

The influence of urban space in dramatic conflicts: transnationality in Mexican fiction films

La influencia del espacio urbano en los conflictos dramáticos:
transnacionalidad en la ficción cinematográfica mexicana

Silvana Flores 

silvana.n.flores@hotmail.com

CONICET

Universidad de Buenos Aires (Argentina)

Abstract

Through this article we will analyze a corpus of Mexican fiction films of its classic-industrial period, produced by Pedro and Guillermo Calderón, *Palabras de mujer* (José Díaz Morales, 1946) and *Maternidad imposible* (Emilio Gómez Muriel, 1955), that have as a common nexus the interurban transfers, based on the migration phenomenon, the exploitation of a transnational cast and the influences of differentiated urban spaces in the narrative conflicts. Those characteristics will be delineated studying the configuration of urban spaces represented on them, its interference in the dramatic structure of these films and the identity translations presented consequently. The topic of migration and its entailments with the plots of these titles will allow us to elucidate the role awarded to the capital cities as spaces of cultural exchange, as also as essential elements for the achievement of the purposes of their characters, promoting a (des)centralizing vision of those types of territories.

Key words: city; territory; Mexico; migration; cinema.

Resumen

A través de este artículo se analizará un corpus de films de ficción mexicanos de su período clásico-industrial producidos por Pedro y Guillermo Calderón, *Palabras de mujer* (José Díaz Morales, 1946) y *Maternidad imposible* (Emilio Gómez Muriel, 1955), que tienen como nexo común los traslados interurbanos basados en el fenómeno de la migración, la explotación de un elenco transnacional y las influencias suscitadas por ámbitos urbanos diferenciados en los conflictos narrativos allí dirimidos. Dichas características serán delineadas estudiando la configuración del ámbito de las ciudades en ellos representadas, su injerencia en la estructura dramática de estos films y las traslaciones identitarias presentadas en consecuencia. El tópico de la migración y su vinculación con las tramas de estos títulos nos permitirá dilucidar el rol adjudicado a las ciudades capitales como espacios de intercambio cultural, así como también como elementos esenciales para la consecución de los fines de sus personajes, promoviendo una visión (des)centralizadora de aquel tipo de territorios.

Palabras clave: ciudad; territorio; México; migración; cinematografía.

1 Introduction and methodology

Since its beginnings, cinema has been an urban art, an industry, and a spectacle. We owe this to the place occupied by cities in modernization processes, and in a very particular way, in the deployment of technological innovations, especially in the intense ending of the 19th century in which it emerged, where inventions multiplied. François Albera would describe, in fact, its emergence as "a technological and social phenomenon characteristic of modernity" (2009, p. 63), and its incipient receptor, that person "hungry for machines" (Comolli, 2010, p. 62), would soon get used to the novelty based on the analogy of the film image with the reality it represents, showing his common spaces, those that were part of the daily experience.

Certainly, cinema originated in the cities, and documented them, even exploring foreign cities, as it happened with the Europeans who introduced cinema in Latin America.¹ But it would soon explode the countryside as part of the scenarios that tried to exhibit to the enthusiastic audience,

1 In this regard, it is worth mentioning Gabriel Veyre (1871–1936), a Frenchman, pioneer in Latin American cinemas, who traveled through the capital of Mexico, where he made a large number of shots with urban scenes. The first was *El presidente de la República paseando a caballo en el bosque de Chapultepec* (1896), —where the president Porfirio Díaz is seen traveling through an emblematic part of the city—, although he would also film in Cuba, Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela (De los Reyes, 1996). Another Frenchman who was sent to Mexico City was Claude Ferdinand Bon Bernard (García Riera, 1998).

a space that would be established as a counterpart of modernity recurrently associated to the city: “a center of progress, of erudition, of communication, of enlightenment” (Williams, 2001, p. 25). Going further in time, the relevance of cities for cinema would continue to exist, testified, for example, for the director Wim Wenders, a great city filmmaker, who said that “city and cinema are closely linked: cities generate cinema and cinema belongs to the city and reflects it” (2010, p. 4). Likewise, film art modified the facades of urban spaces, since, with its appearance and popularization, it proliferated the construction, or adaptations of buildings as exhibition houses. Cinema offered a new space of urban entertainment that would be added to the theaters, circuses and even cabarets, as a new choice to have a popular leisure time.

The splendor of urban planning as synonymous of that progress highlighted by Williams (2001) has been proposed by exponents of *avant-garde* cinema, as *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) and by the film symphonies on Berlin and São Paulo,² but that changed with the cities destroyed or inhabited by misery exhibited by Italian neorealism, whose heirs in Latin America were films as *Rio, 40 graus* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1955) and *Tire dié* (Fernando Birri, 1958), and in Mexico, the harshness of the streets of *Los olvidados* (Luis Buñuel, 1950). In his autobiography, Buñuel described the scenarios of that film as “the ‘lost cities’, that is, ‘the improvised suburbs’, very poor, that surround Mexico, D.F.” (1982, p. 234), ensuring that the capital city is seen from its subordinate domains. That prompted a decentralization in the representations that continue growing as Latin American film industries started their processes of modernization, in this decade and the followings. In one case or another, the city has been present in movies as a self-sufficient means of expression.

The objective of this article is to understand urban spaces in fiction films through a comparative study of the significant aspects of staging and narrativity of two melodramas from the classic-industrial period of Mexican cinema: *Palabras de mujer* (José Díaz Morales, 1946) and *Maternidad imposible* (Emilio Gómez Muriel, 1955). These have as a common nexus the interurban transfers based on the phenomenon of migration, the exploitation of a transnational cast and the influences caused by differentiated urban spaces in the narrative conflicts settled there. For this, we will delineate the configuration of the cities, their interference in the dramatic structure of these films and the identity transfers presented consequently.

2 We are referring to *Berlin, Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927) and *São Paulo, a sinfonia da metrópole* (Rodolfo Rex Luftig and Adalberto Kemeny, 1929), the latter inspired by the first and by the *avant-garde/futuristic* trend that was promoting Brazilian modern art in that decade (Labaki, 2003).

That will be framed in concepts such as territory (Llanos-Hernández, 2010), offered by social sciences to publicize the different scales in which individuals relate to spaces (house, town, city, nation). According to the author, the territory, a broad and flexible notion, capable of being studied interdisciplinarily, allows us to understand the links, tensions, and social practices in their spatial dimension, as well as the functioning of the social actors inserted in it. In each place where they circulate on, they start from a territorial “coexistence” and from different visions and interests that drive them (Llanos-Hernández, 2010). The territory, according to Bustos Velazco and Molina Andrade (2012) explains human relations in their places of action, determined by cultural and social constructions, turning into a symbolic dimension. In a world that functions as a globalized environment, the territory not only involves different points of view in each culture; it is also in a constant deconstruction. Hernández i Martí considers also that social relations in globalization “go beyond the limits of a specific territory” (2006, p. 93) in a sort of deterritorialization, that implies the loss of the links between individuals and homeland, and the beginning of a transnational way of life. Territory is a construction based in the actors that inhabit it and promote an appropriation (Mazurek, 2006). It is also related to space, a social conception linked to geographical localization and its internal and external relationships. These notions, in their mutual conjunction, will be useful in our study; they will determine the ways in which the characters in these film narratives travel through those spaces, losing the anchoring in a cultural identity in the plans to achieve their dramatic goals.

In the films of our corpus, subjects interact with the geography. This spatial dimension, beyond the representativeness, is intimately linked to an affective and historical-political dimension, as promulgated by Irene Depetris Chauvin (2019). This author, although referring to contemporary Latin American cinemas, chooses to understand film space as something more than a metaphorical instrument subordinated to narrative development, but rather as a methodological tool that enables reflection on social problems. These conceptions offer the possibility of scrutinizing the ways in which those spaces are crossed by film subjects, as well as reinvented or reconfigured by the cinematographic device.

The study will also imply an approach through transnationality, because of the foreign crosses manifested in the making of the films as well in the diegetic universe: the movies will involve professionals among different nations, but it will also manifest those exchanges in the plots. This double transnationality factor, evident within the film industry and in the textual structure of the films (Shaw & De la Garza, 2010), departs from the trajectory of the producers of both titles,

Pedro and Guillermo Calderón, that offered, throughout their filmography, multiple variants for this study perspective.³

In this context of globalization, the transnational links are not unusual, as industries go beyond a singular country, and migration movements are a constant source of hybridization in the national landscape. That was visible in Latin American cinemas, especially in Mexico, that was heading a leadership in the region during the classic period. Transnationalism was a focus in cinema studies since several decades ago (Elena, 2005; Hjort, 2009; De la Vega Alfaro & Elena, 2009; Shaw & De la Garca, 2010; López, 2012; Tierney, 2012; Gunckel, 2015; Lusnich et al., 2017), inquiring about a phenomenon that transcends geographical and cultural borders: transfers of film stars and directors, co-production and distribution transactions, and the setting of narrations in different nations. Cinema knew, since the beginning, that cultural identities are related, and that is going to be visible too in the plot of our films.

In the interurban movements conducted by the characters, the notion of centralization will also be relevant, understood as that “pole of attraction generated by the concentration and accessibility of urban, collective and symbolic functions, such as social encounters, and civil, commercial, cultural activities or of government” (Morales Pozo, 2019). In those interrelationships, we are considering both the social and the individual; as we said, a subjective dimension of those spaces. The journeys will be carried out on different scales of territoriality, based on the urban center *par excellence* that are the capital cities, as opposed to the peripheries, installed in the towns, as spaces of segregation or isolation, according to the internal dynamics that mobilize the people who inhabit them. The identification of a certain geographical space, in this institutional-jurisdictional dimension that constitutes the capital-city, is an unavoidable matter of historiographical debates around geography and the region (Fernández, 2007; Bandieri, 1996), and particularly reaches cinema in regard to the representation of spaces: the capital city will continue to be –on its macro scale– the nucleus through which the dramatic tensions develop, reaching the other areas a subordinate status. That minor scale of observations, in consequence, can give us, according to Bandieri (2021), a specific focus to understand social constructions.

The above ideas about territory and transnationality will be applied to our corpus of films through a case study on this two Calderón melodramas, that reflect those notions in their narrative structure. Calderón producers showed along their trajectory different procedures of

3 For an enlargement of the transnational trajectory of these producers, see Flores (2016, 2017).

transnationalism that make their films a productive object of study on audiovisual representation of cities. The hiring of artists from different places, their insertion in a new setting and the use of international music, emphasize the growing multiculturalism of Mexico City.⁴ Their tendency to display in the plots several forms of border crossings, among them, the migration from one city to another, is a constant peculiarity, that is specially seen in the two selected films.⁵

In that sense, the article will develop, in the first place, the implications of the migratory phenomenon in the cinematographic context in which these Mexican films emerged, looking for the portrayal of city in Mexican fiction films, and taking into account the movements of their inhabitants. Then, it will study the incorporation of these urban displacements, that were seen in the film industry, into the plots, to finally analyze the ways that urban spaces, in their different scales of territoriality, affect the character's dramatic goals. These topics will allow us to elucidate the role assigned to capital cities as spaces for cultural exchange, promoting a (de)centralizing vision of that type of territories.

2 Results

2.1 Urban space and migration

Studying urban space in cinema entails a wide repertoire of aspects that we will try to distinguish here. The first consists of the phenomenon of migration, so cinematographic as the city itself. As cinema was born in a globalized and cosmopolitan world, migration has played an important part in the development of film products, finding in cities the main point of reference for the expectations of better standards of living or carrying out professional projects. In fact, the main city of cinema, Hollywood, did not stop receiving artists from different cardinal points, attracted by the possibility of a successful career, by technical learning, or simply by the need to settle in that promising country, that has always attracted countless masses of immigrants, acting as a center of international mobility.

European migration to the United States was closely linked to the workplace (López-Sala, 2020), and these flows also occurred in cinema, since some of the most prominent European filmmakers would arrive there (for example, Murnau, Lang, Hitchcock, and Chaplin, among others),

4 The diffusion of those films through a circuit of exhibition and distribution in Latin America and United States goes in the same direction. See Flores (2019).

5 Calderón productions are an expansible corpus to study these notions of transnationality and territory displacements. Our selection for the analysis considered two fiction films that develop topics related to the representation of urban space and urban experience.

contributing their creativity to that mecca. The pioneers of Latin American cinema also traveled to Hollywood and learned the trade there, especially in the period of Hispanic cinema, which was introduced as a response to sound, a threat to lose non-English-speaking audiences. Mexican cinema would have also an extensive list of filmmakers who travelled to Hollywood to develop their careers, such as Emilio Fernández, Alejandro Galindo, Chano Urueta, and René Cardona (López, 2012; Miquel, 2005; Serna, 2014; Gunckel, 2015).

Those movements not only concern to Hollywood and its emblem city, Los Angeles;⁶ they were a universal phenomenon, and Latin America has a long story to tell about that. As well as Europeans and Latin Americans went to “make America” to the northern country, there were also Latin Americans who moved to Europe, and Europeans installed in Latin America, developing careers or sporadic raids that demonstrated the transnational productivity of cinema.

The historical situation will go hand in hand with those movements, motivated by political affairs, authoritarianism, war processes, or the recognition of the limited opportunities for growth in the place of origin. Specifically, Mexico would receive European migrants (mainly, exiled from the Spanish Civil War), as also Latin Americans, attracted by the possibilities of building a film career. Filmmakers as Spanish Carlos Velo, director of *Torero* (1956) will travel there, or Luis Buñuel, another Spanish who made an extended career in the country, and others less famous as José Díaz Morales, director of one of the films we will study.⁷

Mexican cinema has thus been a bastion in the transfer of Spanish-speaking artists, becoming the most powerful film industry in Latin America during its classic period. These migrants mostly settled in its capital city, that was a center of industrial development. As Francisco Peredo Castro (2011) establishes, artists of different roots arrived in Mexico, such as singers, dancers, screenwriters, directors, and actors, mostly from Spain, Argentina, and Cuba, but also from Colombia, Chile and even the United States. According to Paranaguá (2003), immigration also encouraged the production, distribution, and exhibition businesses, accelerating the industrial growth of Latin American cinemas. The forties were the decade with the greatest reception of Spaniards, because of the arrival of refugees during the conflicts caused by the civil war and the

6 For more references on the incidence of this city of cinema, particularly among Latin Americans, see Horak, Jarvinen and Gunckel (2019).

7 Personalities from other parts of the world also ventured into Mexico, such as the Soviet filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein, who made the unfinished *¡Que viva México!*, or the American Norman Foster, as well as the multinational José Bohr. From other regions of Latin America, not only directors would arrive, —such as the Chilean Tito Davison—, but also actors (the Argentinian Libertad Lamarque, the Puerto Rican Mapy Cortés), or the famous Cuban rumberas Ninón Sevilla and María Antonieta Pons, among others.

Franco regime. Maricruz Castro Ricalde (2014) also highlights this centrality of Mexico for the classic film industry in Latin America, making it an attractor of the main personalities in the region.

In the films studied here, we find these transnational exchanges in the incorporation of a cast of international roots. Specifically in *Palabras de mujer*, the repercussion of Cuba in Mexican cinema is reiterated, represented in the *rumbera*, played by the Cuban dancer Chela Castro, who has a secondary role, but marked by a tradition already installed in musical cinema and in Mexican melodrama. This insular artist had begun her career in her country during the thirties, settling in Mexico in the forties. With her, the Cuban musicians, and their songs, particularly in the first half of the film, seek to capture the public (of the cabaret and of the film itself), in the style of the productions of the Calderón brothers, architects of the so-called *rumberas* cinema, very successful between the forties and fifties.

The *rumbera* conceives a stereotype of foreignness, established in a notorious contrast between two types of women. On the one hand, the Mexican woman –the tragic heroine of this melodrama–, whose talent for singing is assimilated to her moral virtues. In contrast, the unscrupulous *rumbera* played by Castro, –representative of public women in Mexico City nightlife, identified by J. Alberto Cabañas Osorio as a prototype of the “nocturnal woman” (2019, p. 63)–, is linked to sensuality and transgression. In particular, the destructive power of seduction of the Cuban *rumbera* is associated with her talent for moving the hips in the cabaret. Both characters –exploited on “the good-bad woman duality” (Cabañas Osorio, 2019, p. 55)– will cross borders: the first, moved by her sentimental trial; the second, as a migrant that offers, –in her excess and based on the stereotype of tropicality–, a fatal attraction.

On the other hand, in *Maternidad imposible*, the leading role taken by Emilia Guiú, Spanish actress early migrated to Mexico, marks the transnational trade of that production. This Barcelonan arrived at the beginning of the forties with a group of refugees and consolidated a film career in that new place of residence, as it happened with a great number of Spaniards, as filmmakers Miguel Morayta, Luis Alcoriza, Antonio Momplet, José Díaz Morales, and Jaime Salvador.⁸ The exile of Guiú and her fellow citizens will be one of the plot triggers, sharing with her character the migratory experience. The film will involve other Spaniards installed in Mexico, who played secondary roles, especially in the initial scenes located in Spain, as Angelines Fernández, Pin Crespo, –another Barcelonan actress–, Francisco Jambrina and Paco Llopis, who join to the

8 Salvador, in fact, worked, once installed, as a benefactor of Spanish artists, and he gave Guiú the opportunity to progressively enter the cinema.

squad of Europeans that populated Mexican cinema during these years. The urban universe in these fiction films, through the experience of their migrant characters, is thus coordinated to the social and historical events that flooded the cinema industry along these years (Peredo Castro, 2001; Castro-Ricalde, 2014).

2.2 Urban displacements in the narrative structure

A second aspect to be addressed, which also concerns the migratory phenomenon and urban displacement, is precisely its incorporation into the plots. Just as there have been transnational crossings through the circulation of professionals, cinema also exploited the power of foreignness to incorporate it into narratives, revealing many multicultural hybridizations (Elena, 2005). This has been frequent, for example, in classic Argentinian cinema, with films like *Tres anclados en París* (Manuel Romero, 1938) and *La vida es un tango* (Manuel Romero, 1939), examples of a cinema that connected the music of Buenos Aires with the French city of the title. Likewise, Mexican cinema also deployed displacements between one city or another, generating that hybridization that will become noticeable in our corpus.

The representation of cities in cinema, or more specifically, filmed cities (Antoniazzi, 2019), open an understanding of historical processes that have them as a framework, and thus testify about social transformations. As Pierre Sorlin (2001) establishes, cities provide a background to cinema; for this reason, the urban spaces in these films are, initially, an indication of the climate or environment experienced in them. In fact, Álvaro Fernández Reyes (2007), when analyzing the urban culture of modern Mexico, determined that it is marked by a multiplicity of fields, including the economic, the social and the political. However, as Antoniazzi (2019) points out, this testimonial potential does not necessarily imply an assimilation of these representations with reality; there is always a construction: the cinema is installed as an artifact that offers a “partial and fragmentary” gaze (2019, p. 5), marked by the subjectivity of filmmakers. Even the very specificity of cinematographic language is centered on the fragment—in the framing and positioning of the camera—, which will necessarily influence the vision of the filmed space, without forgetting the quintessential (de)fragmenter element of cinema that constitutes editing, whose pieces generate in their assembly, “an effect of ‘cinematic space’, that is, a specific cinematographic reality” (Žižek, 1994, p. 42), which is not necessarily analogous to factual reality.

In this sense, cinema space is not only a platform for staging, a framework to the actions (Martin, 1992); it is a space both aesthetic and narrative: aesthetic, because there is a planning and a

series of expressive procedures;⁹ narrative, as the framing sees its own diegesis emerge in it. Therefore, the city is much more than an environment; it is represented in line with the experiences of its characters, for the way they move through it and live their dramatic conflicts. According to Donald (1999), the modern representation of cities is not the portrayal of a place, but the understanding of an experience, a way of seeing the urban space. Social networks are formed there, that also have the capacity of being narrated. As it is part of the diegetic space, the city is fictionalized and crossed by that internal world of the plot.

Palabras de mujer begins with the arrival of a plane at the airport of Buenos Aires, Argentina, identified by a sign. From the point of view of the representation, the location is appealed as a special framework for the action, although not based on precision, since we can see from the runway a mountain landscape that evidences its filming in the city of Mexico. The journey of Fernando Montiel (Ramón Armengod), a famous *bolero* singer who plays the male lead, occurs on his artistic tours. In addition to using the airplane motif as a migratory emblem, the film executes a series of general shots with landscapes of that capital city, showing prototypical buildings such as the Kavanagh, in the Retiro neighbourhood, as well as the Congress of the Nation and the obelisk, among other recognizable monuments. The circulation of cars and trams is added to them, and functions as a stereotype of the location scenes, giving, in this case, a sense of a cosmopolitan city. The images are accompanied by a musical motif that refers to the tango “Mi Buenos Aires querido”, which crowns the desired setting, as this musical genre is an emblem of nationality, marked by the centralization that identifies it with the city of Buenos Aires.

From the big city, the action moves to the underworld, in the ports where the female main character, Laura Montes (Virginia Serret), earns her living singing after losing her popularity by leaving Mexico, her native country. Despite the new environment, in her clear descent from fame to oblivion, she is not described under the parameters of the nocturnal woman (Cabañas Osorio, 2019), showing a disinterest in breaking the rigid dualistic scheme marked in the contrast with the *rumbera*. That differentiation is also based on the ties between both representations of femininity and the musical genres that they install in the cabaret where they worked in Mexico City: the hot rhythms danced by the *rumbera*, through which she sensually walks the stage inciting the male gaze, contrasts with the melancholic chords of the *boleros* sung by Laura, whose

9 Cinema offers us a mediated space (Gámir Orueta, 2012), determined by an informatic device (and audiovisual in our case), which acts as an intermediary, since it cannot be captured by the senses themselves. The viewer's eyes are the eyes of the camera, and his ears hear only what has been determined from the aural point of view given by the narration.

static figure is bathed in sophistication, inspiring respect, admiration, and the possibilities of economic progress for the nightclub.

The narration approaches the journey that led Fernando and Laura to coincide in that foreign city through a flashback, which begins in the Mexican cabaret where the action had started. The transnationality previously alluded on the industrial aspect of cinema is evident there: Mexicans and Cubans circulate in the cabaret, as well as national artists who have repercussions throughout the continent, marking the circulation of the entertainment business. On the other hand, the singer is located during her stay in Mexico in spaces linked to the notion of transit, in hotels that do not imply a fixed residence or a possibility of anchoring, marked in this instance by the movements of her artistic life. Laura speaks to the audience, praising its chivalry and offering her respect, but later she will say goodbye with deep feelings, to go to South America. Mexico is described in her parliament as the place of her "only illusion", thereby implying this transfer as a sentimental exile, based on the centrality of the *bolero* for this plot, as a sacralizing genre of romance (Castillo Zapata, 1993) and its connection with the roots of her city of origin. The music works as an indicator of the internal experiences of the characters, in an auditory staging of that lost love emphasized by its lyrics, as well as of their belonging to a particular geographical space. As Fernando travels because of his successful career, Laura will do it in the impact of the deterritorialization of a migrant.

Another way in which the city is represented in equivalence with the narrative conflicts is around the love affair between Fernando and Laura. The images of Mexico and its landscapes express the romance, while sightseeing by a lake in the capital. The outdoor space during the day is associated with enjoyment, with a narrative instance free from the conflicts that haunt the characters indoors, such as the cabaret where they work. Under the sunlight, the rides of the lovers are matched with the song that gives the film its title, with orchestral arrangements that highlight the idyllic, albeit temporary, nature of the moment, since these will be one of the few scenes in which the film uses diaphanous lighting.

In this instance of harmony, even when the characters walk through nocturnal exteriors, the gloom of the city is nuanced by the inspiration generated by the full moon's glare, and it is again accompanied by extra-diegetic music that recalls the song written by Fernando, which synthesizes the feeling of that love story. As the characters communicate their emotions, the frames get closer, reaching close-ups. However, the dark lighting stands out both melancholic past and indicates the tragic destiny that awaits them. That melancholy that impregnates the nocturnal city

becomes even more intense when the couple breaks out, for Laura is shown, from a wide shot, disappearing into the mist. As we can see, the dramatic spaces are represented in their symbiosis with the mood of the characters. In Buenos Aires, the nocturnal exteriors will also be full of fog, but this time accompanied by the sound of *tango*, which, like the *bolero* in the scenes in Mexico, reinforces the taciturn tone embedded in the psychology of the lovers, giving a suburb climate to that environment, but also staging the location to that particular city. Music, as Juárez Sedano (2019) establishes, can represent a city; a musical genre can be a territorial referent. Bolero and tango, in this case, are building a place, and specifically, developing the threads of the cities in which these characters are inserted.

The marginal urban spaces have a long tradition in Mexican cinema, especially exploded with the *cabareteras* films, where José Díaz Morales, director of this picture, had great influence.¹⁰ It is also noticeable in the melodrama genre, even with films that preceded or opened the doors to Mexican cinema industrialization, in which the suburbs were already showing, as *El automóvil gris* (Enrique Rosas, Joaquín Coss and Juan Canals de Homs, 1919) and *Santa* (Antonio Moreno, 1931), respectively.¹¹ In the reunion with the singer in Buenos Aires, Fernando wears a hat and an overcoat, that contribute to the “winter” atmosphere of the image, and he is momentarily illuminated by the match that he lights to smoke while he waits for her; all these elements feed that nostalgic imaginary typical of the sound of bandoneon and of that suburb environment. The lighting, always opaque and nebulous, stands the chiaroscuros out, and fleetingly, like the light of that match, illuminates the lovers that resume their relationship, in a hope darkened because of the fatality that soon will seize them again.

On the other hand, the film *Maternidad imposible* also figures the two aspects we have highlighted regarding urban representation. It shows the cities where the action takes place as location frames, and in this specific case as spaces influenced by the historical-social background, the Spanish Civil War. At the same time, it also echoes the characters experiences; the story is seen through the eyes of its protagonists, under the filter of their anguish and joy. From its credits, the film makes a reference to urban space, exposing a still photograph with a series of old buildings. The location will be undefined at that moment, but it will immediately be discovered as a city in Spain, since documentary images of the Civil War are inserted, including

10 See, for example, films like *Perversa* (1946), *Carita de cielo* (1947) —where the Cuban rumbera Ninón Sevilla made her debut—, and *Pecadora* (1947).

11 Argentinian cinema, with its brothel and tango melodramas, also exploited this environment assiduously.

bombings, and the ruins of the buildings affected by the fighting. This will be the environment through which Cristina (Emilia Guiú), will carry out a series of forced displacements, in a desperate search for her little son (Carlitos), lost after a bus accident in the context of that war.

Cristina is in a constant movement, from Spain to Mexico City. Her transfers are promoted by her affections, and she is de-territorialized in such circulation since she does not find a place of belonging after leaving her homeland. That will be a sign of the effect of “existential vulnerability” and “cultural rootlessness” (Hernández i Martín, 2006, p. 95) that implies migration. The environment in which she circulates becomes hostile, in the stigma of the immigrant who cannot be inserted into the new culture, marking that hostility with the fatality of a disease, a consequence of the accident that set the beginning of her misfortunes. Her wanderings from one city to another become a transnational experience between both countries. At the end of her journey, she finally finds, as a consummation of lost affections, the reunion with Spain, to which she returns after locating her son, —adopted by a wealthy Mexican marriage—, and recognizing the impossibility to stay with him because of her social and health condition. Her motherly affection is thus comforted by her adherence to motherland, undertaking a return migration as the closure of her cycle of transfers (Rivero, 2016), and as the culmination of a life that would have already fulfilled its destiny. Therefore, the space of origin is seen as something that orders the de-territorialization suffered by the character, as a vehicle that transports people to the stability lost.

Moving to another country, in this case, Mexico, is described with the same parameters as the previous film: with an image of the sea crossed by the boat that takes Cristina to her new place of residence. After a direct cut, a panoramic view of one of the squares of Mexico’s capital refers us to its great and old buildings. The tour culminates with the exhibition of the famous monument of the Revolution, as a representative building of that city, which functions as a nationality mark, and reflects the centrality of the capitals in the representativeness of a nation. Already in Mexico, the journeys will continue to be a recurring motif, marked this time with the images of the train as a means of transport *par excellence* between one city and another.

Continuing in tune with the conflicts raised in the film, its resolution highlights the inescapable crossing between both countries. The disputed child, although Spanish, will remain living in Mexico with his adoptive parents, Sergio and Leonor. The latter, in view of Cristina’s limitations in leading a dignified life in a foreign country, extols the importance of her own land, encouraging her return as the only way to find a solution to her problem, even when that solution involves her

death; that provokes the patient's nostalgia: "To go back there, to die there". Cristina's final movement will then be to her place of origin, framed in the plane's propellers, this time as an emblem of her return.

With these narratives, we were able to see how geographic mobility from one city (and country) to another generates transformations in the characters. According to Wilfried Raussert, transfers affect the formation of identities, generating "new zones of spatial contact", where "routes increasingly replace roots in an attempt to define the positionality of the person in the world" (2014, p. 136), a world based on a globalization that by the 20th century, where these stories take place, is fully installed. Likewise, citing Doreen Massey, the author contemplates a vision of places or spaces as processes rather than related to the merely physical or territorial. In this way, identities are modified according to "internal conflicts", that is, they are linked "discursively, within consciousness" (2014, p. 143). We can associate this to the notion of transnationality, since there would not be a location that serves as full identification, and therefore, the characters move from one geographical space to another during the narrative plot.

2.3 The cinematographic city and its different scales of territorialization

Finally, the representation of the city in these films not only shows the fundamental role that these figurations have while these narrative conflicts develop but also indicates how the constitution of these territories, in a gradation based on categories such as metropolis/city/ town/underworld, influences in the possibilities of the characters to achieve their dramatic goals. This will lead us to think about the trend toward a (de)centralizing vision of urban spaces.

Cities, as well as other territories on a broader scale such as the nation, are not closed elements; they are in a network with other cities, communities, or nations, preventing us from considering them autonomous (Shohat & Stam, 2002). These exchanges are intimately connected with the movements of the characters, which mark the different degrees of territoriality to which they access, and their implication in the resolution of their conflicts.

Palabras de mujer narrates, at one point in the story, Fernando's success as a singer and composer, showing his presentations in different cities. This sequence includes superimpositions of the artist singing the main song of the film, with newspaper headlines, radio sets, clapping hands, figures of passing trains, and images of urban buildings and public squares. This route shows the transnational exchange generated by artistic tours, reaching Lima (Peru), Santiago de Chile, Havana (Cuba) and Madrid (Spain), until the city of Buenos Aires, in Argentina, where part of the knot of their love conflict will unfold. We see a territorial scale based on intercity transfers,

where the artist echoes in the capital cities of some of the main Latin American countries. The capital is established in that place of centrality, as the seat of professional success, where Fernando is honoured by his public and reaches his fullness as an artist. In that interim, his arrivals and departures are framed by planes taking off and trains in motion.

Another territorial scale is the one that corresponds to the notion of town, on a return trip to his place of origin, where Fernando's ill mother is awaiting him. The journey to that place is synthesized in two elements: a moving train and the suitcase in the singer's hand. Just as Mexico City implied, from a centralized perspective in the capitals, the place where progress can be achieved, the town, is connected to the roots, associated with impossibility and dissatisfaction. The latter is represented in his childhood sweetheart, who awaits him to crown a loveless marriage, based on family mandate and retribution. The wedding is held in "the small little church of the town", an expression that marks in its double diminutive –"small" and "little church"– the marginalized place that is awarded to that space.

In the case of Laura, her career in Buenos Aires derives from an association with the underworld, as an urban space that indicates the social displacement of the singer. However, since her stay in Mexico City, the manager, –who maliciously suffers unrequited love for Laura–, and the *rumbera*, are also attached to that underworld, but guided to illegality, a subsidiary of the dynamics of the big city. Marginalization, from the point of view of urban territories, has had various faces, as undesirable or prohibited areas, "territories of deprivation and abandonment that must be feared, from which one must flee and must therefore avoid as they constitute spotlights of violence, vices and social dissolution" (Wacquant, 2007, p. 13). Its inhabitants are affected, by the psychological atmosphere that these environments cause. In this case, it takes them to a place of relegation, where the big city, the capital, harbours great dangers for those who are not able to face it. That is precisely the case of Cristina in *Maternidad imposible*, forced into unemployment or misery due to her health problems, which incapacitate her. In contrast, the married couple that has adopted her son exercises social privileges that are forbidden for her because of marginality (foreigners, illness, or widowhood). Her impossibility of surviving in the big city in those conditions, as well as her exclusive dedication to the search for the child, are the causes of her social exclusion. That will manifest itself in different ways during the journey she will make throughout the narrative.

From the beginning, Cristina has been in a transit situation; we see her for the first time on the bus from which she plans to move to Barcelona, to settle with her son after her widowhood, a trip

that will be frustrated by the accident. From that very moment, and before each urban space she enters, the narration raises the different possibilities that these places offer to its inhabitants. The town where Cristina lived before becoming a widow, which is not even named, in line with that displacement, did not allow her to advance in that situation of vulnerability. Barcelona is then installed as a growth space for her, because, although it is not the capital city, it did have relevance due to its cosmopolitan transcendence, to its centrality for the Catalan identity –with the multicultural peculiarities of the nation that represents–, and as a recipient, during the times of the Civil War, of a large number of internal migrants who sought possibilities of social insertion.¹² Because of that frustrated trip, Cristina will be forced to migrate to Mexico, specifically the capital city, where she will try hard to reunite with her son, after receiving news of having been transferred by another Spanish refugee. Except for Cristina, these migrants are described in their coupling with the Mexican culture, acquiring the nationality of the country that has received them.

On the other hand, as in *Palabras de mujer*, this film highlights the contrast between the capital city and the outskirts, called in this case "ranches", constituting for Leonor and her husband as places useful to preserve public opinion and the crowd, under the urgency that no one snatches the child they adopted. The capitals, as we said, are always seen as spaces of progress, continuously receiving migratory flows not only from abroad but also internal, in an opposition between the city or town of origin and the urban space to which they migrated. In this way, it is manifested a Manichean construction of spaces, also typical of the sharp division between country/city, so traditional in cinema and literature. In this way, internal, symbolic borders are established, according to the needs of the characters.

That "ranch", that will be the space where Cristina will have to move to support herself, distances her from the possibility of establishing contacts for the search of the child, but at the same time, it is a place of refuge for the married couple who adopted him, who wants to remove him from public view. The field is seen as an inhospitable space, viable for these purposes, but also as an idyllic space (because that is how it is also represented visually). The usual confrontation between the countryside and the city, inherited from the classical tradition, is taken here up again; relating the first area with the virtues of a lost past, in an extremely idealized view contrasted with the mundane life of the city (Williams, 2001). In that place apparently free from corruption (and

12 To know the role of internal migrations during the Spanish Civil War, specifically towards Barcelona, see Burbano Trimiño (2013).

therefore, from danger), the child can grow up “strong and healthy”, a slogan repeated by the couple, in the context of an idea of bourgeois progress. On the other hand, the disease (whether it is Leonor’s sterility or the ailment that afflicts Cristina) is seen as undesirable and as a vehicle for misery or poverty, respectively. Another space associated with marginality is the orphanage in Morelia where Carlitos is adopted, specifically created to house the orphans of the Civil War. It is a transitory place for the boy, but permanent for others exempt from his charisma, as determined by the words of the administrator, loaded with a differentiation between Carlitos and the other pupils. There would be then a division within the very heart of that displaced space, inhabited by those forced migrants.

The transatlantic journey from Spain to Mexico derives in a series of internal movements through different places, characterized by a sort of binary confrontation, marked by the ties that both mothers, the biological and the adoptive, maintain with them. Mexico City has been the facilitator of the social strength of Sergio and Leonor’s marriage, and in turn constitutes the danger of losing the child due to the fears that he would be found; while for Cristina, it represents the option of an encounter with her son, although it also becomes for her a place that plunges her into ever deeper poverty. As Cabañas Osorio establishes, the city shows various faces of Mexican modernity: just as there are industries, cosmopolitization and development (related here to the social context of Sergio and Leonor), there is also the face of “social decomposition translated into poverty, lack of opportunities for improvement and education” (2014, p. 90), aspects that are embodied in Cristina. In the second instance, Morelia will be that transitional space where Carlitos will stop being a refugee to grow up with a family that gives him love and meets his needs. Finally, the field where the marriage migrates constitutes a place of margin; like Cristina after her accident, Sergio and Leonor exile themselves to escape their fears.

3 Conclusions

As we have established from the beginning, urban spaces have had a relevant place, an undisputed leading role in cinema since the very dawn of this art and industry, being its representation one of the recurring motifs in all kinds of genres and registers. As Depetris Chauvin establishes, “the experience of urban life and the new conceptions of time and space fueled the birth of cinema but this, in turn, made it possible to apprehend and reinvent the city” (2019, p. 203), in a feedback that would characterize it over the decades. The fictions films we have analyzed are only a sample of a trend that has characterized not only the production of Mexican cinema, but also the cinematographic repertoire of all Latin America, with which these

films have been connected to a greater or lesser extent, and that encouraged the link between the city and the characters that inhabit it according to their individual experiences.

Cinema captured with its testimonial tendency, in the essence of the "display" that characterizes the cinematographic device (Gaudreault & Jost, 1995), countless territories, among them the filmed cities that serve as a locating framework for the story. However, we understood that all audiovisual productions can extend that functionality, related to the ubiquity of the plot, to the internal space of that narrative universe that is the diegesis. That is why this films not only presented a succession of images that reflect recognizable spaces of capital cities such as Mexico and Buenos Aires, or of certain peripheral territories, –some of them unidentifiable–, but also took advantage of the narrative potential of those spaces, marking with the journeys of the characters the possibilities of concretizing their dramatic objectives.

We can observe this assimilation in the course of Mexican cinematography of its classical-industrial period. That can be particularly seen in other films produced by Calderón brothers, as *Seda, sangre y sol* (Fernando A. Rivero, 1942)¹³ that, as one of the titles we analyzed, connects Spain and Mexico through a common spectacle among both nations, the bullfight. The film is composed of glimpses of Hispanism, based on that specific show, but also in the couplets, guitars, and dances, and in the mestizo religiosity to which the characters entrust. It also uses linguistic expressions typical of the jargon of Spain. Another visible aspect of our corpus, the migration as a constitutive part of the plots, is made clear in another Calderón's title, linked to Hispanic Mexican relationships, *Los amores de un torero* (1945), also directed by José Díaz Morales. The film includes Spanish-style musical numbers, as also Cuban and Mexican, emphasizing transnational exchanges, both from the aspect of industrial manufacture, hiring transnational couples (Aisemberg, 2017) for the commercial expansion of these films in Latin America, and from the imaginary established in the own narration. Finally, in films such as *Socios para la aventura* (Miguel Morayta, 1958) and *Aventura en Río* (Alberto Gout, 1953), the Calderón brothers launched productions based on interurban displacements, using the same principles of transnationality alluded to in this article. We notice, therefore, a production of these topics, reflected in the representation of cities as spaces where multicultural exchanges are promoted, typical of an era of increasing globalization. The filmed city will show, thereby, the diverse streets and landscapes in which the characters, moved by their impulses, will be

13 This film was produced by other Calderón brother, José Luis, not mentioned here.

constantly circulating, and it will be aesthetically re-elaborated according to their instances of nocturnal or daytime ride, based on the plans and moods executed by the characters.

Finally, we highlighted in these films the manifestation of different scales or degrees of territoriality. The capital cities are located in a double impact in their relation with the characters: they can be places for progress and the achievement of the plans that mobilize their actions, as well as threatening spaces, which displace towards marginality those whose experiences are based on a social disadvantage, such as the cases of Laura (marginalized in her sentimental isolation that led her to the artistic decline) and Cristina (forced to return to her homeland, without fully achieving the goal). Likewise, the peripheries of these cities –call them “town” or “ranch”– stand out in these experiences the configuration of the territories according to their positioning, revealing a centralizing mentality in the construction of urban spaces during this classical period: everything that is outside that center is inevitably destined to remain in the margin, without possibilities of insertion.

In one way or another, these filmed cities invest their inhabitants/characters, travelers in the cinematographic space, both framed and traversed by it, in the display of their affectivity, charged with individual experiences around lost loves (the love of a partner, mother’s love), always wrapped in the social imaginary. The film images placed them in the territories in which they have been moving, but also interacting, configuring the internal reality in which the dramatic conflicts unfolded.

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