Diasporic Identities within Afro-Hispanic and African Contexts

Edited by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CHAPTER SIX

THE DANGEROUS LIAISONS OF SPAIN AND AFRICA: HYBRIDITY AND IMMIGRATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH CINEMA

BERNARDO ANTONIO GONZÁLEZ

Abstract

Montxo Armendáriz's Las cartas de Alou *(1990), Llorenç Soler's* Said *(1998) and Chus Gutiérrez's* Retorno a Hansala *(2008) are linked by a striking similarity of theme, style and technique. These similarities suggest the existence of an underlying paradigm or national discourse concerning the representation of immigration in Spain today. The transcultural romantic liaison that is central to this paradigm reflects, allegorically, a common ideological approach to the question of identity formation within modern multicultural societies.*

Armendáriz's Prototype

Las cartas de Alou (1990), arguably the first major Spanish film centred on the theme of immigration, opens with close-ups of men descending into the small *patera* that will taxi them clandestinely across the treacherous Straits of Gibraltar to Spain. The intimacy of the close-ups that shift in rapid succession, the use of a hand-held camera plus the reduced visibility (the scene occurs in the dark of night) visually reinforce the force of the waves, the peril of the crossing, and the emotional impact of the experience as lived by the immigrants. The quick-paced interchange of images, voices and languages—Spanish, Moroccan Arabic and Senegalese—contributes further to our sense of chaos and expectation

that is tempered by Alou's first "carta" (letter), a voiceover narration that orders the experience while explaining both his motives for emigrating and the basis for his mother's objections: "None of your other brothers will have your name or voice." The voiceover ends as the first rays of the sun begin to shed some clarity on Alou, as he emerges from his silhouette, and as he forays into a new day in the Promised Land.

For Spanish viewers, even without the final credits, the geographic coordinates of the journey to and fro that Montxo Armendáriz plots out for his protagonist over the course of a 100-minute full-length feature are patently clear, but perhaps less so is the deeper symbolism embedded in his circular experience. Thus, after his initial stint collecting squash in the greenhouses of Andalucía, Alou proceeds north through Madrid and on to Barcelona, in search of his compatriot Mulai, and from Barcelona to the farmlands of Lleida, in search of the fruits of personal fulfillment, of the ratification of his "voice and name"—of himself, in short—through, as hinted throughout, the experience of family. Roads, rails, trains, streets, the feet that tread and the face and eyes that observe and absorb are flaunted as the visual motifs of Alou's destiny-oriented experience. Lleida's pristine orchards in Spain's northeast mark Alou's deepest penetration into the interior reaches of what might be termed—in keeping with the society—customs and attitudes such as they are represented—the traditional, deep, or pure Spain, particularly in contrast with the images of the cosmopolitan Barcelona portrayed earlier. More to the point, Lleida's pear orchards mark the spot where what is *purely* local or national is defended, where the foreign seed is repelled, where the potential for a blending of races that is suggested along Alou's route is resisted, nullified. The immigrant henceforth begins to retrace his steps, by returning first to Barcelona, at Carmen's father's behest, and finally to Senegal, when he is arrested and deported. The final image of Alou defying the law by returning to Spain in the hope of finding Carmen fails to break the hermetic seal of exclusion that is configured by his travels. Rather, it suggests the future of a revolving door, the unending circle experienced by so many in their experiences at so many crossings.[1]

Motifs abound throughout that either engender or eroticize the circle's dynamic in such a way as to inflect it with the interracial implications suggested above. Alou's progress north is punctuated at strategic intervals by his increasingly significant encounters with Spanish women: from the casual interchange with the well-intentioned female farmworkers in El

[1] Isolina Ballesteros (233-34) also discusses these patterns of circularity in her analysis of this film.

Ejido (Almería), to his nocturnal interactions in Madrid's discotheques with women who sexually objectify Alou, to his arrival in Barcelona, where he is met by Mulai's Spanish wife, Rosa. The many allusions, both verbal and visual, to the experience of a future constructed around a biracial family—his curiosity over the experiences of other immigrants; the recurring image of Alou holding Rosa and Mulai's baby girl—contextualize Alou's heart-felt love affair with the bartender's daughter in the rural town where Alou works in the orchards. They point to the underlying fact that Alou's is a journey based on a multifaceted desire that, on the one hand, has to do with personal fulfillment, as mentioned, while, on the other, it points allegorically to the potential for redefining the social fabric of the nation.

Taken in and of itself, the story that Montxo Armendáriz weaves in *Las cartas de Alou* would seem more or less anecdotal were it not for the fact that other Spanish film artists have subsequently reworked the very paradigms outlined in this brief introduction in accordance with their personal ethics and aesthetics. Llorenç Soler and Chus Gutiérrez are singularly representative in this regard, not only for the full-length feature films, the former's *Said* (1998) and the latter's *Retorno a Hansala* (2008), in which they develop Armendáriz's paradigms in new and suggestive ways, but for the conclusions that emerge from a contextualized and comparative analysis of these works. It should be noted in this regard that these film directors are equally at home in both documentary and fiction genres, Soler having produced various educational social documentaries for Catalan television and Gutierrez for public television in Madrid. As we shall see, the documentary thrust of their filmography, in terms of both style and content, represents a fundamental frame of reference for interpreting their film portrayals of the African immigrant in Spain.

Llorenç Soler (Valencia, 1936) and Chus Gutiérrez (Granada, 1962), in Context

Soler has garnered a certain public reputation, at least in the Levante region (eastern Spain), for his documentary shots, which concern historical, political or ecological issues of general public interest. His *Los orígenes del catalanismo político* (1980), *La mancomunidad de Cataluña* (1980), *Tierra entre tierra y mar* (1982) and *El tren de Sarrià: 125 anys d'historia (1863-1988)* (1988) were all filmed for and transmitted by Catalan public television. Public health shots such as *Falta y especulación de la sangre* (1978) in support of the Red Cross blood drive, although hardly significant in any artistic sense, serve to underscore the public service element in

Soler's profile, an element that blends in suggestive ways with his interest, as a documentary film artist, in giving testimony to the lives and contributions of singularly important individuals—men, it bears noting—who have in some way suffered a painfully marginalizing experience: Walter Benjamin in Soler's *L'ultima frontera* (1992), the Catalan photographer and holocaust survivor (Mauthausen) Francisco Boix in *Francisco Boix, un fotógrafo en el invierno* (2000), the exiled Valencian Republican writer in *Max Aub: Un escritor en su laberinto* (2002) and the Valencian essayist, poet and nationalist Joan Fuster in *Ser Joan Fuster* (2009). This impulse to document the human and, in these cases, individualized sense of marginality parallels his focus on the complexities of a shared or collective marginality in *El viaje inverso* (2007), a film that projects the unique convergences and resulting tensions of emigrant interacting with immigrant, native with foreign, and old with young, in the symbolically significant province of Soria, the medieval cradle of what many take to be *authentic* or *pure* Spanishness.

The testimonial impulse that runs throughout Soler's film production is central to the various headings under which Gutiérrez's films can be categorized. Like Soler, Gutiérrez has received strong public endorsements for her work, not only within the national sphere—many of her movies are supported by Spanish national television in Madrid—but also from international organizations. In *Las siete alcantarillas*, the segment she created for the UNESCO-sponsored *En el Mundo a Cada Rato* (2004), Gutiérrez employs the eyes, voices and bodies of children to document abandonment, violence and repression among those living in misery and squalor on the fringes of Córdoba, Argentina. The harshness of the unknown world she explores and of the images she brings back to the general public reflects a certain bravery and adventurousness that underpin much of her film production, much of which deals with diverse types of marginality: marginalized sectors of society, marginalized social practices, marginalized moments and spaces in the modern urban jungle and marginalized *zones*—private, unconventional or taboo practices and desires—within the complex jungle of human psychology. *Porros on the roof* (1984) and *Sneakers of Fire* (1985) deal with drug culture; *Tropicana* (1986) and *Sexo oral* (1994) deal with sexual behaviour that may seem transgressive. *¡Hay motivos!* (2004; she contributed the segment on adolescents), *Mi primer amanecer* (2010; segment) and *Me gustaría estar enamorada... a veces me siento muy sola* (2010) treat youth (adolescent) nightlife within the framework of the modern city. In contrast to Soler, whose individualized portraits tend to be men, Gutiérrez's realistic portrayals of individuals, whether testimonial or fictionalized, underscore

the plight of women, almost always struggling with the social and material challenges of modern urban life, often by night: as in *Insomnio* (1997); *Lunch Time* (2005; short); *Sublet* (1991); and *El calentito* (2005). Her highly regarded and much studied *Poniente* (2002) represents an important incursion into the theme of immigration, as experienced, in this case, by Spanish farm owners in the south (Daddesio, Berger). Her more recent collaboration with three other women directors, in *Ellas son... África* (2010) offers a compelling example of how she has crossed borders in her films in order to project foreign perspectives. In short, this documentary on how women are driving progress throughout Africa today captures several elements that are basic to our understanding of Chus Gutiérrez generally: her interest in collaborative projects; her focus on communities that may experience marginalization due to issues of gender, race, ethnicity or nationality; her partnership with public institutions (*Ellas* was produced with the support of Spanish national television); and, by extension, her acute awareness of the didactic role that film can play in public life. Most of these films qualify as documentaries, and some do not, but they all share a desire to give real or realistic testimony to less trodden zones, social or psychological, of the contemporary world. Although, again, a mere detail within a rich and complex oeuvre, *El diario de Manuel* (2009), a short public health documentary on the topic of ankylosing spondylitis, confirms the spirit of public service that is as fundamental to Gutiérrez's profile as it is to Soler's.

One might conclude from this overview that the two artists in question are driven by the mutual desire to mainstream what is unjustly or inappropriately sidelined owing to generalized attitudes and corresponding standardized codes of conduct. What stands out, in this regard, is Soler's and Gutiérrez's shared insistence on working within the public sphere—they are blessed, of course, with the institutional endorsement of their efforts—where, presumably, they might maximize their influence over social values, and by the natural, most often seamless, blending of the fictional and the real in their personal film style. Soler has reflected on the problematic status of truth and representation in film in his essays (*Los hilos*: 19-21), which, in and of themselves, constitute further proof of this artist's didactic impulse. His essays (*Así se crean*, *Los hilos secretos*, and *Historia crítica*) take the appearance of personal (artistic) testimonies, manuals for aspiring film artists and pedagogical introductions to the theory, praxis and history of Spanish cinema. These categories merge, in short, in a generalized reflection on the sense of "discovery" that Soler seeks to instill in the viewer through the techniques of "immediacy" that Manuel Barrios Lucena summarizes in his "Prólogo" to Soler's and

Romaguera's *Historia* (19-18). Through a natural and seemingly spontaneous film "gaze" ("mirada") that Soler creates with his camera, a "gaze" that seems unmediated, as if born at the moment of our viewing, spectators are enticed towards a new awareness of the social order that they (we) inhabit and towards a deeper understanding, one would hope, of our role within that order. It goes without saying that the documentary style or personal techniques applied by Soler and Gutierrez in their film-editing go hand in hand with their profound sense of an ideological commitment to issues of social justice and political equality.

In fact, the socio-political commitment that emerges from this overview is crucial for our understanding of Soler's and Gutiérrez's treatment of the immigrant in *Said* and *Retorno a Hansala* respectively, the two movies that are central to this essay. As we shall see, their ideological response to the topic can be related in large part to the elements of style and technique by which they problematize, within the framework of these ostensibly fictitious full-length feature films, a conventional understanding of how fact relates to fiction conceptually and in terms of film genres (documentaries versus feature films). They achieve this, moreover, during a period of burgeoning interest in the theme of immigration among Spanish cultural practitioners, an obvious reminder of the essential interconnectedness of social reality and artistic creativity and of our need to interpret art within its historical and cultural context. In Spain's case, this context is characterized by the sudden and radical conversion of a nation of emigrants into a land of immigrants, a tendency that gathers steam precisely around the time when Armendáriz premiered *Las cartas de Alou*. This trend has since been widely discussed in relation to cultural production, generally speaking (Barbadillo Griñán, and Kreienbrink), and for its impact on cinema in particular (Andrés-Suárez, Ballesteros, Damerau, López Cotín, Nair, and Van Liew). It bears noting that the trend has also been celebrated with important high-profile public exhibits and events organized by those institutions, most notably Madrid's Círculo de Bellas Artes (*De la España que emigra*) and Barcelona's Centre de Cultura Contemporàia (*Ciutat i immigració*), that are widely perceived, by virtue of the activities they sponsor, as sharing Soler's and Gutiérrez's ideological commitment to justice and equality.

Soler's and Gutiérrez's Gypsy

Within this framework, it is telling that Soler and Gutiérrez should, generally speaking, both apply the paradigms outlined here to their treatment not only of the immigrant but of the gypsy as well, historically

Spain's quintessential *other*, the former in *Lola vende ca* (2000), and the latter in *Alma gitana* (1996), both tales of failed romance focusing on the *gitana*, and both centred on the issue of transcultural understanding between gypsies and *payos* (non-gypsies). The fact that the drama in *Alma gitana* pivots on a transcultural romantic attraction—Lucía's relationship with the *payo* Antonio results in nothing but conflict, with her community and within herself, that in the end remains unresolved and the affection persists as Lucía departs with her family for Seville, to think about things—makes *Alma gitana* an especially interesting harbinger of *Retorno a Hansala*. As we shall see, *Retorno* also shuttles back and forth across ethnic, national and sentimental boundaries, and its open-ended plot is of allegorical proportions. In *Lola vende ca*, Soler internalizes the conflict within the confines of the individual female's conscience, giving the young woman a protagonism that she is denied in many of his other films and that is the hallmark of Gutiérrez's cinema. He complicates his story, nevertheless, by framing Lola's attraction to her fellow gypsy, Juan, as a transcultural struggle on a different plane. To do so, he adopts the meta-cinematographic convention of the narrative frame rooted in *our* reality: segments intercalated throughout the movie in which the actress, Cristina Brando, speaks directly to the camera, in a neutral space, about the challenges she faced as a *paya* residing for roughly two months in one of Barcelona's gypsy communities, La Mina, in order to learn to "become Lola." Shades of hybridity are superimposed one upon another as if a palimpsest, since Cristina's Lola, herself struggling with social codes—"escrúpulos" (scruples) and "habladurías" (gossiping)—that complicate her goal of an education within her traditional community, is unaware of the fact that she is, in truth, an "arrecogía" (an adopted half-breed). Brando's heart-felt and moving final monologue offers a poignant synthesis of the experience, such as she lived in real life. Presented with the utmost spontaneity, her monologue takes us, her addressees, into two parallel conflict zones simultaneously, one being that interstitial zone of psycho-social conflict formed where individuals confront their communities, and the other corresponding to the overlap that art and reality share in films of this type and that, when it becomes so uncanny, can surprise or shock us toward new insights:

> Cuando acabé el rodaje y dejé a Lola tenía mucho miedo, porque mientras estaba con Lola y sentía cierta simbiosis con ella, no entendía o tenía dudas sobre cómo iba a ser mi reincorporación a ser *paya*, a tener todo un abanico lleno de posibilidades infinitas para hacer lo que quisiera y como pudiese, ¿no?, pero poder escoger la capacidad de decidir como persona lo que iba a hacer con mi vida. Y me daba mucho vértigo...

salvación"), a shared struggle for personal fulfillment in the face of imposing odds and a mutual sense of loneliness ("soleá") or alienation.

Gutiérrez, by contrast, captures the experience of the passage in her opening sequence through the prism of death. She does so by projecting onto her audience the perspective and experience, not the image, of the capsized immigrant who fails to make it to shore. We see with him the crisp profile of the distant Iberian shore sparkling ironically under a pristine morning sky as the camera teeters with the waves, rising and falling above and below the surface of the sea. His gasps, accompanied by eerie, new-age music, resolve slowly to the silence of the depths as the camera sinks and the contours of the light shimmering on the surface blur and recede, as we recede, with the swimmer, to the surreal underwater graveyard of unfulfilled hopes and aspirations. The abrupt cut to the image of Gibraltar's famed Rock, towering fixedly in the dawn over the morning mist and over a fleet of ships, heralds the circular unfolding of a plot in which love, death, and place will be inextricably intertwined. That the site of the *peñón* should prove so crucial for this equation, within the paradigm of immigration as adopted by Gutiérrez, is suggested again in the subsequent scene in which Leila, a Moroccan, walks home under the steady gaze of the Rock, her image interspersed with shots of the police recovering bodies along the shore and of Martín, the mortician, as he is awoken by a telephone call from the police. The story circles back to this location in the movie's final idyllic interlude, with the glimmering panorama of the straits forming the backdrop to Martín's proposal of a future with Leila. The "imaginary geography" that Edward Said identifies as basic to orientalist discourse is glossed by Leila's acknowledgement, the script's final words, that across the water "se ve África" ["one can see Africa".] If it is true that "imaginary geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (Said: 55), the taxonomic force of Leila's reminder of that geographic and historical distance is stunning, given its framework: a moving interlude of romantic promise, of fulfillment through love in the intercultural contact zone, of new hybridities for an emerging world, on both the personal and global planes. In short, "Africa" and the hybridities it promises "se ven"; they can be envisioned as possibilities, through a trans-Mediterranean way of thinking.

The future that Martín proposes to Leila is thus circumscribed by the geography of a love allegory linking the native and the immigrant on one level, and Spain and Africa on another, an allegory centred on Martín's "vocation" that, as Leila quips, is a bit "strange" but that gains new

meaning for the undertaker, thanks to his odyssey to repatriate Leila's brother's cadaver. Different visual clues strewn along their literal and figurative path back to Hansala suggest something of an ironic undermining of the conventional, Western treatments of this material. To be sure, portrayals of first-world love relationships crashing along roads intended to lead to self-fulfillment in the Asian or African hinterland, in such works as E. M. Forster/David Lean's *A Passage to India* and Paul Bowles/Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky*, to name just two prime examples, seem to be reflected in the most perilous stage of Martín's and Leila's journey south. A nighttime assault and carjacking nearly upend Martín's and Leila's project and leaves them marooned in the middle of the most inhospitable of terrains, but they are resolved when they recover their vehicle along with what is most dear to each: the cash Martín has stowed and the coffin Leila desperately needs to take home. The iconization of this scene by the media—the artistic ground-level shot included often with reviews of the travellers huddled together, awakening the following morning under a blazing desert sun—reflects, with no doubt, the prefabricated paradigms of understanding commonly brought to bear on movies of this type; or, more broadly, the databank of "words and images"—Edward Said's discourse—developed concertedly over time in all forms of European cultural production for understanding—for *Orientalizing*—the Orient.[2] The fact that Leila and Martín achieve, if not fulfillment, then the promise of it, in their journey towards or through death suggests not only her unravelling of the Western Orientalist paradigm in *Retorno a Hansala* but her desire to position herself squarely within the paradigms of a uniquely national discourse, whose distinctiveness derives in large measure from the centrality of the Muslim death rite such as it is portrayed in the three movies under discussion.

It is a striking element of cohesion that each of these Spanish film allegorists should interrupt their movie's diegetic flow with an interlude on the theme of death: scenes of a funeral—Gutiérrez includes a silent and extended close-up on the imam's pre-burial ablutions—in which the near absence of dialogue and elements of verisimilitude—spontaneity, immediacy, and intimacy—lend the episode a meditative overtone and documentary quality. It is equally significant that, in each case, this interlude should be crucial for the development of deep and meaningful interpersonal bonds. For both Armendáriz and Soler, the Muslim funerary

[2] "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also . . . one of its deepest and most recurring *images* of the Other" (Said 1; emphasis mine); "The Orient is an idea that has a history and *a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary* that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (Said 5; emphasis mine).

rite serves to solidify bonds that develop among immigrants in tandem with their evolving awareness of a shared alterity in the face of a hostile environment. The most cursory reading of these films suggests that intimacy is treated broadly as an interlocking spatial and social concept, in an anthropological sense, for the immigrant community. Their filming of the funeral exploits this topic with startling—perhaps unorthodox—boldness, taking the Spanish/non-Muslim viewers into the private domain of the sacred rite, and into the domain of the most intimate brotherhood, introducing them to cultural perspectives and experiences that would normally be inaccessible to a foreign audience, and doing this, most importantly, in creative ways.

In *Las cartas de Alou* the funeral derives its significance in part from issues of sequence. Armendáriz's funeral is climactic, preceded as it is by Alou's mounting sense of rejection that culminates, just before the funeral, in Carmen's father's ultimatum that Alou should forget the man's daughter and abandon the orchards. This ultimatum constitutes an unofficial version of Alou's official expulsion occurring soon after the funeral, when he is arrested in Barcelona and deported. Through the soundtrack, Armendáriz emphasizes the private-public duality of grieving, and the channelling of personal sorrow through collective ritual, by transforming Alou's cries into a sound bridge. His sobbing begins in his Barcelona apartment, where he finds his friend dead by asphyxiation from a butane heater, and fades out only after the camera cuts to the subsequent burial scene in the Montjuic cemetery. As we move from the apartment to the cemetery, Alou's lament mixes with the plaintive chants "Allah, akbar" that rise above the hills of Barcelona, a mixture that evokes with special audible and visual force the unique intertwining of the personal and collective dimension of identity formation as that formation unfolds within the culture of immigration, in a foreign and hostile environment.

To be sure, sequencing plays a significant role in Llorenç Soler's treatment of the theme of death and of brotherhood as well. As in *Alou*, the story of the immigrant's misfortune culminates in death in tandem with deportation, since, as a result of Ahmet's death, Said opts to testify in court, as mentioned, and thereby exposes his illegal status. It is a calculated decision on Said's part, one that seems motivated by a growing and, ultimately, irrepressible resentment and anger toward the injustices and disgrace that immigrants are forced to endure: by a desire to put an end to these ignominies, even at the expense—the death—of his dreams of assimilation, possibly through marriage. His deportation, in a sense, is the death to which he resigns himself, hybridity being, to an extent and as Cristina Brando reminds us in *Lola vende ca*, a matter of one's personal

will or state of mind. The fact that Soler enmeshes the death and funeral scene within a complicated network of official and unofficial systems of surveillance that interact with each other produces an equally complex network of thematic correlations. Said's friend, Ahmet, is killed while providing undercover protection to Said's Spanish girlfriend, Ana, and while Said's well-intentioned lawyer, Elena, seeks official protection for Said through legal channels. Ahmet is killed by skins working as undercover agents in collusion with the police and with the apparent connivance of inspector Vázquez. As we move from encounters between Said and Ana, Said and Elena, Elena and Vázquez, and Said and Ahmet—that is, between licit and illicit systems of surveillance hovering over and wielded by citizens and immigrants alike—the pace quickens (scenes become increasingly shorter). We feel driven forwards, as if by a vertiginous force, toward a stabbing that was intended for Ana, as punishment for her involvement with Africans, but killed Ahmet instead. In the trial scenes that follow, Said's decision to break his supposedly protective silence and testify against the culprits caps the slow process of his understanding exactly how the world he has wanted to inhabit is configured. We discover, in the end, just how much his will—and ours—is configured by its worldly context.

If death is thus ensconced in the alienating network of authority that the innocent victim gradually comes to perceive and apprehend, the funeral rites take us into the conscience where the immigrant retreats in search of the true meaning of life and of his/her sense of identity vis-à-vis community, where s/he gains the strength to confront his/her circumstances through the communitas [3] s/he experiences and shares through symbolic action. For Said, the funeral scene becomes his moment of individuation and it thereby stands in stark opposition, for the fulfillment it connotes, to everything that surrounds it, in terms of the film editing and the urban context in which the funeral occurs. Soler conveys this meaning initially within the symbolic intimacy of the small apartment, where the men have gathered to pay their last respects to Ahmet. His cut from the crime scene to the apartment begins with a close-up of Fatima's framed photograph, dedicated to Ahmet "con todo mi amor" ("with all my love"), enveloped, as if sensually, by the smell of nearby incense and by the imam's prayers, a bitter reminder of what meaning such liaisons of the heart may hold for our search for self-fulfillment when those liaisons

[3] Richard Schechner, who borrows the term from Victor Turner, refers to the "leveling" of all differences through an "ecstasy that so often characterizes performing" (128). See Turner, 45 ff.

develop within a nurturing social environment. The camerawork leads us through this symbolic interior space, as it cuts in a slow and studied way to Ahmet's body, to the shroud, and finally to the group as a unit. The rhythm, pace and path of the camera suggest the suspension of time that is common in symbolic actions on which that communitas is based. These meanings are reinforced by the oppositional strategies that Soler applies as the mourners carry the coffin out into public space and proceed slowly through the narrow streets of Barcelona's Raval neighbourhood towards the cemetery. The camera now transitions back and forth at a clipped pace between the faces of the mourners (Fatima included) and images of local residents gazing incomprehensibly from their balconies above. The interlocking dichotomies of foreign-native, private-public and internal-external are framed by a seemingly antagonistic opposition of young versus old, one that captures the sociological reality of African immigrants settling throughout Spain in inner-city neighbourhoods inhabited by an aging native population. In short, emphasis, in Soler, lies in this sequence on the marriage of urbanism and sociology. It lies, that is, on a degree of realism that infuses the most symbolic sequence in the film with a profoundly documentary frame of reference.

Within the group of filmmakers under consideration in this essay, Gutiérrez stands apart in various ways for her treatment of this common theme. To begin with, she is the only director who transcends borders with her camera both culturally *and* geographically, in an attempt to capture the image of the self and, presumably, the nation, through the prism of the "other's" eye. One need not infer personal testimony from her film techniques alone. She has provided verbal testimony to the events and the people who inspired her to pursue the Hansala project in 2008 and to tell this story using its "verdaderos protagonistas" ["true protagonists"], the people of Hansala, just as she had done in travelling to Argentina, to film *Las siete alcantarillas* in 2004, or as she would do later, in 2010, to film her segment, "Namibia – Las que viven en la niebla," as part of the UNESCO-sponsored *Ellas... son África* project, both of which are bona fide documentaries. As indicated, the paradigm of reverse migration that she thereby uses to configure her plot, a sort of parable of her own personal experience of discovery and solidarity as a Spanish director in Africa, closes finally around the promise of a future built on Martín's "unusual" vocation as an undertaker and on his new-found commitment to helping poor Moroccan families, in partnership with Leila, by finding a feasible means for repatriating the bodies of ill-fated immigrants. Death is the pretext in this film—hence the transcultural liaison is its outcome—and the funeral interlude that in Alou is short and private and that in Said

is viewed ultimately by diffident neighbours is fully integrated in *Hansala* into the Spaniard's spectrum of consciousness as a key facet of his psychological development, a transformative stage on his road to personal fulfillment and in his rapprochement with the *other*. The unpredictable events and forking roads that lead Martín towards the place—the journey from Spain to Hansala is a story unto itself, an episodic string of twists and turns of various dimensions that confuse Martín—give a certain labyrinthine and therefore richly symbolic texture and mythical coherence to the movie. The same can be said about Leila's request that she and Martín tidy up in preparation for their silent descent along the tortuous dirt road that takes them beyond the range of Martín's cellphone reception. It is a descent into Hansala, an unexplored hinterland, a barely perceptible community that upholds the value of shared common experiences.

Upon their arrival, the facial close-ups of Martín glancing awkwardly, pleadingly, toward Leila as men kiss and welcome him in Berber carry this perspective forward into the heart of the symbolic event. The close-ups of Martín and his corresponding sense of alienation are set off, through film editing, against the intercalated photographic perspectives of individuals and of a community who study and identify Martín, individually (close-ups) and collectively (panning shots), as the outsider. His sense of alienation is also projected in stark contrast to Leila's sense of fulfillment, exhibited moments earlier during their descent, as she leans out of the vehicle to absorb the sights and smells of a landscape that defines her. That Martín should seek to anchor himself through eye contact with Leila, at, what is, a moment of profound disorientation for him and of plenitude for her, converts their arrival in Hansala into a significant stage in a gradual rapprochement that is built, as we eventually come to understand, on the potential for a hybrid way of thinking.

To the extent that death rituals are a central feature of the discursive paradigm linking Armendáriz, Soler and Gutiérrez, the latter's treatment of this material stands out for its lengthiness and for the extraordinary precision and deference with which she narrates the highly codified ties that link individual and community in traditional societies, the very reality that Martín slowly comes to apprehend throughout the movie and that seems to draw him toward Africa, ideologically and sentimentally. Dialogue subsides; the social interactions and customs related to the funeral rite take on a reality of their own, seemingly independent of any authorial authority. The mother prays over her son's coffin as it is retrieved from the van, the community united behind her. Men bear the coffin to the mosque, the women following behind. The imam leads the mourners in prayer before the cortege carries Rashid through the arid hills

and past the cultivated fields of Hansala to his final burial place. All of this concludes with a close-up collage of faces, shovels and dirt, of mourners and the imam joined in a final prayer, and of the coffin being lowered into the ground. The hand-held camera that is used throughout, in conjunction with the filming of local residents in their native setting, infuses our vision of what is a profoundly symbolic moment, once again, with a certain crudeness and spontaneity, the hallmarks of the documentary or testimonial framework that Gutiérrez brings to bear on her story.

It is a powerful framework, indeed, for the allegorical parable of transnational romantic liaisons that is embedded therein. As the movie progresses, the fusion of all that seems realistically spontaneous yet artistically contrived intensifies, thanks primarily to those visibly painful realities that are used strategically to shape the narrative. The clothing of unidentified Africans found dead on Spain's southern shores is crucial in this regard. In the short term, Martín and Leila decide to frequent the open markets of surrounding towns, displaying the clothes brought from Spain in the hope of helping Moroccan families to identify and retrieve their loved ones. Throughout the movie, the portrayal of shirts and pants divested of their bodies—a reminder of the symbolic "hombre deshabitado" ["disinhabited man"] put forth by the surrealist Rafael Alberti—becomes a powerful visual motif: of absence, loss and love. Martín's tearful encounter with a man in the open market of Beni-Mellal—because of Spanish custom laws, Martín must reluctantly retrieve the shirt that is now the tearful father's only material connection with his lost son—is certainly the most moving episode in the progressive development of this theme. In the end, the empty shirts of death capture with unparalleled precision the quest for fulfillment through love that is central to all three movies and that comes to fruition, in *Retorno a Hansala*, around the paradoxical interplay of images and motifs, and around the reaffirmation of life and love through the rituals of death. Fluttering in Gibraltar's intense winds, the "disinhabited" clothing seems to signal the untold perils and potentials of such strait-spanning liaisons, built, as they are, on a peculiar interaction of absence and presence and situated in the empirical context of social interactions as much as in the mind.

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