Chapter 2

Migration, Gender, and Desire in Contemporary Spanish Cinema

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It is widely recognized that the notion of Spanish sociocultural uniformity enforced under Francisco Franco (1939–1975), already undercut by the transition to democracy, has faced new challenges in a wave of immigration that has given added urgency to debates concerning national, regional, and cultural identities as well as geographical borders. While successive governments have attempted to negotiate legal and social parameters to this immigration, the media continually report the attempts of pateras [rafts]—often tragically unsuccessful—to reach the Canary Islands or the peninsula. There are, nonetheless, major discrepancies between popular perceptions and new patterns of immigration. One concerns the dimensions of the phenomenon. Whereas many Spaniards envision an image of Spain under siege, and vulnerable to foreigners, the report produced by the Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración in late 2004 indicates that legal immigrants represent only 4.9 percent of Spain’s population of more than 40 million. By the same token, whereas the popular perception has often been that the largest number of immigrants come from Africa, are black, and work on farms or as street vendors—the presence of such immigrants has been met with a barrage of negative stereotypes—reality appears quite different. A study in the mid 1990s, for instance, concluded that 63 percent of legalized immigrants were white, came from other EU countries, and worked in the service sector (Izquierdo 1996, 279). A second, little appreciated, feature of the recent wave of immigration is the markedly increased prominence of women. New scholarship in this area has begun to improve our understanding of social relationships of inequality, including matters of socio-economic visibility among the immigrant population and issues of gender discrimination for both natives and newcomers. As Carlota Solé and Sònia Parella have shown, since the mid 1980s, migratory flows into Spain have become increasingly female, coming to represent 48.2 percent of all migrants by 1998 (Solé and Parella 2003, 61). Among them, women from Latin America represent the highest percentage; women from the Dominican Republic have been identified as the leading group in female migration to Spain (Gregorio Gil 1998; Izquierdo 1996). This article will focus on depictions of recent female migrants in the context of contemporary Spanish cinema.

The topic of immigration has become an important theme in Spanish filmmaking. Cartas de Alou (1990, dir. Montxo Armendáriz) and Bwana (1996, dir. Imanol Uribe) examined the problematic experience of African immigrants in Spain, and each received critical acclaim for addressing the difficulties of socio-economically and culturally displaced subjects, as well as problems of racism and right-wing violence against racial minorities. Peter Evans (1995, 326) echoes critical consensus when he writes that the disappearance of Francisco Franco had the effect of “re-politicizing film language” or, in other words, “to speak the unspeakable, confronting the realities of everyday living, acknowledging the inseparability of art from the frameworks of history and tradition.” This turn meant, on the one hand, the production of numerous films dealing overtly with questions of sexuality and other topics considered taboo during the dictatorship. On the other hand, it also produced films dealing more directly with social and political issues that were in the past avoided or allegorized (Evans 1999, 1–4). For Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas, for instance, if there is one unifying characteristic of this critical gaze, it would be the preoccupation with questions of identity, not only of the individual, but also of groups and communities. Their study of Spanish cinema focuses on the ways it surfaces through the treatment of gender and sexuality (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998, 10–11). In both Cartas de Alou and Bwana, the portrayal of foreigners from racially, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously different backgrounds as an encounter with the “other” revealed an understanding of difference that often relied on existing racial and cultural prejudices. As Isabel Santalla (1999) correctly argues, the representation of the other can be complicated when it fails to recognize the ways in which the very narrative strategies used to convey this otherness are problematic. Many of the recent Spanish films on immigration tend to focus on characters that are visibly distinct from Spaniards (for example, immigrants or refugees.
from North Africa, and lately from Asia) and are, therefore, easily presented as the other. Critics like Santaolalla have fruitfully applied postcolonialist perspectives to understand the remnants of past ideologies and colonialist projects that underpinned and shaped these perceptions (Martin-Cabrera 2000; Molina Gavilán and Di Salvo 2003). For many European countries, as Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith point out (1997, 15), "now that the post-colonial encounter takes place 'at home' in the metropolitan centres," it is important to consider the weight this past exerts in the imagining of national identities. This encounter is not limited to those countries with a formal colonial relationship in the past, as a cursory look into studies on current immigration reveals. The migratory movement from what is generally thought of as the Third World to developed Western countries recalls colonial practice in the way the immigrant is treated and perceived as the other (Kofman 2000). The depiction of female migrants from Latin America in Spanish contemporary cinema, however, reveals a particularly compelling layer to this postcolonial encounter. The familiarity projected by the recently arrived subject becomes a significant element in the representation of her experiences in the metropolis. As natives of Spain's ex-colonies, these women (along with their male counterparts) share a substantial historical, cultural, and linguistic connection, as well as blood relations, with many Spaniards. Compared with the widespread cultural rejection of immigrants from cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds perceived as an "unknown" and as a threat to national homogeneity, issues of difference with Latin American immigrants are consequently more complicated to maneuver. The portrayal of female characters from Latin America in contemporary Spanish films simultaneously blurs and marks difference through a representation sustained by ethnic and racial stereotypes. I will argue in this essay that the use of these stereotypes redraws the boundaries of the cultural and historical legacy of the colonial experience for both Spain and its one-time colonial subjects, while raising questions regarding the understanding of this shared past.

Historically, various forms of nationalism have promoted and depended upon discourses that have invoked different forms of sexuality, and, sometimes, contradictory discourses of gender. Brinker-Gabler and Smith remind us of the different allegories that surround this narrative, from the nationalist fervor sustained by the rhetoric of masculinity under siege to the defeated body of the nation impregnated by the enemy (Brinker-Gabler and Smith 1997, 11–12). This highly sexualized and destiny ridden nationalistic rhetoric is recovered when there are perceived threats to national stability. In this context, what is important to consider are the ways in which "these discourses of nationalism take up and deploy gender ideologies, figures of 'woman,' family likenesses, and sexualized scenarios" and the way they affect immigrant women (Brinker-Gabler and Smith 1997, 15). Thus, the examination of discrimination faced by immigrant women not only contributes to the discussion of difference in relation to the boundaries and strategies of nationalist discourse, but also brings into light its negative consequences within contemporary global female migratory movements.

To navigate the discussion between gendered migration and the legacies of the colonial experience as it affects concepts of the Latin American other within Spanish society, I will focus on three recent films that portray the experience of immigration for women from the Dominican Republic and Cuba. The films in question are Cosas que dejé en La Habana (1998) [Things I Left in Havana], directed by Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, Flores de otro mundo (1999) [Flowers from Another World], directed by Iciar Bollain, and finally, Alfonso Albacete and David Menkes's I Love You Baby (2001). On the one hand, the Latin American characters of these films complicate the notion of otherness, exposing simultaneously their connection to, and rejection by, Spanish society. On the other, these characters, willingly or unwillingly, through the lens of gender and racial discrimination, bring into the present memories of an uneven relationship between the madre patria (motherland) and its ex-colonies. Finally, the love interests that resolve these three films offer a troubling form of assimilationism. The narration that organizes these films, incorporating the new elements into the Spanish social pattern, actively erases marks of "difference" while preserving certain instances of otherness through the use of stereotypes, or what Homi Bhabha (1983, 29) would call a "fetishistic mode of representation" in colonial discourse and its construction of identity.

The currency of stereotypes when representing women immigrants, enhanced by a racialization of the "foreign" female body, is significant when considering existing discourses regarding the role envisioned for female immigrants as cultural intermediaries. This envisioned role, as pointed out by Jacqueline Andall (2003, 3), has played a part in the way some European governments conceived the function of ethnic minority women in their countries as mediators of integration and assimilation of immigrants into their societies. For instance, in France, "crises of national identity and conflicting laws concerning personal status have pushed women to the fore in political debates around issues of the wearing of the headscarf, polygamy and excision. This has been specially charged in a country such as France where women have turned into the 'vectors of integration'" (Kofman 2000, 18). In view of policies formulated from this perspective, it becomes important to study the historical use of con-
cepts such as “culture” in nationalistic projects that have constructed women symbolically as “border guards of ethnic, national and racial difference.” It also becomes pertinent to examine how cultural and racial boundaries become spaces of contestation and negotiation, especially when these discussions can be mediated by “assigning” or “defining” certain roles to and for women (Andall 2003, 3). While discussion of issues of female integration and assimilation of immigrants in Spain is in its earlier stages, it should be of interest to consider the topic of immigrant women in the future treatment of the social and cultural dimension of their experience. In the case of Latin American immigrants, the use of women as spaces of contestation for national identity will have to negotiate issues of gender and race, which will have to take into account the baggage of a shared colonial past.

The use of postcolonial perspective in studying Spanish films is, Isabel Santaolalla suggests, useful for “examining not only the poetics but also the politics governing the representation of ethnic minorities in contemporary Spain, whether or not their presence bears any relation to the country’s remote colonial history” (Santaolalla 1999, 57). Taking a rather different approach, I would like to argue that the value of this critical perspective comes precisely from taking into account the bearing of the country’s colonial history when examining the representation of Latin American immigrants in contemporary Spanish films. Even if Latin America’s colonial past is different from that of other modern colonies where postcolonial theory has been central to the analysis of norms and practices of domination (Alva 1995, 245), its colonial experience triggers specific experiences that complicate gender and racial issues. One instance of this specificity has to do the manner in which the articulation of difference and national identity is expressed in the representation of otherness. For Bhabha (1983, 19), for example, the construction of the colonial subject “demands an articulation of forms of difference, racial and sexual,” which are important differences because they are inscribed in both “the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power.” Despite the historical distance of its colonial experience, the racial and sexual construction of the colonial subject—both biologically and discursively—was part of Spanish colonial history, in which mestizaje (or miscegenation) was widely practiced and later regulated. In addition, if we consider the fundamental linguistic and cultural similarities between Spain and Latin American countries, heralded by some modern Spanish politicians and intellectuals under the rhetoric of hispanidad—replacing imperial hegemony for a cultural one (Labanyi 2000, 63)—the contestation of cultural and national boundaries is no longer a simple affair. From this perspective, the currency of stereotypes in the representation of Latin American women in contemporary Spanish films examined in this essay reveals the permanence of the prior construction of a colonial subject aided by a gendered discourse.

A quick review of the plots of the three films mentioned earlier reveals the common thread that runs through them. Marisol, one of the main characters of I Love You Baby, is a Dominican immigrant living and working as a domestic help in Madrid. Her is the typical case of the immigrant who has left her native country in search of better opportunities. Her story intersects with the ongoing romance between Daniel and Marcos, a Spaniard who has recently arrived in Madrid from his small village. This relationship is changed one night by a falling disco ball at a karaoke bar. As a consequence of the concussion he receives, Marcos becomes heterosexual and is responsive to the romantic advances of Marisol. Meanwhile, Daniel decides to disguise himself as a woman to seduce again his ex-lover. The situational comedy that ensues from these circumstances evolves into a discussion about sexuality, moral principles, and attainable relationships, ending with Marco’s choosing of Marisol as his life partner. The topic of love relationships finds a similar treatment in the box office hit Cosas que dejé en La Habana. Three Cuban sisters, who have just arrived in Madrid in search of better economic and professional opportunities, find themselves at the mercy of their aunt Maria, who wants to save her struggling small business with their help. Part of her plan is an arranged marriage between the oldest sister and the homosexual son of Maria’s business supplier. To keep up appearances, the mother wants to find a wife that might play the role of a traditional good Spanish wife for her son, Javier. However, he expresses his desire to marry the youngest of the sisters who, in turn, has fallen in love with Igor, another Cuban immigrant. When the marriage agreement falls through, the second sister, Ludmila de la Caridad, meets with Javier and is able to bring back the marriage proposal back to the table by turning him away from his homosexuality. Similarly, the forging of romantic ties between female immigrants and Spaniards—amid the harsh realities of the experience of immigration—is also explored by Iciar Bollaín in the critically acclaimed Flores de otro mundo. Based on the “Caravana de mujeres” (Caravan of Women) or “Caravana del amor” (Love Caravan), organized by single men from isolated Spanish farming villages who charter buses to invite single women to meet them, the film follows the story of a Dominican woman (Patricia) who marries a Spanish farmer (Damián) after one of these visits. Her story is narrated alongside that of a young Cuban woman, Milady, who has been chosen by one of the villagers, Carmelo, who rejects modernized Spanish women and seeks in the island his ideal sexual and life partner. The story of both women contrasts that of Marirrosi,
a divorcée from Bilbao, who has also come with the caravan and starts a relationship with another resident, Alfonso. Despite the latter’s failure in her relationship, her easy acceptance by the villagers highlights the struggles of both Patricia and Milady, who must fight to find their place as outsiders to both the village and the country.

The narratives that sustain these relationships are problematic in their propositions. First, the apparent ease with which the female characters (especially Marisol in *I Love You Baby* and Ludmila in *Cosas que dejé en La Habana*) are socially accepted and integrated into Spanish society contradicts the reality of the female immigrant experience. In most of the cases, immigrant women come from “Third World” locations that in terms of both geography and ethnoculture are already disadvantaged. This situation makes them vulnerable and their work is generally characterized by marginalization and invisibility in regard to labor hierarchy and social organization. Their marginalization perpetuates an uneven and gendered distribution of labor that increases the invisibility of migrant women, who are limited to jobs such as domestic service, cleaning services, and caring for the sick (Solé and Parella 2003, 63–65). Even if their disadvantaged situation is portrayed in the films through the hardships of the female characters, the relative facility with which these women are allowed to change their precarious social and financial position through romantic relationships undermines the hard reality of their situation. Second, a stereotypical discourse permeates the characterization of these female immigrants in the films, in terms of ethnically gendered and racialized difference. Finally, the conventional heterosexual narrative advanced in these films counteracts the reality of sexual liberation undergone in democratic Spain. The exploration of sex and sexual identity, which played a major role in the early films after the end of the dictatorship, and for which Spanish film was widely praised, gives way in these films to a narrative in which sexual desire, even if it overrides boundaries of both gender and orientation, ends up reinstating and sanctioning heterosexual social organization.13

In all three films, the leading female characters who find heterosexual love, stability, and eventual social acceptance in the arms of Spaniards are portrayed with specific physical and moral virtues. While these merits, easily identifiable, will not help them achieve success either financially or professionally in their new country, they will help them attain quick social acceptance and stability through personal relationships. In Gutiérrez Aragón’s film, for instance, the aunt of the Cuban sisters describes her eldest niece Rosa as being nice, responsible, obedient, and self-sacrificing. These traits are desirable to the aunt’s business provider, who wants to arrange a marriage for her homosexual son, Javier, to keep up appearances. This ideal recovers a traditional view of women in Spain and their role as spouses and mothers—recalling the traits promoted by National Catholic ideology under Franco’s dictatorship—for which the newcomer seems better suited than the modernized (and liberated) Spanish woman (Morcillo Gómez 1999, 51–52). Even when Rosa is turned down by Javier, she is quickly replaced by her sister Ludmila, who, in addition to the same virtues that her older sister possesses, is young, physically attractive, and sexy. Her womanly qualities are so strong that she is even able to convert Javier from his homosexuality during a brief but sexually charged encounter. This sexual conversion also appears in the movie *I Love You Baby*, where the male protagonist, Marcos, who first seems to respond to Marisol’s advances only as a consequence of his accident with a falling karaoke disco ball, chooses her at the end as his partner over his lover Daniel, because of her virtues. Besides her physical charms, Marisol is a hardworking woman, with strong family values and dedication to her man, and she is also more culturally compatible with Marcos (like him, she loves football while Daniel prefers modern dance). These supposedly positive traits, both moral and physical, also appear in Bollain’s film. One of the main characters, Patricia, struggles to be accepted. While her physical attributes help her to quickly establish a relationship with her husband, she is ultimately only successful in her new life for the effort and sacrifice she makes to provide for her kids and her family. Despite her initial rejection, Damián’s mother learns to appreciate her daughter-in-law for the love she demonstrates for her children, her selflessness, and hard work. And at the end, it is the mother who will encourage her son to keep his new family together.

The stereotypes through which the virtues of these female immigrants are portrayed in these films offer an opportunity, moving beyond the mere identification of positive or negative representation of these characters, to analyze the way the subject of the immigrant is constructed. As Homi Bhabha (1983, 18) has proposed, the study of stereotypes should focus on the “processes of subjectification that is made possible (and plausible)” by them: in other words, how the articulation of difference through stereotypes reflects the way the subject is perceived, varying depending on the power position he/she occupies. From this perspective, Barbara Creed points out how postcolonial theory in film shifts from the study of “flawed” or “negative” images to understand “the filmic construction of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, the flow of power between the two, the part played by gender differences and the positioning of the spectator in relation to such representations” (Creed 2000, 85–86). Rey Chow explains that this “positioning” is favored in films because film narratives offer identity construction and influence
the formation of subjectivity through their narration and technique (i.e., montage, panoramic shots, close-ups, etc.). The processes of introjection, projection or rejection that happens between the images and the narration of the film intersects with the "audiences' sense of self, place, history and pleasure" that reveals how "the fantasies, memories, and other unconscious experiences, as well as the gender roles imposed by the dominant culture at large, play important roles in mediating the impact of the spectacle" (Chow 2000, 168). Put differently, this intersection between the film's narrative and its reception by the audience hints at the ways in which one is rejected or resonates within the other, in the process of constructing or affirming existing identities.

The role of spectacle (or the nature of the screen/spectator relationship) in the process of identification and the formation of a subject, analyzed through psychoanalytical approaches and its emphasis on desire, is revisited by Homi Bhabha in order to reflect on colonial discourse and its ideological construction of otherness. He is interested in the ambivalence of stereotypes since it is what gives it currency, ensuring its continuity amid historical and discursive changes, informing its "strategies of individuation and marginalisation," producing the "effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed" (Chow 2000, 168). Bhabha (1983, 27) expands on this idea to establish a functional relationship between stereotypical discourse and fetishism, in which both rely on the contradictory play between the recognition of absence/presence that simultaneously recognizes difference while it disavows it. This play is constantly put into practice because it reactivates a primal fantasy, which in the case of colonial discourse, always returns to an "ideal ego that is white and whole." For this critic, this ideal that often refers to notions of origin as well as national unity or identity, depends on the visual and auditory imaginary as they work as sites of subjectification (through identification) where histories of societies are created and preserved. From this perspective, films as well as other cultural practices that rely on a scopic drive—they are there to see and to be seen—are important in sustaining structures of power. In the case of colonial discourse, they work on a double identification where the stereotype, "as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it" (Bhabha 1983, 29).

Homi Bhabha's reading of the purpose of stereotypical discourse and its efficiency in a visual medium reveals how the construction of the female characters in these three Spanish films can affect native audiences and the way they see the newcomers and themselves. What becomes clear is that the women immigrants appearing in these films are fragmented in different ways, which on the one hand create positive and thus acceptable identities, but on the other, expose them as outsiders and keep them marginalized from the local community. From this perspective, while it is obvious through the narrative of the films that what allows acceptance of these immigrant women is the similarity they share with other Spaniards, they are simultaneously portrayed through their differences. The visualization that keeps these women marginalized at the same time places the real success of their assimilation in question. The gaze that allows recognition of difference keeps them visualized through their particularities, despite the narrative effort to individualize their stories. In other words, despite the success of the female characters in assimilating to their new culture, they are always introduced in the film in scenarios and spaces explicitly differentiated by clichés associated with their place of origin.

From the very beginning of I Love You Baby, Marisol appears in marginalized social settings clearly intended for and attended by immigrants, whose presence always seems to trigger a salsa rhythm somewhere in the film soundtrack. In these places, like the beauty parlor or the small bar that she frequents, Marisol's friends appear as loud, physically large, colorfully or skimpily dressed, highlighting their foreignness with their accent, speech, and their interaction with each other. This visual marginalization also happens in the opening shots of Flores de otro mundo, which show Patricia and her friends laughing and speaking loudly while riding in the back of the bus to the village. Their behavior is looked upon suspiciously by the rest of the Spanish women who ride in the front of the bus and, one of them, at one point, comments with a hand gesture how the country is full of "them." These scenes effectively project the visual difference that exists between immigrants and natives—the camera lumps them all together, visualizing difference, ignoring the diversity that exists within the first group. That is, the easily recognizable and seemingly harmless stereotypes that are used in the films, such as the salsa rhythm, specific social settings or cultural behavior, reduces the immigrants to a collective without any distinctions, asserting quickly identifiable characterizations that also work to emphasize their foreignness in opposition to the native community and its own identity. When the three sisters in Cosas que dejé en La Habana are taken to a salsa dancing club on their first night out in their new country, their presence in the club does not serve as a space of meaningful interaction with the natives. Instead, the sisters, along with other immigrants, are showcased in the club to accentuate their palatable and colorful presence within Spanish society. Indeed, the Spaniards who patronize this social establishment engage willingly in a voyeuristic experience, with displayed exoticism as just another object of consumption. While the flaunting of visual and
aural difference in these films work to make it more easily digestible or to distinguish one group from another, it is also symptomatic of uneven power relationships. Understanding or being conscious and accepting of diversity is one thing, but it is another when this difference is perceived to threaten existing social hierarchies. It is telling how, during the failed marriage agreement, even if Rosa is welcomed for her traditional Spanish womanly qualities—being responsible, docile, self-sacrificing—Javier’s mother is quick to pull a prenuptial agreement that reminds both her and the viewer the precarious reality of her situation. As Bhabha (1983, 33–34) points out, the use of stereotypes is not just creating false images that can be exploited to justify discrimination. It serves as an “ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of “official” and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities” that reveal the workings of a discourse based on discrimination.

In addition to the focus of these films on ethnic gender stereotypes when portraying Latin American immigrants, there is also a clear emphasis on the visualization of racial difference in the shots that capture both immigrants and natives. Curiously, the question of racial difference in Latin American immigrants is only once explicitly addressed by one of the female protagonists. But as stereotypes are sustained by racial discourse, the subject cannot be ignored, especially when, as Sheelagh Ellwood documents, many Latin American immigrants are victims of racially motivated hate crimes, as are the immigrants from North Africa (Ellwood 1995, 154–155). In Bollain’s movie, it is difficult not to perceive the difference between Milady and Patricia, and between them both and the rest of the village, in racial terms. Even if the priorities between both women are clearly distinguished—Patricia is ready for financial and emotional stability for herself and her children and is willing to work hard while Milady wants to explore the world—the sexualized portrayal of the Cuban woman through her blackness dominates any narrative that surrounds her character. If Patricia is given the chance to demonstrate to her mother-in-law, her new husband, and the villagers that she has the right values and the right mindset to make her life successful in Spanish society, Milady is only further alienated by the way the film exploits her distinctiveness through the sexual and racial stereotypes applied to Caribbean women.

In her influential essay about cinematic gaze, Laura Mulvey (1990, 33–35) has argued that its construction of the viewer reflects the predominant social structures of gender and sexual desire. Her discussion of women in film as a passive and manipulated object of the voyeuristic gaze of the camera that adopts a “masculine” position drew much controversy about the agency of female spectators (Creed 2000, 81–82). The predominance of a male gaze is clearly present in Flores de otro mundo, where the portrayal of Milady focuses heavily on her sexuality, both in terms of her gender and race, overshadowing any attempt to understand her situation: the reason she left the island, her loneliness, or her desire. Her display as a sexual trophy, through close-ups and long shots that follow the gaze of the village men that never stops sexualizing her, hides the story of Milady’s adversities. What drives her representation is her sexuality through a masculine gaze that vacillates between fear and fascination, with comments about her untamed sexuality (Martín-Cabrera 2000, 50–51; Cami-Vela 2000a, 180–183). The persistence of this male gaze in the film, despite the fact that it is directed by a woman, seems to attest to one of Mulvey’s more widely debated observations, where she identifies female desire as adopting a “masculine position” as result of internalizing predominant sociocultural structures. Iciar Bollain has expressed her pride that the film was made without exploiting any female body part; there is no explicit nudity in the film (Cami-Vela 2000b, 238–239). The male gaze that guides the director’s camera work is explained in her own mind by her desire to document the natural reaction of the villagers where the movie was shot. She believes that the way the male characters talk and view Milady is authentic, and therefore good. The director even talks about “authenticity” in the context of the fact that the casting of the actress who plays Milady (Marilyn Torres) was done in Cuba to make the movie more “real.” Unfortunately, the director never questions the old men’s racialized sexual bias that their gaze and dialogue reveal. The male gaze that objectifies Milady, and which the director reproduces as a way to offer an authentic view, ultimately serves only to enforce racial and sexual prejudice. The lack of awareness from the director’s part is indicative of the complexity of reading difference for Spaniards when it comes to Latin Americans. It is interesting that the characters in her film, as racial minorities, appear to be more conscious of the role played by racial difference in the experience of immigration to Spain. When Milady talks about her original plans—first coming to see the village and then deciding whether or not to stay and marry Carmelo—Patricia reveals the reality of their situation: “That works if you’re white and the police don’t stop you in the street.” While it is true that Milady takes advantage of the village men and manipulates them into offering her what she desires, the fact that she cannot be seen as anything but a sexual object undermines any effort on her part to adjust or improve her social standing in the village. Her departure from Santa Eulalia does not guarantee a better outcome and in fact, her future remains pessimisti-
cally uncertain at the end of the film. Ultimately, Bollain’s film still assumes a particular view of gender and racial qualities that serves the ideal of the predominant culture, whereby once immigrant women display certain acceptable virtues, they are easily integrated to maintain existing social and gender hierarchies.

The proposition advanced in the plot line of all three films is that for their female immigrant characters, their opportunity for success comes through their personal relationships, as long as they possess certain attributes that identify them as ideal cohorts in a heterosexual partnership within the dominant society. The implication of this success is, of course, that these characters will be kept within the sphere of domesticity. Interestingly, the issue of gendered social space that arises from this narrative contrasts with the development seen in women’s social roles after the end of the dictatorship. The changes experienced by women in post-Franco Spain have transformed their socioeconomic status and have deeply impacted their traditional ideal of female social passivity (Brooksbank Jones 1995, 387). The increased cultural presence and profile of Spanish women is well reflected in the country’s contemporary cinema, where they are represented as complex, multidimensional, and thinking subjects. But as Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas point out, their visibility hinges on class, professional category, and financial dependence, ignoring the complexity of social reality (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998, 127–128). Patriarchal values and traditional expectations about the role of women in society still persist in lower social classes, and according to Solé and Parella (2003, 69), the situation of employment of migrant women in domestic services reveals the prejudice whereby immigrant women are seen as being capable of performing only “female” tasks. Stereotypes and prejudices intrinsic to the dominant belief system see these women as “traditional” and “underdeveloped” (in contrast to modern and emancipated European women). They “reinforce to an even greater degree the discrimination . . . turning them into ideal candidates for carrying out tasks related to social reproduction, due to their ‘docile’ nature, their ‘patience’ and their submissiveness.”

The love interests that organize all three films also allude to a changed relationship between Spanish men and Spanish women and to the breakdown of a traditional, and desirable, social organization. The three Spanish women that appear in the films—Daniel’s best friend Carmen, María’s friend Azucena, and Alfonso’s girlfriend Marirrosi—are middle-aged women who have failed in their love life and are longing for a cure to their loneliness. When Carmen talks about her romantic misfortunes, she implies that her sexual freedom has prevented her from committing to long-term relationships and has led her down the path of a sterile existence. Her last resort for companionship is adoption, for which she travels to Russia and brings back two orphan brothers. For her part, Azucena is quick to let Igor, a Cuban immigrant, into her bed and her life, clinging to an idealized relationship with a passionate Latin lover, one who satisfies her imagination by providing her with forged pictures of himself with Fidel Castro and other stereotyped images of the island’s revolution. In the case of Marirrosi, even if she is able to briefly find romance with Alfonso, she is unwilling to give up her job and her lifestyle to go join her boyfriend in his village. Even if his refusal to move to the city with her can be seen as egotistic, it is arguably Marirrosi who is portrayed as selfish. After all, Alfonso left the city and has found his vocation living in the village, happily working for its improvement and missing one thing only: a romantic relationship. She, on the other hand, hates her job and her single life in Bilbao, but cannot let go of her urban way of life. In contrast to all these women, the loving and family oriented immigrant characters seem to better fulfill the ideal for a life or love companion. This contrast of values presented in the films, given the successful relationship between immigrant women and Spanish men, suggests an aspiration to social harmony and the preservation of traditional values. It could also be read as indicative of a trend observed by critics of Spanish cinema like Marsha Kinder (1997, 23), who has noted that after the end of the socialist government in the 1990s, the new films speak to a “growing disillusionment with the libertarian ethos and an attempt to recuperate conservative traditions.”

The return to conventionality is also seen in the treatment of homosexuality in the films Cosas que dejé en La Habana and I Love You Baby, where their male protagonists are ultimately denied any sexual identity that is not heterosexual. The apparent fluid treatment of sexuality in these films, reminiscent of the early post-Franco movida, serves to return desire within the traditional and predominant heterosexual structure: Marcos’s sexual orientation is nothing but the consequence of his ambivalence induced by the novelty of the big city, and Javier’s homosexuality is the result of a childhood trauma, after having seen his mother naked. The way in which homosexuality is presented in both films, either as a lifestyle choice or a mental sickness, becomes even more problematic when we consider how these two Spaniards are “sexually converted.” They are changed when two Caribbean women, both with overflowing exotic sensuality and the right family values, are able to turn them from being two emasculated male characters—shy, effeminate, weak, quiet—into “real” men reinserting them into the traditional heterosexual social hierarchy. The sexual explosion that followed the end of the dictatorship and which had brought new visibility and an important political moment for homo-
sexuals seems to be challenged in these films. The sexual freedom of post-Francoism is alluded to in the movie I Love You Baby when Daniel, on his first date with Marcos, wants to kiss him in a park in broad daylight. Marcos reacts with surprise and asks “Right now? In public?” to which Daniel responds: “This is Madrid.” But this freedom does not carry much meaning in the film, as Marco’s happiness does not depend on having the chance to explore his sexuality but rather, as his uncle keeps urging him, in finding the right woman. This conservatism is less surprising than it might seem, taking into consideration that, politically speaking, the freedom enjoyed by Marcos and Daniel to display their affection publicly did not amount to any significant advance in Spanish homosexual rights for a long period after the end of the dictatorship (Garlinger 2003, 83–88). In legal terms, the Ley de Peligrosidad Social y Rehabilitación (Law against Social Danger and Rehabilitation) was not repealed until 1979, four years after the death of Franco. Even after that, its prohibition was exerted through the “figura de escándalo público” (public scandal), an ambiguous legal category used to police Spanish homosexuals. The conservative backlash in the 1990s observed by Kinder seems appropriate to explain the return in these films of the predominance of heterosexual social order and the longstanding discrimination against homosexuality normalized under Francoism. While the recent return of the socialists to the government has meant that concrete progress has been achieved in terms of legislation to promote equal rights for homosexuals, the existence of biased heterosexual perceptions like those narrated in the three films raises questions regarding the existing social tolerance toward different sexual identities.

In none of the three films, once the love interests are identified and engaged, is there any reference to the possibility of conflict between the female and male characters in terms of cultural or class differences. (The tribulation faced by Patricia and Damián because of the woman’s lies to cover her past, for instance, never challenge the cultural or social compatibility between them). Gutiérrez Aragón, speaking about his film Cosas que dejó en La Habana and its commercial success, has reasoned that Spanish filmmakers, despite the increasing number of immigrants in Spain, do not make more movies about them because many of the immigrants, including those from Cuba, are not perceived as foreigners. In this line of thinking, many Spaniards have blood relations with the people from the island and everybody feels like a big family. This assumed kinship seems to be the basic principle shaping the view that even when the portrayal of immigrants is anchored in their differences, the eventual integration into the host society by characters such as Marisol and Ludmila will not be a struggle. Or as in the case of Patricia, any obstacle can be overcome by determination and hard work. The success of this assimilation is, in fact, reaffirmed in the last scenes shown in all the movies: the wedding between Ludmila and Javier with the blessing of their families; Marisol and Marcos after five years of marriage with three kids and a fourth one on its way, a successful family restaurant, and yearly visits to relatives in the Dominican Republic; the picture of Patricia’s new family at her daughter’s first communion.

In light of Homi Bhabha’s articulation of the ambivalence of stereotypical discourse and the way it speaks to existing colonial power relations, these films acquire more complexity. Bhabha refers to the effectivenes of the use of stereotypes within colonial discourse through visual and aural contexts, constantly enacting a primal fantasy, an idea of origin that may be linked to national identities in order to preserve structures of power. By extension, one could argue that the currency of stereotypes can be explained in relation to their allusion to ideals of a hegemonic past that still weighs heavily in the perception of an idealized national identity. The permanence of power relations related to colonial domination, despite its historical distance, can nevertheless be traced in a romanticized view of a past national hegemony. The relationship between Spain and its former colonies continued for many centuries to reveal the workings of a deeply embedded relationship of subordination. Those responsible for the process of nation building in the New World never ceased to look to the West (and to Spain) to replicate social establishments and cultural values in the belief that this model would bring progress in the newly created nations (Lander 2003, 13). This conviction intersected with the racial policy of the new governments, which saw in the arrival of white immigrants from Europe a desirable social composition. As Jo Labanyi (2000, 57) writes: “Miscegenation was thus regarded as ‘normal’ or even, with the influence of Darwinist theory in the post-independence period, as a way of ‘improving the stock.’” The continuance of the rhetoric of the hispanidad today, an ideological bridge between Spanish-speaking countries, continues in similar fashion to locate Spain at the cultural forefront. When considering the presence of Latin Americans in Spain, then, it seems essential to examine how the discrimination between the immigrant population and the natives—in terms of labor, socioeconomic, and cultural relations—becomes reminiscent of past colonial relationships of subordination. The visually identified positive traits that make Latin American immigrants appear less foreign than other newcomers—in terms of language, culture, religious beliefs, etc.—recover a colonial gaze that remains a relationship based on either assimilation or discrimination. This dual idea of familiarity and estrangement is clear in the very opening of the film Cosas que dejó en La Habana. Bárbaro, who
arrives in Spain with his family to pick up the false passports that will allow him to enter the US, when confronted with the possibility of having been swindled, starts arguing with his wife, who asks him: “And now? What are you going to do with your daughter in a foreign country?” To which he snaps back: “Shut the fuck up. This is not a foreign country. This is the motherland (madre patria).” To this statement, his friend Igor responds with an expletive while he takes Bárbaro and his family out of the airport as soon as he sees the guards patrolling the airport asking for documentation. From this scene, the viewer realizes that the familiar motherland has become for them nothing more than, as Igor says, “the puta madre who gave birth to us.” The hardships experienced by Igor and his friends in the film are testament to this changed relationship.

In these films, then, the narrative surrounding cultural affinity proposes a seamless integration into Spanish society and the eventual erasure of any marks of ethnic diversity, while at the same time hinging its representation on the visual difference between the newcomers and the local inhabitants. For instance, in Cosas que dejé en La Habana, the aunt, María, has lost her Cuban accent, changed her eating habits, and modified her manners to conform to the etiquette of her new country. But this transformation is problematic in the way it undermines her nieces, who are constantly being reminded about their bad manners. The message about the unruliness and disorder from the island is repeatedly compared to the operative ethics of a “civilized” society. When the aunt is seen hungrily devouring a Cuban dish made by one of her nieces in the middle of the night, her need to hide her craving speaks to the pressure of assimilation, apparently indicating that successful integration can occur only at the expense of turning away from one’s own tradition. Equally, the happy family portraits and situations that end each film project a sense of unity deriving from having overcome issues of difference. However, what this resolution communicates is that this understanding emerges, not only because of the realization from both immigrant and native groups that they share many similarities, but also as a result of the women’s recognition that they will not change, but only reinforce, existing social and cultural hierarchies. The rhetoric of acceptance for female immigrants happens only within the frame of socially acceptable arrangements. In the case of Nena, the youngest sister of Cosas que dejé en La Habana for example, the desire to pursue an acting career complicates her life and highlights her difficulties as an immigrant in Spain. At the end, she is unable to overcome bureaucracy with her talent only and has to work under a fake identity using falsified documentation. What the visualization of all the immigrant women in these films guarantees is that, despite their differences, they will help preserve the predominant social organization and its traditional ideals. From this perspective, these films do not explore the complexity of immigration but rather simplify its experience, projecting an idealized reality that never acknowledges the possibility of diversity, only its assimilation.

In the last scene of I Love You Baby, Marcos and a very pregnant Marisol, accompanied by their three children, bump into Daniel in the airport. As they exchange greetings, the spectator finds out that the latter has become a big movie star. As the camera zooms in, the tension between the characters becomes noticeable. Marisol is not very comfortable facing Daniel, who seems not to have totally forgotten his ex-lover. Marcos, for his part, looks at him with affection, and the viewer cannot but wonder about his heterosexual conversion. When Daniel’s travel (and presumably sentimental) companion shows up—Boy George, the English pop star who, early in the film, Daniel and Marcos had made the witness of their relationship and the “saint” of all things gay—the viewer understands how different Marcos and Daniel’s lives are and will be. Marcos will remain with his family, his children and his wife. He will stay in Madrid and live a traditional life. Daniel, who has embraced his homosexuality, ends up leaving Spain and now resides in London. His career and sexual orientation suggest he is no longer compatible with Spanish culture. After all, everybody surrounding Daniel has chosen a more traditional path: Marcos married Marisol, and Carmen, his best friend, adopted two kids and has now embraced her role as a mother. Daniel no longer seems to fit in this social organization, and by extension, in Madrid. The social organization portrayed in I Love You Baby—and repeated in the other two films—returns to a basic conception of heterosexual relationships anchoring the plot line. The reality of female immigration finds a narration that erases hardship while advancing a traditional narrative of romantic solutions. This narrative raises several important questions regarding the interaction between Spaniards and Latin Americans, recreating the unevenness of past interactions while projecting a social and national imaginary that becomes problematically assimilistic. This social organization evoked in the films seems to return Spain to its previous, coherent, and unified national identity. It is significant that Spain’s own cultural and linguistic difference is never addressed, visually or verbally, conveying an idea of homogeneity whereby the only differences are those that can be visibly exposed in foreigners. As the number of immigrants grows and the fight for regional autonomy intensifies, it will be interesting to follow the ways in which certain differences will be preserved in Spain, while others will be pushed toward assimilation, and the way these negotiations will shape the future of Spain’s national identity.
Notes

1. Upon joining the European Union and signing the Schengen agreement in 1991, Spain effectively became part of “fortress Europe” and took on the role of protecting its southern borders.

2. 1,977,291 legal immigrants, out of a population of more than 40 million (extranjeros con tarjeta).

3. The visibility of immigrants from Africa in media outlets and the existing rhetoric about immigration have resulted, observes Izquierdo, in the racialization of the immigrant population (1996, 281). African immigration, despite having increased in the past decade, is still smaller than those of European countries or Latin America.

4. The increase in female migration is a global phenomenon. An overview of studies in this area, and a useful bibliography, can be found in Kofman (2000).

5. Their data comes from the 1999 OPI (Observatorio permanente de la inmigración) report.

6. Cartas de Alou was nominated for eight Goya Awards (the Spanish national film award) and won two for Best Screenplay and Best Cinematography in 1991. It also won prizes at the San Sebastián International Film Festival and the Spanish Cinema Writers Circle Awards. Uribé’s film was nominated for three Goyas in 1997 and won prizes at the San Sebastián International Film Festival and the Miami Hispanic Film Festival in 1996. Other films addressing ethnic issues in the Spanish context include Lejos de Africa (1996, dir. Cecilia M. Bartolomé); Taxi (1996, dir. Carlos Saura); La sal de la vida (1996, dir. Eugenio Martín); En la puta calle (1997, dir. Enrique Gabriel); La fuente amarilla (1998, dir. Miguel Santesmases); Sátir (1999, dir. Llorenç Soler); En construcción (2001, dir. José Luis Guerín); and Salvajes (2001, dir. Carlos Molinero).

7. The centrality of identity, as well as the treatment of the past, gender, and sexuality in post-Franco Spanish cinema, is also observed in the works of Marsha Kinder, Kathleen Vernon, and Paul Julian Smith, among others.


9. Cosas que dejé en La Habana was nominated for a Goya Award and won at the Valladolid International Film Award. Bollain’s film achieved greater critical recognition, including wins at the Cannes Film Festival and the Bordeaux International Festival of Women Cinema. i Love You Baby has had only one nomination (from the Torino International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival), but has a wider distribution.

10. I refer to this controversial essay because it takes as its starting point similarities between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of fundamental tenets of sociopolitical organization.

11. Labanyi documents how the Franco regime encouraged the export of Spanish films to Spanish America as a way to emphasize the country’s cultural hegemony. The philosophical underpinning of this concept is laid out in Maetz (1935).

12. The complexity of this relationship, however, seems to go undetected in contemporary Spanish discourse. Isabel Santaolalla (2002, 65) notes, for example, that in Spain, the growing number of immigrants from the Caribbean has resulted in the exoticization of black Latin Americans in media outlets as dark-skinned, voluptuous females. But while the conversion of Latin Americans into “exotic” material is part of the increasing international visibility of Latino culture, the “almost total indifference to the rules of political correctness in Spain... means that the stereotypical connection between the exotic, racialised body and the exotic... circulates practically unexamined and uncriticised.”

13. Paul Julian Smith (2000, 3) writes that the fluid treatment of sexuality in post-Franco Spanish film, with its critique of identity and essence in terms of sexuality, as it appears in Almodóvar’s films, would later become part of academic feminist, minority, and queer theory debates.

14. Given the reality of racism in Spain, the lack of awareness of racial discrimination faced by Latin American immigrants is surprising. An example of this apparent oversight is Bollain’s reaction to the comment made by Marilyn Torres, who plays the role of Milady. Torres made the comment that the actress realized she was black in Spain because the way people stared at her. The filmmaker quickly corrects her experience with the situation of being an attractive woman and people’s perception of difference without ever considering the particularities of Torres’s experience as a black woman from Latin America in Spain (Carrive 2000, 240).

15. One important aspect of this division of labor is that the social shift, which moved Spanish women to work outside of their homes, did not change the dynamics of housework (i.e., men in the house taking more responsibility for house chores, etc.). What it created was a perceived need for domestic help; in this case, from immigrant women who came to fulfil and replace the traditional role played by native women.

16. Or, as she writes, “it also makes us reconsider the moral price Spain paid for replacing matadors and militiants with hookers and dopers as the nation’s privileged cultural icons” (Kinder 1997, 20).

17. Garfinter explains that “the lack of a strong political movement for gay liberation in Spain is often interpreted in a positive light as a self-conscious refusal of identity politics by Spanish gays and lesbians” (2003, 85). Critics even praised this rejection and thought that the sexual fluidity implied in this dismissal would mean an advance in homosexual identity politics. But as he quickly clarifies, this sexual revolution, politically or socially, never happened in post-Franco Spain as it was perceived, and the truth was that the existing sexual tolerance was only superficial (2003, 86).

18. Aliaga and Cortés (1997, 28–33) note that it was not until 1988 that the “figura del escándalo público” disappeared from the Spanish penal code. This did not mean a de facto disappearance of allusion to lewdness allowing a conservative judge to rule against acts of homosexuality (Aliaga and Cortés 1997, 31).

19. The battle for homosexual rights has been a long and sometimes uphill political battle. The outing in March 2004 of the conservative Partido Popular (PP), which during the 1990s worked to impose its traditional values, has improved the
outlook for gay activists in Spain. Within six months, the new socialist government, led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, approved the legalization of gay marriage in Spain (El País 2004).

20. Cosas que dejó en La Habana of official web site.

21. Lander bases her argument on the complicity between the nineteenth-century sentimental novel and the dominant ideology of the ruling class in the newly created societies, who used this literary model to educate its populations. Obviously, the composition of the ruling class guaranteed the continuance of a specifically European and Spanish cultural patron in the recently established nations.

22. Updated versions of Spain as a pioneer on the cultural front can be found in the coproductions being filmed which allow film companies to access the nearly 400 million Spanish speakers around the world (Santaelalla 2003, 49).

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Chapter 3

State Narcissism:
Racism, Neoimperialism, and Spanish Opposition to Multiculturalism [On Mikel Azurmendi]

Joseba Gabilondo

To the car-window sociologist, to the man who seeks to understand and know the South by devoting the few leisure hours of a holiday trip to unraveling the snarls of centuries,—to such men very often the whole trouble with the black field-hand may be summed up by Aunt Ophelia’s word, “Shiftless!”

WEB DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk

Spanish tolerance was Muslim, not Christian.
Américo Castro, España en su historia

At the turn of this millennium, a new globalized form of liberalism (neoliberalism) is being upheld in Europe and the United States as the only valid political future and as the sole prospect of salvation from “barbarism” (Fukuyama 1992, Sartori 2000). At the opposite end of the spectrum, post-Marxism is emphasizing capitalism’s internal contradictions as the only other alternative to this barbarism, which, according to its theorists (Hardt and Negri 2000, Zizek 2001), is being generated by capitalism itself. Ultimately, the First World’s difficult relationship with history and difference is at stake and, as I will argue below, this tension is negotiated and legitimated through a discursive structure I denominate “State narcissism,” which neoliberalism and post-Marxism share. As I will develop in the following, “State narcissism” denominates the modern State’s refusal to deal with different forms of otherness that globalization brings its way. Instead, the State chooses to articulate new forms of nationalism that force otherness to disappear under the pretense of “assimilation” and thus attempt to restore the original modern self of the
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