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Seeing (as) the Eroticized and Exoticized Other in Spanish Im/migration Cinema: A Critical Look at the (De)Criminalization of Migrants and Impunity of Hegemonic Perpetrators

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Abstract

This article examines cinematic perspective in six Spanish im/migration films to show that by resituating the identification from an alignment with that of a hegemonic character (who accepts the systematic bias that confers impunity to perpetrators) to identification with a criminalized migrant subject, these films 1) denounce systemic intersectionality that confers impunity to perpetrators and criminalizes the racialized and/or feminized other and 2) aim at fostering empathy in the hegemonically identified viewer.

Parameters for the selection of the six films are: immigration to Spain, African (whether geographic or ethnic) origins, eroticization of the migrant, objectification/(ab)use/commodification/victimization of the Other, criminalization of the Other while conferring impunity to a malevolent representative of the hegemony and, ultimately, an identification (be it fleeting) between a character of the Spanish in-group and the migrant subject. The cinematic narratives include three canonical films from the 1990s *Cartas de Alou* (*Letters from Alou*, Montxo Armendáriz, 1990), *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996), *Flores de otro mundo* (*Flowers from Another World*, Iciar Bollain, 1999), *Princesas*; and three from the 2000s (*Princesses*, Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005), *14 kilómetros* (*14 Kilometers*, Gerardo Olivares, 2007) and *Retorno a Hansala* (*Return to Hansala*, Chus Gutiérrez, 2008). In essence, this article investigates the ways in which cineastes problematize the hegemonic gaze regarding the migrant Other and depict the transformation from looking at migrants as a criminal “them” to seeing them as a human “us.”

Keywords

Spain, race, racism, gender, immigration, cinema, gaze, empathy, erotic, exotic, extralegal, illegal, impunity, immunity, stereotypes, the Other

Seeing (as) the Eroticized and Exoticized Other in Spanish Im/migration Cinema:
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Hegemonic Perpetrators

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This study takes a look at the trajectory of Spanish immigration cinema to study the interplay between the exoticization and the eroticization of the Other within the context of power, privilege, and impunity. It is the inherent otherness and objectification that situate the erotic and exotic in a precarious value-based binary that posits the seeing-hegemonic-subject against the seen-non-hegemonic-object who in certain instances is reduced to commodified sexuality and criminalized. We will come to understand throughout this essay that as the seen objects are imbued with seeing subjectivity, their de-objectification leads to the possibility of agency. Through the various cinematic viewpoints, hegemonically identified key characters (and ideally viewers) “see” as one who had been seen and, hence, feel a transformative empathy that fosters identification and understanding.

The current essay is focused on immigration into Spain and how cultural production balances reflection, representation, and creation. The Spanish media, according to Teun Van Dijk in his 2008 article “Racism and the Press in Spain,” portrays immigration with criminalistic rhetoric and the discourse of warfare (such as “invasions” and “assaults”), thus creating the myth of a menacing Other.¹ Emily Baxter, US lawyer and author of *We Are All Criminals*, elucidates the universality of criminality, but the selectiveness of holding the non-privileged accountable while conferring impunity and immunity to the privileged. This theory can be applied to the six Spanish immigration films I study. Tribalism whitewashes, pardons, gives passes, or makes invisible the wrongdoing of those within the in-group and repudiates those of the out-group for actions no worse, and often less severe, than those committed by hegemonic subjects. The films studied in this essay underscore the shared humanity of native and foreign born people.² By definition, anything outside of the law is unlawful. Hence all so-called “illegal” immigration is outside of the law. What will become apparent in the six migration films studied is that in practice what is treated as illegal (prohibited or forbidden by law) for some, is treated as extralegal (meaning not governed or regulated by law) for others. The films studied and the documents and reports referenced denounce a double standard: that malfeasance perpetrated on irregular victims seems to be extralegal in that the perpetrators boast impunity, yet the acts committed by the irregular characters carry with them the fear of punitive and, at times would seem draconian, repercussions. The filmic narratives force the spectators to view, re-vision, and re-envision the social realities captured within the frame. When the cinematic

viewpoint aligns with that of the non-hegemonic migrant, the result is an invitation to consider new ways of seeing.

The films to be discussed include *Las cartas de Alou* (*Letters from Alou*; Montxo Armendáriz, 1990), *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996), *Flores de otro mundo* (*Flowers from Another World*; Iciar Bollaín, 1999), *Princesas* (*Princesses*; Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005), *14 kilómetros* (*14 Kilometers*; Gerardo Olivares, 2007), and *Retorno a Hansala* (*Return to Hansala*; Chus Gutiérrez, 2008). The films by Spanish directors I have selected are a sampling. Parameters for the selection of the six films are: immigration to Spain, African (whether geographic or ethnic) origins, eroticization of the migrant, objectification/(ab)use/commodification/victimization of the Other, criminalization of the Other while conferring impunity to a malefasant representative of the hegemony and, ultimately, an identification (be it fleeting) between a character of the Spanish in-group and the migrant subject. The three films from the 1990s can be considered canonical within the migration cinema genre and depict extreme or overt racism, while the three films from the first decade of the twenty-first century tend to share a greater identification with the migrant subject and protagonize a dyad. I would venture to ponder that perhaps the change in tone might be due to a constellation of factors starting near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century: a normalization of (first and second generation) migrants in Spain, the possible relatability to immigrants given Spanish emigration that came about with the economic crisis, and the reduction in Spanish population overall as migrants left due to the paucity of economic opportunities during the 2008-2014 crisis. Spanish immigration cinema is a substantial and growing corpus. Had this study extended to the second decade of the twenty-first century, it could have included the following films that depict illegal acts or criminalization: *Amador* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2010), *Buitiful* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2010) and *A escondidas* ('Hidden Away'; Mikel Rueda, 2014).

These films reflect the fact that immigration is and has been a reality in Spain since the 1990s. According to Laura Delle Femmine and David Alameda in the March 2017 article in *El País* titled "La metamorfosis de España" ('Metamorphosis of Spain') referencing the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* 'National Institute of Statistics,' the last two decades have borne witness to great demographic changes. While in 1998 Spain's population was 39.8 million and 1.6% were foreign born, 2011 reached a record high of 12.9% of the population (5.7 million) being foreign born. By 2016, 10% (i.e. 4.6 million) of the Spanish population consisted of migrants. The greatest population of migrants is European (2,101,500), the largest numbers coming from Romania (717,500) and the United Kingdom (256,500). The next most populous migrant group (1,064,608) originates in America—North, South, Central, and the Caribbean. Ecuadorians (188,300) and Colombians (140,500) rank highest. The foreign-born population from Africa

(1,048,128) boasts the highest population from Morocco (755,500), followed by the remainder of the continent (113,781) (Della Femmine and Navarro). Upon close scrutiny, the numbers of Americans and Africans are almost tied, and the sum of these two populations is close to that of the Europeans in Spain. While the diverse European groups (such as the Romanians and the British) are quite dissimilar and, in fact, are not viewed in the same fashion (either in Spain or the U.K.), they are not protagonized proportionately in Spanish migration cinema. Instead, Spanish immigration cinema disproportionately features the racialized (African and Latin American) Other over any group of European migrants. This disproportionate representation attests to the invisibility of whiteness from a Eurocentric perspective that, while blind to its own reality, racializes and stereotypes the Other (Santaolalla, “Ethnic” 56), inferiorizing/feminizing non-Western cultures (Said) in order to construct a cultural identity in the projection of otherness (Bhabha, “World” 146).

I ground my study in the analysis of the transformed and evolutionary spectatorial gaze through which the filmmakers denounce the impunity of violence to the migrants’ bodies and the abuse to their psychological states. All six films portray behaviors outside of the law on the part of the migrants, ranging from entry into Spain without documentation (all six), street vending without a permit (*Las cartas de Alou*), agricultural work without papers (*Las cartas de Alou*), physical altercation (*Las cartas de Alou*), bigamy (*Flores de otro mundo*), prostitution (being trafficked unwillingly [*14 kilómetros*], prostitution “by choice” [*Princesas*], and coupling/marriage in exchange for better conditions [*Flores de otro mundo*]), as well as the misperception of murder (*Bwana*).

Yet the truly illegal, criminal, inhumane, and morally bankrupt actions—notably treated with impunity—are those perpetrated by the representatives of the dominant discourse or hegemonic values or those who have the upper hand in the power structure—which are inherently racist and xenophobic and, in three of the films, misogynistic. The malfeasance (unlawful acts intended to cause harm) includes molestation, blackmail, rape, battery, assault, aggravated battery, human trafficking, and sexual trafficking. These unsanctioned and morally reprehensible behaviors are predatory. The misfeasance (legal act with unintended harm) is most evident in legalized extortion in charging exorbitant sums to the impoverished families of the dead that wash up on the shores of Andalusia.

While the films studied do, in fact, initially align the spectatorial gaze with that of the characters in hegemonic subject position that objectify and criminalize the racialized other, such identification certainly leads, ultimately, to censure of this implicit bias. While the films portray otherness and evolve to identification with the migrant subject through the gaze initially aligned with the hegemonic character (or co-protagonist), several of them portray sameness with regard to predatory and victimizing behavior. In *Retorno a Hansala*, the transgressors of human decency are the co-protagonist Spanish undertaker Martín and the human trafficker (whom

we never meet); in *Bwana* it is the neo-Nazis and the complicit family; in *Princesas* it is *el de los papeles* ‘the papers guy’; in *14 kilómetros* it is the gamut of traffickers (including protagonist Violeta’s own family and many representatives of the law). If taken as a corpus, what should emerge is that while the migrant subjects have committed the illegal acts of crossing borders and working without filing the proper paperwork, the much more severe illegal (and more importantly, inhuman) acts are committed by hegemonic, predatory transgressors. Implicit in the predation is the reification of human beings, reducing them to their transactional value for the benefit of the predator. The capitalist principles rooted in globalization commodify and, hence, dehumanize, thus permitting the human traffic, be it of corpses in *Retorno*, sex slaves in *14 kilómetros*, prostitutes in *Princesas*, sacrificial victim for eroticized sadistic entertainment in *Bwana*, one-night stand in *Las cartas*, or a modern version of a kept courtesan in *Flores*. In each of these, an investment or a transaction is made by those with pull, be it purse strings, the power to harm, or the authority to grant a desirable outcome to one who dreams of a better life.³

In “Scripting a Social Imaginary,” Kathleen Vernon views the construction of an “oppositional ‘imaginary’ of resistance” to the Francoist nationalist imaginary. She refers to a cinema that “speaks from the margins, questioning the dominant value system even in newly democratic Spain” (320). I shall apply her concept to early immigration films that do not boast explicit anti-Francoist values, but certainly do purport anti-nationalist ideology as evident in the antagonists in two of the first Spanish migration films, *Las cartas de Alou* and *Bwana*. In *Las cartas de Alou*, the Castilian-centered rhetoric and imperatives such as “Háblame en cristiano” ‘Speak to me in Christian,’ meaning Spanish, directly allude to the nearly eight centuries of Reconquista to regain the Christian kingdoms from the Moorish—i.e. Muslim—Empire.⁴ In *Bwana*, the layers of nationalism and tribalism culminate in the neo-Nazi terror and eminent castration of Ombasi. In *Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration*, Daniela Flesler underscores that Spain has adopted the “European [British and French] discourse of ‘new racism’” that “replaces the belief in biological inferiority” with cultural incompatibility and conceptualizes and purports a national-cultural homogeneity and unity (5). Étienne Balibar underscores that new racism deems the abolishing of frontiers or disappearance of borders harmful given the irreconcilability of cultures (21). Flesler looks at how the contemporary cultural imaginary (as evident in media accounts and fiction) collapses the “Moroccan immigrants . . . with the figure of the Moorish invader” repeated and transmuted as later figures in the centuries to follow (10). In other words, Spanishness as a construct purports that to be Christian and European is antithetical to that which is African and Muslim. In the case of Spain, African immigration conjures the ghost of the Reconquista (Christians vs. Moors) and concomitant re-Christianization and Hispanization. In the works I study, all the characters representative of the Other

are in one way or another linked to Africa and those that perpetrate against them represent the hegemonic discourse.

Las cartas de Alou

While Spain did not have an Official Cinema School until 1994 (Gubern et al. 452), many films from the initial two decades of democracy (late 1970s until the 1990s), came about thanks to the “Miró decree” which gave special support to new filmmakers’ projects or those that were experimental (Gubern et al. 450). The novelty of Basque director Montxo Armendáriz’s 1990 *Las cartas de Alou* is that it provides a personalized perspective on social issues (Gubern et al. 450) and is considered the first Spanish immigration film.⁵ The director states, “Yo participo de un cine que piensa que debe reflejar la realidad en que vivimos para mejorarla” (Foro Ibercaja) ‘I participate in cinema that thinks it should reflect the reality in which we live in order to improve it.’ It is this subjective perspective—not quite a gaze—in *Las cartas de Alou* that sets in motion the agential subjectivity that is further developed in subsequent films of “Immigration Cinema,” a genre identified by Isolina Ballesteros:

Immigration cinema, whose label refers mainly to its subject matter and the filmmakers’ (as well as its audiences’) ideological orientation, documents or fictionalizes the social phenomenon of immigration and the unfortunate but unavoidable ramifications of racism and xenophobia, and gives voice to the social group of immigrants and their allies on the margins, the “undesirables” of society that constitute the broader category of Otherness. (*Immigration* 12)

Ballesteros adds that “These films are intercultural, multi-accented and interethnic products that acknowledge the place of history, language and culture in their construction of multiple subjectivities and identities” (*Immigration* 26).⁶ The primary way in which *Las cartas de Alou* presents subjectivity in order to foster understanding is through Alou’s voiceover in Wolof throughout the film. These voiceovers are the letters he writes to those back home and to his friend Mulai.

We witness the Senegalese protagonist’s crossing of the Strait and arrival to Andalusia in a *patera* ‘dingy’ and the ensuing odyssey that takes him from a smattering of varied jobs: agricultural work in the South, selling merchandise in Madrid, fruit harvesting in Segria, work in a fellow migrant’s sweat shop in Barcelona, and also dumpster diving. While his travails end upon his apprehension by immigration authorities and return by plane to Africa, I wish to focus on his attempts at integration, in other words, his efforts to establish relationships and social interaction within the varied cartography of Spanish society. Alou makes

many foreign-born and native-born friends, engages in sexual interactions, and, in fact, has an interracial relationship with his ultimate love interest, Carmen, whose name makes her a synecdoche for the European nation itself.

Alou meets Carmen in her father's bar, and they begin a romance against her father's wishes. Curiously, we never learn the father's name, and even in the credits he is listed simply as Carmen's father. Hence, he stands as a paternal, patriarchal, and, we come to see, paternalistic figure and gatekeeper of all that is purportedly Spanish (and white). The father plays checkers with Alou with black and white pieces, which allegorize race relations.⁷ Alou becomes so adept that he consistently wins. Carmen's father, in spite of knowing the protagonist's name, refers to him only as Baltasar, referring to the one of the three magi alleged to be Black and portrayed as Black in the Spanish imaginary (Deveny 29). The reduction of Alou to his race and concomitant inferiorization, with all that it entails, and the father's supposed superior knowledge of the game proves ironic given the fact that checkers has its origins in 3000 BCE southern Mesopotamia, current day Iraq, and has existed since 1400 BCE in Egypt (which, of course, is on the African continent) ("Checker History"). Not only does the father (as a sort of paternal chastity belt) stand in the way of Alou's relationship with his daughter, but by extension also impedes his integration, as the bar is a microcosm of society. This is not the only incident in which Alou is paradoxically acknowledged and denied as a sex object. In a previous scene, Alou and his friend Kassim meet two women at a disco who refer to him as *moreno* 'dark man' and make very clear sexual advances (which later lead to a one-night stand). The women joke about Alou being an excellent candidate to earn a living "consoling widows," thus reducing him to the racial stereotype of African male sexual superiority. Consoling widows is more than an expression connoting satisfying an experienced woman sexually; it also alludes to the term "consolador" or "consolador para mujer," a 'vibrator' or 'self-pleasuring device for women.' Yet, this sexual encounter does not lead to integration, in spite of the physical connection, for when the women take the two migrants home, they ask them to be discrete so that their neighbors will not know of the brief interracial encounter. This is a perfect example of the eroticized and exoticized, a human being from the non-mainstream culture transformed by the hegemonic gaze into an object to be used and discarded.

Thomas Deveny observes that "Irregular immigrants live marginalized lives, and encounters with representatives of 'official Spain' are problematic" (Deveny 30). While Alou has participated in activities outside of the law—as a street vendor, a day laborer, a sweatshop employee—he is not arrested while working illegally. Rather, as Molina Gavilán and Di Salvo note, his apprehension takes place when he waves farewell to his lover at the train station "at the very point that his relationship with Carmen threatens to become visibly real, which has clear, racist implications." Such "policing" access (especially if we deem Carmen to be a

synecdoche for the Iberian nation and a gateway to the rest of Europe) becomes a “cultural and racial barricade” in line with the “Fortress Europe” paradigm (Molina Gavilán and Di Salvo). In one of his voiceover letters to his parents and his friend Mulai in which he reflects on the personal impact of the migratory experience, Alou ponders why a collective “they” do not accept him or others like him, generalizing that he and his ilk are thieves and drug dealers; Molina Gavilán and Di Salvo remark that the answer lies in the “sexual threat that he poses.” As a sexualized object of the hegemonic gaze perceived to destabilize the hierarchized Eurocentric structure of the imagined national family, the migrant Other is simultaneously sexualized and criminalized.

The protagonist’s first-person voiceover creates a sense of subjectivity that is in stark contrast to the objectification he endures on-screen. The letters in the voiceover are examples of “film-letters”⁸ through which the agential subject protagonist shatters the otherness projected on him (and the immigrant collective). The spectator, hence, must look critically at the biases and re-vision the view of the Other. The viewer listens as the addressee but also empathizes with Alou as he authors the oral missives. By reading and sharing in his experience, the audience, in contrast to the othering hegemonic gaze, sees—that is, understands—Alou’s plight.

Bwana

Rob Stone describes Imanol Uribe’s 1996 *Bwana* as an “anti-racist parable” (152). In this film, based on the theatrical piece *La mirada del hombre oscuro* (*The Dark Man’s Gaze* by Ignacio de la Moral), a family is on vacation, arrives at a beach in Almería, has car troubles, and must stay the night on the beach (Gómez Vilches 176). Here they meet a migrant, Ombasi, who crossed the Strait in a *patera* with a companion who died. The entirety of the film entails the family getting to know the Other as we become aware of their explicit biases and dehumanizing stereotypes. Just as it becomes apparent that the family no longer fears Ombasi, for they now see him as human (kind, prayerful, selfless), the arrival of neo-Nazis puts all in peril, forcing the family to choose between saving all of them (including Ombasi, who had protected them from the violent youths) or saving only themselves and leaving him to a violent death. The film reflects the fact that there were forty neo-Nazi groups in 2001 as well as anti-immigration violence, xenophobia, nationalism, populism, and tribalism in Spain at the turn of the century (Molina Galván and Di Salvo).

Initially, Dori, the mother, states that Ombasi will become a drug dealer like all other immigrants, echoing the stereotypes articulated in *Las cartas de Alou* by many Spaniards and in Alou’s voiceover letters, as well as the racist criminalistic media rhetoric studied by Van Dijk. The family also believes Ombasi killed his

drowned companion, and when he carries their unconscious daughter Jessy, they assume he has hurt her. Each member of the family has projected a fear onto this Other who ultimately saves their lives. This projection not only makes Ombasi out to be a menace, which he certainly is not, but he is also construed as a sexual object for Dori and a perceived threat to Antonio's self-image as a virile man. Several scenes and point-of-view shots reveal Dori's desire for Ombasi. Isabel Santaolalla remarks on the psychoanalytic erotic symbolism of the scene in which Ombasi shucks clams with a knife, eats them, and offers them to Dori and her husband. For Santaolalla, shucking connotes phallic penetration, and the oral contact with the clams, reminiscent of female genitalia, evokes cunnilingus ("Close Encounters," 118). Notably, Antonio meets the offer of eating raw clams with disgust. The first scene when the viewer overtly learns of Dori's lust for Ombasi is just after her husband makes advances at her and she refuses. She falls into slumber and dreams of Ombasi, who is at once himself and is also transformed into a stealthy, prowling, growling tiger-like predator who seductively advances on her. This wish fulfillment dream proves most revealing in that her biases of her sub-Saharan object of desire equate him with animal virility and potency, thus incarnating the stereotype of African male sexual superiority. Furthermore, Ombasi orally pleasures Dori in the dream and, as Diana Palardy notes, "The lack of reciprocity in this sexual fantasy reinforces the restriction of the colonized subject to the role of providing pleasure" (830).

The subsequent morning, Dori sees he is awake, follows him, and voyeuristically delights in his nudity as he bathes. Through point-of-view shots, the spectator participates in her eroticizing gaze. Dori, then, joins the object of her desire in the water. Antonio, in another act of voyeurism, watches his wife undress and to his dismay realizes she is about to join the perfectly physiqued Ombasi in the sea. Interestingly, Ombasi's cleansing was part of a ritual before he prayed or meditated. The scene in which he is standing nude at the summit of an elevation, arms outstretched, reminiscent of a crucifixion, facing away from the viewer as the sun rises before him, proves most revealing in various respects. This is a sacred act, a ritual of reverence honoring the beginning of the day. Yet Dori's sexual objectification profanely desecrates the purity of the act. Antonio's jealousy based on his own insecurities further defiles the sacred scene.

Ultimately, when the neo-Nazis arrive and torment the family and Ombasi, they flash a menacing knife and threaten to castrate Ombasi, which they implicitly do off screen in the conclusion. Ombasi's actions should speak for themselves. To wit, he honored the death of his companion, assisted Jessy and returned her to her family, offered a morning prayer, and finally, protected and saved the family from the skinheads; and yet, in spite of the evidence of his moral rectitude and human decency, he is repeatedly dehumanized and criminalized and becomes a screen onto which the Europeans project their fears and desires. As such, they "recognize

themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’” (Bhabha 146, qtd in Deveny vii). In other words, by dreaming that she is seduced, Dori views herself as desirable; by fearing Ombasi’s sexuality, Antonio wishes not to question his own virility; by castrating Ombasi, the skinheads draconianly punish Ombasi for his “crime” of interracial eroticism and confirm their role as gatekeepers of racial purity; by choosing to believe that Ombasi is a murderer and a future drug dealer, Dori and the family feel safer, for if the outsider represents all that is evil, the insiders do not.

In the climax of the film, Dori and Antonio explicitly choose not to aid Ombasi as the neo-Nazis arrive. The final shots of the film vary between extreme close up and long shots. The close ups show Ombasi on the ground after Antonio has indicated he will not help him, while the long shots include the view of the three neo-Nazis arriving in the distance and the family driving off. This alternation between close point-of-view shots of Ombasi gazing longingly as the family car drives off, to medium and then long shots of the family driving off, and back to Ombasi’s face tightly framed prove most revealing. Just as Alou’s voiceover letters reveal his subjectivity and foster empathy in the viewer, so does Ombasi’s point of view. Through an eyeline match with Ombasi as he lies abandoned on the ground awaiting the certain sexualized torture of castration, we, the viewers, see the dreams of a better life escape metaphorized by the departing family taxi. The sense of unfulfillment is reinforced as the poignant melody closes the sequence. Just as the tight shot fades to black, the music changes to rapid percussion, leaving to the viewers’ imagination exactly what will happen to Ombasi in custody of the skinheads. Implicitly, it is understood that their crime will be met with impunity.

Curiously, then, the two deaths (one by drowning in an attempt to reach Spain, the other eminent at the hands of thugs) prove quite dissimilar. The corpse of Ombasi’s companion was honored in funerary ritual. And yet, the family, through the lens of their racism, projected agency and malice onto this accidental death, assuming that Ombasi murdered his friend. Not only do they criminalize Ombasi, but they are also an accessory for not aiding the soon-to-be victim, for which the ruffians will be directly responsible yet remain unpunished. In fulfillment of the family’s wish for law and order, the skinheads arrive on the scene in a simulacrum of law enforcement (motorcycles, clubs, helmets), charge Ombasi with the crime of being “a fucking nigger swimming naked with a white girl,” and sentence him to castration (Molina Gavilán and Di Salvo.). While the couple can be considered accomplices in the certain torture and murder that awaits Ombasi (Molina Gavilán and Di Salvo), spectators who identify, or had identified, with the Spanish family also share in the responsibility (Santaolalla, “Close Encounters” 122) as the skinheads fulfill the racist xenophobic wish of punishing the racialized, eroticized, and criminalized Other.

14 kilómetros

Gerardo Olivares's *14 kilómetros* is the odyssey of three individuals who yearn for a better life and meet on the way to Spain. This film aims to create awareness in the Western viewer of the monumental hardships experienced by many who dream of crossing the Strait of Gibraltar (González del Pozo 48). The three co-protagonists sally from the most underprivileged part of the world, launching their 3,500-kilometer journey north from the migration hub in Agadez, Niger, to traverse the African continent from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe (Ballesteros 191-92).

In *The Politics of Migration*, Barbara Marshall stipulates that migration stems from what she terms “push factors” and “pull factors.”⁹ The brothers from Niger, Buba and Mukela, migrate due to pull factors: Buba's soccer talent leads him to believe he could make a living as an athlete. Teenage Violeta is fleeing Mali due to push factors: she escapes to avoid being traded into marriage with her elderly rapist in exchange for ten cattle and one hundred kilograms of salt.¹⁰ It is her experiences that I wish to focus on, for not only is she sexual merchandise in the arranged marriage, she is also captured en route and forced to work with countless other young girls and women in bordellos. The travelers' odyssey is almost entirely through the desert, such that the vast landscape becomes a constant companion, reminding the viewer of the travelers' difficulties, courage, perseverance, and humble insignificance. After all, this journey is not just theirs, but also that of all who embark on the epic voyage of migration. Eighty-nine minutes of this ninety-five-minute film take place in the desert en route to the most northern tip of Africa (Deveny 73). The journey reveals corruption by traffickers, the dishonesty of authorities, human trafficking, sex trafficking, and violence, but also kindness, hospitality, generosity, and beauty as seen with the nomads, whose wandering lifestyle and timeless survival reinforce that human mobility and migration have existed since time immemorial. The nomads' kindness is also in stark contrast to the corrupt authorities. While the former had no obligation to lend assistance and did, the latter were charged with duties that they neglected for their own benefit. This film raises awareness of human trafficking, sexual slavery, and human trade. As a billboard in the desert cautions: “Inmigración clandestina a Europa a través del Sahara y el Mediterráneo: Robo, Agresión, SIDA, Hambre, Sed, Muerte. LA VERDAD” ‘Clandestine Immigration to Europe through the Sahara and the Mediterranean: theft, violence, AIDS, famine, thirst, death: THE TRUTH.’ *14 kilómetros* narrativizes and humanizes each of those in order to evoke understanding and, ideally, empathy from the viewer.

I wish to explore briefly the precarious state of trafficked migrants in Spain and current legislative efforts to uphold the law and attempt to protect victims. The *Informe anual 2016 sobre el racismo en el Estado Español* ‘2016 Annual Report

on Racism in the Spanish State' traces the trajectory of reforms to the *Ley de Extranjería* 'Immigration Law.' Beginning with Organic Law 2/2009 (11 Dec.), irregular trafficking victims could receive regular status upon collaboration in the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers and procurers (202). The *Annual Report on Racism* stipulates, though, that "A pesar de estas mejoras sigue existiendo una vinculación entre el hecho delictivo y la víctima, de ahí que diversas entendidas sigan reclamando el tratamiento de estas mujeres, en primer lugar como víctimas, al margen de la actividad delictiva a la que se les ha obligado a participar" (203) 'In spite of these improvements, there continues to exist an association between the criminal act and the victim, hence diverse parties continue to demand that these women be treated first as victims, at the margin of the unlawful act they were forced to participate in' (203). The difficulty in approaching irregular trafficking victims is that there are two issues at stake: irregular status and victims of trafficking. Marta Gonzales, coordinator of *Proyecto Esperanza* 'Project Hope,' advocates for refugee status and concomitant asylum rather than regular status, which is more precarious (*Informe anual* 203). Yet the majority of sex traffic victims identified accordingly receive temporary residence permits and not asylum (*Informe anual* 203). The *Annual Report* underscores the need to create special courts and specially trained judges in order to put an end to the high level of impunity that exists for procurers and provide justice to the victims. Until 2001, the majority of trafficking victims came from Colombia and the Dominican Republic. According to the 2016 *Annual Report*, most trafficking victims in Spain come from Romania and most are sixteen to seventeen years old. Others come from Eastern Europe, particularly Ukraine. But many young victims come from Africa and Latin America. Increasingly more are coming from China. The *Annual Report* indicates that many are deceived to travel to Spain by what the police call (in English) "loverboys," men who pretend to be their boyfriends. According to the UN (referenced in the *Annual Report*) the "business" of the sexual exploitation of sex trafficking moves between seven and twelve billion dollars. In Spain, according to the data from the *Defensoría del Pueblo* 'Department of Protection of Citizens' Rights,' five million Euros pass hands daily, a figure greater than drug trafficking and close to that of arms traffic (*Informe anual* 2014). In 2015, the *Consejo de Ministros* 'Council of Ministers' authorized the 2nd Plan Against the Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation 2015-2018, to which 104 million Euros have been allocated.

Just as legislative efforts are moving toward a victim-centered approach, so does current cinema as evident in *14 kilómetros*. Varying viewpoints reveal the diverse perspectives with regard to human traffic (and sexual slavery) in this film: close shots of teenage Violeta, eyes averted, staring wistfully; close-ups of Buba holding his face in concern; close-ups of a young unknown sex slave numbly looking directly at the camera as she leans against a slot machine, thus, through

juxtaposition, underscoring that her value is reduced to ephemeral entertainment or pleasure for the client whose investment provides financial benefit only to the procurer; this latter shot (from Buba's point of view) is of the nameless slave regarding Buba who has come to the bordello to rescue Violeta. This scene makes manifest the triangulated gaze of the resigned trafficking victim, hopeful Buba, and the viewer who now sees/understands the dehumanizing perils of migration. Medium shots of the protagonists longingly looking outward, through a bus window, onto the vast desert, over the railing of a ship into the distance underscore the exponential gaze of the viewer viewing the protagonists' hopeful regard of a brighter (and literally beautiful) future on the horizon. Long shots of authorities' vehicles approaching and medium shots of police raiding or of traffickers rounding up their human merchandise that they move for exorbitant sums provide the distance of objectivity revealing the precarious realities that situate migrants between two antagonistic forces: those representing the law and those directly violating human rights. These shots also highlight the oxymoronic status of victim and alleged transgressor. González del Pozo avers that viewers become accomplices in Buba and Violeta's voyage. If so, we viewers partake in the illegality and criminality of their travels (54). The neon green night vision and rapid movement shots, reminiscent of action and spy films, point to the adventure and danger leading to the climax of fulfilling the dream of arrival. Yet these frames also provide a different perspective similar to documentary footage—a genre that elicits engagement—of clandestine migrants boarding a truck or arrival in *patera* or running from the authorities once on Iberian soil, thus fulfilling the quest by setting foot in the supposed Promised Land.

Ballesteros understands the compassionate Guardia Civil who lets the travelers go to signify that “immigrants’ fates depend on the occasional kindness and compassion of individual Europeans” due to “institutional and governmental disregard to for human rights” (*Immigration* 194). As viewers-accomplices we (wish to) see what González del Pozo terms “la viabilidad de la convivencia en España” (59) ‘the viability of coexistence in Spain.’ Yet, the film ends uncertainly. Buba and Violeta have arrived, but what awaits them is unknown. Will they remain? Will they become regularized? Will they be gainfully employed? Given that the sex industry in Spain is thriving, unlike the remainder of the economy since the 2008 crisis, and given that the vast majority—85%—of sex industry workers in Spain are foreign-born (Murray 242), will teenage Violeta return to prostitution to make ends meet?¹¹

Princesas

Gabrielle Carty (referencing Alberto Elena) notes the irony that while in the second half of the 1990s the majority of female Latin American migrants were from

Andean nations, Spanish cinema boasted a greater number of Caribbean characters. Guido Rings notes that Latin American immigration is one of the most frequently portrayed in Spanish cinema, perhaps due to the great numbers of female immigrants and the traditional feminization of other cultures, as well as the masculine, paternal, or patriarchal gaze of the audience and the directors (Rings 172). Curiously, Carty asserts, many of the Latin American female characters make a living in the sex industry (127). Perhaps this overrepresentation correlates to the fact that, according to the *2016 Annual Report*, until 2001, the majority of trafficking victims came from Columbia and the Dominican Republic. Prostitution not only eroticizes the (human) object, but also reduces the (feminized) human being to a singular value: sex object. In a perverse metonymization, the sex object (by extension or relationship) is inextricably linked to the agential subject in this gendered binary oppositional hierarchical construct. Gendering is inherent to the power relations of imperialism and colonialism. (One need only recall Edward Said's theory of the feminization of colonized cultures [*Orientalism*] or Octavio Paz's concept of conquest as entailing a literal rape of indigenous women as well as a conceptual rape of a culture and the land [*El laberinto de la soledad/The Labyrinth of Solitude*]). I posit that the Latin American prostitute and particularly the Caribbean trafficked women in Spanish cinema are a nod to the crisis of national identity at the turn of the twentieth century. I postulate that the proliferation of Caribbean sex workers in Spanish cinema reflects the desire to stroke the masculinized hegemonic ego that is nostalgic for an imperial past and in denial of the geo-political castration presupposed by the loss of previous territories. Films such as *Princesas* destabilize the conqueror-conquered paradigm by underscoring the gendered nature of conquest and simultaneously vindicating the Other while reinscribing the in-group based on identification through an understanding of shared vulnerability.

Fernando León de Aranoa's *Princesas* follows the trials and tribulations of a protagonistic dyad of young sex workers in twenty-first century Madrid. The co-protagonists Zulema and Cayetana, respectively from Santo Domingo and Madrid, face the challenges inherent to prostitution, but it is Dominican's "undocumented" status that leads to tragedy. According to film historian Román Gubern, Aranoa "mezcla lo privado con la radiografía social, a partir de la amistad entre dos jóvenes prostitutas, una española y la otra latinoamericana, para hablar de sus sueños, sus esperanzas, sus frustraciones y la dureza cotidiana de la vida que han elegido . . . o no han podido elegir" (507) 'blends the private with a social x-ray, stemming from the friendship between two young prostitutes, one Spanish and the other Latin American, to speak about their dreams, their hopes, their frustrations and the daily difficulty of the life they have chosen or have not been able to choose.' Yet the abject and egregious situation of the migrant protagonist Zule, who is the victim of

blackmail, rape and battering, is a far cry from that of the native born protagonist Caye, whose challenges are not based on fear of physical harm.¹²

Many immigrant characters are doubly discriminated against, due to their foreignness and their femaleness (Ballesteros, “Embracing,” 3; Carty 128); the former is a threat to nationals without resources, and the latter to the patriarchy (Carty 128). This perceived threat is reflected in the “othering” of the Other. Yet identification with the vulnerability of the Other leads to empathy. The moment Caye comes upon Zule’s beaten body, as Murray observes,

not only signals a decisive shift in the plot but also manifests the politics of looking that undergird *Princesas*. Earlier, Caye’s half-naked body, surrounded by money, was the object of the viewer’s gaze. Now, Caye—whose perspective the viewer shares—transforms into the subject who looks at the immigrant body, marked by explicitly sexual victimization and violence. (Murray 246)

Zule’s first words, “No tengo papeles” (Murray 246) ‘I don’t have papers,’ prove most revealing and sadly ironic, for it is this status of illegality that makes possible the criminal behavior perpetrated against her by the representative of the Spanish state.

The nameless bureaucrat known as *el de los papeles* ‘the papers guy’ uses Zule’s unauthorized status to blackmail her, receiving her gratis sexual services in exchange for the promise of purveying her documentation to live and work in Spain. After several “exchanges” without any proof of papers, she refuses and he seeks revenge. While previously she had provided services in her apartment, he schedules a rendezvous in a hotel without her knowledge that he will be her client. Once the papers guy has brutally raped and beaten her, hotel security throws her out onto the street covered in blood, bruises, and swelling, and she limps along in the early morning light. By threatening to call the police if Zule were to return as they force her out a back door, the hotel employees, as representatives of the hegemony, have now criminalized Zule in spite of the fact that she is clearly the victim (Murray 248). There is perfect impunity for this blackmailer, batterer, and rapist bureaucrat. This unnamed, pivotal character is a synecdoche for Spanish bureaucracy—culpable and complicit in the injustices perpetrated on those who are not recognized by the law nor guaranteed its concomitant protection.

Drawing upon Homi Bhabha’s theories of otherness, Santaolalla notes that the inherent ambivalence of stereotyped otherness is empowering in that the object is simultaneously desired and derided (Bhabha, “Other” 19; Santaolalla, “Ethnic” 57). Precisely through this inherent ambivalence, Zule avenges her abuser by offering him a date and, possibly, infecting him with HIV. It is vital to note that Caye, a representative of the hegemonic perspective with its concomitant

Eurocentric racism, also negotiates ambivalence of desire and derision toward Zule; it is her gaze with which the viewer initially identifies. The viewer assumes Caye's point of view while her supposed rival Zule remains silent. Only when Caye comes upon Zule beaten, shaking, and in a fetal position is the binary subverted. Gender violence here becomes a destabilizing force as Caye recognizes Zule's vulnerable state, which leads to a strengthened sense of empathy and the dissolution of barriers. Exoticization, here, gives way to vulnerability within the framework of gender violence. As a result, the menacing masculine becomes the outsider.

The newly constructed "in-group" is redefined as a feminine space of solidarity. No longer is the paradigm self-Other. This is most clear in the feminine spaces of inclusion and exclusion, particularly the beauty salon (patronized primarily by Spanish sex workers) whose glass storefront looks onto the lot frequented by the foreign-born sex workers. The explicit racism and belief that the Latin Americans are taking away the native-borns' jobs lead one of the spiteful clients to report the outside sex workers to the cops and have the rivals arrested. The acts of prostitution are all equally illegal regardless of nationality and migration status, yet the resentful workers from their in-group safe space—the interior of the hair dresser shop—use or misuse the authorities to avenge and discriminate against those who, in reality, are their coworkers. The scenes behind glass in this film connote the invisible barrier that separate the two feminine worlds. Drawing upon Julia Kristeva's theories on abjection, Diana Palardy discerns a resulting attraction and repulsion. Palardy asserts that "the myth of Spanish homogeneity is challenged by representations of physical and cultural 'contamination,' which signals the supposed encroaching of immigrant behavior, dress and appearance on Spanish national identity, and force a re-evaluation and reconfiguration of what constitutes 'Spanishness'" (91). Perhaps contamination could also be viewed in light of perceived criminality. The concept of contamination, like the concept of criminality, cannot be dissociated respectively from the concepts of purity and legality. In other words, to posit an object as dirty or illegal, one boasts a hierarchized binary oppositional paradigm. Hence, contaminated, dirty, illegal, criminal "them" is counterpoised to legal, clean, law abiding, pure "us."¹³ Taken a step further, the desire for (or fiction/fantasy of) homogeneity concomitantly establishes a fear or distance or distrust of heterogeneity. As Caye and Zule become friends, the barrier—metaphorized by the glass window of the hair dresser shop—is broken. Zule soon frequents the salon and teaches the owner how to do African braids. Carty, applying Bhabha's theory on the third space, considers the corn row scene in the salon as a third space in which borders and barriers are dissolved (Carty 131). The braids, which are the blending of different strands into one, of course, stand for social integration within this female microcosm. Caye, who initially embraces hegemonic racism, evolves to see Zule, to understand her, and to share in her trauma and vulnerability. By protecting Zule from her abuser and defending her

voluntary choice to leave Spain to the airport guards, Caye has symbolically decriminalized her co-protagonist friend who was ultimately integrated into the safe feminine space of the salon.

Flores de otro mundo

In the 1999 article in *El País Semanal*, female director Iciar Bollaín indicates one of her inspirations for *Flores de otro mundo*: the murder of a Bolivian woman slaughtered by her Spaniard husband (“Vidas de películas” 67). The film also fictionalizes real-life efforts to repopulate dwindling Spanish towns by making love connections between rural bachelors and women interested in finding a partner, bussed in for the events. The film features three potential couples: Alonso and the Basque Marirrosi; Damián and Dominican Patricia, who is mother of two; and fifty-year-old Carmelo and twenty-year-old Afro-Cuban Milady, whom he met while on one of his vacations to Havana. These sorts of sexual tourism vacations to Cuba organized by travel agencies and targeted to men are the Spanish version of Las Vegas marketing: “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” It is never made clear if Milady had been a *jinetera* (Cuban sex worker whose clients are mainly international tourists) or simply someone Carmelo connected with while in Cuba. From the moment the statuesque Afro-Cuban beauty arrives in the town and steps out of Carmelo’s oversized pick-up (uncommon in Spain), she becomes an object of attention. The following dialog reveals the hegemonic scopophilic gaze as a triumvirate of elderly bumpkins objectify her with their ogling and also with their banter:

“¡Qué buena está!”

“¿Esta cuál es?”

“La cubana.”

“¿No es la dominicana?”

“Que no. Que la dominicana es la de Damián. ¿Es que no te enteras?”

“Esta está mejor que la otra.”

“Sí. Bastante. Bastante mejor.”

“Qué dentadura, qué labios.”

“Qué besazos tiene que pegar.”

“¡Madre mía! Quién fuera . . .”

“¡Quién tuviera veinte años!”

“Boy, she’s hot!”

“Which one is this one?”

“The Cuban.”

“Isn’t she the Dominican?”

“No. The Dominican is Damian’s woman. Get it into your head.”

“This one is hotter than the other one.”

“She sure is. Much hotter.”

“Look at those teeth. Those lips.”

“What kisses she must give.”

“God, if only . . .”

“Oh, to be twenty-years-old again.”

They verbalize the prevailing view held by the permanent residents of the town regarding the women who arrive, that they are racial and cultural outsiders (and inferiors) who belong to the men with whom they partner. Scopophilia objectifies others, fetishes, and dehumanizes. It is this same paradigm that makes possible Carmelo’s abuse of Milady.

Twenty-year-old Milady is a free spirit for whom her trip to Spain is an adventure. When Carmelo takes Milady to his home, he “introduces” her, if you will, to his possessions: the colossal house, the spacious kitchen, the enormous television. At each turn, he emphasizes the magnitude of his possessions, grabs her, and indicates that he likes his things big. Towering Milady—flagrantly embodying the erotic and exotic femaleness and negritude—is one more grand item he has collected. As can be imagined, his sense of ownership (a vestige of colonialism) and her free-spiritedness are irreconcilable. When he does, in fact, batter her, which is a criminal act, it is with impunity, although not without the light censure of his friend.

Curiously, each of the migrants studied in this essay is African in one way or another. Both Ombasi and Alou are ethnically and geographically African; the former is possibly from Equatorial Guinea, the latter from Senegal. Buba and Violeta are from Niger and Mali. Leila is North African (Moroccan). The remaining three are of Afro-Caribbean heritage. Both Patricia and Zulema are biracial Dominicans and Milady is strikingly Afro-Cuban. It would seem then that the cultural differences are insidiously racialized, inferiorizing African geographic origins or ethnicity. It is worth noting that, of the characters ultimately interdependently integrated into the host culture, one (Leila) is of African geographic origins, but not African ethnicity—i.e. “Black”—and the other boasts European physical traits (e.g. Patricia’s green eyes).

Whether intentional or not, this observation would seem to support Ana Corbalán’s claim that Spanish cinema’s gaze is biased regarding migration “debido a que los privilegios legales, económicos y sociales de una nación son reafirmados y cuestionados a través de una serie de discursos de diferenciación racial y cultural” (197) ‘due to the fact that legal, economic and social privileges are reaffirmed and contested through a series of racial and cultural discourses.’ In essence, then, Spanish migration cinema could be seen as participating in the tropicalization that

homogenizes and stereotypes the Other (Corbalán 199), but that also homogenizes the hegemony, fomenting an otherness-sameness binary. As Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman note, “To tropicalize from a privileged, First World location is undoubtedly a hegemonic move” (8, qtd. in a footnote in Corbalán 199). Drawing upon Bhabha, Santaolalla, Aparicio, and Chávez-Silverman, Corbalán claims that Spanish immigration cinema participates in new racism and reinforces preconceived notions. Yet, I purport that said cinema, as a mirror of society, reflects endemic racism and xenophobia that forces the viewer to see his base attitudes while re-visioning his previous conception of the migrant subjects.

The presence of photographs in the film provides an alternate perspective in which the spectator assumes the point of view of the previously objectified migrants. The two sorts of photos I will analyze are self-portraits or selfies and a family portrait. The film takes place before smartphones and the selfie craze, yet Milady enjoys capturing images of herself with her friends in the locus of her adventure. The spectator assumes the point of view of the photo Milady will see of herself with her friends. Milady also travels with a cigar box, a synecdoche of Cuba, with photos of her friends and family back home. Again, the viewer sees, feels, and understands as Milady does. This sharing of perspective with Milady can be viewed as a vindication of her free spiritedness that brought her to couple with Carmelo and an implicit denunciation of Carmelo’s phallo-Eurocentric interpersonal imperialism and subsequent adjudication for the gender violence he perpetrated, as evident in his denouement: alone, having Christmas dinner before the television as King Juan Carlos wishes the national family a happy holiday. Yet the final image of the film is a family portrait of Patricia’s daughter’s first communion, connoting her integration into the religious community, but ultimately standing for the new Spaniards’ (no longer immigrants’) integration into Spanish society. The family portrait (including Patricia’s pregnant belly) signifies that the viewer’s point of view is aligned with that of all reflected in the family portrait, for portraits are of those who will nostalgically re-visit images of themselves in key moments. Hence, we behold the new integrated Spanish family through the eyes of said family. Patricia is pregnant just as the future for both native-born and foreign-born Spaniards is pregnant with possibilities.

Retorno a Hansala

The final film in this study also shows promise, mutual seeing/understanding, and a future based on symbiosis. In *Retorno a Hansala*, the filmic narrative opens and closes in the most striking of ways. Hapticity characterizes the opening sequence. The point of view—shared by the viewer—is that of a character in the sea, bobbing above and below the surface, breathing heavily, gurgling, seeing the longed-after shore, bobbing up and down, to finally

slowly sink and drift to the bottom while seeing the light above the surface becoming more opaque and distant. We soon learn that this point of view, our point of view, is that of nineteen-year-old Rashid from Hansala, Morocco, clandestinely migrating to join his sister Leila in Tarifa as they search for a better life. The remarkable and poignant opening sets the tone of emotional identification and empathy and contrasts with the images during the closing credits. The plot stems from the quest to return Rashid's remains to his bereaving family and properly inter him.

Ballesteros summarizes the 2003 *patera* tragedy that resulted in thirty-seven drowning victims, thirteen of whom were from Hansala, and the subsequent solidarity association response on both sides of the Strait, detailed in De la Cal's 2007 article and website. As Ballesteros notes, "The film illustrates how illegal border crossing has become a business for different parties that profit from the immigrants and their families: first the traffickers, who in the film charge €3,000 to smuggle immigrants across the border, and the undertaker, who charges the same amount to return their bodies to their families" (*Immigration* 184). This symmetry and juxtaposition are startling and underscore that ultimately the illegal trafficking of live bodies and legal trafficking of dead bodies equally commodify a human being. While the undertaker, Martín, with Leila's collaboration, ultimately rightfully returns Rashid's remains to his home and family, his refusal to return other victims for proper burial until he has been paid the exorbitant sum is a legalized version of holding hostages for ransom.

Commodification of human beings is inextricably linked to criminality and also to what I will call border-crossing predation. In multi-layered predation, victims or prey are abused by their traffickers, their procurers, and, of course, both the society from which they come and that which they dream to enter. The precarious in-between space—or Bhabhaian third space—while creating room for freedom and new paradigms, conversely also serves to remove restrictions from abusers to give free rein to their basest drives and behaviors.

Just as the hegemonically-identified viewer comes to relate with the drowned seeing subject, Martín (the male, privileged, European funeral home proprietor) comes to identify with Leila (the female, migrant fish factory worker). Through this bond of equals and through his transformation, he ceases to view her and her culture as exotic or Other. Ballesteros avers that

While Martín drives through the Moroccan countryside, Leila, in the passenger seat, is given the point of view. She is often framed looking out the window and is reflected (in frame-within-frame shots) in the car's side view mirror so as to foreground the crucial act of looking (and reminiscing about her country of origin) while traveling. . . . Once Martín and Leila arrive in Hansala, the point of view switches to Martín who, with the

audience, becomes the observer of the village dynamics, a sort of improvised “ethnographer” through whose eyes we learn about the region’s poverty, miserable living conditions, and its lack of opportunities for the young, all of which lead so many of them to attempt the dangerous crossing. . . . Through the eyes of an initially reluctant and prejudiced Martín, the reasons to emigrate looking for a better life are legitimized. (*Immigration* 185)

Of note is that while Martín does not eroticize Leila, there is one potentially sexually objectifying scene. Martín gazes, with the concomitant power dynamic, at Leila as she bathes. She draws the plastic liner to shield herself from his view, and he stops himself from eroticizing her. It is not that he lacks interest. It is that he now understands (i.e. sees) and humanizes her. The ocular is paramount in this film. Let us consider the windshield—shattered when the van was hijacked. Yet, Leila’s father upon their arrival “fixes” the windshield by attaching in its place a sheet of translucent plastic. Martín’s authentic gratitude is evidence that he understands the depth of his host’s intentions and also the difference of his perspective. The result of the plastic windshield through which one cannot see is the metaphorical and paradoxical seeing—that is, understanding—how another sees. Through the empathetic connection, judgment is not only suspended, but also eliminated. Because Martín has connected with Leila and her family, seeing them as sentient subjects, he stops himself from sexually objectifying her.

The images and loose words during the closing credits reinforce the new ways of seeing realized throughout the film. Just as the film opens with the viewer having assumed the point of view of Rashid drowning as Spain is in view, heart pounding, labored breathing, lungs filling with water, so does the spectator, during closing credits, see negatives of newspaper photographs of the drowned along with fading dehumanizing news terms regarding the dead. They are but numbers that appear and disappear. Words such as “drowned” or “corpses” come into focus and fade to black. We see the same newsworthy stories, but in a different fashion. If the headlines and media rhetoric that had reduced the dead to numbers of those who had crossed illegally (i.e. criminals) are now seen differently, so is the purportedly reputable trafficking of the dead, for now Martín’s business is revealed to be just as unsavory and lucrative as the illegal trafficker of the living who also charges the desperate 3000 Euros to cross the Strait. Like Alice stepping through the looking glass, what Adrienne Riche has termed a re-vision, the viewer—now sensitized—sees the same world with new eyes.

Conclusion

Each of the films de-objectifies, imbues subjectivity, and fosters empathy of the objects of enunciation, while making visible the structures that dehumanize and criminalize the racialized Other. Each film has at least one character that represents the phallocratic-hegemonic symbolic order: Carmen's father in *Las cartas de Alou*, Antonio and the castrating skinheads in *Bwana*, Carmelo in *Flores de otro mundo*, "el de los papeles" in *Princesas*, the unnamed elderly molester and "suitor" in *14 kilómetros*, and Martín in *Retorno a Hansala*. The aforementioned characters and all they represent are threatened, and their power destabilized, by the possibility of autonomy, agency, and authenticity of the previously objectified Other.

These representatives of privilege and power either wish to subdue the sexuality of a racialized Other, jealously possess or guard it as a reflection of their own status, or, in the final case of Martín in *Retorno*, feel uncomfortable with the unplanned voyeuristic pleasure. In this last instance of the trajectory of the aforementioned films, the viewing subject consciously and purposefully controls his voyeuristic impulse and simultaneously averts his gaze as the object sees him looking upon her. This triangulated spectatorial gaze puts all three viewers on equal footing. Leila ceases to be a seen object as she becomes a seeing—reciprocally viewing and agential—subject who draws the windblown plastic liner as she washes. Martín stops looking at her as she sees him. By averting his potentially scopophilic gaze, he acknowledges her right not to be objectified and confers the respect she deserves and elicits as she obstructs his view. This plastic tarp is not unlike, and is perhaps, the actual plastic Leila's father improvised as a windshield. This translucent divider connotes seeing (or not) and being seen. We, as viewers of this most revealing scene become co-participants of the newly established equality and co-subjectivity in the relationship. Hence, Chus Gutiérrez's co-protagonists balance what had been an unbalanced power relation. In conclusion, what we have seen in this essay is an exploration of the evolution of the representation of the hegemonic subject and the "othered" object in an attempt to reconsider the imbalance of power, to make visible the invisibility of whiteness, to subvert the self-interested "ethnic-image-making," and to combat the implicit and explicit Eurocentric phallocratic supremacy that criminalizes and perpetrates against the eroticized and racialized Other.¹⁴ These films, taken as a corpus, denounce the impunity of hegemonic perpetrators and vindicate the criminalized migrant subject through a transformation in point of view: aligning the gaze of one who had seen (and objectified) with the perspective of one who had been seen and objectified, thus restoratively imbuing the latter with the potential for agential subjectivity. In sum, this article has investigated the ways in which filmmakers problematize the hegemonic gaze regarding the migrant Other and depict the transformation from looking at migrants as a criminal "them" to seeing them as a human "us."

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Notes

1. Guido Rings hypothesizes it was the speed with which immigration grew in Spain at the turn of our century that led to it becoming a hot and controversial topic in the media, such as the ten pages *El País Semanal* dedicated to it in August 2008.
2. Rings notes in 2009 that, in spite of the fact that “las noticias y los discursos políticos oficiales . . . suelen presentar a los inmigrantes ‘ilegales’ como uno de los problemas principales del país” ‘the news and the official political discourses . . . tend to present immigrants as “illegals” as one of the main problems of the country,’ cinema deconstructs these stereotypes even if it does not shatter the neo-colonial stereotypes (Rings 72).
3. According Thomas Deveny, “Migration film narratives from the Hispanic World give us a picture of a common human phenomenon: the search for a better life” (xii).
4. All translations in this essay, unless noted otherwise, are mine.
5. While José Luis Borau debuted his *Río abajo* in 1984, it is filmed in English, stars David Carradine, and is about immigration across the Mexican-US border.
6. Of note, *Las cartas de Alou* is part of the Spanish national educational curriculum on immigration and matters of diversity in Spain.
7. Of note is that Alou had learned to play checkers with Moncef who arrived from northern Africa in the opening sequence with the protagonist.
8. Coined by Hamid Naficy in *An Accented Cinema* (101). See also Deveny (26).
9. Push factors: involuntary or forced migration, persecution, natural disasters, extreme poverty (Barbara Marshall 3, referenced in Deveny). Pull factors:

employment possibilities, social well-being, chain migration (Barbara Marshall 3, referenced in Deveny), love (Deveny).

10. Deveny describes how the future husband “had raped her when she was a girl. . . . Violeta confides to her sister” that her “only option is leaving, but she must go far away since ‘if he finds me, he would kill me’” (69).

11. Referencing Daly and the National Institute of Statistics.

12. The film depicts one scene in which Caye is the victim of overt coercion and psychological abuse: a former client forces her to fellate him when she is off work, out on a date with her boyfriend who knows nothing of her occupation. While she is not physically battered like Zule, her pleading and tears speak to the psychological trauma.

13. “One of the first manifestations of abjection in the film is in the song ‘Contamíname’ [‘Contaminate Me’], which forms part of the diegetic narrative Written by Pedro Guerra in 1995 and popularized by the singer Ana Belén, ‘Contamíname’ has become associated with the move to support immigrants’ rights and to help them integrate into Spanish society” (Palardy 833).

14. “Opposed to the ‘invisibility’ of whiteness, ‘coloured’ identities become subject to processes of categorization and stereotyping, with the subsequent propagation of interested definitions of ethnic identity” (Santaolalla, “Ethnic” 56), hence the “need to respond to” dominant discourse of hegemonic “ethnic image-making” (Santaolalla, “Ethnic” 56).

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