

Mexican cinema and migration: the lost steps in The Golden Dream of Quemada-Díez

Cine mexicano y migración: los pasos perdidos en La Jaula del oro de Quemada-Díez (2013)

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Abstract

The cinema that cultivates violence has adopted nowadays new forms, getting to dreadful extremes as can be seen in Mexican cinema. Quemada-Díez in his mix film genre *La jaula de oro*, offers a specific representation of a multifaceted violence, based on real migrants' cases confronted to disasters of social and collective order with individual consequences, as the porosity of borderlines, criminal bands, betrayals, kidnappings, rapes. Victims of an initial symbolic violence (Bourdieu), they risk their own life to obtain what the State doesn't provide them. We have analyzed how step by step the long initiatory odyssey of some four young migrants from Guatemala and Mexico towards the North, their "American Dream", their golden dream, turns into a genuine nightmare because of so much violence.

Keywords

Latin teenagers' migration; violence; Mexican cinema; *La Jaula de oro*; initiatory travel.

Resumen

El cine que cultiva la violencia ha adoptado hoy día nuevas formas, llegando a unos extremos atroces cómo se puede observar en el cine mexicano. Quemada-Díez en su película de género híbrido *La jaula de oro*, ofrece una representación peculiar de una violencia polifacética basándose en múltiples casos reales de migrantes confrontados a catástrofes de orden social y colectivo con repercusiones individuales, sea la porosidad de las fronteras, bandas criminales, traiciones, secuestros, violaciones. Víctimas de una violencia simbólica inicial (Bourdieu) arriesgan su vida para conseguir lo que el Estado no les proporciona. Hemos analizado como etapa tras etapa la larga odisea iniciática de unos cuatro jóvenes migrantes guatemaltecos y mexicanos hacia el Norte, su "American Dream", su sueño dorado, se convierte en una auténtica pesadilla por tanta violencia.

Palabras clave

Migración de adolescentes latinoamericanos; violencia; cine mexicano; *La Jaula de oro*; viaje iniciático.

1. Introduction

Although cinema that has always cultivated violence (*westerns*, film noir, boxing etc.) has always been around, in his thematic study on film, Sánchez-Noriega states that:

in the treatment of violence in classic cinema genre there are enough ellipses so that the audience does not feel literally nauseated. It is a violence of contained expression, including when the discourse of the filmmaker in regards to the causes or consequences is radical, or when there is no explosion of violence, but rather it is an underlying threat throughout the entire story (2004:560).

Thus Mexican cinema (in both ranchera comedies as well as revolution cinema or melodramatic cinema, or wrestling cinema) has repeatedly shown fights, shoot-outs etc. the refer to more than anything archetypes familiar to the audience. The spectacular dimension of the violence was nothing more than a stage in a process known beforehand: revenge, code of honor, the forces of good vs. the forces of evil (like in wrestling cinema, for instance).

Flores-Farfan (2013) considers that in ancient Greece:

violence is shown in order to condemn it, to achieve empathy between the spectator and the character providing a moral that rejects violence that impedes actions leading towards peace and the consolidation of a communal life (107).

But states that:

[i]f nowadays we have lost the capability to be moved in the face of a limitless number of cadavers shown to us without any modesty on TV screens it is because we have become accustomed to its constant appearance. We have taken them from the stories they inhabited and we have objectified them to such a point that no empathy is possible (110).

In fact, Mexican cinema in the last years has been repeatedly portrayed as a country repressed by an economic and political crisis that has brought about an apocalyptic violence in different sectors of society¹. From this crisis parallel powers have emerged that rule by use of terror and organized crime. In addition, the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights says that:

the country is experiencing its worst crisis of violence since the Mexican Revolution. Although Mexico does not officially recognize it as an armed conflict, there have been over 22,000 abductions recorded, more than 70,000 unlawful executions, over 160,000 displaced within Mexico by the violence and thousands of cases of torture [...] (CMDPH, 2014).

Even cinema has created a new genre that shows these criminal groups: *narco-thrillers* or narco movies that portray extremely cruel, dead-end situations². The majority of these movies offer disturbing images in which various transgression occur and to which we grow accustomed to as stated by Flores-Farfan. Other recent movies have treated violence contemplating the mechanisms that operate between the victim and his executioner (Pugibet: 2016)³, as well as the manifestations of violence that affect private, intimate sphere. Finally, migration cinema also reflects the socio-economic crisis that takes thousands of people from their countries. It addresses a phenomenon that stretches from its motivation to the issue of integration or non-integration, passing through a long journey in order to reach the dream country. This film genre, like fiction⁴, docufiction⁵ and documentaries⁶, have been around for decades yet have become more relevant lately: "the migratory phenomenon reclaims the attention of the government and society and has a major effect in cultural and artistic production" (Mora Ordóñez, 2012). Saavedra-Luna says:

In cinema, the story of violence on the US-Mexico border goes practically telling the story of history itself. Said region has different dimensions that go beyond the geographic

space, in the history of both countries has had to do with issues of identity, culture and sovereignty, but also with illegal migration, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, people trafficking, among others (Saavedra-Luna, 2016: 286).

And mentions the particular case of the *La jaula de oro*, object of this article, given that it allows for reflection:

about what the border implies for Central American migrants and for Mexicans. Today it can be said that it goes beyond the Río Bravo and is practically the entire Mexican territory. The violence is no longer only perpetrated by gangs, but now is generated by the state and has affected the country's daily life (Saavedra-Luna, 2016: 289).

In fact, in his study "Violence is Politics", Morales considers that violence "goes with the power of destruction that imposes on the power of construction, that of creating and designing other worlds" (2013: 174). Thus "the dominated", victims of symbolic violence, (Bourdieu: 1970 y 1980) do not achieve their initial dreams due to determined circumstances and are forced to emigrate to carry them out in foreign territory, under the threat however of other types of violence, like that of organized crime.

The title of this work clearly alludes to the work of Carpentier *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) that tells the story of an odyssey from barbarity to civilization, between primitive times and industrial times, wild nature or domesticated, in which the main characters go about facing tests, challenges in a long initiatory trip. It seems to us the perfect reflection of the adventures of the main characters in *The Golden Dream*. The initial group of characters goes decreasing in members due to multifaceted violence.

2. The Framework of *The Golden Dream*

First it is appropriate to question the film genre of the movie, then approach social context, to

the situation experienced by the children that migrate from Central America and Mexico and finally, present the risks that arise on this long journey. Based on this initial approach, we will analyze the different manifestations of omnipresent violence throughout the film to see to what degree the director reflects appropriately or not, the current situation of the migrants and with what objective.

2.1. *La jaula de oro*: a hybrid genre

Films by Quemada-Díez tend to take up the cause of the most vulnerable (adolescents, marginalized people...) denouncing the exploitation of which they are victims. Such is the case of *La jaula de oro*, a fictional story that tells of the dangerous journey of four adolescents from Guatemala (for three of them) to the north in search of a better life. The film is the result of six years of work collecting 1200 synthesized accounts in this cinematographic tale, a type of collective testimony. You could justly consider it a work of docu-fiction, a mix of documentary with fiction knowing that the limit between fiction (traditionally associated with the imaginary and the subjectivity) and documentary (more characterized by a certain objective approach to reality) is drawn ever more finely and with more crossover. Thus, various aspects lead us to classify it not only as a fictional genre but also in the documentary genre. In regards to fiction, it responds to the very criteria of the traditional film genre cited by Freitas-Gutfreind:

the specificity of film as artistic manifestation comes from its subjective capacity to show a reality (...) this type of reflection on film thus manifests the negations of a mechanical reproduction of reality in favor of a reproduction that is of the imaginary type. (2006).

Yet in this film, nor the main characters⁷, nor those that travel on trains (real migrants), nor the North American meat processing factory employees are professional comedians. Cornu reminds us that Quemada-Díez like Ken Loach, with whom he learned his trade, did

not give a script to his actors, but went explaining to them day by day the scenes so they would feel them more than act them (Cornu, 2015: 9). Nevertheless, the movie has the characteristics of fiction since it is based on a preliminary script, pillar of the film narration. Plus, the director, inspired in the previously observed reality, proposed "his" interpretation of it via the interpretation of the protagonists he went guiding.

Finally, the linear structure depicts step by step the phases of the trip like in a documentary. The film portrays an authentic, natural scenery: the landfills where the waste pickers of Guatemala City work, the factory in the United States. In this *cinéma vérité* shoulder mounted camera filming is often used which is suitable for the emergence of situations, providing for shots with long focuses in order to follow the characters. Plus, the Super 16 format reminds us of classic documentaries and reinforces the truthful aspect and reality.

Lastly, if the director of the work fulfills a fundamental role in his film creation, the spectator is also active. Morin distinguishes a double subjectivity, that of film maker-artist in terms of his representation of the world, reflected on screen and that which the audience establishes in its mediation with the reality shown, depending on its knowledge, its sensitivity (Morin, 1956). Therefore, beyond the informative dimension of the film image, Barthes distinguishes a double aspect in the symbolic perspective, one that is intentional on behalf of the creator, which he calls the obvious sense. In terms of the other, he considers it out of one's intellect, stubborn and elusive at the same time and is what he calls the obtuse sense (Barthes, 1982). This last sense refers to the sensitive world and to the field of the emotion. Thus the spectator is not passive, he receives and intertwines these elements giving them a personal meaning and subjectivity.

Likewise, the movie belongs to another genre: *the road movie*. The three initial characters travel through Guatemala, Mexico, starting in Chiapas where a young man from there,

Chauk, joins them until they reach Los Angeles. They take many types of transportation (a small boat on the Suchiate River, a bus, the train –key feature of the film–) and above all never stop walking, following the train tracks so as not to get lost. In general "they're on the tracks". They cross all types of landscapes, thus we see amazing pictures of bridges with a train in the distance. They live out unexpected adventures, are met with dangerous obstacles that they must overcome to survive and reach the end, just like the characters of the stories analyzed by Propp (1928).

2.2. The case of the child migrants

Mexico is the country Central American migrants must go through to get to the United States. If in the 80s and 90s, the NNA, which stands for "adolescent boys and girls" in Spanish, migrated accompanied by adults or stayed in their native land, in the last decades there has been an increasing number of children migrating unaccompanied. According to an OIM, UNI-CEF, UNHCR and OIT-IPEC inter-agency study:

he surveys carried out in the shelters of Mexico and Central America, point of transition for migrants on their way to the USA indicate that, among those recently arrived, 40% are adolescents between 14 and 17 years old (OIM, UNICEF, UNHCR and OIT-IPEC, 2013).

Over 140,000 Central American NNA enter the USA each year, but there are no very reliable statistics. For this reason, we will adhere to those NNA sent back by authorities:

Over 67,000 children under 17 years old were detained by border patrol between October 2013 and June 2014, coming from Honduras (18,244), Guatemala (17,057), El Salvador (16,404) and Mexico (15,634). This number represents an all-time high in detention of unaccompanied minors in the United States, considering that between 2009 and 2013 the annual average was 23,000 and that between 2009 and 2011 the

detainment rate of non-accompanied Central Americans per year didn't reach 4,000 (Rivera: 2015).

The slight decrease in non-accompanied NNA migrants traveling to the USA in 2015 is due to the heavier participation of Mexico in returning these people. In 2014, 18,003 Central American NNA had already been returned by Mexican authorities⁸. In 2015, 11,667 Mexican children were returned by the United States⁹.

Among these NNA, as indicated by the report by United Nations Children's Fund (2014), the young girls are obviously more vulnerable than the men given that they are more susceptible of being raped or suffering different types of violence. They run the risk of being incorporated into the networks of sex slavery that operate in different parts of the country. While they work on crossing to the other side, they have work illegally or even prostitute themselves. The NNA that were deported often end up in southern Mexico, where they survive doing odd jobs, are known as "the kangaroos"¹⁰. They often suffer extortion on behalf of police and city officials.

Since the border with the US really begins in Chiapas.

2.3. The dangers that arise

The trip exposes migrants to risks that involve violence. Film has also taken up itself to show in its own way the dangers faced by children on their journey. In *Sin nombre*, Cary Fukunaga (2010) shows *Maras* (Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18) who rob migrants. Another danger on the train *The Beast*, or *Train of Death*, which is indispensable to arrive to the north. In his documentary, *La línea infinita*, Juan Manuel Sepúlveda (2007) shows for example not only the case of the children deported and those who are abandoned, but also those who are left along the way, mutilated forever by the train. Other dangers that have been reported include abandonment by "coyotes" in the desert, like death by hunger

or dehydration during the journey. There is also another terrible violence:

In the case of missing persons, you have to mention mass kidnapping and murder of Central and South American migrants by organized crime gangs that have taken over the migratory routes to the north (Carton de Grammont, 2015).

These gangs also extort and commit rape.

La jaula de oro highlights this multifaceted violence using a connecting thread, the train: or being filmed in travelling on top of a train car, showing varied, majestic landscapes or even the train pulling away showing what the migrants go leaving behind, rhythmic sequences, through tunnels. When the train comes, you can hear its extraordinary force amplified by the sound design and when you see it from the front in the middle of the shot it's threatening. If the camera is focused on the train you don't notice the speed, but if it focuses on the boys via a subjective camera and some close ups, you can tell how fast it is going, justifying the constant fear and danger.

3. Plural violence in *La Jaula de oro*

¿However, in what way does Quemada-Díez represent the violence previously mentioned? In 1 hour and 48 minutes, the director manages to include a large part of the situations and the dangers brought up earlier, and also other manifestations of violence emerge like we will see, but, what is he after?

3.1. Initial Violence

Symbolic violence is exercised on victims via their conditions of life, their incapacity to escape their social medium and to live a dignified present as well as the impossibility to build a viable future. This initial point justifies the motive to search for a better life somewhere else.

This is how the movie begins with three parallel situations that are apparently unconnected. Juan lives in Guatemala Zone 3, a true lost city made of make-shift houses (like his). He walks decidedly past the alleys, running into military guards, in the midst of background noise that includes sirens blasting (foretelling of his future trip –the sirens of the border police-). In terms of Sara (pl. 6 to 23), she enters a bathroom in rustic conditions whose door reads “LADIES”. She cuts her hair in front of the mirror, signifying a giving up of an exterior trait of femininity, then she binds her breasts with a bandage to hide them. It is a form of self-violence against the identity of women. Later she takes a birth control pill thus anticipating a pregnancy in case of rape. She is very aware of the dangers that lie in wait for her as a woman. Finally, she leaves with a hat on, metamorphosing into a “man” and determined to take the journey. There is no turning back. Samuel, a waste picker, lives from the trash of the city. He picks them up outside in an immense landfill, vulture territory. The three finally begin their journey, and are caught up with in Mexico by Chauk, a boy from Chiapas, of which no one will know anything about because he doesn’t speak Spanish. Around the city, you see police –presenting the various authorities whom they will come into contact with -, a long fixed shot of a wall reveals photos of “missing persons”. Did they disappear on the road? How? At the hands of the police? By the drug traffickers? Without a doubt, it is a clear warning for both the audience as well as the three children.

3.2. Verbal and physical violence on behalf of authorities in Mexico

They fall victim to their first robbery in Mexico by Mexican authorities. They are caught by a group of Mexican police (00:23:50): who take their few possessions from them, “what nice boots!” (when a good pair of shoes is indispensable so the migrant can walk). “Take off your boots!” (twice). They also take Chauk’s shoes and they search everybody, their belongings. They insult them violently “I don’t give a shit! ¡Get on the wall!” (...) “¡Hurry up,

idiot!” They humiliate them (another form of psychological violence): “Did you want to get rich in the USA? You’re not getting there!” They attack them physically and hit Juan. In the end they handcuff Chauk after he tries to grab a policeman’s gun “Your fucking mother, punk!” in the end they take in everyone. In this way the director denounces the corruption of Mexican authorities. They appear behind bars (the symbol of a cage, but not gold at all) and later accompanied by a few police who search them again very forcefully before finally putting them on a train.

Thus they are sent back to their starting point, Guatemala, traveling back over the border. However, they are convinced to continue their trip, but Samuel, after experiencing such violence, gives up and gives Sara a premonitory piece of advice: “You should come back with me”. The camera then follows Samuel in the foreground, using a shoulder-mounted shot, until he disappears forever. They are the first lost steps given that they lose contact with him forever. The first main character leaves the initial group. Has he been the wisest, the most reasonable? The viewer foresees that maybe the others will leave as the journey goes on.

They suffer another act of violence by Mexican authorities when some soldiers stop the train (reminiscent of the westerns movie genre) and chase with clubs passengers that try to escape. The instability of the shoulder-mounted camera, taking shaking, nervous shots, gives a great verisimilitude and realism to the scene. Quemada-Díez filmed this sequence using two cameras, thus creating the sensation of a war-time report. This procedure puts the spectator in the shoes of the migrants being chased, emphasizing the merciless violence they suffer and the fear they feel. The shoulder-mounted camera always running accentuates the movement, the tension, and the agitation, together with yelling “Move!”; the soldiers end up beating those who don’t manage to escape. Meanwhile, a countryside peasant opens his door to the three main characters and hides them in a show of solidarity.

3.3. The violence exercised by the criminal gangs

It manifests at different moments throughout the long journey, transforming it into a real hell. The following robbery (36 shots) also reminds the audience of *westerns* and their traditional train attacks or procedure. It alternates between close-ups and medium shots to be as close as possible to the action, being able to reflect the horror and the fear of the passengers attacked. A gang robs the train and kidnaps Sara and the women, beating the boys mercilessly in the end.

The train stops suddenly at a curve in the middle of the countryside. The sequence begins with a verbal assault dominated by vulgar language. A gang strips the migrants of their belongings. The "boss", film caricature of a pimp, fat, with a flowered shirt goes methodically taking women out from the group of migrants. Meanwhile, his helpers go distributing them into trucks. Thus the audience sees a scene that could be part of the eye witness account of any news program (belonging then to the journalistic genre), but since it is fiction, the climax is when one of them sees Sara (fictional character), and exclaims "This one's a girl!"; is just what the main character feared, as well as the viewer, creating empathy. After briskly revealing her bandage, the aggressor caresses her and says "this one is a virgin". Just as the other terrified main characters, the audience is witness, via Sara, to gender violence. The two boys react spontaneously and physically, but in vain and she is taken away in the boss' truck, leaving a sensation of a horrible future for her. They disappear quickly into the countryside, while a divided shot shows the two boys, beaten and thrown to the ground. The last two shots show the faces of the other passengers helpless in the face of what has happened, meanwhile there is an echo of the screams of Sara. It is the dramatic end of the journey for Sara, who disappears forever given, as Juan later says: "we don't even know where they took her". After being robbed and experiencing gender violence that portrays the mechanism that operates between pepe-

trator (violent, armed, and organized) and victim (helpless, unarmed, and scared), the initial group is reduced to 2.

In another sequence of 8mn 40, that seems very long since that essential to film narration is developed in a closed space that favors the emergence of tensions¹¹. They have been arrested together with other passengers, victims of a trick: the false promise of a job. Juan discovers the scam just like the viewer does via a subjective camera. A gang once more robs them of the few things they have, threatens them and demands from them the telephone number of a relative in the USA in order to extort money from them "If you cooperate, you'll live". Vitamina, the "boss", discovers that Juan is from Guatemala Zone 3 just as he is and sets him free. In vain, Juan asks him to release Chauk. Then, a medium long shot of a spooky town, reveals Juan walking between some train tracks (space of hope since it leads to the north, of reflection, encounters, exchanges, but also of death). After a time of meditation, he turns and heads back, his back to the camera and in a closer shot accompanied by a shoulder-mounted camera, towards Vitamina's hangout. Juan starts the negotiation to save Chauk offering him money, but unexpectedly Vitamina pushes him by the neck; the extra close up shots of the scene emphasize his strength and the violence of the act. He puts him in a room where there are more people, assaulting him verbally and physically. Later, there is a crescendo of violence as he hits him, he tears his shirt; puts both boys on their knees and starts a confrontation between Juan and Chauk via the alternation of close ups, provoking once more, empathy on behalf of the spectator. Vitamina comes into the shot of both and threatens them with a pistol pressuring Juan: "This is what's going to happen, one is going to go and you're going to decide who". In this face off, the close up shots of the exchange of looks reveal the fear. The climax is when Vitamina says: "Very well, that's the way it will be" pointing his pistol against Juan's temple "One, two, three" and pretends to shoot, causing laughs from his gang, meanwhile, you can

see the terror on the boys' faces. Finally, Vitamina bends down to their height and says: "What balls you have, you're a little man". The threatening aggressors say their goodbyes saying "Let's get out of here before I change my mind". Victims of another perfectly organized criminal gang, Juan and Chauk face every type of violence especially psychological violence. Although the kidnapping of the travelers and their distribution throughout Central American countries of origin (referring to the previously mentioned statistics), reminds one of the documentary type genre with testimony value, the pressuring and victimization of the two main characters whose odyssey the viewer has followed form part of the fiction, making for greater empathy.

Likewise, once they are across the US-Mexico border, the "coyote" abandons them in the middle of the desert. They are victims once again of trickery and violence, since they can't defend themselves. Alone they must face this inhospitable place they can't control. Quemada-Díez clearly denounces another abuse, abandonment by "coyotes" who charge them as well as use other migrants as "mules".

In the middle of patches of high grass the color of gold in the foreground, we see them walking in a medium shot, hidden by the vegetation, always thanks to a shoulder-mounted camera and a general medium long shot, accompanied by some background noise made by birds, steps etc. Despite the aesthetic of the shots, there is a certain tension since everything seems "perfect" and therefore hard to believe given the situation. Suddenly you hear an unexpected gunshot ring out and then Chauk falls down dead. The lack of warning (it seems like its the hunting of animal), reinforces the violence of his death. During this, in shot reverse shot there is a militiaman that once again fires four times, the gunshots dominate the sound design. Juan takes of running and disappears; the general medium long shot with the trail in the middle of the landscape alludes to the symbolic immensity of the distance left to travel, and now along. Chauk fell soberly to the bullets of a militiaman that the director assimilates to a criminal. Ano-

ther main character has fallen on the road. The victims, all minors, are abused by adults without shame or ethics. The progressive focusing on the ever fewer number of main characters including the absence of extras in this last tragic scene, emphasizes the unfair fight and fragility returning-the easiest pretty of criminals.

3.4. La violence Juan exercised on Chauk

From the beginning Juan rejects the boy from Chiapas. This attitude is manifested for example via his negation to share food in a town where surely the wall in the background represents Calavera Catrina with long black hair, nude with lace stockings, mounted on an enormous fish that evokes possibly a dragon but also a train, the Beast. It could be interpreted as a foreshadowing of death.

He constantly insults him: "fucking baby", to which Chauk would respond to him in Tzotzil. The director does not offer subtitles in order to give the spectator the same experience as the adolescents and show that despite not speaking the same language, there is still communication. «I don't want anything to do with that Indian", he tells Sara. At the refuge, after the prayer before dinner, Chauk calls him "brother", to which Juan says "damn kid, you don't know Spanish, do you?" This strong, constant racism by the white boy reflects the attitude of Guatemalan society towards its Indian population. Symbolic violence is produced and expressed by a victim of the system towards a more vulnerable person.

Plus, Juan doesn't object to hitting him and Sara will have to intervene to separate them: "Damn it, I'm tired of you", grabbing him violently, brining Sara to say: "the three of us are going, so get over it". They go but Juan once again throw Chauk to the ground and hits him hard. For this, Sara threatens: "I'm going alone" ... "Either you both come on neither".

How can we explain this violence except for perfectly well assimilated racism by Juan? Both are in love with Sara and are jealous of

one another. The movie is also a initiatory, romantic journey, in which they leave childhood behind. Thus, for example, in Mexico, Chauk smiles as he watches Sara naked in the shower. When she chooses Juan one night during a party, Chauk disappears, feeling hurt.

However, the two boys change their treatment of one another towards the end, in such a way that the camera now films them together when before it always filmed the separately. Juan ends up understanding words in Tzotzil that Sara had learned from Chauk, like the key work "snow", his personal dream (represented on different occasions) which marks a change in tempo in the movie with a very soft shot. This stage symbolizes a possible communication that goes beyond languages. It's the director's desire to film the encounter of two worlds, two languages, two cultures, friendship and love. Sara is going to progressively initiate conversation with the mysterious Chauk while Juan rejects him. When Juan takes a picture out of Chauk's hand, Sara and Samuel defend him "would you like it if they did that to you?" However, Chauk will help Juan after Sara's kidnapping. In the end, Juan will return to Vitamina to offer himself in return for Chauk.

3.5. The violence of the natural setting

Hunger (the adolescents have to steal and kill a chicken), thirst, nature, and heat make up a natural violence that they have to overcome. They will have to face new dangers in order to be able to cross the final frontier, the wall that separates the two countries. The image of the division filmed in two shot insists on the separation of the two worlds (north and south), first vertically and then horizontally, substituted by an opposition between desert field and city (on the Mexico side). The omnipresence of a threatening helicopter, due to its constant sound, alternates with the image of the two boys hidden in some tunnels. The director accentuates the tension by way of the police car siren, the flashing lights while in shot reverse shot the hidden group "smells" and "feels"

these dangers via the sounds that add to the accentuation of fear.

At night, illuminated by an enormous floodlight, the boys run out quickly following the "coyote", (the noise of the helicopter continues to remind of the danger). The shoulder-mounted camera advances with the group, observing interruptions: "get down, get down"; they advance, threatened by the noise, the light at times, including a police motorcycle on a difficult and dangerous road. Finally, the open the gate to another tunnel and wait again, in fact, the same scene on the Mexican side is repeated, where fear dominates the wait. However, Juan shares his dream with Chauk, although he doesn't understand him:

I feel like there is a zoo in my stomach, like I have a bunch of animals running up and down my entire body from the excitement that we are going to get to the other side. I feel like everything we will see there is going to be like that ... Everything is going to be ok and we're going to get where we want to go.

Chauk also starts to talk. Or could it be to conjure up the fear in this scary and dark place?

3.6. Final symbolic violence

Although the get to the other side, Juan describes the other side of the American dream, the Golden Cage. Inside a meat processing plant under green neon lights, some men work, their movements are mechanical. They wear white uniforms, head caps, reinforcing the idea of an aseptic, dehumanizing space. The sound design emphasizes the background noise (the cutting of the meat, the belts, the waste that is thrown out...). The melancholic violoncello accentuates the tragedy of the situation. The workers are Hispanic, showing that the American dream is really a sad reality. Several shots of the meat alternate with these workers repeating the same movements. In reverse field in the background, Juan, alone and dressed just like them, is standing between two enormous pieces of uncut meat. In fact,

thanks to a subjective shot we discover the mechanical work via his point of view. Finally the space is empty, and Juan begins to collect the waste, bending down under a metallic light. The two shot over these remains that are pretty disgusting reveals the following paradox: Was this his dream? His work finally reminds him of Samuel who lived among the trash in Guatemala City and preferred to give up on his trip, on the American dream. Was all the suffering and loss worth it? In the end it comes down to being alone, working in a dehumanizing factory where no one talks to anybody, where they have become automated machines, anonymous victims of symbolic violence.

4. Conclusion

We coincide with Saavedra-Luna when he says that *La jaula de oro* "goes beyond the stories make reference to the border, the violence and migration. It shows a "war zone" or a "collapsed state"" (Saavedra-Luna: 291).

They go disappearing one after another, the four adolescents unprotected and abandoned by the Mexican, American, and Central American authorities. In the end only Juan reaches the country of his dreams. The successive disappearance of the characters constitutes an essential element of the story's structure. Juan is no longer the same, there is no turning back for him, clearly referencing the initiatory genre announced via the reference to the title of the Carpentier novel. Likewise, this initiatory *road movie* also features multiple forewarnings that emerge throughout the trip, via for example the voice-over of Solalinde's father, that will later echo in the darkness of a tunnel, "Brothers, nobody is better than anybody else. We come from nothing, we return to nothing." The name of the movie (title of the song by the same name by los Tigres del Norte) evokes trickery, since the director wants to demystify the American dream. The film has an obvious didactic function. It is a warning against an unrealistic fantasy. The best illustration of this is the final scene in the factory,

given that it is totally opposite of this oneiric vision.

The amount of multifaceted violence may seem unbelievable or stereotyped, in addition to the intensity of the drama suffered by these young people in only one trip. But thanks to the imaginary of the director and the audience, the fictional dramatic tension is actually believable. This pseudo documentary vision is based on real events. Maybe this collection can be explained by the fact that Mexican migration cinema has taken on a sentimental and tragic tone, that García and Pietrich call victimization films. Nevertheless, we observe a

gradual abandonment of the melodrama that has saturated public opinion and also restricts the type of audience. To achieve it we see two tendencies: the first consists of advancing towards comedy and the second in accentuating a pseudo-documentary tendency that implies decreasing (at least apparently) the fictionality and have a character that is ever more intimate and personal to the migratory story that is being told." [...] The second tendency to revert the dramaticism has consisted of operating a disfocalization: migration has become a context, a scenario. The punctum (Barthes, 1980) is not constructed by the relationships (friendly, loving, family...) that are established between the characters. Their psychological and/or existential dilemmas tell more than the political or economic pressures that no longer appear their only motivations for migration. The migratory situation (many times the interior error) serves as context so that different individuals come face to face. The camera is interested in the recognition process of the alterity, in the itinerary that goes from the confrontation to the comprehension of another (García & Petrich, 2012).

Undoubtedly the director of *La jaula de oro* has known how to avoid sentimentalism and the melodrama given that, although the narration is based on a few adolescents that are certainly victim of all types of misfortunes and violence, the combination of the intima-

cy between the adolescents and the initiatory trip towards the alterity (via love, friendship, mutual understanding and interculturalness) allows counteract this risk, giving it intensity and credibility.

On the hand, facing the current situation, it's necessary to note that civil society has become organized¹². In our film, whole families throw oranges to the travelers showing their solidarity similar to las Patronas. Such is the case of the refuges often directed by priests. In Arriaga, Alejandro Solalinde (playing himself in the film) distributes food and offers lodging at his shelter. Also the actor, and in this case producer, Gael García Bernal in collaboration with Amnesty International has filmed a report "Los Invisibles" (four short films) for show the motivations of the migrants and inform the population in general of this issue, the treatment and violence suffered.

Notes

1. See: The bastards, Escalante (2008), Batalla en el cielo, Reygadas (2005), Heli, Escalante (2013).
2. See: El infierno, Estrada (2010), Miss Bala, Naranjo (2011) or including the series directed by Oscar López CEO of Loz Brotherz Productions.

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3. See Daniel y Ana (2009) and Después de Lucía (2012), Michel Franco.

4. Dramas like Espaldas mojadas, Galindo (1953), ¡Alambrista!, Young (1978), 7 soles, Ultreras (2008); melodramas like El viaje de Teo, Doehner (2008) o comedies like Un día sin mexicanos, Arau (2004).

5. For example, Norteadado Perezcano (2010).

6. Like Los que se quedan, Rulfo (2008).

7. Oficial price *A Certain Talent at Cannes* (2013).

8. Source: Migratory Police Unit, SEGOB, based on information registered in migratory stations, central and local offices of INM.

9. Source: Ibidem.

10. Sellers of candy, cigarettes, care caretakers and girls that do housework and charge low wages and without access to social security.

11. Made up of four scenes: the initial encounter on the train -1mn41-, followed by the encounter with Vitamina himself - 3mn17-, the moment they let Juan go -1mn21- and finally Juan's return to Vitamina's house -3mn 08-.

12. See the case of Las patronas like in *Llévate mis amores*, (Arturo González Villaseñor, 2014).

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