

# fiar.



*The forum for inter-american research was established by the American Studies Section of the English Department at Bielefeld University in order to foster, promote and publicize current topics in the studies of the Americas.*

*fiar* is the official journal of the International Association of Inter-American Studies (IAS)

---

**General Editor:**

Wilfried Raussert

---

**Editors:**

Yolanda Campos  
Stephen Joyce  
Marius Littschwager  
Mahshid Mayar  
Luisa Raquel Ellermeier  
Paula Prescod  
Wilfried Raussert  
Susana Rocha Teixeira  
Brian Rozema

---

**Assistant Editor:**

Anne Lappert

---

**Editorial Board:**

Prof. Mita Banerjee, Mainz University, Germany  
Prof. William Boelhower, Louisiana State University, USA  
Prof. Nuala Finnegan, University College Cork, Ireland  
Prof. Emerita Lise Gauvin, Université de Montréal, Canada  
Prof. Maryemma Graham, University of Kansas, USA  
Dr. Jean-Louis Joachim, Université des Antilles, Martinique  
Prof. Djelal Kadir, Penn State University, USA  
Dr. Luz Angélica Kirschner, South Dakota State University, USA  
Prof. John Ochoa, Pennsylvania State University, USA  
Prof. John Carlos Rowe, University of Southern California, USA  
Prof. David Ryan, University College Cork, Ireland  
Prof. Sebastian Thies, University of Tübingen, Germany  
Dr. Cécile Vigouroux, Simon Fraser University, Canada

---

**Design:**

Alina Muñoz Knudsen

---

**Contact:**

fiar@interamerica.de  
www.interamerica.de

[49] 521-106-3641  
(European Standard Time)  
Postfach 100131



The association seeks to promote the interdisciplinary study of the Americas, focusing in particular on inter-connections between North, Central, and South American culture, literature, media, language, history, society, politics, and economics.

[www.interamericanstudies.net](http://www.interamericanstudies.net)

---

**Guest Editor of Vol. 16.2:**

José Carlos Lozano (Texas AM International University, Laredo)

## Vol. 16 No. 2 (Dec. 2023):

### Walls and Bridges

El impacto del gobierno de Trump en la salud reproductiva de las mujeres en las Américas . . . . .	5
Clara Buitrago Valencia (Universidad de Bielefeld, Alemania)	
Defecting Cuba: Diplomacy, Baseball, and the Chase for Democratic Opportunity . . . . .	15
Emalee Nelson (University of Texas at Austin, USA)	
A descriptive analysis of the representation of social status through advertisements in Mexican print magazines . . . . .	22
Daniel De la Miyar (Texas A&M International University, USA)	
Film censorship in Mexico, 1925-1928: the case of Saltillo. . . . .	47
Antonio Corona (Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, Mexico)	
Brenda A. Muñoz (Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, Mexico)	
Black noise, police brutality, and city landscapes: Noir aesthetics in Kendrick Lamar's "Alright". . . . .	60
Cristiane Guedes (Bielefeld University and University of Guadalajara)	

# El impacto del gobierno de Trump en la salud reproductiva de las mujeres en las Américas

CLARA BUITRAGO VALENCIA (UNIVERSIDAD DE BIELEFELD, ALEMANIA)

## Resumen

*Este artículo aborda la influencia de la derecha religiosa en la agenda política conservadora en las Américas y sus consecuencias para la salud reproductiva de las mujeres en los últimos años. Usa como ejemplos las consecuencias de la “Mexico City Policy” en Guatemala y la frontera entre Colombia y Venezuela durante la presidencia de Donald Trump y finalmente se centra en la anulación de la sentencia *Roe contra Wade* en los Estados Unidos con los consiguientes efectos sobre la anulación del derecho al aborto a nivel nacional. La “Mexico City Policy” es una directiva de la política exterior estadounidense implementada en repetidas ocasiones por gobiernos del partido republicano en la se requiere de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ONGs) como condición para recibir cualquier financiamiento federal que no realicen ni promuevan activamente el aborto como método de planificación familiar, incluso si estas actividades se financian con fondos no estadounidenses. En el artículo se hará una breve referencia al contexto político entre 2016 y 2020 en las Américas, cuando hubo un giro a la derecha en casi todos los países con gobiernos como el Donald Trump en USA, Jimmy Morales en Guatemala, e Iván Duque en Colombia, entre otros. Después abordará sucintamente el evangelicalismo, poniendo de relieve su sistema de creencias, su imparable expansión en Estados Unidos y alrededor del mundo y su influencia en la política. Por último, pasará a presentar los casos Guatemala, la frontera entre Colombia y Venezuela y los Estados Unidos.*

**Palabras clave:** aborto, derecha religiosa, evangelicalismo, Mexico City pólce, salud reproductiva.

El reconocimiento de los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las mujeres enfrentan en la actualidad grandes desafíos en las Américas [1], no solo si quieren extenderse, sino si quieren seguir siendo reconocidos como tales. Esta situación está ligada a que en los últimos años han surgido discursos y políticas de grupos religiosos y de ultraderecha que colocan al género, la familia y la tradición en el centro del debate. Estos grupos presentan a la “ideología de género” [2] como el enemigo común a combatir, no solo con recursos retóricos o discursivos, sino también usando a agentes de la política (dígase políticos o partidos políticos) para posicionar sus pretensiones en los entramados legales, ejecutivos y judiciales de los sistemas políticos, sean democráticos o no, alrededor del mundo. Este artículo indaga cómo se ha plasmado la influencia de la derecha religiosa en la agenda política conservadora en las Américas y sus

consecuencias para la salud reproductiva de las mujeres desde 2015. Para ello, toma como ejemplos tres casos de estudio que muestran los efectos de las políticas implementadas por el gobierno de Donald Trump. Los dos primeros casos giran en torno al impacto que tuvo la aplicación de “Mexico City Policy” durante el gobierno de Donald Trump en Guatemala y en la frontera entre Venezuela y Colombia. El tercer caso es el fallo del tribunal supremo de Estados Unidos, conformado, entre otros, por seis jueces conservadores, tres de ellos nombrados por la administración de DONALD Trump, que anuló en julio de 2022 el derecho federal al aborto reconocido en el fallo sobre el pleito *Roe contra Wade*.

Este artículo se desarrolla en base a una metodología cualitativa y empírica que busca examinar los efectos de los enlaces políticos y religiosos entre el cristianismo y la política

conservadora de derechas en los derechos reproductivos y sexuales de las mujeres en las Américas. Para este análisis se recolectaron datos de diferentes tipos. Primero, se revisó la bibliografía relevante sobre la derecha religiosa en las Américas, particularmente el surgimiento y expansión del evangelicalismo. También se consultaron artículos de periódicos de medios de comunicación y páginas web de organizaciones sociales internacionales para presentar con detalle los casos y el contexto de cada país.

La estructura del texto es la siguiente: En la primera parte se empieza presentado el contexto político que ha caracterizado a las Américas en los últimos años, poniendo de relieve la influencia de la derecha religiosa. En la segunda parte, se hace una breve referencia al evangelicalismo, haciendo énfasis en su sistema de creencias, su imparable expansión en los Estados Unidos y alrededor del mundo y su influencia en la política. En el tercer apartado, se presentarán con detalles los 3 casos de análisis repartidos a lo largo de la geografía de del continente americano. Para terminar el artículo, se presentarán las conclusiones, las cuales pretender fomentar la reflexión y advertir de los peligros que acechan los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las mujeres, especialmente si políticos afines a la derecha religiosa, como Donald Trump, vuelven a ser elegidos presidentes.

## **1. Contexto Político: Estados Unidos, Guatemala y Colombia**

En el período de 2016 hasta finales de 2020 en todo el continente americano hubo un giro a la derecha en casi todos los países. Este giro permite ver los enlaces políticos y religiosos que llevaron al poder presidentes a quienes se les puede llamar “populistas de derecha” (Althoff “Entrelazamientos” 2) pues fundaron sus campañas en el descontento público contra el establecimiento político y la pretensión de que representaban “al pueblo” (Garner 224; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 16).

Tenemos el caso de Donald Trump en Estados Unidos, presidente de los Estados Unidos entre 2016 y 2020, quien fue elegido con una gran mayoría de votos del electorado

blanco-evangélico estadounidense (Pew Research Center). Donald Trump cortejó el voto evangélico como ningún otro candidato del Partido Republicano lo había hecho antes (Althoff “Entrelazamientos” 2). Además, su administración introdujo una legislación y una política exterior que favorecía las reivindicaciones conservadoras de los votantes evangélicos (proyectos de ley antiaborto, proyectos de ley anti-LGTB, etc.) y también nominó un número sustancial de evangélicos y católicos conservadores en posiciones importantes en los tribunales y la administración en general (Althoff, “Entrelazamientos” 10).

En Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, un cristiano evangélico declarado, fue elegido presidente en el periodo de 2015 a 2019. Jimmy Morales recibió gran parte de su formación académica en centros educativos y universitarios evangélicos y durante la campaña política que le llevo a la presidencia dio discursos en las sedes principales de las iglesias evangélicas más importantes de Guatemala y participó en entrevistas para canales evangélicos como lo es Enlace (Althoff “Right Wing Populism”). En ellas, expresó su apoyo a la familia tradicional, su oposición al matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo, los derechos LGTBQIA+ y al aborto, así como su apoyo a la pena de muerte (Althoff, “Entrelazamientos” 10).

El caso de Colombia es también particular. En 2018 Iván Duque fue elegido presidente de Colombia, cargo que ostento hasta 2022. Llegó al poder impulsado por el partido del expresidente Álvaro Uribe, el cual es un partido de derechas, con fuertes conexiones con los Estados Unidos. Si bien Iván Duque no es un declarado cristiano, sea católico o evangélico, durante su mandato hizo considerables concesiones a partidos evangélicos con sillas el senado colombiano [3], al punto que muchos medios de comunicación le dieron el nombre del “elegido de los cristianos” (Amaya 7), utilizando así una metáfora religiosa para indicar los estrechos lazos entre él y partidos políticos afiliados a organizaciones religiosas evangélicas. A cambio de este apoyo, Duque se comprometió a defender la libertad religiosa y la familia tradicional.

Como vemos una de las características más interesantes de estas presidencias son sus

estrechas conexiones con movimientos religiosos conservadores, principalmente evangélicos. Este artículo se centra específicamente en las políticas implementadas durante el gobierno de Donald Trump y que han tenido un fuerte impacto en la salud reproductiva de las mujeres, conllevando un menos cabo a derechos sexuales y reproductivos que costó mucho conseguir a las mujeres. Antes de presentar dichas políticas, es oportuno hacer una breve referencia al evangelicalismo, poniendo de relieve su imparable expansión en los Estados Unidos y alrededor del mundo, su sistema de creencias, y su influencia en la política.

## 2. Evangelicalismo

Los orígenes del evangelicalismo se remontan al siglo S. XVIII, a causa de divisiones en la religión cristiana protestante que tuvieron lugar en Europa con el Pietismo y en Gran Bretaña y Norteamérica con el Gran Despertar. A las iglesias surgidas de estos movimientos, se les denominó como evangélicas, pues enfatizaban la conversión, la Biblia y el trabajo misionero, y no tanto las tradiciones como lo hacían las iglesias ya establecidas (Schäfer, *Die Taufe des Leviathan* 145). Sin embargo, a pesar de tener raíces europeas, el movimiento evangélico es reconocido por ser un movimiento norteamericano, pues fue precisamente en los Estados Unidos, donde se ha expandido desde entonces sin precedentes (Schäfer, *Die Taufe des Leviathan* 103).

En el siglo XIX, el evangelicalismo se expandió en Norteamérica como resultado del Segundo Gran Despertar, el cual afectó a las principales denominaciones y convirtieron a la mayoría de los protestantes de los Estados Unidos en evangélicos (Schäfer, *Die Taufe des Leviathan* 103). En el comienzo del siglo XX, hubo un renacimiento neo-evangélico que dibujó en gran parte el paisaje evangélico de hoy. Especialmente importante son los eventos de la calle Azusa (Los Ángeles, California) en 1906 que detonaron la propagación del pentecostalismo (Schäfer, Las 'sectas' protestantes 56). El mérito especial del movimiento pentecostal fue la legitimación carismática "desde abajo", que prometía autoridad divina, incluso a los

analfabetos, y que se reconocía por una forma de hablar extática (la glosolalia) (Schäfer, Las 'sectas' protestantes 56).

De la comunidad de la calle Azusa surgieron una congregación blanca y una negra. El movimiento pentecostal blanco –en especial, las grandes Asambleas de Dios– pronto echó mano al principio fundamentalista de las Escrituras, se esforzó por alcanzar una organización jerárquica y empezó con la misión exterior. Un factor clave fue el advenimiento de la radio como medio de comunicación masiva en los años de 1930. Gracias a la radiodifusión, el movimiento pentecostal blanco se volvió rutinario y se acercó a la clase media baja (Schäfer, Las 'sectas' protestantes 57). En la década de 1950 surgió el neo-pentecostalismo con la fundación de la Full Gospel Businessmens Fellowship International (FGBMFI) –Fraternidad Internacional de Hombres de Negocios del Evangelio Completo, FINHEC– por el millonario Demos Shakarian. La organización logró rápidamente dar el salto a la clase alta y la clase media alta con numerosos políticos, industriales y militares entre sus miembros (Schäfer, Las 'sectas' protestantes 58).

Además, a partir de los años 1960, la televisión ha desempeñado un papel crucial en la expansión del movimiento, adoptando un enfoque diferente al modelo de las iglesias tradicionales. En lugar de seguir el formato convencional, predicadores destacados, como Kenneth Hagin y el matrimonio Copeland, se centraron en promover su la doctrina a través de extensas empresas de entretenimiento religioso. Su mensaje se alinea con el esoterismo del siglo XIX, representado por Phineas Quimby, y su actualización en la década de 1950 a través del „pensamiento positivo“ en la industria motivacional, con figuras como Norman Vincent Peale, el pastor del joven Trump y amigo personal de Richard Nixon (Schäfer, Las 'sectas' protestantes 58). En la década de 1980, destacan personalidades como Pat Robertson (Christian Broadcasting Network, CBN), Jim Bakker (Praise The Lord, PTL) y Paul Crouch (Trinity Broadcasting Network, TBN), cada uno con su propio canal de televisión, quienes también participan activamente en la corriente religiosa conservadora (Schäfer, Las 'sectas'



*protestantes* 58).

Gracias a la televisión y masivas campañas de evangelización a nivel mundial, desde la segunda mitad del S.XX, la abrumadora preponderancia de los evangélicos se trasladó de Europa y América del Norte a África y América Latina. Hoy, más de 110 organizaciones regionales y nacionales y alrededor de 110 millones de personas están afiliadas a la World Evangelical Alliance. Sin embargo, es probable que el movimiento supere los 600 millones de seguidores en el mundo.

Dentro de las principales características del movimiento evangélico se encuentran la predicación activa en radio y televisión, la fundación de escuelas y seminarios teológicos para la formación doctrinal y un ferviente espíritu misionero con lo que aspiran tener gran influencia en la sociedad, dando testimonio de la Escritura (la Biblia). La predicación activa en radio y televisión permitió que se crearán gigantescas empresas de entretenimiento religioso a nivel global. En este contexto, temas como la sexualidad, el género, la reproducción y la familia ganan centralidad, promoviendo la idea de que cualquier intento por cuestionar la tradición, sería responsable de una crisis moral en Occidente (Caccia y Oyhantcabal 62).

No debe sorprender entonces que desde 1984, los presidentes del partido republicano hayan puesto en funcionamiento la “Mexico City Policy” o política de la mordaza global. La “Mexico City Policy” “es una directiva de la política exterior estadounidense que tiene efectos globales, especialmente en América Latina y África (Kaiser Family Foundation). Esta normativa requiere de las Organizaciones No-Gubernamentales (ONGs) como condición para recibir cualquier financiamiento federal que no realicen ni promuevan activamente el aborto como método de planificación familiar, incluso si estas actividades se financian con fondos no estadounidenses (Kaiser Family Foundation). Lleva el nombre de la ciudad de México debido a que fue anunciada en esta ciudad cuando fue sede de la Conferencia Internacional sobre Población de las Naciones Unidas y fue instituida por el presidente de los Estados Unidos Ronald Reagan en 1984. En las consideraciones de la “Mexico City Policy” se ven plasmada las

concepciones doctrinales del evangelicalismo, para quienes el aborto es una transgresión al orden natural y moral que atenta contra la vida y la familia. Esta política fue luego adoptada por las administraciones de George Bush y George W. Bush y Donald Trump, mientras que los demócratas la derogan, como lo hizo Joe Biden una vez asumió su cargo (Kaiser Family Foundation).

Donald Trump no solo restableció la “Mexico City Policy,” sino también la amplió significativamente para abarcar la gran mayoría de la ayuda bilateral estadounidense a la salud mundial. Dicha ampliación, según fuentes periodísticas, fue impulsada desde el Consejo Asesor de la Fe (Faith Advisory Council) [4] de la administración Trump (Althoff, “Entrelazamientos” 10). Bajo esta ampliación, si una organización fomentaba el aborto como método de planificación, los recortes no solo incluirían la financiación para la planificación familiar y salud materno-infantil, sino también la ayuda para tratar el sida, la malaria, la nutrición, entre otros programas. En el año fiscal 2017, año en que se puso de nuevo en vigor la “Mexico City Policy”, se calculó que potencialmente 7.300 millones de dólares iban a estar condicionados por dicha política. La ayuda a la planificación familiar representaba aproximadamente 600 millones de dólares de ese total (Kaiser Family Foundation).

Si bien la “Mexico City Policy” tuvo efectos especialmente en Latinoamérica y África, en este artículo se examinarán solo casos particulares en el contexto de las Américas: El de Guatemala y el de la frontera entre Venezuela y Colombia.

### 3. Casos

#### 3.1 Guatemala

El primero de los casos para analizar es el de Guatemala, país en Centro América con una población de más de 16 millones de habitantes, de los cuales más del 40 % de se reconoce como evangélicos (Latinobarometro). La gran mayoría de la población de Guatemala tiene raíces indígenas, quienes sufren una fuerte exclusión y racismo por parte de sus elites ladinas. Las más afectadas de todos los procesos de exclusión



son las mujeres empobrecidas, e indígenas que viven en el área rural. A la falta de acceso a la tierra y otros medios para la producción de alimentos e ingresos para satisfacer sus necesidades (International Land Coalition 3) se suman los millares de casos de violencia contra la mujer, agresión sexual y ofensas contra niños y adolescentes. Durante 2022 se reportaron 82 mil 169 denuncias de delitos perpetrados en contra de las mujeres y menores de edad en el país centroamericano. Del total de denuncias, casi el 66 % obedece a casos de violencia contra la mujer y el resto obedecen a ofensas contra niños y adolescentes, de los cuales la mayoría queda la impunidad debido al débil sistema judicial (EFE).

Con altas tasas de violencia hacia las mujeres en un contexto altamente religioso y patriarcal, en donde el aborto está prohibido por ley y los acuerdos y convenios firmados internacionalmente en materia de derechos sexuales y reproductivos parecen no tener vigencia, cabría esperar que la “Mexico City Policy” no tuviese ningún efecto. Sin embargo, sí los tuvo. La situación de vulnerabilidad de las mujeres se vio agravada por la puesta de nuevo en vigor de la “Mexico City Policy” durante el gobierno de Donald Trump, especialmente en lo referente a la atención sanitaria durante y después del parto (Althoff, “Entrelazamientos” 12). Guatemala tiene un índice de muertes postparto muy alto (Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social). Con la “Mexico City Policy” se redujo drásticamente la disponibilidad de un medicamento, el Misoprostol, que se utiliza para evitar hemorragias postparto. Dado que este medicamento también puede ser utilizado para inducir abortos en las primeras semanas de embarazo, ya no hubo financiamiento para programas y proyectos que utilizan el Misoprostol para prevenir muertes maternas por hemorragia postparto (Althoff, “Entrelazamientos” 12).

Este efecto indirecto derivado de “Mexico City Policy” en la atención a la salud materna implicó que instituciones y ONGs que trabajan en el ámbito de la salud de la mujer, de los derechos para las mujeres y de la educación sexual integral y que solían recibir fondos directamente de la Agencia Estadounidense para el Desarrollo Internacional (USAID) vieran reducidos sus

recursos. La normativa de la “Mexico City Policy” era muy estricta en su formulación y dejó sin financiamiento si solo se comprobaba que el centro o programa hacía uso de cualquier medicamento que pueda provocar un aborto, desatendiendo que esos mismos medicamentos pueden salvar las vidas de las madres después del parto (Althoff, “Entrelazamientos” 12). Esto supuso que las ONGs y clínicas recibieran menos fondos de las organizaciones de los Estados Unidos y tuvieran que buscar otras fuentes monetarias para continuar su trabajo. Lo que resultó bastante complicado pues la falta de financiamiento para programas relacionados con la salud sexual y reproductiva de las mujeres no sólo se redujo por parte de la Agencia de Desarrollo de los Estados Unidos (USAID), sino que también afectó al Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas e incluso la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS), organizaciones a las que también dona dinero los Estados Unidos.

El caso de Guatemala también es interesante porque paralelo a “Mexico City Policy” surgió una iniciativa legislativa “Ley para la Protección de la Vida y la Familia” del gobierno guatemalteco de Jimmy Morales, que como ya se mencionó, fue otro político de derecha, muy cercano al movimiento evangélico (Althoff, “Entrelazamientos” 13). Entre otras cosas, esta iniciativa intentaba prohibir y sancionar el aborto, incluso el aborto involuntario y la reducir la educación sexual inclusiva. La iniciativa tenía tres propósitos. Primero, la modificación del Código Penal para que las mujeres que abortan reciban penas más duras y la criminalización del aborto involuntario. Segundo, la eliminación de la Educación Integral en Sexualidad. Y tercero, la prohibición de que personas del mismo sexo puedan casarse y adoptar hijos.

Finalmente, el gobierno siguiente de Alejandro Giammattei, aprobó en julio de 2021 a través del acuerdo gubernativo 149-2021 la “Política Pública para la Protección a la Vida y la Institucionalidad de la Familia 2021-2032” (Coyoy). De acuerdo con este documento, el objetivo principal es garantizar el bienestar y protección de la vida y la institucionalidad de la familia en todas las etapas de vida del ser humano, desde la etapa prenatal hasta la

adultez mayor.

Como lo muestra el caso de Guatemala, las alianzas de líderes populistas de derecha con movimientos religiosos ultraconservadores resultan devastadoras para el avance de los derechos reproductivos y sexuales y el fomento de la salud reproductiva y materno infantil.

### 3.2. Frontera Venezuela y Colombia

Así también lo muestra el caso de la frontera Colombia y Venezuela. Es bastante sabido, que desde que Hugo Chávez murió y Nicolas Maduro asumió la presidencia de Venezuela, el país ha estado sumergido en diferentes crisis económicas, políticas e incluso militares con consecuencias enormes en la provisión de alimentos y servicios sanitarios y medicinas.

Entre el 2016 y el 2019, Venezuela estuvo sumida en la peor crisis económica de su historia, con una tasa de inflación del orden del 500%, un tipo de cambio volátil y una deuda agobiante que se había quintuplicado desde 2006 (Corrales 30). A esto se sumaron las sanciones impuestas por los Estados Unidos al considerar que Venezuela bajo el gobierno de N. Maduro era un país que no respetaba los derechos humanos (Gratius y Ayuso Pozo 40).

De un país pionero y ejemplar en cuanto a la reducción de la pobreza y la atención sanitaria entre 2000 y 2014, años en los que se redujo en un 50% la pobreza y se ofreció a millones de ciudadanos pobres un acceso a la atención sanitaria de buena calidad, ante el declive de la industria petrolera internacional, Venezuela pasó a ser en 2016 un país donde miles de pacientes no podían recibir tratamientos médicos esenciales, y otros miles estaban en lista de espera para someterse a una cirugía vital porque los médicos no tienen los recursos necesarios (Freitez 38)

Estas crisis variadas tienen implicaciones para todos los venezolanos. Desde 2014 hasta el comienzo de la guerra en Ucrania [5], miles de venezolanos cruzaban la frontera con Colombia porque no encontraban comida ni atención médica su país. Pero las que más han sufrido las crisis son las mujeres. Sus derechos y opciones se ven afectados de manera distintiva, especialmente cuando se trata de derechos

reproductivos, salud sexual y violencia de género. Miles de mujeres quienes no pueden acceder a métodos anticonceptivos, ni recibir atención en materia de salud reproductiva cruzan la frontera con Colombia en búsqueda de atención médica. Organizaciones no gubernamentales internacionales que trabajan en Colombia se han instalado en la frontera para intentar atender a estas personas. Es el caso de *Médicos sin Fronteras*, organización que ha abierto clínicas móviles que se desplazan de pueblo en pueblo en los departamentos de Norte de Santander, la Guajira, y Arauca, departamentos colombianos que tienen frontera con Venezuela (*Médicos sin fronteras*). Los pacientes que atiende *Médicos sin Fronteras* desde el 2016 han sido tanto migrantes pendulares como venezolanos que viven en Colombia de forma permanente, los cuales reciben asistencia sanitaria primaria en salud mental, atención pre y postnatal, atención de salud sexual y reproductiva y planificación familiar (*Médicos sin fronteras*).

La financiación de *Médicos sin Fronteras* para sus proyectos en Colombia procede de donaciones no gubernamentales. Ellos no reciben ninguna financiación gubernamental para sus actividades en la frontera y una gran parte de la financiación para responder a este tipo de crisis suele provenir de los Estados Unidos. Debido a la "Mexico City Policy" reinstaurada durante la administración de Donald Trump, la organización no pudo utilizar dichos fondos para atender a la población migrante venezolana en áreas de atención tales como planificación familiar, incluidos servicios de anticoncepción, aborto seguro y en el asesoramiento a mujeres sobre cuestiones reproductivas (*Médicos sin fronteras*). Esto resultó particularmente grave porque el 68% de los recursos totales destinados en 2019 para la crisis migratoria venezolana procedieron de Estados Unidos, lo que en la práctica se tradujo en una barrera infranqueable para las organizaciones que prestan estos servicios que eran altamente demandados por las mujeres migrantes venezolanas. En departamentos fronterizos, por ejemplo, aproximadamente una de cada cinco consultas estaba relacionada con este tema (*Médicos sin fronteras*).

La pérdida de financiación a programas de

salud sexual y reproductiva no solo pasó en Guatemala, Colombia y Venezuela sino en toda América Latina y África, donde la cooperación de Estados Unidos es vital para ofrecer servicios de salud. Es de lamentar que las ideas de una minoría religiosa conservadora tengan efecto sobre la vida y salud de millones de mujeres en el mundo. Si bien esta normativa fue retirada por Biden en 2021, las ONGs que trabajan en salud sexual y reproductiva siguen teniendo actualmente problemas de financiación porque debido al COVID19, todo el dinero de donantes internacionales en materia de salud del 2021 fue destinado a combatir el COVID19. Desde el 2022 los conflictos bélicos como el de Ucrania, la atención los desastres naturales (terremotos en Turquía y Siria) y las consecuencias del cambio climático como las inundaciones de Libia en septiembre de 2023 o la oleada de incendios en Europa durante el verano de 2023 ha aumentado las necesidades de ayuda humanitaria a una escala sin precedentes [6] (Stacey), haciendo que la planificación familiar pase a segundo plano.

### 3.3. Fallo sobre el pleito *Roo contra Wade* en los Estados Unidos

El último ejemplo de la influencia de la derecha religiosa en la agenda política conservadora en las Américas lo encontramos en Estados Unidos donde en Julio de 2022, el Tribunal Supremo, conformado por jueces de tendencia conservadora y claros vínculos con movimientos religiosos, anuló el derecho federal al aborto reconocido en el fallo sobre el pleito *Roo contra Wade*, de 1973.

El fallo en el pleito Dobbs contra Jackson Women's Health Organization dejó una marca significativa en la historia judicial y social de Estados Unidos. En este litigio, las autoridades de Misisipi se encontraron en disputa con una clínica de salud reproductiva en la capital del estado. La controversia giraba en torno a una ley estatal promulgada en 2018 que prohibía la mayoría de los abortos después de las primeras 15 semanas de embarazo.

Seis jueces conservadores, tres de ellos nombrados durante la presidencia de Trump, (contra tres liberales), sentenciaron que el

aborto no estaba amparado por la Constitución y devolvieron a los 50 Estados la potestad para legislar sobre el tema. Este fallo ha desatado un auténtico terremoto político y social en Estados Unidos. La sentencia dejó así en manos de los Gobiernos estatales los derechos reproductivos, hecho que en Estados Unidos es relevante si se tiene en cuenta que, en muchos estados, especialmente en el sur, gobierna el partido republicano, quienes siguen una clara política antiaborto. La decisión del Supremo estadounidense dejó así desprotegidas a 36 millones de estadounidenses en edad reproductiva, precisamente aquellas las que viven en los Estados en los que el acceso al aborto está prohibido o muy limitado. Las mujeres que pertenecen a minorías raciales, los colectivos marginados y las clases bajas son las que más verán limitados sus derechos. Entre ellas se encuentran muchas hispanas y migrantes residentes en los Estados más restrictivos, que enfrentarán barreras estructurales si deciden interrumpir sus embarazos. Los tres jueces liberales Breyer, Kagan y Sotomayor, que votaron en contra así lo señalaron:

Algunas mujeres, especialmente las que tienen medios, encontrarán formas de evitar la afirmación del poder del Estado. Otras (las que no tienen dinero, ni guardería, ni la posibilidad de ausentarse del trabajo) no serán tan afortunadas. Tal vez prueben un método de aborto no seguro, y sufran daños físicos, o incluso mueran. Tal vez mantengan el embarazo y tengan un hijo, pero con un importante coste personal o familiar. Como mínimo, tendrán el coste de perder el control de sus vidas. (Breyer, Kagan y Sotomayor 51)

A diciembre de 2023, de los estados que componen Estados Unidos, 14 prohíben totalmente el aborto. Otros 12 estados imponen restricciones que van de las 6 a las 26 semanas de gestación, así como limitaciones en el acceso a los servicios de aborto. En ocho de ellos, las prohibiciones absolutas o severas están bloqueadas por decisiones de jueces federales. En cinco estados se aplican restricciones leves, mientras que, en 20 estados el aborto es legal

en una fase avanzada del embarazo o sin límite de semanas de gestación (BBC).

Como vemos, el fallo sobre el pleito *Roe contra Wade* dictado por el Tribunal Supremo de los Estados Unidos ha provocado tres cambios fundamentales: En primer lugar, el Sur del país se ha convertido en un extenso terreno de limitaciones al aborto, negando a las mujeres que residen en esos estados la posibilidad de someterse legalmente al procedimiento. En segundo lugar, esto ha desencadenado conflictos legales entre los gobernadores que han respaldado leyes restrictivas y los jueces que han bloqueado esas decisiones en los tribunales supremos estatales, suspendiendo las nuevas prohibiciones en algunos casos de manera temporal y en otros de forma indefinida. Por último, ha motivado a los estados que defienden el derecho al aborto a promover salvaguardias más amplias como una respuesta a la tendencia restrictiva que prevalece en otros lugares (BBC).

Ante este panorama, resulta pertinente señalar como en Estados Unidos, en plena controversia por la sentencia del tribunal supremo, grandes empresas garantizaron que pagarán los gastos de los empleados que decidan viajar a otros lugares con el fin de obtener un aborto legal. Entre estas se destacan a las multimillonarias como Amazon, Disney, Apple, Starbucks, Netflix, Tesla y J.P Morgan. De esta manera, “las empresas se levantan como garantes de los derechos a las mujeres” (Moyano). Por otro lado, en 2023 la Administración de Alimentos y Medicamentos (FDA) de los Estados Unidos aprobó la venta libre en farmacias de dos fármacos abortivos: Mifepristone y Misoprostol [7] (New York Times). Estos dos ejemplos dan cuenta de la peligrosa incidencia del capitalismo estadounidense en la toma de decisiones de las mujeres respecto de sus propios cuerpos y libertades individuales. El mercado toma protagonismo en lugar del Estado y, justamente, es el mercado, quien causa retrocesos en el acceso a un derecho, pues lo convierte nuevamente en privilegio, para aquel que pueda permitírselo y pagarlo (Sanchez y Becker 1178).

#### 4. Conclusión

En resumen, la poderosa influencia de la derecha religiosa en la agenda política conservadora de las Américas ha dejado una huella significativa en la salud reproductiva de las mujeres en los últimos años. La ascensión de líderes „populistas de derechas“ en respuesta al descontento público ha propiciado alianzas pragmáticas con movimientos religiosos, particularmente los cristianos ultraconservadores en la región. Aprovechando momentos de malestar político, estos movimientos pueden ofrecer votos y recursos financieros.

Esta dinámica ha desencadenado un embate neoconservador, consolidado por diversos grupos de poder que se unen contra la llamada „ideología de género“. Estos esfuerzos se manifiestan a través del boicot a fondos destinados a organizaciones y centros de salud reproductiva, generando impactos perturbadores a nivel local. También se traduce en un recrudecimiento de la violencia hacia las mujeres, discriminación por identidad de género y un retroceso en los derechos sexuales y reproductivos, especialmente para las mujeres, comprometiendo su autonomía. Aunque ha habido un aumento en el cuestionamiento de género y sexualidad, este no sigue el enfoque desesencializador propuesto por Judith Butler. Por el contrario, actores y grupos religiosos y de derecha buscan reificar y re-esencializar estos aspectos, reafirmando estructuras sociales patriarcales y heterosexuales.

Al analizar los efectos de la administración de Donald Trump desde una perspectiva interamericana, este estudio muestra como decisiones tomadas desde Washington y articuladas en torno a los planteamientos de elites religiosas cristianas y conservadoras no solo afectaron los derechos reproductivos locales de las mujeres en los Estados Unidos al remover el derecho al aborto de las competencias del gobierno nacional y devolverlo a las competencias de los estados, sino que también afectaron gravemente el reparto de los recursos económicos para la atención de la salud en toda Latinoamérica y el sur global.

En América Latina, la mayoría de ONGs que ofrecen atención sanitaria y trabajaban



con financiación estadounidense y de otras organizaciones internacionales recipientes de dinero de los Estados Unidos debieron reformular o cancelar sus programas de planificación familiar, incluidos servicios de anticoncepción, aborto seguro y en el asesoramiento a mujeres sobre cuestiones reproductivas la salud reproductiva, si no querían verse privadas de los recursos para atender programas en áreas también importantes como la salud infantil, la malaria, y la nutrición. Este giro ha desplazado las necesidades de atención sanitaria sexual y reproductiva de las mujeres en las Américas a un segundo plano. La posibilidad de que Donald Trump sea reelegido en 2024 podría agravar esta situación, relegando nuevamente las necesidades de las mujeres al último lugar en la agenda de políticas de salud. Como ya lo vaticinó Simone De Beauvoir (63):

Bastará una crisis política, económica o religiosa para que los derechos de las mujeres vuelvan a ser cuestionados. Estos derechos nunca se dan por adquiridos, deben permanecer vigilantes toda su vida.

## Notas

[1] “Las Américas” en este artículo hace referencia a una perspectiva interamericana y transnacional que indaga en la génesis y reproducción de conjuntos densos y continuos de transacciones transfronterizas que toman lugar y conectan Norte, Centro y Suramérica. Esta perspectiva también analiza los efectos dichas transacciones transfronterizas en locales, nacionales y globales y como se engarzan en el triángulo poder-espacio-conocimiento (Kaltmeier 175)

[2] „Ideología de género“ es un término empleado por los grupos neoconservadores para describir el género como una falsedad que se enfrenta a la realidad empírica y al sentido común. Lo utilizan para negar las pruebas científicas respaldadas por la investigación de las ciencias sociales, la biología, la psicología y la antropología que ponen de manifiesto que el género es una estructura social y una relación de poder que da forma a la organización de la sociedad basándose en las diferencias percibidas entre los sexos (Ver Scott 1996).

[3] En la campaña para su elección en la segunda vuelta, Iván Duque se ganó el apoyo de los líderes de las tres listas cristianas que se presentaron al Congreso y que sumaron un millón de votos. Estos partidos fueron “Colombia Creyente”, el movimiento cristiano “Colombia Justa Libres”, y el Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta (MIRA).

[4] El consejo asesor religioso evangélico de Trump es

una mezcla de predicadores radicales, tele-evangelistas e influyentes políticos conservadores, casi todos evangélicos o neo-evangélicos (Walters y Morris).

[5] La invasión rusa de Ucrania y la subida del precio del petróleo mundial abrió una insólita ventana para el diálogo entre Estados Unidos y Venezuela desde marzo de 2022. En octubre de 2023 la Administración del presidente estadounidense, Joe Biden, alivió las sanciones de su país a Venezuela en el sector petrolero, de gas y de oro durante al menos seis meses. Esto, como respuesta a un acuerdo sobre las elecciones presidenciales venezolanas de 2024 celebrado entre el gobierno y la oposición, en las cuales habrá observadores internacionales (Blandón Ramirez).

[6] Un informe de Médicos Sin Fronteras alerta de un grave déficit para satisfacer las peticiones de la ONU para ayuda humanitaria global, unos 48.000 millones de euros en 2022. Ese año la cobertura de solicitudes de la ONU alcanzó un récord de 30.300 millones de dólares (27.700 millones de euros), el déficit fue el de mayor volumen registrado y llegó al 42% (Stacey).

[7] La mifepristona bloquea una hormona llamada progesterona que es necesaria para que continúe el embarazo. El misoprostol provoca contracciones uterinas, haciendo que el cuerpo expulse el embarazo como en un aborto espontáneo. La toma conjunta de estas píldoras provoca un aborto completo en más del 99% de las pacientes (Belluck).

## Obras citadas

Althoff, Andrea. “Right-Wing Populism and Evangelicalism in Guatemala: The Presidency of Jimmy Morales.” *International Journal of Latin American Religions*, vol. 3, 2019, pp. 294-324, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.

---. “Donald Trump Y Jimmy Morales: entrelazamientos de política transnacional y religión.” *Ciencias Sociales y Religión/Ciências Sociais e Religião*, vol. 23, 30 dic. 2021, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.

Amaya, Daniela. “Con el Mira, se confirma que Duque es el elegido de los cristianos.” *La Silla Vacía*, 11 may. 2018, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.

Belluck, Pam. “Abortion Pills Can Now Be Offered at Retail Pharmacies, F.D.A. Says.” *New York Times*, 3 ene. 2023, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.

Breyer, Stephen, Elena Kagan y Sonia Sotomayor. *We Dissent: Justices Breyer, Sotomayor, and Kagan on Dobbs v. Jackson, the Supreme Court's Decision Banning Abortion*. House Publishing, 2022

Blandón Ramirez, Daniela. “Estados Unidos levanta temporalmente las sanciones sobre el petróleo, el oro y el gas de Venezuela.” *France24*, 19 oct. 2023, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.

Caccia, Magdalena, y Laura Mercedes Oyhantcabal. “El género y los derechos sexuales y reproductivos bajo amenaza: tres posturas, un mismo objetivo.” *Revista del Laboratorio Iberoamericano para el*

- Estudio Sociohistórico de las Sexualidades*, vol. 9, 2023, pp. 60-76, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Corrales, Javier. “¿Cómo explicar la crisis económica en Venezuela?” *Tribuna: revista de asuntos públicos*, no. 14, 2017, pp. 30-34, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Coyoy, Melani. “Guatemala no tiene una política pública para garantizar derechos sexuales y reproductivos.” *Plaza Pública*, 28 oct. 2022, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *El segundo sexo*. Cátedra, 2017
- EFE. “Guatemala registra más de 45 mil denuncias por delitos contra mujeres y menores en lo que va de 2022.” *Prensa Libre*, 6 jul. 2022, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Freitez, Anitza. “Crisis humanitaria y migración forzada desde Venezuela.” *Crisis y migración de población venezolana. Entre la desprotección y la seguridad jurídica en Latinoamérica*, editado por Luciana Gandini, Fernando Lozano Ascencio y Victoria Prieto, UNAM, 2019, pp. 33-58.
- Garner, Roberta. *Contemporary Movement and Ideologies*. McGraw-Hill, 1996.
- Gratius, Susann, y Anna Ayuso Pozo. “Sanciones como instrumento de coerción: ¿cuán similares son las políticas de Estados Unidos y la Unión Europea hacia Venezuela?” *América Latina Hoy*, vol. 85, 2020, pp. 31-53.
- International Land Coalition. *Mujeres Rurales: Acceso a tierra, presupuesto para el desarrollo, participación en espacios de decisión, criminalización y acceso a la Justicia de defensoras*. Informe Alternativo Actualizado 2023. Guatemala [https://d3o3cb4w253x5q.cloudfront.net/media/documents/INT\\_CEDAW\\_CSS\\_GTM\\_56114\\_S.pdf](https://d3o3cb4w253x5q.cloudfront.net/media/documents/INT_CEDAW_CSS_GTM_56114_S.pdf) Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). *Global Health Policy. The Mexico City Policy: An Explainer*. 28 ene. 2021, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Kaltmeier, Olaf. “Inter-American Perspectives for the Rethinking of Area Studies.” *fiar*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2014, pp. 171-182, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Latinobarómetro. *Informe Latinobarómetro 2020 por países*, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Médicos sin fronteras. *Los migrantes venezolanos en Colombia atraviesan una crisis desatendida*. 18 dic. 2019, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social. *Plan Estratégico Nacional para la Reducción de Muerte Materna y Neonatal 2021 – 2025*. Jun. 2021, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Moyano, Mariana. “Aborto, EE.UU. y cómo leer desde Argentina.” *Es al revés, Radio 10*. 28 jun. 2022, Spotify. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Mudde, Cas, y Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2017.
- Oropeza Colmenares, Valentina. “Aborto en EE.UU.: los mapas interactivos que muestran cómo crecen las restricciones en el país.” *BBC News Mundo*, 23 jun. 2023, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Pew Research Center. *An Examination of the 2016 Electorate, Based on Validated Votes*, 9 ago. 2018, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Stacey, Diego. “La demanda de ayuda humanitaria en el mundo se eleva a cifras récord y más del 40% queda sin cubrir.” *El País*, 19 dic. 2023, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Sánchez, María Lucía, y María Sol Becker. “Las voces sociales por el aborto legal, seguro y gratuito en la coyuntura Global: Avances y Retrocesos”. Actas de ponencias del XXIV Congreso de la Red de Carreras de Comunicación Social y Periodismo de la Argentina (REDCOM), Lomas de Zamora, 3 al 5 de octubre de 2022. Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.
- Schäfer, Heinrich. *Las ‘sectas’ protestantes y el espíritu del (anti-) imperialismo: Entrelazamientos religiosos en las Américas*. Ensayos InterAmericanos 8, kipu Verlag, 2020.
- . *Die Taufe des Leviathan. Protestantische Eliten und Politik in den USA und Lateinamerika*. Bielefeld UP, 2021.
- Scott, Joan W. “El género: Una categoría útil para el análisis histórico.” *El género: la construcción cultural de la diferencia sexual*, compilado por Marta Lamas, PUEG, 1996, pp. 265-302.
- Walters, Joanna, y Sam Morris. “Trump’s evangelical panel remains intact as others disband. Here are his religious cheerleaders.” *The Guardian*, 19 ag. 2017, Web. Consultado 22 dic. 2023.

## Biografía de la autora

Clara Buitrago Valencia obtuvo su doctorado en sociología en la Universidad de Bielefeld (Alemania) en 2019. Cursó en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid sus estudios de Máster en Antropología Social (2008) y Estudios en América Latina (2012). También ha sido Investigadora visitante en la Universidad de Columbia, Nueva York y en Universidad Humboldt, Berlín.



# Defecting Cuba: Diplomacy, Baseball, and the Chase for Democratic Opportunity

EMALEE NELSON (UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN, USA)

## Abstract

*International competition has been the most common venue for athletes from countries like Cuba to stage their best attempt at a getaway from their home country. Oftentimes, this is the case for many athletes who may only receive approval and an exit visa for sport related reasons. This paper provides a brief history of the defections of Cuban athletes, the United States and Cuba's complicated relationship with defected athletes, and the legal and diplomatic consequences of these athletes' actions.*

**Keywords:** baseball, Cuba, democracy, sports, communist regime

## Introduction

In 2021, a team of Cuban baseball players traveled to Mexico to compete in the U-23 World Cup. Though the team ultimately fell to Bolivia in the bronze medal match, the action continued following the final out. Twelve Cuban players decided to not return with the team back to their home country. Ultimately, this led to the largest defection of Cuban athletes in recent history. Through Cuba's state media, officials called the actions of these young men a "vile abandonment", insinuating their "weak morals and ethics" (Will Grant 2021). For Cuba, the actions by these baseball players were not only an embarrassment on the international stage, but a heavy depletion of talent from their international roster. For the players, this was their sole attempt to leave a Communist regime in order to maximize their chances of playing professionally in the United States on a Major League Baseball (MLB) team.

Cuba has a long history of defecting athletes, but recent geopolitical turmoil has reignited a practice many athletes, especially baseball players, are all too familiar with. Former presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro attempted noticeable efforts to mend diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba

in 2014 by easing trade and travel restrictions, while keeping certain elements of the economic embargo. However, the Trump administration reversed many of these policies, ultimately solidifying the contested relationship between the two nations (Trotta and Marsh). Cuban baseball players aiming to pitch, hit, and run in their sport's highest professional league were once again caught in the midst of an ideological contest with no clear end in sight. This paper will discuss a brief history as to why athletes defect, the United States and Cuba's complicated relationship with defected athletes, and the legal and diplomatic consequences of athletes' actions.

## Defecting Becomes an Olympic Sport

International competition has been the most common venue for athletes to stage their best attempt at a getaway from their home country. Oftentimes, this is the case for many athletes who may only receive approval and an exit visa for sport related reasons. But also, international competitions can be sites where ideological and political regimes are put to the test to determine a winner and loser. While we know this *isn't* actually true, countries have pumped endless amounts of resources into their athletes to

ensure success on the international stage. The Olympics have served as the premier event for over a century for countries to display their finest performers as ambassadors of their respective political ideology.

Pierre de Coubertin established what would become the modern Olympics and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 in France. From the earliest idea of the event, the Olympics were intended to bring together the world to participate in a “courteous contest” which, to de Coubertin, represented the “best form of internationalism” (Müller 301). Yet, the international olive branches were almost too fast and loose when reports of some individuals from various countries teamed up in events like men’s doubles tennis during the 1896 Olympics in Athens. By the 1908 Olympic Games in London, event organizers aimed for stricter regulations for competitors to represent their respective countries. This began to set the tone for the Olympiad to break away as a side show to the World Fairs and become an important international event. Furthermore, it began to solidify the relationship between the athletes and the country they represented on their uniform.

The years between World War I and World War II, sports became an increasingly popular form of recreation for people around the world. The significance of success, especially on an international stage, became more than just a win. It represented nationalistic pride for one’s country in a safer, healthier outlet for displaying a country’s success, as opposed to a global war of attrition. However, following WWII, it became increasingly evident that two types of ideologies would remain—a brand of liberal democracy touted by the United States of America and a highly centralized implementation of communism practiced by the Soviet Union.

As a result, countries across the world had to decide which side of the Iron Curtain they fell on. Additionally, sporting organizations were subject to this divide, as well. IOC president Avery Brundage was concerned by the development of “political blocs” in the Olympic movement. “Since the War [WWII]...we have a group of countries operating as a unit...we certainly do not want anything like the Iron Curtain dividing the IOC” (“Memorandum”). Yet, the Olympics

would indeed become the political arena Brundage aimed to avert, especially as Soviet sport officials viewed the Games as a vehicle to spread communism throughout the world (Parks 126). However, it didn’t take long for citizens to feel the political effects in their own backyard.

During the 1948 Olympics in London, Marie Provaznikova was the Czechoslovakian women’s gymnastics coach. A few months prior to the games, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia carried out a successful coup d’état which marked the beginning of (what would become) four decades of communist rule. Because of this conflict, Provaznikova cited her “lack of freedom” in Prague as her reason to become—what many consider—the first known defector from the Olympics (Daniel). Her defection marked the beginning of two important concepts. First, she introduced international sport competitions as the premier site to pull off an illegal exit from one’s home country. But more importantly, she set off a trend which would become a key aspect of the Cold War.

### **Cuba Comes to the Plate**

As the early post-war years crept into the Cold War years, the United States kept a close eye on Cuba. Fulgencio Batista’s leadership was proving to be problematic for many Cubans, as rates of poverty increased, along with crime and vice-laden practices in the streets of Havana. The United States’ long interest in Cuban sugar kept Batista’s pockets full, but popularity amongst his countrymen low. As a result, Fidel Castro and his close comrades led a long-shot revolution which surprisingly ended with Batista fleeing to the Dominican Republic in late 1958. The overthrow of Batista’s presidential dictatorship turned Cuba into a full-fledged communist state. Subsequently, the United States imposed a series of harsh economic sanctions, including a severe trade embargo in 1960. Two years later, the Cuban Missile Crisis escalated tensions to a near nuclear brink. While no weapons of mass destruction were fired, the proxy war between the United States, the Soviet Union, and the smaller countries on their respective “sides” reached a turning point which would define the latter half of the 20th century. It was becoming

increasingly clear to citizens that they belonged to either communism or democracy.

Castro's Cuba aggressively shifted towards a centralized government. Julie Marie Bunck notes, "Fidel Castro set out to substantially change pre-revolutionary culture and to impose on Cubans different beliefs and attitudes. The regime sought to create a 'new man'—selfless and cooperative, obedient and hard-working, gender-blind and incorruptible, non-materialistic, and completely loyal" (Bunck 112). While this included attempts at incorporating literacy programs, universal healthcare, and free schooling, Castro's agenda had many repercussions. The government seized private land and facilities, which affected many citizens. Anyone who attempted to challenge the revolution was subject to interrogations, imprisonment, or even sent to labor camps. As a result, many Cubans attempted to flee this strict regime in hopes for freedom. South Florida became a popular destination for those seeking to rebuild their lives in the United States. Yet, athletes found themselves in the midst of this geopolitical crisis.

The lure of professional sporting opportunities and freedom in the United States was a soft power Americans dangled over Cubans looking for an escape from their tumultuous homeland. H. Michael Erisman acknowledges soft power as a type of influence countries use in attempts to alter behavior of certain groups to achieve a specific result. For the United States, swaying anyone away from Communism, let alone athletes, was considered a success and a task of the utmost importance during the Cold War. Yet, for Cuban officials, it was the ultimate betrayal.

The new Cuban regime encouraged participation in sports for two reasons: Body and country. In accordance with Communistic ideals, healthy bodies created physically skilled laborers. However, those same healthy bodies could perform on the international stage as "successes of the socialist Revolution" taking place in Cuba, or so Castro thought. For him, these young international athletes were the ambassadors of the new Cuban man (Bunck 112). In post-revolutionary Cuba, sports were something accessible to everyone, not just the elites, as it was during the pre-revolutionary years (Bunck 115). Castro was adamant to

remind Cubans that sports, under Batista, had "gravitated around institutions, around private clubs which were only for the powerful classes, the national bourgeoisie, those who could belong to clubs because they had money and opportunities" (*Granma Weekly Review* 1969). For Castro, sports was the perfect opportunity to create "anti-American, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist sentiments among the Cuban population" (Bunck 113). This placed sport in the forefront of the tensions between Soviet communism and Western capitalism, with Cuba and America as the two key players representing each ideological team.

Cuba was quite vocal in their revolutionary model of sports, while also critiquing "capitalist sports." In a 1969 interview with *Granma*, the official publication of the Communist Party of Cuba, Castro stated,

One day, when the Yankees accept peaceful coexistence with our own country, we shall beat them at baseball too and then the advantages of revolutionary over capitalist sports will be shown!...We aspire to give our example of the triumph of a worthy concept of sports...We have raised the revolutionary concept of sports... in addition to having taught lessons to the enemy, they have also achieved an extraordinary victory, not for country, but for an idea. (*Granma Weekly Review*)

As idealistic as this sounds, sports were not an escape from the grim realities of the failed socialism promises from Castro and company. For baseball players, especially, these two countries were the land of opportunity for a career on the diamond.

### The Karl Marx to Uncle Sam Pipeline

Major League Baseball was experiencing tremendous growth in the postwar years. The growth in attendance helped aid the slump experienced during the war, though the creation of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League helped sustain professional baseball in the Midwest while men, including professional athletes, were serving in the armed forces (Fidler). The 1947 season marked a significant

step of progress in race relations within the United States when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in professional baseball as a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. While this was (and still is) a profoundly important moment for racial inclusion, it marked the beginning of the end for the Negro League, which were seen as a valuable asset and business opportunity for many Black entrepreneurs (Lanctot). Yet, many of these Black players from the Negro League and white MLB players would flock to the Caribbean in the off-season to play in the Cuban Leagues. In fact, most historians acknowledge this league was the most competitive, elite level of play in the world, at that time, because it was an integrated, more equitable playing field than MLB.

The Cuban League continued to operate into the 1950s, even though the Mexican League became stiff competition when they started to sign big named players during the late 1940s. However, the Cuban League's biggest demise would not be their neighbors to the west, but instead from their own baseball loving leader. Following the Cuban Revolution, the political estrangement between Cuba and the United States severed the relative ease in which players could flow back and forth between the two countries. Major and minor league teams grew skeptical of their players spending their winters playing ball in the "new" Cuba. In 1961, the league folded—only for non-Cuban players. Castro, who was once scouted by the Washington Senators, wanted to blend his love of the sport and the idea of this post-revolutionary man. As a result, the professional league on the island turned into an amateur league only available for Cubans (Kelly).

During these years, Cuba fielded impressive teams which performed well during international tournament competitions. At home, the shoddy, run-down stadiums were packed full with fellow countrymen and women to cheer on their national team. Katie Krall stated, "While in the US a Little Leaguer might dream of playing shortstop for the Yankees, in Cuba there was no higher honor than being named to the national team" (Krall). Cuban baseball historian Peter C. Bjarkman described this league as a near "alternate universe" to the other professional leagues in the United States,

and even abroad, like the Japanese professional leagues (Bjarkman, "Cuban League"). While Castro saw the league's success as a symbol of socialist triumph, it did spur a sense of nationalistic pride in the players who felt torn between staying in Cuba and seeking the fame from professional teams in the United States.

In 1977, former MLB Commissioner Bowie Kuhn released the "Kuhn Directive", which clarified the MLB's stance on emigrating Cuban players. In short, the policy essentially forbid MLB teams from discussions to sign any baseball player from Cuba. This signified to Cuban players that if they wanted a chance on an MLB roster, defection appeared to be the only option. Furthermore, the Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA) of 1966 gave Cubans, who resided in the United States for one year, permanent status (Greller). The abandonment of the amateur and national team in Cuba for American professional baseball was, to Castro, the ultimate betrayal.

For the latter half of the 20th century, the two countries danced in a purgatory of hostility, while maintaining slight functionality. However, the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked an important turning point in the relationship between Cuba, the United States, MLB, and baseball players. Economic issues began to immediately arise once the monetary Soviet assistance of nearly \$4,000,000,000 abruptly ceased and the embargo from the United States seemed insurmountable to alleviate the blow to the budget. In fact, Cuba's gross domestic product fell by 37%, while 50% of the economy lost its purchasing power (Huish 31). Cuban baseball quickly began to deteriorate, leaving players with seemingly sole option of a hopeful MLB career over hometown glory. When Cuban national team pitcher René Arocha left his country for the United States in 1991, the defection dominos began to tumble.

Archoa, along with many players suffocating under the collapsed Cuban economy and waning disillusionment of national loyalty, were faced with many difficult decisions. It was definitely not a simple choice to leave one's homeland for a new country. Archoa, who played for the Cuban national team for over ten years, feared the Cuban government would retaliate against his family after viewing his departure as an



“act of high treason” (Greller). Yet, once in the United States, Archoa sought political asylum and was able to achieve residency through the CAA. While these were proverbial green lights for Archoa, MLB was unsure how to proceed since the Kuhn Directive addressed players in Cuba, not Cuban players in the United States. Ultimately, once Archoa was able to satisfy the MLB’s residency requirements, a special lottery-style draft allowed the St. Louis Cardinals to win the drawing, negotiate, and sign Archoa to a contract (Greller).

This set an early precedent for drafting Cuban players during this tumultuous geopolitical time, which allowed players to only be considered for the draft each June, only if they were to follow legal immigration steps, including seeking asylum and obtaining residency. On October 11, 1992, Omani Estrada and Alexis Cabreja illegally entered the United States, hoping to join teams as free agents, rather than through a draft. Understandably, MLB advised all teams against signing unauthorized aliens. Both Estrada and Cabreja waited until the following June to be selected in the draft. It was worth the wait, given the Texas Rangers selected both players (Greller).

Throughout the decade, an increasing number of highly talented players continued to leave Cuba, and the risky move was appearing to pay off. By 1997 and 1998, half-brothers Livan and Orlando Hernandez won the World Series with their respective teams (Greller). Yet, their journey to hoisting the trophy in October began with Livan sneaking away from his hotel when training with the Cuban national team in Mexico to board a flight for Venezuela. Seen as a traitor, Orlando was subsequently kicked off the national team, which prompted his decision to depart for the Bahamas in the middle of the night on a small dinghy (Associated Press). For their fellow curious Cubans back home, this was the ultimate success story for the opportunity defection could bring. For Americans, the Cuban players remained pawns in the aftermath of the Cold War conflict, too, except on the other side of the border. Their successes in the United States seemed to add runs for democracy’s team on the proverbial scoreboard. In short, the more success the defectors had in MLB, the

more Americans could relish in the downfalls of Castro, communism, and Cuba. In fact, Cuban baseball players began to receive “favorable treatment [...] over other Cubans, and over other Latin American refugees because of the damaging political implications to the Castro government” (Greller). Ultimately, this proves that sports and its athletes can be players on the field and courts just as much as they can be for governmental leaders all over the world.

### Who’s Next at Bat?

These players made difficult decisions regarding their futures that would impact their families for generations to come. Katie Krall’s research (2019) outlines a “cost-benefit analysis of the value of defection.” She concludes that “strong familial and community ties” kept many players in Cuba, especially those players who bought into the nationalistic pride Castro preached to young men vying for a spot on the national team. Yet, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent effects in Cuba tainted the rose colored glasses many Cuban baseball players had worn for decades.

Not all players chased the salary and the American Dream. For Omar Linares, his patriotic sentiments towards Cuba kept him home. Some even referred to him as the “poster boy for deep-seated loyalty” for playing on the national team, though he was frequently approached by MLB teams to make the underground journey to the United States (Bjarkman, “Omar Linares”). Though Linares was making a mere \$20 a month while playing in Cuba, he truly believed he was a comrade for Castro and the state. In 1999, the Cuban national team defeated the Baltimore Orioles in an exhibition game. Linares was overcome with joy and pride. “Commander-in-chief, the mission you gave us has been completed,” he proclaimed, even going as far to add, “Socialismo o muerte! (*Socialism or death!*) Patria o muerte! (*Homeland or death!*) Venceremos! (*We will triumph!*)” (Jamail 142).

Dedication to one’s homeland can be viewed as an admirable trait, regardless of which ideological camp you call home. However, the blend between sport and nationalism as a weapon for diplomacy has become impossible

to separate in the past century. Eric Hobsbawm describes this concept as the “gap between private and public worlds was bridged by sport” (Hobsbawm 142). The agendas of some of the most powerful men in the world relied upon athletes to fulfill their diplomatic ambitions dreamed up in war rooms thousands of miles away from a baseball field.

Even as heated tensions between the United States and Cuba briefly thawed during the Obama administration, uncertainty remains for athletes today. For a moment, the eased embargo and open borders for tourists signified a turning point for not only citizens, but especially for Cuban baseball players who had waved goodbye to any chance of returning to their homeland after defection. For many, their journey to America was geopolitically and physically dangerous. In 1993, shortstop Rey Ordóñez scaled a fence at the World University Games in Buffalo, New York to escape his team and Cuba’s communism on foot. In 1996, Rolando Arrojo was pitching for the Cuban national team at the Olympic Games in Atlanta when he snuck out of the hotel, jumped in a vehicle, and found his way to Miami. In 2012, slugger Yasiel Puig was smuggled off island with the assistance of a Mexican drug cartel (Associated Press).

These risky voyages illustrate the strong sentiments athletes feel when deciding the fate of their futures. The intersection of sport and politics is not a new concept. In fact, the merging of sport, nationalism, and diplomacy has long been a theme for many countries who utilize athletes to employ a particular agenda. It is time to acknowledge this unique relationship for what it is, rather than vilify athletes for choosing what they determine to be best for themselves and their family. For the fan, sport is seen as a recreational escape from the grim and deflating realities of the world. For many athletes, those realities are their world.

## Works Cited

- Associated Press. “Defection ordeals may be a thing of the past for Cuban stars.” *USA Today Sports*, 19 Dec. 2018, Web. Accessed 10 May 2021.
- Bjarkman, Peter C. “Cuban League.” *Society of American Baseball Research*, 12 May 2016, Web. Accessed 10 May 2021.
- . “Omar Linares.” *Society for American Baseball Research*, Web. Accessed Jan. 20, 2022.
- Bunck, Julie Marie. “The Politics of Sports in Revolutionary Cuba.” *Cuban Studies*, no. 20, 1990, pp. 111-31.
- Daniel, Clifton. “Woman Seeks Asylum Here: Leader Of Czech Contingent At Olympics Refuses To Return To Her Homeland.” *The New York Times*, 19 Aug. 1948, p. 2.
- Erisman, Michael H. “Brain Drain Politics: The Cuban Medical Professional Parole Programme.” *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3/4, 2012, pp. 269-290.
- Fidler, Merrie A., *The Origins and History of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League*. McFarland & Company Inc., 2006.
- Grant, Will. “Cuban Baseball Players Defect During Tournament In Mexico.” *BBC News*, 4 Oct. 2021, Web. Accessed Jan. 20, 2022.
- Granma Weekly Review*, January 26, 1969.
- . September 10, 1972.
- Greller, Matthew N. “Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor, Your Fastball Pitchers Yearning for Strike Three: How Baseball Diplomacy Can Revitalize Major League Baseball and United States-Cuba Relations.” *American University of International Law Review*, vol. 14, no. 6, 1999, pp. 1647-1713.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Huish, Robert, et al. “The (Soft) Power of Sport: The Comprehensive and Contradictory Strategies of Cuba’s Sport-Based Internationalism.” *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2013, pp. 26-40.
- Jamail, Milton H. *Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball*. Southern Illinois UP, 2000.
- Lancot, Neal. *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2004.
- Kelly, Matt. “Winters in Cuba.” *Baseball Hall of Fame*, Web. Accessed 12 May 2022.
- Krall, Katie. “Community, Defection, and equipo Cuba: Baseball under Fidel Castro, 1959-93.” *Society of American Baseball Research*, 13 Nov. 2019, Web. Accessed 12 May 2022.
- Norbert Müller, ed. *Pierre de Coubertin 1863-1937: Olympism: Selected Writings*. International Olympic Committee, 2000.
- “Memorandum.” *Avery Brundage Collection*, 1908-75, box 149, reel 84, International Centre for Olympic Studies Archives, University Of Western Ontario.
- Parks, Jennifer. *Red Sport, Red Tape: The Olympic Games, The Soviet Sports Bureaucracy, and the Cold War, 1952-1980*. 2009. U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ph.D dissertation.



Trotta, Daniel, and Sarah Marsh. "Cuban Deal With MLB Allows Players To Sign Without Defecting." *Reuters*, 19 Dec. 2018, Web. Accessed 12 May 2022.

Wolf Lyberg. *IOC General Session Minutes*, 2000.

### **Author's Biography**

---

Emalee Nelson is educator for Intercollegiate Athletics and Education at the University of Texas at Austin, USA.

# A descriptive analysis of the representation of social status through advertisements in Mexican print magazines

DANIEL DE LA MIYAR (TEXAS A&M INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, USA)

---

## Abstract

*The purpose of this essay is to discuss the mechanisms through which social status is presented in print advertisements and make the reader aware of the ways they reflect and promote social status in Mexican magazines for their upper-class readers. The goal is to determine the relationship between social status and the messages advertisers create through the use of visual and textual semiotics based on the semiotic analysis framework of Bell and Milic (2002), and to locate instances that index social status reflected in the advertisements selected. Four campaigns were selected with a total of 25 advertisements included in two Mexican elite magazines only circulated in Mexico: Caras and Quién. Studies on the influence of social statuses presented in advertising targeting higher economic-class are scarce and this paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon. The intended audience for these magazines are upper class readers with financial freedom and high social status, a sub-segment of the audience also underrepresented in current scholarship.*

**Keywords:** Mexican advertisement, social status, Mexican elite magazines, semiotic analysis of advertisements

---

## A descriptive analysis of the representation of social status through print media

Marketing, worldwide, uses advertising to promote and sell products. One of its tools is imagery. Advertisers present different types of lifestyles through their campaigns, which they hope viewers will desire to imitate. These lifestyles are stereotypes of their respective cultures and consequently advertising presents them in a way that audience members feel a need to be part of that group. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the strategies advertising use to reflect social status and to make the products appealing to their readers. It tries to deconstruct the advertisements promoting products associated with social status through the semiotic analysis of the signs and symbols used. The target readers of these magazines are individuals with financial access to travel, private education, and who have the means to acquire products worldwide.

Advertising is a tool used in a vast amount of cases, including political campaigns (Granato

and Wong), product merchandising (Syverson), religious proselytizing (Stolow), and military recruitment. Advertising is an important medium to inform and to stimulate interest in a product (Vikander). It is reported that in 2010 the United States spent \$142.5 billion in advertising and \$467 billion worldwide (WPP). This study focuses on advertising as it refers to consumer behavior. The purpose is to deconstruct the mechanisms through which social status is represented in advertising, specifically in magazines geared towards upper-class readers, focusing on the following criteria through which social status is conveyed: signs, symbols, color, lexical and non-lexical, and proximal devices.

## Advertising

Advertising plays an important factor in people's lives. Through this medium, messages are conveyed through verbal and non-verbal tools. They are not static. These tools and devices are embedded in the culture and the context in which they are used. Every message,

whether verbal or non-verbal, contains ideas with multiple meanings. The main function of mass communication, and consequently of advertising, entails engaging in different activities such as connectivity, interpretation and setting examples (Kalish and Anderson 74).

Advertising offers viewers depictions of lifestyles that perhaps audience members may lack or wish to have. Social status is presented as a commodity that is achievable through the ownership of a product (Sivanathan and Pettit 564). Thus, the abstract construct of social status is reified through its representation in advertisements. The message is that through the ownership of a particular product, the individual can get in contact and possess social status (Sauder 280).

### Definitions of Social Status.

Social status as defined by Max Weber is established by stratifying three components: property (Kalish and Anderson), prestige (Kong and Phau) and power (Whittaker). According to Sheumaker and Wajda, "social class may be defined simply as a division in society" (416). Kalish and Anderson discuss that social status is mostly represented by exclusivity, right of membership, special privileges, and ownership and is characterized by power. Both state that "ownership is a status; to have the status of 'owner' is to have a particular set of rights and duties" (66). Thus, in advertising, social status is projected onto the product. Rege mentions that there is a social transaction in social status. This transaction may not be physically visible but people can observe a change in status (Pedone and Conte, 250) or behavior in an individual (Rege 233).

These objects do convey and do influence a person's behavior. Rege later states that "the only thing a person cares about is how much money he is 'burning' on status consumption relative to other people" (234). These authors indicate that social status is attainable through the consumption of goods and determined that to obtain social status, it becomes a self-motive for individuals to acquire it and to make it noticeable to their peers.

### Roles in Advertising

Advertising has a strong impact on society (Gustafson). Certain roles portrayed in advertising are considered to be role-playing in society. Advertising builds an ideology and creates a need to acquire what the campaign is proposing. Thus, Kalish and Anderson assert that "status is a kind of reason, a reason to act in a certain way" (66). Social status then becomes the reason individuals act in society. Advertising demonstrates what can be attainable thus giving you that social positionality. Nonverbal communication is applied in advertising to send a certain message without the use of words or dialogue. There are different forms of communicating certain general data for the receiver to analyze and understand what the message is trying to convey. For example an individual's sex, age, personality, economic background, place of work, origin, social clubs and attitudes can all be understood without the use of verbal communication. Body language is the main medium used to send a message with the intention for the receiver to either agree or disagree. Some forms of nonverbal communication mostly rely on body language, gestures and facial expression to carry many feelings without any written language.

As mentioned before, advertising is always structured for an idea to be successful. Gustafson states that "advertising is a powerful force in society because it is the matrix or context within which we understand ourselves and the world" (205). Most of the unstructured messages in advertising are what individuals are exposed to in present times. Advertising presents a lifestyle and lure people that what they are selling is the idea of becoming that in the advertising, not the product. As mentioned by Kalish and Anderson stated that "status is a kind of reason, a reason to act in a certain way" (66).

Advertising exposes consumers to various lifestyles. It encourages the individual to own particular products. In high-end products, advertisers are not targeting individuals who already own that product, but rather those that do not and wish to be part of that social sphere. The individual is being approached to question his or her lifestyle and status. Advertising also

makes use of non-verbal interaction that some advertisement layouts include and they interact with the audience.

Image and status is what sells. As mentioned by Gustafson “advertising usually attempts to penetrate and co-opt all aspects of worldview with consumer ideas and values” (206). If you do not own an image and style you can always purchase it.

The purpose of this essay is not to argue against advertising assessment practices. There is a need to identify and document the strengths and weaknesses of advertising and the representation of social status. Why is it so important to have social status? Advertising is frequently a contributing factor in personal changes to occur at the behavior level of individuals receiving the message. Changes in behavior reflect on the person receiving that message or image of certain products. It is through advertising that strategies of repeated messages are used to get a concept or product across to people. This process that happens through time and repetition is what causes the change in attitude in the person receiving the image or message. Intercultural communication, which is the basis of many of the advertising strategies today, may help create an atmosphere that promotes cooperation and understanding among different cultures and provides ads with particular characteristics that facilitates the desired outcomes to happen. Visual persuasion in advertising, most of the times, is considered negative because of the needs that the message creates in people to desire and actually acquire items that may not be essential.

Advertising is the number one form to promote a product and for it to be integrated in society as a form of necessity. Certain images of products become icons when featuring the advantages of owning. It is extremely crucial for readers being targeted to be exposed to the right ambiance, colors, and lighting. The purpose of the ad is to sell a fantasy and the consumer most of the times purchases the product with the ad in mind.

### **Advertising Topics and Implementation**

Advertising uses repetition and reoccurrence as forms of strategic planning for a product to

be part of the consumer’s standard of living and everyday use. Any magazine ad that is appealing to the eye is more likely to have a positive reaction on people and tend to sell easier. The intention of today’s advertising is to associate particular lifestyles through products, images and beautiful people. In an ad layout, the consumer may see his or her image reflected or may know someone that may relate to that person in the ad. This intercultural concept is a huge success in advertising because advertising agencies seem to offer equality and togetherness.

Advertising is also about selling people appealing lifestyles and how they live and interact with other individuals. It is very common to see in ads more than one individual engaging in a particular activities, for example, singing, traveling, driving, or even eating. Colors, fonts, people, places and the environment are important for the consumer to relate to the ad and the product being promoted. Every ad usually has a story to tell the consumer. That is why it is very important to analyze how the characters in the ad are presented and whom they are interacting with. The excessive use of stereotyping in ads is frequently very effective and to some extent tolerated because it is very appealing. The researcher Edward T. Hall coined the term proxemics to refer to this kind of phenomena, meaning the placement of images or people, (personal territory) in any public space. This contributes to what viewers are being exposed to and accept it through the use of the product presented in the advertisement. It is a lifestyle what ultimately ads are offering. Currently, most members of society are mostly worried about consuming, owning and just having the advertised products to make their lives easier. Every product in today’s advertising world is presented a necessity in life. Every item advertised today is sold as a must that the individual must own. Advertising campaigns have always made use of attractive models to present the concept of the idea they are advertising. Advertising encourages the consumer to have certain lifestyle and own particular products so that they become part of a group that owns the same product. Gattone states that “images have come to play a key role

in this context, influencing public perceptions on a wide range of social, political, and economic issues" (499).

In most cases, print ads in magazines are telling people what to do and how it would feel to be experiencing a particular product, but there are no real bases behind it, since the reader is only being given the information without prior explanation. A vast number of hidden messages are contained in the words and images being used to advertise the product. Print messages found primarily in magazines tend to make the reader stop for a few seconds and view the ad because some element in the ad caught their attention. These elements include, color, placement of objects, fonts used, messages, animations and people used in the ads to convey a message. Ads are placed between sections of an article so that the reader will give the ad a few seconds to be analyzed. Sometimes the reader may stop and search for a logo or the actual item that is being advertised. Messages contained in ads, thus, are placed in such a way that the reader tends to be persuaded by the article being advertised. Persuasion tactics are sometimes difficult to spot and depend on the individual situation of the consumer being approached to be persuaded. Persuasion goes outside the normal parameters an individual is able to detect and seeks to make that person change his or her way of thinking either temporarily or permanently. Basically, any ad promoting a product is after certain reactions from its viewers. Advertising has become the key element for any product to become part of everyday life due to the connectivity that the product is looking for it to be adopted in an individual's life. Persuasion in ads is subtle and obvious at the same. Subtle because it makes the reader have the need to belong to that group of people and obvious because the sense of enjoyment is always present. The feeling of the person or their mood in a particular moment is what will make the audience member to spend any time on that ad. Mixed messages and feelings are constantly created through ads and transferred to the viewer. The creators of ads have thoughtfully researched appealing ways for the target audience. An important key factor is to persuade and make the reader have a

change in attitude towards a product. Delbaere, McQuarrie and Phillips state that "indirect persuasion attempts are common in magazine advertisements" (7).

Verbal messages and images change and expose viewers to many changes in our society. The ads directed at upper class readers are open to different interpretation and offer viewers a lifestyle to imitate or be part of. Ethical issues, values and morality are always factors influencing the final interpretation by the consumer, giving them the option to either disregard it or do something about them. The reader attributes a reason behind the image of a product and reach conclusions depending on the person's beliefs. Advertisements, however, are created to entertain, introduce and promote a product. Some ads are informative and others are geared towards the creation of brand reputation. While advertising should reflect the diversity of a culture, in present times media only reflects what the gatekeepers (the media industries) wants society to be exposed to. Stereotyping is one of the many ways media are hindering diversity in the portrayal of our culture. Media in their different types of ads are sending out messages and images focused mainly in obtaining people's attention through beautiful and well planned images in order to get the audience captivated and make them offer a lifestyle.

Ideologies are also affected by the content of messages because of the cultural meanings embedded in them. This means that through advertising various concepts may be transferred to other cultures. Exposing of ideologies is mostly common in advertising. Malmelin mentioned that "advertising is an increasingly prominent part of everyday life in our Western society today. More intensely than ever before, consumers lives are saturated by marketing and advertising messages" (130). Advertising leads them to diverse ways of interpretation. Since they have no prior knowledge of the theme or topic, they allow themselves to make up conclusions of what messages the ad is trying to convey. The more controversial the images are, the more they tend to stay in the reader's mind for over a period of time, enough as to purchase the item and try it out.



## Research Questions

Based on the discussion above, the following questions will guide this study:

- a) What elements are utilized through Mexican print media to index (symbolize) social status?
- b) What are the concept-ideas conveyed about products that reflect a sense of social status?
- c) What are the concept-ideas conveyed about consumers that reflect a sense of social status?
- d) What type of discourse is projected through the media regarding social class?
- e) How do advertisements use semiotics as a mechanism to influence the ideology of its viewers?

This research will address these questions using a descriptive critical discourse analysis to deconstruct the mechanisms through which social status is presented in advertisements.

## Methodology

As mentioned before, the purpose of this research is to deconstruct the mechanisms through which social status is represented in Spanish-language print media (advertising) targeting affluent Mexicans, because Mexicans of this socio-economic stratus are seldom studied in the literature on consumer behavior and advertising. Different theoretical lenses (e.g., Bell and Milic; Kress and van Leeuwen) were used to view and analyze the different symbolic components that the advertisements included to index social status.

## Criteria for Selection

I selected four campaigns and a total of 25 advertisements from two Mexican magazines: *Caras* and *Quién*. The campaigns were from a published list of the top 100 global companies. The campaigns used a minimum of three different images and were advertised in two Mexican magazines with national circulation. While global corporations market a variety of goods and services, only campaigns for high-end products being marketed to affluent Mexicans were considered. The advertising

campaigns selected were Nestlé Nido Excella Gold Milk (Nestlé Leche Nido Excella Gold), Audi Mexico automobiles, Antara Fashion Mall (a shopping center in Mexico City) and Estée Lauder cosmetics. They serve as a case study to find the interconnection between semiotic elements and social status. The study focuses on how social status is represented in these ads and the concepts used to denote prestige and power for the Mexican elite.

The analytical approach for this study is informed by Bell and Milic (2002)'s use of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) semiotic analysis. Their framework provides a set of tools to identify and describe visual elements and referents within an advertisement image. Using this approach, I will deconstruct the elements that index social status in the advertisements selected. This framework socially contextualizes the process of analysis, while providing a deeper and richer analysis through the consideration of the objective formal relationships within the images (Bell and Milic, 203–204).

## Profile of the Magazines

The images (advertisements) were collected from *Caras* and *Quién* magazines. These magazines were selected because they target the social elite of Mexico.

## Quién

According to its website, the magazine *Quién te lo cuenta mejor* (who tells it better), commonly known as *Quién*, had a monthly print run of 120,000 distributed only in Mexico, with a bi-weekly frequency, and a total readership of 456,000. Its reader profile was 28% male and 72% female, with an age range of 18–24 (15%), 25–34 (30%), 35–44 (31%) and 45+ (24%). *Quién* described its readers in the following way:

*Mujeres y hombres vanguardistas, modernos, urbanos y socialmente activos. Gente que viaja, consume y vive el estilo de vida de la alta sociedad mexicana. (Males and females who are avant-garde, modern, urban-hip, stylish and socially involved. People who take pleasure in*



traveling, as well as have expensive taste and enjoy a VIP social lifestyle within Mexico's high society.)

## Caras

According to its website, the magazine *Caras* (faces) features Mexican high-society, social gatherings, VIP events, fashion, entertainment, culture, travel, and royalty news, and published by Editorial Televisa. According to Mexico's National Print Media Institute (Padrón Nacional de Medios Impresos, <http://pnmi.segob.gob.mx/>), *Caras* has a monthly print run of 18,691 magazines for paid subscribers. Its reader profile is 36% male, 64% female, with an age range of 13–18 (1%), 19–24 (16%), 25–34 (32%), 35–44 (34%), and 45 and above (17%), with distribution only in Mexico. It states:

*La Revista Caras es la publicación que le ofrece lo más selecto de la vida social en México y el mundo, con artículos internacionales exclusivos, el glamour de Hollywood y las personalidades que marcan la pauta reflejando un estilo de vida sofisticado y cosmopolita para aquellos que exigen calidad. (Caras magazine offers its readers the most exclusive of Mexico's society and the world by including articles of international events, as well as Hollywood's glamour and of those celebrities who reflect a sophisticated and cosmopolitan lifestyle. Caras also features Mexican high-society, social gatherings, events, fashion, entertainment, culture, and travel and royalty news.)*

## Procedures Used to Analyze the Advertisements

I will deconstruct the images from the campaigns using Bell and Milic's and Kress and van Leeuwen's framework of semiotic analysis, in order to locate instances of the indexing of social status, as represented in the advertisements. Based on a review of the literature, I selected the following criteria to deconstruct the advertisements into the constituent elements that comprise the advertisers' strategies for

indexing social class and social status and the product itself. The structure of Kress and van Leeuwen's semiotic analysis will be used to deconstruct and demonstrate how social status is represented in advertisements.

*Phenotype.* This characteristic of human skin color makes a significant contribution to social perception (Maddox 383). Phenotypes are characteristics and traits that are viewable to others, such as skin tone, eye color, and hair color.

*Social divisions.* Anthias mentions that social divisions create classes within society and states that "the practices and outcomes in inequality involve experiential, intersubjective, organizational, and representational processes which relate to hierarchical difference, unequal resource allocation and inferiorisation" (837). Thus, the use of certain objects and tools represents specific social classes and/or tools only used within a specific group of people.

*Language use.* English is a power language and a language of prestige. Phillipson writes:

English is integral to the globalization processes that characterize the contemporary post- cold-war phase of aggressive casino capitalism, economic restructuring, McDonaldisation and militarization on all continents. English is dominant in international politics and commerce, its privileged role being strengthened through such bodies as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and regional groupings such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the European Union. (187).

The use of the English language in advertisements categorizes it within a higher status.

*Social positioning.* Anthias states:

Despite acknowledging that gender and ethnic/race processes are relevant in determining social positioning and that they may influence an individual's class

position, within stratification theory, non-class forms of differentiation tend to be seen as either manifestations of class or as “status” categories. (835)

Thus, the message being sent on social positioning is not only visible but, seen through the use of objects that have acquired certain statuses within society.

*Anglophone cultural references.* The role that the advertisement plays symbolizes the status of the objects used. Bell and Milic state that they follow “Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) in focusing primarily on the formal features of the image that constitute the resources for specific responses to different examples or to different genres of advertisements” (207). They continue by explaining that different codes can define a culture that gradually has morphed into an Anglophone culture/society and represent social status, wealth, and positionality within society.

*Leisure.* The construct of leisure is important because it denotes social status and how it is represented in the advertisements by the activities developed within the displayed advertisements.

*Idealized subject.* Bell and Milic (203-204) explain that advertisements give objects an idealized meaning and thus become items that reflect a role in society.

*Visual and textual images.* According to Bell and Milic, advertisements contain indicators of what the audience will define the product to be. For example, the use of a grand piano denotes wealth. Bell and Milic assert that “the transfer seems to be achieved in the mind of the audience by means of the structure of the advertisement” (207).

*Visual semiotics.* The analytical tool used recognizes three primary dimensions of visual semiotics vis-à-vis the image: (a) the representational (i.e., narrative process vs. conceptual process); (b) the interaction with the viewer; and (c) the metafunctional. Bell and Milic discuss how the representational

dimension will be reflected on the visual of the advertisement and the action that is developing in the advertisement: “The representational dimension...can be divided into the representation of narrative processes (‘goings on’) and conceptual processes (‘ideas’) within the frame of the image” (208). Bell and Milic mention that the metafunction is “the interaction between the viewer and the image” (208). Thus, metafunction is the communication between the objects and the viewer, such as the way an individual looks directly or indirectly at the camera. They continue: “Kress and van Leeuwen discuss the way interaction between the viewer and represented participants in images is structured by the gaze of the represented participants” (Bell and Milic 208).

*Social distance.* Bell and Milic further discuss visual representation and call it “social distance”; thus, they divide visual representation into three categories—personal, social, and public—that will also be used in this study to represent social status. Bell and Milic then state that “Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) analysis of modality, or the socially conventionalized realism or credibility of images, can also be regarded as an aspect of the interpersonal metafunction” (Bell and Milic 210).

*Realism.* This is “judged on dimensions such as color, degree of contextualization, comprehensiveness of representation, nature of the perspective, sources of illumination, and degree of brightness” (Bell and Milic 210).

In summary, for the purpose of this study, I modified Bell and Milic’s and Kress and van Leeuwen’s research on advertising approaches to take social status and social class reflected in advertising images into account, in order to be able to adapt them into this study. The approach I have adopted from Bell and Milic and from Kress and van Leeuwen is to analyze the potential meaning of advertising images, as well as indexed codes and semiotics that have created constructs, to display social status and social class in advertisements.

## Results of the Advertisements Indexing Social Status

The following elements demonstrated in the advertisements index social status and social position because of the actions portrayed in the layout:

a. Leisure activities: dancing, shopping, relaxing, playtime (these activities involve between one to two people only). See Figure 1.

b. Recreational activities (such as ice sailing), playing the piano, playing football alone (these activities involve one person only). See Figure 2.

c. VIP status and access. See Figure 3.

d. Language used in the text is a mixture of English and Spanish. In the Antara Fashion Hall advertisements, the text is only in English. See Figure 4.

e. The use of certain clothing, props, surroundings, accessories. These elements do not carry social status per say, but when integrated to a specific activity, then that element becomes status. For example, the tea set in Figure 5. A tea set is made up of an ordinary small pitcher with cups and saucers. The action of the little girl playing in her room alone, the props behind her and the porcelain tea set being used, it now becomes an element of social position because a specific little girl is playing by herself in a secluded (private setting) with a porcelain tea set. The little girl's clothing and atmosphere places her in a higher social status position as oppose to a room filled with more children, that the focus of the action, being tea time, would be lost.

f. Phenotype of the models overall are light-skinned toned, colored eyes, blonde hair, referring to Caucasian or "European/White" features, both physically and in the choice of clothing. See Figure 6.



Figure 1: Nestlé Nido Excella Gold – French Window



Figure 2: Audi México – Perfección





Figure 3: Audi México – Like a Boss



Figure 4: Antara Fashion Hall – Spring Goddess



Figure 5: Nestlé Nido Excella Gold – Tea Time



Figure 6: Estée Lauder – Vivid Shine

## Categories of Elements Indexing Social Status

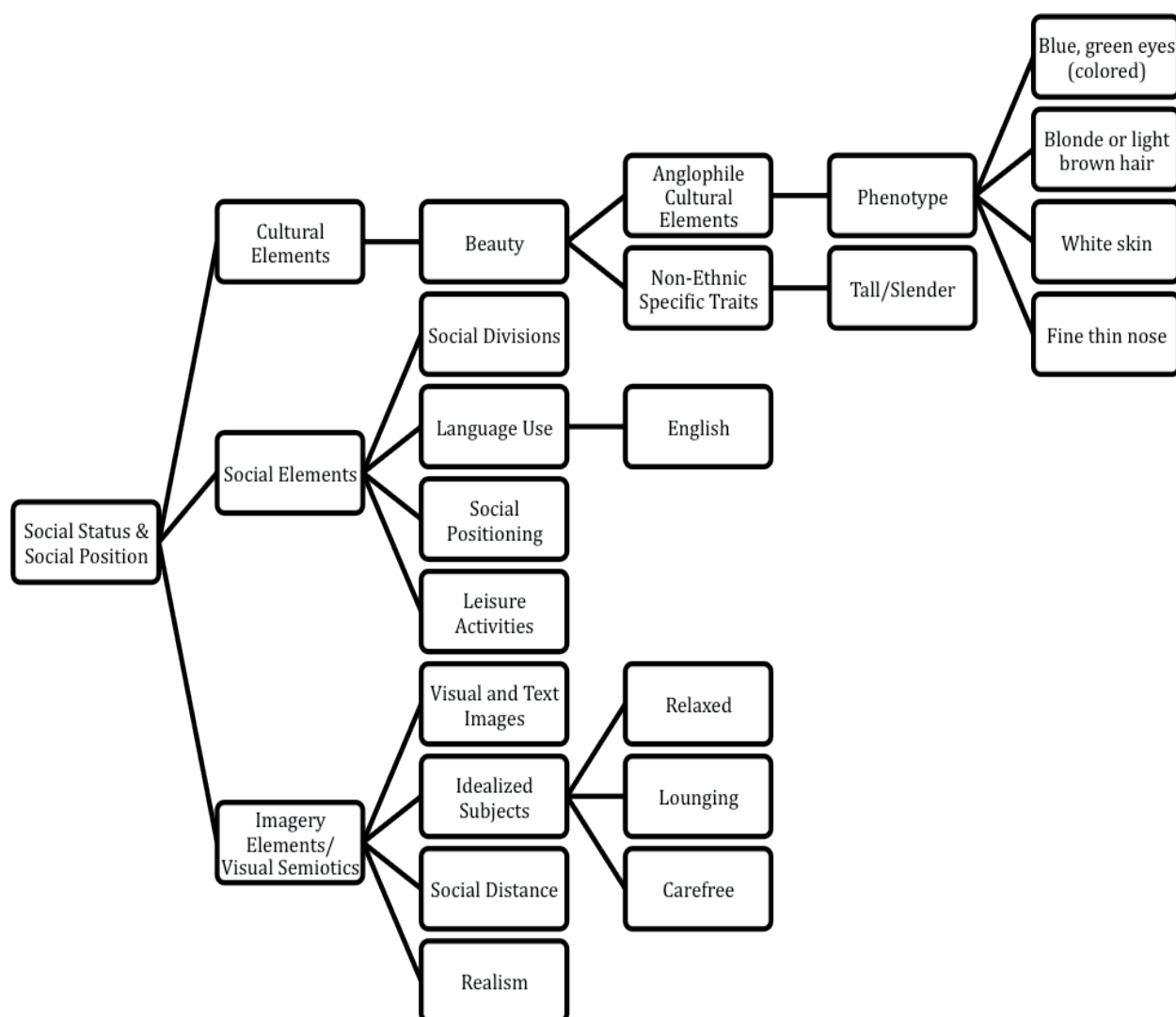


Figure 7: Categories of Elements

In Figure 7, the diagram demonstrates the elements that according to high society Mexicans, indicates social status and how the image of beauty is created. The concept of beauty is predetermined using the description of white-skinned, colored eyes and tall individuals. Amy Chua describes the population of Mexico and other Hispanics and what it means to be outside the range of beauty. Chua states “Latin American society is fundamentally *pigmentocratic*: characterized by a social spectrum with taller, lighter-skinned, European- blooded elites at one end; shorter, darker, Indian-blooded masses

at the other end; and a great deal of ‘passing’ in between. The roots of pigmentocracy are traceable to the colonial era” (57). In the figures to follow, Chua’s pigmentocracy will be reflected in the advertisements included in my research. Thus, Chua continues by explaining how society in Mexico is created and the individual is placed in the social scale depending on their skin tone. Chua states that “almost without exception the Mexican officials, lawyers, and business executives we dealt with were light-skinned and foreign educated, with elegant European names. Meanwhile, the people doing the photocopying



and cleaning the floors were all shorter, darker, and plainly more “Indian-blooded” (60). These elements will later connect back to the Anglophone cultural references stated in Figure 7.

## Cultural Elements

### Anglophone Cultural References

Cultural elements refer to those instances that strictly relate to objects or ideas that denote something specifically owned by a culture. Specifically in the advertising campaigns, there are certain objects utilized that refer to a different culture and not to the Mexican culture. For example, in Figure 8 the campaign uses a football as a prop. By connecting the football to the product it communicates to the viewer that there is a connection between the value of the product and the value of the culture indexed. Today football is, by far, the U.S.’s most popular sport, with millions of fans and supporters. Consequently, a football belongs to the national sport of the United States and the ball itself is then connected to U.S. culture because it is treated as a cultural element.

There are mayor differences between American football and soccer. Football requires space, specifically a large field preferably with grass and sufficient financial support to purchase the equipment. For that reason, football playing is specific to the affluent in Mexico. See Figure

9. In Mexican culture, soccer is the national sport, and consequently it is also the most-played sport worldwide. In the United States, football is part of the culture, and it is customary for high schools and colleges across the United States to have football teams rather than soccer teams. Thus, worldwide, football is associated with the United States. Football is played on a field that is larger than a soccer field. Also, football gear and equipment is more expensive than soccer gear and equipment. This in turn translates to a sport that is played in a power country and suggests the idea of the better culture.

In the Nestlé Nido Excella Gold advertisement, the use of a football is used in the advertisement to denote American culture. In Figure 8, a little white boy with blue eyes and rosy cheeks,



Figure 8: Advertisement – Nestlé Nido Excella Gold

dressed in long, striped shirt and a light blue vest holds a football. Mexico is not a country where football is the national sport—soccer is. The football symbolizes the United States, where athletes are highly paid and belong to the elite. The football in this advertisement represents the *better culture*, because the United States denotes prosperity and power.





Figure 9: Interconnection of Child with Football

Advertisers hope that viewers will directly connect the child with the United States where English is spoken. According to Rahimi and Bagheri, “in its role as a global language, English has become one of the most important academic and professional tools. English is increasingly recognized as, undoubtedly, the most important language to learn by the international community” (119). Thus, the English language is also a symbol of social status.

### Social Elements

### Social Divisions

Social elements are those that refer to activities that denote social status and index social position. Culture that is not common “*Kulture*”

is high culture, and technological culture while the elements and objects do exist, very few can afford to own them and have access to. The activities that are presented throughout the campaigns all reflect a social division, meaning a lack of people and thus making the scene exclusive. This exclusivity is reserved for people with status, money, and consequently access to certain leisure. The absence of people in the advertisements speaks of special attention, and only certain individuals may have access to that place or own a certain object.

In the campaign for Audi Mexico, the cars are placed in an exclusive surrounding like in Figure 10. The car is presented in front of a building with a special parking space only for the car. There are no other cars present next to the Audi, which is also placed in reverse so the



Figure 10: Advertisement – Audi A6 S line

driver of the car can have an accessible way to depart. In countries such as Mexico, where parking is limited, having a vehicle parked in front of a building denotes social status. This is only reserved for special people and like the advertisement includes in the text, the person driving the specific car has ‘VIP access’.

The European car industry in Mexico reflects the importance of status consumption, and it is necessary to demonstrate social status within a group. According to Eastman and Eastman, “status consumers are brand conscious and not price conscious” (9). It is more important to have status through the brand than to have a product that will provide you with no status.

The code in the campaign is that having an Audi will “always give you limitless access and powerful perfection available to a VIP,” and in this case, the advertisement refers to the consumer. Every word mentioned above was placed separately throughout the campaign. For

the purpose of this research and to demonstrate the codes, I have created the sentence using the words placed in the advertisements. The placement of the car in the advertisements is also an important code that denotes power, status, and having the car readily available for when the owner needs it (see Figure 11). Because of the different social classes that exist in Mexico, driving a European car is code for power, status, wealth, and ownership. Prestige comes with driving an Audi, and only a select group of individuals have access to the cars that communicate codes of higher social class and wealth.

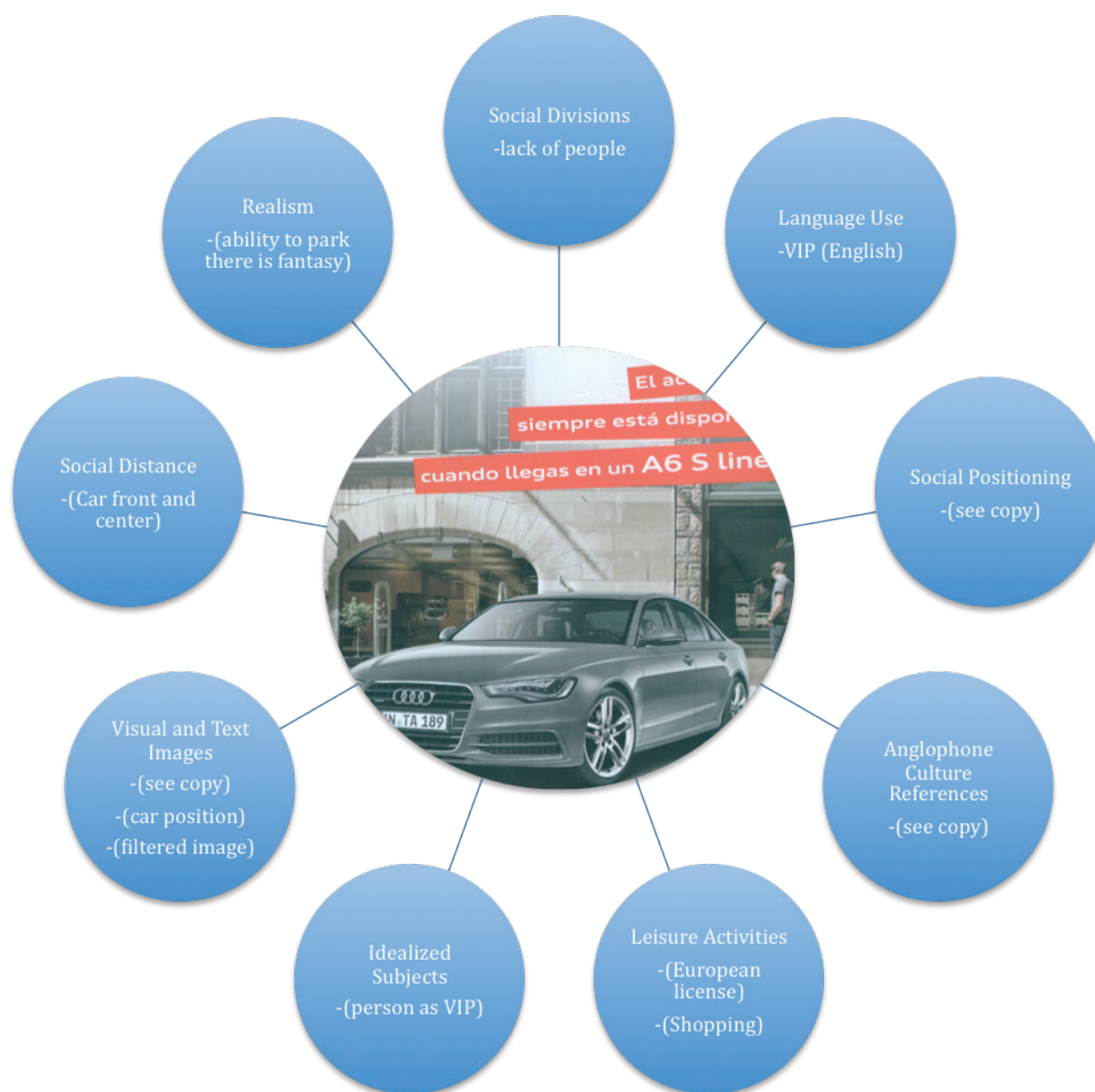


Figure 11: Interconnection of Vehicle

## Language Use

Through the use of English in the advertisements, various words were created to denote social status. For example, the word “*excella*” see Figure 8, was created for the Nestlé Nido advertisement campaign, and though the word does not exist in any language, people assume that the word means “good” or “positive,” because they have the notion that the milk is good for their child. In addition, *excella* is made up of the first few letters of the word *excellent*

and followed by the word in English, *gold*. Gold is a highly valued precious metal, and also the color gold relates to power or a coveted status. For example, the gold medal in the Olympics represents first place; consequently, Mexicans who know English, can automatically conclude that *excella* means excellent and *gold* “oro.” Mexicans who do not know English assume that the word gold means *oro* because the color of the font is in the color gold.



Codes are used as a narrative in advertising using semiotics, which produces meaning whether verbal or non-verbal, by telling a story using coded colors and created words, with the intention to communicate a message. Thus, the use of the words *excella* and *gold* in this campaign communicates the concepts and ideas of being the best, top, excellent, golden child, and high expectations.

In the campaign for Audi Mexico, words such as *perfección* see Figure 2, *sin límites*, *siempre*, *disponible*, *acceso*, *VIP*, *poderosamente* (perfection, limitless, always, available, access, VIP, powerful) are used in the advertisements. Each word has a definition, but for the purpose of this research, the common meaning of the words is status and social positionality. The concept of having social status is reflected in the selection of words to advertise the car.

The advertisements contain messages in Spanish that convey social status. For example, take the lines, “Perfección sin límites” and “El acceso VIP siempre está disponible cuando llegas en un A6 S line”—translated into English as: “Limitless perfection” and “VIP access is always available if you drive an A6 S line.” Both messages suggest that perfection and accessibility are attainable by owning an A6. As mentioned by Eastman and Eastman, individuals purchase the status that the product offers them.

Figure 2 advertisement features a man in his mid-30s preparing his ice sailboat. His A6 is being compared to the lightness of the ice sailboat but is powerful enough to go at fast speeds. The word *perfection* is also used to describe both the ice sailboat and the vehicle.

The advertisers use the English language to describe the product and the purpose of the item, thus it is necessary for the reader to understand what the word means and how it is being applied in the advertisement. The ability to not only read English but also interpret the meaning is necessary to comprehend the advertisement. In order for the individual to do this, he or she must have knowledge of English.

I have mentioned before that when English is spoken in Mexico within a social setting or amongst acquaintances, it is a symbol of social status. Thus, in this advertising campaign the use of an English word within a Spanish

sentence, symbolizes social status and having the necessary literacy to understand the meaning of the English word. The presence of the English language carries enough weight that it is socially acceptable to use the mix of both languages in a Spanish speaking country. Consequently, a person must know a certain level of English to appreciate the symbolism in the advertisement.

Estée Lauder cosmetics, see Figure 6, are high-end women’s products, known worldwide.

Consequently, the advertising campaign targets only women. The words *perfectionist*, *vivid*, *pure shine*, and *illuminator* are presented throughout the campaign describing the different products. These words are also in the name of the product. Although the Estée Lauder campaign is worldwide, only Mexico was selected for my research; consequently, the four advertisements selected are currently printed in Mexican magazines.

The word *only* is used throughout the campaign and reflects the one of a kind shopping experience that is expected in Antara. See Figure 12. *Only* is a significant word in the advertisements because it connects the concepts of exclusivity, accessibility, and the elite in one word. Antara is the *only* place to shop and it is the *only* outdoor concept shopping mall in the heart of Polanco.

Antara is a shopping center in Mexico City located in Polanco, one of the city’s most luxurious residential areas. Polanco is situated in the heart of the city adjacent to Reforma Avenue and in close proximity to Los Pinos, the Presidential residence. Polanco is similar in tradition to Beverly Hills, California, because of its old money and high fashion stores along Presidente Masaryk Avenue. Lida (2008) stated that Presidente Masaryk in Polanco is an avenue of the highest value worldwide—even above Rodeo Drive—because of its commerce. In addition, she mentioned that “Mexico’s is the second most dynamic economy in Latin America, after Brazil’s, but its wealth is scandalously distributed” (4). Thus, wealthy Mexicans mostly visit Antara shopping center located within the heart of Polanco. Antara’s official name in their advertising campaign is Antara Fashion Hall. According to the website *explorando Mexico*, in its entry “Shopping Centers, Malls in Mexico City”, “Antara Fashion Hall is one of the most

luxurious and stylish places in the city; the looks of the complex are sublime and the quality of its materials is superb” ( Equipo Editorial) See Figure 12.

The campaign creates a sense that shopping in Antara will bring the individual a better social status, because of what surrounds Antara, in luxury, exclusivity, and selectiveness (see Figure 12). Thus, at Antara, social status and glamour are part of the experience. Antara Fashion Hall is the only shopping center in Mexico City that offers concierge service. Antara’s concierge service is an exclusive amenity that offers its customers the highest level of personal attention and a distinguished shopping experience. Concierge Antara *only* in Antara is one more reason the advertising campaign indexes social status.



Figure 12: Advertisement – Antara Fashion Hall





Figure 13: Interconnection of Outdoor Activity

## Leisure Activities

Signs to communicate social status in this campaign are present in the activities that the children are engaged in. The activities are of leisure and represent alone time with the mother. The children are placed in the center of the advertisement and are in a protected environment. The areas in which these activities develop are spacious grounds, gardens, and in large homes. The sign of the large home is indicative of a wealthy family. The advertisements feature someone aside from the mother attending to the child. In Mexico, families with high economic stability have hired help and the children have nannies to watch over them during their playtime.

Another aspect of social status representation

is that the children are very relaxed and engaged in a one-on-one activity. These are children who are protected and taken care of.

Keane explained that Pierce's theory of signs could also be verbal and non-verbal. Specifically in this campaign, there is a verbal message that states, "Behind every excellent child, there is an excellent mother." The original message is in Spanish "detrás de cada niño excelente, hay una mamá excelente." Throughout the campaign, Nestlé Nido Excella Gold constantly sends out a sign within their message of being an excellent mother—that only a level of excellence may be reached by providing your child with Nestlé Nido Excella Gold and then hopefully your child

may reflect the phenotype of the children in the advertisements. The activity that these children are engaged in is indicative of a more prestigious society that only a select few may have the opportunity to experience.

The campaign also contains objects that have a direct connection with money and the elite. The piano in one of the advertisements is being used as a toy rather than what it is meant to be used for. A little boy has his arms over the keys, without paying much attention to the piano. Thus, the child is aware of the presence of the piano in his home but just uses it as a place to rest. The piano symbolizes wealth and leisure. A piano in a home where an infant uses it only to hit any random key is using it as a play toy.

Figure 5 advertisement of the little girl serving tea from a porcelain tea set. She is alone and her table is properly set for four. There is only a teddy bear sitting at the table besides her. The presence of the porcelain tea set denotes social status and social class even in child's play.

In the campaign for Audi Mexico, the country where the iceboat is being prepped, Mexico, does not have a lake or pond to engage in ice sailing; however, wealthy individuals can travel out of the country to practice this activity. This elite group of people can also own an Audi A6. It is these signs of wealth and status that a person wants to assume, which are reflected by the lifestyle that is being presented in the campaign.

### Imagery Elements/Visual Semiotics

The different visual and textual elements that are presented in the advertisements are used as ways to communicate social status in the campaigns. For example, the use of jewelry, the use of text, the visuals to reinforce social status, and the way reality is manipulated in the campaigns are part of the elements of imagery.

### Phenotype

In the campaigns researched and included in this project, all of the people included have fair skin, blue or green eyes, physical features of the white race. The phenotypes of the women are fair complexion, blue, grey, and green eyes, light brown and blonde hair, slim figure, and

approximately between 25 and 35 years of age. The characteristics of the women are important because the product being advertised needs to be visible to the target audience.

The advertisement of "Mother and Daughter Bonding" in Figure 12 has several indexes to reflect social status. First is the clothing selected for the mother and secondly, the oversized handbag indicating she has a keen sense of fashion. Another index of social status is that in the shopping center in the background, very few people appear to be walking around. This indexes exclusivity of the place because a selected population has access to purchase items at Antara.

Both mother and child are enjoying quality time for the purpose of a leisure activity in an atmosphere of exclusivity in the heart of Polanco.

The physical features of both individuals also indicate social status through the slimness of the mother suggestive of a runway model and demonstrate perfection with both them and their surroundings. Both mother and daughter have long blonde hair; both are very slim and are of a white complexion. They are not representative of Mexico.

### Visual and Text Images

Visual and text images also carry meaning in the advertising campaigns. They convey ideas through verbal and non-verbal images. For example, in the Nestlé Nido Excella Gold campaign, the message is to be an excellent mother. The actual title of the entire campaign is "*Mamá Excelente*,"—"Excellent Mom." This is achieved by providing your child with Nestlé powdered milk Nido. Throughout the campaign, this is demonstrated by the well-groomed child's clothing, and by the mother, who is attending personally to the child and engaged in cultural and controlled activities, for example playing the piano and using the china set.

The campaign demonstrates how a mother, through the different career choices of the child, may help him or her become excellent and successful. The career choices in the advertisements are of the elite: a musician, an attorney, an art collector, an athlete, a business owner, an archeologist, a botanist, a stage-

designer, an explorer, or a yacht owner.

The activities in which the children are engaged in the campaign are individually focused.

The campaign demonstrates the importance that the child must be given personal time and focuses on their alone time. These are privileged children who have special access to things and places. The selection of careers are not the careers of middle-class individuals, instead they are exclusively of the elite.

The focus in this advertising campaign is on the high expectations that each mother has of her child, which seems to align with the notion that every mother wants her child to be successful in life. According to the campaign, children who drink this type of milk have been raised by excellent moms, and the images indicate that they belong to an elite group that has access to wealth, status, and belongs to a higher social class.

Perfection, power, speed, accessibility, importance, leadership, and belonging to the elite comprise the central theme of the Audi campaign. The advertisements analyzed are for different class models of the Audi: the A1, A6, A6S, and the A8 lines. The campaign tells a story throughout the advertisements, sending out the message of wealth and social status. The young successful entrepreneur who holds a high position becomes part of the social elite that has economic freedom to purchase an Audi in Mexico. As Bell and Malic explained, visual and textual images are what give the viewer information to categorize the product. Thus, the phrase *VIP access* tells the viewer that the individual in the advertisement has to hold a certain status for the vehicle to be parked in front of the building in the first parking space. Furthermore, the cultural idea that living in Mexico and driving an Audi or any other European-brand luxury vehicle sends a strong statement of social class, social status, and wealth.

Social status comes standard with Audi vehicles. In addition, the characteristics of a successful individual as seen in the Audi driver are clearly stated visually and textually in the advertisements. In the advertisement for the A8 in Mexico, an English phrase states "*Like a Boss*," the words "*like a*" are stricken through and only the word "Boss" is left to read. The

A8 is the fastest four-door sedan built in the A class with either a V8 3.0 liter 333hp or a 4.0 liter 420hp engine. The starting price in Mexico for the A8 sedan is \$110,000 dollars (\$1,399,900 Mexican pesos). The advertisers felt it was necessary to mention the retail price of the Audi A8 to demonstrate how social status is attainable through owning an Audi. Having wealth, social status, and social positionality are more important because they give the individual the status of a VIP and the idea of being a Boss. According to the campaign, these two concepts of all access and social status in Mexico are a top priority.

The purpose of the advertising campaign for the Antara Fashion Hall is to feature the exclusive shopping experience in an outdoor setting. The theme in this campaign is how the seasons change, and with this change comes changes in the way a person dresses. The season goddesses must bring change of the new season—there are four goddesses: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Aside from the seasons, Antara Fashion Hall also presents Mother and Daughter Bonding spreads and the winter Believe advertisement. All of the campaigns are in English and present a magical place within Antara.

The visual and textual images in the Estee Lauder campaign see Figure 15, offer products that women can use to be more radiant and help restore any naturally occurring skin imperfections due to age. Age is not specifically mentioned but through the name of the product, its purpose is understood. It is not specifically stated as such, but the concept and idea behind the purpose of the product is to provide the necessary tools to become and remain physically beautiful. The campaign solely concentrates on the product being advertised. Based on the physical features of the women, as mentioned before, it may be assumed that the women belong to an elite group and mostly attend social functions where a high social status is represented.

Through the use of such products, the campaign's focus is on the ability to wear invisible products to hide imperfections. Another theme is to be radiant and visibly luminous by recharging your skin. These products will offer women's skin the necessary hydration to always

look young and energized. The text is written in Spanish and states “*ahora recarga tu piel*” (now recharge your skin), “*imagina no tener nada que ocultar*” (imagine not having anything to hide), “*maquillaje que no se ve, ni se siente*” (makeup that is invisible and weightless), and the reoccurring theme is flawless-looking, visibly radiant skin.

Estee Lauder’s concept of perfect skin is reflected through the women featured in the advertisements. With the advertiser’s use of images and their close placement of the models before the audience, these advertisements suggest that these women now belong to a special group of females who enjoy having perfect skin. Thus, ultimately the viewer would also like to belong to that elite group of women that use Estee Lauder, and consequently, will also give them social status through the brand. See Figure 14.



Figure 14: Advertisement – Estée Lauder Cosmetics



Figure 15: Interconnection of Female Model



## Idealized Subjects

As stated earlier, the Polanco neighborhood is the place where old money families reside and people of intellectual tastes in the arts, in fine eateries and in elegance reside as well. It is similar to living in the old European cities of Paris, Rome, or Barcelona and perhaps even Manhattan. Polanco has always been surrounded by other bigger neighborhoods. Polanco residents make it clear, when asked if they live in Polanco: “soy de Polanco”—“I’m from Polanco.” The word itself has a connotation of rich, powerful, and old money individuals.

To own an apartment on Presidente Masaryk Avenue or Campos Eliseos (Champs-Élysées) or to own a house in Polanco represents social status, wealth, and exclusivity. Although there are other places more expensive than Polanco, to live and shop in Polanco is for the elite, because the area has exclusive status for the rich and upscale. It was necessary to describe the area of where Antara Fashion Hall is located because of the importance that the location holds, which then becomes a code of social status for those individuals who have the possibility to shop in that mall. In the advertising campaign, the main area of the mall is always pictured and referenced as Antara, the outdoor exclusive shopping center.

The words used in the Estee Lauder campaign to describe the products also describe the lifestyle of the individual, a lifestyle of glamour, sophistication, and exclusivity. In the advertisements, the human subjects are not engaged in any particular activity, but rather they are only posing. Their flawless skin and complexion makes their outer beauty radiate confidence and demonstrate good taste in their selection of makeup.

Sensuality is communicated by placing the models’ hands either on the neck or close to the mouth, which accentuates the facial area where the product will be used. The women of Estee Lauder have always been portrayed as sophisticated and successful. Thus, the women who use Estee Lauder identify with the women in the advertisements and have similar interests. They are successful and demonstrate social status through their choice of attire, jewelry, and

makeup.

## Visual semiotics

In the advertisement of the child with the football, the child is alone out in the garden playing. There are no adults or other children visible, communicating that the child is in a private place and in a spacious backyard. Also, the child resting over the piano is alone, and because of the size of the piano, it is located in a room where enough space has to be available. Both of the advertisements index the lifestyle of both children. They are in a large home, either with their mother or hired help looking after them. This is similar in the advertisement with the little girl having tea with her teddy bear, who is in her room. In the background, there is a large, opened, and mirrored armoire with clothes and sunlight coming in through a window. All three advertisements share the concept of ample space, leisure activity, and security for all three children as well as their possessions around their homes.

The Audi campaign indicates an individual who is economically successful, who has the freedom to travel out of the country to practice leisure sports, and whom always has VIP access as stated in the advertisements. The individual who drives an Audi is selective of his surroundings and seeks perfection. The Audi owner enjoys elite activities where he can have personal attention. Like with the other campaigns in my research, the Audi campaign also suggests a *better culture*, through the use of the ice sailboat. This type of sailboat is only practiced on frozen lakes or places with cold temperatures. Mexico does not have any place where ice sailboat racing occurs. Thus indicating that somewhere out of the country, this sport is practiced, perhaps in the United States or Europe. According to the Swedish Ice Sailing Federation the cost of an ice sailboat starts at \$13,363.50 dollars or 10,000 Euros. For this analysis, the description of these elements is important to index social status and social class. Aside from driving an Audi, other factors indicate social status, such as: location, activity, attire, and phenotype. The individual in the Audi advertisement is in his early 30s, light skinned, dressed in sports attire, and a world



traveler.

## Social Distance

The campaigns demonstrate a commodity, but most importantly they demonstrate an activity and what an individual may achieve from owning the product in question. In the car campaign, social status and social class are automatically included in the vehicle, as indicated by the actions that are presented in the advertisements. Driving an Audi will open doors to exclusivity and VIP access.

A luxury vehicle parked in front of a building waiting for the owner is a symbol of status. People may not know who the person is or what he does, but the scenario of having a luxury car in front of any building indicates social status, power, and wealth and this will distance the person from other individuals.

## Realism

The symbolism transformed into reality from owning a car will possibly give the owner a certain status. The idea of having access, the individual will possess access to exclusivity once he takes ownership of the vehicle. This conveys social status and is important in order for the buyer to feel connected with the brand and feel like he has acquired a degree of social status within society.

The campaigns indicate wealth, social status, and selectiveness because of the choice of settings, atmosphere, and activities that the children are engaging in. Each child was carefully selected to represent a golden child. Every child in the campaign is of fair complexion, has colored eyes and light colored hair, and is dressed in light-colored clothing. Social status and social class are attainable if you are able to provide your child with a piano, a football, a porcelain tea set, and a house with French doors. Not all these items have social status on their own, but within a context of an elite group of people, they then become commodities and consequently gain a value that transforms into a social status.

In the case of the shopping center, it is exclusive and constantly indicates social class and social

status. It is an establishment that indicates a place where wealthy people congregate. In the advertising campaign, the models and the activities they are doing reflect a fantasy world.

This is presented in the text as the advertiser refers to women as goddesses. Also, the seasons are heavily marked and the ads include two scenes of falling maple leaves in autumn and snow in the winter. In Mexico City, it is not common for leaves to turn into autumn colors or for snow to fall during the winter. The referencing of the falling leaves and snow relates to what happens during those seasons in countries like the United States or in Europe. Also, the possibility that “magic” occurs is considerable because this too holds a certain status, meaning, that in Antara everything is fabulous, grand, and exclusive—anything is possible.

To indicate social status in a beauty product and to be considered a luxury item, the models must reflect such exclusivity in their physical features. Consequently, in some cultures being slim and having a light complexion, fair-hair, and colored eyes indicates social class and reflects the individual’s social status.

## Language Lexicon Inventory

The number of words in English used in the advertisements is an indicator of social status in the Mexican culture. Of the 25 advertisements, there were a total of 68 words used in English, excluding the text on the packaging.

The following words in English were used throughout the advertisements that denote social status: *Gold, VIP, Only, Fashion, Boss, Perfectionist, Performance, Shine, Goddess, and Ultra*.

The following words in Spanish were used in the advertisements that denote social status: *Excelente (excellent), Exclusiva (exclusive), Acceso (access), Disponible (available), Personalidad (personality), Perfección (perfection), Sin Límites (limitless), Poderosamente (powerful), Potente (strong), Liderazgo (leadership), Líder (leader), and Estilo (style)*.

## Conclusions

The advertising campaigns in two magazines presented in this paper encourage the Mexican consumer to have a certain lifestyle and own particular products to be part of an elite world that will provide access and status. The campaigns present ways to have accessibility within society. Throughout the different campaigns studied, I was able to establish a pattern and structure through the research lenses of codes, signs, symbols, icons, indexes and themes in each of the campaigns. Ultimately, one topic reoccurred constantly throughout the advertisements; the importance of social status and positionality within society, and for this study, in Mexico's society. As a result of this research, semiotic modes (Najafian and Ketabi 220-221) yield that elements such as phenotype, location, color, image, and language are used to denote social status and class in Mexican society.

I have always been intrigued by the nonverbal interaction presented in print advertising and the idea of the creator's message when producing an advertisement. Thus, through the research analysis performed, I can state that image and status dominate the campaigns that target rich Mexicans living in Mexico. Thus, the person (viewer) will consequently want to exist within what it is socially acceptable to own and engage in certain leisure activities. From my point of view, this form of communication surpasses the classical and traditional form of rhetoric because it is presented in this form through indicated a specific lifestyle. Thus, having your child relax over a grand piano in a spacious living room during his alone time is far more attractive than just presenting the product and its benefits and noting that the piano is not the product being advertised, but rather the lifestyle of the child.

For this reason, the main goal of this study was to deconstruct the mechanisms used in advertisements and make the reader aware of the influence that is created to reflect social status in Mexico. This research focused on how social status is conveyed through the use of codes, signs, symbols, indexing, and themes in print advertising campaigns. Thus, the use of certain products establishes or represents a position in society. Consequently, we want to be part of

the social status that advertisements offer. The campaigns analyzed expose the Mexican viewer to diverse methods of interpretation mainly because if viewers have no prior knowledge of the theme or topic, they allow themselves to make up conclusions as to what message the advertisement is trying to convey. The reader then attributes a reason behind the image of a product and draws a conclusion based on the person's social status.

The primary finding of this study is that overall, social status and social class are present through the use of images, scenarios, props, selection of texts, English-language use, and the participation of individuals whose phenotype is similar to the light-skinned, blue-eyed individuals from Europe and the United States. In addition, this study reveals the importance that is weighed on power, wealth, exclusivity, and elite access. Social status is attainable through the acquisition of certain products.

The campaigns selected demonstrate how social status is perceived in Mexico by deconstructing the advertisements and analyzing what those characteristics in the display denote as social class. The use of the English language has a representative context, meaning that English symbolizes higher status and is a language of wider prestige. Consequently, in the advertisements researched, the campaigns demonstrate a reflection of high social status and the symbols that society uses as a form to state their social position within a society. Moreover, advertising dictates what is appropriate and acceptable in order to obtain high social status. Thus, I can then state that by acquiring luxury products at high-end prices may not give the person class, but it can give them status; in the advertisements, we see both class and status together. As Bourdieu stated, "What is at stake in symbolic struggles is the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions, that is to say, symbolic power" (13). Bourdieu refers to the importance of individuals demonstrating their status through classes in society. Ultimately, this is also true in advertising, which is a demonstration of one's status and place in society through products.

Different genres and trends have changed throughout the decades due to advertising that

exposes the viewer to options for obtaining the social status presented in advertisements. Thus, more than changing the way society lives, advertising causes a change in the way members of society think they must live and forces culture to go out and acquire certain items to achieve that style of living. In consumer society, people's decisions are based on the images they view, and they make judgments based on whether they like what they see in advertising. Individuals portrayed in magazines are next to perfect, and advertising makes individuals purchase items with the belief that they will bring them wealth, power, control, and sometimes a dream that they will reach the social status presented. Ultimately, it is offering a lifestyle. In most cases, print advertisements in magazines tell people what to do and how it would feel to experience a particular product.

I can state that in Mexico, the importance of social status is a top priority among individuals who seek to be positioned within the elite. Thus, according to the campaigns presented, it is a norm to place fair-skinned models resembling non-Hispanics to reflect a superior race because their skin color connotes class, exclusivity, education, and social status.

The semiotics reflected in the advertising campaigns were deconstructed through the research lenses of codes, signs, symbols, icons, indexes, and themes; they were then analyzed on how social status is reflected in the campaigns. Consequently, the campaigns denoted the importance of status consumption in Mexico and ultimately its place in society. O'Cass and McEwen stated that "Increasingly, brands are seen as important in creating an identity, a sense of achievement and identification for consumers" (25). Thus, Mexico's conspicuous consumption of advertising like the one included in *Caras* and *Quién*, ultimately, is to establish status within society and demonstrate social status through the accessibility of high-end brands.

## Works Cited

- Anthias, Floya. "The concept of 'social division' and theorising social stratification: Looking at ethnicity and class." *The Journal of the British Sociological Association*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2011, pp. 835-854.
- Bell, Philip., and Marko Milic. "Goffman's Gender-Advertisements revisited: combining content analysis with semiotic analysis." *Visual communication*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2002, pp. 203-222.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, no. 32, 1987, pp. 1-17.
- Chua, Amy. *World on fire: How exporting free market democracy breeds ethnic hatred and global instability*. Anchor Books, 2004.
- Delbaere, Marjorie, Edward F. McQuarrie, and Barbara J. Phillips. "Personification in Advertising. Using a Visual Metaphor to Trigger Anthropomorphism." *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2011, pp. 121-130.
- Eastman, Jaqueline K. and Kevin L. Eastman. (2011). "Perceptions of status consumption and the economy." *Journal of Business & Economics Research*, vol. 9, no. 7, 2011, pp. 9-19.
- Equipo Editorial. "Shopping Centers, Malls in Mexico City." *Explorando Mexico*, Web. Accessed 20 July 2020.
- Gattone, Charles. "Image and Persuasion: The Machiavellian World of Advertising and Public Relations." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2002, pp. 499-508.
- Granato, Jim and M.C. Sunny Wong. "Using Monetary Policy to Coordinate Price Information: Implications for Economic Stability and Development." *Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 2004, pp. 49-60.
- Gustafson, Andrew. "Advertising's Impact on Morality in Society. Influencing Habits and Desires of Consumers." *Business and Society Review*, vol. 106, no. 3, 2001, pp. 201-223.
- Hall, Edward T. "A system for the notation of proxemic behavior." *American Anthropologist, New Series*, vol. 65, no. 5, 1963, pp. 1003-1026.
- Kalish, Charles W. and Craig D. Anderson. "Ownership as a Social Status." *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, vol. 2011, no. 132, 2011, pp. 65-77.
- Keane, Webb. "Semiotics and the social analysis of material things." *Language and Communication*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2003, pp. 409-425.
- Kong, Cheen Lau, and Ian Phau. "Impact of Gender on Perceptual Fit Evaluation for Prestige Brands." *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 17, no. 5, 2010, pp. 354-367.

- Kress, Gunther, & Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design*: Routledge, 1996.
- Lida, David. *First stop in the new world. Mexico City, the capital of the 21st century*. Penguin Group. 2008.
- Maddox, Keith B. "Perspectives on racial phenotypicity bias." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2004, pp. 383-401.
- Malmelin, Nando. "What is Advertising Literacy? Exploring the Dimensions of Advertising Literacy." *Journal of Visual Literacy*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2010, pp. 129-142.
- Najafian, Maryam and Saeed Ketabi. "The words behind images: A critical social semiotic approach toward analyzing advertising." *International Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1-21.
- O'Cass, Aron, and Emily McEwen. "Exploring consumer status and conspicuous consumption." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2004, pp. 25-39.
- Pedone, Roberto and Rosaria Conte. "Dynamics of Status Symbols and Social Complexity." *Social Science Computer Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2001, pp. 249-262.
- Phillipson, Robert. "English for globalisation or for the world's people?" *International Review of Education Globalisation, Language and Education*, vol. 47, nos. 3-4, 2001, pp. 185-200.
- Rahimi, Forough and Mohammad S. Bagheri. "On the status of English as a 'lingua franca': An EFL academic context survey." *Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2011, pp. 118-122.
- Rege, Mari. "Why do People Care About Social Status?" *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2008, pp. 233-242.
- Sauder, Michael. "Symbols and Contexts: An Interactionist Approach to the Study of Social Status." *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2005, pp. 279-298.
- Sheumaker, Helen and Shirley Wajda. (Eds.). *Material culture in America: Understanding everyday life*. ABC-CLIO, 2008.
- Sivanathan, Niro, and Nathan C Pettit. "Protecting the self through consumption: Status goods as affirmational commodities." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2010, pp. 564-570.
- Stolow, Jeremy. "Religion and/as Media." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2005, pp. 119-145.
- Syversen, Andrea. "The Art of Elegant Merchandising." *Trade Journals*, vol. 26, no. 12, 2009.
- Vikander, Nick E.. *Targeted Advertising and Social Status*. Tinbergen Institute Discussion Paper 11-016/1, 2010, Web. Accessed 20 July 2020.
- Whittaker, Kelly D. "Power vs Status." *The Atlanta Tribune*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2008, pp- 36-37.
- WPP. Web, 2011. Accessed 20 July 2020.

## Author's Biography

Daniel De la Miyar has a M.A. (2006) degree in Communication Studies from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, TX and a Ph.D. degree in Culture, Literacy and Language from the University of Texas in San Antonio. He is Instructional Assistant Professor at Texas A&M International University, at Laredo, Texas.



# Film censorship in Mexico, 1925-1928: the case of Saltillo

ANTONIO CORONA (UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE COAHUILA, MEXICO)

BRENDA A. MUÑOZ (UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE COAHUILA, MEXICO)

---

## Abstract

*This paper explores the censorship of American movies in the city of Saltillo, Mexico, between 1925 and 1928, within the framework of New Cinema History. Drawing on archival documents from the office of the Mayor of Saltillo and a historical overview of the interactions and tensions between various actors at the national and international level, we attempt to illustrate the bureaucratic mechanisms that translated presidential decrees and centralized executive orders into concrete actions at the local level, and how these mechanisms interacted with pre-existing social connections in the city, shaping the local movie-going experience. We found that 10 films and 6 distributors were banned – some of them later unbanned – in the city during this period for one of three reasons: denigrating Mexico, denigrating allied nations, and undermining the regime. In all cases, it was the Department of the Interior that ordered the ban, while the city's mayor and his theater inspectors were ultimately responsible for enforcing it. In the case of movies that were 'uncomfortable' for the regime, the correspondence was more urgent and simply ordered a stop to exhibition without mentioning any legal or diplomatic precedent.*

**Keywords:** film, censorship, audience, Saltillo

---

The 1920s in Mexico was a period of significant social and political change as the country was emerging from the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. During this time, the Mexican government embarked on a nation-building project aimed at defining the country's identity and establishing its future direction. As part of this project, the government sought to regulate various aspects of society, including the rapidly growing film industry. This paper examines the censorship of American movies in the city of Saltillo, Mexico, between 1925 and 1928, within the framework of New Cinema History,[1] which emphasizes the broader historical dimensions of everyday cinema experiences and explores the interconnectedness of cinema with other social institutions and contexts (Verhoeven). By analyzing archival documents from the office of the Mayor of Saltillo (*Presidencia Municipal* Collection), this study aims to shed light on the mechanisms of censorship, the role of institutions, and the interactions between

exhibitors, audiences and government officers that shaped the consumption of movies in the city. The ultimate goal is to deepen our understanding of the cultural, social, and political dynamics of cinema-going in 1920s Mexico, as well as its significance in Saltillo's urban landscape.

## New Cinema History

As a research approach, New Cinema History poses questions regarding the manufacturing and circulation of films, aiming to understand how, why, by whom, and for whom films are made and distributed. It seeks to understand cinema as a complex set of processes, practices, and experiences in specific locations and historical contexts (Treveri Gennari et al. 20). Because films are a distinct form of evidence that requires specialized decoding (Maltby et al. 5), New Cinema History expands the scope of relevant information, including government reports, ordinances, records, legislation, marketing



materials, oral histories, industry archives, maps, box-office data, and more (Verhoeven). It also emphasizes the unique and place-specific aspects of cinemagoing, connecting it to the rhythms of local life, relationships, and community (Lozano et al.). New Cinema History aligns with social history by studying the everyday experiences of cinema attendees and their relationships to larger historical events and trends (Maltby et al. 32). This includes studying local exhibition contexts and comparing them with broader frameworks to understand cinemagoing and exhibition practices (Treveri Gennari et al.). Thus, studying censorship from this perspective implies identifying the mechanisms of censorship, the interaction of social institutions that gave rise to it and the agency of exhibitors and audiences to evade it.

### **A time of turmoil: Mexico in post-revolutionary times.**

The 1920s were a turbulent period in Mexican history, characterized by social upheaval and transformation. Emerging from the ashes of the Mexican Revolution, the nation faced the task of rebuilding itself both socially and economically. This tumultuous era witnessed the consolidation of political power, the emergence of new ideologies, and the complex interplay of various social forces, both in the large cities and in less urbanized parts of the country. Against this backdrop of uncertainty and change, the rapidly consolidating Mexican government embarked on a journey to define the nation's identity and future direction.

This period, often referred to – with varying degrees of irony – as the ‘Mexican Renaissance,’ was marked by the presidencies of Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles. The two most powerful members of the so-called Sonoran Dynasty undertook an ambitious nation-building project with many avenues of action: restoration of central authority, instauration of a centralized education system, complete overhaul of the financial system, and aggressive separation of church and state (Buchenau 409-410). Key to the project was the formation of a unified, post-revolutionary Mexican identity through the sponsorship of ‘revolutionary art,’

and the restoration of diplomatic relationships. Mexico had not been included in the League of Nations in 1919, having been neutral during World War I and thus not a signatory of the Treaties of Versailles (Zea Prado 117). At the time, this exclusion was not a salient concern to Carranza's (1917-1920) government, which was more occupied with the country's internal turmoil, and cited the League's endorsement of the Monroe Doctrine as a reason for their lack of interest (Herrera León, “El Problema del Distanciamiento Mexicano” 143; Zea Prado 118). But by the time of Obregón's (1920-1924) and Calles' (1924-1928) administrations, things had stabilized in the interior, and the new order of business was to undertake a “process of normalization and institutionalization by the post-revolutionary regime, which implied the gradual reconstruction of relationships with the exterior” (our trans.; Herrera León, “México y la Sociedad de Naciones” 1668).

Mexico's entry into the League of Nations was one of the key diplomatic goals of this process, but not at any cost; in a meeting with the League's delegate Julián Nogueira, Obregón stated that Mexico wanted *to be formally invited* by the European members, to which the envoy replied that there was neither need nor reason for that (Herrera León, “El Problema del Distanciamiento Mexicano” 126-128). Improving public opinion of Mexico in the U.S. was another key objective (Delpar, “Goodbye” 35), especially after the Bucareli Treaty was signed and the U.S. formally recognized Obregón's presidency. The Mexican government organized visits by American businessmen, journalists, and people of influence, and even established a Summer School for Foreigners program (Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue* 18). Still, other than an initial influx of left-leaning intellectuals, American tourism remained low; in contrast, northward migration from Mexico steadily rose, to the point that the Mexican population in the U.S. nearly doubled during the decade (Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue* 16).

### **American Film, Mexican Film**

In the years leading up to 1920, Hollywood cinema often portrayed Mexico and Mexicans

through stereotypical and one-dimensional lenses. Mexican characters were frequently depicted as bandits, villains, or savages, reinforcing negative stereotypes present in American society at the time (Peredo-Castro 66). The Mexican-American War and subsequent annexation of Mexican territories played a role in shaping these perceptions, further contributing to a rarified view of Mexico in early Hollywood films. All of these negative attitudes are evident in the ‘greaser,’ a harmful stereotype perpetuated by American media, literature, and popular discourse at the time. The term ‘greaser’ is documented as early as 1850s Texas (De León 16), and although it was initially used to describe Mexican laborers, it came to allude to a particular negative stock character in Hollywood films: ‘thievish, underhanded, cowardly, and all too ready to resort to violence when driven by jealousy or vengefulness’ (Delpar, “Goodbye” 35). These portrayals were abundant during the first decade of the 1900s, in films such as *The Lost Mine*, *The Pony Express*, *The Mexican Crime* and *The Mexican’s Faith* (Peredo-Castro 66). Despite Carranza’s 1913 law against defamation of Mexico in cinema, the unflattering depictions continued throughout the 1910s.

Ironically, at the same time there seemed to be a growing interest for all things Latin in American popular culture; this interest, however, emphasized – and even romanticized – the Spanish heritage of Latin America and Mexico in particular (Lynch 24-25), in the context of a sort of ‘Spanish craze’ while lamenting the ‘Indian’ aspects of the country’s heritage. Not until the early 1930s would the American infatuation with Mexico grow into its own phenomenon (Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue* 55).

Meanwhile, in Mexico, film was moving in the opposite direction. Art was conferred a pivotal role in Obregón and Calles’ nation-building projects: that of constructor and unifier of the nation’s identity. That said, cinema was not yet central to the endeavor; instead, painting – and particularly muralism – became the medium most favored by Vasconcelos, the man in charge of creating a national identity (Beezley 420). Not until the 1930s would film take the cultural forefront (Belmonte Grey), at the start of the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of Mexican cinema. Instead,

these administrations saw film as a practical tool with more mundane uses: propaganda and education (Gudiño Cejudo 19). National-interest films were funded through the Departments of Education, Defense, and Agriculture (De los Reyes 194). The newly formed *Secretaría de Educación Pública* launched projects to increase literacy in the population through film (Gudiño Cejudo 19), while *Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento* produced short films aimed at teaching scientific knowledge and technical abilities. The commercial film industry, on the other hand, struggled and languished, unable to compete with the technical prowess of American productions, and resented the government – and specifically Vasconcelos – for a perceived lack of support (De los Reyes 194-195).

And yet, the figures that would become synonymous with national pride during the later ‘Golden Age’ began appearing in this decade. One such figure was the *charro*, with ornate sombreros and embroidered attire, national symbol of courage and resilience (Nájera-Ramírez 7). Pastoral scenes and colonial architecture dominated films such as *El Caporal* (1920), *La Hacienda* (1921) and *La Parcela* (1922) (Lara Chávez), while the work of Guillermo ‘El Indio’ Calles was dedicated to a post-revolutionary vindication of indigenous heritage (Cineteca Nacional). Still, Mexican film production ground nearly to a halt – an average of six films a year – while the screening of American productions exploded, with over 500 titles imported yearly (Serna, “Exhibition in Mexico” 70).

### The Case of Saltillo

Situated in northeast Mexico, the present-day city of Saltillo originally consisted of two distinct settlements that later merged in the 19th century. The first of these settlements, *Villa de Santiago del Saltillo*, was established in 1577 by Alberto del Canto and a group of peninsular Spaniard immigrants seeking to build generational wealth (Muñoz Borrego 66). On the other hand, the town of *San Esteban de la Nueva Tlaxcala* was founded in 1591 by Tlaxcalan settlers, natives from central Mexico allied with the Spaniards, in an attempt to stabilize the region, which was

then inhabited by nomadic tribes considered hostile and dangerous (Güereca Durán 51; Santoscoy 123). *Allende* Street in the city center served as the demarcation line between these two settlements until their amalgamation was decreed by the State's Congress in 1834, resulting in the unified city of Saltillo (Malacara Martínez 112).

During the 17th century, Saltillo experienced economic growth primarily driven by wheat production and trade with neighboring towns in Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León (Durón Jiménez). The city's annual commercial fairs, held in September and October, became renowned in the region and attracted a wide array of products and overseas merchandise (Marroni). By the 19th century, Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans had established educational institutions in both the Spanish and Tlaxcalan sides of Saltillo (Berrueto González 130-132). Some of these structures later became the city's first venues for film exhibition.

Saltillo's early commercial dominance in the region eventually waned, overshadowed by the rapid growth of Monterrey and Matamoros. This shift prompted an economic deceleration and a need for diversification, leading to changes in its urban landscape (Marroni 22). By 1900, with a population of 24,000, Saltillo introduced modern services such as electric power and a sewer system, a new marketplace, a slaughterhouse, and mule-drawn streetcars to connect various parts of the city (Marroni 22).

Throughout the country, the relations between business owners and laborers underwent transformations following the onset of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. However, this transformation proceeded more gradually in Saltillo. During the first two decades of the 20th century, workers continued to grapple with pre-revolutionary financial systems, reinforced locally by both clerical and secular institutions. Independent, informal and/or intermittent laborers were characterized as "bums" (*vagos*), lazy, drunken, and quarrelsome. A distinction emerged between these "bums" and employees, factory workers, and craftsmen, collectively referred to as the "toiling class" or *clases laboriosas* (Marroni 51). This distinction underscored the

difference between "productive" individuals with formal employment and the "destructive" independent or unemployed people. As cinema emerged in the city, it was regarded as a tool to contain these "bums" and divert them from their perceived vices.

In the 1920s, there were three main movie theaters in Saltillo: *Teatro Obrero* (1917-1950), *Cine Apolo* (1919-1928), and *Teatro Variedades* (1926-1930) (Gutiérrez Cabello). All three of them were owned by the *Adolfo Rodríguez y Hno. Company*, and together they formed the *Circuito Rodríguez*. This company, based in Monterrey, thoroughly dominated the exhibition market in Northeast Mexico at the time. They operated most movie venues and were also heavily involved in distribution: its owners, Antonio and Adolfo Rodríguez, held the exclusive rights to distribute the products of Columbia Pictures and Metro Goldwyn Meyer in the region (Meers et al.).

### The 1922 Embargo

When Álvaro Obregón declared an embargo on all Paramount films in February 1922, it was far from the first attempt by the Mexican government to face this issue: the First Mexican Censorship Law was enacted in 1913 to limit the showing of films that denigrated Mexico or the Revolution (Peredo-Castro 66). Carranza's Film Censorship Act of 1919 established the Office of Film Censorship (68), but the measure had little impact. By 1922, after decades of ignored complaints and fruitless actions, the Latin American market had grown enough that losing it might hurt the Hollywood distributors' bottom line (Serna, "Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign against Derogatory Films" 231). In February 1922, after a series of offending movies including Paramount's *Her Husband's Trademark*, Obregón's government notified the distributor that they would face consequences if they didn't act. After Paramount refused to withdraw *Her Husband's Trademark* from circulation, Obregón officially banned the screening of Paramount movies. The presidential decree, which included not only the offending movie but all other films distributed by Paramount, was to be enforced at the municipal

level by town and city mayors. Over the course of 1922, this embargo was expanded to include Goldwyn, Metro, Aywon, Educational Films, Warner Bros., and Famous Players-Lasky (Peredo-Castro 68; Serna, *Making Cinelandia* 164). Unlike previous attempts, the embargo raised eyebrows immediately in Hollywood, and may have factored in the formation of the MPPDA (Delpar, "Goodbye" 36; Peredo-Castro 69). After the first meeting of the MPPDA Board of Directors, a resolution was approved condemning thoughtless portrayals of Mexicans (Peredo-Castro 69). And yet, movies with offending content continued to be exhibited freely in the U.S. (Delpar, "Goodbye" 36; Serna, *Making Cinelandia* 163-164) and so the embargo continued. The MPPDA sent a representative to Mexico to speak to the president directly and reach an agreement, at a time when formal diplomatic relations between the two countries had not yet been reestablished. The strategy was fruitful and on November 6, 1922, a formal deal was struck between the Mexican government and the MPPDA (Delpar, "Goodbye" 38).

But the agreement was short lived: by 1924, Metro-Goldwyn was banned in Mexico again, along with Vitagraph (Delpar, "Goodbye" 38) and First National (Peredo-Castro 69). The Mexican government argued that the studios' new strategy – fictionalizing the names of Latin American countries and regions – didn't change much if the quality of the portrayal itself didn't improve (Serna, *Making Cinelandia* 170-171).

This was the state of affairs in 1925, when the municipal documents of Saltillo first start mentioning censorship of films in the city. The banning decrees were passed down from the *Secretaría de Gobernación* to the states and then to the municipalities via telegraphed memo (Serna, "Exhibition in Mexico" 230). It was the mayors of the towns and cities that would be responsible for preventing the screening of movies from the indicted companies. In his report of January 1924, theater inspector Gabriel Rodríguez asked the mayor of Saltillo, Manuel Gómez, to make it so that exhibitors were required to mention in their daily programs the distributor along with the name of the movie (Rodríguez), so it would be easier to tell which movies couldn't be screened (from later documents, we learn

that his request was ignored). The inspector also shared his suspicion that the distributor's name had been intentionally cut out of the films to avoid the embargo. If we compare this report to those of municipal inspectors around the country in 1922 before the initial embargo (Serna, *Making Cinelandia* 164), we can see a marked difference: whereas the pre-embargo inspectors in Mexico City and Guanajuato are limited to the realm of reprimands and moral disappointment (164), the Saltillo inspector in 1924 has the authority of the presidential decree behind him. By 1925, the mechanism had been put in place for theater inspectors at the local level throughout the country to stop certain movies from screening at the behest of the central government. As we will see in the next section, this mechanism was often employed not just to stop exhibition of denigrating movies but also for other, more political reasons.

### Film censorship in Saltillo, 1925-1928

In our exploration of the ban on American films in Saltillo during the 1920s, our primary source material consists of a collection of 14 documents, originating from the office of the Mayor of Saltillo, that directly pertain to the prohibition of certain films and distributors. The documents span from 1925 to 1928. Most of these documents are memorandums from the office of the Executive Secretary of the State (the governor's right-hand man), hand-signed by him, and addressed to the mayor of Saltillo.

These memos followed a regular format, featuring the distributor's name, the title of the film, and the original communication received from Mexico City. Consistently, all documents attribute these directives to *Secretaría de Gobernación*, with some also mentioning *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*. From our examination of these documents, *Secretaría de Gobernación* played a central role in communicating the orders to "impede exhibition" to the states, on a case-by-case basis. In practice, this process involved *Gobernación* sending a memo to the governor's office which, in turn, passed the information along to the mayor of Saltillo. The mayor, upon receiving these orders, acted by notifying the ban to the city's theater inspectors. Given that



all exhibition venues in Saltillo at the time were under the ownership of *Circuito Rodríguez*, it is noteworthy that the mayor also frequently instructed his office to “notify the Rodríguez” directly. This connection between the mayor’s office and *A. Rodríguez y Hno.* underscores the significant role that the company played in the social and economic landscape of the city at the time. Other documents from the office of the mayor attest to this: a short letter informs the mayor that – as is tradition for *A. Rodríguez y Hno.* – he has been granted four complimentary seats for all functions at the *Teatro Obrero* (Orta). The mayor instructs to graciously accept and give thanks to the company’s representative. In another document (by *A. Rodríguez y Hno.*), the company informs the mayor that they’ll be delighted to comply with a request to allow their lighted marquees to be used for official purposes and, furthermore, are willing to perform this civic service free of charge. Although the documents often mention “the Rodríguez” or “the Rodríguez brothers,” it is the company’s representative [2] in Saltillo – and not the owners themselves, located in Monterrey – who corresponds with the local authorities.

In five instances, the contents of the memos bear striking similarities to those documented

in Aguascalientes by Gutiérrez Pantoja (483-484). This suggests that both Aguascalientes and Saltillo likely received duplicate copies of the same memorandum from *Gobernación*. This supposition is further substantiated by identical spelling errors present in both sets of documents. For example, both in Aguascalientes and Saltillo, in a memo (Oyervides, Prohibición de la Película *Su Enemigo la Ley*) ordering a ban on the film *Su enemigo la ley*, the name of film distributor Triangle K.C. is written “Triangle Kav See,” presumably because they received the exact same transcription. The municipality of La Paz mentions the same memorandum on November 17, 1925, with the spelling “Triangle Kay See” (Archivo Histórico Pablo L. Martínez 44)

From 1925 to 1928, 10 offending movies and 6 companies are mentioned in the documents, as seen in Table 1. In most cases, the order to impede exhibition pertains to a single movie, but some of the memos mandate embargos on distributors, citing the precedent established in 1922. One such case is the memo of January 19, 1925, which declares that “the presidential agreement of June 5, 1922 is to be applicable to the products of Jimmy Aubrey Production Inc., for having produced the movie *El Perturbador*[3], which is denigrating to the uses and customs

Film Name	Distributor	Date of Ban	Date of Memo	Medium	Mayor's Response	Type of Ban
<i>El Perturbador</i>	Jimmy Aubrey Production Inc.	1/15/1925	1/19/1925	Written memo	1/22/1925	Distributor
<i>La Furia Desatada</i>	Universal Film Company	4/23/1925	4/29/1925	Written memo	5/6/1925	Distributor
<i>The Genuine Panama</i>	Not Mentioned	8/11/1925	8/17/1925	Written memo	8/25/1925	Movie
<i>Vivo o Muerto</i>	Casa Pathé	8/15/1925	8/17/1925	Telegram	8/22/1925	Movie
<i>Los Cuatro Jinetes del Apocalipsis</i>	Metro Picture Corporation	10/13/1925	10/16/1925	Written memo	10/28/1925	Movie
<i>Su Enemigo la Ley</i>	Triangle Kav See	10/16/1925	10/23/1925	Written memo	10/28/1925	Movie
<i>Mare Nostrum</i>	Not Mentioned	3/9/1927	3/14/1927	Written memo	3/16/2027	Movie
<i>El Atropellado</i>	Anónimo	9/8/1927	9/19/1927	Written memo	N/A	Movie
<i>Funerales de los Señores Arzobispo Mora y Del Río y Obispo Valdespino</i>	Not Mentioned	6/11/1928	6/18/1928	Written memo	6/21/1928	Movie
<i>Lines and Races</i>	Ink-Well Studios	10/1/1928	10/8/1928	Written memo	10/18/1928	Distributor

Table 1. Films banned in Saltillo, 1925-1928

of Mexico” (our trans. Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Prohibición de la Casa Jimmy Aubrey Production Inc.). The 1922 decree is again invoked on April 29 to order an embargo on Universal Film Company in retaliation for the film *La Furia Desatada* (Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Prohibición de la Casa Universal Film Co.). A subsequent memo on May 8th calls off the embargo (Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Derogada la Prohibición de la Casa Universal Film Co.). Considering that the mayor had only notified the inspectors of the ban on May 6th, it’s safe to assume that this particular prohibition was effectively never enforced.

For the most part, though, it was singular films that were banned during this period in Saltillo, mostly because they were perceived to contain scenes denigrating to Mexico. On September 19 (Flores), 1927, the mayor passes along the order to ban *El Atropellado*, a film which – the memo specifies – was produced anonymously in the U.S. and distributed in Mexico by *M. González y Compañía*.

The only ban order to come to Saltillo via telegram, rather than written letter, is the one prohibiting *Vivo o Muerto*, a film depicting Pancho Villa’s attack on Columbus, NM (Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Prohibición de la Película *Vivo o Muerto*). This is an example of the presidential decree being used not just to ban the movies that denigrated Mexico but also the ones that ‘denigrated the Revolution’, which is to say, went against the narrative of the reigning Sonoran Dynasty. Pancho Villa had become a bitter rival of Obregón and Calles before his pardon and eventual assassination (Cázares Puente and Treviño Villarreal), and as a political and social figure he was – to put it mildly – problematic to the sitting government. Thus, while the orders to ban racist movies crept to Coahuila by written letter, the order to stop a movie that might undermine the Sonorans’ national narrative traveled on the electrical wire. The order was enacted swiftly, with the mayor notifying not just the theater inspectors but also the Chief of Police.

Another interesting case is the order to stop screenings of the filmed funeral of Archbishop José Mora y del Río (Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Prohibición de la Película *Funerales*

*de los Señores Arzobispo Moral y del Río y Obispo Valdespino*). This order came at the height of the Cristero uprising, a violent and protracted conflict from 1926-1929 between the forces of President Calles and an armed rebellion which arose in response to his government’s anti-Catholic policies and persecution (García Ugarte 133-155). The Cristeros, primarily composed of devout Catholic rural workers and other supporters of the Catholic Church, rose up in armed resistance against these measures under the battle cry *¡Viva Cristo Rey!*

Against this backdrop, it’s not surprising that the Calles government would seek to stop exhibition of the funeral: José Mora y del Río had been the most prominent voice of Catholic discontent in the country. The conflict had begun, at least in public perception, as a personal struggle between the Archbishop and President Calles (García Ugarte 139). Archbishop Mora y del Río was arrested by the regime and later sent into exile, where he died. He was, by far, the most vocal and prominent opponent of the President.

Unlike most other documents (but much like the above-mentioned telegram), no law or decree was cited in the letter that informed the mayor about the ban on the archbishop’s funeral. Instead, the missive reads “this Department has seen fit to agree to prohibit throughout the Republic the screening of the cinema film titled *Funerales de los señores arzobispo Mora y del Río y obispo Valdespino*, which is divided in two parts and was recently recorded in San Antonio, Texas” (our trans.; Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Prohibición de la Película *Funerales de los Señores Arzobispo Moral y del Río y Obispo Valdespino*). A letter from the Chief of Police a week later assures the mayor that all measures have been taken to prevent the screenings.

This ban, like the previous one, illustrates how movies with political implications were handled less officially but more urgently than movies which fell squarely under the scope of the 1922 decree. There was, however, a third category: movies which were denigrating to friendly nations.

Such is the case of Rex Ingram’s work. The Irish director’s film, *The Four Horsemen of the*

*Apocalypse*, was unbanned on October 16, 1925 'because, after reviewing it, the German Delegation in Mexico declared that it contains nothing offensive to their country' (our trans.; Oyervides, *Permiso para Exhibir la Película Los cuatro Jinetes del Apocalipsis*). Another Rex Ingram movie, *Mare Nostrum*, presents an interesting case: along with the letter ordering the ban (Berchermann), *Gobernación* forwarded the note received by *Relaciones Exteriores* from the German Delegation, offering a window into the diplomatic process:

... the movie *Mare Nostrum* which, as I had the honor to relay to Your Excellency in my note from November 19, quite alarmed the German colony here, continues to be shown in other Mexican cities, from where I receive telegrams asking if there is no way to prevent their exhibition. For this reason, I'd be thankful to receive from Your Excellency the decision from Secretaría de Gobernación stating the reasons why the screening of this movie *Mare Nostrum* was allowed ... (our trans.; Berchermann).

A letter from August 17th of the same year (Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Prohibición de la Película *The Genuine Panamá*) contains a similar note from the Panama Delegation, requesting the ban of the movie 'The Genuine Panama'. In the note, the Panama Delegation invokes – and praises – the country's recent policy regarding bad portrayals of Mexico and other friendly states:

... requesting that said film's exhibition be forbidden according to the policy that Mexico has maintained of late in matter of cinema films, and by which all movies that denigrate friend nations are excluded from exhibition, and also to put into practice the reciprocity to which we are beholden by virtue of the constant ministering of our diplomatic and consular agents ... (our trans.; Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno, Prohibición de la Película *The Genuine Panamá*)

As for the way in which the censorship was enacted by the theater inspectors, we know

precious little; although some inspector reports are present in the mayor's papers, the only one that mentions the bans is the one containing inspector Gabriel Rodríguez's suspicions that the theaters are tampering with the movies to evade the prohibition. Some other American films are mentioned by name in the reports, although not due to the bans but because of the poor quality of the copies being projected. As for Mexican commercial films, they are completely absent. It's not surprising, considering that – as we've established – domestic production was practically negligible during this time. In keeping with the government's view of film as a more pragmatic tool for education and modernization, the only national productions are mentioned in a letter to the mayor by a Mr. Antonio T. Alanís, who presents himself as a "Cultural Cinematographer" and requests monetary compensation for his service to the community. The letter states that "a few departments of the executive branch have made available to me several movies made in our country, quite useful for the education of children, laborers and peasants" (our trans.; Alanís). The films listed by Alanís include topics such as meat processing, cattle vaccination and dental hygiene. We have already mentioned that both the Department of Agriculture and the incipient National Department of Education (*SEP*) invested in a number of literacy projects throughout the country during the administrations of Obregón and Calles, and it is very likely that these films were part of their efforts. However, we have no way of knowing whether their goals were accomplished or how many people attended these educational shows. We do know, however, from the reports of the inspectors and other documents collected for this project, that as far as commercial cinema goes, business was booming in Saltillo: from insufficient toilets to the need for ventilation (De León), most of the negatives mentioned in the inspector's reports stem from blatant overcrowding in the theaters. Of the 11 cities where the *Circuito Rodríguez* operated, Saltillo is the only one other than Monterrey – at least according to the company's stationery (A. Rodríguez y Hno.) – with more than one theater. Whether this was because of the city's geographical proximity to their center of operations or because it had a large

consumer base relative to city size, it is clear that cinema was Saltillo's preponderant form of public entertainment from 1925 to 1928.

## Conclusion

The censorship of American movies in 1920s Mexico was the product of complex dynamics between various actors at the national and international level, but it also influenced and modified the local movie-going experience in towns and cities throughout the country. In the archival documents from the office of the Mayor of Saltillo, we not only observe the inner bureaucratic workings of the censorship itself but also get a glimpse into the interactions that it elicited within the city. The evolving relationship between the Mexican government and Hollywood, and their negotiation and struggles with local venue monopolies, occurred on a larger scale but had concrete implications for the cinema experiences of people in Saltillo.

When it comes to public debate over the film censorship by the Mexican state in the 1920s, we can identify four interest groups with different goals. The Mexican government sought to reconstruct the image of Mexico both diplomatically and among the Mexican people, whose identity was fractured by the revolution. The Hollywood studios and distributors, incarnated by 1922 in the MPPDA, aimed to evade regulation by reaching informal agreements both in the U.S. and internationally, and were beginning the journey of self-moderation that would eventually lead to the Code era. Because of the growing immigration, ex-patriate Mexican citizens in the U.S. and even Mexican-Americans emerged as another group in this controversy, acting as watchdogs of national pride and sending advance notice of offending films and even film clippings as evidence of the offense (Serna, "Exhibition in Mexico" 235-243). Lastly, the exhibitors in Mexico were the most affected by the government's measures, considering that the vast majority of films shown were American in origin. The larger companies – such as *Circuito Rodríguez* – were by then strong enough both socially and financially that they could openly fight against censorship, but they may have employed more covert tactics

to evade the bans, as suspected by theater inspector Gabriel Rodríguez.

As with any controversy, there were tensions between these groups at different levels. In Saltillo, as a smaller city in northeast Mexico, the interaction that is most palpable is between the exhibitors and the government. Even though there are some tensions in that relationship – as evidenced by the inspector's report – the missives from *A. Rodríguez y Hno.* to the mayor evidence a cordial relationship, marked by the small-town niceties that are to be expected in a small city where all the people in positions of authority probably know each other. From the mayor notifying *Circuito Rodríguez* directly about the bans, to the gifting of seats and marquee space, it is clear that the relationship between the mayor and the company's representative is an agreeable one with open lines of communication. What is interesting is that in this relationship, mayor Manuel Gómez and attorney José Orta are both acting on behalf of larger interest groups that transcend the environment of the city: the mayor represents the national government and Orta represents the Rodríguez Company.

From the documents we have studied, we can identify three main reasons for censorship of a film in 1925-1928 Saltillo: because they were denigrating to the image of Mexico, because a friendly nation had requested it, or because they were detrimental to the regime's narrative. In all cases, it was the Department of the Interior that ordered the ban, while the city's mayor and his theater inspectors were ultimately responsible for enforcing it. In the case of denigrating movies, the 1922 presidential decree was invoked. In the case of movies that were denigrating to other nations, the Department of the Interior acted by request from the Department of Foreign Relations, which had received complaints or requests from foreign delegations or diplomats. In the case of movies that were 'uncomfortable' to the regime, the correspondence was both more urgent and vaguer, with no law or decree being mentioned. This might indicate that the senders – and perhaps even the recipients – were aware that there was no provision that legally justified the censorship. All three reasons for censorship that we found are, to a degree,



political. Unlike other incarnations of censorship at the time, no movies were forbidden during this time for reasons of morality. That, however, does not necessarily mean that the moral fiber of screened films was not a concern: in fact, it might even be that examining the morality of the movies was an implied responsibility of inspectors, to a degree that it is taken for granted: on March 5, 1925, the inspector reports that he found the film *Canción de Cuna* to be “moral, but highly-damaged, with constant interruptions that annoyed the public and elicited protest” (our trans.; De León). The inspector noted the bad physical state of the movie, but mentioned that he found it to be moral, which may imply that it was part of his duty to perform this examination. If there was indeed a public decency aspect to the work of the inspectors, it was definitely a local phenomenon and not part of the bureaucratic mechanism that enforced the 1922-rooted bans and embargoes.

In this article, we’ve tried to gain a glimpse into how complex and multi-faceted diplomatic conflicts at the binational level unfolded in a small city in northeastern Mexico. It is difficult to trace how each aspect of this conflict impacted the audience’s experience when attending the cinema or how local interests intersected with the presidential goals of national representation. That said, from the fixation on national identity to the use of cinema to ‘modernize’ and ‘educate’, it is clear that the central government of Mexico at the time had a paternalistic approach that subtly – and sometimes not so subtly – patronized the population and probably underestimated their capabilities. It is hard not to notice traces of this prejudice in the way the embargoes were decreed and carried out. Moral and political censorship is, after all, a condescending measure that tacitly judges the audience incapable of acting on their own judgement to discern what is appropriate.

Kuhn points out, “In the early years, film censorship was productive in the sense that it actively contributed to creating a public sphere of cinema, establishing cinema as an institution and an object of regulation,” but eventually the burden of a national censorship system had an impact on the entire cinema-going experience, mainly to the detriment of audiences (qtd. in Biltereyst et al. 96-111). In their description of

a conflict between the Motion Picture Export Association and the Netherlands Cinema Association, Pafort-Overduin and Gomery (147-158) touch on an interesting subject: part of an embargo based on national identity is trying to sell the public on that identity. Let us not forget, also, that Saltillo was quite removed from the country’s political and economic center, and that José Vasconcelos himself, the man in charge of educating the nation and creating its identity, wasted no opportunity to make it known that he believed the north to be a backward and barbarous region (Salas Cortés).

This patronizing undertone to the censorship had resonance in Saltillo because of the prevailing idea that some segments of the population needed to be educated into productivity and saved from their own vices and harmful behaviors. There was irony in these measures: for a man with a surprisingly modernist-industrialist approach (Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue* 22), Obregón’s bans harmed not just Mexican entrepreneurs but also Mexican workers in a booming economic sector (Serna, “Exhibition in Mexico” 235-236). If nothing else, it is clear that while the experience of going to the movies in Saltillo between 1925 and 1928 may have been influenced – or even inconvenienced – by the censorship policies passed down from Mexico City, it was far from the main concern of the attendees. As attested by the inspectors, other more immediate and mundane worries were on their minds: the theaters were too hot; the movies were torn from overuse; the aisles reeked of urine and people were committing indecent acts in the back rows (De León). The experience of going to the movies in Saltillo was situated in the physical, not in the abstract realms of diplomatic bonds, Revolutionary narratives, or national honor.

## Endnotes

[1] This study is part of the project *Cultura de la Pantalla en Saltillo: ideología, economía política y audiencias en interacción con el cambio social*, conducted at Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila as part of the *Cultura de la Pantalla* network, whose objective is to examine cinema's social practice and experience through empirical research inspired by New Cinema History, focusing on film exhibition spaces, programming and the experience of audiences (Meers et al.). This paper presents a small part of our findings for the first phase of the study, carried out through a systematic review of historical documents related to cinema at the *Archivo Municipal de Saltillo* (Municipal Archive of Saltillo). The documents mentioned are available for public consultation at the archive. We'd like to thank the Archive's staff for their invaluable help with this project.

[2] The representative is José Orta, legal attorney of the Rodríguez's interests in Saltillo and manager of the Teatro Obrero.

[3] Probably "Tootsies and Tamales" (Noel M. Smith, 1919).

## Works Cited

- A. Rodríguez y Hno. Exhibición de Placas de Anuncios Luminosos. 7 Feb. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 2, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.
- Alanís, Antonio. Exhibición de Películas Educativas Mexicanas. 13 Nov. 1936. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 179-2, L 11, e 29, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.
- Archivo Histórico Pablo L. Martínez. "Regímenes Revolucionarios 1925." *Proyecto, Ordenamiento, Inventario, Conservación y Catalogación del Ramo Regímenes Revolucionarios 1918-1969*, Gobierno del Estado, Baja California Sur.
- Beezley, William H. "Creating a Revolutionary Culture: Vasconcelos, Indians, Anthropologists, and Calendar Girl." *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, edited by William H. Beezley, John Wiley & Sons, 2011, pp. 420–38.
- Belmonte Grey, Carlos Alejandro. "El Cine de la Comedia Ranchera Durante el Socialismo a la 'Mexicana.'" *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis*, vol. 6, no. 11, 2016, Web. Accessed 26 Sept. 2023.
- Berchermann, Guillermo. Suspensión de la Película *Mare Nostrum*. 17 Mar. 1927. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 170, L 12, e 13, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.
- Berrueto González, Arturo. "La Educación en Saltillo Durante los Siglos XVI-XIX." *Revista Coahuilense de Historia*, vol. 98, 2009, pp. 127–37.
- Biltereyst, Daniel, et al. "Comparing Historical Cinema Cultures: Reflections on New Cinema History and Comparison with a Cross-National Case Study on Antwerp an Rotterdam." *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, Routledge, 2019, pp. 96–111.
- Buchenau, Jürgen. "The Sonoran Dynasty and the Reconstruction of the Mexican State." *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, edited by William H. Beezley, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 407–19.
- Cázares Puente, Eduardo, and Héctor Jaime Treviño Villarreal. "Villa y Obregón." Ciclo de conferencias La Historia a Debate: Villa vs. Villa, Sociedad Nuevoleonesa de Historia, Geografía y Estadística y el Centro de Estudios Políticos e Historia Presente, 21 Jun. 2023, Museo de Historia Mexicana, Monterrey, México.
- Cineteca Nacional. "Guillermo 'El Indio' Calles Guerrero - Director de Cine." *Diccionario de Directores Del Cine Mexicano*, 25 Apr. 2022, Web. Accessed 26 Sept. 2023.
- De León, Pablo. Informe Sobre Irregularidades en los Teatros. 03 Jun 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 7, 2 ff. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.
- De los Reyes, Aurelio. "El Cine en México 1896-1930." *Cine Latinoamericano 1896-1930*, edited by Héctor García Mesa, Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinematografía (CNAC), Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, 2014, pp. 166–98.
- Delpar, Helen. "Goodbye to the 'Greaser.'" *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 12, no. 1, Apr. 1984, pp. 34–41, Web. Accessed 2 Dec. 2021.
- . *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935*. U of Alabama P, 1996.
- Durón Jiménez, Martha. "Saltillo y Ramos Arizpe en Total Oposición a la Anexión de Coahuila a Nuevo León 1854-1864." *Revista Coahuilense de Historia*, vol. 98, 2009, pp. 219-42.
- Flores, Félix. Prohibición de la Película *El atropellado*. 19 Sept. 1927. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 170, L 12, e 20, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.
- García Ugarte, Marta Eugenia. "Los Católicos y el Presidente Calles." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, vol. 57, no. 3, July 1995, p. 131, Web. Accessed 28 Sept. 2023.
- Gudiño Cejudo, María Rosa. "Un Recorrido Filmográfico por la Secretaría de Educación Pública: México (1920-1940)." *Revista Tempos e Espaços em Educação*, vol. 11, no. 26, June 2018, pp. 91–112, Web. Accessed 4 Apr. 2022.
- Güereca Durán, Raquel. "Las Milicias Tlaxcaltecas en Saltillo y Colotlán." *Estudios de Historia Novohispana*, vol. 54, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Jan. 2016, pp. 50–73, Web. Accessed 26 Sept. 2023.
- Gutiérrez Cabello, Ariel. "Las Salas Cinematográficas de Saltillo." *Relatos y Retratos del Saltillo. Historia, Retratos, Arquitectura, Personajes, Lugares, Toros, Tradiciones.*, 19 Oct. 2012, Web. Accessed 30 Sept. 2023.
- Gutiérrez Pantoja, Gabriel. *Presencia del Pensamiento*

*Acalitense Contemporáneo*. UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas, 2005.

Herrera León, Fabián. "La Sociedad de Naciones y el Problema del Distanciamiento Mexicano: La Misión Internacional de Julián Nogueira en México, Agosto-Septiembre de 1923." *Tzintzun: Revista de Estudios Históricos*, vol. 57, no. Enero-Junio, 2013, pp. 125–53.

---. "México y la Sociedad de Naciones: Sobre su Exclusión e Ingreso (1919-1931)." *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2020, Web. Accessed 30 Sept. 2023.

Lara Chávez, Hugo. "Fin del Cine Mudo (1920-1928)." *Página web oficial Corre Cámara*, 11 Dec. 2006, Web. Accessed 26 Sept. 2023.

Lozano, José Carlos, et al. "La Experiencia Social Histórica de Asistencia al Cine En Monterrey (Nuevo León, México) Durante las Décadas de 1930 a 1960." *Palabra Clave*, vol. 19, no. 3, July 2016, pp. 691–720, Web. Accessed 3 Mar. 2023.

Lynch, Andrew. "A Historical View of US Latinidad and Spanish as a Heritage Language." *The Routledge Handbook of Spanish as a Heritage Language*, edited by Kim Potowski, Routledge, 2018.

Malacara Martínez, Antonio. *Breves Historias y Otros Temas*. Siglo XXI y Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, 2007.

Maltby, Richard, et al. *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Marroni, Gloria. *Los Orígenes de la Sociedad Industrial en Coahuila 1840-1940*. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, 1992.

Meers, Philippe, et al. "Concentración de la Propiedad y el Control de Salas de Cine en el Noreste de México, el Caso del Circuito Rodríguez: 1904-1947." *Salas, Negocios y Públicos del Cine Latinoamericano. 1915-1960*, edited by Clara Krieger and Nicolas Poppe, (forthcoming).

Muñoz Borrego, Miguel Ángel. "Un Tejido Familiar en la Vida Pública de Coahuila." *Revista Coahuilense de Historia*, vol. 98, 2009, pp. 63-79.

Nájera-Ramírez, Olga. "Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse, and the Mexican Charro." *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 1, Jan. 1994, p. 1, Web. Accessed 28 Mar. 2020.

Pafort-Overduin, Clara, and Douglas Gomery. "The High Stakes Conflict between the Motion Picture Export Association and the Netherlands Cinema Association, 1945-1946." *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, Routledge, 2019, pp. 147-58.

Orta, José. Envío de un Pase por Media Platea Para el Teatro Obrero. 12 Feb. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 3, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

Oyervides, Enrique. Prohibición de la Película *Su Enemigo La Ley*. 23 Oct. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 9, 3 ff. Archivo Municipal de

Saltillo.

---. Permiso para Exhibir la Película *Los Cuatro Jinetes del Apocalipsis*. 16 Oct. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 11, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

Peredo-Castro, Francisco. "Inquisition Shadows: Politics, Religion, Diplomacy, and Ideology in Mexican Film Censorship." *Silencing Cinema. Film Censorship around the World*, edited by Daniel Bilitereyst and Roel Vande Winkel, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 63-80.

Rodríguez, Gabriel. Proyecto para Regular los Precios de Entrada a los Espectáculos Públicos. 10 Mar. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 4, 2 ff. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

Salas Cortés, Jesús. "La Construcción Ritual de La Carne Asada En La Ciudad de Saltillo, Coahuila, México, Desde Una Perspectiva de Género." Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, 8 Oct. 2021. Conferencia Virtual, *Facebook*. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.

Santoscoy, María Elena. Historia de Coahuila. Cápsulas. *Revista Coahuilense de Historia*, no. 112, Sep. - Dec. 2016, p. 103-76.

Secretaría Oficial de Gobierno. Prohibición de la Casa Jimmy Aubrey Production Inc. 19 Jan. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 1, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

---. Prohibición de la Casa Universal Film Co. 29 Abr. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 5, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

---. Derogada la Prohibición de la Casa Universal Film Co. 08 May 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 6, 1 f. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

---. Prohibición de la Película *Vivo o Muerto*. 17 Aug. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 9, 3 ff. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

---. Prohibición de la Película *The Genuine Panamá*. 17 Aug. 1925. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 168-3, L 43, e 9, 3 ff. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

---. Prohibición de la Película *Funerales de los Señores Arzobispo Moral y del Río y Obispo Valdespino*. 18 Jun. 1928. Presidencia Municipal Collection. AMS, PM, c 171, L 8, e 26, 2 ff. Archivo Municipal de Saltillo.

Serna, Laura Isabel. "'As a Mexican I Feel It's My Duty:' Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign against Derogatory Films in Mexico, 1922–1930." *The Americas*, vol. 63, no. 2, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 225-244, Web. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.

---. "Exhibition in Mexico during the Early 1920s: Nationalist Discourse and Transnational Capital." *Convergence Media History*, edited by Janet Staiger and Sabine Hake, Routledge, 2009.

---. *Making Cinelandia: American films and Mexican film culture before the Golden Age*. Duke UP, 2014.

Treveri Gennari, Daniela, et al. *Rural Cinema Exhibition and Audiences in a Global Context*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2018.

Verhoeven, Deb. "New Cinema History and the Computational Turn." World Congress on Communication and the Arts, January 2012, Guimarães, Portugal. Conference presentation. Web. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.

Zea Prado, Irene. "México en la Sociedad de Naciones." *Relaciones Internacionales*, vol. 68, no. Oct/Dic, 1995, pp. 115-22, Web. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.

## Authors' Biographies

---

Antonio Corona es profesor investigador en la Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, Mexico y Brenda A. Muñoz es profesora investigadora en la Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, Mexico.



# Black noise, police brutality, and city landscapes: Noir aesthetics in Kendrick Lamar's "Alright"

CRISTIANE GUEDES (BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY AND UNIVERSITY OF GUADALAJARA)

## Abstract

*The paper attempts to analyze whether the music video of the song "Alright" by Kendrick Lamar reveals new conceptions of the urban occupation and power relations within Oakland. To conduct this reflection, the author uses a Fanonian analysis of selected scenes from the music video with police officers and an analysis of the aesthetics of Noir cinema present in the music video. The article's argument is that the image of the police helps construct a dichotomous imagery of dangerous places in a city: on one hand, for certain groups, the police can represent the fight against crime; on the other hand, for other groups it represents the danger personified. According to the author, the video not only criticizes police violence but also reclaims urban periphery as an alive space of Black culture.*

**Keywords:** police officer, representation, Noir, Kendrick Lamar, Alright, Oakland, cityscapes.

## Introduction

This paper attempts to analyze how the representation of the tension between police and Black society in the video clip of the song "Alright" (Kendrick Lamar, 2015), the latter part of the album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (TPAB), reveals a new conception of spatial power relations in Oakland according to a Fanonian analysis. The purpose of this work is also to investigate whether the music video in fact proposes a new representation of the city regarding the tension between police and peripheral Black people. [1] To pursue this endeavor, it is important to conduct a close analysis of the video clip especially of scenes including with police officers. Theoretically, I will draw upon the notion of the split in the colonial world (Fanon 28) and follow the argument that film noir styles are being appropriated in the video in order to present a new and urbanized perspective of Black images on the screen (Diawara 526). The theories of Fanon will be the base for a methodologically complex discourse analysis that considers not only the images of the music video but also the lyrics of the song, the music sampling used, and the positioning of the song "Alright" within

the music album. The paper at hand conducts a deeper analysis of the relations between police violence, ideology, and urban space represented in the video.

According to Livien Ameel, cities are usually understood in terms of centrality and density, respecting an implicit opposition between a (suburban, rural, colonial) hinterland or periphery and a city center. However, "as urban sprawl and the implosion of post-industrial cities have shown, a sense of peripheral urbanity may, however, be as essential to contemporary urban centres" (1). In this sense, this paper will focus on the representation of Oakland considering the dichotomy between center and periphery and following the hypothesis that Lamar's music video presents a new perspective on the occupation of the city regarding Black lives.

My argument is that the image of the police helps construct a dichotomous imagery of dangerous places in a city: on one hand, for certain groups, the police can represent the fight against crime; for other groups, it represents the danger itself. This appears true since "in the colonies the legal and institutional interlocutor of the colonized, the spokesman of the settler and the regime of oppression is the gendarme or the

soldier” (Fanon 28). Furthermore, according to Douglas Muzzio, scholars on urban studies have shown that cities’ representation in audiovisual art such as cinema not only shapes the public’s imagination of cities but also the way people understand and experience them (189). In that sense, I suggest that Lamar’s music video not only criticizes the police violence in the cities but also reclaims periphery as an alive urban space.

### Historical contextualization

Lamar’s choice of recording and shooting the video in Oakland is not arbitrary, but rather symbolic: the video appears as a creative and critical response to Oakland’s part in protest culture. In the music video, which comes close to a short film, the connection between the cityscape and cultural expressions is represented, exploring the city’s composition and revealing Oakland’s socio-racial tensions. To observe how these dynamics are perceived in terms of spatial organization, it is important to understand the context of the city, since “the suburban ‘white noose’ surrounding the urban black community stood metaphorically for metropolitan inequality and segregation” (Self 256); in other words, even in the organization of cities, it is possible to observe socio-racial distinctions.

Oakland is historically recognized for its duality of resistance and oppression through police brutality. The city has been plagued by police violence and repression towards social movements but has also been known for its protest culture (Epstein 66). There is a strong connection between the city and the hip-hop scene, highlighting the large number of rappers who supported the city’s American soccer team, the Raiders, in the late 90s and early 2000s (Bracelin). Since the 1960s, with the influence of the Civil Rights and Black power movement, Oakland also has had a great importance for the development of social ideas in the United States, being the birthplace of the Black Panther Party (BPP) (Self 218). The latter group was responsible for a “form of black nationalism commonly known as revolutionary nationalism” (Jessica Harris 409). As Donna Jean Murch points out,

In July 1972, the Black Panther started publishing a multipart series entitled “Oakland - The Base of Operation.” The title had a double meaning that referred both to the Party’s decision to focus all of its resources on the city of its birth and to Oakland’s status as a major disembarkation port for the Vietnam War. The Black Panther explained, ‘Sitting on the northern coast of America’s most militarized, industrialized, most technologically developed state, California, Oakland operates as a base for much of America’s dirty work, with relatively little attention.’” (203)

The strong political agitations of the Black community in Oakland since the 1960s’ highlight the great protest culture in the city. Moreover, a few years before the release of Lamar’s video in 2015, the Occupy Oakland movement took place and, later, the United States (US) saw the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, in 2013. Occupy Oakland initially was a protest against corporate greed and economic inequality, which used the strategy of occupying spaces in the city, beginning with the famous encampment at Frank H. Ogawa Plaza on October 10, 2011 (King 20). Just a few years later, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged criticizing the systematic violence on the rise against Black people. However, to better understand the specificity of both protests in the Bay Area is important to expose the region’s political economy based on gentrification and the speculative real estate boom it suffered, which has contributed to the notion of “how security is produced in the region” (Maharawal 340). Maharawal explains his approach with the following words:

I analyze Black Lives Matter protests in the Bay Area as protests against a racialized security regime designed to protect capitalist urban redevelopment, tech-led property speculation, gentrification and the regional restructuring of the Bay Area’s economy. I understand racialized police violence as a means of creating ‘safe’ spaces for capital investment and gentrification in the region (since at least the mid-1990s). Or as activists from the Anti-

Police Terror Project bluntly say: 'police are the shock troops of gentrification'. (340)

According to the critic, the racialized aspect of police violence is connected to the construction of the space dichotomy in cities, regarding 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces for investment. Further, police forces would actively work in favor of gentrification in the cities. The author points out that BLM protests, far beyond being a mere expression of a national movement against racist police violence, also had local and regional idiosyncrasies closely connected to the political challenges of specific places.

Considering that the hip-hop culture was born within the tension between the growth of modernization and the increase in the number of slumlords, the urban space became inadequate for those who suffered the rise in the redlined loans from the banks, further marginalizing Black people and their artistic and cultural expressions (Berry 232). This historical context contributes to a better understanding of the intertexts and political commentary present in Lamar's music video "Alright". Recorded in Oakland in 2015, shortly after the two events mentioned above, the video criticizes police violence and structural racism.

### Short summary of the video's narrative

Directed by Colin Tilley, Kendrick Lamar's music video, "Alright", was released in 2015, as part of the critically acclaimed album "To Pimp a Butterfly" (TPAB). The video begins with a black and white shot of the Oakland Bay Bridge. In the audio, parts of "Loving me is complicated" are intertwined with the scream from the song "U", both from TPAB. The screams are played while the spectator watches a black ceiling in which white lights stand out. From then on, the first minute and a half of the music video shows a city in apocalyptic fashion; either desert-like or with people breaking up public spaces. Meanwhile, the poem "I remembered you was conflicted" is recited (00:00:00 - 00:01:30). In a later interview, Lamar also pointed out that the poem is directed to 2pac (MTV).

The poem is built up progressively throughout the album as it is divided into several parts and recited in different songs. This gives the album a specific conceptual structure that helps the viewer to understand not only the order of the songs but also the connections and the common thread between them. It is important to note, though, that the complete poem is only present in the music video version of "Alright" and it reads like this:

I remembered you was conflicted  
Misusing your influence  
Sometimes I did the same  
Abusing my power full of resentment  
Resentment that turned into a deep depression  
Found myself screaming in the hotel room  
Lucifer was all around  
So I kept running  
Until I found my safe haven  
I was trying to convince myself the stripes  
I got  
Making myself realize what my foundation was  
But while my loved ones were fighting  
the continuous war back in the city, I was  
entering a new one  
A war that was based on apartheid and  
discrimination  
(00:00:30 - 00:01:42)

From the penultimate line of the poem onward, the video shows a policeman violently trying to handcuff a Black man who escapes. At this point, the policeman draws his gun and shoots the fugitive. This shot takes the viewer to the formal beginning of the song, in which a presentation of the video appears, as if it were a movie, mentioning its author Kendrick Lamar, its title "Alright", and the direction by Colin Tilley, above a black and white image of a lamppost with the cityscape of Oakland behind it (00:01:30 - 00:01:53).

The music video begins with four Black men in a car listening to songs and singing rap. By zooming out, the viewer realizes that the car is actually being carried by four white police officers. The screen goes completely dark and all you hear is the sound of car tires dragging

on the ground. The image returns with Lamar driving while accompanied by a child that throws money into the air (00:01:55 - 00:02:45). Throughout the video there are images of Black people on the outskirts, dancing and expressing Black culture. Everyone seems happy, partying, and Lamar appears on screen floating, literally flying through the city as they celebrate. It seems fair to conclude that these scenes take place on the outskirts of the city, because in some scenes the skyscrapers of Oakland appear far away in the background. For most part of the music video there are no further scenes with police officers. On the contrary, the police car appears “occupied” by Black children who dance on it.

After the representation of intriguing cityscape images of Oakland and the resistance of the historically marginalized Black culture, the music video ends with the reappearance of the police figure, as Kendrick Lamar stands above the lamppost we already saw at the beginning of the video (00:05:35). Since downtown Oakland can be seen in the background the viewer understands that the action takes place on the periphery of the city. The police officer gets out of his car. He is armed. Looking at Lamar, the officer forms the shape of a pistol with one of his hands and simulates a shot with his fingers. The plot twist of the entire music video is that, although the shot is fictional and metaphysical, Kendrick Lamar appears shot in the chest and falls from the lamppost to the ground. During the fall, the poem from the beginning of the song is recited again. As Lamar hits the ground, he smiles at the camera (00:05:50 - 00:06:40).

“Alright” also serves as a sample for another song, “Blood”, by the same composer on a future album entitled *Damn*. It is about a blind woman who seems to have lost something and the lyrical self, interpreted here as Lamar himself, tries to help her; out of the blue she shoots him. “Blood” ends with an allusion to the US news followed by the sample from “Alright”: “Lamar stated his views on police brutality with that line in the song, quote: ‘And we hate the popo, wanna kill us in the street fo’ sho’.” (Blood, 00:01:42 - 00:01:56). According to Mair, in the song “a female voice replies with disgust, ‘Oh please, ugh, I don’t like it’” (1). This reinforces not only the police violence already addressed

in “Alright” but also highlights the participation of the elites in perpetuating the genocide of young Black people due to racism.

Despite the various possibilities of interpretation arising from “Alright” and its music video, the work’s reception is generally linked to a strong message of hope and determination to overcome adversities which is also “evidenced by the song’s adoption in protests”, according to Noriko Manabe (2019 par. 1.3). Moreover, it was nominated for four categories at the 58th Grammy Awards, winning Best Rap Performance and Best Rap Song. As Manabe sums up various critical responses,

Much of the praise stems from the song’s political import. In its summary of the song for the Best Hip-Hop Songs list, Billboard notes its presence in Black Lives Matter and the Million Man March, adding, “it would be criminal to overlook the social struggle that K. Dot [Lamar] captured from the frontlines with ‘Alright’” (Platon and Rhys 2015). As Matthew Schnipper (2015) notes in Pitchfork, “It has soundtracked a movement.” Generally interpreted as a message of hope during a dark time, the song has been called the “unofficial anthem if the Black Lives Matter movement” (O’Connor 2017), the “New Black National Anthem” to replace “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (Harris 2015) and its generation’s “We Shall Overcome”, making it “the most important rap record of the decade so far” (Garrett 2015). (par. 1.1)

The choice to shoot the video in the city of Oakland is highly symbolic due to the history of the place, which is closely linked to Black resistance against social and institutional violence. The song and music video represent powerful critical works of art against police brutality and the socio-racial distinction of cityscapes in the United States.

## Noir by noirs [2]

The aesthetics of “Alright” has an important role for the message created in the video clip. Tilley, the music video director, and Lamar use film Noir aesthetics in order to frame the



narrative. In the first 30 seconds, the music video depicts urban spaces as a desertscape. However, the music video demonstrates all the vivacity of Black life and a strong presence of Black culture that permeates these spaces, previously imagined as apocalyptic. In this regard, the white and black colors used in *Noir* reinforces the issue of the city's duality.

The music video begins with a shot of the Oakland Port, which can be interpreted as a reference to the "dialectical interplay between protest and repression" observed during the Occupy Oakland's movement, since the "police miscalculations in the course of trying to maintain control of public space led them to temporarily lose control of the city and the Port, building mass support for the movement in the process" (King 20). During the protests of Occupy Oakland, in 2011, a general strike shut down the Port. Its noir-style representation in the music video reinforces the conflict over control of public space and economic inequality in Oakland. Also, the appropriation of film Noir by Black people orient the style toward a representation of a Black way of life and resistance. According to Diawara, the "content criticism of noir by noirs is more appropriate to analyze ... the specificity of Black culture in the text ... making Black people and their cultures visible. In a broader sense, Black film noir shines light (as in daylight) on Black people" (Diawara 526-7).

Defining Noir is certainly an arduous task. It is said that the style emerged in the United States from a synthesis of German Expressionism and hard-boiled fiction, experiencing its prime time between 1941 and 1958. Still, it is possible to recognize "certain visual and narrative traits" that define the genre (Naremore 12). According to Naremore, "nothing links together all the things discussed as noir – not the theme of crime, not a cinematographic technique, not even a resistance to Aristotelian narratives or happy endings" (13). Borde and Chaumeton maintain that "film noir is a film of death, in all senses of the word" (5). Hence, according to their point of view, the one constant in film Noir is the presence of crime:

It's the presence of crime that gives film noir its most distinctive stamp. "The dynamism of violent death," as Nino Frank put it, and the expression

is excellent. Blackmail, Informing, theft, or drug trafficking weave the plot of an adventure whose final stake is death. (Borde and Chaumeton 5)

Regarding death Lamar suffers a symbolic one in the music video, by a shot that comes from the policeman's hands – not his gun. The scenes are gradually darkened, allowing Lamar and the police officer to alternate on the screen. Since the former's death does not derive from the actions of the physical world, that is, it does not come from a bullet, it can be said that Kendrick suffers a symbolically motivated death. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is a physical violence that occurs in a veiled and often unconscious way so that it is usually invisible or forgotten (Bourdieu 22). More than that, "Bourdieu's emphasis on class fractions acquires more importance in the context of global cities, wherein capitals and signs of distinction tend to shift quickly" since not only material capital but also cultural capital, shape class (Ghannam 268). One of the main points of the music video is to defend and praise Black culture, usually rendered invisible or marginalized by elites that suffocate other forms of cultural expression. Working in favor of those elites the police force reinforces this marginalization of groups of people including their entire cultural expression.

As I argue, the music video ends with a very strong message about crime. First, it shifts the common imagery that the police force represses illegality by presenting them as major perpetrators of rights' violations against Black people. Second, it shows a violence the execution of which does not require weapons; rather, it is a crime of an ideological nature. Ideologies are responsible for displacing, marginalizing, stigmatizing, and killing people. Third, Lamar's fall, as he spends the entire music video in motion, is also a "fall into" the cruel reality that Black people live in. However, Lamar's death in the video does not mean the death of hope. This can also be related to 2Pac, to whom the poem recited throughout the album is dedicated. In this respect it is interesting to note that originally TPAB was to be named To Pimp a Caterpillar, so that the initials would spell out "TuPaC" (MTV, 2015).

After the shot, Kendrick falls from the lamppost and hits the ground. As the screen

fades to black and returns to the video, the poem from the beginning is recited again. The murder scene appears as a “revolutionary” form of crime representation in the Noir narrative precisely because it is committed by those who are in power and supposed to protect society. As soon as Lamar hits the ground, he smiles at the camera, giving a second air of irony to the scene. After all, since Lamar’s symbolic death does not represent the death of everything, it signals that the hope that everything will be alright still remains. The use of Noir aesthetics serves well to represent the rage of Black people and their resistance to live in urban spaces that are violent towards them. As Diawara puts it when analyzing the movie *A Rage in Harlem*, the Noir style functions “as a way of describing Black rage at being trapped in these conditions” (528). Something similar occurs in Lamar’s music video since it reflects not only police brutality towards Black people but also a Black way of life in Oakland within a juxtaposition of various cityscapes and their respective power relations.

In recent years, new conceptions of centrality and marginality have been created in urban studies due to “changes in the spatial, cultural and political form of the city” (Kennedy 3). The distinction between black and white in the Noir aesthetic reinforces the duality structure of Oakland. This is also expressed by the figure of the police officer who is presented in the music video as perpetuating violence against the Black community in the city. The argument here is that the police officer works as a divider of worlds manifesting a drastically different behavior in white middle-class areas as compared to urban areas populated by Black people. He thus helps to shape cityscapes in a political way.

### **The spokesman of the regime of oppression is the gendarme**

Space is an important approach for studying the construction of social relations, especially since “the organization of space was central to the structure and functioning of capitalism as a coherent whole” (Warf & Arias 3). In colonized societies, the biggest representation of the regime of oppression is the gendarme that speaks in a language of violence. According to

Fanon,

In the colonial regions, on the other hand, the gendarme and the soldier, by their immediate presence, by their direct and frequent interventions, maintain contact with the colonized and advise them, with guns or napalm explosions, not to move. It is clear that the power broker uses a language of pure violence. The intermediary does not make the oppression lighter, he does not conceal the domination. He shows it, he manifests it with the good conscience of the forces of order. The intermediary brings violence into the home and brain of the colonized. (28)

Applying Fanon’s theory to the music video, I argue that the police officer prevents Lamar from continuing to fly over the city by metaphysically shooting him. It not only denounces the attack on the freedom of Black lives, but also highlights the colonialist mindset in controlling Black bodies and spaces wherein they live and move. This can be traced back historically, according to Sandra Bass, since an informal but still organized type of police force was born during slavery in the US, working as a slave patrol in order to control insurrections and the possibility of slaves escaping from captivity (156). Nowadays, there is still a relationship between race and policing, also considering space. For that purpose, it matters to observe not only the way that the police force acts but also where. Bass explains that the “construction of urban ghettos and public housing were deliberate efforts to promote social control and isolation through racial containment” (156). Therefore, the location of a more ostentatious police action is not chosen naively. To that end, whereas the police violence is directed towards racial minorities, “‘race’ is also entangled with common perceptions of ‘the city’”, guiding police action aimed at gentrifying spaces and marginalizing Black lives in favor of economic elites (Kennedy 1). As Bass points out with a nod to Steve Herbert,

Urban spaces are socially and politically constructed to meet certain goals, ends, visions, and dreams. Ethnic/racial

separation has historically been a central feature, and in some instances, goal in the development of American cities, ... The social construction of space has had a significant impact on the development of policing in America. As Steve Herbert (1997) notes, the police are the domestic institution responsible for preserving domestic spatial sovereignty. Thus, how the police conceptualize territory is critical to understanding police work. (Bass 157-8)

That being so, it is possible to argue that policing, race, and space are inextricably intertwined since the police force not only works pro-gentrification but also in order to preserve spatial sovereignty. This entanglement can be observed in Lamar's music video in the correlation between the figure of the police officer and the spatial organization of Oakland. In cultural studies, representation is considered responsible for the "production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language" (Hall 17). According to Stuart Hall, representation is able to connect meaning and language to culture, since what is used to represent the world is the language. By using a constructionist approach, the analysis of meaning is oriented by the idea that it is constructed "in and through language" (Hall 15). It is important to note that language here is understood in a broader sense, not just communication with words, but refers to the aspects that provide an entire "system of representation" in which the complex relationships between organized concepts can be analyzed (Hall 17). To this end, this paper pursues a complex discourse analysis including the visual narratives of the music video, the lyrics, as well as musical aspects – such as sampling. As the police force has historically oppressed racial minorities in the US, segregating spaces between "safe" and "unsafe", the representation of the police officer in the video clip "Alright" sets an understanding regarding the organization of Oakland city.

Nevertheless, the perception of the police is not homogeneous in US society, as the police force behaves differently and also arbitrarily towards different groups. Although exposing bias in police

decisions can be very difficult, "an analysis of the policies and practices associated with drug war, quality of life, and zero tolerance policing reveals a system of de facto racial discrimination driven by specific policy choices and low-level police discretionary decisions" (Bass 171). Therefore, the social perception regarding the image of the police force can change depending on the group one investigates. Usually "the role white civilians play in perpetuating police dynamics has been largely overlooked by sociologists" (Magliozzi 4). Using violence against racial minorities, the police force tends to work in the protection of social elites and supports social segregation.

On one hand, Bass explains that there is a "contentious relationship between the police and racial minorities based on social control rather than public service imperatives" (159). On the other hand, it is important to note that the police forces are, in fact, a state force working for social security. The question that remains is: whose safety does the police work for? As Magliozzi continues, elites play an important role in shaping racial prejudice in police action, even though they sometimes ideally defend progressive discourses on racial justice and inclusion. "Elites shape policing from the perch of policymaking and then leave police to run amok as racial bias seeps into their discretionary enforcement of the law," (3) he concludes and explains further:

Elites are not by-standers to racially unequal policing; they actively produce inequality by mobilizing police to act on their biases. "Over-policing" is not limited to the urban core. In suburbs, too, police zealously enforce petty criminal codes and carry out discretionary stops and searches of people of color. But whereas in marginalized neighborhoods over-policing takes place over the objections of residents, in elite suburbs it takes place at their request. (4)

In that matter, the police officer in the video clip "Alright" stands for the representation of the forces that stigmatize Black culture including social violence, whiteness, and class. Inherently associated with the disposition of the spaces of a city, the police violence towards Black

people has a stronger and more spontaneous occurrence in urban spaces, not neglecting the occurrence of it in suburbs where police forces work more properly as the spokesperson of the elite's will. In both cases, police forces act as an intermediary for institutional desires of preserving spatial sovereignty. In the "Alright" music video, the verse "resentment that turned into a deep depression" echoes with the first appearance of a police officer (00:00:49). The lines appear for the first time in the song "Institutionalized" (ft. Bilal, Anna Wise, and Snoop Dogg) which appears just before "Alright" in TPAB. This song talks about institutional racism which also traps Black people's minds and self-perceptions.

In "Institutionalized", Lamar not only refers to society as a whole when talking about institutionalized racism, but also elaborates a critical reflection on an individual level. In the song, the narrator, who is Lamar himself, is feeling trapped by his own thoughts, and success has not alleviated him from them. The track then tells us that "the largest challenge that institutional racism has is the mindset it often yields in neighborhoods like Compton to break the cycle of feeling trapped, wanting us to conquer the mind that has fallen victim to systemic racism" (Spotify *Dis/sect*). This reference is key to comprehend the first appearance of the police officer in the video clip "Alright" because the police forces are not only the image of institutionalized racism. The violence that comes from them also contributes to socio-spatial perceptions based on race on a larger scale.

In the second appearance of a police officer, a Black man is being handcuffed and tries to escape, when is shot by the police officer (00:01:36). At the same time, the narrator of the video, Lamar, continues to recite the poem: "but while my loved ones was fighting the continuous war back in the city / I was entering a new one / a war that was based on apartheid and discrimination" (00:01:30-00:01:45). The path of the bullet leads to the beginning of the song, with the presentation of the title of the video clip, as if it were a Noir movie. The video clip starts with four Black men in a car listening to music. This scene is usually a target for police action, in a clichéd perception of Black men as intrinsically violent. This image makes a reference to racial

profiling, which means, according to Rafael Garcia, that police suspicion presents a "criteria that are specifically directed at a certain group of people" (149). However, the zoom out reveals that the car is actually being carried by four white police officers, which can be read as a mark of servitude. This practice was very common in some Amerindian traditions, such as Calusa or Kalinago, as a symbol of homage to the carried ones (Santos-Granero 119), when the slaves or servants carried rich and important personalities. The reversal of roles proposed in this scene shows a response to, and even more so, a subversion of the historically constructed system of oppression against Black people.

### Sampling and a larger Black Consciousness

Lamar draws on sampling techniques to unfold a larger Black consciousness. As Phillips puts it, the progressive modifications during the construction of the songs in the album show that "Kendrick is treating TPAB not as a finished product but a continued work in progress" (Phillips 2015). Sampling consists in reusing a portion of a sound recording in another one. This practice is widely performed in the hip hop scene, aiding in the cultural exchange of this musical genre on a global scale. According to Stephan Kreher, "appropriating, reorganizing and restructuring existing musical material has played an important role in the creation of the Hip Hop sound" (3). Those influences can be observed in all possible directions and transnational exchanges, from the most obvious to the most unusual.

One of many noteworthy samples in Lamar's song are the drums that introduce the chorus (00:02:58). It is a sample from "Flowers of the Night" by Paul Kantner, Grace Slick and David Freiberg, which can be understood as "a celebration of monarchial overthrows throughout history" (AllMusic). The use of the sample in "Alright" signals that the monarchy to be overthrown refers to the power structures that marginalize and oppress Black people, allowing the urban spaces to be resignified as safe places to live in. During the video clip the police car is used as a dance stage for Black children while Kendrick Lamar is driving a 1969 Chevy Camaro,



where the child in the passenger seat throws money in the air. This can be understood as a seizure of power, especially due to the absence of the police figure in the scene. It can also be interpreted as a reference to Occupy Oakland's strategy of protest by occupying institutional and historical places as a resistance. Just after that, Lamar appears fluctuating in the streets as a symbol of liberty.

While Kendrick is positioned on a lamppost in the final moments of the music video, and is still above the policeman, it is possible to see the city of Oakland in the background of the scene. This reinforces the urban duality that permeates the entire music video between the periphery and the center of the city, and the spaces destined for the expression of Black culture. The poem at the beginning of the video restarts as Lamar falls from the lamppost. When he hits the ground the effect of floating through the streets ends. However, he smiles at the screen in the last few seconds of the video, suggesting that even though he is on the ground, it is important to believe that everything will be alright at some point. There is a hint of irony in the scene that while leaving space for further interpretation it certainly also suggests the struggle will have to continue.

## Conclusions

The image of the police has a significant impact not only in the imagery regarding the feeling of safety or insecurity but, further, has a significant impact on how we organize and conceive urban spaces. This is mainly due to the fact that police force's attitudes change depending on the place within the city: in some spaces, the police are seen as protectors; in others, such as those featured in the video clip, they are seen as perpetrators of violence. According to Fanon, there is a division of worlds, a colonial division, and the state's armed agents uphold this dichotomy. Thus, applying Fanonian theory to urban spaces which are commonly differentiated according to the implicit opposition between center and "density" part — here called periphery — the police force holds the responsibility to guard this dichotomy, which is not only spatial, but also considers aspects of

class and race, as Lieven Ameel puts it (3).

In Lamar's music video, the noir aesthetic reinforces the construction of the dichotomous narrative present throughout the music video. The aesthetic also appears in a subversive way, especially when it comes to the construction of crime, which, in the analyzed video, is committed by the police officer who is normally responsible for keeping the peace, thus underlining systematic violence against Black people and the distinction of police action in different spheres of the city. This contributes to the perception that the cityscape is also constructed by its citizens and the relationship between them.

With the growth of the periphery in cities, there is also the cultural marginalization of people who live in those places. This may also explain why Lamar's "Alright" has become a Black anthem of pride and resistance; much more than just denouncing police violence, it pays homage to the entire periphery's Black culture, marginalized by the dichotomous construction of urban spaces. Recording and shooting in the Bay Area, one of the most economically developed places in the US, and focusing on lives on the periphery can be considered a revolutionary act in itself. Throughout the video the focus is not only on the violence suffered by the marginalized Black population, but also — and above all — on their resistance to it all. The video's message signals that it is important to keep fighting and resisting, because living is the best way of resisting and the only way to see that "everything is going to be alright" some day.

## Endnotes

[1] In this paper, Black will be capitalized, and not white, when referring to groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural terms. "For many people, Black reflects a shared sense of identity and community. White carries a different set of meanings; capitalizing the word in this context risks following the lead of white supremacists." (Laws).

[2] Reference to Manthia Diawara's paper "Noir by Noirs: Towards a New Realism in Black Cinema."

## Works Cited

- Ameel, Lieven., Jason Finch, and Markku Salmela. "Introduction: Peripherality and Literary Urban Studies." *Literature and the Peripheral City*, pp. 1-17. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- AllMusic. "Paul Kantner, Grace Slick, David Freiberg - Baron Von Tollbooth & the Chrome Nun Album Reviews." *Songs & More*. Web. Accessed 22 Dec. 2023.
- Bass, Sandra. "Policing Space, Policing Race: Social Control Imperatives and Police Discretionary Decisions." *Social Justice*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2001, pp. 156-76. *JSTOR*, Web. Accessed 10 Aug. 2023.
- Bracelin, Jason. "Bond between Raiders, West Coast hip-hop forged long ago." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. 2020. Web. Accessed 16 Aug. 2023.
- Berry, Venise. "Black Noise by Tricia Rose." *American Music*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1996, pp. 231-33. *JSTOR*, Web. Accessed 19 Dec. 2023.
- BETNetworks. Kendrick Lamar's Best BET Awards Performances Of Alright, m.A.A.d city & B\*\*\*h Don't Kill My Vibe. BETNetworks. *Youtube*, 2019. Web. Accessed 10 Oct. 2023
- Borde, Raymond, and Etienne Chaumeton. *Panorama du film noir américain*. Translated by Paul Hammond, City Lights Books, 2002.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Esboço de autoanálise*. Companhia das Letras, 2005.
- Diawara, Manthia. "Noir by Noirs: Towards a New Realism in Black Cinema." *African American Review*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1993, pp. 525-37. *JSTOR*, Web. Accessed 13 Sep. 2023.
- Epstein, Barbara Leslie. "Occupy Oakland: the question of violence." *Socialist Register*, vol. 49, 2012, pp. 63-83. Web. Accessed 13 Sep. 2023.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by José Laurênio de Melo, Civilização Brasileira, 2001.
- Garcia, Rafael de Deus. *O uso da tecnologia e a atualização do modelo inquisitorial: gestão da prova e violação de direitos fundamentais na investigação policial na política de drogas*. MA thesis, University of Brasília, 2015.
- Ghannam, Farha. "Two Dreams in a Global City: Class and Space in Urban Egypt." *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*, edited by Andreas Huyssen, Duke UP, 2008, pp. 267-288
- Gerber, Monica M., and Jonathan Jackson. "Justifying Violence: Legitimacy, Ideology and Public Support for Police Use of Force." *Psychology, Crime and Law*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2017, pp. 79-95.
- Harris, Jessica. "Revolutionary Black Nationalism: The Black Panther Party." *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 86, no. 3, 2001: pp. 409-421.
- Jones, Robert M. "Popular Music. A Survey of Folios with an Index to Recently Reviewed Recordings." *Notes*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1974, pp. 878-924. *JSTOR*, Web. Accessed 27 Dec. 2023
- Kennedy, Liam. *Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture*. Edinburgh UP, 2000.
- King, Mike. "Occupy Oakland and State Repression." *Counterpunch*, 31 Jan. 2012. Web. Accessed 10 Oct. 2023
- Kreher, Stephan. *Black Atlantic Hybrids: Samples of Brazilian Music of the 1960s and 1970s in U.S. American Hip Hop*. KIPU Verlag, 2022.
- Lamar, Kendrick. "Alright." *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2015.
- . "Blood." *DAMN*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2017.
- . "Institutionalized." *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2015.
- . "Kendrick Lamar - Alright (Official Music Video)." *Youtube*, 2015. Web.
- Laws, Mike. "Why we capitalize 'Black' (and not 'white')." *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2020. Web Accessed 24 Dec. 2023.
- Magliozzi, Devon. *Securing the Suburbs: How Elites Use Policing to Protect Their Advantages*. Stanford U. ProQuest Dissertations, 2018.
- Mair, Duncan. "Finding a Healthy Balance in Hip Hop and How Kendrick Lamar Achieves It." *Liberated Arts*, vol. 6, 2019, Web. Accessed 23 Dec. 2023.
- Maharawal, Manissa M. "Black Lives Matter, gentrification and the security state in the San Francisco Bay Area." *Anthropological Theory*, vol.17, no. 3, 2017, pp. 338-364.
- Manabe, Noriko. "We Gon'Be Alright? The Ambiguities of Kendrick Lamar's Protest Anthem." *Music Theory Online*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2019, pp. 57-80.
- MTV. *Kendrick Lamar Breaks Down Tracks From 'To Pimp A Butterfly'* (Pt. 1). MTV News. *Youtube*, 31 Mar. 2015. Accessed 23 Dec. 2023.
- Murch, Donna Jean. *Living for the City. Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*. The U of North Carolina P, 2010.
- Muzzio, Douglas. "'DECENT PEOPLE SHOULDN'T LIVE HERE': The American City in Cinema." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, vol. 18, 1996, pp. 189-215. Web. Accessed 26 Dec. 2023.
- Naremore, James. "American Film Noir: The History of an Idea." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 12-28, 1995.
- Phillips, Yoh. "The Definitive Breakdown of Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright' Video". *DJBooth*, 2015.
- Rose, Tricia. "Voices from the Margins: Rap Music and Contemporary Black Cultural Production." *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Wesleyan U., 1994, pp. 1-26.
- Santos-Granero, Fernando. "PART 3. SOCIOLOGIES OF SUBMISSION." *Vital Enemies: Slavery, Predation, and the Amerindian Political Economy of Life*, U.

of Texas P., 2009, pp. 103-170. Web. Accessed 23 Nov. 2023.

Self, Robert O. "8. Babylon". *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, Princeton UP, 2003, pp. 291-327. Web. Accessed 19 dec. 2023.

Sillyman, Jacob. *Loving You Is Complicated: The Aesthetics of Personal and Political Tension in Kendrick Lamar's To Pimp A Butterfly*. USC Columbia, 2017, Senior Theses. Web. Accessed 19 dec. 2023.

Spotify. "'Institutionalized' by Kendrick Lamar." *Dis/sect.*, Spotify app, season 1, episode 6, May 2018.

Warf, Barney, and Santa Arias. "Introduction: the reinsertion of space in the humanities and social sciences." *The Spatial turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Routledge, 2009, pp. 1-10.

### Author's Biography

---

Cristiane Guedes Peixoto is Double degree master student in Inter-American Studies at the University of Bielefeld and in Literaturas Interamericanas at the University of Guadalajara. She completed and MA in Law at the University of Brasília. Her main research interests are related to cultural studies, representations of race and class, feminism, institutional violence against minorities, and the entanglement of power and language.