families with "the experiences of contemporary Chinese Canadian youth who embody diverse, transnational identities across Canada today." One of the most revealing accounts is that of Charlie Quan, a migrant who arrived in Canada when every person of Chinese origin had to pay a head tax of $50 to be allowed in the country: "I didn't know anything," he says. "I had to learn everything again. Learn how to eat, learn how to walk, learn everything just like you are reborn." His testimony says as much about the difficulties of adaptation as it says about cultural expectations and biases. A place that does not embrace difference offers many challenges for newcomers, and for those who arrive with them.

As the documentary explains, nowadays Canada has come a long way since the implementation and derision of those discriminatory policies. However, University of British Columbia historian Henry Yu reminds us that there are (hi)stories that have not been completely revised. According to Yu, if Canada wants to give an image to the world as a welcoming place, it must "rethink [its] history through the eyes of those who paid the price for the building of a

particular kind of nation that is built around white supremacy" ("The White Elephant in the Room"). Although *Eve and the Fire Horse* does not literally revolve around the topics of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the head tax, or the Vancouver riots, it does show the remnants of unexpiated (hi)stories of white supremacy and anti-Asian sentiment. The film presents a Vancouver in transition towards multiculturalism, where Chinese immigrant families continue to face hardships because of their race and their ways of understanding the world. Eve herself, in the style of Charlie Quan, needs to constantly learn how to behave, how to see, and what to believe to better fit within a local community glued together by the doctrinal principles of Christianity.

If *Eve and the Fire Horse* allows us to understand the historical mode of racial repression of Asian communities in Vancouver through processes of exclusion/inclusion, *A Silent Love* confronts the mode of racial repression and marginalization by exploring the notion of Salvationism concerning women of colour. When considering a subject as controversial as salvation, one can only ask these questions: what is someone to be saved from? What kind of threat menaces the wellbeing of those who allegedly need to be saved? Is the act of saving based on an imposing supposition? Are those deemed as in need of salvation really in danger? In danger of what precisely? These are some of the questions that Lila Abu Lughod was probably trying to answer in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* when she describes Laura Bush's 2001 radio address about the War on Terror as a speech that reinforced "chasmic divides, principally between the" 'civilized people throughout the world,' whose hearts break for the women and children of Afghanistan, and the Taliban-and-the-terrorists, the cultural monsters who want to, as she put it, 'impose their world on the rest of us'" (784). Who is, according to Laura Bush, the one to be saved? Women in the global south, the "us" fearing for the imposition of terror in the

free world? Both? Salvation would seem to be, in this context, that which is done "in the name of" and "for the sake of," a discursive political practice that scholars of (post)colonialism know too well.

"White men saving brown women from brown men" (93), the maxim Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak coined in her groundbreaking 1985 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has become iconic and instrumental in its description of the appropriation of feminist discourse to justify colonial intervention, and the subaltern's lack of agency. By deconstructing the debates on the abolition of Sati during British colonial rule in India, Spivak reflects on the silencing that female voices have historically suffered at the hands of both colonial and patriarchal rule in India. Though British intervention saved some lives and may have granted Indian women certain possibilities of free choice, it also served to secure British rule by establishing an epistemological hierarchy that distinguished between us and them, between civilization and barbarism. Part of Spivak's critique is constructed around the notion of epistemic violence, one that Western scholars are also guilty of promoting when they instrumentalize gender and turn it into an object of symbolic solidarity in historical archives. Under such a premise, differences are erased and subsumed under the fallacy that there is one common form of oppression suffered by all women against which they should unite.

This narrative of salvation, of placing the responsibility of realization, restoration, or emancipation outside of oneself, of making assumptions and silencing the other, is one of the discourses that limits the migrant's sense of membership in *A Silent Love*. Later in the film, Molly gives Gladys a book, *Divorce Doesn't Mean Deportation: A Guide for Mail-Order Brides*, in the hope that Gladys reconsiders her situation and looks for better opportunities for herself. Ironically, it is this book, which he finds in one of Gladys' drawers, that eventually leads

Norman to reconsider his relationship with Gladys. At the end, he asks her for a divorce with the excuse that there is no real love growing between them.

If *A Silent Love* elaborates a discourse that relies on the rhetoric of Salvationism, it is not only to suggest that Norman and Gladys' relationship is predicated upon a power imbalance. Far from establishing the moral limits between what is right and wrong, the rhetoric of Salvationism is nothing but one of colonialism's most controversial faces: epistemic violence. The conversation between Molly and Gladys is only a paradoxical kind of enunciation of the logics of colonialism, disguised as feminist progressiveness and even pedagogy, one willing to teach the subaltern/migrant to live according to the principles of the receiving society, and to speak for her. At the same time, it is also stubbornly dismissive of alternative forms of knowing and experiencing the world. Molly is thus not someone that remains exterior to the colonial epistemology; it is a symptom, or better, an expression, of that logic to the extent that she, a white feminist, reproduces and inverts it. Spivak's paradigmatic phrase "white men saving brown women from brown men" then becomes "white women saving brown women from white men." Molly aligns in "anti-imperialist" feminist universalizing solidarity with Gladys, whom she, wrongly, perceives as oppressed, vulnerable, and naïve. But, in doing so, she also denies Glady's empowerment and strips her of the right to talk. It is no accident if we do not hear the opinionated voice of Gladys during the brief conversation. As Spivak explains, she cannot speak because she is silenced and spoken for by the Western, authoritative, academic, sophisticated, and modern voices of Molly and, later, Norman. Thus, if Molly constitutes a critique of the western academic and the western feminist colonial discourses of salvation, that critique is directed against the hubris of presumptive, fetishized academic practice failing to see that which lies beyond sameness and makes of the subaltern (Gladys) a nuanced "un-westernizable" yet

gendered individual: her cultural upbringing, her tradition, and probably more importantly, her desires for a decent husband and for escaping solitude. In giving the guide for mail-order brides to Gladys, Molly never seems to doubt, even for an instant, that Gladys is an object of scholarly inquiry, an oppressed brown woman in need of salvation and intellectual illumination. In her eyes, Gladys is not a nuanced intersectional subject, but a becoming citizen defined only from the perspective of her sexualized, commodified body, and her status of perpetual otherness. One of the critiques of the film stems from this articulation, yet the film also manages to redeem Gladys' position as a woman who can have a voice.

Gladys rebels against societal expectations through the exploration of her own erotic capital. Catherine Hakim's definition of erotic capital includes not only beauty and sexual attractiveness but also charm, liveliness, and social presentation (500). She suggests that erotic capital is as significant an asset and has as essential a meaning in the everyday life and life course of an individual as Bourdieu's economic, cultural, and social capital. According to Hakim, erotic capital is both performed and developed. It can be argued that in consumer societies, performing and developing erotic capital is centrally intertwined with consumption. In considerations of consumer culture, the importance of body and physical appearance has been widely recognized. The body and the self are inextricably intertwined in consumer culture: people are not just encouraged, but expected to constantly evaluate, modify, and control their physical appearance, and by doing this, express their identity (Featherstone 18). This is especially true in the context of *A Silent Love*. Gladys is a mail-order bride, unfamiliar with Anglo North American culture, that must compete in the international marriage market. At the beginning of the film, Gladys fulfills the Western stereotype of women from the global south as innocent, submissive, domesticated, and yet exotic and sexually eager. Although Gladys is

legally vulnerable, these hyper-feminized images mischaracterize her. As the film progresses, the viewer realizes that she is jaded rather than innocent, rebellious rather than submissive, and career-minded rather than domesticated.

By stretching the boundaries of her identity as a mail-order bride, she speaks out in resistance through other parts of her identity. With her body the marginal space that she occupies, she does not seem to be empowered at the beginning of the movie but grows and develops to that point. Gladys' marginal space is first defined and highlighted to show how she later redefines and transcends its boundaries. The growth and development towards empowerment are riddled with difficulties. Gladys often has to struggle with her identity as a migrant and as a Mexican and revisit the unfair expectations placed on her role as a traditional wife from the global south. The process involves much introspection, and, at some point, she takes an active step in rejecting the current inscription of her identity to become the subject of her own life.

This process is characterized by what Naficy calls "journeys of identity" (31), of which the notion of borders is an integral part: borders can either be connections or divisions between the home and elsewhere, or the familiar and unfamiliar. In this sense, Gladys often seems to be in a state of tension about who she is expected to be, and who she would like to be. Before crossing this type of border, however, Gladys embarks on a metaphorical journey; as Naficy points out: "Not all journeys involve physical travel. There are also metaphoric and philosophical journeys of identity and transformation that involve the films' characters and sometimes the filmmakers themselves" (33). Focusing on the latter type of journey, many elements of physical journeys can be applied. For instance, psychological/metaphorical journeys can be heterogeneous and evolutionary. They can also be exploratory, involving personal quests, wandering, and searching,

thereby altering individual targets, purposes, and objectives (Naficy 33). In other words, they are journeys in which the individual finds their own identity. Gladys undergoes a journey of identity, as she travels from being an obedient, dutiful, and agreeable woman to one who steps outside of tradition and becomes empowered. The change comes through the embracement of her identity as an immigrant from Mexican origin whose actions disrupt mainstream convention and redefine the nature of social expectation. In this last sense, Gladys, contrary to Spivak's understanding, can speak, probably not in the archives of official histories, but in that of private ones, if she reclaims the right to do so.

III. Sight, Silence & Mobility

A Silent Love and *Eve and the Fire Horse* link physical and textual mobility to a third kind of movement: the social mobility of racialized citizens and denizens in contemporary Montreal and Vancouver. In these films, the racialized heroines' images have opportunities to be seen, to be heard, and to circulate. *A Silent Love* and *Eve and the Fire Horse* dramatize the plight of racialized citizens and denizens who are not afforded the same social mobility as full citizens. The films' mixtures of musical spectacle, silent sequences, lurid melodrama, and fantasy sequences generate multiple, mobile images of their female protagonists. At the same time, their ambiguous endings suggest that mobility as related to the process of migration is not just about arrivals and departures, but it is processual and contingent. Embodied, affective, and material components of becoming are embedded in the migratory process's possibilities and enactments (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 228). A way for the protagonists to make sense of such possibilities is through the senses, more specifically, through sight and speech/or the absence of it (silence).

Eve and the Fire Horse relies on the intersection between sight, fantasy, and the child's point of view to reflect on a bicultural child's positionality and mobility, depicted in the film as

the access, or lack thereof, to different social spaces. *Eve and the Fire Horse* presents us with the fantastic world of a child, one influenced by her cultural upbringing and defined by the cognitive strategies adequate for a girl her age, with, perhaps, nothing unexpected. The point of view of a child, one should remember, is different from that of an adult, because the child has not reached the same level of maturity. In other words, the child cannot decode reality with the same precision. Children filter all the information they receive and interpret it as well as they can: usually through the sieve of specific coping mechanisms that help them deal with the difficulties life throws their way.

Sometimes these mechanisms imply that they should grow up faster than others. In *400 Blows*, for example, the troubled adolescent Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) struggles to integrate to his scholarly and familiar worlds, and he ends up in a juvenile prison for having stolen a type of machine. Throughout the film, we see him smoking, wandering alone on the streets of Paris, and trying to make a life for himself while rejecting traditional social institutions, like the family or the school, that discipline, limit, and oppress him, in the purest Foucauldian sense of these terms. The recurrence of doorways and grids speaks of Antoine's continuous struggle to find authentic freedom in a world that insists on imprisoning him in roles he does not want to and cannot play. In a similar "realist" vein, Ponette, the four-year-old protagonist of the eponymous French film, tries to make sense of her mother's death. The story is told from the point of view of Ponette, who uses all her intelligence and the information available to her to figure out what has happened to her mother, and if she will come back at some point. To understand her mother's departure, Ponette engages in "mature" theological disquisitions with her aunt and finds logic in the cruel assertions of the other kids who blame Ponette for her mother's death. If her mother is dead and in Heaven, then, Ponette concludes, the only way they

can be together is if she dies too. It is not until the end of the film that Ponette's mother returns and prompts us to ask if we are experiencing a miracle or a vision created by the girl's imagination.

Other times, however, films rely on images that come directly from the child's imagination to show how they understand the world and comment on deeper issues, such as trauma. A couple of Spanish films offer a good example of this. The wild visions of *The Spirit of the Beehive's* Ana (Ana Torrent), and *Pan's Labyrinth's* Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), are vibrant illustrations of the role of the imagination in shaping children's point of view as related to the trauma of war. Plagued with monsters and fairies, the girls' visions present us with alternative worlds in which children seek refuge and comfort from war and its terrors. Both *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth* are films set during Francoism, an infamous period in Spain's history that was characterized by terror and by the silence of people who feared for their lives, among whom, presumably, would have been Ana's and Ofelia's parents. In a world without the strong and guiding "voice" and presence of adults, either because they are too traumatized to speak up or they are dead, the girls try to find the answers they look for in fantasy: fairy tales in Ofelia's case, and films in Ana's. But the fantasy worlds they presumably create for themselves are far from idyllic: Ana is fascinated by the story of Frankenstein and how he murders a girl, while Ofelia sees anthropophagi monsters and a ghostly faun. The macabre nature of their visions has led multiple scholars to postulate that Ana's and Ofelia's adventures function as allegories of the numbness of Spain as a traumatized nation, retreating within itself to forget the war and its aftermath. It is indeed not a coincidence that, especially after Franco's death, multiple works of fiction dealing with the topics of memory and trauma were produced.

It would be an exaggeration to equate Eve's experiences as a migrant child to those of Ana or Ofelia as war survivors. Yet, Eve's point of view still shares common traits not only with those of the Spanish girl protagonists Ana and Ofelia, but also with the French child protagonists Antoine and Ponette. Like many of these children, Eve has been exposed to the cruel reality of loss and death at a young age. An added element to that first encounter with loss, in Eve's case, is guilt, as she blames herself for her grandmother's death. We see glances of that in Ponette, but the French girl, at four years old, is too young to process the nature of the emotion. Eve, however, at nine years old, has already the cognitive ability to fully grasp what guilt means and how it "feels." She experiences that emotion so strongly that the memory/ghost of her deceased Chinese grandmother will mercilessly haunt her.

Ghosts and apparitions are not an uncommon occurrence in China. The idea of haunting has a long literary and representational history: stories and storytellers of the supernatural abound, and the fascination with haunting spirits and ghosts is pervasive. Chinese poetic representations of ghosts usually use them to explore major existential concerns such as the experience of death and what Judith Zeitlin calls "the passage of collective time." Some stories "represent death as an interior state of exile in which suffering and longing are intensified rather than annihilated […] Only when the grievances fueling the phantom's manifestation are properly redressed can the emotional stasis of ghosthood be ended and the dead soul finally enter a cycle of rebirth or dissolve into silence and nothingness," while others center on the issue of historical trauma and are "always framed through the perceptions of a living observer, who is placed in the position of contemplating the past reanimated in front of him" (Zeitlin 152). We can observe the same coping intentions in *Eve and the Fire Horse*.

The figure of Eve's grandmother's ghost is the materialization of an "unfilial" version of "suffering and longing" that cannot be externalized. The veiled mourning that the ghost represents is not only for the person that has departed. In the style *of The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, it could also be an allegory for the erasure of cultural identity: the Chinese part that Eve has started to question as a product of the abrupt eruption of inauspicious occurrences. With her grandma's death and subsequent apparition, Eve is forced for the first time in the film to face the reality of death and all the other hardships that, after her grandma's funeral, will tirelessly hit her family one after the other. Such an experience of loss and struggle, embodied by the ghost, is comparable to migrants' experiences when arriving at a new territory or being confronted with a new culture. Within this context, the ghost comes to be signified as a poignant memory of a tumultuous period that returns in hazy but haunting fragments. Such a painful experience is common to many children who, like Antoine, resist the influence of social institutions; like Ponette, cope with death or loss; or like Ana and Ofelia, attempt to survive war trauma.

Eve's childhood experience can be abridged to the single phrase *the sum of all factors,* when compared, of course, to the cinematic points of view of the children mentioned above. Eve, like Antoine, must face the disciplining power of social institutions such as the school and ritual hegemonic practices and beliefs that fight to erase the exotic part of her subjectivity, the Chinese in the Chinese Canadian equation. Like Ponette, Eve must deal with loss and use all the cognitive resources available to her to explain, in her own terms, the contradictory nature of Western Christian theology. Eve, for example, continuously posits reasonable questions that children find easy to ask but philosophers find hard to answer: why is it that Jesus' acts of magic can be called miracles, while the auspicious/lucky events in the life of a Chinese dad cannot? Finally, like Ana

and Ofelia, Eve finds refuge in a fantasy world rife with divine figures from different religious traditions. Yet, unlike the Spanish girls, Eve does so not because of the absence of her parents, but probably because they are too present.

Frank and May Lynn's "ethnic" point of view influences in (un)suspected ways that of their daughter Eve, but not precisely because they practice what we popularly call helicopter parenting. Their unavoidable presence is related to one of the main concepts in Chinese traditional thinking: filiality. A hegemonic force that operates almost as a version of personhood, filiality is the dominant principle that ties a Chinese family together. Composed of the characters *lao* (old, aged, experienced), and *zi* (offspring, child, seed), the word *filiality* (*xiao*) denotes a relationship between a child and their parents, and all the moral codes on which that connection relies. Under the principles that rule filial relationships, parents should nurture their offspring. Sons and daughters, for their part, must comply with their parents' wishes, take care of them in their old age, and have children of their own (preferably boys) to keep the family line going. This cycle repeats with each generation. Because of the ineradicable tendency of filiality to construct Chinese sons and daughters almost as extensions of their parents, the question of why Eve's point of view relies so much on those of her parents could have been already answered: Eve's point of view functions like a mirror of her filial persona, and thus it is an "extension" of those of her parents. However, we can also propse a second, and more allegorical, explanation that aligns with how the child-like point of view in films such as *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth* use fantasy to reflect on trauma, memory, and healing. Of course, in contexts in which fantasy has been relegated to the corners of the surreal, the fantastic experience of the child is forcefully a type of escapism that imitates the broken hopes of a traumatized nation. Yet, *Eve and the Fire Horse* presents us with a different take on child-like fantasy and its uses. In a

multicultural context such as that of Canada, Eve's visions (Christian, Daoist, and Buddhist) are allegorical representations of the clash between cultures of belief and a way to express the inner conflict of a bicultural child who is torn between the filial world of her parents and the more individualistic take that multicultural Canada offers. These visions also determine Eve's perspectives on Canadian society, her access to certain spaces, and her mobility within her community.

Although it is problematic, the influence that filiality exerts on Eve is not completely negative, for it is through the close relationship she has with her parents and their culture of origin that Eve understands the world in terms others cannot, her capacity to see beyond. The phrase "see beyond" comes from Toni Morrison's understanding of memory, ghosts, and alertness: "I think of ghosts and haunting as just being alert. If you're really alert, then you see the life that exists beyond the life that is on top" (qtd. in Greenidge, "I Believe in Ghosts"). In this sense, the ghost of filiality and Chinese tradition "haunts" Eve's point of view, keeping her alert of what "exists beyond": other ways of looking at the world that may not align with local points of view. Eve's active perspective is bonded by tradition and opposes the colonial dismissal, for the sake of acceptance, in which the other young Engs engage. Eve, therefore, can see beyond and differently, both literally and metaphorically. She sees ghosts, gods, and fairies, and she recognizes unfairness and biased practices. She imagines and finds solace in fantasy, and by doing so, she learns how to know. In other words, Eve can do more than just see apparitions and deities; she curiously examines and judges the unfair events she witnesses.

A pivotal scene from the opening sequence may help us better understand Eve's ability to see beyond. When Eve's mother is chopping down the family apple tree, her voiceover tells us that no one can explain the kind of evil spirit that made her mother grab the ax. As if suggesting

the source of the "evil eye," according to Eve, the camera immediately focuses on the point of view of Eve's white Canadian neighbor (Sally's family member), who has been watching May Lynn (Eve's mom) all this time. It is no accident that the camera work accompanies Eve's narration. For most of the movie, the camera lens functions as Eve's own eyes; through it, we can experience the world precisely as Eve does. Very much in her necessarily child-like and imaginative lyrical style, she then offers a judgment of her neighbor's disapproving gaze: she regards him as an evil spirit who probably made her mom grab the ax and chop the tree. In a more allegorical sense, though, we can see her description as a kind of (always child-like) consciousness that confronts Canadian and Chinese ways of seeing.

In a similar vein, Eve discerns the preferential treatment that the members of unprivileged groups receive. She questions the reasons behind the bullying that Sally, her classmate from an impoverished background, is subjected to, despite being a white Canadian. She also questions her catechism teacher when the latter asks her to refrain from labeling her father's auspicious experiences as miracles comparable to those that Jesus performed. These ethically sedentary perspectives privilege local normative epistemologies that function as cultural and psychological regimes of mobility restricting the free and full expression of Eve's citizenship.

Mobility as related to citizenship enters the picture through another path in Federico Hidalgo's *A Silent Love*, which also evokes the notion of domesticity. Indeed, the film struggles to imagine mobility, citizenship, and domesticity in positive or even stable terms. The protagonists' forms of movement and domestic lives are anything but stable. Now married to her Canadian husband, the Mexican mail-order bride Gladys moves to Montreal. Throughout the film, Gladys finds herself trying to adapt to life in a place that seems more hostile than welcoming. In this context, Gladys does not only experience a physical dislocation, but also a

psychological and emotional one. She is then forced to be hyperaware of her surroundings all the time. For instance, in what turns out to be a balcony in Norman's house, a puzzling scene opens with a static camera in a medium shot that reveals a couple of now-familiar characters to the audience: Gladys and her mother, Fernanda. The camera focuses briefly on a photo of Norman and his friend Andre, that Fernanda is inspecting. When the camera returns to the balcony, we see Gladys exploring the street through a monocular that serves, one could say, as a visual metaphor of Gladys' anthropological perspective: one interested in examining and deciphering the culture around her. After a few seconds, the camera shares with the audience Gladys' perspective. A square with a blurred inverted image of Norman carrying an exotic plant is shown, and we hear Gladys say: "Norman, talk to me. Tell me all your thoughts, even if I don't understand."

Figure 5. Gladys uses the monocular in A Silent Love

Figure 6. Gladys sees Norman through the monocular in A Silent Love

The scene takes place at a crucial moment in the film. Gladys and her mother, Fernanda, have just arrived in Montreal from Mexico City, and they are starting to adapt to their life as new landed immigrants in Canada. Gladys, Fernanda, and Norman are getting to know each other as a new family, and the lack of smooth communication, mainly due to the language barrier, does little to facilitate the process. Enunciated through imperative and negative sentences, speech, and cognitive related and affective vocabulary ("talk to me," "tell me all your thoughts"), Gladys'

demand is related to this last point. *A Silent Love*, as its evocative title suggests, exploits speech and verbal expression to construct Gladys' point of view.

Gladys' perspective, that of a migrant willing to talk and obsessed with language, is inextricably linked with the notion of silence. The presence of silence and almost complete absence of speech in *A Silent Love* has a significant effect on the interpretation of the migrant experience. The relationship between silence and utterance, between both and communication, between communication and mobility, is enormously complex. The film features some silences that communicate as much as the spoken word, and other silences that mystify and confuse, since language does not always communicate. The importance of silence in *A Silent Love* may be unclear and perhaps a bit hermetic and absurd. In Gladys, we perceive the impossibility of communicating, despite her best intentions. To save her marriage, Gladys must try to obsessively communicate with Noman. For her, it is clear, without verbal communication, love cannot flourish.

In the scene of the balcony, a trace of irony comes through in Gladys' inflexible attitude toward language, love, and communication. She pleads for Norman's words, even if indecipherable, in the name of love. What Gladys' request alludes to is not that an almost perfect, unbroken enunciation of language is essential to decode meaning and communicate, but that a language for intimacy can be crafted and articulated through other-than-standard means.

This controversy between a standardized version of language and a more intimate one is explored in Amy Tan's essay "Mother Tongue," well known for its statements about the power of language, Englishness, and migrants. The narrator confronts the reader's linguistic prejudice by declaring that there are multiple kinds of English we have grown accustomed to describing, "for lack of a better term," through negative terms such as "broken," "simple," "limited,"

"imperfect," and suggests that this act of negative description, imposed on language competency, affects migrant bodies in unsuspected but dramatic ways. The first thing to be questioned, when judged through the lens of language competency, is a migrant's cognitive ability. Expressing elaborate thoughts with flawless grammar becomes synonymous with refinement, a certain degree of sameness, and the willingness or vocation of the migrant to show his/her appreciation for the receiving society. The opposite is also true: inaccurate grammar and the expression of thoughts through more straightforward vocabulary account for the inability and even the indisposition of migrants to adapt to their new cultural context. In such a space of restrictive belonging, migrants are deemed undeserving or lacking respect, undeserving quasi-members of the community, and lacking humanity, especially if they are to participate in the public sphere. In private, though, they are allowed to create their own language of intimacy, which can be as inaccurate and "illogical" as needed.

While linking second language competency with cognitive ability, or full membership in the receiving community and humanity may seem a bit exclusionary, in the West the idea of proper linguistic expression as related to reason is a relatively common form of aesthetic and political preservation of an imagined community. The Greeks, for instance, identified foreigners as those who produced unintelligible noises such as *bar, bar, bar*, and named them *barbar*ians. Euripides mocked these attitudes by subverting the expectations of his Athenian audience and turning a barbarian, Medea, into an acute thinker capable of crafting the most sophisticated arguments in Greek. Public life in the Athenian polis was dominated by speech, and this ideal has survived Western modern definitions of responsible citizenship and participatory democracy, under the understanding that language is critical for public debate, discussion, and decision-making processes. In the Western tradition, language has long been viewed as something more

than simply a means of communication, and is inextricably intertwined with notions of race and culture.

As the narrator of "Mother Tongue" implies, the language of intimacy has a particular essence, which, in the case of Norman and Gladys, could neither be a Spanish nor an English structure, but a unique register that relies on mutual affective and alternative verbal understanding. Indeed, in the film, language use makes claims about both the citizen's and the migrant's relationship to standard Canadian English, and thus to community belonging. As an outsider, Gladys produces a nonstandard version of English that becomes a formative factor in her own self-perception as a migrant. Gladys is not Canadian, does not sound Canadian, and does not speak as anglophone Canadians do.

Norman's silence, on the other hand, complicates things by adding an element of surprise to the film's narrative. The kind of communication the seemingly quiet, foolish, patient (as other characters call him), white, university professor of film, and full Canadian citizen expects to have with his brown, unemployed, obstinate, and much younger Mexican wife is other than verbal. The interaction between Gladys and Norman begins with hand-written letters in English and Spanish where they declare their love. The first time they meet, they communicate with the help of an unethical and judgmental translator that forces them to rely on body language to better understand each other. In the beginning, all was silence between Gladys and Norman, until it was not. While Gladys is always eager to start a verbal exchange and express her feelings as best she can, in Spanish or Spanglish, Norman is more reluctant to do so. This, however, does not denote an unwillingness to try, and that is what a pivotal language learning scene seems to suggest.

The scene's camera rests on a puzzling composition. A medium shot of Norman listening to a Spanish lesson opens the scene. He is wearing headphones and stares into space while

religiously repeating the contents of the recording: "¿A qué hora termina tu clase? (What time does your class end?)" The camera abruptly cuts to bring Gladys into the scene. She is cleaning the house and listening to an English lesson: "Negative expressions." Norman is now part of the background as he occupies the lower right corner of the frame. The spectator can actively participate in Norman's and Gladys' activities, as she distinguishes what they are saying until their voices start to overlap. The words of both characters become unintelligible. After this brief interference, Norman and Gladys continue their memorization drills: "Who wants to have a coffee with me? ¿Quién quiere tomar un café conmigo? "Terrible." "Cuál camisa te gusta más. (Which shirt do you like better?)" "¿Cómo se llama tu perro? (What's your dog's name). "Neutral expressions." "¿Qué color son tus *osos* (ojos)? (What color are your *bears* (eyes)?)" "Dónde está el camino? (Where is the path?)" The shot ends with the camera following Gladys' movements and stopping to make a revelation: Gladys has found the photo of Norman's Canadian ex-girlfriend and gives him a cautionary look.

The result is a piece of heavy-handed symbolism. The action of learning each other's language speaks of the characters' willingness to establish an intercultural conversation, no matter how unachievable or challenging the task may seem. Yet, the frame and *mise-en-scène* suggest something different. Their position in the frame, with Gladys at the forefront and Norman in the back, almost as part of the background, could refer to the type of relationship that the characters have. Gladys is in the center of the action and, as seen repeatedly in the film, she *talks* and takes the initiative to create an intimate language of love. Norman, for his part, prefers silence. The distance between the characters in the frame seems to also highlight the emotional distance and lack of understanding growing between the two. The idea of an emotional gap is reinforced through the elements of the *mise-en-scène* and narrative. Even though they are in each

other's presence, Gladys and Norman are, in fact, portrayed and constructed as isolated individuals. Both are wearing headphones, which means they cannot listen to what the other is saying. They are completely immersed in their own language learning experience. At some point, their voices in Spanish and English overlap and a multiplicity of Spanish and English sentences, which do not follow the logic of traditional conversation, are pronounced one after the other, signaling on the one hand that miscommunication is what governs their affective interaction, and on the other that the crafting of an effective, communicative, intimate language is impossible. Apart from speech, the logic of this impossibility of communication also unfolds in a variety of character perspectives that clash against one another.

III. Clashing Perspectives

One of the most remarkable organizational features of *Eve and the Fire Horse* is its sophisticated visual and narrative structuring patterns. Though numerous scenes could be cited as examples, I will touch upon several qualities of the sequences most meaningful to the concept of the (post)colonial mindset, expressed throughout the film through parallelism and juxtaposition. (Post)colonial mindset here refers to a group of practices that become axiomatic and are distinguished by their own cultural and interpretive codes.

In terms of doxastic attitudes, epistemological approaches and interpersonal relations, Eve's personality and understanding of the world contrasts sharply with and, at the same time, complements those of her sister Karena, who ends up playing the role of Eve's other half, doppelganger, double, or alter ego. The literary and cinematic history of the mobius-strip-like relation between the doppelganger and its ego is lengthy and complex. It would certainly be futile to try to delineate it here; suffice it to say that the alter ego refers to a "notion of the subject that is defective, disjunct, split, threatening, and spectral. With the rise of psychoanalysis, such

epithets are taken to indicate a tendency toward a sense of failure or loss in the self" (Vardoulakis 100).

The same parallelistic intention can be found at the heart of the Eng sisters' relationship which, although less twisted than the aforementioned examples, is still undeniably thorny. Stephenson Humphries-Brooks analyzes the Eng sisters' interactions from a *Western* Religious Studies point of view by suggesting that the relationship of Eve and Karena mimics that of Eve and the serpent in the book of *Genesis*. Eve and Karena continuously engage in dialectical disputes, where Karena assumes the role of theological interlocutor and apologist for Christianity. According to Humphries-Brooks, Eve, as her name indicates, is the greatest sinner in the film and, at the same time, a kind of illuminated prophet or visionary mystic (798, 799). Under this lens of analysis, the family tree symbolizes the *tree of knowledge* and, for Eve's migrant family, Christianity becomes a threatening belief that needs to be interpreted in new ways in order to be fully grasped.

While this understanding of the film and the Eng sisters' relationship is thought-provoking, it underestimates the role of culturally Chinese symbols and the specific characteristics of Chinese thinking and spirituality. As Lizhu Fan and James D. Whitehead point out, "historically, Chinese religiousness has drawn upon plural sources of spiritual nourishment […] For centuries the common ritual activities of China's peoples have existed symbiotically with more formalized traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism" (Fan 55). This is precisely the symbiotic and eclectic religious interaction in *Eve and the Fire Horse*. Therefore, it is not so much that Christianity threatens the Engs as it offers them an opportunity to accumulate auspiciousness. As Eve's mom herself remarks when she learns that her daughters want to embrace a new faith: if having one god in the household is good, having four is even better. The

reinterpretation of the Christian precepts, then, owes more to the hybrid and adaptive nature of Chinese migrants' mindset than to their "necessity" of fully adopting said Christian precepts. The same can be said about the Eng sisters' relationship. They share a connection, undoubtedly, but somewhat different than the one proposed by Humphries-Brooks.

Here I argue that we can better understand the ego-alter/ego connection between Eve and Karena regarding the postcolonial conflict between mimicry and cultural hybridity. Mimicry, in a colonial and postcolonial context, refers to members of a colonized collective imitating norms, beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours that the dominant colonizer culture establishes as normative. In contrast, broadly understood hybridity is any mixing that finds a balance between the cultural attributes of the colonizer and those of the colonized. In Homi Bhabha's terms, the concept may serve as a subversive tool through which the colonized challenges the dominance of the colonizer (qtd. in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 140, 141).

Postcolonial hybridity and mimicry can be used to describe how migrant and dominant local cultures tend to interact. Dominant cultures pressure migrant cultures to assimilate to the local norms. At the same time, migrant cultures may react to such demands in one of two ways: by embracing the cultural norms of the majoritarian culture and rejecting the ones from their own culture of origin or by creating modes of adaptation that reconcile the cultural norms of the dominant culture and the migrant one. This conflict underlies the Eng sisters' relationship too. Karena represents the attitudes and behaviours of migrants that engage in mimicry practices. She, for example, rejects Chinese spiritual practices (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism) for being associated, according to her, with sin, as they encourage the cult of deities or ancestral figures other than the Christian god. The scene of the ancestral altar sheds light upon this point.

The scene starts with a medium shot of the family red altar. The slow camera motion forces the audience to appreciate the many details and objects on the altar: the portrait of the deceased grandpa and grandma, Eng family' ancestors; the character *an* 安 (peace) carved in gold on one of the sides of the left altar's frame; two apples---*ping guo* 苹果 homophone of *ping an* 平安 "peace"--- denoting the auspicious intention of attracting peace to the household; a bowl with incense sticks and the characters *zhaocai jinbao* 招財進寶 (to provoke, money, to enter, treasure=ushering in wealth and prosperity); and two small red cups. The camera suddenly loses focus of the altar to draw the viewer's attention to Eve's father's ritual movements. A few seconds later, the camera pans to the right to concentrate on the Eng sisters walking toward the altar to pay Grandpa and Grandma their respects. Eve *filially* imitates the ritual movements of her father, while Karena adamantly refuses to do so, under the premise that such practice contradicts the Bible's teachings. All her parents' efforts prove fruitless. Things rapidly escalate when family conflict erupts and the *an* (peace), promoted by the symbols in the altar, is shattered. Frank and May Lynn decide to give Karena an exemplary punishment. At the end of the scene, we see a medium shot of Karena kneeling in the middle of the living room, praying to Jesus and crying.

During this brief but effectively strenuous and rebellious event, every aspect of Confucian order and authority Karena knows and relies on (family, cultural tradition, and traditional beliefs) is shaken. Such infringement of Confucian moral codes, however, is turned on its head in a suitably ironic way. When Karena refuses to perform the expected rituals to honour her ancestors, grandma and grandpa, she commits an unfilial act. While the Confucian tradition does not have a notion of sin, like Christianity, it does recognize wrongful conduct. Improper unfilial behaviors go against the mandate of Heaven, and they can drain auspiciousness from the

household. The degree to which unfilial conduct can affect a household is not exclusively metaphysical. It also has psychological and sociocultural repercussions. By refusing to honor her ancestor and perform the appropriate rituals, Karena is severing the filial ties that make her an extension of her parents. In other words, she starts to embrace a form of thinking (opposed to the Chinese correlative epistemology) that is typical of Western modernity: individualism. Understood from a postcolonial perspective, this corresponds to having her mindset colonized by the mainstream religious ideology of Canadian culture in the film: Christianity. It is then no wonder that Karena's epistemological rebelliousness is met with a corrective punishment and that the penalty is antagonized through a paradoxical reaction.

Along the lines of distorted Christian martyrdom rhetoric, Karena *mimicrily* decides to "be a witness to God's truth" by defying the authority of the Confucian family as an institution (as a martyr, what in early Christianity would do with the State) and being willing to endure any punishment for her faith. Here precisely lies the irony. When she kneels in the middle of the living room and prays to Jesus on the cross, a long shot evinces that Jesus is not the only image she is kneeling before. There are some recognizable figurines of Buddha and Daoist deities on the shelf where her mom keeps the cross. Karena, blinded by the colonizer power of her faith, fails to see that, even when she insists on worshiping only one god, unconsciously or unintentionally she is still "honoring" all the deities that appear alongside crucified Jesus. The ironic shot seems to suggest that there is a part of Chinese culture and tradition that, no matter how hard she tries, Karena will never evade.

By contrast, Eve, regardless of her name, rather than recur to mimicry, makes the most of hybridity as a migrant. She, for instance, is open not only to expressing cultural belonging but also to defending traditional epistemologies and assimilating new ones. There are multiple

examples of this throughout the film, but I will analyze the most representative in this section. The context for one of the critical articulations of Eve's hybridity takes place in the Eng household's living room. For an unknown reason, Eve wakes up at night and goes downstairs. When she inspects the "improvised" altar shared by Jesus, Buddha, and all the other Daoist deities, she realizes that two figurines are missing. Jesus and Buddha are nowhere to be found. Suddenly, a medium shot shows Eve smiling at something. When the camera cuts off, the spectator can finally see the source of Eve's joy: Jesus and Buddha are dancing together in the living room and invite Eve to participate in their dance. At the end of the scene, the viewer sees how Eve "embraces" them both and waltzes with them to the compass of a sweet melody.

Whether the supernatural encounters of Eve with deities and ghosts are the product of a mystical ability, as Humphries-Brooks suggests, or the result of her vivid imagination is an issue that remains open to contestation, one of the delightful uncertainties of the film. However, what underlies them from a postcolonial point of view is the creative expression of a hybrid migrant epistemology: one that, in the case of Eve, has successfully integrated spiritual beliefs from the receiving and the migrant cultures. The embrace shared by Jesus, Buddha, and Eve, for instance, seems to be alluding to the inner world of Eve as a bicultural kid, a world where all kinds of spirituality have a place, can peacefully coexist, and where no belief takes precedence over the other. How Jesus and Buddha engage in a pair dance also supports this interpretation.

According to Tim Cresswell, dance is a form of cultural knowledge and a politicized type of embodied mobility. This is to say, and it is mediated through a network of social relations and power (*On the Move* 123). In many ballroom dances, for example, as in other types of partner dances, the music and the behaviours are essentially gendered. Some salsa musicians use discursive descriptors such as "masculine" or "feminine" to describe tight or fluent

performances. Meanwhile, in some dance genres, such as salsa, tango or waltz, there are distinctive gendered roles: male (leading) and female (following). Remarkably, this gendered interaction is eliminated in *Eve and the Fire Horse*'s dance shot. Jesus and Buddha both take what would normally be the feminine role. They perform a close hold where Buddha's left forearm goes to Jesus' forearm and their opposite arms rest on each other's shoulder blades. The "feminization" of the iconic religious figures indicates that, in Eve's hybrid world, there is no place for cultural power struggles but for mixing and accommodation.

The scene clearly delineates the nature of Eve's connection to her parents' culture and the adherence to the cultural norms of her receiving community. The elements from what has been termed mimicry and hybridity intrude upon each other in a manner that suggests that migrant consciousness, especially second-generation migrants', is about doubleness. The artifacts displayed in the analyzed scenes reflect the tragedy of migrant families with no option but to witness the by-product of their kids' integration into a new cultural context: the continuous struggle to regain emotions and symbols locked inside the migrant language and culture. And the always partial, at least in terms of acceptance by the local culture, Westernization. These processes are key in the migrant's experience unfolding. They directly influence how migrants belong and are made to express or be silent about that sense of belonging.

The expression and suppression of that sense of belonging is also explored in *A Silent Love* through the notion of the gaze. When the journalist Bruno Cornellier, in an interview, asked the director Federico Hidalgo about his treatment of notions such as "otherness" and the gaze in *A Silent Love,* the director answered that he had a clear intention: he wanted to give migrants, Fernanda and Gladys, an anthropological gaze through which they explored and understand their new surroundings. "They are very involved in their research – one of them is even married to her

research! If you accept this idea, I guess this approach reverses what many people are used to, which is that the privileged reflexive view is usually the Northern view of the South," he said (qtd. In Cornellier 9). Here Hidalgo's notion of the gaze tells us that looking is not pure and innocent but rather an interpretive task. The migrant's perspectives are socially and culturally framed. What Gladys and Fernanda perceive is filtered through the mediation of their race, age, ideas and even desires. Thus, as a socially and culturally mediated reality, gazing becomes a performance that orders and not just perceives the world (Urry and Larsson 5). A scene that Hidalgo cites as an example of this act is the following:

> There is a moment where Gladys is very jealous, but at the same time embarrassed of being jealous. Then Norman tells her that she should not be so childish. At that very moment, behind him, is this bookshelf with books all over the place. Behind her are all these Mexican and African masks. This composition is kind of split down in the middle and she is located as a kind of exotic object, and he is located as a sort of confused rational spirit. These things and objects within the frame were not planned out this specifically. They were in the character's apartment. But they ended up in this composition (10).

Federico Hidalgo suggests that Gladys' and Norman's relationship is based on a mutual act of exoticization or the tension between gazes that look at each other as an "other." While my intention is not to privilege Hidalgo's interpretation above any other reading, his understanding of the film is a good starting point to explore the notion of the gaze in its connection to exoticization. I want to show that, although there are multiple instances throughout the film of Norman's exoticizing tendencies, Gladys's participation in the act of exoticization is not that clear. What is more, several theoretical considerations and formal elements seem to contradict Hidalgo's and his interviewer's, Bruno Cornellier, explanation of the scene.

I want to start my discussion, then, by exploring the *mise- en - scène* and its connection to Annette Indorf's "eyedentity." The *mise-en-scène*, we know, is one of how a film can regulate narrative information. Although, in some cases, it is used to create dramatic interest, the context

in which this scene and its visual elements stand potentially gives Hidalgo's decisions broader significance and makes further discriminations available for the audience. In other words, we can make certain assumptions about the characters and their eyedentity from the objects in the *mise-en-scène*.

"Eyedentity" refers to how the camera mimics how a character sees and interprets the world, and the elements of the mise-en-scène further this effort. A key sentence in Federico Hidalgo's description of the scene is based on the objects hanging on the wall of Norman's apartment, the Mexican and African masks and a bookshelf that happens to be *unintentionally* in the background. I emphasize the word *unintentionally* because it is hard to see "unintentionality" at work in this scene or the film in general. While the director probably meant that he did not intentionally include exotic objects and objects of knowledge to comment on Gladys' exoticism and Norman's epistemic authority, as part of the *mise-en-scène*, the objects do tell us something about the place we see, and the character with which we associate these elements. Not fortuitously, in 1980 the American philosopher and psychologist, William James, had already advanced the theory that "a man's self is the sum total of all that he can call his" (Chapter 10). And his idea holds as relevant today as it did back then. The things we possess embody who we are. From a Marxist perspective, things also describe our economic capital and societal place. The things Norman owns, then, *unintentionally* reveal essential details about his point of view, in this case through visual elements that account for what the film critic Douglas Pye has named "rhetoric performance" ---disclosure of narrative information and details about the interior life of a character.

Considering all of this, I argue that Norman's performance relies on silence and exoticization. I have briefly analyzed the notion of silence as connected to love in the previous

section, and I shall return to its function as a defamiliarizing narrative element in the last section. Here, however, I instead focus on the second notion, the exotic, and its relation to the gaze (Norman's and that of the audience).

When we take a look at Norman's apartment and its objects, we participate in the film text from his inner world and anticipate specific details about his character and life circumstances: that he has economic and cultural capital, that he loves silent film, that he lives alone, that he has no order in his life, and that he has a distorted view of what it means to be Mexican. These last two points are a cornerstone on which the film narrative relies. Norman looks for a wife for companionship and to bring order to his life. But his image of an operating marriage relies on racialized expectations rather than reality. From all the potential matches, he chooses Gladys, a "traditional" woman whose purpose, according to her online profile description, is to make "a happy home for a happy husband." From Norman's perspective, Gladys' cultural background and traditional mores make her the ideal candidate and mean to achieve domestic happiness. To this idealized image of the traditional, domestic woman from the Global South, are Norman's preconceptions about Mexicanness. A good entry point to his distorted notion of what it means to be Mexican is the exotic masks of devils hanging on the wall and the exotic plant he buys Fernanda so she feels more at "home." Apart from these objects are the portraits of several silent film stars hung on the wall, among which is the image of Dolores del Río during her time as a silent film actress. The decision to include the portrait of the iconic Mexican diva as part of the *mise-en-scène* is provocative in more than one way.

Historically, the presence of Dolores del Río brings us back to a complicated period of trenchant racial ideologies, where stereotyping was the rule rather than the exception, especially in Hollywood. In this less-than-ideal environment, the Mexican actress broke into the American

film industry and became the first Latin American crossover actress to gain stardom status. She was also one of the few silent film actresses to survive the transition to sound film in the 1930s. Despite her success and talent, Dolores' opportunities were limited by ethnic and racial profiling that came with the advent of the talkies. Soon "her roles became less and less significant, and she became much more identified with Latin American and/or Mexican characters." The iconic aristocratic-like but sensual and sultry beauty of Del Río subsided to the new type of tempting but harmless Latin American woman, represented by the tropical Carmen Miranda (Lopez "The Height and Fall"). As Abbey White points out in her piece about the actress, Del Rio could not escape the tyrannies of the epoch and was forced to come to terms with the misplaced laudation of the press, which had no eyes but for her physical attributes ("Dolores del Rio").

In 1933, "the alluring Miss Del Río, with her bright eyes, pretty lips and lithe figure" (qtd. in White "Dolores del Rio"), unanimously won the title of the "most perfect feminine figure in Hollywood" (qtd. in White "Dolores del Rio"), surpassing white stars such as Irene Dunne or Fay Wray. Something about her natural and alien beauty captivated American audiences and may have prevented her from reaching the legendary status of *white* migrant divas like Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich. The seemingly contradictory characteristics of Dolores del Río's natural but exotic beauty preserved her status in Hollywood and landed her roles that satisfied American expectations of Mexican femininity and nurtured their ideas of Mexico as an exotic country. In her reading of *The Fugitive*, a film starring Del Río, the filmmaker and film critic Joanne Hershfield, sees her as a postcolonial figure that embodies Hollywood's imagination of Mexico as a feminized and colonized space. And she warns us that these postcolonial relations are not simply asymmetrical, for Mexico contributed to forge the American understanding of Mexicanness and Mexican womanhood (Hershfield 71).

Similarly, *A Silent Love* offers a trace of gendered postcolonial thinking that reminds of Del Río's complicated story in Hollywood. Although I would not go as far as to suggest that the film can be read as an expression of a geopolitical landscape where colonizers and colonized cultures interact, in Gladys and Norman, we see the relationship between love and gazing unfold. From Del Río's portrait on Norman's wall, I can propose several assumptions about Norman and Gladys. First, being Norman an expert on silent film and arguably interested in Mexico, he may have been familiar with the figure of Dolores del Río. Second, like the American audience of the times of the Mexican actress, he may have been influenced by Hollywood's exoticizing grand narratives and Mexican Golden Age Cinema's traditionalist versions of femininity that promoted the ideal of family unity, sexual permissibility, and the image of the *esposa y madre sufrida y abnegada* (enduring and self-abnegating wife and mother). For her part, Gladys even involuntarily inherited these same visions of Mexican womanhood. Like Dolores, she is a character expected to project certain gendered expectations that obey two patrons: Mexican and foreign constructions of the feminine.

One of the most important Mexican literary and feminist voices of the 20th century, the poet and writer Rosario Castellanos, in her poem *Jornada de la Solterona* (The spinster's day), captures the essence of what it means to be an accomplished woman in Mexican society, through the depiction of her opposite, the spinster:

> Da vergüenza estar sola. El día entero/arde un rubor terrible en su mejilla./(Pero la otra mejilla está eclipsada.)…/ De noche la soltera/se tiende sobre el lecho de agonía./Brota un sudor de angustia a humedecer las sábanas/y el vacío se puebla/de diálogos y hombres inventados…/ Asomada a un cristal opaco la soltera/-astro extinguido-pinta con un lápiz/ en sus labios la sangre que no tiene.
>
> It is shameful to be alone. All day long/ a terrible blush burns on her cheek / (But the other cheek is outshined.)…/ At night the spinster/ lies on the bed of agony./ Flows an angst's/ sweat that dampens the sheets/ and emptiness is populated/ with dialogues and invented men…/ Sticking out her head to an opaque crystal the spinster/ -extinguished

> star- draws with a pencil/ on her lips the blood that she does not have/ and smiles before a dawn with no one.

Through her use of enjambment and interruption, Castellanos' narrator attempts to pack into a few sentences of multiple significations the strenuous affective burden that traditional societal expectations put on the shoulders of an older unmarried woman. Multiple absences of punctuation marks encourage multiple readings. And multiple readings speak of multiple meanings. *Da vergüenza estar sola. El día entero/ arde un rubor terrible en su mejilla.* The line's messages hang on the relation between continuity and disconnection, favored by the careful disposition of the temporal modifier *El día entero*. If we decided to read the first line as a linguistic unit, where *el día entero* functions as a complement of the verb *estar,* the reading would speak about the insufferable duration of the state of being alone. But if we decided to go along with the enjambment and read *el día entero* as part of the next sentence, then the reading would rather highlight the length of a state of thoughtfulness or disordered contemplation represented by the endless blush on the spinster's cheek. What these intense affective images and meaning possibilities ultimately epitomize is the marginal position of women forced to live by the strict rule of the Mexican patriarchal code, which demands that women construct a life project in the function of others. If they defy and refuse to fulfill these expectations, they are charged with treason against their gender role. In her collection of essays *La mujer que sabe latin* (The Woman Who Knows Latin), Castellanos analyzes the types of imbalances, produced by prevailing asymmetrical gender relations, on which such expectations rely. Indebted to her reading of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, her project looks to demystify the national feminine symbols that have become the standard for Mexican womanhood: the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Malinche, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the self-abnegating mother, the whore, and the socially deviant scholar.

It is precisely these distorting types of conventional femininity through which we should analyze Gladys' positionality and animate the possibilities of her circumstances. Ironically as it may seem, the need to reconstruct her social mores and values arises from the word of others. "Is it true that you got fired? No, lots of teachers are grouchier than you," exclaims Gladys' elementary school ex-student. There is something affectively negative about Gladys, the unmarried girl that her cohabitants cannot finish to understand but associate with her status as a spinster. "Listen, honey. A house is a house, and a man is a man. But a woman is not a woman until she has both," says Fernanda's co-worker when she learns Gladys is reluctant to meet her Canadian suitor. For an aging woman like Gladys, implies another woman, there does not seem to be any other prospects or ways to construct a socially acceptable Mexican version of femininity but by getting married and having a domestic life. Gladys herself is comfortable with being a mail-order bride and marrying a Canadian older man if he proves to be an honest and ambitious husband.

Fundamental to the film and, therefore, to some extent influencing the audience's response to the film is that a clash is emphasized between two points of view or epistemological poles: the whole film is predicated on Gladys's idealization of marriage with a husband from the Global North (white, mature, educated, loving), and Norman's expectations about Gladys (young, pretty, traditional, understanding). Both Norman and Gladys, it seems, find primary reasons to marry, but whether this act of mutual idealization constitutes a symmetrical exoticizing intention, as Federico Hidalgo suggests, remains open to contestation. In sharp contrast with Dolores Del Río's compliance with gender expectations about herself, Gladys seems to, at least, try to break them. She is obstinate, she is neither servile nor sexually permissive, and because of that, her "stubborn" nature is constantly questioned by Norman. To

this, we should add the vulnerable status of Gladys as a mail-order bride, barely protected by immigration policies. Thus, while Gladys and Norman's gazes remain in constant dialogue, in the end, it is Norman's gaze which seems to be posited in a better epistemic and authoritative position that limits Glady's sense of belonging, at least until she manages to obtain her "unwilling" independence and integrates to a community of non-locals that accepts her for who she is.

V. Defamiliarizing Sight and Speech

One of the main features in *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* is their defamiliarization in those uncomfortable moments that help the audience gain a new perspective that helps them better understand Eve's and Gladys' circumstances. The way the films make the film world strange is through the senses, as they push the limits of sight and speech by exploiting the point of view of a woman in need of constant communication in a foreign country whose codes of communication she does not know how to navigate, and of a hyper imaginative kid who is trying to make sense of the world around her.

Indeed, Julia Kwan could have easily based most of her film *Eve and the Fire Horse* on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's sentence, "greatness depends on where you are coming from." The film uses mythological, religious, and ritual imagery to raise the audience's consciousness, and question rigid perceptions of race, migration, and alternative ways of seeing. Bizarre and funny explanations and visions of gods and goddesses, as well as bad omens, plague Eve's world and force the viewer to participate in the shift of epistemological viewpoint that occurs when a nine-year-old Chinese Canadian kid "lends" the audience her eyes to *see* things as she does. The Canadian multicultural world of adults looks familiar. Still, the exotic, "ethnically" ritualized explanations of daily life phenomena, filtered through a child's gaze, elicit unfamiliar reactions

from non-racialized citizens in the film world. As a result, when Eve's way of looking and knowing is questioned, she learns that her world is unfair and that her cultural background, religious beliefs, and family profoundly impact how others perceive her. The audience, for their part, participate in Eve's inner and outer world and, to a lesser extent, in that of her older sister, Karena. Through the girls' experiences and visions, viewers can also reflect on their prejudices and attitudes towards alternative systems of beliefs, which according to the film, share more commonalities with hegemonic religious discourses than anyone, inside and outside the film world, would like to admit.

That of course is not a ground-breaking storytelling strategy. As I pointed out in section IV, multiple examples of films use the child's gaze and their fantasy world to comment on different issues. In the case of *Eve and the Fire Horse,* the inclusion of images with religious and ritual relevance is a defamiliarization technique used to generate humour and deliver a message: things are not as simple as they may appear. We need to be alert and inquisitive to distinguish unfairness from fairness. Comedy, along with ritual and myth, as Julia Kwan argues, sometimes can be coping mechanisms: "when you grow up in the new world with Old World parents, things can look quite comical, and this adds a kind of hope to all the horrible things that happened to you as a kid; it's a way actually to survive and surpass the demons of childhood." But comedy has yet another function. It twists the ordinary to make it extraordinary and exploits the absurdity of the familiar to present it as unfamiliar.

The first (de)familiarized image of the film is the apple tree that I analyzed in section II. Above I described the apple tree at the film's beginning and then silence. This image, cloaked in veiled sacrality, introduces us to Eve's world. A medium shot of the apple tree fills the screen for a few seconds, just the exact time for us to contemplate it. The moment of retreat dissolves with

an abrupt interruption. In the background, we hear the voices of the Eng sisters, Eve and Karena, chanting. The camera anticipates our hopes and gives us a glimpse of what they are doing: the Eng sisters are seated by the tree, facing each other, and playing a hand-clapping game. Close-up shots alternate between Eve and Karena's faces, suggesting their relationship is predicated on unbreakable familial ties and contradictory understandings of the world. The Eng sisters are Janus-like, different halves of the same "migrant-way-of-seeing" whole. And the tree is a palpable metaphor for their sororal and epistemological connection. But not only that. The tree is also a defamiliarized metaphor for the difficulties hiding behind intercultural communication.

The apple tree is a familiar image from the perspective of a (Western) Christian audience, mainly because the film has instructed us to relate its image to the Biblical myth of Eve and the fall of humanity. It is not a coincidence that the protagonist's name happens to be Eve. Instead, it is a narrative marker that "manipulates" our assumptions. However, these assumptions are disrupted when Eve starts to speak: "God leaves an indelible mark in everyone…. He has gifted my father with crooked fingers that cannot grasp good luck." The phrase sounds simple, even naïve, but is poignant and playful. It clashes with the sacred tone imprinted by the images of Eve, the apple tree, and God. In the sacredness of the context, Eve's comment feels a bit off. It would probably seem less bizarre if instead of luck she had used the world miracle. God and miracles fit well together in a sentence. God and good luck not so much. Perhaps for the modern Western mind good luck sounds too superstitious to be associated with the idea of God. As if anticipating this reaction, the film explains the nature of the seemingly odd revelation. Eve is not your typical Eve. Eve is nine years old. She is the daughter of a couple of Chinese immigrants with a very particular idea of how the world works.

With a phrase that hooks the spectator: "the fire horse was believed to bring great misfortune to their family. I am a fire horse. If I imagine it, I can change my family, I just have to believe," the trailer of *Eve and the Fire Horse* gives some glimpses about the film world of Eve Eng and her migrant family. Although the expression is nowhere to be found in the film, it narratively summarizes and announces the kind of conflict to be fully developed in the film. The assertion is indeed astute, but not only for advertising purposes. When examined carefully, we realize that the affective and narrative effectiveness of the phrase rests on a few sturdy pillars. Aside from inauspiciousness and its objects, the most remarkable of these is Eve's culturally driven point of view. Then comes her eagerness to keep her culture alive but also to adjust to change, and to change the history of her migrant family, their unlucky destiny, then faith or the desire to accumulate auspiciousness by any means. In Eve's world, suggests the phrase, auspiciousness---and inauspiciousness by extension---are of the utmost importance. But why?

The concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are integral to Chinese culture and its "correlative" epistemology (Smith 32). Unlike its Greek and Western counterparts, Chinese see the universe as composed of interrelated parts. In other words, '"conceptions are not subsumed under one another but placed side by side in a pattern;" phenomena happen in a certain way "not necessarily because of prior actions or [the] impulsions of other things" but because they resonate with other entities and forces in a complex network of associations and correspondences.' Such associations are represented by the interaction between the opposing correlatives *yin* (feminine principle, moon, darkness) and *yang* (masculine principle, sun, light). These two opposite but complementary forces must remain in balance so that good fortune/auspiciousness occurs. The universe's interconnectedness extends to the social world by the shared ground between Heaven. This supreme transcendental power mandates/dictates the

destiny/*ming* of man, and man, who receives its mandate/destiny/*ming* from Heaven. Human beings should be active participants of this order and do whatever is in their power to preserve cosmic harmony. They can do so by performing a series of actions (Smith 8). Some may involve avoiding inauspicious dates for getting married or plates and phone numbers with bad connotations. The acquisition or use of objects or symbols to attract, generate, maintain, or extend specific culturally desirable outcomes or "worldly benefits" is also a common practice. Primary benefits are a male heir, longevity, abundance, wealth, peace, health, success, prosperity, or social/economic status. Such auspicious connotations are transferred to objects using symbolization and/or homophony (Bickford 128). An excellent example of this phenomenon is the apple tree.

Since ancient times, apples have been considered a symbol of peace and harmony in China. The pronunciation of "apple" in Chinese (*ping guo*) is the same as that of "peace" (*ping*). Similarly, crabapple blossoms (*hai tang*), the tree observed in the Eng family's garden, by homophonic association, symbolize the hall of a house (*tang*). Accordingly, having an apple blossom painting in the hall (*tang*) may attract wealth and honour to the owner's household (Eberhard 16).

Returning to the Engs' apple tree with these interconnections in mind sheds light upon the nature of the film's most dramatic and representative inauspicious act: the tree chopping. In the opening sequence, a medium shot shows Eve's mom chopping down the apple tree in the family garden. No apparent reason seems to be behind her decision. As she tells Eve later: she will never be able to explain the kind of evil spirit that made her grab the ax. The chopping of the tree is an ominous occurrence and according to the characters, it was, as contradictory as it may sound, an irrational act. First, as *nainai* tells Eve, chopping down a tree, according to a tradition

with a gendered separation of labour such as Confucianism, is a task for a man. When a woman, especially if she is pregnant, wrongfully oversteps her limits due to an imbalance in the proper order of things, inauspiciousness happens. Second, when the tree comes down the peace and prosperity of the household disappear, both in a metaphorical and, in Eve's universe, literal sense. "When you severed the tree, you severed the core," remarked the Chinese elder ladies in the community, echoing grandma's concern. Without the object of "radiating" auspiciousness and bringing stability to the family, inauspiciousness takes control over the Eng household's *ming,* and ominous things happen. The worst of all is Eve's grandma's death.

Here I would like to emphasize the critical role that Chinese epistemologies play in the narrative. *Eve and the Fire Horse* deals with the theme of intercultural communication between full citizens and racialized citizens. The religious images come from Chinese tradition, then affect the viewer in a new, unfamiliar way, for the primary purpose of defamiliarization is to alter the viewer's consciousness or prompt a new perception of old attitudes. The film cannot accurately reproduce the totality of Chinese Canadian identity. Still, it can represent the experience of a bicultural child who tries to participate in different systems of belief and her attempt to be accepted in communities struggling to find commonalities. Eve not only becomes a character worthy of empathy because of all the difficulties she faces and the trauma she deals with, but technically speaking, a subject of empathy because of the use of point-of-view shots, especially in scenes prone to misinterpretation.

Late in the film, a disheartened Eve sees how the Buddha and Jesus have fallen apart. Curious as she is, she tries to find out why. A Daoist fairy acts as a bone of contention. She explains to Eve that Jesus' entitlement has created a tense atmosphere in the house. Buddha, Jesus, and the Daoist fairy cannot cohabitate anymore. The figurines of Buddha, Jesus, and the

Daoist fairy dominate the composition of the first shot. The objective camera dollies and keeps us anchored by forcing us not to lose sight of the figurines. The familiar voices of Eve and the Daoist fairy and a childlike non-diegetic sound, like that of a music box, interrupt the focusing effort and symbolically anticipate that we will abandon the real world of the figurines to venture in the *mare magnum* of Eve's imagination. This is not the first time we have heard that sweet melody. Throughout the film, the tone functions as a fanfare announcing the arrival of distinguished visitors: fantastic visions and meticulous cultural references. If Matthew Bribitzer-Stull is correct when he proposes that repeated melodies assume thematic identities, the child-like, sweet melody of *Eve and the Fire Horse* may be one of them (Bribitzer-Stull 35). Eve then asks the Daoist fairy if her grandma is still in limbo. The fairy confirms Eve's fears and advises her to burn some paper money so her grandma can bargain with the devil.

In the next scene, the camera focuses on a Bible and then tilts up to show Eve's elder sister, Karena Eng's face. The voices of girls repeating Bible passages resound in the background. As if mocking biblical passages' tedious and unconscious ritualistic repetition, the camera pans to the left to reveal a series of well-differentiated girls reading or pretending to read their bibles. The pattern is repeated several times. We first see a distressed Sally (Eve's friend), then the judgmental look of the girl that serves as leader of the small gang of Catholic girls. Lastly, the camera reaches the end of the series, and a troubled Eve Eng appears. The seriality of the composition has an ironic tone. It ridicules the rituality of repetitive recitation. The fact that the girls' individual reactions and emotional states are overemphasized adds to the film's critique on heterogenization vs homogenization. There is a disconnection between the girls' diversity of behaviours and backgrounds and the uniformity of their recitations. The shot seems to criticize how Christianity tries to standardize difference to create an appearance of conviviality through

unconscious repetition. The camera then cuts to show the gang of Catholic girls, with a previously ostracized Sally as their new member, making fun of Eve Eng. Eve leaves the frame, and we see her again inside a chapel. An objective medium shot and a traditional Chinese non-diegetic musical pattern that mismatches the Catholic "vibes" of the chapel disclose Eve's intentions: she is about to do "something Chinese." We then see her in front of a wastepaper basket, gathering some papers. A long shot confirms our suspicions by giving us an even more objective view of the action and the *mise en scène*. There is a photo in front of the wastepaper basket. It is her grandma's. As the Chinese ritual demands, Eve is burning what she thinks is paper money. But she is discovered right before she can finish the ritual correctly and receives a reprimand for her improper behaviour.

The interest of this sequence extends beyond the narratological; it carries interpretive significance as well. It offers a commentary on the dangers of misinterpretation and the limits of uninformed "objectivity." We empathize with Eve's situation and understand why she started a fire because we have more knowledge than the inhabitants of the film world. Had the filmmakers decided to cut the scene of the fairy, we probably would have judged Eve as harshly as the Catholic girls' gang or the nun that reprimanded her. They do not know better, and they do not seem to be preoccupied with doing so. For them, Eve Eng is a bit exotic. Her oddity is there for everyone else to enjoy until they do not. While compassionate, the nuns in charge of her evangelization distrust her cultural upbringing. They ardently guard at least two of the ten commandments ("You shall have no other Gods before me" and "You shall make no idols"). For their colonial gaze, Eve holds beliefs that must be contested, expiated, and eradicated. The irony is that our point of view, under other circumstances, may not be that different. What this sequence ultimately suggests is that we need to make a constant effort to understand Eve's world

on her terms. This is to say; we require to have a point of view as inquisitive as Eve's to disrupt biases, frustrate stereotyping expectations, and reanimate racialized histories. Put another way, we are invited to distinguish between Jesuses, Buddhas, Confuciuses, fairies, and ghosts, and learn that they are culturally contingent, unique expressions of Eve Eng's spirituality. While belief and sight play a vital role in *Eve and the Fire Horse*, silence is a key notion in *A Silent Love*. When Norman and Gladys were planning their housewarming dinner with students and friends, they expected to have a fun and uneventful night. Instead, they found themselves amid controversy, having uneasy conversations, and realizing uncomfortable truths. It is in this atmosphere that the following exchange takes place:

> M: How among the thousands of available women from Mexico and other third world countries did you come to choose Gladys?
> Norman: She is very beautiful, intelligent, and very pleasant to be with. Siento mucho gusto con ella.
> M: Yes, but that must describe hundreds of women that are just waiting for their first world prince to click on their webpage. How did you decide on Gladys?
> N: We corresponded for a year. […]
> M: It's just that I know that there are a lot of men out there who are hunting for wives in poor countries and they don't really care who they get as long as the woman is reasonably attractive and totally servile.
> N: Well, that may be true, but it is not my case. […]
> M: Well, still, you have to admit that this system of wife-buying is pretty colonial.
> G: Hey! Norman didn't buy me.
> M: Oh, of course, I'm not talking about you and Norman, Gladys, but let's not pretend to be ignorant about the way the world really works.
> G: Molly, ignorant?
> N: We don't have to defend ourselves, Gladys, it's just a conversation.

The awkwardness of the conversation is given visual emphasis. Molly's incisive observations are framed in a medium shot as she sits exactly before the portrait of three men: an invisible figure, and what seems to be the actor Rod La Rocque, and the actor/director Erich von Stroheim---an appropriate backdrop for a commentary on silence and love.

Here we have the type of characteristic ironic aesthetics which recurs throughout *A Silent Love*. In this instance, Noman's relation to speech and love has been questioned. Deflected from

his customary position as an individual who keeps to himself and avoids verbal confrontation, he finds himself at the center of controversy. He is forced to speak and justify his marriage to Gladys and the authenticity of their feelings. For the first time in the film, Norman *speaks* about his relationship with Gladys and how he sees her. However, the question arises here is whether Norman is a reliable character/onlooker. As the film will show a couple of scenes later, that night, he realizes that he loves Fernanda and not Gladys. Reliability, then, becomes a crucial concept for a film whose formal strategies and main concerns are constructed around the silence and chattiness of its characters. From this moment on, the audience will be forced to posit difficult questions themselves: does Norman happen to be a reserved person, or has his silence been concealing something else? And if this is the case, what are we to make of Gladys' compulsion to talk?

These debates are hinted at in the title of the film. Ironically and whimsical, this feature film is, first and foremost, a film of unfulfilled desires. *A Silent Love* somewhat unexpectedly hints that its narrative was designed to break expectations for both the audience and the characters that are part of its fictional world. *A Silent Love* is one of the most puzzling phrases or images the viewer is confronted with right from the start. There are numerous reasons why love can be silent—first, the formal ones.

Silence and love, like death, are timeless literary and filmic tropes. Sometimes, they are used in conjunction to express sacred devotion---a vow of sublime awareness---. At other times, they are combined to express pain and suffering. They have a long representational history. Poets have used the interaction of silence and love to move between the domains of the speakable and the ineffable. Filmmakers have connected the concepts to the unwillingness or the inability to communicate. Mythology and ritual have shrouded the pair in mystery. The thematic and formal

combination of these two words is not new, but precisely its antiquity gives it the recyclable quality of the palimpsest.

A Silent Love exploits this quality by assigning diverse and complex meanings to the story of a mail-order Mexican bride that decides to marry a Canadian professor. These meanings become apparent in the title of the film. In *A Silent Love*, silence qualifies love. Through that qualification, it calls into question the expressive capacity of language, which in contrast to the intensity of a feeling and the effectivity of speech, takes a more modest and less emphatic stand. Love, as a noun, would be subject to a definition, but, as intensity, it is irreducible to language. Paradoxically, as it may seem, silent love also describes an (in)capacity: the willful decision to banish speech or remain quiet. Such determination tightly bonds love and silence with secrecy through concealments and signals meticulously codified and registered by the body.

Another quality of the palimpsest "silent love" is precisely embodiment. By this I mean the discursive potential of the expression to evoke different kinds of bodies: national bodies, gendered bodies, and bodies of citizenship, both accomplished and impaired. In her work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed reflects on these entanglements. The discussion about love is of particular interest to this study. It reads in part: "a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, which takes shape as an effect of such bonding" (124). In other words, the nation is nothing but an object stemming from a communal emotion of love and resulting in the fear that such an ideal object may be taken away by others. The same logic applies to multicultural national discourses built on openness and acceptance. The idea of an all loving and tolerant multicultural nation is a beautiful deception, since the nation is accessible as an ideal only to bodies that follow and fulfill the requirements to inhabit it. Under such circumstances, the action of "becoming" (becoming British, becoming Canadian, becoming Australian,

becoming an ideal citizen) becomes imperative. The question to be asked in this section is the kind of things the combination of silent love forces the bodies it is qualifying to do or become in the name of love (or the name of silence) and the kind of assumptions we can make from those practices.

At a first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to relate the idea of silent love to the practice of loving the nation, sharing that love with others, and defending that object of love from others. After all, love as an intensity always requires prolonged and expressive evidence. Yet, when linked to the notion of citizenship, what a silent-love may be revealing is the inherent contradiction at the heart of loving the nation in an ideal way: becoming an ideal citizen. Here, by an ideal citizen that becomes, I refer to those bodies struggling to become part of a loving nation, either because of their threatening mobility, gender, or queerness, and for whom the aspiration to full citizenship, although legally possible, has been discursively constructed as unachievable. What these bodies need to (are made to) do to become approved ideal loving citizens of a loving state, composed by loving members, contravenes the ideals of democracy, the construction of the human as a political entity, speech, logic, and their public display.

Racialized/diasporic citizenship demands the ability to love in silence. And, as Lily Cho eloquently points out in her essay *Citizenship, Diaspora and the Bonds of Affect*, behind this "skill" hides a profound emotive paradox. Through its surveillance practices and documents, the state requires citizens to be transparent and unemotional. But, at the same time, the same state encourages diasporic individuals who aspire to become full members of the national community to show an undivided, unconditional love for their new nation by severing ties with their previous country and culture. This contradictory prerequisite for diasporic citizenship (we need you to be an emotionless and transparent subject, but we also need you to be an affective

newcomer so we can trust you and reward you with an incomplete version of citizenship) evinces the existence of a double standard that confronts the figure of the human versus that of the citizen, emotion versus reason, and natural rights versus civil rights (Cho 277). While certain kinds of loving, non-silent citizens have access to the benefits that full membership to the nation guarantees, others, who are deemed as non-loving or, in other words, (un)expressive bodies, are relegated to an increasingly rightless realm. In other words, when added to the silence-love equation, full citizenship becomes a privilege only available to those entitled to an unreserved love grounded in perceptual, cognitive, and communicative ability.

As if mocking our expectations, *A Silent Love* translates the intercultural discursive interactions between (un)expressive racialized migrants and full citizens from the public domain to the domestic sphere of interracial marriage, and its gendered and racialized dynamics. For the most part, the film relies on the point of view of Gladys and its (very Quebecois) obsession with language and communication to produce subjectivity for the viewer. There are some moments, though, when Gladys is not on screen. The film uses Norman's point of view selectively to reassert the message: intercultural communication is not always possible and migrants, despite language barriers, are cognitively capable individuals willing to adapt and show their *love* for the new territory. The hardships behind intercultural communication are elaborated through the tensional, asymmetrical, and postcolonial interaction between Norman's and Gladys' gazes: that of a man from the global north with a citizenship status, and that of a woman from the global south with no legal protection. Here, I would like to delve into how the film defamiliarizes this postcolonial asymmetry, not to show, as Federico Hidalgo suggests, that Gladys and Norman exoticize each other in symmetrical ways. After all, while Norman truly exoticizes his wife, Gladys idealizes her husband, and she is constantly subjected to Norman's epistemic violence.

But there are parts in the film in which the masculinized Gladys' gaze can if not completely subvert, briefly equalize the power dynamics existing between hers and Norman's and her point of view. The film achieves this through intertextual allusions to silent film.

A Silent Love is to subtleties what silent film is to small gestures. Both rely on a shared intertextual framework or "code by which producers encode their messages, and the audience decodes them" (Pearson 20). Thoughts and emotions are not always revealed through elocutions, voices, or the narrative itself but also other more subtle signifiers, such as objects, images, and a character's quirks. In *A Silent Love*, the characterization of Norman as a quiet university professor of silent film serves this purpose. He, in a sense, personifies the ideals of a silent film or of silence by turning into an embodied intertext in need of interpretation. His "unexpressive" treatment of silence is dexterously captured in Norman's explanation to his students on the nature of silent films: "To us, the silent movie is missing something essential. But many people back then thought that the talking picture lacked something essential from the previous experience. […] You see, gestures, sometimes very tiny gestures watched carefully by everybody were enough to…"

If Norman had had the chance to finish the sentence, he would have probably said, "sometimes very tiny gestures watched carefully by everybody were enough to" "engage them in the narrative" or "communicate a message," or "produce a reaction". He, however, was not allowed to do so. The task is for the audience to fill in the blanks as they think it is more appropriate. But the philological act of reconstruction does not end there. Norman's words are only one of those codes or tiny gestures, a meta-cinematographic language that needs interpretation. When he says implies that the audiences from the silent film era were used to reading beyond silence, he is inviting the modern spectator to do the same with *A Silent Love* and

to work through the tiny gestures used by the main characters and the "chaotic" disposition of visual imagery in the film.

Let us look first at how the characters' peculiar intertextuality is established. Although never literally mentioned in the film, the defining traits of the citizens of *A Silent Love*'s fictional world are revealed in the commercial trailer of the movie. The trailer opens with a black screen and three pairs of intermittent expressions in white fonts: foolish husband…, obstinate wife…, and irresistible mother-in-law…. The camera, as if not wanting to leave the use of the appellatives open to interpretation, cuts off to show us the images of Norman, Gladys, and Fernanda. By now, what defines each character is precisely his foolishness, her obstinacy, and her irresistibility. This is how the film makes explicit its project of taking cultural images recognizable by the audience and subverting them to break expectations. An irresistible mother-in-law trumps the idea of older women's lack of sexual appeal and of older actresses not being cast in the role of temptresses. An obstinate wife trumps the idea of a naïve, insecure, global south woman of colour being subservient to her global north white husband to secure herself a better life. And a foolish husband trumps the idea of the cognitive superiority of white men, who save brown women from precarity and offer them economic stability. Words in *A Silent Love* become powerful carriers of meaning, especially because their signifying quality suitably extends beyond the world of the word to that of the image.

The more one studies the expressions and characterization of *A Silent Love*, the more one cannot help noticing that there is more to them than meets the eye. The foolishness of Norman, for example, is a non-neutral reference intended not only to challenge, as pointed out above, the expectations of the audience, but also to subtly reveal small details about his silence. Such information becomes available late in the film, during Gladys and Norman's housewarming

dinner with friends and students. After having an other-than-peaceful dinner, Norman, Gladys, Fernanda, and their guests amuse themselves with a couple of silent films that Norman shows in his private projection room. The shots that become part of the film's narrative correspond to fragments from Buster Keaton's *One Week* and Erich von Stroheim's *Foolish Wives*.

Released in 1920, Buster Keaton's *One Week* tells the story of a newlywed couple trying to make a home for themselves. The opportunity arrives as a wedding gift: a set of wooden boxes labelled "Home---Portable House Co." The intertitle accompanies the shot: "To give this house a snappy appearance put it up according to the numbers on the boxes." The movie's villain secretly changes the numbers on the boxes to frustrate the husband's attempt at assembling the house within one week. The result is a deformity only reminiscent of a house that seems to have a grimace and life of its own. Windows are misaligned, and things from the domestic space constantly fall out of place, putting the couple's lives in danger. The house even rotates at will and at the slightest provocation.

A criticism against American capitalist values and traditional republican domesticity ideals, the film, along with its objects, argues Babette Bärbel Tischleder in *The Literary Life of Things*, "parodies the promises of the modern industrial age, both in terms of its alleged technological advantages and in the figure of the struggling? husband as a homeowner" (Tischleder 174). Interestingly, the image of spinning objects and characters constantly appear throughout *A Silent Love*. The spinning house full of life is shown three times in the film, once while Norman explains the characteristics of silent film to his students, once during the dinner scene, and at the end. The spinning wife of Buster Keaton appears only once in the film, but this isolated insertion is pivotal. Conflicted about his feelings for Fernanda and her departure, Norman decides to spend more time at the University. Although he is in the company of his

friend, no conversation is started, and no words are pronounced. The only thing that gives a hint about Norman's affective state is an image inserted in the place of what in silent film would be an intertitle. The brief but powerful image shows Sybil Seely, Burton's wife in *One Week*, sitting on a stool in front of a piano and spinning without control.

Indeed, the image's message hangs on the relation between domestic space and the illusion of familial safety, as Burton's movie does not only explore the struggles of a husband but also those of a wife. It is no coincidence that the characters of both actors are portrayed as equals and pull through together. The failed home making experiment takes a toll on both, and the house as a living entity preys evenly on them and their relationship as a newlywed couple—the house as a monstrous and dangerous entity comments on the deficiencies of discourses and ideals of domesticity. A house is not enough to have a home. There is an act of assembling and building, the movie suggests, on which such social ideals depend. If this act is not performed correctly, the foundations of the domestic system crumble. In *One Week*, the house spins because it has not been correctly assembled, and the wife spins because she is inside the spinning house. What happens to the house, or the domestic, directly affects, in predictable ways, those who assemble the domestic discourse.

What does this tell us about Norman? The spinning Sybil may be describing Norman's affective state, or it may be referring to his chaotic private life. Both readings say something about intimacy and domesticity, but not the same thing. One reading reveals Norman's repressed desires; the other turns upside down domesticity and by extension, gendered expectations by identifying him with the figure of *One Week*'s wife rather than that of the husband. This identification with the wife is emphasized by the reference to Erich von Stroheim's *Foolish Wives.* Released in 1922, the acclaimed silent classic tells the story of the con artist Count

Vladislaw Sergius Karamazin, and his two "cousins," Princess Olga Petchnikoff and Vera. Although they are not consanguine relatives, the trio are partners in crime who traffic counterfeit money for gambling. Karamazin also seduces rich women for their money. An ode to the male scopophilic gaze, the film is famous for its sexually charged blurs and "illicit" and voyeuristic shots that formally account for Karamazin's optical desire. The foolish wives are the object of the male gaze, from which the film takes its title. The foolish wives of the movie, Margaret Armstrong and Helen Hughes, are growingly sophisticated but innocent American women, credulous and "fascinated by the European male's nobility and intriguing *savoir faire.*" It is precisely their gullibility that leaves them at European males' evil schemes' mercy (Fischer 523).

If we substitute the appellative foolish wives for a foolish husband, as *A Silent Love* characterizes Norman, key small details about the film's fictional world and its citizens are revealed. As Armstrong and Hughes, Norman is credulous, gullible, and is fascinated with intriguing, sexualized, but still "traditional" Mexican women. Norman has a preconceived idea of how Mexicanness and Mexican womanhood should be constructed. That is part of his foolishness. One of the narrative functions of Gladys, his obstinate Mexican wife, is to show him the dangers behind stereotyping presumptions not in a vindictive but in a pedagogical spirit, that is, not by taking advantage of his foolishness, as Karamazin does with American women, but by gaining control over her circumstances and her independence.

At the end of the film, Gladys' rhetorical point of view is that of a woman awakened to a new awareness of her world, and the people around her. While Norman's account for that of a man who has learned to be honest to himself. The most radical character's progression, however, is Gladys', a racialized denizen, and mail-order bride who moves from obstinacy to bitterness to despair, and then to confidence. The narrator takes an emphatic stance and leads Gladys and the

viewer toward a resolution of broken expectations. Gladys is not your typical mail-order bride looking for a green card romance, unwilling to accept change. She learns English, and she learns French, she starts working at a local restaurant and finds a new potential love interest who happens to be a migrant as talkative as her.

VI. Conclusion: Explanations & Comparisons

In this section, I want to compare and read *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* to explore what their narratives and thematic preoccupations tell us about Canada and its immigrant experience. I do not intend to contrast the films to show which is more compelling or better structured, but rather to delve into issues that arise from examining the movies as cultural products manufactured in a specific context—Vancouver and Quebec— and historical period—the 1970s and 2000s. While a more extensive corpus of Canadian films with the topic of migration would be required to offer a more nuanced overview of this type of movie and their treatment of multiculturalism, there are specific patterns that emerge from interpreting *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* in parallel.

The first similarity concerns the collision of multiple points of view. Even when *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* tell their stories mainly through Eve's and Gladys' eyes to express their sense of eyedentity, it would be a mistake to believe that the camera assumes a claustrophobic point of view, limited only to explore their perspectives. One of the virtues of both films is how they refuse to kowtow before one single point of view and instead advance deep into other characters' experiences and ways of seeing. Even more provocative is that the films constantly confront opposing gazes and present the audience with a moral dilemma: whose point of view should we trust? Eve is nine years old and sees things that any adult or kid with a less vivid imagination may find extremely bizarre and hard to believe. Gladys, for her part, is

sometimes too stubborn to recognize her faults. But the point of view of Eve and Gladys' counterparts do not offer a completely trustworthy alternative either. Karena blindly follows Catholic teachings because a book makes her believe that Jesus is the only who can impart racial justice over the world. And Norman prefers to remain oblivious and silent to the fact that he does not really love Gladys because she does not conform to his ideal of Mexican and traditional womanhood, rather than accept his wife for who she is. If we bring citizenship to this mix, then things complicate even further.

The gaze of a racialized citizen and denizen is presented as extravagant and sometimes lacks empowerment. *Eve and the Fire Horse* makes sure we understand this point by defamiliarizing the film world and filtering through the eyes of the daughter of Chinese immigrants, whose point of view is full of images and came from unfamiliar religious and mythological systems. Gladys, for her part, is in no better position. Her point of view is that of a racialized denizen who sometimes cannot get rid of the qualities that come with the commodification of her body and her identity.

But this richness of contradicting points of view contribute to offer a more nuanced and "objective" exposition of the migrant experience. The narration of Eve and Gladys' (hi)stories of exoticization and liberation rely on this multiplicity of visions, and the unreliability they postulate at certain moments in the films, to create variation and types of film with an unrestricted narrational authority. That is, in the words of the film critic George Wilson, when "the narration is authorized to show, shot by shot and scene by scene, whatever is demanded by a predesigned and maximally articulated overview of the narrative action" (85). Through a variety of shots that alternate between the objective and the subjective, images of symbolic relevance, and selective camera movements, *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* allow for the

existence of a narrative consciousness with an epistemic position superior to the more limited points of view of the characters. In the films, omniscient and dramatic narrative sequences provide illustrative scenes or additional details to supplement the information given by the protagonists, antagonists, and other citizens of the film world.

One of the main intentions of that narrative epistemic consciousness is to allegorize the sometimes "unseen" or unheard difficulties behind intercultural communication in the Canadian multicultural state. It does so in several different ways. One is by showing the doings of epistemic violence, or what happens when a single point of view is privileged over the others. The omniscient epistemic consciousness of *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love*, for example, plays with the expectations of the audience and shows us how Eve's and Gladys' points of view are constantly disregarded by members of the multicultural film world, always in the name of belonging. Eve's sister has decided to join forces with Catholicism, and adamantly pushes Eve to do the same. If they are to accumulate auspiciousness for their family, they better do it the local way. Her teachers see Eve as a cabinet of curiosities, and the Catholic nuns in charge of her evangelization, while compassionate, distrust her cultural upbringing. For their colonial gaze, Eve holds beliefs that need to be contested: Jesus performs miracles, auspicious events cannot randomly happen to Chinese dads, Buddhist paradise does not exist, Buddhist grandmas either convert and gain a place in Christian heaven or take a bullet train to hell; gospel choirs are too jovial for the ears of the Lord, he prefers the solemnity of the Catholic ones. Visions wrapped in extravagant shadows of blue and brown that remind us of Chinese mythology's world of water and fire overemphasize these exoticizing intentions. Gladys is subjected to a similar kind of exoticization and thus dismissed. Her sexualized body and exotic femininity are seen as her main attributes. Norman and other well-meaning intellectuals, like

Molly, condescend Gladys in public. Her intentions of defending herself from the colonial gaze of those who see her as nothing but a naïve and vulnerable mail-order bride are dismissed as quirks of her stubborn, immature, and unpredictable personality. And her intentions for marrying a white Canadian man are constantly questioned. No matter how much Gladys tries, at moments, Norman's extremely silent personality eclipses her voice, and a cinematic narrative that depletes the film almost entirely from diegetic sound. In the *silent* world of a racialized denizen and the *exotic* world of a racialized citizen, the epistemic consciousness of the films seems to warn us: escaping from epistemic violence is almost impossible.

In *A Silent Love*, we do not see conflicts between communities and systems of belief. Language systems and linguistic communities ingeniously substitute these disputes. With Quebec as its geographical landscape, the film not only talks about Gladys' (hi)story of struggle and her journey towards belonging but also about the city of Montreal and its controversial relation to migration and language. The Montreal of the first half of the 2000s suggests *A Silent Love* was (and continues to be) a cosmopolitan city where a multiplicity of cultures and languages converge, and that is also (in)famous for its expressions of nationalism, and adoption of interculturalism as a response to the embracement of multiculturalism announced by Ottawa by the end of the 70s. Given the primacy of language in Quebec, it should not come as a surprise that *A Silent Love* is also everything about language. And one may even dare to ask if Gladys' obstinacy and obsession with language and communication is an allegory of Quebec and its disputed intercultural policy.

Whatever the case, the film offers us a controversial face of Canada, different from the one presented by *Eve and the Fire Horse*. In the intercultural world *en français* of Gladys, there is no communication where there should be. In a brilliant use of irony, most of the film recurs to

silence to expose the "one language so that all can communicate" fallacy. The immigration policy of the Quebecois government, according to which aspiring immigrants to Montreal require to speak French, does not apply to everyone equally. Anglophone Canadians, the film suggests, are exempt from that requirement. Norman is more willing to learn Spanish than he is to learn French, and it is Gladys who in the end puts in more effort to learn French. Despite that, Norman usually is considered *more* Canadian than other citizens of the film world whose families have been in Montreal for generations. The nationality and right to belong of French-speaking Andre, for example, Norman's friend of Cameroonian ascendance, is constantly questioned. And even Norman admits to Gladys that they are different. The difference, it seems, is not something to be cheered in intercultural Quebec.

According to *Eve and the Fire Horse*, the difference should not be celebrated in multicultural Vancouver, despite what policies proclaim on paper. Multiculturalism, in the sense heralded by Megan Ryburn (2-11), is a discourse based on the notion of difference that encourages migrants to maintain the cultural practices from their places of origin. In reality, a discourse is one side of the same assimilationist coin, in which migrants are allowed to retain parts of their heritage, but they "focus on doing so within the context of the settlement country." This is to say, in one way or another, they need to participate in a process of integration, for it is impossible to "remain part of more than one geographically bounded society." *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* challenge the contradictions at the heart of multicultural citizenship by suggesting that migrant bodies engage in tangible or otherwise practices that reinforce their connection to their countries of origin.

CHAPTER II.
Intertextuality, Expectancy & (Dis)comfort: Informal Citizenship in *A Better Life* and *Take Out*

No two immigration films developing the point of view of undocumented immigrants in the US could, at first sight, appear more different than *A Better Life* (2011, Chris Weitz, US) and *Take Out* (2004, Sean Baker & Shih-Ching Tsou, US). The former tells the story of a Mexican father and a Mexican American son's quest for a truck that gets stolen by a fellow undocumented immigrant. The film has been understood as a denunciatory narrative that brings to light the systemic racism in the US (Jiménez-Murguía 45-48) and the "heartbreak of mixed-citizenship-status families torn apart as a consequence of the lack of immigration reform" (J. López 96). *A Better Life* has also been interpreted as a narrative that negotiates cultural conflict and has the potential to prompt intercultural communication (Mukherjee and Williams 31-53) that humanizes the migrant while educating the audience about otherness and the contributions of migrants to American society (Horn "Chris Weitz's 'Better Life' shines light on illegal immigrant issues"). Meanwhile, *Take Out*, a film that tells the story of a Chinese undocumented immigrant who needs to gather enough money from tips to pay off his debt to the smugglers that helped him enter the US, has been understood as a narrative that brings to light structural oppression, and that makes visible the life of people inhabiting the margins of society (Murphy 224, 225), and that focuses on the misery of the immigrant experience (Ortner 87).

In as much the stories are concerned, these films share an impoverished migrant worker confronting a violent and alienating urban environment where the vehicle upon which their livelihoods depend is stolen. The plot follows that of the neorealist classic film, *Bicycle Thieves*, which tells the story of a worker in the Italy of the postwar whose bicycle also is stolen. The search for the missing vehicle in the three films becomes a search for identity in a chaotic city

and it posits an important question: in a cruel urban environment, who can be considered human and what are the prerequisites to access that category of being? In *Bicycle Thieves*, it is precisely the isolation and loneliness of a man amid his brutal social world that infuses the film with a deep sense of humanity. The same criteria do not apply to the cases of *A Better Life* and *Take Out*, both of which raise the question: why?

Part of the answer to that concerns the notion of empathy, a disposition of film through which audiences experience a shared emotional state with the characters on screen. This empathetic function of cinema is well documented. In her essay "Empathy in Film," Jane Stadler explores the role of cinema as an aesthetic form that produces emotional responses in the audience, from which an intersubjective way of experiencing cinema arises. Due to this quality, film has become an ideal medium to reflect on pressing social issues, such as being human in a hostile urban environment (317-325). Unsurprisingly, cinematic empathy has also become a staple of migration films, for they "have the power to immerse us through images and stories in the reality experienced by others" (Briciu 1). Likewise, they rely on the idea of a shared human experience to elicit an emotional reaction and expand the empathetic concern of the spectator. However, empathetic responses are not always guaranteed. As Stadler explains, vicarious experience should also be considered when analyzing how cinematic empathy works in a film. Vicarious experience refers to "spontaneous sharing of feeling and perspective-taking that can be evoked by seeing, hearing about, reading about, or imaginatively simulating another person's story and situation" (Keen 208). This type of experience is not always empathetic in nature, but empathetic responses are always vicarious. As Stadler explains, "not all vicarious experiences necessarily function to help us understand another person's mind or subjective state; sometimes, as with vicarious disgust responses, such experiences are indicative of self-directed concern

because they convey an embodied apprehension of substances or actions that we ought to avoid to preserve our own wellbeing" (Stadler 6). Taking this perspective as a starting point, the objective of this chapter is to analyze the kind of vicarious experiences elicited by *A Good Life* and *Take Out* compared to *Bicycles Thieves*. I argue that both migration films can be understood as narratives whose formal dispositions destabilize the universalizing notion of the human, and thus illustrate processes of citizenship repositioning -—as films whose very complexities tell us a great deal about legally sanctioned forms of being and moving. I would like to suggest here some directions for such understanding, first by conducting an intertextual reading of the films, then by exploring the way in which they subvert generic expectations to disrupt the notions of formal citizenship and humanity.

Despite their differences, *A Better Life* and *Take Out* do in fact agree on one thing, humanness is a slippery category to which informal citizens/migrants do not belong, and while humanizing them on screen by trying to prompt intercultural communication and understanding is a noble endeavor, the results cannot be predicted. By this, I do not mean that visibility and identification are not legitimate or possible projects but examining them as an end of the films under analysis here falls out of the scope of my dissertation. Instead, I want to examine how the point of view of *A Better Life* and *Take Out*, through stylistic and thematic reorientations, creates an other-than empathetic representation of migrant mobility in the US context. On the contrary, the films manage to elicit uncomfortable responses that may reveal white spectatorship's fears regarding migrant mobility. Accordingly, *A Better Life* and *Take Out* design a fictional world where migrants are protagonists with a certain degree of agency. Their precarity uncovers a structure of informal/undocumented migrant labor, based on an ethnicity/citizenship hierarchy. By analyzing the entanglements between narrative, stylistic decisions, and mobility, I aim to

expose the formal mechanisms that give life to the aesthetics of citizenship. These aesthetics are based on the opposition of comfort/discomfort, a concept used in political discourse to distinguish the bodies of formal citizens from those of informal citizens, and whose function in migration films critics have disregarded.

I. Critical Receptions & Non-citizen Danger

American filmmakers who strive to be socially conscious are often hard-pressed to create new stories and strategies to express their apprehension regarding the urban fabric surrounding them and its shifting tides of socio-economic change. One of the main topics of concern for these filmmakers is, without doubt, migrant mobility, for it allows them to explore the role of the (im)mobile ethnic "other" in the sometimes unforgiving American megacities, and it also highlights several racial and cultural tensions. These conflicts are at the heart of the Hollywood melodrama *A Better Life* and the independent film *Take Out*. The movies tell the story of a Mexican and a Chinese immigrant who struggle to survive in LA and New York, respectively.

A Better Life, a 2011 film directed by Chris Weitz and nominated to the academy award for best actor in a leading role, tells the story of a Mexican family in the US. Carlos Galindo (Demian Bichir) is an undocumented immigrant living in LA's margins. Quiet, discrete, and hardworking, he tries to stay out of trouble while working as a gardener for wealthy families. Many years ago, his wife left him and his Mexican American son, Luis (Jose Julian). Carlos does what he can without his wife to take care of his rebellious son and connect with him. But long working hours and cultural, generational, and citizenship gaps hinder the process.

Luis Galindo has big dreams for himself. He hopes to be able to live a good life by buying a house in Beverly Hills and avoid being as invisible and precarious as his father is. Yet, he constantly misses school to engage in gang activity. In his distorted world, it is better to be

respected as a member of a criminal organization than to be looked down upon and invisible to others.

To secure a better life for him and his son, Carlos purchases a truck and some tools from his friend Blasco, an undocumented informal citizen who is returning to Mexico. Dramatically, the truck is stolen by another undocumented informal citizen Carlos invited to work with him. Stealing the truck brings father and son together when they start a quest for the lost truck. During the journey, Luis is initiated and introduced to the ethnic world of Mexican (in)formal citizens in Los Angeles, which ignites a process of identification with his own ethnic identity and with his father. However, the renewed filial bonds get severed when Carlos is arrested after stealing back the truck and deported to Mexico.

Similarly, *Take Out*, a 2004 drama directed by Sean Baker and Shih-Ching Tsou, depicts a day in the life of Ding Ming. Ding Ming (Charles Jang) is an undocumented immigrant living on New York City's margins. He works as a delivery man for a Chinese take-out restaurant and hopes to make enough money to support his son and wife in China. He leads an uneventful life: he pedals his bicycle to work, he delivers food, he receives tips, and he goes back home.

One day, however, things turn for the worse when a couple of snakehead smugglers visit him in his apartment. They come to collect a payment of 800 dollars that Ding Ming was supposed to make several months ago. After learning that Ding Ming has no money to pay off his debt, the smugglers hit him with a hammer, threaten him, and ask him to repay his debt by the end of the day. A desperate Ding Ming manages to get a loan for 500 dollars from a relative but needs to figure out how to earn the remaining $300.

When his fellow delivery man Young learns about his predicament, he proposes that Ding Ming take all the orders for the day and keep all the tips to himself. The previously

uneventful existence of Ding Ming, suddenly, turns into a race against time full of obstacles: the rain makes it harder for Ding Ming to pedal throughout the busy streets of New York, he delivers wrong orders, angry clients do not give him tips, and he gets robbed. The film, however, ends on a happy note when a cook at the restaurant where Ding Ming works lends him all the money he needs.

Despite their manifest differences, the films emphasize mobility as a goal of immigrants to take hold of desired objects or statuses. They are also often compared to the neorealist Italian classic, Vittorio De Sicca's *Bicycle Thieves,* and with good reason. The comparison between the films is not only inescapable, especially that at issue here is human mobility in a hostile urban environment, but it is indispensable because of the peripatetic nature of the films themselves that perpetuate a high degree of generic intertextuality. Indeed, both *A Better Life* and *Take Out* feature several allusions to *Bicycle Thieves.* In both instances, intertextuality functions as a way of highlighting the otherness of the migrant before the exoticizing gaze of white audiences. Although the comparison between *A Better Life*, *Take Out,* and *Bicycle Thieves* at a diegetic level was not completely transparent, some thematic and stylistic connections must be established. I contend that a thematic and cinematic analysis of *A Better Life*, *Take Out*, and *Bicycle Thieves* can prove instructive when analyzing human mobility in the US context and that a broader comparison with melodrama and social film genre functions can reveal some complexity. Here I seek to illustrate how fundamentally ambivalent cinematic genre conventions are seemingly used to try to create a "humane" image of the immigrant with which audiences can relate and that reminds of the figure of the victimized father in *Bicycle Thieves*. Interestingly, the reception of both *A Better Life* and *Take Out* shows that American audiences struggled to identify with the fathers depicted in the films due to their status as undocumented immigrants.

Accordingly, I explore how the role of immigration films, such as *A Better Life* and *Take Out*, is not to encourage the audience's identification with migrant characters but to inconvenience the white gaze by subverting their expectations.

Indeed, that migration films prompt intercultural communication is difficult to predict or demonstrate, especially because aesthetic tastes vary from audience to audience and critic to critic. American critical reception of undocumented migration films, like *A Better Life* or *Take Out,* has often tended to celebrate those that encourage sympathy in the viewer without having to recur to points of view that idealize the figure of the undocumented migrant. For example, Richard Brody from The New Yorker calls *A Better Life* a movie in which “the story unfolds without hagiography, pity, or trumped-up heroism, as the filmmaker approaches the lives of everyday people with modest compassion and imaginative sympathy” (Brody “A Better Life”). Meanwhile, Nathan Lee from the *New York Times* praises the film *Take Out* for taking “no false step as a scrupulous and socially conscious slice of life” and describes it as “the season’s freshest, most sympathetic movie about making your way in modern-day Manhattan” (Lee “A Tall Order”). Openly right-leaning critics were harsher. Despite its “foul language and light violence,” *Movieguide* describes *A Better Life* as a “heartfelt family drama” which nonetheless is “marred slightly by politically correct tone siding with the protagonist’s status as an illegal alien breaking several laws and protagonist has to rely on bending the rules and evading the legal system in order to survive, leading to an antinomian or lawless (and possibly libertarian, “open borders”) attitude toward the illegal immigration issue” (Kozlowski “A Better Life. Heart Felt Melodrama”). As the product of a mimetic art representing real life subjectivities, migration films seem to upset the aesthetic taste of audiences and critics alike when they are not “faithful” enough and show “nuanced” situations and characters.

Indeed, undocumented migration remains a controversial subject in the US, and so does its cinematic representations. US audiences, for instance, were not less forgiving of the films than the critics. In the popular online platform *Rotten Tomatoes, A Better Life* obtained mixed reviews from the audience ranging from those that considered the movie an "emotional journey," "heartwarming," and "a film with a positive message" to those that judged it as a "corny telenovela" and "stereotypical melodrama" ("A Better Life"). *A Better Life* ended up obtaining an 85% from the critics and a 79% from the audience. Interestingly, *Take Out* had a better reception from the critics than from the audience. Critics gave the film a solid 100% score due to its formidable cinematography reminiscent of Italian neorealism, social realism, and Dogma 95. Audiences, however, were not as impressed by the film's aesthetic quality. They gave it a 72%, along with mixed reviews that described the movie as presenting the "admirable traits of migrants," "a hidden gem," "just fair," "slow-paced," "with repetitive dialogues," and a "tedious bore" ("Take Out").

Despite the diversity of the criticisms, most of them agree that the quality of *A Better Life* and *Take Out* is that they do not flagrantly seek to "manipulate" the audience's emotions to sell a political manifesto in favour of undocumented non-citizens. Quite the opposite, they praise the films for their moderation. These constructions of (non) affective and compelling storytelling respond not only to the films themselves and their cinematography but also to individual political pronouncements on migration discourses that revolve around the notions of legality/illegality and certain types of bodies moving in(to) the US.

The "resistance" to see overly empathetic representations of migrants on screen may be a symptom of the changing attitudes regarding migration in the post-9/11 world. During the first months of 2001, the US government was in the anteroom of a major immigration reform.

President Bush met a record of five times in nine months with the newly elected president of Mexico, Vicente Fox, which marked a transition from hostility to cooperation (Nelsen 80). The Congress, for its part, was in the process of reviewing three legalization proposals for undocumented migrants: a) an extension of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which allowed unauthorized migrants to adjust their status without having to leave the country; b) introduction of a bipartisan version of the DREAM act that seek to regularize youth who entered the country as children, and c) a couple of proposals to offer agricultural workers the opportunity to earn legal status under certain conditions. The events of 9/11, however, frustrated these efforts and changed forever the panorama and public attitudes and discourses on immigration in the US and other countries (Rosenblum 8).

Along with immigration policies, public attitudes also suffered drastic changes in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Branton et al. point out that the immigration issue was framed in a threat context (677). During this period, multiple minoritarian groups, especially Muslims and Latinos, became extremely visible and not in a positive way. Words like “invasion,” “army of illegals” started to frame the immigration debates in the media. The language of threat and fear had already taken effect of the American public.

Cultural repercussions soon followed. Affects such as fear, anger, brooding, uncertainty, and melancholy, established by Thomas Riegler, dominated the Hollywood scene. Manichean battles became the norm. Evil enemies threatened the established order of things with a zeal reminiscent of the one held by terrorists. And it was the responsibility of tormented (super)heroes, who distinguished themselves for not having fallen prey to evil temptations, to save the day. Along with the threat of terrorism, other menaces such as pandemics, natural disasters, and the dismantlement of society made their way to the big screen. Political movies

about the global war of terror offered new ways of approaching conflict in cinema. Suddenly, no one was willing to take a stance at the risk of being branded as disloyal to one of the represented parts. Audiences also played their role in establishing this new tendency by favouring in the box office movies that avoided making direct political statements or approached touchy subjects indirectly (Riegler 35-45).

With the mixed reception of migration films such as *A Better Life* and *Take Out*, we could be witnessing the remains of such a tendency towards political moderation, which partly explains the modest success of both films at the box office. With a profit of around 1.8 million and 66.9K, *A Better Life* and *Take Out* are far from more successful migration films. The post-9/11 migration film, *Under the Same Moon* (2007) grossed around 23 million globally and 12 million in the US alone. Factors such as the film's point of view, the director, the actors, and the available funds play a crucial role in determining a film's economic success. *Under the Same Moon* is a commercial film told from a child's sympathetic point of view, which counted among its ranks "recognizable," at least for a Latino audience, starring Mexicans Kate del Castillo and Eugenio Derbez. Suppose we consider that *Take Out* is an independent film whose directors, Sean Baker and Shih-Ching-Tsou, worked with non-professional actors and a painfully low budget of 3000 USD. In that case, one could with difficulty argue that its box office numbers represent a failure. And, as the reviews from critics and audiences suggest, its magnetism probably depended more on the mythical aura surrounding its modest production and the aesthetics of its cinematography than on the film's theme itself. Yet, *A Better Life* confronts us with a different animal. The American production by Chris Weitz---the man behind the camera of movies such as *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*---and starred by Oscar-nominated Mexican actor, Demián Bichir, could not recoup the initial investment of 10 million. Despite its mediatic

director and lead actor, the film did not do well among the American audience, which bears the question: how can we explain this lack of enthusiasm for certain migration films?

Film critics approach the above question from the perspective of how characters are constructed on screen. Migrant stories, especially those about undocumented non-citizens, told from the point of view of a heroic figure who must undergo and overcome numerous undeserved calamities in the pure style of Odysseus, tend to stir controversy. And reacting with certain suspicion against this kind of representation is not the prerogative of US critics and audiences. In their piece for *Le Monde*, the French film critics Jacques Mandelbaum and Thomas Sotinel comment on the unprecedented (*sans precedent*) success of the French immigration film *Welcome* (2009), directed by Philippe Lioret ("La figure"). Set mostly in Calais, a port in northern France, *Welcome* tells the story of a Kurdish teen, Bilal (Firat Ayverdi), who hopes to reunite with his girlfriend in England. Since he does not have €500 to pay for a *passeur* (the French version of a coyote), Bilal decides to swim across the English Channel, even if he does not know how to swim. To achieve the titanic task, he seeks the help of Simon Calmat (Vincent Lindon), a Calais local swimming instructor who agrees to train the boy.

In Calais, reports Jason Burke for *The Guardian*, "audiences cheered at the preview screenings. 'It's the most beautiful and upsetting film I have ever seen,' said Laure Ducastel, 31, a local resident. "It shows how the refugees and the charity workers are heroes and what dirty work the French state does to make their lives a misery'" (qtd. in Burke "France Hails"). The critics of *Le Monde*, Jacques Mandelbaum and Thomas Sotinel, attributed the local success of the film to its astute treatment of the undocumented immigration theme. According to them, one of the common places and pitfalls of most migration films is their depiction of the undocumented migrant, and by extension of their point of view, as a story of an idealized traveller willing to

face all sorts of hardships to get to their destination. Through these stories of liberation and courage, certain films fall into the trap of "miserabilism, schematism and aestheticism." Audiences from rich countries (*pays riches*), then, end up having trouble identifying with these extremely pitiful, artificial, and inaccessible stories and the characters these films depict. If a migration film's point of view aspires to be as effective as that of *Welcome*, imply Mandelbaum and Sotinel, it needs to include the figure of a mediator or "Western fictional citizen" that helps ease the already complicated (by distance, by ideology, by guilt) identification process between audiences and undocumented migrants. Through "Western fictional citizens," claim the French critics, the spectator is forced, if not to completely identify with the figure of the undocumented migrant, at least to recognize in s/he a fellow human being.

What Mandelbaum and Sotinel do not explain, however, is what they mean by "Western fictional citizen" and "audiences from rich countries." By synecdochical and euphemistic association, we can safely assume that they refer to white Western fictional citizens and white audiences, which poses several problems. Among them, two are of the utmost importance for this dissertation. The first concerns the implied function of migration films about undocumented non-citizens as catalyzers of identification and intercultural communication. The second touches on the implied condition to achieve this extrinsic teleological objective. Not all films about undocumented non-citizens necessarily encourage empathy in the viewer, facilitate identification between the migrant character and the audience, or prompt intercultural communication. And to assume that a migration film's "success" depends on that premise is to overlook its aesthetic qualities. Similarly, the implied switch from racism to misanthropy, by the inclusion of a white fictional citizen mediator or savior reminding the spectator that the undocumented non-citizen is a fellow human being, is a kind of *deus ex machina* that presumes the existence of a universally

shared humanity and turns a blind eye to the complicity of the white imagination in the fabrication of dangerous non-citizen strangers and of their movement, as deviant.

Sara Ahmed's work on the way that racialized strangers connotes an immediate sense of danger for the white Western citizen is important here. In her well-known monograph, *Strange Encounters,* she discusses the discursive formation and function of strangers, otherness, and difference. Drawing upon the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism, she attempts to 'demonstrate the links between representation and broader relationships of production' (Ahmed 61). Ahmed examines the construction of strangers as objects that precede knowledge and whose production has been severed from their historical conditions. Noting that, contrary to otherized bodies, stranger others are immediately recognized as such. She shows how stranger bodies' ontologizing serves to bolster Western notions of the self. Theorizations that see undocumented migration films as mere channels of empathy and intercultural communication made possible by the shared humanity of white citizens and racialized non-citizens, reproduce the fetishization of the stranger migrant. For they assume that non-citizens are figures non-reconcilable to dominant values, and mere accessories to the norm that need to be introduced to the codes of social legality by a white character.

In addition, such theorizations understand migrant characters as non-agentic presences, and do not recognize the role they play in the cultural deconstruction of citizenship. The concept and institution of citizenship, establishes Dutch American sociologist Saskia Sassen, is undergoing a process of repositioning in which informal political subjects actively take part and produce "moments of citizenship." Undocumented migrants, she goes on, sign an "informal social contract" with the host societies by participating in daily practices that are like those full legal and political subjects adopt. Some of these practices involve raising a family, participating

in the economy by holding a job, schooling of kids, etc. Cultural representations, then, that focus on the figure of the informal undocumented citizen illustrate these tensions between citizenship and legal status, a normative project versus an aspiration that has been explained by Saskia Sassen as follows: "citizenship is a status that articulates legal rights and responsibilities" (48). Thus, "the mechanisms through which this articulation is shaped and implemented can be analytically distinguished from the status itself, and so can the content of the rights" (48). The significant point of films like *A Better Life* and *Take Out* and their point of view is that, by centering the film on the figure of the informal undocumented citizen and their aesthetics, they illustrate how that separation of citizenship status from its content is reproduced in specific cultural productions about migration. They also uncover the structure of informal/undocumented migrant labour describing how, in the film worlds of A *Better Life* and *Take Out,* precarious work is segregated according to an ethnicity-citizenship hierarchy. As I will show in this chapter, this hierarchy can be better scrutinized by delving into how *Take Out* and *A Better Life* manipulate formal and generic expectations by interacting with their genre function and the filmic traditions they ascribe to. This is, using intertextuality, a notion that understands texts as dynamic sites where relational historical and social processes take place. And whose expression we can find in the dialogue between *A Better Life* and *Take Out* with Italian neorealism, more specifically with the neorealist classic *Bicycle Thieves* and with the social realist cinema of Ken Loach, the Dardenne brothers, and the movement Dogma 95.

II. The Influence of Neorealism: Intertextuality and Thematic Reorientations

It was the year 1922 when the fascist Benito Mussolini seized absolute power. Italian cinema had stopped enjoying the great international influence and glamour it once had, especially during the first years of the silent era. The films produced by Italy at the time ranged from American-style

romantic comedies to family melodramas known as white telephone films. The white telephone was their unspoken protagonist, a luxury item and symbol of opulence during the 30s. Stories about family conflict and the luxurious life of Italy's elite (those who could afford a white phone) became the narrative focus of filmmakers. They provided an escape for the audience from their dire social reality.

It was as a reaction against this political and cultural backdrop that Italian neorealism, one of the most important movements in film history, took place. A psychologically and morally devastated post-war Italy encouraged its emergence. How, indeed, could that not have been the case? By the time the war ended, Italy had undergone 20 years of fascism, Nazi occupation, and liberation by the Allies. As a result of the war, almost seven percent of the population lived in extreme poverty and did not even have a roof over their heads. The whole economy had collapsed.

The consequences in the aftermath of war for the film industry were equally dramatic. The production of films had fallen, and there were no properly operating commercial film studios or equipment. However, not everything was negative. In a sense, the dire situation brought neorealist filmmakers closer to their subject matters: deprivation and poverty. By exploring these themes, they seek not only to distance themselves aesthetically, thematically, and politically from the cinematographic practices promoted by the fascist regime but also to restructure Italian society and restore its sense of identity completely. They thought cinema was a medium capable of achieving as long as the camera was granted an unmediated access to reality.

One of the most influential instances of neorealist filmmaking and a relevant source for the films to be discussed in this chapter is Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves,* whose script was

written by the no less celebrated Cesare Zavattini. Right from the moment it was released, the classic *Bicycle Thieves* fueled controversy and prompted attacks from both sides of the political spectrum. According to many of its critics, the film offered no clear solutions to Italy's social problems. It ended up in the middle of the gunfire between opposing political discourses. Conservatives enshrined the film in Vatican disapproval. They interpreted it as an unforgivable, decadent, and negative portrayal of society. Meanwhile, some leftists considered it an unfulfilled promise, an inadequate political statement that did not incorporate enough of a Marxist and socialist program into the narrative. But Vittorio De Sica preferred to see his film as a criticism of the politics of the time through the exploration of what it means to be human, in all its vulnerable splendour. His films, rather than being a conduit to advance definitive answers to social problems or an instrument for social change, represent in his own words "a struggle against the absence of human solidarity, a word in favor of the poor and unhappy" (qtd. in Thompson 260).

It was precisely this crystallization of certain “universal human experience” that struck a chord in different audiences and critics like Andre Bazin, who saw in *Bicycle Thieves* an appropriate narrative form to express “the tragedy of actuality” (*la tragédie de l'actualité*) (Bazin 820). For Bazin, the film, which recounts but an insignificant and banal incident in the daily life of an Italian man named Antonio Ricci (a worker buys a bicycle; someone steals the bicycle; the worker spends a whole day in the streets of Rome trying to get it back, then steals a bicycle, and gets caught), is one of the best films ever made since 1946. And part of its narratological genius lies in the atrocious simplicity of the event. The event does not have any value as a dramatic occurrence but as a social conjecture and signification. The social message, for its part, is not obvious but immanent to the narrative and painfully simple as well: in the film world, the poor

needs to steal from other poor to survive. But the film, rather than literally stating such a thesis, invites the audience to imply it. *Bicycle Thieves'* main preoccupation is the logical concatenation of accidental and anecdotal events, not to reduce them to any "economic or political Manichaeism" (*un manichéisme économique ou politique*) (824). While a film with a political agenda would rely on the inevitability of the event by trying to *demonstrate* (*démontrer*) that the worker *cannot* get back his bicycle because he is trapped in a vicious and unavoidable cycle of poverty, De Sica's film exploits the fatality of the possible to *show* (*montrer*) that the worker *may* or may not get back his bicycle, which determines that he stays unemployed and cannot provide for his family (Bazin 820-832).

Another theme that *Bicycle Thieves* explores is the human predicament about space. As David A. Cook puts it, the film is "a modern parable of an alienated man in a hostile and dehumanized environment" (Cook 283). The film, almost like a travelogue, takes the audience in a voyage to explore Ricci's space of alienation. It is precisely in the city of Rome, its streets, restaurants, police stations, and catacombs, where the struggles of an estranged man with his social surroundings materialize. As Ricci makes his way through the city trying to find his bicycle, the film comments on the social composition of the city: the division between social classes, the fallibility and breaking down of institutions such as the police, the unions, and the church, as well as the emergence of solidarity networks.

Despite its relatively short life, *Bicycle Thieves* and Italian neorealism became extremely influential all over the world. It not only influenced American television and film noir, but paved the way for The French New Wave, The Polish Film School, India's Parallel Cinema, Third Cinema, Cinema Verité, Dogma 95, and documentary style filmmaking. Among these, the last two are of special importance for this chapter.

In March 1995, the Danish director, Lars Von Trier, was invited to talk on the future of cinema at a Parisian conference celebrating the 100 years of film, appropriately named *Le cinéma vers son deuxième siècle.* Lars Von Trier had telephoned director Thomas Vinterberg to invite him to create a manifesto that challenged all the cinematographic practices of the times, especially those shielded by Hollywood and its blockbuster flourishing industry (Schaefer 65-87). He distributed a bunch of sheets among the audience with the rules that Dogma 95 filmmakers had to follow. Some of them include filming on-location, using diegetic music only and a hand-held camera, avoiding crediting the director, superficial action, props, and special lighting.

The Dogma 95 movement was controversial among the filmmaking and film criticism elites right from the start. Neither the manifesto nor the Vote of Chastity were taken seriously. And the Dogma 95 movement was quickly assigned the by now familiar and somewhat pejorative postmodern label. The edgy flavour of the manifesto, the stylistically too heterogeneous films that came from it, and the excessive intertextual allusions made more than one critic raise their eyebrows in suspicious awe. Dogma 95 films were "perceived as ready-made texts and not as movies in the making" (Schaefer 66).

Another movement heavily influenced by Italian neorealism was the British New Wave, a film movement focused on portraying social reality with roots in social realism. Social realism was a multifaceted art movement whose ideals of representing the real life of the underclasses found their way to the big screen. The most important figure of the movement was probably Ken Loach, the "definitive social realist" who took an interest in the lives of the socially disadvantaged and marginalized while criticizing the capitalist system and institutions that kept them in such precarious conditions. It was this focus on politics and society that gave Ken Loach

a distinctive cinematographic hallmark and that became paradigmatic: location shooting; static or purely reactive camera placement; a rejection of stars, and a dialogical style that appears improvised in its naturalism (Forrest 128).

In the same realist vein, we find the cinematographic work of the Dardanne brothers. Playfully called “the grim brothers of cinema” by Xan Brooks in his article for the Guardian, 'We're the same: one person, four eyes,' the Belgian brothers made a name for themselves in the industry by exploring, from a social-realist and Levinasian point of view, the struggles and daily life of the members of the Belgian underclass: poor teenagers, undocumented immigrants, traffickers of the black market, labourers. Themes of social relevance, such as precarity, unemployment, family and economic relationships, nurtured their creative genius and motivated the creation of feature films with political connotations and essential style parameters. Among these, the film scholar Marie-Aude Baronian highlights the following: natural settings, over-the-shoulder camera, raw editing, rigorous dialogues, *mise-en-scène* at the service of an economy of moral and emotional weights, frontal social themes, effect of truth and documentation, and the central imposition of characters (Baronian “La caméra à la nuque”).

A *Better Life* and *Take Out* are inheritors of the social realist tradition favored not only by the Dardanne brothers, but by the cinematographic schools that preceded them and whose main attributes I have briefly, and somewhat reductively, described in this section: Italian neorealism, Dogma 95, and social realism. Through thematic allusions, and stylistic borrowings, the films elaborate a complex network of associations or intertextual connections that engage in conversations with these cinema movements and with their genre function---formal conventions of Hollywood genre filmmaking---and by extension with our expectations and understanding of the films. With these, come an ideological field (ideological axis of point of view) of

considerable complexity central to which are the politics of mobility, the figure of the limited undocumented citizen, and their encounter with the other.

The social subject matter of the films does not inspire an intertextual reading of their point of view but the irradiation zones of cinematographic styles through which that point of view is expressed and constructed. It is difficult to divorce film form from its content, for style actively affects a film's point of view and how we as audience perceive, relate to, and understand it. A style helps structure the point of view of a film and build the cinematic world, and it also comments on the significance of the two. Through distinct styles, films take determined shapes and communicate different meanings. And this function is crucial to how we understand *A Better Life* and *Take Out* as intertextual spaces prompting political and ethical readings of narratives that focus on the (arguably apolitical) life of individuals.

The link between the films' points of view and different cinematographic styles is not difficult to forge. Both Chris Weitz and Sean Baker have declared a debt to different filmmakers and influential film movements. In an interview for *Empire Magazine*, Chris Weitz talks about some films that inspired him and his crew while making *A Better Life*, in the following terms:

> We owe a bit debt to Italian neorealism in general…The last thing I wanted to do was to watch the *Bicycle Thieves* right before making this movie because that would be extremely daunting. But I did watch a lot of other De Sica films, *The Children are Watching* and *Umberto D* just to remind myself of the impact of films about individual lives can have on people…Well it's a very simple story. In this version, the movie is: guy meets truck, guy loses truck, guy tries to get truck back, but of course the complexities around that are immense. And his relationship with his son, I think it is even more complicated than *Bicycle Thieves* because the son is older and has a lot more to say for himself.

For his part, *Take Out* co-director Sean Baker explains to *IndieWire* the cinematographic styles that have influenced him and Shih-Ching Tsou, and describes the characteristics that distinguish their own camera work:

> Obviously, the Dogma 95 movement had a tremendous impact. If DV filmmaking was not introduced and forced into acceptance, “Take Out” never would have happened. If you see the film, you’ll instantly see the influences. The Italian neo-realist films, New York films of the ’70s, and the films of the Dardenne brothers. Throw in some Cassavetes, Ken Loach, and even some Mike Leigh. But we still wanted to have our own style, not just an homage to all of these social-realist filmmakers. I think our film has its own style in terms of the camera work. We like to think of it as a combination of security cam, voyeur cam and hidden camera. Most of the scenes are shot with a telephoto lens to observe Ming from a distance. Scenes in which the characters open up with one another and our slightly more personal, we move in.

Once the stylistic differences between *A Better life*, *Take Out*, and other films of the realist vein have been properly accounted for, however, the influence of (neo) realist film movements on films about non-citizens is revealed as deep. The intertextual tie that connects the two films with the realist filmmaking tradition is, in fact, fundamental, and a shared subject matter defines it, the reorientation of narrative units, the camera work, as well as by the manipulation of genre functions.

In his 2001 monograph *Intertextual Encounters in American Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture*, Michael Dunne delineates three “intertextual assumptions” that must be considered when analyzing film and its relationship to other texts. The first assumption he makes is that certain films can enter into a dialogue with the literary works they are based on, the so-called filmic adaptations of literature (71). Some examples of Hollywood movies that could be analyzed under the lens of this first intertextual model proposed by Dunne are *Gone with the Wind*, and *The Shinning*, since both films are based on novels by Margaret Mitchell and Stephen King, respectively.

Dunne’s second assumption on intertextuality deals with the relationship between films and metacinema, a type of filmmaking that reflects on its own textuality and constantly reminds the audience that what they are watching is fictional. We can find a good example of this kind of intertextual practice in MGM resident filmmaker Vincente Minelli’s 1952 melodrama *The Bad*

and The Beautiful. All the director hated and loved about Hollywood was distilled in the story of an alienated filmmaker and its complicated relationship with the Hollywood industry and filmmaking establishment. Ambition, power dynamics, opportunism, betrayal, all vices held a special place in the film.

According to Dunne, the third and last form of intertextuality develops when films dialogue with their film genre. The concept of genre, he warns us, is highly controversial, for, as many critics argue, any specific genre definition relies on a paradox since certain filmic models presumed generic conventions come from an "a priori (unstated) definition" (Dunne 72). Despite the logical impossibility of genre, Dunne defends its provisional usage and quotes film critics, such as Andrew Tudor, to establish the importance of genre as a framework that allows the critic to initiate discussions about auteur theory and cinematographic innovation. In this analysis, I am less concerned with the actual generic status of *A Better Life* and *Take Out* and more interested in how their presumed generic status enables certain interpretations and deconstructions of the concept of (informal) citizenship.

This way of approaching film intertextuality and "genre" analysis has been inspired by the work of James Naremore, who, in his introduction to film noir, explains: "the point is, there's no way of really defining the term. What you have to do is see how it's used by various constituencies over time and how it becomes in people's minds a stable idea, but it's never really been one." In other words, it is easier to recognize a film genre than to define it. A genre like film noir, after all, is a type of discourse that belongs to the history of ideas, for it is composed by "a loose, evolving system of arguments and readings that helps to shape commercial strategies and aesthetic ideologies" (Naremore 11). Film noir and by extension, other genres,

Naremore says in *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*, can be equated to the Foucauldian notion of authors as functions.

An author's individuality, states Foucault, is cancelled out by the text because authorship is a function of language. For the French philosopher, the presumed relationship between the author (the one who creates), text (the creation), and the reader (the one that receives the author's creation) should be replaced by that between language (a structure) and subjects (the ones posited inside language structures). The real problem for Foucault is not to determine who the author of a work is, but rather what he/she can do, the kind of knowledge they put into place or generate. Drawing upon this idea, Naremore proposes to look at cinematic genres not as genres per se but as functions or discourses with certain modes of existence that can be used in specific ways, circulate, and be appropriated by others (Naremore 136-166). At the end, Naremore's functional theory shifts the focus from analyses concerned with the generic composition of a text to those that emphasize, instead, how perceptions of a genre influence interpretation. In the case of my analysis of *A Better Life* and *Take Out*, I am concerned with how the genre functions of social problem film, melodrama, and indie film serve as unifying discourses that create a polysemous, aesthetic, and political space for textual encounters.

In *Genre and Hollywood*, Steave Neale seems to agree with Naremore's problematization of film noir by recognizing that social problem film suffers from a similar malady. The generic name is but a label invented by critics. And as with any other critical categories arbitrarily created, it resists definition. Purdy and Roffman, however, tried to identify in *The Hollywood Social Problem Film* the main characteristics of the fictional category of social problem film. They claim that this type of films was reserved to make statements and teach a moral lesson. The genre, they continue, is more concerned with the depiction of social surface mechanisms, as they

call them, than with social values, such as religion, or the family. Their most defining characteristic, they establish, is their didacticism and the social message they impart (Roffman and Purdy 9).

As with other film genres, the label of independent film cannot be adequately defined, but this has not stopped film critics from trying to do so. Michael Z. Newman summarizes the conventions of indie film in three slogans: “characters are emblems; form is a game; and when in doubt, read as anti-Hollywood” (Newman 34, 35). The first slogan (characters are emblems) refers to the degree of social engagement of independent films and their potential to embrace cultural politics. Independent cinema is more prone than Hollywood to dramatize social conflict and identity issues, especially of marginalized people and minorities. The representation of these characters tends to be developed more in-depth, they are more vivid and compelling than their Hollywood counterparts.

Although useful for analyzing the indie genre function, these conventions, Newman points out, should not be taken as a set of enough and sufficient conditions to identify or define an indie film. Like what happens with those of other film genres, indie conventions are based on specific exemplars whose cinematographic strategies, rather capriciously, became paradigmatic. And while some films may be closer to these models, others tend to be further from them (Newman 36).

To these problems with definition, we should add yet another complexity: the increasing overlapping of film functions within a single movie, something that film scholar, Ira Jaffe, calls hybrid cinema. In her introduction to *Hollywood Hybrids: Mixing Genres in Contemporary Films*, Jaffe uses the example of Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* to explain the “omnivore” nature of hybrid contemporary filmmaking. Through the manipulation of genre function expectations,

tones, and styles, for instance, is that Tarantino manages to evoke in his film the likes of gangster movies, sexploitation, kung fu, silent film, sci-fi, horror, anime, and even family melodrama (Jaffe 16). Although *A Better Life* and *Take Out* do not stretch the generic limits as dramatically as *Kill Bill*, they still exhibit specific hybrid cinema characteristics. In *Take Out* we can distinguish functions proper of indie and social films, while in *A Better Life* we witness the mixing of social film and melodrama. I have already explored the main expectations of the social and indie genre functions. Still, before delving into how they interact with each other to evoke styles of celebrated film schools and filmmakers, such as neorealism, Dogma 95 and the Dardenne Brothers, I would like to describe Hollywood formula for the melodramatic genre function briefly.

The term melodrama or its correspondent adjective, melodramatic, is not exempt from controversy any more than the notions of social film or indie film. Particularly intriguing are the two ways in which the concept has been employed. The first use concerns language and its familiar register, in which melodrama comes to pejoratively signify highly emotional or charged with emotion. The second use refers to a classifying category through which literature and film scholars' group dramatic and filmic works with certain characteristics. Among them, the literary critic, Peter Brooks, emphasizes strong emotionalism, moral polarization of plot and characters, extravagant expression, and "breathtaking peripety" (P. Brooks 11).

While Brooks does a good job in establishing a general pattern of reference for literary studies, it is worth remembering that melodrama is a historically contingent and ever evolving category. What started, for example, as a theatrical genre in France and Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, then became more generalized and varied.

We can understand Hollywood melodrama as a direct inheritor of that literary tradition, though not completely. They share the Manichean conflict; the triumph of good over evil; and the character types: heroes, heroines, and villains. But literary and Hollywood melodrama also differ in some respects. Contemporary Hollywood melodrama is more a cluster form than a clearly distinguishable genre function, and we can find examples of its implementation in films as diverse as *Star Wars*, *Terminator* or *Ben-Hur*. Interestingly, both the film industry and contemporary reviewers tend to equate melodrama with action genre functions, precisely because, as points out, "they contain more of melodrama's traditional—and 'popular'—ingredients." In the next section, I shall examine more in detail how melodrama cluster function is used in films with the topic of migration in conjunction with other genre functions. I also shall delve into how different genre functions and their styles remind the viewer of certain film schools, and prompt different readings of *A Better Life* and *Take Out*.

III. The Good/Better Life in *A Better Life*

The most forthright homage *A Better Life* pays to *Bicycle Thieves* is via its invocation of a material icon and symbol of a moment of citizenship at the heart of the film, the bicycle. But instead of a bicycle, *A Better Life* recurs to the image of a truck, onto which layers of meaning are weaved. The truck, just like the bicycle does in the case of Antonio Ricci, distils Carlos' predicament into a seemingly uneventful but dramatic occurrence. The precious object that opens the doors to labour and community belonging is stolen, and the stealing crystallizes the predicament the films are trying to portray. Without the bike, Antonio cannot work pasting advertising bills. Without the truck, Carlos does not have the equipment to work as a gardener, provide for his son, and demonstrate the value of his labour to the community. The truck also replicates the intersecting levels Antonio's bicycle comments on. Both objects work as

functional narrative devices, as an element of the *mis-en- scène*, and as symbols of the complex economic and citizenship relationships present in the fictional world of the films.

At a narrative level, the truck and the bicycle function as devices that wrap the story in expectation. With its premonitory title, *Bicycle Thieves* gives us glimpses of the suspenseful tone that will prevail for most of the film. In other words, the title is as much a title as it is a promise. While watching the film, one experiences uncertainty but also certainty. Ricci's bicycle will be stolen at some point. The real dilemma becomes when and, later, if he can recover it or not. The film seems to answer this burning question by suggesting that he will never find it. In a key scene at the market of Piazza Vittorio, we see thousands of bicycle parts that foretell that Ricci has no chance of finding his bike in the materials' incommensurable ocean of the plaza. Yet, Ricci continues his search only to be trapped in a relentless and endless cycle of blind tenacity, hope, and disappointment.

A Better Life recurs the same strategy to play with the spectator's expectations. The title of the film also relies on a promise and a possibility, not of an imminent dreadful occurrence but of a more dramatic and naive conviction: life can be better. By doing so, the film instructs the audience to relate the direct reference to Ricci's bicycle, the truck, to the optimistic promise upon which the American dream is built, and thanks to which community labour-based value is given to the informal undocumented citizen: you can create your own luck by working hard, then everything else will become possible. For the American cultural theorist and literary critic, Lauren Berlant, such promise forces people to engage in a citizenship bounded practice she calls "cruel optimism."

Cruel Optimism, a monograph published in 2011, develops a theory in which optimism may not feel optimistic and therefore ends up being cruel. A cruel optimism, establishes Berlant,

is when the object of desire (what we think of as attainable) hinders our flourishing. In other words, it is a "relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *im*possible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (24). If this dynamic works, it is because we inertly accept our life conditions and the "cluster of promises" embedded in desired objects, even if those objects prevent us from fulfilling those promises. Berlant divides them into four categories: promises of upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and durable intimacy. These four promises are the backbone of liberal-capitalist models of what means to have a life with a "purpose" or that adds up to something, a "good life." The real problem with them, however, is that societies cannot guarantee their fulfillment or provide individuals with opportunities to reach their flourishing "potential." To nuance her study of the cruel optimism, Berlant focuses her analysis on questions surrounding the concept of a "good life:" Why is it that people keep an attachment to determined conventional fantasies of the "good life" even when their fragility and instability are easy to prove? And most urgently, she asks: what happens when these fantasies start to fall apart?

Similar questions seem to be at the heart of *A Better Life's* film world, but with the added components of race and legal status. If we incorporate these two elements, then the questions posited by Berlant acquire new significance: What does a good life mean for an undocumented and racialized informal citizen? And how does this racialized version of a good life connect to the promise the film gives the audience? What forms do the attachments to the fantasies of a good life and a better life take for informal undocumented citizens? what happens when they realize these fantasies are unachievable? How do their attachments, expectations, and reactions differ from those of the formal citizens Berlant evokes in her study?

Probably the best way to start discussing these questions is by describing what *A Better Life* understands as an American style, migrant-like "good life," and by opposition, a "better life." In the opening sequence, the images and diegetic sounds express the predicaments in which undocumented informal citizens find themselves, while trying to fulfill that double fantasy: of a good life, and of a better life. The camera's stillness allows the establishing shot to sink in during an intimate introduction: Carlos Galindo is sleeping on a sofa of what seems to be the living room of a house. Hanging on the wall above his head, there is a picture in which we read "God" and "home," words that later in the film will acquire new significance. The brown tones of the shot emotionally engage the audience into relating the space they are viewing to notions of a good life for an ordinary formal citizen, such as home, reliability, comfort, simplicity, and stability. The very shape of Carlos is rhymed by a sunbeam that signals the beginning of his day. On a table, we see a pile of newspapers, a remote control, a wristwatch, an ashtray, a coffee cup, and a wallet, quotidian objects that give us a glimpse of Carlos' "good" life. He owns the strictly necessary, he probably works long hours, needs to keep alert (that would explain the cup of coffee), and arrives home so exhausted that he barely has the time or energy to change his working clothes and organize the things on the table before going to sleep. After all, as the wristwatch invites us to imply, time is money. And having money, in Carlos' film world, equates to having a good life and aspiring to make it better.

Figure 7. Carlos Galindo in his house from A Better Life

Carlos waking up and looking at his watch fulfills what filmmaker Barber Shroeder once said about film and representation: all movies are a documentary, for they record real people doing real things. Here, we see Carlos, an undocumented Mexican non-citizen, perform moments of citizenship. He starts his morning and goes to work, as any other person/formal citizen would do. Some details, however, are left to our imagination. After waking up, we do not see him having breakfast or taking a shower. The camera's eye conveniently omits these details from his narrative arc, perhaps because they are inconsequential in Carlo's quest for a better life, or because his point of view is exclusively constructed around the fantasies of that better life. An undocumented informal citizen, suggest this omission, does not have too much time to "focus" on the small details of the daily "good" life. Instead, he should always remember the bigger picture: he needs to work to improve his life. A long shot showing us the view of the street through a window, an interface between the productive outside and the domestic inside, transforms us into intruders and insiders of Carlos' intimate, domestic world by letting us witness how he leaves the house to get into the object of his cruel optimism: a truck owned by his boss and friend Blasco Martínez.

After Carlos gets in the truck with Blasco, the camera adopts the former's point of view. We now become his companions and experience the world outside through his eyes. The camera moves along with the truck showing us the diverse urban scenery of LA, the global city by antonomasia. We start the journey in the vicinity of Carlos' neighbourhood. Stacked houses, in their vast majority small, dominate the composition. We see markets with Spanish-English bilingual signs, which suggests that the area is home to a diverse population that includes people from a Latinx background. While the truck moves forward, the urban scenery "upgrades." We start seeing medium size houses, and signposts of a more "civilized" and urbanized environment

such as a vast cemetery, bus stops, and a pair of soccer courts. The most drastic change in the urban landscape comes when the truck crosses a bridge, a liminal space that divides the LA of the masses from the LA of the rich. A long shot of a vast, well-maintained park with a lake anticipates a medium shot of Carlos' tired face and the faint gasp he gives after he turns his head back from the luxurious urban scenery---a bodily expression of his realization that the fulfillment of a better life's promise is as far as the distance he has been traveling on Blasco's truck.

After a few seconds, a long shot reveals the truck in all its splendor, as it arrives at its destination. There, we learn that Carlos and Blasco work as gardeners and landscapers. The same shy camera that refused to recount Carlos' morning routine now follows him to document his workday in painstaking detail, those activities that really matter, the moments of citizenship that shape his value to the community and his fantasy of a "good" life: how he carries plants, how he cuts the grass, how he travels to another house, how he blows leaves, how he prunes palm trees, how he travels to another house, how he waters plants, and how he puts pots in their right place before being called by Blasco announcing the end of the workday. When Carlos finally gets to stop, a long establishing shot discloses important information about his last working place. From the restriction on the individual activity of the informal undocumented citizen, the camera now leads us to a limitless open horizon with an idyllic background composed by the mountains, the sea, and some luxurious buildings. Carlos is part of that background, but is presented as minuscule and insignificant, blurred and almost the exact size of the plants he was accommodating a few seconds ago. In front of him, there is a pool that increases the sense of openness, an authorial strategy to indicate that while the possibilities of a "better life" are open on the spatial level, palpable and right in front of Carlos, their actual realization is ultimately frustrated on the narrative plane. This shot may also be read as stating that Carlos is imprisoned,

trapped in a net of better life unattainable fantasies, which he can touch and help perpetuate for other people/formal citizens, cannot fulfill for himself, but "cruelly" hopes to fulfill for his family.

Indeed, when reviewing Latin American and American migrant story-telling filmic tradition on undocumented non-citizens and informal citizens that precedes *A Better Life*, we could hardly disagree on the relatively "good" life network of fantasies and conditions in which the film immerses Carlos. Unlike some of the migrants represented in *La Jaula de Oro* (Diego Quemada-Díez, Mexico, 2015), Carlos has reached the US and did not die *en route*. Unlike the Guatemalan undocumented informal citizens also living in LA, Rosa and Enrique from *El Norte* (Gregory Nava, USA, 1983), Carlos has a home. Yet, his life is still precarious and calls for improvement. He probably works for less than or the minimum wage and is invisible to the state. He also performs strenuous and exhausting physical activities with long working hours that, as we will learn after the opening sequence, prevent him from spending time with his teenage Mexican American son, Luis.

The relationship between father and son directs the narrative action of *A Better Life* just as it does in *Bicycle Thieves*. The importance of the familial dimension has dominated many formalist and realist readings of the neorealist classic. Many of these agree that Antonio Ricci is presented as a melodramatic, and child-like figure, helpless, and incapable of gaining control over his own life. Meanwhile, the film sometimes posits Bruno as the spit and image of his father that imitates every single of his moves, but sometimes also depicts him as a grown-up infant that becomes the emotional support of his father. Their relationship is the backbone of the film and accounts for a type of solidarity that even the greatest of adversities cannot tear apart.

Contrary to what we witness in *Bicycle Thieves*, the relationship between Carlos Galindo and Luis Galindo acquires new dimensions of complexity that have to do with the hardships proper of racialized adolescence, in addition to those caused by generational and legal gaps. Luis is an American citizen, who self identifies as Chicano. As many other teenagers of his age, he struggles to communicate with his father, whom he sees as an example of everything he would not like to be or become poor, “informal,” invisible, desperate, and anxious. The introduction of Luis can be described as an eye-opening, narrative guide that rewards our curiosity. Before we can see him, *A Better Life* first shares with us what he is watching on TV. “Los Angeles, CA” reads a title meant to describe an establishing shot of some luxurious mansions hidden among huge, green trees. A voice over interrupts the contemplation of the image, as the camera focuses on the TV. “Yo, yo, what’s up? Today like every day, we are gonna be showing you the dopest cribs in the world. Check it out,” we hear the announcer say, while the TV bombs us with successive shots of a piscine, a jacuzzi, a sumptuous dining room, some lavish cars, and the entrance to a house in Beverly Hills that includes a small banner detailing the following specifications: 5800 SQ FT, 9 bedrooms, and 4 bathrooms. After the brief display of luxury, the camera eye focuses on a familiar image. It is the same establishing shot we saw at the beginning of the film; the same brown tones; the same picture framing the words “God” and “home,” and hanging on the wall; the same disorganized table with a bunch of stuff on it. Except that, in the sofa, we do not see a tired Carlos asleep, but his son Luis resting and watching TV.

This parallelistic intention is not fortuitous and makes a meaningful difference in how we, as an audience, perceive Luis and Carlos. For Carlos, the promise to remain immersed in the fantasy of a migrant-like good life and to procure a better life for his son depends on, or so he thinks, how hard he works. But for Luis, such fantasies and promises are of a different nature,

one prefabricated by the American "propaganda" machine of celebrity lifestyles. For Luis, all the world of possible desires has been decided and paired down to two things: money and a lavish house, markers that account for a kind of social recognition that he, the son of a Mexican migrant, lacks. Moreover, this is an intimacy episode dominated by the uninvested witnessing of unattainable aspirations. At least for a moment, there do not seem to be any visible emotional investments from Luis. Yet, his young and malleable psyche has already implanted the images and fantasies of what should count as a good life or a better life. The film, however, maintains an unemotional atmosphere only for a few seconds. Unsurprisingly, the first affective response we seem comes from Luis in the form of disgust, a reaction of aversion towards the conversation that happens between him and his recently arrived father:

C: Hey
L: 'Sup
C: I'm tired. Go to bed. Come on, go to bed.
L: All right, man. I'm leavin'.

The brief verbal exchange between father and son disrupts the visual "good" fantasy of home, reliability, comfort, simplicity, and stability the brown tones had helped create. The "cruelty" intimated by this contrast is affirmed a few moments later, when we see Carlos sleeping again on his sofa, and his cycle of labour and community value demonstration ends. What is important here is the irony set up by the intratextual relationship between event and location. No family communication ensures a functional home environment. After the conversation, the viewer asks whether Carlos and Luis have a home. The disruptive event also serves as a *formal* warning. This narrative marker tells the viewer that the dissonance between fantasies, promises, and the real will continue to menace the narrative stability of the film world. Finally, it unveils one of the most significant conflicts at the film's heart: the painful relationship between Carlos and Luis,

father and son, racialized informal citizen and racialized formal citizen, their fantasies, and their hopes for a better life.

Many film critics, and Chris Weitz himself agree that the relationship between Carlos and Luis directly references *Bicycle Thieves'* Antonio Ricci and Bruno's, though with its own complications, as I have already mentioned. One of the major virtues of both films is their ability as a domestic melodrama to critique the structures that condition the stability of the Mexican/Chicanx migrant family and Italian family but also of the state. I intend to illuminate this reading strategy by linking *A Better Life* to *Bicycle Thieves* through melodrama criticism. Laura Mulvey and David N. Rodowick offer a way of linking melodrama to *A Better Life*. Both Mulvey and Rodowick argue that melodrama is Oedipal in its form. For Mulvey, the label of Oedipal depends on the degree of prominence the film gives to the female gaze or male Oedipal dilemmas (63,64). Rodowick complements this definition by suggesting that the function of Oedipal narrative structures is to organize the failures of an internalized conflict system where law and desire are in constant tension. The Oedipal structure offers the possibility of reconciling the two formulations: at a symbolic level by accepting patriarchal authority or at a hermeneutic level by accepting madness and self-destruction (Rodowick 40-45).

Bicycle Thieves and *A Better Life* indeed feature some of these familial Oedipal tensions, in the absence of mothers, but most notably in the complicated relationship between Ricci and Bruno and the explosive relationship between Carlos and Luis. And more generally, in Ricci's and Carlos' inability to live up to their role as fathers and model citizens. The Oedipal configuration of *Bicycle Thieves*, points out Frank P. Thomasulo, takes two forms: one dealing with the tensions between Ricci and Bruno, and one that presents the frictions between Ricci and the State (2-13). These two relational patterns perpetuate the existence of the patriarchal family,

whose prominence is underlined by the absence of the mother for the most of the film. In the end, the relationship between father and son suggests the resolution of *Bicycle Thieves* is rooted in family unity and solidarity, which dramatically contrasts with the kind of unresolvable thorny relationship Ricci ends up having with the state.

The Oedipal structures of *A Better Life* operate slightly differently than they do in *Bicycle Thieves. A Better Life* is Oedipal more in its emphasis on journeying and identity. The film's conventional narrative structure introduces straightforwardly and linearly both of its central male characters' journey of self-discovery and the quest for the authentic meaning of home and family. Yet, the film is also Oedipal in approaching the problem of lawful/unlawful presence and movement and how the state sanctions them. In this respect, Carlos' and Luis' ultimate realization of what home and family mean might seem the most essential and obvious Oedipal structure of the film. However, their journey into the city's jungle of concrete; Carlos's ultimate deportation; his forced desertion of the role as father and his later intent to reenter the US via the Arizona desert; as well as Luis' embracement of the fantasy of a better American-style life account for other Freudian themes that help explain the disruptive and upsetting potential of the migration trope.

As a reworking of *Bicycle Thieves*, *A Better Life* represents an intense study of the (dis)integration of the single-parent, Mexican/Chicanx family, coincident with the forced plummet of Carlos into the throes of criminality. Just like the family (dis)integration portrayed in *Bicycle Thieves* required the narrative device of the bicycle, *A Better Life* needs the figure of the truck not only to expose the dangers behind the fantasies of a good and a better life but also to evince the Galindo family domestic problems that would have otherwise remained buried under the sands of Carlos' exhaustion and silence. Carlos, wanting a steadier source of income,

borrows money from his sister to purchase the truck and tools Blasco offers him. This will also allow him to achieve his ultimate objective of providing a better life for his son. But the truck will also give him the excuse to connect with his son on a deep level and to continue to honour the informal social contract he has with his host community. The first time Carlos and Luis have a friendly and animated conversation is when Carlos arrives in his truck at Luis' school to give him a soccer ball and jersey he recently purchased. The recently acquired objects are materializations of the good life fantasies and the cruel, optimistic promises of a better life. The truck, for its part, and its subsequent disappearance represents the infamous realization that the fantasies of a good life and the promises of a better life account only for that, for an unattainable dream that is close enough for the informal citizen to feel and touch. But the scene also comments on the expansion of citizenship's concept. Carlos, with his newly acquired truck, has also acquired a new type of visibility, given by purchasing power, which, although does not account for an increment of real power, establishes the basis for Carlos' future demand for legal inclusion in the community of formal citizens.

The most revealing example of how the presence/absence of the truck syncretizes domestic conflict, the fantasies of a good and a better life, and a new kind of visibility is the one offered by the truck's quest sequence. Carlos and Luis start their quest for the stolen truck in an apartment complex where the truck thief, Santiago, allegedly lives. The sound of Carlos' also stolen phone alerts the father and son duo and confirms the presence of Santiago in the building. They follow the sound until they reach a barred door. Carlos opens the door that engulfs his figure evoking the image of a prisoner behind his cell. The provocative medium shot could be understood as a cruel reference to how Carlos remains trapped in his fantasy of a good and a better life. It could also be a reminder of his informal citizenship status and the shared condition

between him and the apartment's inhabitants, or even worse; the image could be read as a premonitory warning of what is to come. A Latino kid opens the door, but before Carlos can utter a word, Luis storms into the apartment furiously, calling Santiago's name in the purest ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) style. A visibly upset woman exits a room to hug her distressed kid. Carlos apologizes and requests to see Santiago. The reckless camera imitates Carlos and Luis' angst. Luis starts exploring the place in search of Santiago. He tears apart the paper covering a window, and the light reveals a cramped room filled with beds that remind him of concentration camp barracks or human cargo. The camera takes a moment to register Luis' emotional response while a tense musical accompanies its effort. Luis stands in the middle of the room in disbelief. Around him, we see parts of bodies: heads, arms, and indistinguishable masses moving, which turns the room into a performative space of Kristevan abjection and establishes the division between body and labour.

Julia Kristeva's work on abjection has done much to destabilize Cartesian notions of the individual (35). Something that disturbs the self by provoking reactions of fear, disgust, or repulsion, the significance of the abject lies in the operations through which we distinguish ourselves from others. The image of the confined bodies shown in the scene of the room may evoke sympathy for some viewers, or even fear. But it also fulfills the role of the abject. The cramped, hidden bodies are reminiscent of cargoes and containers transporting non-citizens and others aspiring to become informal undocumented citizens. The image is fraught with danger: inside a cargo, there are risks associated with being and not being (detected). The passengers of a cargo can either die suffocated or be arrested and deported. The risk in the room boils down to the possibility of being found, arrested, and deported. Through this seemingly inconsequential

piece of abject evidence, the film appeals to the viewer's political emotions of compassion, uneasiness, and discomfort.

IV. *A Better Life* & The Ethics of Discomfort

A resonant affect in contemporary political life, discomfort is part of a group of "ugly feelings" that the theorist Sianne Ngai describes as semantically and syntactically negative, for they rely on trajectories of repulsion, displeasure, or pain. The image of the cramped non-citizens in the room elicits the painful trajectories of part of the migrant journey using metonymic association. But it also highlights the fantasies of a good life by evoking the antithetical relationship between discomfort and comfort.

Emerged as a marker of Anglo-American bourgeois culture, comfort described the self-complacency between the body and its immediate surroundings. It also opened the way for creating a new material culture whose main objective was to demarcate the limits between "luxury" and "necessity." Desires of a good life, such as being warm without stifling, having a cozy home, or having fresh air, were materialized as the reconceptualization of interior design and its new concerns with providing "ample ventilation of sleeping quarters, the elimination of smokey chimneys, umbrellas for rainy weather, and furnishing homes for domestic pleasure" (Crowley 751). More recently, however, the affective and aesthetic category, argues the anthropologist Julie Chu, has been used in the immigration discourse as a "sign of the good life capable of moving people to help themselves and to help or (impede others)." In other words, it has become an "organizing symbol and measure of the in/human in transport" capable of infusing vehicles with the powerful virtue of "garnering sympathy, as well as revulsion, towards distant and intimate Others" (Chu 406).

In sharp contrast with the shot of the Galindo house, whose brown tones and illumination evoke feelings of comfort, family life, home, simplicity, stability and reliability, the shot of the cramped apartment, its emphasis on shadows and harsh lights, reminds of neo-noir and its criminal underworlds. The low-key lighting serves to create an uncanny atmosphere. The result is a shot that expresses the film's attitude towards the good and the better life: for some informal undocumented citizens, the promises of a good and a better life are even more cruel and less tangible. A clear contrast between Luis and the rest of the characters in the shot operates exceptionally well, thanks to the manipulation of the light. The sun's illumination in this shot and its overhead direction is sufficiently unglamorous to make Luis look like a villain whom his father justifiably confronts. The dim light allows the two men to dominate the composition, arresting our attention to the back of the shot where the horizontal lines of a blind highlight, even more, the villainous figure of Luis. "Tell these fools that if they don't fess up, we're callin' la migra," we finally hear Luis say. With these words ends a superbly written scene, capturing the dark undertones of migrant life in the "unseen" periphery and Luis' abject reaffirmation of his identity that posits him, a US formal citizen, against people with similar ethnic background but different legal status, a group to which father also belongs.

Although the legal gap between Luis and his father will remain wide and unfilled for the rest of the film, the ethnocultural one starts to narrow during the rodeo/charreada sequence. While they wait for Santiago to arrive at the restaurant where he works, Carlos decides to take Luis to a charreada that is taking place nearby. They used to go there when Luis was five. Still, Luis lost all recollection of the event, a signal perhaps of his distancing from the Mexican part of his Mexican American identity. They arrive at an entrance with the banner at the top that reads "Congreso Nacional Charro" (National Charro Congress), which seems to function as a kind of

liminal frontier that separates the urban LA from the ethnic world of the rodeo. Almost as in a rite of passage, Carlos reintroduces his son into the world of Mexicanness. They start merging into a mass of human beings dressed as cowboys, a crowd that brings together people closely related not by blood but by ethnic ties. Their similar cowboy attires make the crowd closely allied physically, although they remain strangers on a more essential level. The public space of the rodeo, for its part, functions as a producer of provisional ethnic connectivity among people that would be otherwise mere strangers. Through these visual clues, both the crowd and the space of the rodeo start to reestablish at a formal level the lost connection between Luis and his heritage. And this reconnection intent will remain central to the rest of the sequence. When Luis and Carlos get inside the rodeo, the camera wanders away from them to reveal a charro woman mounting a horse and looking at her phone. The choreography is revealing. The camera comes back to Luis and Carlos and then pans to the right to show more people dressed as charros, which provides an immediate narrative payoff: Luis is not as different from the other Mexican people and charros as he likes to think. The accompanying conversation between him and his father supports this reading.

> L: Where these people think they are at? Some Halloween party or something?
> C: This is where I'm coming from. This is your people. They are charros. They're you.
> L: They ain't me.
> C: Really? I'll get you a hat and some boots and we'll see.

Luis' reconnection with his ethnic roots coincides with the resolution of the melodramatic Oedipal conflict between him and his father through a "peace-making" dinner that pays homage, by means of intertextual allusion, to *Bicycle Thieves* and the dinner between Ricci and Bruno at the pizza restaurant. Acknowledging that the distance that has grown them apart is in part his

responsibility, Antonio Ricci unexpectedly decides to invite his son to have something for dinner. They look for a pizzeria and end up in a fine restaurant where they decide to enjoy some mozzarella cheese sandwiches and some sips of wine. Father and son can establish an anti-oedipal connection for the first time since they engaged in the quest for the bicycle. But the moment of familiarity and provisionary privilege is soon interrupted. The image of a well-to-do kid eating a generous plate of spaghetti draws Bruno's attention. "To eat like them, you'd have to earn a million lira a month," Ricci finally declares in a sombre tone reminded of all the circumstances that led him and his son into this moment: his recently landed a job, the stealing of the bike, and the future of scarcity and deprivation that, as result of the stealing, awaits his family. Through that simple phrase, Bruno has also been made even more conscious of his father's desperation and flaws, and of his family's precariousness. And the phrase summarizes, too, one of the conflicts at the heart of the film: how Bruno's journey into adulthood has been accelerated by life circumstances and by his own at times of his infantilized father.

While the dinner scene of *A Better Life* follows the same course of action of the scene at the restaurant in *Bicycle Thieves,* the Mexican American production incorporates some audacious and effective changes. At this point in the film, Carlos and Luis have started to reconnect and know about each other's flaws. Due to his age, Luis is supposed to be more conscious of his family's peripheral position, yet he is in denial and still trying to figure out the life he wants to live. In the dinner scene, we see Carlos and Luis eating tacos. As Bruno, Luis is distracted by someone or something sitting on the table right behind his father. After a few seconds, the camera reveals a Chicanx family composed of various women and men dressed as stereotypical *cholos*, the members of an LA-born subculture usually and many times unjustifiably equated with criminal and gang activities. Unlike Bruno's realization of class difference and struggle and

their historical conditions, Luis' has to do with the promises of a bad life (as opposed to a good and a better life) in the periphery of citizenship offers. Indeed, this is not the first time we see a group of *cholos*. Luis' Chicana girlfriend and her family also belong to the *cholo* LA subculture, and they fulfill the criminal stereotype American society has created for them. They are an active gang with which even the police "do not dare" to engage in confrontation. But they also have a moral compass that makes them refuse to recruit younger members, like Luis himself, for fear of seeing them killed out on the street or locked up in jail. At a young age, Luis has already acquired consciousness of his fluctuating citizenship status. A formal citizen in the eyes of informal citizens, he is just another informal yet documented citizen in the eyes of the state. He was racially profiled and detained by LA police when his girlfriend hit one of their classmates, and he was the only one who could not escape. The image of the cholo family eating at the rodeo, then, evokes for Luis the promises of a bad life and the dangers behind his (in)formal citizenship status that his closeness with his girlfriend and her cholo family has let him experience firsthand: fear, crime, violence, racism, racial profiling, and temporary detention.

The choice for Luis is not as easy as it may seem. On the one hand, he does not want to be like his invisible and powerless informal undocumented citizen father, whom he and his friends contemptuously call lawn mowers. Although gang life cannot guarantee him richness, at least it can, in his distorted version of reality, grant him a certain degree of social recognition, respect/dignity, and (un)wanted visibility, both before the eyes of other gangs but also of law enforcement. On the other hand, he already has a clear idea of the fantasies of a good/better life for formal documented (white) citizens: money and a house in Beverly Hills. Moreover, he starts to doubt that a "thug life" will help him fulfill these fantasies.

In a reversal of the narrative action constructed in *Bicycle Thieves,* where father and son exchange places and the son saves his impulsive and flawed father several times, a different dramatic trajectory takes place in *A Better Life*. The impulsive and disruptive force that more gravely threatens the family unity is that of the son rather than that of the father. Different identarian alliances, implied citizenship statuses, and economic concerns hinder the communication process between Luis and Carlos. "Why do all these poor people have kinds? What's the point?" asks Luis about all the Mexican families around him, without realizing that he and his father belong to that same group. "Don't say that, m'ijo. Don't say that," states Carlos, as if wanting Luis to become aware about his own family class and citizenship status. This conversation serves as an example of how melodramatic generic elements in *A Better Life* provide a framework for a critique of the workings of the American class and citizenship system and the white racial frame (a set of cognitive stereotypes and articulated values of what is desirable and undesirable regarding racial matters), particularly in the way this class and citizenship system and white racial frame condition the stability of the Mexican American (migrant) family.

My reading of *A Better Life*, along the lines of melodramatic genre functions, centers around the way the film develops a critique of the American class and citizenship structure and the white racial frame. In *A Better Life*, Carlos is driven to crime by the financial necessity of guaranteeing a better life for his family. The oppressiveness of the class structure, the community value of informal contract, and the white racial frame on the Galindo's is revealed almost at the end of the film when they finally find the truck Santiago stole and sold. In a rendition of the scene at Piazza Vittorio---where *Bicycle Thieves*' Ricci hopes to find his bike, and in an homage of the scene outside the stadium---when Ricci is torn between the thought of stealing the bicycle

and not doing it, *A Better Life* recurs to the sequence of the junkyard to put Carlos in a similarly desperate position. The scene takes place at night. Carlos furtively climbs the junkyard fence and manages to sneak in without being noticed by the guards or the workers still there. He then starts looking for his truck trying not to be noticed. The camera follows him religiously, it moves with him and stops with him, as if trying to make us Carlos' accomplices. The rhythmic choreography may also be commenting on two issues. The first one is Carlos (in)visibility. For most of the film, he has been trying to acquire visibility by performing certain moments of citizenship. Still, he has remained invisible to everyone—clients, the State, and sometimes even his son, and he has tried to remain like that. But in the junkyard, he is willing to risk everything to get back the truck, the materialization of the promise of a better life he wants to offer Luis. The second issue is precisely about the fantasies of a good and a better life. Along with Carlos, a medium shot shows several cars and trucks perfectly aligned but covered by shadows, which reminds us again of the lightning aesthetics of film noir and neo-noir and highlights the descent of a decent but desperate man into criminality. The image also seems to expose the cruelty that *hides* behind the promises of a good/better life, and to foretell the dramatic outcome of Carlos' attempt to retrieve the truck.

Indeed, no one would question both the affective, pragmatic as well as material value that the truck has for Carlos. As it happens with the bicycle in the case of Ricci, behind the truck hides a literal and metaphorical promise of autonomy, informal citizenship expression, informal community belonging, and mobility. Literal in the sense that the truck guarantees geographical and metaphorical mobility because the automobile truck comes to symbolize a particularly modern, and American kind of freedom related to the fantasy of upward social mobility: the American dream, or the belief that everything is attainable through the dreamer's own effort.

Without the truck, however, Carlos cannot escape the vicious circle of poverty in which he is trapped. On the contrary, he is doomed to spiral into more precarity, as the film suggests with an earlier scene of a migrant worker's mass waiting for a job opportunity that can only be granted to one of them. For Carlos, then, there is no way around it: he must recover the truck, for the sake of his family. The junkyard that presumably hides the much-wanted truck, then, is the assumed cause of the horrors to come. Several circumstances (Carlos' inability to find a job due to the abondance of cheap labourers, his status as an undocumented informal citizen, the high amount of money he borrowed from his sister to buy the truck, the tendency of his son to associate with gang members) have led to his needing to recover his truck by becoming a criminal finally visible to the surveillant eye of the law sanctioning mobility.

As the film approaches its climax, Carlos' sensitivity to his inability to provide for his son is contrasted with his desire to be a good role model and father for Luis. This desire translates into Carlos' last act of "redemption" and abandonment. Having spotted the truck, Luis urges his father to escape security by driving the truck. They manage to get away, seeming for an instant that Carlos and Luis are on track to keep pursuing their fantasies of a good/better life. In the *comfort* of their truck, they are finally able to establish a connection ultimately. "That was nuts, man! That was nuts! You are an ol'G, apa. Man I've never seen somethin' like that in my life. Never! Man, that was the craziest shit I've even seen, ever! That was just incredible. That was just the most incredible thing I've ever seen!" proudly says Luis. "Thanks for coming with me," answers a joyful Carlos while slowing down to talk to his son more *comfortably*.

The moment of familial intimacy, however, is short lived. The class and race issue as well as the cruelty hiding behind the promises of a good/better life surface when Luis spots, from the *comfort* of the truck, a patrol with a police officer inside who follows from the distance every

single of the Galindos' movements. Luis asks his father to drive while the camera takes us out from the *truck's comfort* and exposes us to the urban concrete jungle. A long shot shows us the reduced image of the truck circulating on a highway. In the background, a group of energy structures stands out, probably commenting on LA's industrialized, modern, and progressive nature, a city committed to offering its (formal documented) citizens a good life. But the dominant place of the structures in the composition also highlights the (in)human cost behind such industrial and modernizing processes. Ultimately, it is perhaps an irony that minuscule and invisible non-citizens like Carlos, whose figure in the truck we cannot distinguish, contribute to sustain them.

A few seconds pass before we see Carlos looking through the driver's side mirror making sure that the patrol has left. We get a sense of relief when we see a vehicle, presumably the patrol they just encountered, fade away. But the camera soon reveals the *cruelty* of the situation, and the subsequent event forces us to re-examine our *optimistic* expectations. Out of nothing, a patrol appears. The voice of a police officer ordering Carlos to stop is heard through the speakers. Carlos has two options: he can listen to his son's plea, resist the force of law, press the accelerator, and try to escape, or stop the truck and assume the consequences of his actions. In a last act of redemption but also abandonment, he chooses to set a good example for his son and abide by the rules. He stops the truck, and the police officer approaches him, asking for his driver's license. Then, the camera cuts, and we see the image of a detention center where Carlos awaits to be deported. We later learn that his petition to stay in the US has been denied even when his son has not reached the age of majority. With this sequence, the film finishes developing a race, class, and citizenship critique by exposing the American dream as a cruel

myth, law enforcement as an arbitrary and biased practice, and citizenship as a notion in need of being deconstructed.

That is most forcefully exposed in the moment of *comfort* that precludes Carlos' ultimate apprehension. The paradox at the heart of the American dream is evoked by the short-lived sense of safety and family unity the Galindo's get to share inside the truck, almost enchanted by the illusion of ownership and the fantasies of a good life and informal citizenship belonging to that illusion entails, while they are at the mercy of external forces, being law enforcement one of them. The film remains ambiguous and never clarifies whether Carlos' apprehension is the product of serendipity, systemic racism, or "karma." There is no way to know if the vehicle Carlos saw through the mirror was the patrol they first encountered. There is no way to know either if the patrol that detains Carlos had been alerted of the stealing or if it was the patrol they previously saw. What is clear, though, is the kind of Oedipal injunctions the melodramatic functions of the film end up perpetuating. As pointed out, "split between madness and authority, [the melodrama] could either adopt an arbitrary and purely formal resolution, or else it could let its crises of identification follow their self-destructive course (in which case the power of authority came into question)" (Metz 279).

When their story is resolved, we find that Luis has "fallen prey" to the power of patriarchal authority and the cruelty of the promises a good/better life offers; Carlos, meanwhile, remains attached to those promises but keeps resisting the power of patriarchal authority represented by the state. With his absent father, Luis ironically accepts paternal authority and hopes to be able to access formal citizenship by embracing its expectations for a good/better life. He moves in with his aunt's family and modifies his problematic behaviour. Instead of trying to fulfill the promises of a good/better life through criminal activity, he starts playing soccer and

abides by the rules of his new home so his father does not worry. However, the outcomes of resistance to authority, for Carlos, are dramatic. He is deported to Mexico, but at the end of the film, in a bold move that could be interpreted as the melodramatic hero's descent into madness, we see Carlos trying to cross the Sonoran Desert to go back "home." This last shot affords another interpretation. The act of Oedipal defiance also accounts for the display of a moment of citizenship through which Carlos reclaims his informal right to belong, based on the informal contract signed between him and the LA community that he has called home for more than 15 years, where he has worked and raised a family.

One of the similarities between *A Better Life* and *Bicycle Thieves* is how their melodramatic heroes reassess the concept of home and reconnect with their sons. Another similarity is their precarious condition and desire to provide a good/better life for their families. But ironically, that shared precariousness also makes them essentially different. The represented experiences account for different historical, geographical, and social conditions and also narrate a different relation to citizenship. That poverty has rendered Ricci the category of marginal citizenship is probably out of the question. Yet, his position in the intersectional and human/subhuman scale is much better than that of Carlos could ever be. Ricci is white, Carlos is brown; Ricci is a formal citizen entitled to belong, although Carlos has an emotional attachment to the US and has signed an informal contract with the host society by holding a job, contributing to the economy, and fathering a formal racialized citizen, as an undocumented informal citizen, he does not have the legal formal privilege to belong. These essential differences are important when talking about melodramatic empathy. The immortal classic *Bicycle Thieves* has been praised several times for its portrayal of the "human experience," even though that experience corresponds to the one of a white man that lived in times of the postwar in Italy. However, this

label of universal humanistic narrative may be better understood if we think about the film in terms of identification, its possibilities, and its barriers. Everyone could become a Ricci: a mortified parent trying to provide for his family, an unemployed person wanting to find a job; a flawed individual that makes the wrong decisions. That holds especially true when not everyone could be or become a Carlos, for he is first and foremost a racialized informal and undocumented citizen. This figure distorts human mobility through the lens of race and illegality rather than mere precariousness and social immobility. That is indeed one of the significant challenges we face when trying to impose migration narratives and the virtue of prompting intercultural communication. Some may be able to do so. But others, as the American independent filmmaker Sean Baker suggests in an interview with Jordan Cronk, are too specific, and their narrative may have difficulty encouraging empathy in the viewer. The function of a migration narrative, then, cannot only boil down to the catalyzation of intercultural understanding based on a shared human condition, but their particular use of point of view extends that function to *discomforting*, upsetting, and disruptive territories that question audiences' expectations and preconceptions.

V. Realism & The Aesthetics of Precarity in *Take Out*

One of the most prevalent misconceptions of film criticisms on Sean Baker's and Shih-Ching Tsou's *Take Out* harbours is that the realist and realistic documentary-like film "transcends modern limitations" to position itself as a humanistic narrative of universalizing proportions comparable to the Italian neorealist classic *Bicycle Thieves* (Tully "A Conversation"). There are indeed multiple instances that call for comparison, but universality is not one of them. While it is true that, like *Bicycle Thieves*, *Take Out* relies on the simplicity of the event---a day in the life of a delivery man---to put a "human" face on the migrant struggle, an essential problem emerges when we try to catalog the film as universally humanistic.

The labels of universal and humanistic presume the existence of a shared sense of humanity and of a universal human condition. But Sean Baker himself has already set the record straight on that issue. In his interview with Jordan Cronk, he implies that *Take Out* is a “plight of” story that relies on experiences too specific to “be applied to any culture” or make empathy among the American audience grow. Talking about his film *Tangerine* in an interview with Rod Bastanmehr for *Vice*, he goes on: “What I'm trying to do with *Tangerine* is step away from a "plight of" movie and get closer to telling stories that white guys in the middle of Kansas can identify with (Baker, qtd. in Bastanmehr “Tangerine”). While some white guys in the middle of Kansas may not be able to identify with the story of a Chinese delivery guy, who does not speak English and needs to pay back $800 to smugglers before the end of the day, *Take Out* does much when it comes to disrupting the white racial frame and the normative concept of citizenship using intertextual dialogue, primarily with Italian neorealism, Dogma 95, and the realist cinema of the Dardenne brothers and Ken Loach.

As Tully points out, the main narrative of *Take Out* comes from a (neo)realist repertoire. The pacing, composition, and narrative structure appear to correspond well to that understanding of cinema where a multicoloured and artificial narrative tends to be substituted by the representation of bare social reality: a day in the life of a Chinese delivery man, who nevertheless is in a “not so universal” predicament. The opening sequence seems paradigmatic of Take Out's formal methods and thematic concerns. Reminding us of Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs* opening sequence, *Take Out* opens with a black screen and a conversation between two men:

> Man1: 几楼？ (Which floor?)
> Man2: 三。。。五楼啊 (Third…fifth floor)
> Man1: 走 (Let’s go)
> Man2: 这个鬼地方 (This place sucks)

Man1: 这是十三号 (Here’s number 13)
Man2: 啊，对对对 (Yes)
Man1: 再来两层楼 (Two more floors to go)
Man2: 没有气啊 (I can’t catch my breath)
Man1: 妈的，别抽烟了 (Shit. You should quit smoking)
Man1: 十四，十五 (Fourteen, fifteen)
Man1: 那边（Over there）
Man2：Is it the one we just passed?

We then hear steps that accompany the verbal exchange. The men are seemingly inside of a building looking for an apartment. Moments later, the black screen is abruptly illuminated by a neon sign with the legend “Take Out,” in clear reference to the title and theme of the film: a day in the life of an undocumented Chinese informal citizen who delivers take-out food, and who ironically was once himself “boxed” and “delivered” from China to the US. These opening frames with diegetic narration have a dramatic effect. Without any other visual information, we are forced to make assumptions regarding the two men: they do not live in the building but are looking for someone, probably a co-worker or a friend.

The film confirms our suspicions when the camera shows us a close-up shot of the two men knocking on the door of an apartment and calling for someone named Ding Ming. However, the film warns us that our assumptions may be wrong. A man shily opens the door, and the two men storm inside the apartment, desperately looking for Ding Ming. The restless eye of the camera mimics their apparent urgency, while making us active intruders that involuntarily join them in their quest.

As with the scene of the migrants’ apartment in *A Better Life*, the spaces we get to explore remind us of neo-noir aesthetics and of the abject and uncomfortable geographies of the human cargo. Stacked beds with curtains that demarcate the end of the public space and the

beginning of a "private" space fill a room barely illuminated. Groups of people inhabit reduced areas meant for one person. The atmosphere feels stuffy and tense. Suddenly, the narrative takes an even darker tone, once the men find Ding Ming, the film finally reveals their real identity. They are money collectors sent by Mr. Jiang, the boss of a local gang that sneaks migrants into the US. As it turns out, Ding Ming missed his last two payments because he does not earn enough money to send remittances to his family in China, pay for his own living expenses, and give the money he owes back to Mr. Jiang.

Figure 8. The men are looking for Ding Ming in Take Out

Figure 9. The men find Ding Ming in Take Out

Behind the two men looms a colossal and transnational mobility network comprising corrupt officials, governments, and ("shipping"/human cargo) corporations. The film emphasizes the invisible, "underground," and criminal nature of these elements: we learn about the existence of Mr. Jiang and the characteristics of his business thanks to the words of the two money collectors; we, however, never see the smuggling ring or those who deliver the immigrants. The only two visible collaborators of Mr. Jiang are the unnamed men that threaten and intimidate Ding Ming to force him to pay part of his debt ($800) by the end of the day.

The *mise-en-scène* offers inside into the magnitude of Ding Ming's predicament. He shares a small apartment with a group of Chinese migrants, presumably undocumented. In this kind of precarious space, objects fulfill new functions. A fridge, for example, apart from food storage the money of migrants that like Ding Ming do not have the luxury of privacy or a sense

of safety. The intrusive and trembling camera highlights the precariousness migrants are submerged in, by focusing on an ordinary but disgust-inducing image: a cockroach, whose dimensions have been exaggerated by the camera lens, crawls on a kitchen spoon that is hanging on the wall.

A common but undesirable pest found inside apartments, commercial buildings, and restaurants, cockroaches invite us to think about the clean/dirty antinomy as related to disgust, contamination, and exclusion. In their chapter entitled “Cleanliness Issues: From Individual Practices to Collective Visions,” social psychologists Giuseppina Stelpini and Stefano Passini delve into the history of purity/impurity and cleanliness/dirtiness to establish how these categories intervene in processes of social categorization, such as moral exclusion, and dehumanization practices (162-165). Building upon Maru Douglas’ theorizations on purity and danger that understood the concept of dirt/pollution as the “by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (Douglas 13), Stelpini and Passini connect the systems of cleanliness/dirtiness to the basic emotion of disgust. This emotion, establishes the Italian social psychologists, was primarily an adaptative and oral emotion that prevented the ingestion of dangerous food. But it evolved “to be used as an emotion of social rejection of certain kinds of socially inappropriate people and behaviors,” by associating them to the idea of contagion. Disgust, they continue, may induce an interpersonal distance between out-groups and members of a community, ‘by which people create a physical and psychological barrier towards those individuals perceived as “disgusting”’ or those perceived as contagious. The construction of an outgroup and contagious and disgusting, however, they conclude, depends on a priori judgment. Only membership to a group that has been labeled as contagious or disgusting can guarantee exclusion (Stelpini and Passini 167). In

this sense, the image of the cockroach says much about Ding Ming's precarious situation, as it says about the audience's predispositions to disgust and prejudice.

Take Out utilizes the image of a cockroach to reveal previously effaced prejudices that deem the migrant body precarious. What the cockroach walking on a kitchen spoon puts in place is dirtiness as a force that opens the film to migrant alterity and barbarity and the anti-bourgeois *disconformable* modes of existing and living they entail. The cockroach introduces us to a non-comfortable/non-habitable and abject space inhabited by migrants. In addition, it puts the signifiers of disease and impurity into the frame; what remains ambiguous and "unseen" is the "disgusting" and feared possibility of contagion. "Brief contact with a cockroach will usually render a delicious meal inedible," claim the social psychologists Rozin and Royzman (Rozin & Royzman 296). By extension, brief contact with a cockroach will render a cooking utensil unusable unless it is cleaned and "purified." In this sense, the magnified image of the cockroach walking on the kitchen spoon posits the emotion of "disgust" and the idea of contamination as something that is overly present and unexpectedly imposed on the viewer.

Instead of recuperating disgust for the verbal, *Take Out* lets contamination show as a visual sign of discomfort that, as Julie Chu points out, garners revulsion towards the living conditions of the distant other (406). The film does not literally or visually engage revulsion in a clear binary of clean vs dirty. Instead, it commits to the implied dirtiness of the cockroach and the a priori judgements the audience may have, which positions the pest as a contaminating agent propagating dirtiness and impurity throughout the space it has invaded. The mobilizing of an image that we tend to relate to impurity and contamination, then, opens a position for the possibility of contagion to create an interpersonal distance between the audience and the

precarious space Ding Ming inhabits along with the Chinese migrant outgroup represented on screen.

Another narrative marker of precarity and vulnerability is the restless or frantic camera. The logic of the opening sequence is pivoted around the protagonist's shots/countershot exchange with some spy/hidden camera variant. Once found, Ding Ming is forced to sit in a chair in the middle of the room (and of the frame), while the collaborators of Mr. Jiang interrogate him. No one else is there but them and "us," the audience. The shoulder-held camera never rests still and constantly alternates between close-up shots of the men and Ding Ming, reacting with fear and nervousness to the menacing situation it witnesses. This inaugural moment of surveillance is also an act of disruption of the private that registers the violence against the migrant body. The result is a vision of realist proportions remindful of the cinematic style of the Dardenne brothers and Dogma 95.

Their 1999 film *Rosetta* is, according to the Canadian director Pier-Philippe Chevigny, when the style of the Dardanne brothers was "officially" born. Arguably, it was the first registered usage of the "shoulder-held frantic camera." A camera characterized by its "constant movement, glued to the body of the heroine and reacting to her anger with the same panic" (*portée à l'épaule survoltée, en constant déplacement, collée au corps de l'héroïne et réagissant à sa colère avec autant d'affolement*) (Chevigny 12). According to the journalist, film critic for *Le Monde*, and former Editorial Director of "Les Cahiers du Cinema," Jean-Michel Frodon, this ultramobile camera that "sticks to the character and literally sucks the spectator up" (*colle au personnage et aspire littéralement le spectateur*), is a stylistic "trademark" of realist contemporary cinema, whose distant aesthetic reference can be found in the TV reportage and its videorecording techniques: twitching images not always legible and with "acceptable

imperfections" proper of the medium (Frodon "Les Frères Dardenne inventent "film-personnage").

These video production techniques for the small screen gave life to videotaping, and videorecording, the main aesthetic source of the *caméra folle,* establishes Frodon. What filmmakers borrow from amateur videorecording is the stylistic usage of family video recordings and intimate video diary imperfections. When used by filmmakers, this *caméra folle* and its aesthetics of imperfection impose essential modifications on the system of representation, and its ethical and political modalities (*ses modalités éthiques et politiques*) (Frodon "Les Frères Dardenne inventent "film-personnage").

Less significant when it concerns productions based on artifice and phantasmagoria, this phenomenon is particularly interesting when dealing with films like *Rosetta*, where the observation of reality plays a significant role (*où l'observation de la réalité joue un grand rôle*), points out the French critic. For Frodon, the most important function of the *caméra folle* is its ability to call into question the foundation of the theatrical *mis-en-scene* since the frantic camera "breaks the barrier that separated spectator and spectacle and destabilizes the formal construction that inscribes what is seen in a shot ---by nature endowed with an off-screen [referent] (*casse la rampe qui sépare le spectateur du spectacle, déstabilise la construction formelle qui inscrit ce qui est vu dans un « champ »---par nature doté d'un « hors-champ »*). Before the Dardanne, one of the most hypermobile and frantic cameras that exaggerates the conditions of a live reportage is Lars Von Trier in his Dogma 95 classic *The Idiots* (Frodon "Les Frères Dardenne inventent "film-personnage").

"Lars von Trier's film *The Idiots* (1998) is in a sense an unbearable film to watch," establishes Ove Christensen in his "*Spastic Aesthetics*, The Idiots." The reason behind the

provocative statement lies, according to the Danish film scholar, in the quality of images portrayed in the film: ugly, and careless in matters of colours, composition and lighting. "Sometimes it is even difficult to determine what is being shown on the screen in that too direct lighting from windows disturbs the images," he continues. Another "criticism" that he gives of the movie is the usage of the hand-held camera; its frenetic movement makes it difficult for the spectator to orient themselves, and the equally chaotic jump cuts repel the spectator "in that they destroy any conventional comprehension of the cinematic space and time." Yet, these same strategies make the film a jewel of cinematography and point-of-view aesthetics, for they immerse the audience into the film's narrative by reducing the distance between the story and the point of enunciation (Christensen "Spastic Aesthetics – *The Idiots*").

We find similar (intertextual and aesthetic) intentions in the celebrated cinematography of *Take Out*. The shoulder-held frantic camera, or the *camera folle,* as Frodon calls it, draws the audience into the narrative by imitating the "imperfect" and intimate aesthetics of amateur video. As it does in the case of *The idiots* or *Rossetta*, the mobile camera of *Take Out* closes the gap between the narrative and the omniscient point of view from which that narrative is being told. The camera and its imperfect aesthetics will show what "someone," not necessarily a filmmaker, could plausibly have shot. As Christensen (and Frodon) point out, "the position of enunciation becomes, if not equivalent to, then very close to that of the spectator" because the style of the hypermobile camera and its realist aesthetics produce a sense of complicity between the spectator and the film based on the visual register or videorecording/videotaping of daily life and familiar images (Christensen "Spastic Aesthetics – *The Idiots*").

A similar sense of complicity and of a real rather than fantastic or dramatized situation into which the audience can move is also crucial in *Take Out*. By recording Ding Ming's

interrogation in the apartment, the frantic camera of the opening sequence forces the spectator to immerse herself in the precarious world of a Chinese migrant, a world that, nevertheless, aims to be coextensive with that of the spectator. To increase that sense of complicity or coexistence, the camera eye does not stop in the interrogation of Ding Ming but goes beyond that. It also shows us the violent event of Ding Ming's physical punishment and its aftermath. After being hit with a hammer on the back by one of the men, the camera sticks to Ding Ming's head and then suddenly cuts and takes the position of a distant observer. An objective long shot focuses on part of Ding Ming's body. He is kneeling on the floor trying to recover from the aggression. For the first time in the opening sequence, the camera remains still, as if announcing that the anxiety-inducing danger is gone; but also as trying to attentively record Ding Ming's struggle. What remains is precisely Ding Ming's suffering, an estate of which we are made aware when the camera sticks again to his face and his facial expressions of pain.

In a variation of the camera movements of the subjective opening sequence of *Rosetta*,[1] where the film establishes an aesthetics of immediacy by drawing us into the character's experience through close-up shots, *Take Out* intersperses close and distant, subjective, and objective points of view. From the violent intimacy and subjectivity offered by the close-up shots of the heated exchange between the men and Ding Ming, the camera changes its focus to take a more distant and voyeuristic position. Located behind a door frame, it reveals Ding Ming's legs and part of his arm through a medium shot, leaving other parts of his body out of the frame. We can ascribe two functions to this subtle piece of visual information: the first one has to do with foreshadowing what it will take for Ding Ming to solve his predicament---hard labour through his legs; the second one suggests how his informal citizenship status derives utilitarian value

from this part of his body. It is also in this last sense that the film illustrates the moments of citizenship in which an informal citizen, like Ding Ming, engages.

The narrative of *Take Out*, I argue, is itself a moment of citizenship, for it revolves around a day in Ding Ming's work routine, but with the added dilemma of him having to make money to avoid physical harm. The film constructs the narrative around this daily life event related to an urgent predicament. At the film's beginning, we see Ding Ming riding his bike in the rain through the congested streets of New York. The shots alternate between the subjective when the camera insists on registering Ding Ming's emotional state, and the objective, when the camera acts as a mere spectator of his movement. When he finally stops, we learn he works as a delivery man for a Chinese restaurant. From the disconformable and precarious *mis-en-scene* of Ding Ming's crowded apartment, the film transports us to the open space of the city, then to the enclosed space of the restaurant where Ding Ming works, and then to the private spaces that most of Ding Ming's clients inhabit.

Physical space in the film is defined largely about Ding Ming's movement between these places that are constructed as part of one world of work with different characteristics: the estranged, more private, multiethnic world of the clients, inhabitants of apartments buildings, with whom Ding Ming must interact, and the communal and ethnically uniform world of work of the Chinese restaurant where Ding Ming works. Much of the narrative tension centers around the crossing of the threshold separating the community of workers in the Chinese restaurant from the individuals waiting for their takeout and on whose tips Ding Ming depends to repay his debt. Most of the interactions that happen in the individualistic world of the clients become a ritualistic business transaction captured by the frantic camera. The nervous recording of every single interaction underscores the repetition of urgent action. The frantic camera makes it clear that for

Ding Ming each encounter is essential, for it is a step closer or further in his objective to accumulate the money he needs. But there is more suggested than this. Several interactions are shown from an objective point of view that posits Ding Ming and his clients as objects of our perception, utterly removed from any subjective position. This strategy yields the sense that the encounters are devoid of any ethical implications due to the distance the camera takes and due to the epistemic gap that the film narrative has created between the spectator and the clients. While the spectator *knows* that Ding Ming needs every single penny he can get to solve his predicament, the clients do not have access to this relevant piece of narrative information.

This manipulation of narrative information flow sharply contrasts with the nature of the ethical encounters used by the Dardanne brothers in some of their films. It is a well-known fact that the cinema of the Dardanne brothers relies on the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and his ideas on human existence and its relationship with the Other. "Much of film scholarship on Levinas," proposes Edward Lamberti, "begins with the *visage,* the Levisan concept of the face." When assessing the relationship between the self and the other, the face becomes an important factor, for it is a carrier of meaning. "The Other's face is enigmatic, providing an opening into the Other's presence…The ethics of encounter happens when the self recognizes the Other's demand and responds favorably" (Lamberti 4). Lamberti then goes on to examine the nature of the Levinasian ethical encounter as portrayed in the Dardanne brothers' *La Promesse* (The Promise, 1996).

The plot of the film, set in Belgium, follows a father (Roger/Olivier Gourmet) and a son (Igor/ Jérémie Renier) who are involved in a network of undocumented migrants trafficking. Roger helps immigrants to obtain documents that allow them to stay in Belgium, and in exchange exploits them. When an immigrant named Hamidou (Rasmané Ouedraogo) gets hurt in

an accident, Igor is forced to help his father cover it up. Before dying, Hamidou asks Igor to take care of his wife and baby. The narrative tension revolves around Igor's determination of keeping his promise to Hamidou. This promise, explains Lamberti, is a source of inner conflict for Igor, who "becomes torn between his loyalty to his father and his concern for Hamidou's family." It is precisely this conflict expressed in the form of a speech act that, according to Lamberti, accounts for a Levinasian ethical conduct, for Igor's behaviour illustrates "the degree to which we are prepared to sacrifice our own comfort and enjoyment in order that we might assume responsibility for another's needs" (Lamberti 37).

This establishment of the ethical encounter contrasts with the setup in *Take Out*, where the necessity of sacrificing personal comfort and assuming responsibility for the other is not formally suggested in the individualistic, more private world of the city space/apartment buildings. The flow of narrative information plays a vital role in the creation of an epistemic gap between the (un)shared knowledge between the spectator and the characters in the film. *La Promesse*, for example, relies on the shared knowledge between the characters and the audience to develop its plot. Hamidou's predicament is well-known by Igor and by the viewer, who is, in turn, through formal techniques, encouraged to sympathize with Igor's own dilemma. But the nature of Ding Ming's encounter with the inhabitants of the apartment complexes is of a different nature. Neither the film narrative nor the camera construct Ding Ming's clients as being in an uneasy Levinasian ethical situation.

VI. (Un)Ethical Encounters in *Take Out*

Several exchanges between Ding Ming and his clients are instead structured around an ethnic, linguistic, and economical visual hierarchy, in which the buyers that hold the acquisitive power, especially if they are white, end up dominating the frame while the camera eye deliberately

ignores Ding Ming's presence. In an illustrative scene, through a medium shot and as it did in the opening sequence, the camera takes the position of a hidden observer that shyly "hides" behind the stairs to spy and record what is happening. As a result, Ding Ming almost becomes invisible in the frame, as if he had been absorbed by the stairs behind him. The white, English-speaking client figure dominates the frame, rendering Ding Ming figure even more diminutive and almost insignificant in the composition.

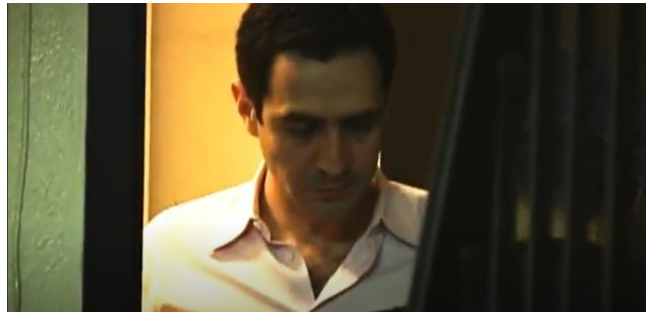

Figure 10. Ding Ming wiht a client in Take Out

The camera then focuses with interest on the material exchange that happens between Ding Ming and the client. It shows us a bag with food and a bunch of paper currency. Once the business transaction is over, the eye of the camera nervously follows Ding Ming as he prepares to leave the building. Suddenly, the client exits his apartment to complain to Ding Ming. The camera alternates between subjective and objective shots that comment on Ding Ming's distress but also on his lower position in the ethnic hierarchy. There is a moment in the scene, for example, in which we see the client leaning on the railing of the stairs and looking down while holding the bag with food. Ding Ming is in the lower right corner of the frame, but he is almost invisible. We only know he is there because we can see part of his cap.

In another scene, the camera registers Ding Ming's encounter with an old white lady in similar hierarchical terms. Through a close-up shot, the camera amplifies the image of the woman, leaving Ding Ming, once more, out of the frame. It is through these formal strategies

that the camera, on several occasions, treats Ding Ming's body as though it did not have or deserved any power or prominence, whereas that of others is treated as deserving of visibility.

Interestingly, this selective visual hierarchy does not hold in the communal, ethnically Chinese world of restaurant work. The film narratively and visually constructs the restaurant as a space with no distinguishable ethnic, economic, or linguistic hierarchies that may position any of the workers as more preeminent than the rest. It would instead seem that the clients that arrive at the place are the outsiders that do not have access to the "world" that is beyond the ordering counter. Although the camera can access this enclosed space, it adopts the position of an outsider, for it observes the activities of the cooks and other workers with non-intrusive caution. Multiple over-the-shoulder shots, for example, immerse the viewer in the repetitive routine of the workers, granting the film a certain degree of documentalist realism. Contrary to what happens in the world of the apartment buildings, in the restaurant, the camera does not construct the relationship between the characters as hierarchical, for they occupy a similar position of visibility within the frame. This may suggest that the migrant workers of the restaurant share a status of precarity and that they are a community bounded by ethnic origin, language, and the practice of solidarity.

Part of this sense of community is possible thanks to the "authenticity" of the *mise en scene* and the filmmaking process that took place in an authentic restaurant with a mixture of nonprofessional actors and real restaurant workers and with a reduced group of crew members. "PD 150 I had to shoot clandestinely, I had to shoot in a business that we couldn't shut down. My co-director and I, we were the only two crew members. We were the entire crew, so it could only have been shot on the PD 150," explains Sean Baker ("Take Out Taught Us the Way"). This

kind of documentary-style shooting and mixture of amateurish actors and real workers reminds me of the realist style and preoccupations of Ken Loach and the Italian neorealist tradition.

Ken Loach's films focus on giving the spectator faithful access to the real experiences of people within society's borders. Part of this experiential realism comes with the employment of non-professional actors with life experiences that account for a representation of reality that "gets away" from fiction: real-life dissidents, like Gerulf Pannach, play the role of fictional dissidents in *Fatherland*; construction workers, like Robert Carlyle in *Riff Raff,* play the role of construction workers; and so do immigrants like Elpidia Carrillo, in *Bread and Roses*. For Ken Loach, the inclusion of non-professional actors with relevant life experiences contributes to the rawness and directness he strives for in his films. Indeed, he is interested in keeping the integrity of his narratives as working-class narrations that "express a point of view, not about working-class people, but working-class people's point of view" (Loach in an interview with John Hill).

This feeling of "authenticity" permeates *Take Out*. Despite its simple narrative plot, the film reveals complex meanings through the point of view of Ding Ming, interpreted by the actor Charles Jang, and that of his real co-workers. The camera often stays on these all-too-human, *all-too-real* characters and on their insignificant activities to tell a story about the colourless repetitiveness of life in the margins, but at the same time to tell a story about solidarity, presented in the film as a worker ethic that does not engage in competition against co-workers, but that emerges instead from the establishment of networks of support between informal undocumented citizens belonging to the same ethnic and citizenship hierarchy are established.

Throughout the film, three illustrative scenes exemplify this emergence of ethnic solidarity. The film's most crucial moment of solidarity occurs almost at the end. Having discovered Ding Ming's secret, Wei (Justin Wan), an informal undocumented citizen and cook

who is longer in the US than all his co-workers, offers to lend Ding Ming all the money he needs to repay his debt. The camera follows the two men outside the restaurant to an ATM. It focuses momentarily on Wei and Ding Ming before showing us Ding Ming's bicycle and, then again, the two men, establishing a sort of parallelism. At the end, it was not the bicycle that helped Ding Ming solve his predicament, but another fellow informal, undocumented Chinese citizen.

Another moment of solidarity occurs when Young, Ding Ming's fellow delivery man, learns about Ding Ming's predicament and, in an outburst of Levinasian-like recognition, decides to lend Ding Ming some money and to let him deliver all his orders, so he can keep all the tips. The scene takes place in the basement where Ding Ming and Young are helping get the MSG for the cooks. To capture the moment of solidarity, the camera stops its now familiar frantic movement and instead records the interaction with discretion, responding with empathy to the solidary exchange. Ding Ming and Young are located close to the basement entrance, and a tenuous light illuminates part of their faces. This lack of light has two effects. On the one hand, it helps to visually highlight the furtive nature of the conversation between the two delivery men, which complements Ding Ming's verbalized desire to keep his situation a secret between him and Young; on the other hand, it renders Ding Ming and Young as equals---in citizenship status, in ethnicity, in occupation, in precariousness---since they both almost completely blend with the dark tones of the composition.

Figure 11. Ding Ming and Young

The third moment of solidarity also comes from an interaction between Ding Ming and Young. With a flat tire, Ding Ming has no other option but to finish the delivery he is on his way to complete on foot and then go back to the restaurant. From the rainy scenery of urban New York, the camera cuts to show us the moment when Young tries to repair Ding Ming's bike inside the restaurant. It captures all the process of knowledge and expertise sharing with documentarian vocation: Young examines attentively the bicycle tire, Young hammers parts of the bicycle, Young struggles to fix the bike, Ding Ming observes in angst. That this scene focuses on the bike is interesting in terms of solidarity networks' emergence and formal and functional terms.

As I established at the beginning of this section, the film's narrative, a day in the life of a delivery man, is a moment of citizenship in which Ding Ming, the informal undocumented citizen, claims community ties to the New York community through the unrecognized value of his labour. This unrecognition is visually highlighted through the constant camouflage of Ding Ming with his surroundings, especially when he interacts with characters holding a better position in the economic and ethnic hierarchy. I have already called attention to this fact earlier in the chapter. But this is not the only way the film "conceals" Ding Ming's presence and place in American society. By positing the bicycle at the center of the narrative action always related to Ding Ming's body, the film acknowledges the precarious nature of Ding Ming's labour.

In his essay "Work in Bicycle Cinema: From Race Rider to City Courier," Lars Kristensen identifies how bicycles, work, and cinema relate. He identifies three modes of cinematic representations dealing with the intersections between bicycles and labour: bicycles as leisure utensils for the race rider; bicycles as transportation machines and working tools of the carrier; and bicycles as images that emphasize the division between labour and leisure. He establishes these categories based on the two basic functions he ascribes to bicycle work: the

transportation of objects, people, or goods; and the participation in a riding race where the winner earns a prize. The first paradigm emphasizes movement and the utilitarian value of the machine; carriers take an object from point A to point B. The second one stresses the function of the bicycle as an object utilized for leisure activities that do not produce an outcome or surplus value. Kristensen argues that these uses of the bicycle result in two kinds of productivity: "external material gains, such as relieving human workload or actual monetary income, and well-being from physical fitness." In the external mode, the bicycle is primordially considered a "mechanical tool that increases productivity" (251), which in Marxist terms translates to the production of surplus and capital for the machine owner. The second mode of productivity, according to Kristensen, arises from the interpretation of work as an activity through which the individual rider obtains certain personal benefits that do not necessarily have to be economic, such as good health and feelings of independence (250).

Take Out itself provides a rejoinder to this machine/toy bicycle work dialectic proposed by Kristensen. For a great part of the film, the camera pays special attention to Ding Ming's bicycle riding and pedalling throughout the streets of New York. This same activity that, in *Quicksilver* (1986) Kristensen interprets as a paradoxical representation of an external mode of bicycle labour from which the protagonist obtains "internal enrichment," in *Take Out* takes darker tones.

There is no question that, in Ding Ming's case, the bicycle accounts for a tool or a machine that increases the worker's productivity and surplus, in the Marxist sense theorized by Kristensen. Setting aside the agency of the clients who decide whether they give Ding Ming a tip or not, with each ride, there is a real possibility for Ding Ming to make some additional income, as minuscule as possible. But the activity does not trigger in Ding Ming any spiritual awakening

or prompts any sense of freedom. Quite the opposite, the image of Ding Ming riding his bike instead comments on his marginal position in American society by opposing the idea of leisure to that of boredom.

Several criticisms of the audience about *Take Out* have to do with its "tedious," "repetitive," and "boring" narrative. And, at least in part, they seem to be right. The slow pace of the movie, the amateurish looks of the *mis-en-scene*, and the complete absence of diegetic/non-diegetic music, along with its focus on the simplicity of the event---in the style of the neorealist classic *Bicycle Thieves*--- do create a sense of tediousness and ritualism pushed to the extreme.

In *Take Out*'s defense, I would argue that this is precisely one (if not the main) objective of its neorealist-like uneventful narrative. Ding Ming's work routine is supposed to be tedious because he, being in his predicament, cannot derive any pleasure or sense of accomplishment from the experience. And the film is relatively successful at immersing the spectator into Ding Ming's heavily ritualized, tedious, yet desperate world by making them participants in every single of his rides and encounters. In other words, the film opens the door to the viewer to a world that, although is part of the daily life of the city, remains inaccessible for many and, thus, invisible.

Take Out's vocation of making visible the lives of Chinese informal citizens in the margins has prompted critics to see the film as a narrative of universalizing humanistic intentions comparable to those of the canonical film of cinematic humanism, *Bicycle Thieves*. As I established previously, some reasons justify this comparison, but a universal version of what it means to be human is not one of them. It is not hard to see why.

Bicycle Thieves is a protest against capitalism's brutalizing machinery and a celebration of the familial solidarity that opposes it. De Sica's film owes part of its reverential status to its

humanist vision that brought the lives and concerns of ordinary people—unemployment, poverty, human suffering---to the big screen. However, the conditions for that humanist vision are often misinterpreted by some critics as an a priori condition that facilitates the identification process between the audience and the now humanized character. For example, speaking on the humanistic qualities of *Bicycle Thieves* and its characters, Vojković explains: “We recognize their humanity. According to André Bazin, the humanism of Italian neorealism is its greatest value. We recognize De Sica’s pessimism, which is related to the notion that a person does what he or she can as evidence of his or her humanity” (Vojković, 2019). And then goes on to argue that third-world cinema has replicated this vision multiple times.

What this kind of interpretation overlooks is not only that identification, as the example of Sean Baker cited at the beginning of this essay illustrates, is hard to predict, but also that humanness is an unstable category whose definition, as Mel Chen points out in her monograph *Animacies*, depends on other notions and factors such as animality, nationality, race, security, environment, and society (Chen 3). In other words, neither are all bodies, despite their assumed humanity, constructed as human, nor are they located in the same category of the human-subhuman and citizenship/non-citizenship spectrum.

While *Bicycle Thieves* tells the story of a white citizen and a father in a precarious situation, *Take Out* deals with the occurrences of a Chinese, informal undocumented citizen in a predicament directly related to his legal status. Unlike Ricci, Ding Ming is not unemployed as a product of an uncontrollable situation, but in turn, he has to pay the smugglers that helped him get into the US. The specter of his undocumented status, not his humanity, haunts the film.

Despite their differences, *Bicycle Thieves* and *Take Out* share some thematic preoccupations. In *Take Out*, there is a sequence with a narrative structure that reminds of a

specific sequence of *Bicycle Thieves*. While Antonio Ricci is busy posting an advertisement on the wall, a man wanders on the street suspiciously, continuously looking at Antonio's bike, which is lying against the wall next to Antonio. The camera cuts to show us a young man looking at Antonio and the bicycle from the distance. Taking advantage of Antonio's distraction, the young man steals the bike. When Antonio reacts and tries to grab the thief, the other man who has witnessed the event; presumably another thief, blocks Antonio to try to slow him down. Antonio's facial expressions indicate his agonizing need for the bike to work and support his family. The cruelty of the situation summons the film's rhetorical energies to the formal organization of the scene. The camera impassively looks at the occurrence, contrasting with Antonio's angst but imitating the indifference of the people around him. They hear his cry for help but do nothing. The apathetic atmosphere gains intensity when the film cuts to a long shot of Antonio running through the streets of Rome. The effect is powerful, for Antonio appears as an isolated figure in an urban jungle that offers no compassion and where the poor steal from the poor.

Take Out loosely draws upon this sequence in the last moments of the film. In his mounting desperation to get the rest of the money he needs to repay his debt to the smugglers and avoid physical harm, Ding Ming accepts to deliver a last order, even though the restaurant has stopped taking orders. *Take Out* borrows the economy of the stealing sequence of *Bicycle Thieves* that I have been discussing. A long shot shows Ding Ming leaving his bike unattended on the street and entering a building. The camera calmly follows Ding Ming to the entrance of the building but takes a break to frame in a long shot Ding Ming's bicycle. Like Antonio, Ding Ming is unconcerned with the object he needs to work. Even if the spectator is unfamiliar with *Bicycle Thieves* and its dramatic outcomes, this shot produces a certain uneasiness by positing

the bicycle in the middle of the street as if asking to be stolen. The barely illuminated surroundings create a tense atmosphere, for in the shadows of the night, all dangers become more palpable and real. In an unexpected turn, the camera cuts for a moment to return to the restaurant, where the owner checks with her employees about the products they have and the ones they lack. The temporary distraction is a bold move that increases the dramatism of what will come. For a moment, the camera seems to suggest that the film has come to a happy ending where the restaurant is about to close, and the employees are preparing to return home. For a moment, the camera seems to suggest that Ding Ming will appear in the restaurant after collecting enough tips to pay his debts. But that does not happen. Instead, the camera takes us back to the streets of New York. Here *Take Out* breaks significantly with *Bicycle Thieves*, initiating a parallel sequence in which Ding Ming prepares to deliver the last order. He gets on the elevator. The camera cuts again to the restaurant to keep the dramatic tension alive but also to contrast Ding Ming's desperate situation and his need to keep working while everyone else is ending their daily job routine. In the restaurant, the owner keeps revising the list of available products, and the employees start mopping the floor and taking out the trash. From the safety of the closing restaurant, the camera invites us again into the elevator with Ding Ming. He delivers the order, but the camera withholds some narrative information from the spectator: we do not know if Ding Ming got a tip for delivering that last order. We then see a visibly exhausted Ding Ming entering the elevator. The camera follows him as he descends to the main floor. The elevator, however, stops on the 12th floor, where a couple of black men dressed in clothes that remind of rap aesthetics get in the elevator with Ding Ming. They focus on him, making fun of his clothes, and asking him questions. Sensing that their intentions may not be the best, Ding Ming establishes that he does not understand and cannot communicate in English due to the language barrier. The

camera alternates between him and the men, establishing a parallel with Ding Ming and the smugglers' interaction in the opening sequence. This time, however, the mise en scene is constructed as more claustrophobic. The men push Ding Ming to a corner of the elevator, pushing him out of the frame and rendering him once more invisible. He treats the men by calling the police, but they start battling with him. The camera jumps out of the elevator and shows us the manual elevator door. Through a small window, we only see hands moving. The suggestive shot reinforces, even more, the sense of claustrophobia and metaphorically comments on Ding Ming's precarious state. He is trapped, and there seems to be no way out of his predicament. The camera returns to the elevator to show us when one of the men takes out a gun and threatens Ding Ming. Ding Ming tries to resist even with a gun pointing at his head. Ultimately, he has no option but to give all his money, all the "surplus of his pedalling," to the two men. After the two men run away with Ding Ming's money, we see Ding Ming inside the elevator, sobbing his heart out. When Ding Ming finally manages to get out of the elevator, the camera follows him to the street, where he finds his bicycle. He lies on it and throws up.

The narrative similarities between these two sequences are obvious: the mechanism used for work is left unattended; an object of value is stolen, leaving the characters in more despair than they were at the beginning of their respective films. There are many ways to shoot such a sequence but *Take Out* takes a departure and does not religiously follow the events as they unfold in *Bicycle Thieves*. The main similarity, however, is the formal quality that *Bicycle Thieves* utilizes and *Take Out* replicates. It involves several strategies and techniques: the first is the mounting anxiety by foreshadowing, through the image of the unattended bicycle, the imminence of calamity. It features the focusing effort of the camera that impassively in *Bicycle Thieves* and quietly in *Take Out* observes the bicycle, an object of work value, from a distance.

In the second one, when calamity arises, and the objects of value are stolen from Antonio Ricci and Ding Ming, the formal techniques employed take different directions and produce different results. The camera is again mobile in the case of *Take Out,* and the space is constructed as hyper-closed or claustrophobic. Meanwhile, the camera in *Bicycle Thieves* remains still and composed while witnessing the stealing of the bike and Antonio's angst. The effects are contrasting but equally powerful. The camera of *Bicycle Thieves* focuses on the insignificance of Antonio Ricci's predicament for the inhabitants of the city's open space. At the same time, *Take Out* suggests with its suffocating *mis-en-scene* that Ding Ming is trapped in his precarity.

The stealing scenes in *Bicycle Thieves* and *Take Out* repeat the dynamics of precarity that operate in both sequences. The robbery perpetrated by the black men in *Take Out* replaces one of the main problems in *Bicycle Thieves*---the problem of a never-ending circle of precarity in which members of marginalized groups must compete against other for survival. But, if Ricci's situation insists on the lack of support and solidarity for a fellow citizen, its doing so helps to make visible the logic under which *Bicycle Thieves'* universalizing humanism produces in the figure of Ricci, a precarious version of the human that, nevertheless, seeks to exalt the human itself as a category. *Take Out* reveals a citizenship and ethnic logic as clear at the heart of its narrative. In its allusion to *Bicycle Thieves*, *Take Out* foregrounds the role of citizenship and ethnicity in the distribution of work value. Located at the bottom of the citizenship/ethnicity spectrum, Ding Ming, the informal citizen whose low-wage labour represents a moment of citizenship, is still invisible to other citizens. Still, someone deserves solidarity inside the Chinese ethnic world of the restaurant where he works.

VII. Conclusion: Explanations & Comparisons

This chapter aimed to explore the vicarious experiences or not-so-empathetic responses that films, such as *A Better Life* and *Take Out* can evoke. Here, I have argued that the narrative as well as the formal strategies of *A Better Life* and *Take Out,* fiercely dedicated to bolstering the agency of informal undocumented racialized citizens, destabilize the notions of universalizing humanness and citizenship by establishing intertextual dialogues and subverting generic expectations. In addition, I tried to indicate and juxtapose the intertextual factors in A *Better Life* and *Take Out*, as well as some characteristic elements of composition and plot. By analyzing the narratives and styles of *A Better Life* and *Take Out*, I hoped to put them in the context of elementary characteristics of their shared intertext, *Bicycle Thieves*---including aspects of aesthetics, thematic, and social nature, to demonstrate how *A Better Life* and *Take Out* disrupt the notion of what it means to be human and an informal citizen in a hostile urban environment, especially for a migrant whose mobility is perceived as threatening. The comparison between the two films and *Bicycle Thieves* allows us to unpack various understandings of the culturally and historically contingent notion of citizenship and migrant mobility. The thematic and stylistic differences that emerge from the analysis of the films include differences in perception, expression, and interpretation of those two concepts.

The stylistic differences revealed in the discussion of the film narratives are the differences in the expression of particular film genres and how they function invoked by melodrama, social, and independent film. Characterized by Manichean conflict; the triumph of good over evil; and the character types (heroes, heroines, and villains), the melodramatic function in *A Better Life* is used with a very specific purpose: it develops a critique of the American class and citizenship hierarchy and the white racial frame, which undermines the

stability and unity of the Mexican American migrant family. Like Ricci, the father protagonist of *Bicycle Thieves*, Carlos Galindo is a desperate man trying to survive his adverse environment. Like Ricci, he is confronted with a significant moral dilemma. He must choose between being a model informal citizen or committing a crime to get back the truck that will give him and his son access to the unachievable ideal of a good life.

A Better Life subverts the melodramatic function and expectations of its main intertext, the Italian neorealist classic *Bicycle Thieves*, to offer a story about a father trying to help his son regain his sense of ethnic identity and about a son that, due to a citizenship gap, refuses for most of the film to accept that racialized identity for it entails precarity and discomfort as a form of life. Emerged as a marker of Anglo-American bourgeois culture, comfort appeared as a social category that described the self-complacency between the body and its immediate surroundings. More recently, however, the term has expanded its definition to become a symbol of the in/human in transport. In *A Better Life*, this in/human categorization posits the figure of migrants who can aspire to participate in the illusion of a good life against those who cannot. These concerns are predicated upon the belief that a good/better life for an undocumented informal citizen (who has signed an informal contract of belonging with his host society) is possible through his labour and the establishment of family ties. However, embracing the fantasies of a good/better life, as the function of melodrama itself, depends on a series of Oedipal injections that become transgressive with the melodramatic hero's descent into madness. While at the end of the film, we see how the son succumbs to the demands of paternal authority and the promises of a good/better life, the father ends up spiraling into the throes of criminality, losing his home, and the promises of a good/better life due to his legal status. To bring the informal contract of

belonging he has signed with his host society, he "descends" into madness by trying to cross the Sonoran Desert to retrieve his family and return to where he now calls home.

Take Out, for its part, relies on cinematic style to mark its alliances to the (neo)realist filmmaking tradition of Italian neorealism, the humanist cinema of the Dardenne brothers, the socially conscious cinema of Ken Loach, and the imperfect aesthetics of Dogma 95. Characterized by a *mise en scène* that reminds us of neo-noir aesthetics, *Take Out* explored the abject and uncomfortable urban and domestic geographies of the human cargo, a space that migrants placed in a position of precarity are forced to inhabit. Stuffy, dirty, and by extension, impure, these spaces elicit responses of disgust and construct migrants as contaminating agents. In addition to abject spaces, Take Out relies on the shoulder-held frantic camera, or the *camera folle,* to draw the audience into the narrative by imitating the "imperfect" and intimate aesthetics of amateur video. In so doing, the mobile camera of *Take Out* closes the gap between the narrative and the omniscient point of view from which that narrative is being told. The camera and its imperfect aesthetics show, in reality, how it is supposed to be perceived by anybody.

To frame the migrant's otherness, *Take Out* also instructs the audience to recognize the ethics of encounter. Understood as the necessity of sacrificing personal comfort and assuming responsibility for the other, the setting of *Take Out* is constructed as a rather individualistic universe where a visual hierarchy prevails. In this world, the precarious migrants are visually constructed as an outsider that should rely on their body to survive their hostile environment. In this context, ethnic solidarity becomes a tool through which migrants establish cooperation networks and help each other.

Indeed, *Take Out's* pacing, composition, and narrative structure appear to correspond well to a (neo)realist understanding of cinema, where a multicoloured and artificial narrative

tends to be substituted by the representation of bare social reality: a day in the life of a Chinese delivery man, who nevertheless is in a "not so universal" predicament. A moment of citizenship, *Take Out* focuses on an undocumented and racialized Chinese informal citizen that needs to rely on his pedalling and on a machine to generate the surplus that will let him pay off the debt he has with the smugglers who helped him come to the US. Through a *mise en scène* that alternates between precarity and claustrophobia, framing that evinces the invisibility of the migrant and its more disadvantaged position in the ethnic/citizenship hierarchy, and a camera that alternates between frantic and sober states, the film constructs the world of the informal citizen as precarious, impure, and disconformable. But it also grants the informal citizen the agency to establish networks of ethnic solidarity.

In eliciting vicarious responses that do not always correspond to an empathetic reaction from the audience, *A Better Life* and *Take Out* perform a social function. They offer concrete shapes to migrant mobility threatening the fabric keeping receiving communities together. The films also mirror a cultural understanding of citizenship and migrant mobility. They also reveal important aspects of how American society articulates differences. Compared to their intertext, *Bicycle Thieves*, it is clear that *A Better Life* and *Take Out* challenge generic expectations to destabilize the notion of the human. As a result, they evoke vicarious responses that range from discomfort to revulsion. However, how those emotions find expression is slightly different. Despite being produced in the US, *A Better Life* and *Take Out* feature distinct forms of understanding human mobility. The overall logic of the narrative is all determined by stylistic decisions that allow us to gain insight into how notions such as citizenship and mobility are not only legally but also culturally constructed.

CHAPTER III.
For the Sake of Status: Sex Work and the Anti-Citizen in *Crows* and *La Mara*

The migration novels *La Mara* and *Crows* have parallel features. Both of them use the struggles of migrants as a starting point of conflict and rely on the quasi-ethnographic experiences of their respective authors to build that conflict. The protagonists of both novels fail in trying to take root in their new homes. Both are constructed as vulnerable non-citizens through narrative markers that accentuate their otherness, in both novels the settings seem to acquire a life of their own and hinder the characters' chances for social mobility and success; lastly, violence, sex, and the brutality of life at the fringes of society appear to be the main topics of concern for both Rafael Ramírez Heredia and Jiu Dan.

There are some apparent differences also to be found. The novels are set against different social and historical backgrounds. *La Mara* is a product of the geographical and cultural contact zone between Mexico and Guatemala. It focuses on telling the stories of the inhabitants of a border space described as chaotic and violent. Meanwhile, *Crows* takes place in a modern but unwelcoming Singapore and describes the experiences of a group of Chinese international students who struggle to adapt to their new receiving community. *La Mara* is a neo-policial novel where crime, sex, corruption, and violence are the main protagonists (Galgani "La Mara. La Historia Interminable"). In the novel, the southern border between Mexico and Guatemala seems to acquire a life of its own and becomes an insurmountable obstacle for those who want to reach the US (Kunz 71-82). What is more, the border is a place where multiple narrative voices converge to represent the language of the other (Burki 219-246) and where melodramatic characters turn into victims of deterministic trajectories (Ducoux 24). For its part, *Crows* is a novel that exposes the defining structures of male oppression as well as the tension between genders (Zhang 104-106; Huang "物化"的生长), a piece of body writing where the act of reading

becomes a kind of voyeuristic contemplation and the act of writing a kind of exhibitionist practice (Guan 颓废·偷窥·欲望——棉棉《糖》、九丹《乌鸦》、卫慧《我的禅》评析), and a story about how women always something to attain worldly possessions (Chao 58-64). Indeed, while in Heredia's novel violence seems to be the dictating rhythm of the narrative events, in Jiu Dan's case money and power are the elements that unify the plot. In the worlds depicted in the novels, however, there is a figure that stands out and that has not been examined in depth, especially as related to the notion of migrant mobility: the sex worker.

In this chapter, I strive to analyze the figure of the sex worker as a means through which both novels point to the unsettling function of the migrant body and migrant mobility in the texts as a whole. The importance of the body in the narrative is underscored not only by graphic descriptions of physical violence, but also by the different perspectives of the novels (first and third person narrators) and their focalizers. While the first-person narration of *Crows* emphasizes the agency of female protagonist as well as her fallibility, the third person narration of *La Mara* highlights the lack of agency of the female characters and their subjugation to the main consciousness of the narrative. By analyzing these diverging points of view, I hope to explore how the novels describe with morbid detail a human condition that has stopped to be human. In other words, I strive to analyze how the preferential attribution of a "human essence" is narratively and thematically constructed in the novels. In addition, I want to investigate why the narrative voice of each novel tends to attribute greater humanness (understood as the quality of being human or ascribing human qualities and essence) to certain characters depending on their social class, gender, and citizenship status.

I pursue the logic of this narrative point of view by giving attention to the various inscriptions of the sexualized migrant body and embodiment in the text and exploring their

significance in relation to the novels' overall concerns (gender disputes, violence, and mobility). Central to this analysis is the novels' deployment of the sexualized female body as a means of exploring the notion of (anti)citizenship as related to sex work, commoditization, mobility, and clean/decadent landscapes. The trope of the body is also significant for the connections it articulates between sexual violence in the private sphere and styles of mobility sanctioning in Mexico and Singapore. Similar gestures of bodily and mobility control are evident in what is identified as the narrative voices intent to otherized precarious characters. This, along with a marked tendency in the novels toward textual excess, becomes a means of disclosing connections between the precarious bodies inhabiting the fringes of society and a community at large that refuses to accept those bodies as one of their own, especially if they are female and sexualized. Accordingly, I shall examine how different textual derogatory markers, such as Dragon girls, are used to describe the otherness of certain female characters.

My reading of the sexualized female body in *Crows* and *La Mara* is placed with an established corpus on mobility, narratology, and sex work. Of additional significance is a growing body of literature on anthropology and migration that has given attention to the subject of the migrant, gendered and sexualized body. My attention to the latter is placed within the broader question of the novels' representation of migrant prostitutes and the specific form of their cultural critique. Necessary here is the novels' negotiation between different ethnic and sexual proximities, co-ethnic homogeneity, and social imaginaries of class and anti-citizenship.

I. The Literature on/of Prostitutes & The Anti-citizen

Crows and *La Mara* were written and published in response to two different types of migratory flows but related conditions, as they both give the world of sex work an essential place in their narrative. Both novels follow unique trajectories of critical reception and treatment of the topic of the migrant prostitute as an anti-citizen. Let's start by analyzing the case of Jiu Dan and her *Crows*.

Since it was published in 2001, Jiu Dan's Crows stirred much controversy and was quickly dismissed as a sensationalist semi-autobiographical novel written by a "prostitute writer" (BBC News). One of the reasons Crows attracted so much unwanted attention was its unapologetic and sexually overt prose and explicit content that offended the moral taste of the Chinese imagination. The book tells the story of Helen, a Chinese student who migrates to Singapore intending to get permanent residency and eventually citizenship by marrying a local. In Singapore, though, any woman of Chinese origin is considered suspicious. The girls from the land of the Dragon, or "Dragon girls" (*xiaolong nv*), as the locals call them, are not to be trusted, for they are unscrupulous monsters that go to great lengths to see their ambitions crystallized. Prostitutes, gold-diggers, and murderers, no matter the category to which they pertain, equally prey on Singaporean men and steal them from their wives. A former Pekinese journalist, Helen now belongs to that group. She wants to leave China to become a permanent Singaporean resident, so she arrives in Singapore as an international student. Once there, she will face several challenges that will force her to devise different strategies to survive her hostile social environment and gain the favour of Singaporean men. After trying to land a Singaporean husband that will let her stay in Singapore permanently, Helen has no other option but to work as a prostitute at a local brothel. Ultimately, a series of events will force Helen to turn into what she despises the most: a murderous Dragon girl.

Jiu Dan and the story she tells in around 294 pages belong to a strand of Chinese contemporary writing that has been named "body writing" or "genital writing." The authors of this type of literature are known as the bad girls of Chinese literary tradition: Mian Mian, Wei Hui, and Jiu Dan. Born in Shanghai and Jiangsu respectively in the early 70s, these beauties---how they are called by their fans and some critics--- took the Chinese literary scene by storm with their outrageous stories and writing style that opposed the much more subtle conventions of traditional romantic stories: a kind of spiritual and idealized version of love that shies away from overt descriptions of physical love and the body, more particularly, the female body and sexuality. Starting in the 80s, Wang Anyi opened the doors to a new kind of writing about love and eroticism. After her, other writers such as Lin Bai, Chen Ran, and Hong Yin would go forward in portraying female eroticism but always from a perspective that embraced the principles of Chinese moral good taste. The bad girls of the PRC, Mian Mian and Wei Hui, by directly challenging the core values of Chinese "puritanism," transformed the Chinese literary scene forever.

At the center of their writings is what these female writers themselves call "body writing" (*shenti xiezuo*). The term was coined by Ge Hongbin, professor at Shanghai University, and it exploits the poetics of sensuality, privacy, and exposition (China Daily, Bodies Melting into Words). The common ground of these writers is an exploration of the female body, including all its private thoughts, sensations, and bits. To write from such a position is to appropriate the world, to dominate it through "distasteful" images and words that come to signify not only a certain kind of liberation from the severe impositions of Chinese tradition but also a symptom of celebrity culture that along with their work sells an author's sex appeal ("Beauty writer"). In a sense, these works also offer a starting point for a female self-consciousness of women's bodies

and women's sexual pleasure, precisely because they have been so absent or so misrepresented in Chinese traditional literary discourse.

Although Jiu Dan cannot be compared to Mian Mian or Wei Hui in terms of celebrity status or literary quality, her novel *Crows* falls under the category of body writing. Set in the Singapore of the 2000s, the novel paints a broad picture of the life of a group of Chinese students and their lifestyles through the recollections and personal encounters of the narrator-protagonist Helen. This is an underworld of brokers, cheating husbands, old rich men, and prostitutes. Told in the first person by a female narrator, *Crows* is an extremely subjective novel, chronicling the tempestuous lifestyle of the protagonist herself as well as other Chinese students. What is shocking to the reader is the kind of world she describes. Jiu Dan goes to great lengths to detail the fates and daily routines of Chinese migrant prostitutes in Singapore. The protagonist herself weaponizes her own sexuality to lure men. In this way, Jiu Dan exposes the underground world of sex that hides behind Singapore's façade of modernity. The self-exposure of female sexuality is a central narrative strategy of *Crows*. It is also a controversial and selling point of the novel, which despite not being well received in China and Singapore, gathered a good amount of |readers in other parts of the world. Suffice it to provide one example of such narration. The following is a quasi-pornographic description of Helen´s sexual encounter with Liu Dao:

> 为了鼓励他，我装出一副激动的表情。但他依然柔软如泥。他搂着我竭力想从虚幻里走出来，变成一个有血有肉的真人.我不断吻着他，像蛇一样游动着他的整个面庞。这个在微暗中蠕动着的躯体不时呻唤着。我不知道这呻唤表示什么。他难道会快乐吗？我闭着眼睛也跟着他一起呻唤起来。他又耷拉着脑袋，望着自己那没有力气的生殖器。那淡漠无奈的模样重又像针刺了我. [···] 这时，他颠覆着身体，猛地一声叫喊，然后拿起床头柜上的纸包裹住自己。他说他射了。那是几张白色的柔软的纸，他用它们把它擦净，便又随手揉成一团，扔到地上，我听到一声轻微的声响。他下了床，走进浴间。我有些疑惑，看着他把浴间门关紧，便悄悄从地上把那揉皱的纸打开，我用手触摸着，又凑过眼睛去看，发现上面干干的，什么也没有，只有擦脸油的淡淡的幽香气息。(80) [To encourage him, I writhed in fake desire and kiss him passionately. He clutched my body, striving to break out of an illusion and turn himself into a man of blood and flesh in my colon but he remained as soft as mud. He writhed and moaned. I wasn't sure what his moaning signified. Was he really experiencing real pleasure? I closed my eyes and

> moaned together with him. Then he rolled over, reached out for some tissues, gave a cry of ecstasy and said he'd ejaculated. He wiped himself with more tissues, then crumpled them into a bowl and threw it on the floor. As soon as he closed the bathroom door, I picked up the crumpled tissues and opened them. They were dry and smell only of the lotion. I pushed open the bathroom door and embraced him in the swirling mist of water vapor. He caressed me and muttered some tender words. Slumping on the chest of this old man, my tears again rolled down my cheeks] (138) Trad. Alan Chong.

This sort of exhibition is typical of the novel's language as a whole. It is also what has prompted many dissatisfied readers to quickly label Jiu Dan as a prostitute writer and cabaret girl, who writes not about the experience of Chinese women in Singapore, but about her own experience. In other words, her novel is considered the work of a prostitute. Jiu Dan herself has denied these claims and stated that *Wuya* is actually fiction and that she writes about women in general. Philosophically speaking, for Jiu Dan all women are prostitutes. The unapologetic remark refers to the capacity of all women to sin, in one way or the other. Precisely because of that, they do not have the right to judge or look down on each other. In Crows, Jiu Dan makes this clear. Moral depravation is not a prerogative of the prostitute but also of the "decent" woman. There are multiple examples throughout the novel that portray respectable women in a morally ambiguous light. For example, Helen's first encounter with Liu Dao's daughter is less than amicable. Not being able to withstand Helen's presence, Lui Dao's daughter subjects her to a process of dehumanization by assaulting and imposing on Helen the marker of Dragon girl. Siyan's mother and wife behave in a similar way. Helen, who is also the subjective third person narrator of the novel, adopts a rather ironic and denunciatory tone. In the narrative, it is never clear who is more deserving of moral reprobation: the Chinese sex worker or the Singaporean respectable woman. Indeed, at moments the Chinese sex worker seems to be a bit more humane than her Singaporean counterpart, especially due to the emotional labor she performs.

The concept of emotional labor refers to "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild sees emotional labor as

increasingly relevant, given the particular demands of service jobs. Because these jobs depend heavily on workers' ability to manage their emotions, service employers have sought to control this process, thereby transforming emotion management into emotional labor as a formal job requirement. Having undergone training programs provided by their employers, employees can consciously engage in evoking, shaping, or suppressing their feelings by changing their thoughts, physical conditions, and expressive gestures through both private superficial and deeper intrinsic acting exercises. Based upon her ethnographic study of American flight attendants and bill collectors, Hochschild understands emotional labor to be the commodification of private emotions sold for a profit. She argues that emotional labor varies by gender and social class, and women have far less independent access to money, power, authority, or status in society. The contention of emotional labor is that sex workers' expressed emotions, as a purchasable commodity, may be estranged from their true feelings owing to the commercialization of their emotional displays.

In *Crows*, the opposite seems to be true. Chinese migrants who become sex workers are capable of an emotional intimacy that contradicts the "gold digger" rhetoric by which they are judged. From there, it probably stems from Jiu Dan's incendiary statement that all women are prostitutes. They both sin but also they are both subjected to double standards involving strict and moral and social codes, the burden of maintaining honorability via their own chasteness and meeting filial obligations to continue that same family line. Ultimately, what the figure of the prostitute suggests in *Crows* is that a kind of intimate experience, by which the sex worker acts as a girlfriend to meet the client's unique desire for a real and reciprocal connection, blurs the boundary between authenticity and inauthenticity, thus creating a moral dissonance. Characters

such as Helen are able to form emotional attachments with Singaporean men, even though they first enter the relationship wholly for financial and visa reasons.

The world of sex work showed in *la Mara* is from a different nature than that showed in *Crows*. In the violent underworld of the border, there is no place for any kind of emotional intimacy but only for the raw experience of male sexual pleasure at the expense of underage girls. Despite the exploitation and humiliation in which they are involved, the sex worker's continued existence in *La Mara* relies on social convention, moral inclinations, and legal norms. The role of prostituted children is perceived as immitigable, even as a custom whose mitigation is undesired, as it would harm the consumers at the border, limiting the right of migrant girls to keep on procuring such services. Nevertheless, in *la Mara*, each prostituted child engaged in sex work suffers serious, almost irreversible harm—owing to the social ignominy and continued humiliation and trauma afflicted on her.

Contrary to what happens in *Crows*, in *La Mara* we appreciate an extreme manifestation of the polarization between masculine and feminine gender roles according to which subjectivity is mainly a masculine prerogative while objectification is restricted to the feminine pole. In both cases, one of the main expressions of the corruption of power is the common use of violence as a means for the subjugation and oppression of women. In other words, *La Mara* elides the sexual autonomy of the prostitute by making her a victim of men.

Published in 2006, *La Mara* by Rafael Ramírez Heredia, Mexican writer and journalist, is one of the most honest twentieth century examinations of prostitution as related to migration in contemporary Mexican literature. Ramirez Heredia joined migrants in their journey, starting at the Mexican southern border with Guatemala. He interviewed several of them, and the information they provided served as inspiration to write his novel, *La Mara*. Seeking to expose

the abuses to which migrants are subjected, Ramírez Heredia explores the underworld of the border landscape. Comprised of several intertwined narratives, *La Mara* tells the story of a train in which countless men, women and children travel packed together. They come from different places in Central America: Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Honduras. And their objective is to ultimately arrive in the United States.

The novel, however, does not have a linear evolution or a defined plot. It is rather a chaotic representation of an infinite universe where migrants are the protagonists and the text, the only acceptable reality. It is the text, with its multiple rhetorical figures and particular orality, that recreates migrants' stories through the use of multiple repetitions, the absence of referential narrative points, and an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator. The resulting atmosphere is dark but introspective. The reflective nature of the narrator in many ways resembles the fluid dimension of the border and its tensions: between stagnation and mobility, between the act of staying and that of fleeing, between the possibility and impossibility of escaping an intricate repressive mechanism of repression, illegality, and exploitation. Indeed, freedom, if there is any, comes at a high cost: the loss of life and identity.

In this manner, the omniscient narrator presents to the reader the different stories of those who live on both sides of the border, and in two different realities. On the one hand, we have the stories of those with a certain amount of power, like consul Nicolás Fuentes, who has in its hands the destiny of thousands of migrants. He knows about clandestine migration, he knows about the trafficking of young women and the violence they suffer, and he chooses to participate in it. On the other hand, we have the stories of migrants, those who carry on their shoulders the weight of their brutal experiences. Primary among them is a group of women, many of them underage, who

enter Guatemala with fake papers. To be able to survive the harsh conditions of life at the border, they work as prostitutes in well-known brothels, such as “El Tijuanita.”

An emblematic character in the novel is Selene Artigas, a Panamanian girl who works as a prostitute in the local brothel, who has to change her name to Lizbeth to sound more appealing to her potential clients, and who loses her identity in the process. Seeking to highlight Selene/Lizbeth’s naivete but also her vulnerability, the narrator of *La Mara* describes her as a victim, never in a position of power, not even in certain circumstances where the sex worker is believed to have autonomy for being able to sell her body as a commodity. Selene/Lizbeth has to report back to Doña Lita all the time and the only glimmer of personal freedom that she seems to have in the novel, rapidly gets overshadowed by her responsibilities. When Lizbeth is waiting to be picked up by a taxi that shall bring her to a brothel in Mexico, she has the unique opportunity to behave as a girl of her age and play videogames while being surrounded by gazes that for the first and only time in the novel are not there to objectivize her:

> No hay público grosero, borracho o ausente. Existe un gran gusto por ver a quien baila al compás golpeador de la música salida del aparato, lo nota en los rostros de los seres vivos y de los que viven dentro de la máquina. Ahí están. Ve sus expresiones de júbilo. No importa que no interpreten Marea Baja, ella sabe que puede bailar la música que lanza la máquina. [There is no rude, drunk or absent audience. A great pleasure exists to see who is dancing to the rhythm of the music that comes from the device. There they are. She sees their jovial expressions. It does not matter that they don’t play Marea Baja, she knows that she can dance to the music that comes out of the machine] (195).

The moment of autonomy, however, is short lived as Lizbeth has to go back to her reality where she is expected to work. This is a reality from which Lizbeth tries to escape by remembering the melody of familiar songs:

> al desnudarse frente al primer cliente, canto algunas de sus canciones […] tararea mientras el calor le atiza un fuetazo en la misma cama que había estrenado horas antes con Melchor Corona, el Rey Mago y después con una hilera de clientes que alababan su cuerpo. [When she got naked in front of the first client, sang some of his songs…she

> hums while the heat hits her on the same bed that she had been at with Melchor Corona, the Rey Mago, and then with a line of clients who praised her body] (197).

In the case of Selene/Lizbeth, her sexuality is not autonomous but the result of male action and, therefore, potentially under male control. Her circumstances speak of a likely scenario: she enters into prostitution because of financial need, and little can she do to improve her situation or leave that world. However, being an girl gives Selene/Lizbeth an aura of innocence that puts her completely at the mercy of male power. Her clients usually appear as predatory presences whose appetite for sexual gratification is almost insatiable. At the hands of these clients, Selene/Lizbeth is subject to the most violent forms of sexual brutalization and threats of physical violence that emphasize her powerlessness. In a novel where sexual violence is just another form of pain in a lawless world, the brutalization of women like Selene/Lizbeth is another common narrative occurrence, obscenely titillating precisely because in the border everything is allowed, and there is no place for social taboos. The powerlessness of the prostituted child, however, seems key to her deliverance. Selene/Lizbeth survives her trials, not through any action of her own. Her survival seems to lie in a bigger force that lingers in the background and whose moral nature is hard to distinguish. When Selene/Lizbeth crosses the river to work in Mexico, for example, she goes there with the blessings of the minister of that unknown presence, Ximenus Fidalgus, a chaman who dominates both sides of the border and is the pragmatic complement of the gang, la Mara Salvatrucha.

Not all the girls suffer the same fate though. The case of another prostituted child, Sabina Rivas, is an especially tragic one. She, as Selene Lizbeth, arrives in Guatemala with fake papers to work as a prostitute at El Tijuanita. She is both the lover and younger sister of Giovanni, a member of La Mara. One of her recurrent clients is consul Nicolas who helps her get her fake documents. She dreams of going to the US where she can aspire to have a better life. But she is

not a common character. She is more like a ghost, an image that come in hazy fragments to the memory of consul Nicolas, the only character who seems to remember her. He himself constantly wonders about Sabina's whereabouts. Indeed, very little is known about what happens to her. It is this detail what nurtures a sense of mystery in the novel and opens up its narrative possibilities to the genre convention of a genre known as *neopolicial latinoamericano*.

Writers of the neopolicial find inspiration in the hard-boiled American novel, defined by Giardinelli as a narrative of mystery and suspense that focuses on the topic of crime developed in a realistic manner and with sociopolitical overtones. Some of the characteristics of the *neopolicial latinoamericano* include: an interest to reflect reality as it is perceived; the obliteration of the mystery to be solved; law and society as responsible for the crime; a reflection of mass culture; the primacy of the other; and the use of intertextuality and metafiction. In the neopolicial novel, the most important element is crude reality and not crimes, for knowing who is the perpetrator of the crime is not as relevant as knowing why the crime was committed in the first place. As a result, neopolicial writers highlight the distrust that characters have towards any kind of authority figure, and the law. In neopolicial settings, legal systems are rigged, and judges and politicians are criminals themselves. Given its proclivity to denounce structures of power, it should not come as a surprise that the neopolicial genre tends to celebrate mass culture, by finding inspiration in comic books, parodying "serious" crime works, or incorporating rhythms of speech influenced by popular dances, such as cha-cha and bolero. This predilection for mass culture is also one of the reasons why, in neopolicial novels, criminals and victims play an important role in the plot. Finally, neopolicial writers rely on parodies and intertextuality of canonic texts, such as those of Agatha Christie, to question the mythification of certain types of literature, characters, and figures (Spanos 117-120).

One of the figures constantly challenged in *La Mara* is that of the citizen whose presence, curiously enough, is never highlighted in the novel. Instead, following its neopolicial vocation, *La Mara* explores with morbid dedication the figure of the anti-citizen, who has been constructed and portrayed as a risk to the well-being, norms, and values of a particular society. Given the dangers that anti-citizens posit, governments and administrations implement technologies, procedures, and devices through which they seek to "shape and instrumentalize" their conduct (Inda 6) so they cannot transgress borders, be identified with the human/citizen. Through discourse and regulation, systems of control create an-other less than human that cannot be politically identified. This is how the poor, the immigrant, or the asylum seeker are excluded from the community they intend to belong to, for they represent a threat to the "well-being of the social body." "In contrast to the ideal citizen, there is the anti-citizen, an individual who exists outside the ordinary regulatory system, one who violates established norms and who may constitute a risk to the safety and quality of life of 'normal' citizens." (Khosravi 77).

La Mara does not shy away from representing the figure of the anti-citizen in a nuanced way that makes them victims of the brutal environment they inhabit. Indeed, in La Mara the border stands out for its inexorable ruin. There, everything is negative. It is a place untouched by the hand of god that from "oscuridad que lame, grita y espanta y que no se ilumina con los rezos (the darkness licks, shouts, and scares, and that cannot be illuminated through prayers)" (16). It is "la cueva del diablo" (the devil's lair) and the entrance to the domains of the lord of the night (la entrada a los dominios del señor de la noche), a place where pestilence, shootings, and wrath govern with impunity (24). There, time seems inalterable, forced to repeat itself incessantly. Migrants are condemned to move incessantly as well.

II. Migratory Flows & The Management of Mobility

Crows and *La Mara* are novels about migrant mobility. They describe some social and legal issues that impede and facilitate migratory flows between China and Singapore and Mexico and Guatemala. Before delving into those matters, I want to examine the migration history between those countries. Singapore and China have a long history of migration. The Singapore government has always been interested in attracting skilled migrant labour to help develop the country. Many migrants of Chinese origin are always looking for opportunities to move there due to dissatisfaction with their current circumstances, a desire for adventure, or to find better jobs (Bun and Sing 171-200).

The kind of migrants that Singapore attracts are varied, but here we are particularly interested in the migratory flows of Chinese women. Among the Chinese women who migrate to Singapore are those who follow their also migrant or Singaporean husbands, migrate to accompany their sons and daughters while they study in Singapore, move for work, and want to study in the country (Huang and Yeoh 479). Ang points out that "immigration processes are highly gendered and migrant occupations can be based on nationality" (1178). Singaporean migration law establishes that certain visa types are only open for women and not men. That is the case of migrants accompanying underage students, for example. Ang also highlights the case of domestic workers. While women from the Philippines and Indonesia can freely move when hired for this kind of labour, Chinese women are not allowed to work in that field, which Ang attributes to the Singaporean government's fear of the dangers and instability that co-ethnic migration may bring, a situation that is also symptomatic of the government's desire to control migrant women's sexual and moral behaviours.

Language also plays a vital role in the type of jobs Chinese women have access to. "Their perceived ability to communicate in Mandarin meant they (especially women) are

increasingly placed in frontline positions such as servers, hawkers, and sales promoters. In this manner, Chinese migrant women, especially of the working class, are highly visible and interact with Singaporeans on a daily basis" (Ang 1178). This preoccupation with language is related to two assumptions: a) racial affinity is preferred for it facilitates mutual understanding between migrants and the locals due to similar cultural practices, and b) immigrants who fit the racial composition of Singapore are thought to be more politically acceptable (individuals must fit the existing Chinese-Malay-Indian racial model sanctioned by the state, where 76% of the population are Chinese, 15% Malay and 7.5% Indian (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2019b). Among them, Chinese immigrants are assumed to be less likely to upset Singaporean cultural sensitivities.

Yet, as media reports show, in practice, the locals do not as well accept Chinese immigrants as the government would presume, and they are usually subjected to a process of racialization (Lu 20). This is especially true for sex workers, who are also abused in other ways. In the year 2018, for example, the Chinese and Singaporean governments were forced to intervene and crack down on a WeChat prostitution ring that lured Chinese women into sex work under the false promise that once they arrived in Singapore, they would be offered a highly paid professional job (Chen "Chinese women 'tricked into Singapore sex trade by WeChat prostitution ring'"). This is indicative of a major social issue. As reported by ProjectX, a significant proportion of migrant women work in Singapore's sex industry, and face significant levels of precarity and exploitation due to the criminalization of their professional activity: harassment and intimidation from clients, agents and police; physical assault from clients and agents; rape by clients; extortion (sometimes accompanied by impersonation of a police officer) from clients; theft from clients; deception about the nature of the work from agents; deception

recruitment from agents; coercion from clients and agents; threats to privacy from clients, agents and police; confiscation of passports and financial penalties. The same report establishes that the sex industry is of easy access for these women, who migrate for different reasons, including the duty to provide for their families financially; the significant strength of the Singapore dollar in Asia; scarce job opportunities in home countries; relative ease of travel into Singapore; better sanitation and physical infrastructure in Singapore; and relatively lower rates of crime in Singapore (ProjectX).

Apart from the abuses stated above, Chinese migrants often must deal with the uncertainty that legal processes prompt. Indeed, working-class migrants have difficulty gaining permanent residence due to their temporary status. Their situation sharply contrasts with that of middle-class and upper-class migrants who have other avenues to become permanent residents. However, as Ang points out, “nationality is often used as a key differentiator of main-land Chinese migrants (‘PRC woman’, ‘China lady’) in colloquial speech.” Thus, even when a middle-class woman may not go through the same process of discrimination that her working-class counterparts suffer, she may find herself as a victim of discrimination if the locals are prone to enunciate their concerns against this migrant group by categorizing Chinese migrant women as “PRC women” or “that China women” (Ang 1778).

Guatemalan and other Central American migratory flows to Mexico exhibit different patterns but similar tensions to those observed in the Singaporean/Chinese case. These flows historically register an intense dynamic, mainly due to the presence of Guatemalan labourers who cross the border to partake in the labour market of Chiapas, a southern Mexican border state. Guatemalan refugees, who arrived at the beginning of the eighties, are another source of migratory flows to Mexico. Similarly, several migration waves of transmigrants coming from

different places in Latin America have been trying to cross Mexico and reach the US since the early eighties. The migrant influx of regular and irregular transmigrants intensified during the nineties and the new millennium (Grupo Guatemala-Mexico).

A set of asymmetrical social structures frames these migratory processes between Guatemala and Mexico and how the governments of both countries have defined differential policies regarding migration flows regardless of the migrants' country of origin, transit, destination, and return. In that last sense, neither Mexico nor Guatemala has made enough efforts in migrant departure zones or to offer dignified conditions and opportunities for development (Grupo Guatemala-Mexico). To this complication, those common in border areas, such as Tecún Umán, should be added. The city functions as a geographical marker in *La Mara*.

Tecun Uman is the municipality of Ayutla, in the department of San Marcos, in Guatemala. The region has around 27,000 inhabitants and a floating population of around 30,000. In 2004, most of the population was composed of young people between 10 and 19 years old in the case of men and 10 and 29 years old in the case of women (Cruz Burguete 256). According to some statistical data, 54% of the migratory flows south-north refer to a stay of less than 24 hours and alludes to people working in the service industry in Mexico. The other 46% refers to stays of one day or more of workers in Mexican soil that are hired to work in the agricultural industry (Encuesta sobre migración en la frontera Guatemala-México 2007, 23). Tecún Umán–La Tijuanita de Guatemala– is a special border space that "represents the heterogeneity, the border relations, the many failed crossing attempts, and the knowledge that, as in Tijuana: "Seek and you will find"" (Campos-Delgado & Odgers Ortiz, "Crossing the Border"). The region witnesses the majority of illegal crossings between Mexico and Guatemala. Regarding mobility and cultural exchanges, Tecun Uman offers interesting possibilities for

analysis. The means of transportation for the locals are rafts that help them cross the Suchiate River, a natural border between Mexico and Guatemala. Apart from migratory flows, many of the crossings happen for commercial reasons. The exchange of merchandise has become so common that the Mexican authorities have established a trade infrastructure to allow buyers to acquire everything they need without travelling further. On their return to Guatemala, residents rely on tricycle riders for transportation. According to Campos-Delgado and Odgers Ortiz, this burgeoning crossing point, especially the river, has become dangerous due to mobility control measures reinforced by the Mexican government focusing only on surveilling certain strategic zones along the border. Indeed, several reports of stolen merchandise and people being attacked daily while walking near the river. The Mexican government installed an iron fence to control immigrant flows and increase selective surveillance.

Those flows vary from regular crossers and travellers to other workers. The migrant prostituted characters described in La Mara pertain to this last group. Their narrated experiences mimic those suffered by some Latin American immigrant women. These women are usually undocumented and look forward to crossing Mexico to reach the US. They end up working as prostitutes in Guatemala, where they arrive from various countries in Latin America, such as Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. They work in shifts of 30 to 60 minutes and are exposed to all sorts of abuses: rape, robbery, and sometimes even death. Despite the dangers, these women take the risk and start the journey from their country of origin to avoid paying the fee of coyotes for five to six thousand dollars. Many of the women first stop in Guatemala. They arrive at the border city of Tecún Umán and stay there to work temporarily. For women, there are no other better opportunities but to try to make a living in the sex work industry. Unlike other industries, the sex work industry allows them to quickly access a job with a salary that will allow

them to survive for a while. To flee their violence and precarity at their places of origin, the immigrant women are willing to face all sorts of vexations that the roads offer (Oscar Felipe Q., "El país es un paraíso para turismo sexual"). Primary among them is the abuse at the hands of immigration authorities, actors who become symptomatic of the monopolization of the authority to restrict legitimate forms of movement by the state, organizations, and laws.

La Mara and *Crows* depict the monopolization of movement by institutions, the power and possibility of mobility for some, and the violent consequences of immobility for others, particularly for migrant sex workers. The novels examine the material and ideological infrastructure on which mobility relies and the violence that the construction of such infrastructure entails. By representing the consequences of mobility systems, the novels convey the unevenness of experiences of movement and flows of migration, capital, goods, and services across the borders of Mexico and Guatemala and within the borders of the Singaporean national community. The two works connect transportation geographies to migration regimes through their focus on mobility. By emphasizing the ways mobility control haunts the experiences of migrants, the texts attend to the relations between spatial, institutional, and legal forms of oppression. They draw out the complexity and the consequences of transportation and documentation technologies by highlighting the physical and socioeconomic (im)mobility that shapes and produces the experiences of migrant prostitutes.

In explaining the representations of several mobility infrastructures (airports and buses), migration regimes (documents, immigration departments and checkpoints), and disciplinary institutions (schools and brothels), I foreground a critical perspective emphasizing issues of mobility concerning transportation, documentation, and disciplinary technologies. I discuss this analysis with what some migration studies scholars have termed "migration regimes." Although

there does not seem to be a definitive agreement on a migration regime, many uses of the term can be scrutinized. The field of international relations defines one of these uses as a "sets of explicit or implicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given arena of international relations" (Krasner 186). Scholars favouring this strand seek to explore states' role in defining the conditions of mobility across borders. Another use of the term is associated with labour regimes and migration studies. The focus of scholars interested in this strand is the intersection and comparison of different levels of social, economic, and political rights that migrants are given in comparison with their counterparts, full citizens (Sainsbury 237). A different treatment of the term "migration regimes" comes from the disquisitions by geographers, historians, and ethnographers. For them, regimes refer to contact zones where it is possible to witness the interaction between powerful and powerless actors influencing migration flows (Bernt 10-13). Apart from analyzing the processes happening between national borders, this strand of research also looks at those within the urban fabric (issues like ethnic segregation and the establishment of internal borders). Although this discussion is not exhaustive, it is clear that many themes overlap. For example, a general preoccupation of the strands is the interrelation between power structures and discourses and the asymmetries of power and mobility. Responding to these entanglements, this section takes up notions of routes, mobility, and migration by examining the regimes and infrastructures that allow and/or hinder mobility and migration, namely documents, immigration departments and checkpoints, buses, and airports. *La Mara* and *Crows* are pertinent texts with which to explore the narrative construction of migrant prostitutes' mobility due to their focus on the interactions of race, class, and gender and their emphasis on the role of migration regimes in shaping contemporary migration.

Through an analysis of point of view, we can, for instance, note how the narratives of Crows and La Mara rely on transport infrastructures to start building their characters' "spatial" and "mobile" otherness. Disclosing for the first time in the novel her plans to leave China, Helen reaches a Chinese airport, presumably in Beijing. Her experience at the waiting area before boarding her plane to Singapore:

> 里面有许多人，某一个角落处正放着电视。[···] 我穿过人群，想找一个偏僻的位置。我看见在放置电视机的左侧有一个空位，便向那儿走去。挨着那空位的是两个女人，她们正头挨着头窃窃私语，当看见我时便迅速交换了眼神，止住话头沉默了。(15)
> The lounge was crowded with about a hundred or so people. There was a television set at a corner […] I picked my way among the crowd, searching for a remote spot. I saw an empty seat to the left of the television set and headed for it. Next to the seat, two women huddled head-to-head in a tete a tete. As I approached, they exchanged a quick glance and felt silent abruptly (11). Trans. Alan Chong

Note the use of the spatial markers "television" and "seats" which place the point of observation on Helen's eye level. This panoramic perspective is soon interrupted by Helen's gazing and focus on the two women. Here, Helen's perspective in her role as experiencing self is not merely visual but also focalized in the full narratological sense of the word; as regards her visual impressions, they are linked to a stationary viewpoint and delineate a crucial observation. Although the gaze tour is not circular, but traces a front to back trajectory where the women occupy a central position. Such act of gazing and spatial disposition is not the product of chance. But it serves a narrative purpose that is revealed a few lines later:

> 我知道年轻女孩总是一些老女人的敌人，而占着优势的我，总想看看她们的表情。我悄悄地打量她们，她们都是已四十出头的女人，穿得都很随便，也许是旅行的疲惫，两张脸上都带着明显的黄色的倦怠，屋顶上照射出的光射在她们的脸上，投下了淡绿色的病态的影子，在这影子中，她们的眼睛里充满了烦躁，那是秋天长了刺的篱笆，我只消看一眼，就有一种被刺的感觉.紧挨着我的这一位，着一件绿色T恤和棕色仔裤，偏瘦，一头短发紧紧贴在头皮上，知道我在看她，居然不安地挪动了一下身子，想与我保持着更远一些的距离。 [···] 这时两个女人又开始交头接耳起来，一个抱怨说这趟旅行不愉快，到处那么脏，去商店买东西找回的零钱根本不敢要，公共厕所也没有门。"但是现在来了很多小龙女，这比战争更可怕，她们不是把我们的饭碗砸了，就是把

> 我们的老公抢了。”那个瘦的幽幽地说。不知为什么，我对她们有些害怕，刚才莫名地滋生出的优势又莫名地离去。小龙女是些什么人呢 [···]我不知道这张脸究竟在人群的什么方位。我想再看一下，但是很快，我的眼前又是混沌一片，心里思忖起刚才的印象：那是不是一个幻觉？(16). I know a sweet young thing is always a threat to some not so young women. Being the one with an upper hand, I always can't resist taking a look at the expression of the threated ones. […] Both of them were in their forties, casually attired, with fatigue written all over their faces, perhaps from long hours of travelling. […] The two women had resumed their conversation. One complained that her trip this time was a terrible let down. It was so filthy everywhere she went that she dared not even keep the small change returned by shopkeepers. Even doors from a public toilet were missing…'There's so many Dragon girls now. It's worse than having a war. They either wreck your rice bowl or snatch away your husband,' the thin woman said woefully. […] I didn't know why, but suddenly I found myself a little afraid of them. My sense of superiority earlier on had left me without a trace. Dragon girls? I mumbled in bafflement as my eyes roved around the lounge, subconsciously searching for a profile that would fit my conjured image of a specimen of a nascent sub-species of *homo sapiens* (12). Trans. Alan Chong

This passage makes its beginnings in an authorial disquisition on female beauty. Helen, the main character and focalizer of the novel, discerns the two mysterious women through their apparent age, which illuminates by contrast Helen's specificity and a sense of self based on physical attractiveness. The description invokes social fantasies about the young female body as readily available for consumption. However, the narrative takes a turn when what gave Helen a sense of the self turns now into the source of the loss of the self and constructs Helen as a marginal character through dehumanization. In this process of otherization, the setting plays an important role. Airports, according to Tim Cresswell, are places where mobilities are produced. Waiting areas or lounges, like the one described by Helen, are spaces where a kinetic hierarchy entirely at work can be appreciated. Privileged business travellers, the kinetic elite, are distinguished from their counterparts who buy discounted tickets. Yet airports are not only transit ports for travellers, but also for refugees, asylum seekers, drug smugglers and immigrants, whose mobility is "different forms of significance." "In the airport the corporality of mobility---the way the body feels---intersects with categorizations of types---citizen, alien, tourist, business traveler,

commuter" (Cresswell 223). The cited fragment illustrates this process of hierarchical kinetic categorization. In the context of the fragment, Helen is constructed against the two women as an isolated individual rather than a subject assimilated to the shared status of a passenger. Within this framework that we can observe the immediate effects of geopolitical configurations, especially those related to immigration. The narrative voice, a migrant herself, paints a grim picture of the airport (lounge) as an infrastructure of isolation and degradation. The space seems to have the power to question migrant identities in transit. The performance of vigilance (hyperconsciousness about the presence of those who are different) displayed in the fragment is practiced subtly, using strategic methods of subjugation. Helen is subjected to central rituals of control and otherization right before even arriving in Singapore. The ethnic marker "Dragon girl" and its relation to the act of murder point to a ghettoization process of a migrant with an undesirable national origin. In this sense, the airport lounge functions as a threshold toward other subjugation that Helen will suffer, but now on Singaporean soil.

The novel's two important catalyzers of movement control are the immigration department and the language school where Helen and other characters take English lessons. Indeed, in Crows, the immigration department is a spectre that continuously haunts the narrative from the background. There are multiple instances in which the immigration department is mentioned, by other characters who usually use an admonitory tone. Right at the novel's start, Madam Mai warns Helen in the following way:

> "喔，这说不定，她也许是在跳色情舞，假如真是这样，总有一天移民厅会抓住她。一旦抓住立即遣送回国。"麦太太的脸上露出得意之色，好像芬已被抓着了一样。我默不作声，从感觉上来说，她刚才虽然说的是芬，但也好像说的是我。(110) Precisely, I said, trying to please her by citing her period but whatever it is, she's definitely not working in a bar. Hard to say. Maybe she's doing strip dancing. If that's the case, she'll be caught and deported sooner or later by the immigration department." Madame's warning was directed at Fanny, but it could well be directed at me too (87). Trans. Alan Chong

In this surface narrative, Helen is reminded of her precarious legal status in Singaporean society. The narrative also serves to trace Helen's disciplining, one that subjects her to a variety of social norms, rules, and regulations, through her social circle, education, and the kind of work she is allowed to do. Throughout the novel, we can appreciate how various forms of overt discipline to which Helen is subject---social connections (especially the one she establishes with Madam Mai), education (at the English school), and work (at SMILL)---also influence her character development. In other words, Helen's narrative arc is defined by the coercive disciplining suffered at the hands of the mentioned persecutors and institutions. This narrative finds a more comprehensive cultural parallel in the use of those disciplinary technologies, which Michel Foucault has traced in "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison." Foucault's subject is "the mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals" (155), and that general investigation finds its specific historical grounding in the birth of the prison. Then, discipline shifts from punishment by a visible authority to new kinds of prisons which isolate individuals rather than herding them together and becoming arms of an anonymous state bureaucracy. In *Crows*, the disciplining of Helen starts at the hands of Madam Mai, who not only warns the girls about working in general but, more specifically, about working in morally questionable occupations, under the premise that if the neighbours learn about that, it will stain her reputation. In this sense, Madam Mai's disciplining campaign is subtle and persuasive. Her lifestyle (living in an affluent neighbourhood, a great house, and distinguished friends) reveals the rewards of conforming to Singaporean bourgeois values and, in a certain way, marks Helen's covert moral and social discipline.

Once introduced to some of Singapore's laws and social expectations by Madam Mai, Helen is now aware of her positionality. She can continue her discipline at the school she is enrolled in to study English. In Foucauldian terms, social control passes from Madam Mai's visible authoritarianism to a network of disciplinary technologies represented by the English school. At the English school, all the girls are conditioned to behave under Singaporean law:

> "这是移民官。"我带着几份恐惧看着他们。两位移民官的眼睛从我们一张张脸上扫过去，眼光里露出既严肃又鄙夷的神色。"希望你们一个个老实读书，不要歪门邪道，一旦发现，和你们其中的一个一样，立即遣送回去。" (150).
> "These are officers from the immigration department," she said grimly. The man scanned our fearful faces scornfully. "let's hope that all of you will study seriously. If you are caught for any hanky panky, you'll be deported immediately like one of you" (120). Trans. Alan Chong

The quotation suggests that none of the girls seem to be able to escape the surveilling eye of the Singaporean government. As Fanny puts it, Singapore is a country that goes strictly by its laws, and anybody who does not comply with them is held accountable. Thus, the English school successfully encourages in the girls a kind of self-discipline and self-surveillance that, according to Foucault, leads to an integrated system of disciplinary power which functions as a network of relations: "Discipline makes possible the operation of a relational power that sustain itself by its own mechanism and which, for the spectacle of public events, substitutes the uninterrupted play of calculated gazes" (Fucault 176/177). The English school illustrates such an uninterrupted play of gazes. It is made precise several times in the novel that the objective of most students who arrive in Singapore is to obtain permanent residency, by marrying a Singaporean man. The ostensible reason for the success of the educational center is precisely the perceived easiness with which allows foreign students access to Singapore. Still, this appeal disguises a network of discreet surveillance which ensures that the students behave according to the norms of the state through the immigration department, demands: no student is to work in any occupation or to

miss a class at the risk of being deported. In this sense, the English school is subject to unobtrusive public scrutiny whose main objective is to keep Chinese woman migrants', especially the morally questionable sex worker, upward mobility under control. But not only does the presence of immigration officers at the language school reminds us of a second technology of control, enforcement rituals that De Genova defines as everyday producers of migrant illegality. They serve as a disciplinary apparatus that exacerbates migrants' sense of vulnerability and by fetishizing migrant illegality seemingly objective thing itself (437).

In *La Mara*, we can also see several enforcement rituals, such as racial profiling, immigration raids, and detention, at play. These rituals police the "illegalities of everyday life." They are expressed as "heightened [law enforcement] directed at the bodies, movements, and spaces of the poor, and especially those racialized as not white" (De Genova 246). A clear example of this is the immigration checkpoint and the raids that constantly happen there:

> La corrida de las nueve entrará despacito al retén sin necesidad de que alguien le marque el alto. […] Esta noche a Julio el Moro le toca escoger a quienes tienen que bajar para la revisión de los papeles. Avanza por el pasillo hacia el fondo del autobús que huele a dulce machacado, a sudor, a eructo rancio; sin detenerse a reflexionar va marcando a los escogidos: ----Tú, tú, tú también…[…] los agentes cerraron la investigación sin siquiera mirar a los pasajeros. […] La hondureña regresó a la celda y salió la otra. ---La panameñita mexicana, ¿verdá? ---Selene Artigas, señor… Sarabia le mira las manos a la muchachita, el maquillaje corrido, lo apretado de los pantalones, la blusa ombliguera, el color de las uñas de los pies. ---¿Edad? ---Dieciocho. ---Eso quisieras, cuántos menos, panameñita. [The 9 bus will enter to the immigration post without needing that somebody ask it to stop. […] Tonight, it's Julio el Moro's turn to choose who needs to get off the bus for documents' inspection. He walks through he aisle toward the end of the bus that smells like sweet, sweat, rancid burp; without stopping to reflect he goes marking the chosen ones: "You, you, you too…" […] the agents closed the investigation without even looking to the passengers. […] The Honduran woman went back to her cell and the other one came out. "The Mexican Panamanian, right?" "Selene Artigas, Mr."…Sarabia looks at the hands of the young lady, the smeared make up, the tight jeans, the crop top, the toe nail color. "Age?" "18" "That's what you would like, some years less, little Panamanian."] (60).

The fragment exposes the fragmentation and immobility that the immigration checkpoint represents. Likewise, discourses of legality and illegality operate to normalize and/or mandate enforcement of exclusion and the regulation of public space by immigration authorities while disciplining the mobility of certain types of migrants. As Cresswell argues, "The way people are enabled or constrained in terms of their mobile practices differs markedly according to their position in social hierarchies" (199). Reflecting this important contention, research on the politics of mobility has examined how different axes of social inequality, such as class (Ohnmacht et al. 2,3), gender (Uteng and Cresswell 1-10), and sexuality (Nash and Gorman-Murray 756-768) can enable or constrain people's mobility. In this vein, one way of interpreting the politics of the fragment would be to interpret some of the longer durational social formations that might be discernible here. First, the bus to which the fragment refers bridges two social forces related to the world of sex work and the corruption that surrounds it. Selene Lizbeth is the world where she belongs and lives, but she is also the other world across the border where she works whenever required. She is a sex worker in both worlds, a foreigner, but on the Mexican side of the border, she seems more vulnerable to the influence of enforcement and objectifying rituals. Genre, national origin, citizenship status, and social class seem to play an important role in that otherization and objectification by structuring Lizbeth’s experience of inequity and constraining her mobility. No matter where she goes, Lizbeth is always judged and objectified by the gaze of immigration officials and clients alike. Neither side of the border offers a safe space for Lizbeth and the other female characters, who are constantly exposed to all kinds of abuse. This mode of violence speaks to the important connections between material embodied experience and the criticism of the notion of citizenship that I see at the heart of Ramirez Heredia’s project. Such criticism is articulated in the form of the policing of space and the

policing of race. In the cited fragment, there does not seem to be criteria other than racial for the immigration officials to identify the migrants from the locals. A conception of place then (who belongs and where they belong) is inextricably tied to that action of profiling. The immigration officials' strategies referred to in the fragment involve enacting boundaries and restricting access. In this sense, social power relies fundamentally upon territoriality since it is certainly the case that immigration authorities would not be able to control migrant flows and restrict mobility at the border without the capacity to create and enforce boundaries. The undefined tactics of the immigration officers are effective precisely because they objectify people of colour that look a certain way and classify them as dangerous outsiders who are "out of place." Through patrolling and rituals of enforcement, immigration officials are policing both the border space and race and social class (skin colour and physical appearance as a proxy for illegality and criminality). Therefore, the continuous and pervasive presence of immigration officers at the border between Mexico and Guatemala is a constant reminder of migrant "illegality" and, therefore "deportability." In other words, migration officers discipline the mobility of migrants and limit their access, in the case of Lizbeth, to alternative sources of income. As De Genova points out, the spectacle of enforcement at the border space between Mexico and the US is necessary "for the spatialized difference between the nation-states of the US and Mexico to be enduringly inscribed upon migrants in their spatialized (and racialized status as "illegal aliens" (437). The same logic can be applied to analyze how the narrative voice of *La Mara* depicts the border between Mexico and Guatemala. In the fragment, immigration officers perform the spectacle of enforcement on the bodies of undocumented migrants. By doing so, they reify connections between nationality, race, social class, and citizenship status.

Another way in which these rituals play out in the novel is precisely through the implementation of another technology of control: documentation. In a pivotal scene of La Mara, Sarabia asks Lizbeth to see her documents:

> ---Vamos a ver tus papeles. Nacionalizada Mexicana, dijiste, ¿verdá? […] Sin decir una palabra los gringos le muestran a Sarabia los documentos comparándolos con los otros […] Los gringos se acercaron. Sin hablar enseñaron una nota al mexicano. Sarabia levantó los hombros, tomó los papeles de la mujer y los rompió todos menos la credencial de elector, a la que le hizo un doblez en el plástico y guardó en un sobre grande. ---Ya eres otra vez panameña, mi vida. ["Let's see your papers. Nationalized Mexican, you said, right?" […] Without saying a word, the gringos show Sarabia the documents comparing them with the others […] The gringos approached. Without talking they showed a note to the Mexican. Sarabia raised his shoulders, took the papers of the woman and tore them except for her Mexican photo id, which he folded and kept in a big envelope.] (65).

It is the surveilling and unwanted presence of the officials that establishes the basis of a regulatory process that Lily Cho calls mass capture. The notion is based on the work of Philip E. Agre on capture. The verb "to capture" describes a model of privacy that can interact with another more commonly used privacy model, called surveillance. Capture refers to "a computer system's act of acquiring certain data as input and to a representation scheme's ability to fully, accurately or cleanly express semantic notions or distinctions, without reference to the actual taking in of data" (107). A good representation scheme has the virtue of "capturing" the language of human activity and its grammar, a grammar of action or set of unitary words or lexical items of action. For Agre, the relevance of a grammar of action lies not in the mere act of capturing information into a machine but rather in how human activities are structured. Since they can also be implemented to organize and sanction movement, grammars of action, explains Lily Cho, are a kind of technology of control ("Mass Capture as a Technology of Non-citizenship"). They analyze the activities of bodies on the move and construct their subjectivity, articulate how bodies move within the nation, and impose over them a status of citizenship or non-

citizenship. In *La Mara*, the grammar of action and their process of mass capture are enabled by the documents given to Lizbeth by Doña Lita and Consul Nicolas, so she can cross the border to Mexico and work there as a hostess for corrupt politicians. Once at the migration checkpoint, Lizbeth's otherness gives out her irregular status, and is incarcerated with other immigrants. The fragment says much about the capture process as it says about its dehumanizing practices. Lizbeth's information on nationality and citizenship status is captured through a simple act of gazing and destruction of the fake means of identification. The narrative tone of a subsequent fragment intensifies the capturable nature of the migrants:

> "…se detuvieron a cuatro guatemaltecos de sexo masculino, y a una de sexo femenino. También a un hondureño varón, y a una mujer de la misma nacionalidad, de los cuales cinco, los de nacionalidad guatemalteca serán devueltos a la brevedad posible a la frontera de ese país hermano" […four Guatemalan males and one female were detained. A Honduran male and a female for the same nationality were also detained. From these five, the Guatemalan nationals will be returned as soon as possible to the border of this brotherly country] (68).

Here, the narrator abruptly suspends the focalization of Sarabia and his speech patterns to adopt a more objective point of view. The tone changes from familiar to formal or informational, and it narratively mimics the process of capture referred to above. The migrants' identity is captured utilizing statistical information, and their humanity is reduced to brute facts or data. The report-like narrative criminalizes the migrants simply based on their national origin and gender. The fragment establishes who is not a legitimate member of the national community. Interestingly, the fragment yet serves another function, and reveals just as much about capture as about mobility control and corruption. When closely scrutinized, it is clear that the fragment lacks some crucial information related to Lizbeth. This is revealing because although the narrative voice abandons for a while Sarabia's mode of expression, the narrative suggests that it is actually he who has composed the report about the captured migrants. By deliberately omitting the

capture of her details, he subtlety reveals the existence of the trafficking network operating behind the scenes throughout the novel.

As the fragments above show, the process of dehumanizing capture begins with an inspection that helps officials determine the status of a person as a citizen or non-citizen. Here, the narrator suggests that citizenship/non-citizenship determination or imposition is based on absurd premises that discriminate based on physical traits. A non-citizen has similar looks to those of the criminals whose photos and data have been captured in the computers. This is relevant. There is a specific physical appearance associated with criminality. For the capturing and surveilling mechanisms of state apparatuses, there is a specific appearance that makes mobility threatening and "capturable." This appearance is inextricably linked to spatial notions that will be further explored in the next section.

III. The Cartographies of the Underworld

Crows and *La Mara* are set in contemporary Singapore and Mexico/Guatemala, respectively. Still, much of the narrative action is centred in an underworld of pimps, prostitutes, brothels, gangs, and violence. In both novels, the authors construct an urban and national history that explores systemic violence rooted in co-ethnic relationships and the production of difference. In their evocation of violence, often linked to sexuality, the texts are deliberately outrageous, constantly undercutting the implied reader's assumptions about ethics and morals as the norm in human behaviour. The shocking nature of many of the novels' unethical and inhumane moments is intensified by both the solemn and casual modes in which they are narrated. Moreover, both novels richly illustrate the complex role of the other in the urban fabric and an urge to control and repress it.

The narrative voices of both novels do not shy away from that brutal mapping. They draw the pollical boundaries and cultural frontier of life at the city's margins and try to define them. Since the urban fabric of Mexico, Guatemala, and Singapore is as much the substance of social geography as of fantasy, the novels offer a way to examine how landscapes of violence, moral degradation and propriety have been translated into literary discourse. To visit the border between Mexico and Guatemala and modern Singapore means to hurtle through spaces marked by social inequities and ideological and economic demarcations, allowing the reader to readdress and map out the material and psychic contours of seen and unseen violence.

In rendering the city spaces, Jiu Dan and Heredia spare no fact. They rely on a remarkable specificity to describe the spaces through which the migrant characters move with partial liberty. Walking in the cities of *Crows* and *La Mara* is guided by an urban script comprised of streets and place markers that add another level of textual mediation. Here, the novels become a kind of urban text that could also be seen as a map in its own right. In reading the spaces occupied by migrants as a map, I follow literary geographers who assert that the spatial and textual are always intertwined, such that textual analysis becomes a critical method of geographic inquiry (Saunders 436–452). Similarly, Brooker and Thacker draw on J. B. Harley to argue that literary geographies---like other cartographies--- are embedded within power structures, serving to both represent and (re)produce power (4,5). Thus, reading the treatment of the novels of space and setting as maps is instructive, as they both reflect and reproduce existing hierarchies of power and privilege concerning migrant mobility.

Given this dissertation's understanding of mobility as an exercise of freedom and liberty and as an expression of full citizenship that is distributed along uneven axes of social power, the novels become highly instructive. As migrant characters travel their routes through Guatemala,

Mexico, and Singapore, they exhibit this uneven access to mobility according to their social positions, closely related to identity markers such as gender and class status.

In the first lines of *Crows*, the narrator reveals a bit about her otherness by describing Singapore in the following terms:

> 这就是新加坡吗？这是一座怎样的城市呢？一瞬间只觉所有的摩天大楼恍如活的生物蠕动着，斜斜地倾着身子，好像一根根细高的棍子要往路面打过来。这样干净的地方恐怕连小偷都不会有一个，我感叹道。(26)
> So, this is Singapore. What kind of city is it? In a moment, I felt as if all the skyscrapers in the city had come to life. They came wobbling menacingly like long sticks, ready to slam on the road ahead at any time. I broke out in cold sweat and sighed: 'In a clean place like this, even a thief would find it hard to survive.' (21). Trans. Alan Chong

In a typically detailed style, Jiu Dan maps a modernized Singapore that Helen, the protagonist of the novel, finds threatening for being indecipherable and probably too orderly and modern for its good when compared to mainland China. On this journey toward the heart of the city, several references and coded clues also come into play. As in other parts of the novel, the places Helen visits define the encounters and interactions she will have. One of the first things Madam Mai, a well-to-do Singaporean woman, says to Helen is that her house is in District 9, the best in Singapore. That discursive act of toponymic naming is not an innocent one. Street names have much to tell about ideology and power, identity politics, and the political history of city space.

District 9 is the epitome of what has become Singapore's signature on the global stage: green, clean, and modernly sophisticated. It is no coincidence that the district is the shopping haven of the country, where luxury brands establish their stores, and where many real estate major companies have built top-notch housing that attracts the most affluent tenants. That's part of the reason why District 9, along with Districts 10 and 11, is often posited against the rest of the districts, thus becoming a marker of wealth and acquisitive power which, as Bilveer Singh points out, often obscures the manifold vulnerabilities of Singapore's social fabric, such an

uneven distribution of wealth and the complex relationships between different ethnicities (Singh 190). Some of the characters of *Crows*, although not wholly aware of Singapore's concealed problems, seem to give a glimpse into the issues. For example, Helen, the narrator of *Crows*, expresses her concerns about Fanny disliking their host country in the following terms:

> "我不喜欢这个地方。" 她继续向窗外看去。我又一次盯着她那圆润的额头，心里想，她为什么不喜欢？她不喜欢又来这干什么？她肯定是在装，她肯定是和我一样，来到这里就是想取得个长期居住证，然后不慌不忙地悠闲地在这块干净而文明的土地上度过一生。(36)
> "I don't like this place." Her reply sent many thoughts racing through my mind. Why doesn't she? Why come here if she doesn't like it? She must be putting up a front. I'm sure she's come here with the same intention as mine: to secure permanent residency and stay leisurely in this clean, civilized land for the rest of her life." (30).

Another place that keeps coming back throughout the novel is the beach, which presents as a possibility of escape for the Chinese women living in Singapore. In the novel's opening lines, Jiu Dan writes: 新加坡没有冬天，但和许多地方一样有梅雨季节。雨一点点落着，像无数张小嘴在说话，像那天站在海边的她。(13). "Singapore has no winters. But like many other places, it does have its fair share of drizzly days too- It was on such a day that she strolled along the beach with me" (9) (Trans. Alan Chong). At the edge of the landscape where the city meets the sea, escape from the dreadful reality of life that Chinese students must face, while in the expensive and unwelcoming Singapore, seems tangible. The farther they move away from the city's heart, the more freedom the students feel from the repressive institutions of school, the Immigration department, and their rented home (Madam Mai's apartment). Behind them, the heart of Singapore represents control. The school and their rented space act as a 'restraining' mechanisms and disciplinary social institutions, combining the forces of culture, society, law, and state to regulate the mobility, behaviour, and activities of Chinese students who come to Singapore under a student visa with multiple restrictions.

By contrast, the beach, the world outside the city, is a site of untouched comfort, which the constraining forces of the state and the disapproving ones of Singaporean society cannot reach. On the city's outskirts, the women feel a sense of liberation. Nevertheless, Jiu Dan subtly undermines this symbolic status even as she proposes it, through the opposition between the weather descriptors and later through the rumination of an identity marker. Thus, even though Singapore is presented as a welcoming space due to its seemingly eternal good weather, it is also portrayed as a place that can be occasionally hostile. That unwelcoming face of Singapore is emphasized by the description of the overcast weather but also by the dialogue that takes place between Helen and Fanny: "你知道吗？新加坡把我们这些中国来的女人都叫做小龙女小龙女是什么人呢？小龙女就是妓女 (13)。"Do you know, in Singapore, they call China women like us Dragon Girls?" she said, tears glistening in her eyes as she fixed her sight on the distant horizon (9) (Trans. Alan Chong). These moments of indeterminacy—where, for example, the line between what is considered Singaporean and what is imagined as the other becomes even more demarcated—diminishing the authenticity of Chinese women's liberation, and signaling to the reader that their escape gradually taking substance may be merely illusory. In this way, while the beach is a site of possible escape, the narrative voice of *Crows* hints that the women's brief trips, however pleasurable, are a circular and futile intent at being free, from social and legal expectations that never come to fruition.

Journeying along this route, the women long for freedom but cannot permanently escape the controlling influence of immaculate Singapore, its legal institutions, and social mores. As the site of potential escape, the city's outskirts are also the location of a revealing social encounter. Helen, the protagonist, is forced into self-definition: "沃尔沃"顺着一条公路蜿蜒而上，把我们带到一座高高的山上。山上长满了绿色植物。四下里静悄寂寥，只有细雨碰落在树上的轻微的沙沙

声。我们走出汽车，往下望去，那里是一片光的海洋，层层叠叠，似有许多女人裸着身子扭动着，宣泄着疯狂的欲望 (34). “The Volvo wound its way up a hill and finally came to a stop at the top. We got out of the car. The place was deserted. Apart from the patter of rain on the lush vegetation all around, there was absolute silence. […] 他掀起了我的裙子，雨丝和他一起渗进我的两腿间 (34). He lifted my dress; rain and his manhood merged with my body as I relished the subtle fragrance of orchids drifting over me” (64). In that remote space is where the furtive sexual encounter can happen. Helen appears as a desirable figure as she is focalized through the eyes of Siyan. As the lines suggest, Helen derives her value from the sexual favours she grants to her lover. What is more, in the following dialogue, she appears to be constantly identified by her immigration status and citizenship hopes while contrasted with other Chinese women. “就是这个，你们的国花。如果有一天你能把它插在我的头上，我将感到很幸福。我希望那是我们结婚的时刻。” (35). “This, your national flower. I’ll be very happy if I can wear it in my hair one day. I hope that day is our wedding day,” says Helen. To what Siyan replies: “也是那个女人判刑的时刻。”他说。“That’ll also be the day that woman is sentenced.” Then Helen adds: 这时小雨变成了大雨，雨水密密地压过来，打在身上又疼又害怕，我畏惧地缩着头，生怕我所有的好梦都被冲走。私炎抱起我仓惶地向汽车里躲去 (35). “The drizzle was turning into a downpour. I huddled more tightly against Siyan for fear that the storm would wash away my dreams. He carried me and scurried me to the car” (66) Trans. Alan Chong.

Symbolic use of weather and elements of nature seems to be at play in Helen’s intervention and her conversation with Siyan. The elusiveness and perpetual changing nature of meteorological conditions substitute for the also elusive nature of Helen’s self and of her complicated relationship with Singaporean society. In the fragment, emotional, social, and

atmospheric drama are one. Much of it reflects a reality of contemporaneous Singapore, where the hardships usually associated with the winter are obscured by warm days and modernity. Here the weather is unmistakably symbolic: the rain imitates Siyan’s intrusive movements but also announces conflict. Meteorology here is also moral, as the prevailing conditions bring with them the possibility of erasure. With the case of the orchid, Jiu Dan observes a nice parallel: just as she intends to explain Singapore’s selective unwelcoming but modern nature through its weather, she seeks to amplify Helen’s otherness through her association with the China woman who murdered Siyan’s brother, and through the impossibility of marriage regardless of Helen’s best intentions to try to belong by adopting one of Singapore’s national emblems. The narrator's uncertainty deepens at the end of the intervention when her options to permanently stay in Singapore and call it home seem to become thinner and thinner after Siyan’s subtle deflection.

Apart from these places of escape in the outskirts of the city, there are yet some others that offer a deconstructive reading of migrant mobility as related to domestic ideology: nightclubs, rooms, and other clandestine places, such as saunas, where sexual encounters and the expression of desire happen freely, and where hi-jinks of all sorts can be enacted. These hidden places locus serves to dissolve normative notions of decorum and propriety, allowing a furtive and suffocating atmosphere to prevail. In a misty sauna with hazier air, Helen and Xiaolan are abused by a pair of Japanese men who want “to see if they are different” from the prostitutes back in Japan. In a hot and stuffy room, Helen is subject to the harassment of the impertinent and voyeuristic gaze of one of her clients. The brothel where Helen works has dimly lit corridors, and its Rose Room is only about ten square meters. These underground spaces tend to invert and/or dissolve many categories. What may be termed the inside-out nature of smothering and

clandestine places is one of the more obvious ways in which they signal their inversion of the normative standards of idealized Singaporean citizenship.

One of those standards is marked by the domestic space. In *Crows*, there is an evident opposition between family households and Chinese students and sex workers households. Unlike the former, the latter are not made up of kin and thus are not responsible for the reproduction of society. Most of the students, who inhabit these spaces, were not born into a state of economic grace, and what they are looking for when moving to Singapore is precisely that: to leave the precarity in China to be brought into a kind of paradise of bourgeois domesticity that will let them remain permanently in Singapore. The respectability of bourgeois domestic life as a wife of a Singaporean is a haven built upon the unshakable foundations of economic security. However, Helen and her co-nationals find and inhabit spaces utterly different from the ones they were expecting since all the Singaporean men in their lives are already married. Thus, the students are not only denied access to bourgeois domestic spaces or only granted selective and temporary access to them, but they also are seen as a threat to the basic foundation of those circles that must be protected at all costs by Singaporean women themselves. For example, there are multiple instances in which Helen is denied access to the domestic space of others. In the novel's last chapters, she has an aggressive encounter with both Siyan's wife and Liudao's daughter when she comes to the men's apartment looking for a place to stay. This has a significant implication. Helen's efforts to find a place for herself inside the domestic worlds of Singaporean men never come to fruition. Thus, there is not so much a sense of loss of the self for her but rather a knowledge that she is an outsider from the beginning, that she will never be seen in the likeness of other Singaporean women or have access to Singapore's domestic life, even if other Chinese women's stories of success seem to indicate so. There is a narrative explanation behind this fact.

In the novel, the function of familiar spaces and their inhabitants is constructed as one of splitting and restricting. By outlawing all kinds of (sexual) deviant behaviours not conducive to the expression of ideal citizenship based on harmony and not on displays of aggressiveness, the familial domestic spaces protect and perpetuate the bourgeois family through the production of otherized selves.

Marked by the interplay between reasonableness and perversity, clarity and incomprehensibility, the spaces in which Helen and the rest of the students move present the reader with an uncomfortable yet uniquely urban interaction—a kind of hypocritical encounter between the migrant and a host society that can only take place in the chaotic and heterogeneous environment of Singapore's modern and idealistic social environment, which despite its greenness and cleanness, it also lends itself to a lack of moral integrity that remains hidden in the also concealed spaces of an underworld to which only some chosen souls have access. In this setting, the restrictive spaces that hinder migrant mobility are also violent narrative proclamations that evince the harshly repressive measures of Singaporean society from which Chinese women are trying to escape unsuccessfully. Thus, while the narrator's earlier exaltations regarding the beach revealed a sense of liberation, Helen's arrival at the nightclubs, stuffed rooms, and misty saunas show the hidden, "dirty," and less favourable face of Singapore.

A different approach to space is the one that takes place in La Mara, a novel that packs within its pages a remarkably rich evocation and much more symbolic use of space than that present in Crows. The spatial structure revealed in La Mara encompasses a quasi-religious character that takes away any sense of personal freedom from the characters. Unlike *Crows*, where Chinese women actively test the boundaries of their restrictive society by wandering to the outskirts of the city and expose the reality of Singapore's underworld, La Mara presents a

narrative of urban life marked by brutal passivity or, more radically, the total lack of social agency. In *Crows*, Helen and other Chinese women can move freely around Singapore and discover different facets of the country. As a result, place markers such as the nightclub SMILL, the beach or Orchard Road pattern their journey. In contrast, for Lisbeth and Sabina Rivas, a couple of young migrant sex workers from Panama and Honduras, respectively, spaces can also be experienced firsthand but as a result of the actions and will of others. The story of the two girls does not lack the immediate spatial cues present in Crows. Still, it presents the reader with curated and uncontrollable social exchanges different from the ones that ground Chinese women in their free journey through the beaches and underground spaces of Singapore. The references to place in *La Mara* allude to specific geographical markers and locations with which the protagonists directly interact, but without much agency and real freely expressed mobility.

Probably the most critical geographical marker in *La Mara* is the Suchiate River, called Satanachia, by the omniscient narrative voice of the novel. Perhaps no river has so secure a place in the popular and social imagination of the Southern border between Mexico and Guatemala. The Suchiate has long been one of the main crossing points for thousands if not millions, of immigrants who cross into Mexico hoping to reach the US.

Such an act of crossing over is represented in the novel as a change of state that leads characters into new circumstances. La Mara also uses river crossing to explore the intermix between the personal and the political, the mobile and the immobile, the ethical and the unethical, and the physical and the spiritual. In these two last senses, the Suchiate/Satanachia River is often described as an entity with a life of its own: “Stanachia da y quita” (the Stanachia gives and takes), “el Satanachia no regresa, todo es palante, pallá arriba” (the Stanachia does not return, everything is forward, up there), “El río es la única fuerza capaz de comprender y se llama

Satanachia: agua transformada de paz y furia. Satanachia que marca las dos tierras" (the river is the only force capable of understanding and it's called Satanachia: water transformed into peace and fury. The Satanachia marks the two lands), "Satanachia permite el paso hacia el sol del norte" (the Satanachia allows the pass to the northern sun), "ya se lo llevó la corriente del Satanachia que nunca mira para atrás aunque lo tiente" (he was already carried away by the current of Satanachia who never turns his head back even if you lure him). In each example, it is easy to see that the river itself plays an integral part in the narration, sometimes serving as a veiled narrator. The omniscient narrator's reference to different actions as associated with human behaviours and emotions is essential to the characterization of the river as focalizer. The river never speaks directly, but the narrator seems to commune with the river as he serves as a witness to its seemingly cruel but "natural" actions.

The powers ascribed to the Suchiate/Satanachia have a double meaning and function. On the one hand, they mean, of course, the literal devastating and natural force of the river and its character as a physical barrier that separates Mexico from Guatemala, the south from the final destination up north in the US. On the other hand, however, the characteristics adjudicated to the river in question retain some of their original literal meaning, functioning as prosopoeia in its strict sense, and therefore implies that the river could have a narrative perspective of its own. This implication is brought out to the open by the nickname given to the river[2] by Ximenus, a shaman and charismatic leader who lives on the border and, as the main focalizer of the novel, seems to be able to witness all the events firsthand. As Luis Armando Gonzalez and José Manuel Camacho Delgado point out, through the focalization of Ximenus, magical and religious concerns build a symbolic universe around the notion of the border and its inhabitants (Gonzalez,

[2] Satanachia is a name that in occultism refers to an infernal king, grand general and commander of Satan's army, the demon of devastation. He is believed to have the power to spread incurable illnesses and pests over humanity and to subjugate women. D'Ange, "Satanachia."

504; Camacho 547). This serves to justify the perverse practices happening in the border space, such as corruption, prostitution, and violence. To understand this implication is to realize that the narrator has given the river a face not just to speak about it as if it were a person or a demonic entity but also to let it speak to him and focalize narrative occurrences through him. From this perspective, the violent events taking place in and around the river acquire a mystical aura since it is clear that they are part of a dark cosmic order where the migrants forced to cross the river turn into sacrificial victims of their deviant mobility.

In crossing the Satanachia River, what is supposed to function as a boundary, an obstacle, or the means to a new set of circumstances becomes a mystical, religious, and almost cultic experience of the worst kind. By associating an expanding spiritual dimension of existence with the river, Ramirez Heredia advances the more significant movement of the novel to which river crossing belongs. In other words, the actual crossing of the migrants sets in motion a metaphorical crossing between two states of being that does not stand, however, for a salvific experience of any kind. But quite the opposite. The sights, sounds, and sensations of crossing the river to trying to get on the train named "The Beast" are quite something on their own, but are also indicators of something else. *La Mara* first sets the quasi-divine supra consciousness or omniscient narrator of the novel and his vision in motion, migrant crossing from Guatemala to Mexico and then back in some cases, then continually expands its scope to include others who also cross the river and make of the experience a living hell (los mareros) or directly partake in it as its victims (the girls who work as prostitutes on both sides of the border, Lizbeth and Sabina Rivas).

Lizbeth and Sabina Rivas constantly cross the river. Although they are not socially isolated or denied the opportunities extended to their counterparts in *Crows*, their freedom of

mobility is only apparent, and never find a place to which they can escape. Most of the time, they are constrained by spatial enclosures, the brothel Tijuanita, the immigration station cell, and the brothels in Mexico. All of these have boundaries that distinguish the inside from the outside; all provide protection or imprisonment, inclusion, and exclusion.

Perhaps the most notable example of the power of the mentioned bounded enclosures appears in the first chapters of the novel when the place and brothel that the girls inhabit is described in the following terms:

> [Ahí] está Tecún Umán, o Tijuanita, mismo nombre del bailadero de luces moradas y amarillas, con la fila de cuartos cuadrados y pequeños, olorosos a venidas y vomitadas, esperando a los clientes en el traspatio ([There] is Tecún Umán or Tijuanita, same name of the brothel of purple and yellow lights, with the row of squared and small rooms, with the smell of streets and pukes, waiting for the clients in the back yard). […]
>
> Lizbeth esperar más palabras y al no haberlas tomó rumbo a los cuartos donde las chicas viven de día en el bar Tijuanita y por las noches sirven de cogedero sabroso, porque sabroso debe ser desnudarse y desnudar dentro de esos olores, algún día ella le va a decir a Felipe Arredondo que nada más por ver qué se siente se metan a uno de los cuartos a revolcarse como locos, a cubrirse de esos olores, y que al terminar, si el cliente quedó satisfecho, el cura le pague un fajo de quetzales (Lizbeth waits for more words, but since she didn't get them, she went back to the rooms where the girls live during the day in the bar Tijuanita and at night serve for tasty fucking, because getting naked and getting others naked within those smells must be delicious, one day she will tell Felipe Arredondo that, just to see how it feels, that they get inside one of the rooms to have a roll in the hay like crazy, to cover themselves with those smells, and when finished , if the client was entirely satisfied, the priest pays her with a wad of quetzales) (179).

The enclosed space of el Tijuanita refers to both the border city of Tecún Umán and the bar/brothel where Lizbeth and Sabina Rivas live during the day and work at night. These two enclosed spaces serve a paradoxical function. On the one hand, they limit the mobility of the girls. On the other, they promote it. They act both as trapping but also protective spaces. They take the girls off the street and allow them to work for a salary, however insignificant. But at the same time, they limit the possibilities and conceal the girls' actual lack of agency and unrestricted mobility. By the smells ascribed to them, they also signal precarity, depravity, and

violence, so characteristic of the life in the margins of the border as described in the novel, a life from which Lizbeth and Sabina Rivas participate as victims.

In *La Mara*, Lizbeth and Sabina Rivas fit into the category of victimized objects of sexual pleasure. While both girls, as their counterparts in *Crows*, work as prostitutes, they also remain primarily controlled by their abusive environment. Their central conflict stems from their inability to move freely since they depend on the actions of others. Thus, the girls' physical location surrounded by the walls of the Tijuanita or those of the rooms inside of the Tijuanita also represents their social position, relegated to a precarious female world contained in, but separate from any kind of public realm, to which they can escape even if it is just for a small period.

Confined in this manner, the girls only experience the world outside thanks to the intervention of other characters, often pimps or clients. Though they can move and interact with other characters of the border space outside of the Tijuanita, they remain passive participants. They are witnesses and victims of abuse of a similar kind to that suffered by the girls in *Crows*. But what makes the situation of both groups different is their freedom of movement. In *La Mara*, only the pimps and other female characters not related to the world of prostitution can travel freely. They come and go, in a way Lizbeth and Sabina Rivas do not. While we know that both girls leave the brothel at some point—to go to work in Mexico, for example—their movements are regulated and prescribed: the brothel's owner, a Mexican woman called doña Lita, decides where and when the girls can travel. Likewise, Sarabia, a corrupt migratory officer who also works as a trafficker, waits for the girls on the other side of the Satanachia and brings them to the private parties of rich Mexican men and politicians to serve as entertainment. The life of the

migrant prostitutes in Guatemala is, as the examples illustrate, under the rigid control of a specific type of migration infrastructure.

IV. Narrative Agency and Apparent Power*lessness*

All the narrative events that occur in and beyond the marginal subworld of *Crows* and *La Mara* are filtered through two distinct types of narrators, the first-person, homodiegetic, subjective narrator of *Crows*, Helen, and the third-person omniscient, heterodiegetic, and objective narrator of *La Mara*, whose name and identity are never revealed. Two very different modes of seeing are at issue in each of the novels; the first is an active kind of seeing where the first-person narrator also functions as the focalizer of the story. All the narrative events are filtered through the eyes and perception of Helen. The second is a more passive kind of seeing, where the narrator takes the role of a supreme observer or witness that takes the focalizing position of the character whose experience he is narrating. As a result, what is narrated and what the reader perceives in one and the other novel is necessarily different, and it tells a great deal about narrative authority, the narrators' alignment with certain kinds of values, and also different conceptions around the migrant subject. While the first-person narrator of Crows functions to unify the discourse in the novel, the variety of discourses introduced by the omniscient third-person narrator of *La Mara* serves to demonstrate how multiple perspectives influence each other. Because one of the most important goals of single and multiple narrative perspectives is to portray the development of characters' identity and subjectivity, the uses of different modes of narration in *Crows and La Mara* reveal details about migrant worldviews. They also highlight questions of power by (de)constructing simple or complex networks of characters' relationships that demonstrate the challenges that migrant prostitutes, in particular, face while navigating various institutional and

social hierarchies. Ultimately, what these two modes of narration reveal are two different ways of constructing migrant subjectivity.

I will start by analyzing the narrative techniques and abject migrant subjectivity as related to the migrant prostitute developed in *Crows.* As it is typical for first-person narratives, *Crows* employs one focalizer through whose eyes the events are presented and perceived. The focus on Helen's single consciousness allows for a comprehensive development of her subjectivity. She has privileged access to narrative information, while the reader is doomed to a peculiar uncertainty regarding the first-person narrator's informational content. As a result, the reader cannot refer to an authoritative narrator because of their fallibility. Assumptions, fantasies, and lies often haunt Helen's narration, and therefore her narrative logic becomes multivalent. Her perception of the narrative world and narration of the events inform and misinform the reader. In this sense, Helen's position and access to information are as vital as her lack of it. To analyze these discursive techniques, I rely on Nancy Miller's work on the perception of women's texts as unrealistic or lacking in verisimilitude as a way to avoid male constructions of female experience:

> The blind spot here is both political (or philosophical) and literary. It does not see, nor does it want to, that the fictions of desire behind the desiderata of fictional are masculine and not universal constructs. It does not see that the maxims that pass for the truth of human experience, and the encoding of that experience in literature, are organizations when they are not fantasies of the dominant culture. To read women's literature is to see and hear repeatedly a chafing against the 'unsatisfactory reality' contained in the maxim (46).

Working with Miller's perspective, I would suggest that Jiu Dan uses Helen's narrative inaccuracies, assumptions, and fantasies to escape the dictated conventions of the realistic masculine form, one that in *Crows* is also associated with citizenship status, social class, as well as ethics of sedentarism. The author and the narrator reject eh maxims of behaviour available to them and develop a sense of female power, to be gained through the act of narration of the

invisible lives of migrant prostitute in Singapore. The maxims are overt in the text; Helen and Fanny speak on maxims to discuss their experience. Such maxims mainly refer to the possibilities available to migrant women in a hostile environment. Jiu Dan allows Helen to come to develop her mode of discourse, but she does not stop there. In criticizing the division of labour that gives the men a chance to inhabit public space while women rule the private one, Jiu Dan weaponizes female sexuality and gives Helen meaningful ways to challenge that binary.

What does Helen do that makes her a fallible narrator? She is not exactly an unreliable narrator, like Lu Xun's Diary of a Madman, where the reader must distance herself from the narrator's judgements. Yet, Helen cannot be trusted entirely either. In general, Helen's character judgements are very good---about Fanny, Madam Mai, and Siyan. But on one or two occasions, Helen withholds information with the objective of misleading us, for instance, about the real identity of her father. Later in the novel, she also gives out a warning, explicitly raises the issue of truth and falsity, and presumably accepts her fallibility to Xiaolan. She does not try to deceive us entirely since she tells us later and draws attention to her behaviour. Therefore, there must be another purpose for this strategy. Looking at the most egregious examples of duplicity, perhaps we can reflect on what the narrator gains from this apparently calculated dishonesty.

Helen's most gratuitous falsehood is in her failure to reveal to the reader who her father is. There are several levels in the process, and we do not find out the truth until later in the novel when Helen becomes a prostitute. First, Helen makes us and other characters believe that her father is a high-rank government official in China. But then, she admits that she deceived everybody and creates another persona for her father until we finally learn the truth about his identity. By not disclosing this information, Helen remains the sole owner of the truth.
When she meets Madam Mai on the plane to Singapore Helen explains:

> 我放下水杯，突然绯红了脸，对她说："我爸爸这个人不但不管我，还不许我告诉别人我在新加坡。那些人都是他的客户，他怕他们因为照顾我而又反过去再麻烦地。实际上我也不需要。"[...] "那你爸爸一定是个高干了？" 她问，声音显很平淡，她又转过脸去看窗外。我也朝那里看去，透过斑驳的光影和浮动的云块，我想我离我的父亲是否越来越近了？我亲眼看见他的躯体化为一股浓烟，从烟囱里缕缕飘去，和天空化为一体。那么他现在看见我了吗？[...] "他也可以算叫高干吧，" 我望着那下颌，也扬起头，平淡而又沉着地说道，"可正因为这样，做子女的都倒了大霉，不许这样，不许那样，连去新加坡都要偷偷摸摸的。" (7) . "You know my dad didn't allow me to tell anyone I'd be in Singapore. All those people are his customers. He's afraid that they'll go and bother him after taking care of me. [...] 'Your dad must be a senior cadre,' she said non chalantly. I looked in the same direction. As the plane soared through drifting clouds and mottled shades of light, I wondered if I was getting closer to my father. I'd witnessed his body being reduced to thick smoke, swirl through a chimney and drift away into thin air. Could he see me now? [...] I suppose you can call him a cadre, I said, but this only means big trouble for his children" (17).

Helen describes the control that she exerts over the situation by creating a persona for her father. The syntax reveals use of declarative sentences with an interesting mixture of verbal tenses. The present tense (you know, he's afraid) separates what is happening in the fictional reality from Helen's introspective thoughts (I looked, I wondered, I'd witnessed, could he...?). The picture is clear: there seem to be two versions of her father, one of which she uses to assume control of her life narrative and how Madam Mai, the Singaporean woman Helen admires and whom she is trying to impress, perceives her.

Through the novel, there are several ways in which Helen gains ascendance over her situation as a migrant by constructing an alternative persona for her father. First, being in a vulnerable position, not wanting to go with the agent who brought her to Singapore, and in general lacking the power to improve her situation, she can influence Madam Mai's image of her by controlling the flow of narrative information. Thus, she transforms her disadvantage (being a Chinese woman) into an advantage by sharing the fact that her father is a businessman in China. Thus, he has an advantageous social and economic position. Helen then becomes a manufacturer of lies, especially regarding the real identity of her father, because she would rather shape her

destiny and try to get what she wants by lying than let life take her by surprise. Second, she has a proper claim to Madam Mai's attention, as she puts herself close to Madam's level by pretending to be of a similar social class and privileged position. Thus, her duplicity gains her a local's favour, at least temporarily, as Madam Mai implies: "I think orchids will bloom for you" p. 18. Third, Helen gets a revealing pleasure from the deceit. Recognizing her peripheral position in Singaporean society, she derives a certain satisfaction from being able to trick Madam Mai. At the same time, Helen exhibits a bit of doubt when she wonders if her father can see her, and leaves the reader asking: in what ways is Helen able to get closer to her father? By somehow recreating his travelling experiences? By holding his memory close to her? Or is there any other reason? The doubt comes as a result of breaking a series of gender, class, and narrative conventions: Helen is being overtly unfilial; by revealing so many details about her own life and her father to Madam Mai, she has broken the covenant with her father, and by extension the reader, who by now suspects that she may be a fallible narrator. Readers and Madam Mai are both caught short by Helen's manipulation of the narrative truth. When she finally reveals herself to the reader and one of her clients, she also refers to a kind of powerlessness and moral dilemma:

> "我父亲死的时候我才十二岁。那天晚上，房间的灯光也像这张床上的灯光一样很强烈，很邪恶。这种灯光使我全身失血，就像你现在看到的一样，你看我身体跟墙壁一样白吧？那晚，我的脸我的眼睛干枯得像冬天里的树叶，我想睡觉，想要躺在什么地方。我的父亲，他在咳嗽，可我瞄瞄旁边的那张空床，趁他不注意，就缩在床上悄悄睡起来。我一下睡着了，一下做起了梦。我梦见自己在一条河流旁奔跑，后面是我的父亲在追赶，我跑啊，跑啊，像是在飞……淡蓝色的河水潺潺地流着……我突然没有了实体，只是一片干枯的落叶在天上飞，就像现在躺在这张床上一样，没有名，没有姓，不知从哪来到哪去。我惊恐地大声地喊起我的父亲……可他死了。" […] 当然这跟我突然有一天对别人说我父亲在什么什么地方做着大官丝毫不矛盾，虽然这有违于事实，但说他是省委书记就一定意味着谎骗？先生，你说呢？(129). I was only 12 when my father died. That night, the lights in the room were just as strong as this. He was coughing badly. I was sleepy, so I lay down on a bed beside him and fell asleep. Then I had a dream. I dreamt that he was chasing me along a riverbank. I ran and ran, and suddenly found myself floating in the air like I tried falling leaf, without a name, without knowing where I came from and where I was going, like I'm lying here on his on this bed. I cried loudly and tried to browse my father. But he was

> dead. […] One day, I told somebody that my father was a high official at some place. It was untrue no doubt. But does it necessarily mean I'm out to cheat somebody when I say my father is a secretary of a provincial party committee? Mr, what do you think? From your voice, I suppose you're not old, but you ought to have your personal experiences too (218).

That Helen is powerless is marked by the mortification of the lie she has told and the question she posits to her client. This lie is not important in the first part of the novel, when she seems to enjoy the better treatment she receives from other characters, especially Madam Mai and Siyan. Now Helen tells us that she is mortified. And that mortification does in fact not give her any advantage with her strategy of trying to survive the hostile environments that Singapore turned out to be. Now she is more preoccupied with the kind of moral judgement other people will make on her. The position of power that Helen holds at the beginning of the novel now seems to have dissipated, as she positions herself as a victim of her own circumstances.

But we must recognize that this may result from a defensive strategy against otherization or a veiled recognition of her own migrant abject subjectivity. I borrow the term from the work on migrants and the border by Ozgun Topak. Building on Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler's theorizations of the abject, as something/someone that is not subject and occupy a peripheral position in society, Topak adds to the notion another sociological interpretation that applies the concept to the study of "those who are degraded to a lower status in a society. (p. 799)." Migrants are an excellent example of such degradation. They become abject as soon as they are contrasted against the figure of the citizen since their status of implied illegality prevents them from negotiating their own subjectivity. As a result, they perceive themselves as less of a subject than citizens (p. 799). When understood from this perspective, we can understand that Helen is powerless and marked by the mortification of her own lack of morality and her father's absence. This absence did not seem so important at the novel's beginning , yet that changed. Now Helen directly tells us why she is so mortified. The absence of the father's marks Helen as an abject

subject in the novel because no matter how much she tries, she cannot even aspire to be filial. She is a prostitute, not married, does not have children, and is a migrant in an inhospitable land. She narratively constructs her chances at success as very slim.

That perennial status of unfiliality also has social ramification in her fictional world because it posits her against other more socially "honourable" characters whose presence only serve to increase Helen's own sentiment of inadequacy and abjection. In an illuminating scene at Liu Dao's apartment, we witness his Singaporean daughter, who recently returned from the States, say to Helen: "The way you dress and the expressions on your faces and in your eyes make you all like a breed quite different from our human race. Oh yes, maybe Dragon Girls can't be considered humans at all. […] You all are animals" (p. 264). A bit later, after informing Liu Dao about his daughter's behaviour , he only manages to tell Helen that he does not believe that his daughter is capable of using such foul language because she was born in Singapore. As a migrant student and later a prostitute exposed to the otherization by Singaporean characters, Helen must cultivate ways to protect herself from them by lying and by weaponizing her innocent-like beauty and her sexuality. Still, the truth is that she is not very successful. She tends to adopt the same discursive strategies employed to otherize her and apply them to her own self-definition: "I was born a bad woman, a rotten woman?" she explains to Xiaolan to later add: "How do you know I'm telling the truth in front of you? For all you know, I could be telling lies in front of others" (270). These lines reveal an intriguing aspect of Helen's personality and discursive strategies. Just as Helen's materials in her dealings with the characters in the novel are information about herself. Jiu Dan employs a narrator who claims to be telling the true story about her circumstances; her power depends on how effectively she entices the reader and other characters. However, we are much more aware of the power of language when it leads us astray

by suggesting the possibility of deceit. When games like that are played and we are forced to pay more attention to what we are told, we are much more conscious of the medium of a story and, consequently of the authority and narrative power of the storyteller. Jiu Dan highlights that deceptive power by having Helen mislead and enlighten us.

That technique of giving and withholding evidence achieves its zenith in the last chapter of the novel, where Helen finally shows her true colours.

> 我把头埋在他的怀里。"再向前走一走，好吗？我觉得今晚真好。""我也这样觉得。"他抬头看了看天空，忽然不自然地大声笑起来，"过去我竟那么怕水，我为什么会怕水？" [···] 他用手继续撩起海水，似乎没听见我说的话，单独向前走去。他越往前走，周围的气氛就越显得死一般寂静，我甚至听不到了海浪的扑打声。就在这时，他站住了。月光下我只看到他的双肩和一个剥了皮一样的鸟的头颅。我定定地望着他，突然感到这不是一个人的脸，是一个陌生的物体，一个肉块，一种组织 (379).I buried my face in his chest. "Let's move further out; I feel wonderful tonight." "Me too. In the past, I was so scared of water. Why should I be scared of water?" […] "Let's get back on shore," I said, letting go of him. He continued to splash water as if he hadn't heard me and moved forward alone. The further he went, the quieter the surrounding became. Even the sounds of splashing water and lapping waves seemed to have died now. Then he halted. In the moonlight, I could see only his shoulders and a head that looked like a flayed bird. I stared blankly at him. Suddenly, I felt that he was no longer a human but just a strange body, a blob of meat, a kind of tissue" (287).

It would seem that the "stared blankly" is insightful, for it reveals part of Helen's personality, with which we were not familiar until this point in the narrative. Helen's seeming empowerment is related to her tendency to lie because she manufactures a different identity for her own survival. But when we go further in the narrative, the veil falls down, revealing Helen's darker persona. Here, she allows us to imagine that she has led a dishonest life that is nevertheless connected to her own abject subjectivity. In this way the deceptiveness of Helen is related to the substance of her life and to the plot of the novel, for it is in the plot that we find all the narrative clues that make it possible for us to distinguish Helen from Singaporean women, even though Helen herself is at pains to try to look and act like them. For instance, she tries to study English

and make herself more elegant and appealing to the gaze of Singaporean men. These pictures represent a key reality in the text: all too obviously, Chinese women's lot is tied up with and peripheral to the lives of Singaporean men, and it is in this respect that Helen asserts that she is not different. She aspires to get a permanent residence, but when her efforts seem to be frustrated, she turns into the murderous dragon girl from which she has been trying to distance herself for the most part of the novel. The social roles are then inverted. Lui Dao, who has been victimizing Helen through physical violence, now becomes a powerless victim of Helen's cunningness. What is more, he ceases to be a human being to become "a blob of meat" in Helen's eyes, and, as the narrative has been tirelessly trying to show us, for those who remain outside of the "humanness" categorization, dignified life is out of the question.

La Mara also presents us with different levels of dehumanization and abjectness, but its narrative is a bit cruder than that of *Crows*. In addition, instead of a singular perspective, *La Mara* relies on multiple perspectives to highlight the multiplicity of migrant subjectivity in the border space, and the kind of institutional and social hierarchies migrants have to navigate. Although migrant characters are given a certain degree of limited narrative agency, it is immediately and frequently challenged by the other perspectives in the novel, which compete for influence and control.

Such distribution of narrative influence suggests that be the best way for migrants to survive their oppressive environments and gain partial agency is by adapting to their circumstances and accepting their abject position in a repressive, immoral, and corrupt system. While some of these preoccupations are also present in *Crows,* how *La Mara* portrays them is fundamentally different. As a single perceived narrative world, *Crows* presents the reader with a top-down or vertical power relationship between the audience, narration, and characters (the

fallible point of view of Helen dominates the narrative and influences the perception of the reader by the withholding and revelation of narrative information). For its part, *La Mara*, employs a rather effective narrative strategy to reflect on the border space, migrants and their problems, focalization, "a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld" (Niederhoff par. 1). Genette, in his seminal study Narrative Discourse, was the first one who proposed the notion as a substitute for the traditional, less concise notion of point of view. Genette distinguished between three types of focalization: zero, internal, and external focalization. Niederhoff 's contribution to *The Living Handbook of Narratology* clearly explains what each category involves:

> The first term [zero focalization] corresponds to what English- language criticism calls narrative with omniscient narrator and Pouillon "vision from behind," and which Todorov symbolizes by the formula Narrator > Character (where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly, says more than any of the characters knows). In the second term [internal focalization], Narrator = Character (the narrator says only what a given character knows); this is narrative with "point of view" after Lubbock, or with "restricted field" after Blin; Pouillon calls it "vision with." In the third term [external focalization], Narrator < Character (the narrator says less than the character knows); this is the "objective" or "behaviorist" narrative, what Pouillon calls "vision from without." (Niederhoff par. 4)

Generally speaking, zero focalization, the domain of authorial narration and omniscient narrators, lends itself to emphasizing the thematic components of characters, while internal focalization is better suited to represent mental states and thought processes, inviting the reader to view the world from a (mimetic) character's perspective, as la Mara. The description of the prostituted child, Sabina Rivas, shows how zero and internal focalization, narrative comment and dialogue help set the tone of the narrative, offering the reader some expositional information about Sabina Riva's character:

> ---Prefiero que me entierren aquí---masca Sabina dejando ver los muslos ardidos por las luces neon del Tijuanita […]
> Sabina alza la voz sobre la del locutor […]:
> ---No don, yo no me cambio el nombre porque al rato van a querer que me cambie la vida…
> Y su vida es de ella sola, de Sabina Rivas, a mucho orgullo, de ella que tiene que dejar su charla y subir al escenario. En esta noche por tres ocasiones ha bailado. […] y quitarse la ropa, usando la mirada sin matices, con la oscuridad del sexo como mancha rabiosa, sin siquiera pulsar los desfiguros que causa su baile entre los diez, doce hombres muy jovencitos.
> (---I prefer to be buried here---Sabina chews showing the tights burned by the neon lights of el Tijuanita […]
> Sabina raises her voice over the announcer […]:
> "No Mister, I won't change my name because later they will ask me to change my life…
> And her life is her own only, Sabina Riva's, and proud of it, only of hers who have to leave her conversation and get on stage. This night she has dances three times. […] and take off her clothes, using her gaze without nuances, with the darkness of sex as a rabid stain, without paying attention to the mess that her dance causes among the ten and twelve very young men.") (16).

The first sentence, indicating Sabina's excitement over her new job, might introduce zero focalization. However, the kind of information passed on by the narrator, that is, how she experiences life behind the closed doors of el Tijuanita, and behind the scenes where she dances every night, is too specific to make readers believe that they are not looking at all the narrative events with Sabina's eyes. It is also highly unlikely that the non-omniscient narrator would adopt Sabina's speech pattern. The phrase "a mucho orgullo" implies that the narrator is "becoming" Sabina. This kind of strategic approach to representing consciousness is indicative of what Genette has termed internal focalization. The information is more detailed and at the same time somewhat less coherent, a clear and ironic indication of heightened subjectivity. But why ironic? Sabina is constructed as an unconventional heroine, not characterized by modest evasion and restraint. She is a public figure on whose very body, class, and gender conflict is inscribed. Her presence in the novel raises disturbing social questions that destabilized precarious social structures, like the migration regimes, corruption, and trafficking networks that make possible the objectivization of the underage female body. Apart from that, Sabina is also a tenuous force

promoting the novel's mystery. She has disappeared, and nobody has heard anything about her. The reader only learns about her through the flashbacks of the Mexican Consul who was a frequent client of the girl. What we experience with the fragment then is a multilayered focalization. The narrator filters the narrative experience through the eyes of the Consul who tells us about Sabina. Yet when the reader accesses Sabina's remembered experience, she does it through the consciousness of Sabina herself instead of through the Consul's. This has several narrative and ideological implications. Sabina's subjectivity is a reconstruction that somebody else does, rather than a construction of the self. Sabina is then not only objectivized through the dance she performs but also through the double focalization to which she is subjected. Involuntarily, the reader participates in that objectivization of the female underage body. Sabina's impulsiveness, willful character, and apparent freedom of choice (represented by her desire to die in el Tijuanita and her reluctance to change her name and by extension her life and current situation) are just that, an appearance, a tenuous hazy image that comes to life through remembrance. Within a multiple-focalized narrative, then, Sabina's participation in the narrative must be understood in the context of her relationship with the Consul Nicolas. Were it not for him, we would simply not remember her. From this perspective, the multiple focalized narrative usefulness as an interrogation of cultural hegemony extends beyond questions of race, nationality, and class to include concerns about gender and age, as well as the hierarchical social and institutional systems at play in a sex worker's and migrant's life. Sabina's perspective is not posited against but "contained" by that of consul Nicolas. Thus, her point of view does not transgress, reconsider or rewrite that of the Consul, as would be expected. Quite the opposite. Sabina's narrative agency and perspective are mitigated, reconsidered, and rewritten by that of the Consul. Her identity and character development become impossible. She is oblivious to the

kind of social forces that have made her what she is. She cannot participate in the narrative negotiations for narrative power that mimic the social institutions within which she must function. However, my intention here is not to equate narrative or discursive power with the struggle for social recognition within the fictional world, for there seems to be a disconnection between Sabina's agency as a focalizer and her agency as an inhabitant of her fictional world. Despite her apparent lack of narrative or discursive power, the prostituted child is reconstructed as having a certain kind of social agency, by means of her erotic capital.

Drawing onto Bourdieu notion of capital as accumulated labour, Hakim elaborates on an expression of capital that she calls erotic. For Hakim, the erotic capital is a series of elements relevant to different societies and moments: beauty, sexual appeal, charm, vitality, social representation, sexuality, and fertility (38). Hakim argues that erotic capital is similar to human capital in the sense that a basic level of talent and abilities are needed to exercise it, but it is also possible to develop it. It has as much value as money, education, and contacts. Erotic capital is fundamentally different from economic, social, and cultural capital, for they are determined by a system of classes, while the first one is only partially linked to that same system. Economic capital, argues Hakim, determines the social and cultural capital of a person, but its relationship with erotic capital is contingent, or economic capital cannot be acquired with no other type of capital. As Hakim states, no rich parent can guarantee that their sons and daughters will be born attractive. In this sense, erotic capital is defined as a subversive form of capital because it is independent of social class and status, but mainly because it is possessed by women.

Although her perspective is not constructed as powerful, Sabina does possess a certain degree of pragmatic agency in her fictional world. Her partial agency derives from her erotic capital (represented in the novel by Sabina's extraordinary beauty and charm), one that she has

been forced to use. The narrator of *La Mara* explains that Sabina was introduced into sex work due to her abject and precarious condition. She lived in a broken household and was constantly abused by her father and her brother, who is now a member of the gang, la mara salvatrucha.

The world of sex work and the "maternal figure" of Doña Lita were the only safe alternatives that Sabina could find to survive her life circumstances. Compared to the life she used to have at home, life as a prostitute does not seem like a bad option for her, or for other girls: llegan las chicas con ojos de hambre del camino del sur, del sur de ese norte donde está Tecún Umán o Tijuanita (the girls arrive with eyes of hunger from the southern path, from the south of the north where Tecún Umán or el Tijuanita are), explains the narrator. Later in the novel, we learn through the focalization of consul Nicolas that Sabina is willing to do anything it takes to reach California because she thinks that there, she will have access to a room for herself, a bathroom with a shower, and a big mirror in which she could see herself. This reference does more than simply exemplify how the notion of gender is closely linked to agency and social class. It operates in the realm of possibility and unrealizable dreams. There is not much that a migrant girl can do to avoid her fate of working as a prostitute, since she must survive.

Once immersed in the scene of sexual work though, how migrant girls exercise agency seems to change. As a prostitute from working-class origins, Sabina's femininity is represented as primarily physical. From her first appearance, we are told that she is extremely beautiful. Men's response to her is also merely physical. The spectators of her dance are not able to control themselves and it is rather obvious how obsessed the Consul becomes with Sabina. However, even such magnetic sexual power does not prevent Sabina from being discriminated against and from being most probably murdered.

Another example of the precarious and ambiguous situation of prostituted children in La Mara is that of Lizbeth, one of the favourite entertainments for rich Mexican politicians. After being abused at the migration checkpoint, Lizbeth is sent to the city of Coatzacoalcos to give a show at a private party for some "señores bien forrados del bolsillo" (misters disgustingly rich). Doña Lita then tries to convince Lizbeth to be obedient and take advantage of the unique opportunity she will have. Among other things, that implies forgetting about the abuse she suffered at the hands of the American officials and using the "cuerpo que la Santísima Trinidad" (body that the Trinity) has given her and that she should not hide but offer instead to the best bidder. Here Lizbeth is made believed by Doña Lita that her best possibility of success is by pleasing the right men, those with money. The expression "body that the Trinity has given to you" denotes Lizbeth's sexual capital.

Meanwhile, Lita's assertion that Lizbeth should not hide her body but sell it ironically indicates Lizbeth's declining position on a spectrum of humanness (humanity?) and womanhood. Lizbeth, still young and as Sabina abandoned to the streets, is linked to Lita as a type of weaponized yet abject femininity. Lizbeth's purely physical femininity approaches the scarcely-human example embodied by Lita, an ex-prostitute who knows she owns her brothel and can now choose the men with whom she wants to be intimate. Lizbeth's narrative trajectory (and Sabina's), though, unlike Lita's, closes down the possibility of success, real agency, and social mobility, enforcing gender, class, and citizenship boundaries by making the girls victims of a corrupt and immoral system where those with money are the ones holding real narrative and pragmatic power.

By providing explicit reminders that no perspective exists by itself and in isolation, La Mara effectively illustrates how power and influence operate and affect every corner of the

fictional world where that interaction occurs. That quality has made multiple focalized narration a particularly effective tool for Ramírez Heredia to explore and represent the experience of peripheral populations, more specifically, the experience of migrant underage prostitutes. It is obvious that the use of multiple focalization that challenges a single governing discourse gives equal importance to the clashing perspectives of disenfranchised characters, like Sabina or Lizbeth. These different focalization points challenge what could be a simplistic point of view. Indeed, in La Mara, there is no authoritative and controlling angle of vision, but rather a narrator that acquires a quasi-mystical aura and transcendental qualities and interrogates notions such as nationality, social class, and gender. These notions are problematized by the inclusion of regime systems (immigration corrupt officials, brokers, and traffickers) that exploit incessantly the female body.

V. The Odors of (Anti) Citizenship: Womanhood and Prostitution

The second half of *Crows*, details an intrusive event. The scene occurs behind the closed doors of a private room when Helen, the protagonist of the story, is interviewed by her first potential client as a prostitute. The customer examines Helen's body to ensure he is satisfied with the service. The first-person narrator unapologetically describes how he explores Helen's cleavage, squeezes her breast, and demands that she opens her legs so he can insert his finger in her and smell it to make sure he is paying for a good quality, non-smelly woman. Meanwhile, the third-person omniscient narrator of *La Mara* describes how a couple of undocumented migrant women, who have been detained at the migration station on the border between Mexico and Guatemala, are profiled and ethnically marked by their Honduran foreign smell. The migration agents confirm their suspicion by testing the women's pronunciation and enunciation and smelling their breath.

The representation of odours in both novels is not unconventional in the sense that scent provides Jiu Dan and Rodriguez Heredia with a kind of aesthetic to build the narrative underworld that allows violence to happen. Reading the novels for their smells, places or bodies explicitly described as giving off odours, is quite frankly to make much of what these novels typically take almost for granted. The passages paraphrased above are unusual in that they portray characters making assumptions about and commenting at some length on an odour, a sense impression that more often appears in these works as simply unremarkable. Moreover, as the occasions for both instances of discriminatory responses suggest, the treatment of smells in both novels has different levels of subtlety and narrative effects.

What both examples show, however, are the effects of contemporary attempts to sanitize and deodorize the female consumable body and the more highly defined sensibility to less potent aromas indicative of ethnicity, economic and citizenship status, and class. Examining how narrative structures, such as smells, indicate the nature and function of those notions in the novels. Among the various factors that can be identified as the bases of class, the central determinant in *Crows* and *La Mara* is the source of a character's income, their national origin, and their citizenship status. Understanding the implications of this equation of class, work, nationality, and citizenry requires not only an analysis of the smells cited but also a closer look at other markers of citizenship and anti-citizenship.

The kind of narrative code implicit in *Crows* and *La Mara* provides a way of understanding the citizenship status distinctions characteristic of this conception of class and their relation to other prominent otherizing registers of culturally constructed difference, such as gender and sexuality. The forms of analysis undertaken here reveal that class defined as a function of (sex) work results in social maladies specific to the contexts of Singapore and

Guatemala/Mexico. These conditions may be seen as a telling perspective on the anxieties that these social contexts tell about unwanted or deviant migrant mobility.

The smells evoked in the two cited fragments are linked to the class positions of those who emit them and those who perceive them. Smells indicate class because they share with it qualities that full citizens of the fictional world of the novels, and by extension the social environments that influence them, often attribute to categories that codify inequality, a finding backed up by contemporary anthropological research on smells.

As a sensation, smell has less to do with thought than with feelings, both in China and in other societies subjected to colonization by the West, such as Guatemala and Mexico. In both cases, the smell seems inescapably material in its effects. In “Deodorizing China: Odour, ordure, and colonial (dis)order in Shanghai, 1840s–1940s,” Xuelei Huang examines the implications of such materiality and its direct connection to otherization, modernization, and colonization. In her own words, “smell constituted a hidden site where the dynamics of power relations were played out. Smell also opened up a window to showcase modernity's power and ambivalence.” The second part of her article is of particular interest to this dissertation. It deals with the norms that the British colonial regime tried to impose in Shanghai to deodorize its characteristic “stench.” To the Western nose, Shanghai presented a variety of smells: that of incense, burning chestnuts, evil-smelling tunnels, dirty streets, narrow and filthy canals, the odour of decomposition, garlic and onion, and familiar residents of the city (deformed cripples and others). According to Huang, “such foreign accounts of the malodorous environment in China were abundant, and such discourses on the detrimental effect of stench and filth on health were also widespread. This echoed an overarching narrative of hygiene, deodorization, and civilization developing in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe” (Huang 1098).

That complicated European history of smell has been detailed in Alain Corbin's ambitious study, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (initially published in French in 1982 and translated into English in 1986), where the author attempts to trace the history of the perception and meaning of odour in France and Western Europe between the end of the seventeen century and the nineteen century, times of the Pasteurian revolution. Corbin's history of smell starts with anecdotes of the chemistry of public stench at the end of the Ancien Régime. We learn of the death of the cesspool clean smelling ordure during an inspection by Lavoisier and others in 1782. In Italy in 1789, one of Volta's students conducted research on the noxious airs collected from "a few young beggars enclosed in large leather sacks (42). Chemists and physicians devoted their energies to exploring the smells of swamps, privies, sewers, and graveyards. After the mid-nineteenth century, sensitivity to odour was accompanied by the appearance of perfumes. Charles Worth takes his place alongside Louis Pasteur as a key actor in a world that has made space for delicate odours, political and rich in meaning. Corbin emphasizes that while Pasteur's microbes damaged faith in the correlation between stench and disease, they preserved and reinforced the thought that "from contact with the proletariat the bourgeois contagion but also of biological mutation. The danger was personal too. A sexual threat, especially through prostitution, infects with pungent odours the French brothels.

The brothel spaces and prostitutes inhabiting them referred to in *Crows* and *La Mara*, share that stench that preoccupies French and, in general, Western sensibilities. Among these smells, none are linked to the specific class and citizenship positions of either those who emit them or those who perceive them. In *La Mara*, migration officials can identify undocumented immigrants by the smell of their breath. Those officials are often called “magos” or magicians due to the precision of their predictions.

Meanwhile, Helen often describes herself as a stinky prostitute. The smells of the novels reveal the status of their less and more sophisticated characters. By far, the novel's greatest number of olfactory representations have a very consistent source. The reason is simple. The smells emanating from the work done by the lower classes and their citizenship status. Migrant characters smell of their work and their citizenry. The sex workers in both novels are defined by a distinctive smell, the stink characteristic of prostitutes, and their workplaces. In *La Mara*, the narrative voice consistently equates migrant bodies and their deviant mobility with the odours of their places of origin. While in *Crows*, Chinese women must wear perfume to diminish their foreignness and increase their desirability before the eyes of Singaporean men.

The mutually defining relation of work, class, citizenship, and smell is confirmed by the representation of the odours conventionally associated with the middle and upper classes, and in *Crows* and *La Mara* in particular, related to citizenship status and national origin. The discursive strategy is nothing new. In his monumental work *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Scents*, Johnathan Reinarz has already explored the function of smells in creating a sense of community. Odours inform constructions of race and are embedded in the language and politics of racism. As Reinarz points out: "while each culture has historically possessed a subgroup that is deemed untouchable, this status was often constructed through narratives rich in olfactory imagery. Foreignness, in particular, was "cast as dirty because it brings alien cultures and customs that challenge the myth of a single system of social equality" (111).

Such practices of ethnic distinction in *La Mara* and *Crows* involve the differentiation between clean and dirty environments and bodies. Interestingly, each novel chooses to emphasize one of those contrasting notions. Tecún Umán, the border space of *La Mara*, is an enclave of social decay, moral degradation, and foul smells (a combination of urine exhalations,

pungent food smells, puke, sweat, stale burps, and even blood). In contrast, Singapore is presented as a hyper-clean and ordered space, with only some places that deviate from this norm that are nonetheless either mostly frequented by Helen and her friends (the Chinese food market) or outrightly hidden from the public eye (SMILL and the brothel).

When we compare the treatment of this kind of place in *Crows* and La *Mara*, then it becomes clear that the glare of the modern metropolis overshadows the decadent in *Crows*. The description of ordered and luxurious departments, hotels, streets, and tall buildings, make the modern world's contours hyper-visible. The decadence of the underworld of prostitution infiltrates the luxurious city space of Singapore in the form of a spectre whose offensive strategy derives from the sense that something else misses the eye and escapes the overarching agenda of modernization and sanitization. In this space of clean appearances and hidden decay, immigrants are forced into rituals of purification aimed at making them more palatable for the taste of Singaporean men/citizens. For example, Chinese students are often portrayed as wearing the most fragrant perfumes to become more attractive. The opposite is true for *La Mara* and the fictional citizens of Tecún Umán. The border city, which seems too out of reach of cleanliness and modernization, gives a physical shape to the interruption of moralism, hypocrisy, and the modern. There, the systemic cracks, instead of being covered, are aggravated, as the city is not only an unsanitary space but a business place for corrupt politicians and home to traffickers and a bloodthirsty gang, la mara salvatrucha.

In all this, the figure of the migrant prostitute is a key component. While the prostitute can be seen logically as the ultimate human commodity in any context, such a figure tends to obscure her ability to participate in consumer culture as an autonomous subject. According to certain formulations, in this economic relationship, she is seen as only an object/victim, not an

agent/ subject. *Crows* and *La Mara* offer two slightly different readings of the prostitute; while both authors seem acutely aware of the prostitute's position in an oppressive socioeconomic system, Jiu Dan and Rodríguez Heredia are engaged simultaneously in illustrating the resistive measures the commodified and oppressed migrant prostitute can adopt. The narrative tactics used in each novel, of course, are different: what works for Jiu Dan's *Crows* is often not an option for Ramírez Heredia's *La Mara*. Consequently, while Jiu Dan's project focuses more explicitly on how women can weaponize their sex appeal revealing points of intersection between the prostitute and the respectable woman/the anti-citizen and the citizen, Ramirez Heredia is more concerned with the devastating effects of prostitution on the life of girls, especially with how prostitution can be patronized and weaponized to control women's mobility. Each of these novels has a distinctive, yet equally intriguing, form of slippage between mobility, citizenship, and the commodification of female bodies and their consumption.

Crows' Chinese prostitutes remind us of a long history of migration, sex work, and their regulation in Singapore. James Warren's ground-breaking work has shown that the demand for young Chinese women was great by the end of the 1800s. Economic factors in rural China, such as poverty and a rise in the cost of living, propelled the first waves of migration of Chinese women to Singapore. Apart from their precarious situation, other factors that influenced the mobility of Chinese prostitutes were family pressure, the patriarchal system, and filiality. The families encouraged their daughters to go abroad to work, even when they knew that the women would have to engage in sex work, a profitable activity back in the day. Although the colonial authorities regulated commercial sex, the market was prosperous due to the presence of migrant labourers. The industry achieved its zenith by the mid-1890s when Singapore started receiving more workers from China and sailors from England, Germany, and Japan. Due to the high

demand, the trafficking of women was a severe problem. Especially after the issue started to attract the attention of British and Chinese authorities. To arrive in Singapore, the women passed through the hands of a network of brokers and intermediaries. Most ended up in Singaporean brothels, where they suffered different forms of violence and abuse (Warren 360-383).

Crows indirectly refers to those events. The mobility of Chinese women and the impact of migration infrastructures will be examined in the next section. But what is relevant here is precisely the existence of such a history of migration and its dismissal by ethnical Chinese Singaporean women. The way that shows in the novel is through the contrast between the prostitute and the middle-class respectable, ethnically Chinese Singaporean woman.

For Jiu Dan, the sexualized Chinese fallen woman becomes a discursive tool for various issues, occupying a space in the Singaporean middle- and upper-class imagination. There are several instances in the novel where ethnically Chinese and Singaporean women are posited against each other. The anxiety of Singaporeans over the influx of Chinese women into Singapore and the lingering preoccupation of middle-class ethnically Chinese women with racial "uplift" make the mainland prostitute an ideal scapegoat.

While discussing inter-ethnic relations in Singapore, Sylvia Ang provides a term for this tension, respectable femininity. In “Chinese migrant women as boundary markers in Singapore: unrespectable, un-middle-class and un-Chinese,” Ang discusses how, in the absence of “convenient markers” of a different language and ethnicity, Chinese Singaporean women have had to rely on alternative strategies of otherization and scape-goating to ease their anxieties regarding the arrival of new Chinese women immigrants into Singapore. One way of dealing with such anxieties is through the lens of respectability, benchmark, marker, and burden of class “against which to judge others and to be judged” (1779). To be respectable, explains Ang,

means to be moral, and worthy of society. Most of the time, it is inextricably related to being a woman because women are usually the ones who become prey to the moral judgements shielded by appearances. Respectability not only makes women the object of a judgmental and moralizing gaze but also defines them. Such class and gendered markers can be traced back to Singapore's colonial past, where "white, middle-class femininity was a significant symbol of national culture" (1779). Considered protectors of order and stability, British culture idealized the image of middle-class women, and these ideas and ideals slowly became ingrained in the identity of middle-class women (Ang 1776). In this context, to perform respectability, a Singaporean woman must "uphold the Asian/Chinese family and to reproduce the claims on which the Asian/Chinese family is based." In all that, filiality plays an important role, for it is a respectable woman's responsibility to care for the housework, children, and parents (Ang 1776).

In addition to placing the prostitution issue in historical context, *Crows* works in exciting ways with the notion of respectability as related to the figure of the migrant prostitute, who becomes a threat to the respectable woman and the emblem of female non-reproductive sexuality and ultimate commodity in a time and place where money dictates the power and success an individual holds. The following passage, where Siyan brings Helen to meet his mother, illustrates this:

> 握住她的手，说：“妈妈，我带一个朋友来看你。” 老太太仰起头朝我望着，明亮的阳光透过玻璃照着她的脸，她蔼然地笑着，问他的儿子，是从哪儿来的。私炎回答说从中国来的。老太太脸上的笑刷地凝固起来，两眼发直，目光惊恐，嘴唇也颤抖起来。她忽然把苍白枯瘦的手指着我。“快把她带走，她就要杀人了。” 于是她把头碰在阳台上的窗子上，发出很响的声音。我恐惧地站着。私炎抱起他妈妈的头，用手轻拍她的背说：“她是好人，她还会为我们做好事呢。”他在说这话时，眼睛里射出强烈的目光。而她妈妈依然惊恐地望着我(338). Siyan squatted by her side, held her hand and said: 'Mama, I've brought a friend to see you.' The old lady looked up at me with a affable smile and asked her son where I came from. He said I was from China. The smile on her face froze. With terror in her eyes, she raised her bony hand, pointed at me and said with quivering voice: 'Take her away! She's going to kill somebody!' So saying, she slumped her head on the wall with a

> thump. I stood in apprehension while he lifted her head and patted her back gently. ‘She’s a good woman; she’ll also help us to do something good’ His eyes beamed sharply as he spoke. Her mother was still staring at me in terror’ (255). Trans. Alan Chong.

In these lines, Jiu Dan touches upon points worth pausing over. She suggests the precariousness of the position of a Chinese migrant woman in Singapore: Helen is directly posited against the mother and is constructed as her other. The nurturing figure of the mother serves as an idealized image of respectability, being the one who reproduces and keeps the family together. The emblem of domesticity and filiality, Siyan’s mother constructs Helen as a threat, especially to family unity and, by extension, to the social ideals promoted and protected by the nation and its colonial history. In this last sense, the mother also functions as a site of buried memories of colonial trauma. Her dementia amplifies the reaction of disgust she feels towards Helen, but it is also symptomatic of a nation that has forgotten its history of migration. While also ethnically Chinese, Siyan’s mother refuses to see Helen as her equal. In doing so, she also dismisses her family’s history of migration and embraces the kind of condemning colonial attitudes to which her ancestors may have been subjected. Apart from this, there is also an act of pragmatic identity creation in which the male character imposes the marker of good if not respectability. The results are ironic because Helen is by no means a good woman by the standards of Singaporean society. She will not turn into one after completing the criminal task Siyan has demanded from her as repayment for helping with her permanent residence—quite the opposite. Helen ends up cementing Chinese migrant women’s ill repute by turning into the stereotype Singaporean women despise: a Dragon Girl.

Dragon Girls, as defined in the novel, “means a prostitute,” a woman from China who is constantly seeking money from men and who is called that way precisely because China is the land of the dragon. Jiu Dan plays with this temporary and mutable citizenship and co-ethnic otherizing marker. All Chinese women are considered Dragon Girls upon their arrival to

Singapore. However, among them, some overgrow that categorization and access the realm of respectability by becoming the wife of a Singaporean man:

> 小龙女就是妓女。但是我想，只要成为有钱人，只要换了身份不回去，被叫做什么又有什么妨碍呢？只是当一些女人真的实现了她们的梦想成为有钱人或者成为这里的老婆时，别人也就忘了她们曾是小龙女，久而久之，就连她们自己本人，也真的认为她们不再是中国人了(95). "'And a Dragon girl means a prostitute---someone who sponges on men with the tenacious spirit of a dragon. But I'm telling myself, so what? When I'm rich, I can always give myself another name and go somewhere else. Who cares what they call me! When you are rich, when you're the wife of a Singaporean, others will forget you were once a dragon girl. In time, even you yourself will believe you're no longer a Dragon girl.'" (75). Trans. Alan Chong.

Interestingly enough, that fragment becomes ritualistic employing repetition. Jiu Dan accompanies her incipit with that description, and the passage is repeated in chapter six. In so doing, she reminds the reader of two issues: one is the certainty of the position of Chinese migrant women who end up working as prostitutes and/or become mistresses of Singaporean men; the other one is the transitoriness of such situation thanks to the possibility they have to access a different citizenship, economic, and social status. The passage reinforces this connection, as Fanny, one of the main characters in the novel, positions herself as a Chinese migrant woman against Singaporean men and their wives. The dichotomy is constructed to pit respectable and non-respectable women against one another in the logic of Jiu Dan's text. Ironically though, even as both categories of women define each other, they are trapped by an ideology that defines them as opposite even to men. As referred by Ang, ethnically Chinese women are charged with carrying on the family line and caring for children and aging parents. As organizer and keeper of tradition and, by extension, the social structure that upholds the nation, the respectable woman's identity is much dissimilar from that of a patriarchal-projected fantasy; the former's primary role is to guarantee the survival of the family and offer psychological and spiritual support, while the latter is in charge mainly of sexual gratification.

A different type of prostitute is the one presented in *La Mara*. Set in the Guatemalan slum of Tecún Umán, the novel by Ramírez Heredia is an example of a hyperrealist and decadent text that draws attention to the infamous under-age sex trade and violence in a border city. The plot of *La Mara* is centred on the commission of crimes and the lack of punishment for the perpetrators. Two of the main protagonists of the multiple stories' saga are a couple of child prostitutes, Sabina Rivas and Lizbeth, that allow Ramirez Heredia to document the multifaceted nature of child sex work in the Guatemalan city depicted. In this depraved world, respectability has more difficulties entering the picture.

On the contrary, Ramírez Heredia's foregrounding of crimes---multiple instances of sexual violence, the murderous presence of *La Mara*, the psychological abuse, and the disappearance of Sabina Rivas---constitutes an important register for scripting underage prostitution. It allows the author to place a socio-analytic dossier in the literary public sphere concerning the institutions and corrupt practices that facilitate underage prostitution on the border between Mexico and Guatemala. Here we are reminded of John Scagg's claim that "the notion of crime as transgression also establishes the boundaries of acceptable social behaviour. Such boundaries are eventually codified in law. In this way the social order is maintained, and a particular view of the world, or ideology, is further validated or disseminated" (9), which is why crime fiction seems to fit so well Ramírez Heredia's narrative decisions. Among them, we can cite the depiction of a lawless and decadent world and the public identification of some of the worst crimes committed against migrants, especially against underage girls who end up working as prostitutes in the border space.

The novel constructs these girls as particularly vulnerable. Ramírez Heredia's writing emphasizes how the investiture of a migrant girl child's body with eroticized notions of purity,

innocence, fragility, and delicacy perilously places her body and sexuality at an intersection between patriarchal attitudes, socio-political crises, and the female body consumption. While *La Mara* does not take on a morally outraged tone or employ a battery of complex data to argue against such sexual exploitation of vulnerable girls and teenagers, its matter-of-fact, brutal, and unapologetic prose resembles a dirge for their lost or violently stolen childhood innocence, perhaps to highlight the degradation to which prostituted children are subjected.

A general mood of gloominess and mourning pervades *La Mara*, as the narrative voice depicts the ordeal of migrant prostituted child as a theft of their innocence and childhood. The prostituted children of *La Mara* are not constructed as such, or even as humans, but as mere objects that should be always available for the consumption and pleasure of others:

> " y mira a la panameña, siente que le puede quitar los calzones, olerle el sudor, chuparle el mono rizado, en que va a tener que regresarla a los separos, en los pelillos de las axilas, en los vergas gringos esos que no quitan la mirada de encima, en los ojitos con suciedad de rímel gastado sobre los párpados, en que si no estuvieran los gringos le iba a empezar a besar los pesones, en la vieja caraja de doña Lita [...] a su vez [los gringos] se entretuvieron las horas dentro de la celda de las mujeres con la hondureña jovencita y con Selene-Lizbeth, dura de cuerpo, con las tetas como asta de novillo, y eso no fue registrado en el parte" (and looks a the panamenian, he feels that he can take her undewear off, smell her sweat, lick her beaver and thinks that he will have tol et her go back to the cell, he thinks in her armpit hair, in the mother fucking gringos who do not look away, in her little eyes with dirst of worn maskara on her eyelids, in that if the gringos were not present, he was going to start kissing her nipples, in that stupid cunt doña Lita [...] at the same time [the Americans] entertained themselves a few hours inside the cells of the women with the young Honduran and Selene-Lizbeth, with a firm body, with tits like the horns of a steer) (66).

Here, the narrative voice produces a rhetoric of containment and victimization. The fragment reduces a history of sexual assault to an anecdote in which the violent details are intriguingly omitted. The narrator limits himself to providing a rather disturbing description of the physical attributes of the migrant prostituted child and his fantasy but vehemently refuses to recount the narrative of the assault. This is both unexpected and surprising, given the morbid detail with

which the narrative voice describes most violent events, and especially intriguing if we consider who the focalizer of the fragment is, the corrupt and unscrupulous Mexican officer and trafficker, Sarabia. Does the lack of explicit details indicate that Sarabia has a limited point of view? Does he have a sense of decency that distinguishes between fantasy and reality and that we have failed to notice until this point in the story? Is this instance of focalization indicative of the values shielded by the narrator? How does this relate to the figure of the migrant child prostitute? I argue that the narrative technique and type of focalization used in the example above have multiple effects relevant to the narrative development of the migrant child prostitute. By limiting the narrative spaces to which Sarabia has access, the omniscient narrator succeeds in conveying the character's submission to the authority of American officials. But this type of focalization also has another function. It highlights Sarabia's lack of emotional involvement about the events narrated. One may speculate that this supposed neutrality on the emotional level may serve the purpose of underscoring an ideological facet where the prostitute migrant child is sexualized, objectified, and constructed as an "other" that is everything but human. The narrative is focalized so that it becomes clear that the migrant child prostitute is to be viewed as a character defined by the parts of her body readily available for the enjoyment of male consumers and the male gaze. That kind of focalization underscores the narrator's effort to force the reader to participate in Lizbeth's objectivization and make her imagine the violent event. In this context, the fragment means just as much by what is left unsaid as by what is said, by what is absent as by what is present.

A different kind of focalization is the one that is done through the eyes of tata Añorve, a rafter who helps people cross the Satanachia safely and father of Anamar, helper of the visionary and witch doctor, Ximenus:

> La siguió con los ojos al subir la cuesta del cauce del río. Se fijó en las caderas tan diferentes a las de su chiquita. El cabello largo tan distinto al de Anamar. Su niña jamás usaría esos colores en las uñas de los pies, y tuvo ganas decirle a esa muchachita de cabello brillante, olorosa a baño enzacatado y perfume pegosteoso, que los zopilotes siempre hacen rodelas a los fiambres y que lo pensara mucho antes de atreverte a cruzar la noche del camino, porque las ratas devoran a los pajarillos que se apartan de su nido. (He followed her with his eyes while she went up the ridge of the riverbed. He focused his attention on her hips so different from those of her little girl. The long hair so similar to Anamar's. Her girl would never wear those colors on her toenails, and he wanted to tell the young woman of bright hair, smelly of grassy washroom and sticky perfume, that the vultures fly around corpses and that she should think it twice before daring to cross the path at night, because rats devour the little birds that draw away from their nests) (102).

There is a lot to say about this fragment. First, it shows how the description of Lizbeth changes depending on the focalizer who filters her image. The predatory description by a morally depraved migration officer now changes and acquires the seemingly empathetic tone of a concerned father. From this perspective, the migrant child prostitute is simultaneously victimized and otherized. It is clear that Tata Añorve sees Lizbeth with compassion, but he also compares her to his daughter, Anamar. The result of the narrative intervention, then, is ambiguous. The focalization of Tata Añorve distinguishes between two different ways of being a girl, the one embraced by Lizbeth and the one adopted by Anamar. The way of Lizbeth is the way of a prostitute. It includes sex matters, of course, but also a disrespectable and dangerous representation of the self: cheap perfume, age-inappropriate clothing, painted toenails, and a certain level of naivete, all traits that render the migrant prostitute child an easy prey for unscrupulous and predatory men, whom Tata Añorve characterizes as vultures and rats. In contrast, the way of Anamar is the way of the respectable family girl, somebody who does not wear revealing clothing, who does not share the same body type as the underage prostitute and who has morals that translate into a safer existence.

The longstanding storytelling formula echoed in *La Mara* and *Crows* uses narrative components to assign a negative moral and social value to the image of the migrant prostitute

and her body caught in the throes of biological degradation where odours powerfully participate in creating a cross-sexual atmosphere and heavily gendered nature. A plot in which the female body transgresses against receiving society's laws and norms, making what the text identifies as a threat to other characters, citizens of the fictional world, and other social arrangements; the use of the sexualized body in the characterization of the "bad" woman, through binary opposition to the image of a respectable one and through the emphasis of her vulnerability, whose identity is equated to citizenship status; and a changing perspective (often, but not always, that of a man) through which the sexualized female body is perceived and portrayed as polluting and obscene ---when these narrative elements are present, together or separately, they read the female sexualized body as a grotesque emblem of risk symbolizing a menacing state of non-respectable femininity. At the same time, the imagery of the sexualized, commodified, and repugnant body of the prostitute lends a visceral power to the novels' denunciation of the migrant, bolstering moral disgust and physical repulsion with co-ethnic imaginaries that construct differences based on social class, gender, and citizenship status.

VI. Conclusion: Explanations and Comparisons

This chapter began with a critique of the role of the migrant sex worker in *Crows* and *La Mara,* arguing that the sexualized female body allows for a narrative exploration of the notion of (anti) citizenship. In the novels, this notion appears entangled with other social constructs and geographical markers, such as gender, class, mobility, and clean/decadent landscapes. I also reflected on how narratively constructed images of prostitutes enjoin readers with the task of challenging regimes of mobility that privilege social imaginaries of shared national origins and "sameness." The uptick of interest in the figure of the sex worker has been fueled by her close relationship in the novels with the notion of the anti-citizen, the antithesis of the citizen and

someone who has been defined as a threat to the social body. Both *Crows* and *La Mara* rely on the development of themes, such as mobility, clean/decadent spaces, and odors, and different narrative points of view to construct the figure of the sex worker as precisely that, an anti-citizen.

The narratives of *Crows* and *La Mara* start building their characters' special and mobile otherness by means of transport infrastructures. *Crows* first attempt at otherizing its female protagonist happens at the airport, where Helen is posited against a couple of Singaporean women who are jealous of her youth and beauty and consequently look down on her. It's not a coincidence that the airport is the backdrop of such an otherizing act. Airports are places where mobilities are constantly produced and hierarchized. For example, Helen's encounter with the two Singaporean women obey to a kinetic categorization that places Helen at the bottom of the mobility ladder, especially under the surveilling gaze of Singaporean citizens and institutions of social and mobility control: Madam Mai, the English school, and the immigration department represented by the immigration officers who constantly visit the English school where Helen is enrolled. After being introduced to the societal and moral expectations by a local citizen, Madam Mai, Halen is then subjected to the disciplining authority of the English school she attends, and the surveilling gaze of immigration officers. Meanwhile, *La Mara* exhibits different technologies of mobility control or enforcement rituals, such as racial profiling and immigration detention. Contrary to the hypermobile nature of the airport used in *Crows*, *La Mara* relies on the immobility of the checkpoint to show how the disciplining of certain types of mobility works. In the check point, for example, one of the female protagonists of the novel, Selene/Lizbeth, and other migrant women are constantly objectified by the gaze of corrupt immigration officers and subjected to violent treatment due to their national origin, race, gender, and class. Another technology of control and ritual of enforcement that *La Mara* explores is the use of fake

documentation. The otherness of the female migrant and sexualized body is established by the capture of the migrant's data and the reduction of her humanity to brute data. In this way, the mobility of migrants with an appearance that makes them threatening becomes capturable.

In this chapter, I have also argued that space plays an important role in the construction of the migrant sexualized body as an anti-citizen. The migrant sex worker is represented in *Crows* and *La Mara* as the inhabitant of decadent spaces marked by social inequities as well as by ideological and economic demarcations that allow the reader map out the material and physical contours of violence. These spaces also exhibit the uneven mobility trajectories of migrant characters as related to identity markers, such as gender, social class, race, national origin, and citizenship status. In *Crows*, the ordered, modernized, and clean space where the country's rich live contrast with the decadent places that sex workers inhabit. The clean landscapes include the well-to-do neighborhoods in the city as well as the domestic bourgeois spaces to which only Singaporean women and some lucky Chinese immigrants married to Singaporean men have full access. In *Crows*, nightclubs, rooms, and other clandestine places, such as saunas, are where sexual encounters and the expression of desire happen freely. These are the kind of landscapes where the sexualized bodies of Chinese students can move with relative freedom. Such a version of mobility is not available to the female characters of *La Mara*. In the novel by Ramirez Heredia, spaces are ritualized and seem to acquire a life of their own. An exemplary case is the natural border that separates Mexico and Guatemala, the Suchiate river, called in the novel Satanachia. The nickname given to the river by the narrative voice highlights its ritual role in the novel. Almost a personification of evil itself, the river seems to have a (super)natural power to decide whether migrants live or die, and it also seems to be the center of a cult of violence and corruption. Other spaces also bear testimony of this decadence of the

border landscape. The foul smells of streets and enclosed rooms signal precarity and depravity so characteristic, according to the novel, of life at the fringes of society. These conditions are in part what hinders the mobility of the main female characters and what limits their narrative agency.

Indeed, everything that happens in *Crows* as *La Mara* gets filtered through the consciousness of the narrators of the novels and their focalizers. And these points of view determine the tone of the narratives as well as the kind of information the audience will have access to. In Crows, the third person fallible narrator Helen tells the story of her life in Singapore completely from her own subjective point of view, and only sporadically lends her narrative consciousness to a limited number of focalizers, such a Fanny. As a result, Helen becomes a character with a certain degree of autonomy capable of tricking the reader into questioning whether all she is reading is factually possible. This last point relates to a revelation further in the novel that Helen is after all what she despises the most, a murderous Dragon girl. For its part, *La Mara* relies on a multivocal narrative with various focalizers to highlight the multiplicity of migrant subjectivity and perspectives, along with the multiplicity of obstacles that migrants have to face in the border space. However, the whole narrative is dominated by a single consciousness which seems to imply that migrant characters are at the mercy of their circumstances. At the end, it is a what ends up cementing of *Crows* and *La Mara*.

Despite the seemingly dreadful tone of both novels, it is through this kind of more straightforward narrative labor that a kind of justice can be done to highly mobile, sexualized, and gendered bodies that cannot exercise complete autonomy. The more explicit the narratives are, the more they seem to harbor the power of redeeming justice. Indeed, a broader revelatory idea shaping the chapter has been the notion that the novels are key sites where narrative point of view and its interactions with social formations, such as citizenship, happen. This is not to say

that fiction is a smooth representation of social phenomena or that its main objective is to imitate social life. To put this more categorically: *La Mara* and *Crows* are not novels about prostitution. Rather, in environments where mobility is a common incidence, these cultural forms generate a communality that can be capacious enough to mobilize other ways of looking at and being in the world, they privilege certain perspectives that societies sometimes do not want to acknowledge. This is related to the point made in this chapter that the novels use narrative structures to pull us into a violent narrative journey proper of the life at the fringes of society. This is to say, *Crows* and *La Mara* give their readers a narrative code to crack, and this in turn has the potential to carve out conduits through which audiences can start pondering how migrants and sex workers suffer violence and discrimination because of their gender, class, ethnicity, citizenship status, and national origin.

CONCLUSION
Looking at Migrant Mobility

British novelist and journalist Hari Kunzru famously noted, "Imagining ourselves into other lives and other subjectivities is an act of ethical urgency" (qtd. in "Whose life is it anyway?"). His aphorism is important in part because it imbues the act of writing (and reading) with a moral character. Yet in a sense that point seems to be always there with migration literature and film. It shapes the media's lexicon, poised as it is on the hinge between the representation of lived and imagined experience.

This controversy is most paradigmatic in the comparison of the heated debates that the novels *American Dirt* and *Crows,* discussed in the introduction to this project, ignited. Jeanine Cummins, the author of *American Dirt*, claims to have conducted extensive research before writing her book. Meanwhile, Jiu Dan, as the subtitle of her novel in Chinese suggests (我的另类留学生活 - literally *My Double Life as a Foreign Student* but translated as *The Singapore Dream of a Group of China Women*), experienced firsthand the hardships that life as a migrant inflicts.

Yet the problem does not seem to be about the identity of both writers, but rather about the points of view they adopted to tell their migrant stories. For example, both novels develop their characters in different levels of sophistication. Cummins' characters remain painfully static as she fails to bring out various aspects of even their relatively stable traits. As a result, we see a mother more preoccupied about her son's haircut than about the gang chasing them. By contrast, Jiu Dan allows her characters to grow and evolve, or, better said, involve. That is partly why, at the end of the novel, Helen ends up becoming a murderer. In terms of the traits and predispositions which recur in their behaviour, Jiu Dan's characters' actions and motivations are easier to understand than Cummins'.

This type of characterization is in tune with Cummins' own apolitical and non-confrontational writing style. Indeed, her book offers a more palatable reading than Jiu Dan's, precisely because it does not confront the reader with uncomfortable questions and reduces the complexities of migration to a problem about humanization. The message is clear: since the Mexican, brown migrants portrayed in *American Dirt* are humans, we should care about them regardless of their national origin, gender, social class, or race.

This study of Hispanic and Sinophone migration narratives concludes with a reference to the controversy of Cummins and Jiu Dan because their projects vibrate with emblematic value for the argument made here. The case studies presented here have shown that migrant mobility is a core site wherein power dynamics find trackable form, and that the labor of interpreting it opens up an antagonistic dialogue with the hard social facts that novels such as *American Dirt* prefer to ignore. This dialogue is threatening, which is why the cultural products with an apolitical vocation have repeatedly tried to shut it down, opting not to interrogate the issues at the heart of migrant mobility.

The works selected are revelatory because they shed a different light on the types of values that migrant mobility is assigned. The migration novels and films discussed here rely on different points of view to interpret and represent migrant mobility and the associated legal discourses sanctioning it, such as citizenship and non-citizenship. These works have all, and in various ways, successfully negotiated a path to arrive at various conclusions and various propositions about this concept "migrant mobility." They also have projected social attitudes towards the theme they all share of citizenship and (non-)belonging.

My process of selecting works for discussion has both influenced and been influenced by my argument. I use point of view as a method to analyze how migrant movement is represented

in different cultural products from the Hispanic and Sinophone cultural spheres. Each distinctive use of point of view relies on different culturally designed versions of (non-)citizenship that are defined and redefined to challenge or reinforce "sedentary" ethics, privileging stasis over mobility. All the works I have discussed explicitly address this issue of mobility and its relationship to citizenship. For example, films as different as *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love* both read migrant mobility in relation to citizenship thought the lens of cognitive metaphors (sight and speech), that facilitate or hinder (intercultural) communication in multicultural Canada.

Yet, (intercultural) communication is not the only source of inspiration for exploring some Hispanic and Sinophone understandings of migrancy, mobility, and citizenship. As I have progressed through the chapters of this dissertation, starting with a discussion of cultural clashes and symbols, and moving through the issues of comfort/discomfort, ethical encounters, the good/better life, objectivization, sexualization, and otherization, these topics have served as theoretical tools to analyze the migrant and the narrative construction of their (il)legal movement according to the vision of a selected group of Spanish and Chinese speaking novelists and filmmakers.

But a question remains to be answered: how do these works inform our understanding of migrant mobility? The written and visual narratives analyzed here challenge the universalizing tendencies of some novels' points of view. *American Dirt's*, for example, unifies the migrant experience and uses universals to guide its narrative. From a universal notion of migrancy, the novel moves to postulate that there is a common human experience of suffering. By contrast, the points of view of the novels and films included here are much more sensitive to specific conditions of class, gender, race, and culture.

The comparison of works with these characteristics allows for the historization of the migrant experience. It is not the same to be a Mexican migrant living in California as to be a Chinese migrant living in New York. What it means to be a Panamanian migrant sex worker in Guatemala is very different from what it means to be a migrant sex worker in Singapore. The experience of migrancy and mobility is not homogeneous. Thus, the hope for a universal migrant point of view cannot be fulfilled. The selected works show that, once the need for categories relative to historical, racial, cultural, gender, and class variables, among others, is accepted, then the temptation to postulate universal features of migrant experience becomes less strong. One then realizes that the differences among cultural understandings of migrant mobility can be as important as their similarities. The consequence of such a realization is critical as the distinctions between different conceptions of migrant mobility are emphasized.

This is why I have explored the various aspects of point of view that I have. Each aspect is related to the process of defining and redefining the legal identity of migrants as shadow citizens, denizens, informal citizens, and anti-citizens. Cultural artifacts and symbols, religious beliefs, family and community bonds, odors, textual racial markers, and descriptions of specific physical traits, behaviors, and spaces to which characters have access are all aspects of point of view that arose in the chosen narratives.

Underlying this study is the assumption that the patterns found are indications of a culturally contingent system of components that is used to tell migrant stories, and that each migrant story reflects the influence of such a system. But when juxtaposed, all the narratives show more general patterns that follow the basic narrative structure of migration narratives delineated in the introduction of this dissertation: an immigrant protagonist, usually unassimilated and with great expectations, arrives in a new world and faces inevitable

tribulations that lead to a change. There are also many conceptual categories for which very significant patterns are obtainable for one culture but not for the other. The Sinophone narratives discussed in this project seem to be more oriented toward the concern with the decline and rebounding of the relationship between migrants and their receiving community over the course of the narrative. This relationship determines the easiness with which migrant characters move. Eve struggles to belong to a religious community that sees her system of beliefs as exotic. Ding Ming's day focuses on his encounters with clients, and he ends up finding support in his community of coworkers. One of Helen's (and other female characters') main preoccupations in the novel is to be seen as a dragon girl. Meanwhile, in Hispanic narratives, the relationship between the migrant and the receiving community seems to be fractured right from the start. Thus, the concern of these narratives is more oriented toward how migrants try to move despite their adverse circumstances. Gladys struggles to establish a relationship with Norman due to the lack of a mutual language of intimacy. Carlos Galindo has troubles connecting with his Mexican American son, and it is not until the end of the movie that they both manage to create a bond. Sabina Rivas is missing, and she only appears as a memory in the story of consul Nicolas, while Selene/Lizbeth is subjected to all kinds of vexations.

It is within these areas of point of view and mobility that I have had to leave out much from this dissertation. Geographical imaginaries and issues of language use, for example, are equally important in the construction of migrants' (il)legal narrative personae and in the understandings of their mobility. But these will have to wait for a separate work in which I can give them the attention they deserve. Having to necessarily limit the focus of this dissertation, I have moved through many different types of legal identities and regime controls (through the notions of citizenship and non-citizenship), and different understandings of migrant mobility,

from one understood in terms of cultural difference and cognitive metaphors in *Eve and the Fire Horse* and *A Silent Love*, to one that relies on body metaphors and ideals of the good life in *Take Out* and *A Better Life*, and one that is the product of sexualization in *Crows* and *La Mara*. Each understanding is a glimpse of a commentary on a social reality where the ability to move reflects different perspectives of what it means to be a migrant.

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