

GENDER IN THE CITY: THE INTERSECTION OF CAPITAL AND GENDER
CONSCIOUSNESS IN LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

By

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CHAPTER 1: A CINEMATIC SPACE OF THEIR OWN: SITUATING WOMEN IN THE LATIN AMERICAN WORLD

Introduction

“Sex in the City,” the HBO series that first appeared in 1998, follows the life of four Manhattanites as they deal with their lives and sexuality in the Big Apple. Carrie, Miranda, Samantha and Charlotte find themselves constantly evaluating how to be a woman in the 90’s (and into the new century). Their lives are filled with “fabulosity” and Manolo Blaink shoes that mark their conception of self. The constant reference to the city and how they relate to it makes me ask --in the voice-over style of Carrie Bradshaw, which usually triggers the theme of the episode, —“Is sex and all it conveys different in the city, and if so, why?” Although I do not intend to bring about a discussion on the politics and gender complexities that arise in a space such as Manhattan, I do wish to redirect those questions to focus on Latin America, and how the politics of sex, and more importantly, gender, will be played out in this less “decadent” region of the world.

Latin American society, as evident in its cinematic representations, creates and disseminates images of its various societies, cultures, peoples. Traditionally this condition has not benefited the representation of women, which has been dominated by stereotypical characters with set expectations. This is alarming to feminist researchers because those images have been consumed and accepted by masses as “real” images becoming the social expectation for women. But, what is the root of that construction? That is, how do women socially come to establish who they are as women? Gender as a learned construction is manipulated by a social environment that makes each woman

assume a unique construction of identity. That environment is one that is constructed by physical spaces and people whose interactions are further complicated by the presence and struggle to access capital; all of these elements will interact at the level of gender construction.

The purpose of this study is to see how the exchange of capital intersects with the urbanization of consciousness and has an effect on the construction of gender as it is represented filmically in Latin American cinema. Gender, I argue, is manipulated, and the socioeconomic conditions that the female characters encounter will impact this representation. This study uses an interdisciplinary approach to gender, one which includes feminist film theories and urban theory. These factors complement each other and interact to explain how the physical setting influences the process of women learning to be “women.” This investigation aims to identify how this process translates visually in the form of the filmic representation of women in Latin America. By understanding this relationship, we can determine the effect that socioeconomic and geographic conditions have on the individual and his/her construction of self and gender.

Latin American Woman with a capital “W”?: Background on Gender Theories

There is an extensive and growing body of theoretical work that has come about since the latter 20th century that has tried to explain and theorize the complexity of the social construction of females. Different theoretical proposals have attempted to explain how women are “different,” “similar,” “equal,” “biologically” and/or experientially different to men, to other women, or to other cultures. Furthermore, gender as a construction in itself, the creation, dissemination and ultimate destruction of gender

categories has also received considerable attention since the formalization of an area of Gender Studies came about in the 1980s. Seminal works have opened the path to this theoretical field and include authors such as de Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, Monique Wittig, and Julia Kristeva. In the face of these contributions, there is also a growing area of feminist theory that sees the diversity of women and the distinctive social conditions faced by females in different areas of the world, which can help us when considering women in the specific area of Latin America.

An example is Chandra Mohanty's essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," which addresses the concept of the "Third World woman." Mohanty proposes that different considerations must come about when analyzing women in what she identifies as the Third World. She believes that Western feminism has created a concept of "Woman" that erroneously supposes that all females homogeneously share the same experiences.

Building on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, Susana Chávez Silverman and Frances Aparicio analyze the specific representation of Latin American women. Just as the West tends to homogenize Eastern countries, the West looks down at Latin America in a homogenizing, stereotypical manner. The authors term this "tropicalization." The representation of Latin America, they note, will depend on the power of those looking.

When Latin American women contemplate their own conception of women/ "Woman," interesting propositions such as those of Rosario Ferré come about. In "La cocina de la escritura" the Puerto Rican writer states

Sospecho que no existe una escritura femenina diferente a la de los hombres. Insistir en que sí existe implicaría paralelamente la existencia de

una naturaleza femenina, distinta a la masculina, cuando lo mas lógico me parece insistir en la existencia de una experiencia radicalmente diferente. Si existiera una naturaleza femenina o masculina, esto implicaría unas capacidades distintas en la mujer y en el hombre, en cuanto a la realización de una obra de arte, por ejemplo, cuando en realidad sus capacidades son las mismas, porque éstas son ante todo fundamentalmente humanas. (“Cocina de la escritura”)

Ferré proposes a concept of women based on social conditioning. Historical lack of access of women to politics has led to the introspection of the body and the self.

Furthermore, this has also directed women to themes that may be perceived as radical.

She mentions

Las mujeres hemos tenido en el pasado un acceso muy limitado al mundo de la política de la ciencia o de la aventura, por ejemplo, aunque hoy esto está cambiando. Nuestra literatura se encuentra a menudo determinada por una relación inmediata a nuestros cuerpos: somos nosotras las que gestamos a los hijos y las que los damos a luz, las que los alimentamos y nos ocupamos de su supervivencia.[...] Es por esto que la literatura de las mujeres se ha ocupado en el pasado, mucho más que la de los hombres, de experiencias interiores, que tienen poco que ver con lo histórico, con lo social y con lo político. Es por esto también que su literatura es más subversiva que la de los hombres, porque a menudo se atreve a bucear en zonas prohibidas, vecinas a lo irracional, a la locura, al amor y a la muerte; zonas que, en nuestra sociedad racional y utilitaria, resulta a veces peligrosos reconocer que existen. Estos temas interesan a la mujer, sin embargo, no porque ésta posea una naturaleza diferente, sino porque son el cosecho paciente y minucioso de su experiencia. (“Cocina de la escritura”)

The attention to the female experience cited by Ferré helps determine how the difference of gender is constructed. Though Ferré speaks of literature, this relationship translates to cinema so it follows logically that women direct the majority of the films that are dealt with in this study.

Anny Brooksbank Jones's article "Latin American Feminist Criticism Revisited" discusses similar concepts that were first identified by Mohanty. Her revision of Latin American feminism includes the contributions of Rosario Ferré, Patricia Elena González with Eliana Ortega (1985), as well as the influential works of Sara Castro-Klarén (1985), Debra Castillo and Jean Franco (1986, 1988). All these women respond to the need for a specific Latin American theory concerning feminism. They consider that French and North American feminist theories do not accurately depict the issues of Latin American women, which should be seen as multiple voices and take macro and micro-political divisions of power into consideration. Furthermore, these theorists explore the position of marginality; they take gender, class, race and sexuality into consideration, offering what they believe is a more accurate representation of Latin American feminism. Similarly, Castillo's *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* addresses the different efforts by various scholars to devise a theory that tends to the specific needs of Latin American women. Though Castillo does not outline a definitive theory, she too emphasizes the need to consider race, class, and the unique colonial historical past of Latin American women, which has created an oppressive state for this demographic, and which will be a consideration in this study.

The foundational work on feminist film theory establishes the theoretical advancements towards representations of women in film. The various studies on classical cinema portrayals concur in that there is a persistent traditional representations of women as Sharon Smith first discussed in "The Image of Women in Film: Some Suggestions for

Future Research” (1972/ 1999)¹ where she states that women have been left out of film as is the case with literature (14). She argues that the representation of women in US cinema (which is very similar to other developed cinemas in this respect) has been reduced to the following: “today’s American actresses fall mainly into two categories... those who in some way deflect, travesty or blatantly overstate their womanliness and sensuality; and those who suppress it, or have nothing to suppress” (15). Smith suggests a different approach to the representation of gender in films: “Women just want a chance to be heroes; a chance to be shown as humanly (not just femininely) frail; and a chance to see men in some of the ungainly situations in which women have so commonly been shown” (18).

Teresa de Lauretis has been instrumental in identifying how cinema functions to create images that are accepted as “accurate” portrayals. A relationship between cinema and set expectations of women exists, which feed into each other and continue to reinforce set social codes of females. This relationship is: “[c]ulture influencing film content, in turn influencing culture” (Smith 19). In this manner, cinema functions as a technology in the Foucaultian sense.

As a resolution to the condition of male dominated films, Claire Johnson in “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema” (1999/ 1973) calls for a revolutionary cinema that will question the established patterns of classic cinema. She states that a counter cinema will be one where women are not only represented differently, but will also

¹ This article was first printed in 1972 and was reprinted in 1999. That is the same case seen in the essays by the following theorists cited in this study: Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doanne, Claire Johnson and Jane Gaines.

include the presence of more women at different levels of production. Her request for a revolutionary cinema supports a rejection of patterns in decades of filmmaking, which have constructed a one-dimensional image of females that abides with patriarchal structures. This rupture with societal expectations of women is what will be found in feminist films where women characters will have a multifaceted characterization and agency as will be explored in Latin American cinematic production. Norma Iglesias Prieto has broadly defined women's films in the following manner:

the movie has a female producer; it presents a feminine or feminist perspective; it handles new themes; it portrays more complete and complex female characters; it reassesses female subjectivity by talking not only about women but also about world issues from a women's perspective; and it envisages new rhythms, narratives, perspectives and forms, striving to develop an alternate aesthetic. (226)

These definitions are oversimplified because the analysis of Latin American cinema will face further challenges when we consider the experience of women in this region who are faced with diverse social conditions.

The representation of women is made more complex by the role of the spectator in this construction of representations. Laura Mulvey, in her foundational essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1999/ 1975) discusses the subjectivity of the male gaze, which explains the sexualized representations of women. The representation of women in Hollywood classic film is intended to satisfy the pleasure of the male (gendered) spectator and is created from a patriarchal point of view, thus explaining why classic cinema abides by binary representations of women.

Mulvey's work does not initially take into consideration the position of the female audience, something that later became of great importance to feminist film theory. Her

follow-up article titled “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)” (1999/1981) rethinks the concept of the female spectator and assumes that the viewer incorporates a transvestite attitude when watching films. Mary Ann Doanne addressed the concept of the female spectator in “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator” (1999/ 1982) and states that female spectators are faced with the sexualized images of females are able to accept them because they are masqueraded spectators, thus hiding their masculinity behind their femininity. By this she means that they are assuming the position of male spectators because cinema is, in essence, created for men.²

Feminist film theory, though useful, will also have to consider the diversity of race and class found in Latin America and the precise social constructions found in this region of the world, which will bring about a variant representation. The majority of the theories concerning feminist studies in cinema centers on the filmic production of Hollywood or First World countries where the theories deal with ethnocentric representations. In contrast, there is a growing area of research that deals with the representations of women who do not constitute “mainstream” representations. Such is the case of Jane Gaines, who in “White Privilege and Looking Glass Relations” makes note of the difference in representation that must be considered when dealing with race. This is an area that must be further explored to fully understand how Latin American countries are viewing and representing themselves. What follows below is the specific

² These studies were fundamental in theorizing the creation of cinema for audiences since, as these two studies show, women have been left out of the target audience in classical film. Though my study does not focus on reception theory, another area of study that deserves attention is how the films analyzed here are to be translated to gendered audiences.

theoretical consideration, which will be used to bring about a discussion on how gender is being constructed in cinema.

Theoretical Framework

Construction of Technologies

Film, as Teresa de Lauretis explains, functions as a technology. In one of her most influential books, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (1987), de Lauretis explains that gender can be understood along the line of thought established by Foucault where “gender, too, both as representation and self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and the institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (2). Films provide us with images, which will in turn reflect the views that society has of gender, but it will also help shape these views.

De Lauretis borrows from the term “technology of sex” used by Foucault, which was originally used by the French theorist to term the “techniques” established by the bourgeoisie to conserve their power (hegemony) and seek class survival (de Lauretis 12). De Lauretis explains Foucault’s original application of a “technology,” to control sexual behavior of state institutions, whether they are public institutions or “private” institutions such as the family. De Lauretis concludes from Foucault’s theory that “sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under ‘surveillance’” (13). Society perceives an individual’s behavior and construction of self as “natural” though in reality these are strengthened and manipulated by various social mediums; one of those social expressions is cinema.

De Lauretis parts from Foucault in determining that gender is never taken into consideration in the French theorist's work since "sex", as Foucault applies it, is non-gendered. De Lauretis argues, however, that

The construction of gender goes on today through the various technologies of gender (e.g., cinema) and institutional discourses (e.g., theory) with power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote, and "implant" representations of gender. But the terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Posed from outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also have a part in the construction of gender, and their effects are rather at the "local" level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation. (18)

Film, according to De Lauretis, serves as a viable medium through which the representations of gender can be analyzed.

Cinema also represents how technologies function within the filmic space. As the construction of gender is being produced within films, this representation in turn constructs gender on a different level, one directed towards the spectator. Within the visual image and narrative of films, characters interact with their society (technologies) to shape the depiction of gender. The concept of 'Woman' or 'Man' becomes apparent in the specific context being visually represented in the relationships and interaction with technologies established within the film. This apparatus of gender will then be portrayed on the screen where the spectator (audience) will receive these images and representations. The outcome of this system of different levels of technologies demonstrates how cinema, then, functions in a way to impact the representation of gender as it will be perceived by a society.

Cultural Intelligibility and Meaning in Cinema: Portraying Ideologies

For the technologies of gender to function, we must first accept that film represents a political discourse capable of producing this effect. For this, Mas'Ud Zarvazadeh's work is important here. Films, according to Zarvazadeh, "are not merely aesthetic spaces but political ones that contest or naturalize the primacy of those subjectivities necessary to the status quo and suppress or privilege oppositional ones (5)." Cinema functions as a social representation guided by an ideology of the social surroundings it represents, and it is also a controlling mechanism that represses whatever is undesired in the principles it attempts to uphold. Cinema, therefore, is a medium that helps create perceptions of the way we understand gender. Its representation is not an "innocent" act, but rather a political representation as will be seen in the chosen films.

The gender politics in film can be assessed through the analysis of the politics involved in the construction of meaning. Zarvazadeh addresses this issue when he asks questions: What makes the films appear to be "real"? In other words, how does a film become intelligible and what politics are involved in making the visual image and the narrative of a film intelligible to the audience? To explain this, Zarvazadeh approaches film from the concept of the "tale," which he identifies as "the way that a film offers a narrative- and proposes that narrative to be a paradigm of intelligibility" (8). The tale is different from the plot and the story where the "tale" works on a grander level, per se, which goes beyond the aesthetics and the narrative. Furthermore, this tale helps the films by "[instructing] the audience on how to make sense of the global reality of the culture- how to fit together the details of reality to compose a coherent model of relations and

coherence through which an all-encompassing picture of the real emerges” (8).

Therefore, in relation to gender, the tale will create an image which must seem “real.”

This “real image” will then depict the values of societies and demonstrates the manner in which the society is revealed by this tale in the visual image.

By exploring the “tale,” Zarvazadeh explains that films

[track] the activities through which the spectator chains together the film’s signifiers in a cultural grid of intelligibility- an ensemble of assumptions and presuppositions about the “real”- into the account that makes the film socially intelligible. By making sense of the film, the spectator does not merely engage in an aesthetic act but a political practice: a practice that also enables her to make herself intelligible as a cultural entity- she achieves social ‘reality’ as a ‘subject’. (11)

Who, where and what is represented must make sense to the viewer since the dissection of this composed image reveals the values, expectations and perceptions of the dominant class. Zarvazadeh states that “in a sense, constructing the tale of the film is an indication of ideological skills: a mark that the object has learned ‘proper’ codes and practices through which the socially needed ‘reality’ can be made intelligible. Film, as an ideological apparatus, then serves as a means for making sure that the subject is equipped with the elements of the cultural logic of the (dominant) real” (13). By making the film intelligible, it is assumed that it reproduces the images expected by the dominant discourse and the underlying ideology. It can be dangerous, however, to assume that every spectator will approach the film with the same codes of intelligibility. Zarvazadeh cautions that not everyone will construct the same tale; though there may be different readings, there persists a “core of truth” that the dominant ideology claims and will help establish the widespread intelligibility. This concept of spectatorship is also echoed by

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam who state that “The strong ‘subject effects’ produced by narrative cinema are not automatic or irresistible, nor can they be separated from the desire, experience, and knowledge of historically situated spectators, constituted outside the text and traversed by set of power relations such as nation, race, class, gender and sexuality” (347). There exists various registers for the “ethnography of spectatorship” (term from Shohat and Stam) that are factored into the perception of derived meaning (350).

How, though, has gender been perceived in contemporary filmmaking? How are women portrayed and what underlying politics does that reveal? When discussing the portrayal of “femininity,” the Zarvazadeh states:

the normal woman (as feminine) is articulated in contemporary films (one of the many discourses of ideology), for example, as emotionally warm, as physically slim, as intellectually accommodating, as morally sensitive and caring. None of these traits are in themselves and ‘by nature’ definitive femininity and all are in fact political attributes required for maintaining asymmetrical power relations and the exploitative gender relations between men and women in the patriarchal capitalism. (93)

Furthermore, when Zarvazadeh discusses the portrayal of women in contemporary films, he states: “under capitalist patriarchy, the construction of women is fundamentally fraught by contradictions: she is, on the one hand, represented as authoritative, efficient and highly intelligent; but, at the same time, she is expected to honor the old code of allurements, submissiveness, and ‘dumbness’” (205). These parameters, though they succeed in creating a space for women in film that acknowledges their presence, also limits them within the film since the characters are unable to achieve power in these cinematic representations.

In Latin American, the capitalist patriarchal structure is intensified due to the unequal distribution of wealth. Though more advanced societies identify with a larger middle class, this is clearly still not the same situation experienced throughout the most part of Latin America.³ The combination of Zarvazadeh's and David Bordwell's approach in the analysis of film helps in determining how these structures are constructed and represented in a medium that feeds off the dominant ideology and at the same times feeds the perception of the dominant ideology. Bordwell's various levels of meaning derived from films, specifically the symptomatic meaning, echoes Zarvazadeh's concept of ideology presented in film. According to Bordwell, a spectator creates various levels of meaning while viewing films ranging from the direct referential meaning derived from the context, to the complex symptomatic meaning (Bordwell 46-49). Still, Zarvazadeh's concept of underlying politics involved with film sometimes strays from a discussion of the formal elements of the film. Bordwell's discussions of the mise-en-scene, shot, editing, and sound create a complex system that allows the viewer to derive coherence, symbolism and interpretation; these filmic elements are of greatest importance in analyzing the gender politics involved within each film.

A Place for Gender: Theoretical Considerations on Geography and Gender

Gender, I hold, occurs in a specific space and in a specific time frame under conditions that, depending what they are, will be changing its construction. Geography, therefore, impacts the expectation, allowance and permission of a given society's

³ I refer here to the three main countries that are the subject of this study. In Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, this situation persists where there is a substantially larger lower class compared to the middle class, which is different from the more developed societies such as the United States.

representation of females. But what other factors come into play? Geography is tied to the construction of spaces and, David Harvey holds, spaces, especially urban environments, are constantly in the process of urbanization due to the exchange of capital. This is a “[C]ircular process of capital that has the augmentation of exchange values as its primary goal” (“Urbanization of Capital” 17).

The process of urbanization of capital interacts with a society and the individuals within it at different levels. He states that the “[i]ncreasing urbanization makes the primary level at which individuals experience, live out, and react to the changes going on around them. To dissect the urban process in all its fullness is to lay bare the roots of consciousness formation in the material realities of daily life” (“Urbanization of Consciousness” 230). What we come across in our everyday life and our interaction with the city will help form who we are, who we perceive ourselves to be. Therefore, to see how gender is affected within the urban environment, as represented in film, Harvey’s theoretical ideas are employed in order to consider how the process of capital in the city-space acts on the individual and his/her construction of gender.

The Marxist geographer states that the individual within the urban capitalist society develops a consciousness through a process which he terms “urbanization of consciousness,” which shapes the self-perception of a person (231). This process is affected by different factors, “loci”, which impact the access to capital. The “loci” are summed up into five areas: individual, class, community, state, family. He explains this process in the following manner:

Individualism attaches to money uses in freely functioning markets. Class under capitalism reflects the buying and selling of labor power and the

social relations embodied in the sociotechnical conditions of production under conditions of surplus value extractions. Community, [...] is a highly ambiguous notion that nevertheless plays a fundamental role in terms of the reproduction of labor power, the circulation of revenues, and the geography of capitalist accumulation. The state exists as the center of authority and as an apparatus through which political-economic power is exercised in a territory with some degree of popular legitimacy. The family, (to which [...] all other forms of domestic household economy [is added]), finally, has a profound effect upon ways of thought and action simply by virtue of its function as the primary site of social support and of reproduction activities such as child-rearing. (231)

The manner in which individuals perceive themselves is based on how they interact with monetary assets and, furthermore, how the ‘self’ interacts, interprets and organizes itself in regards to the “loci.” All of these elements are tied together, as Harvey states, and cannot be understood independently of the urbanization of capital (231).

This historical materialist interpretation of the urban process explains how “the ways of seeing, thinking and acting produced through the interrelations between individualism, class, community, state and family affect the paths and qualities of capitalist urbanization that in turn feed back to alter our conceptions and our actions” (Harvey, “Urbanization of Consciousness” 231). The model of consciousness formation presented by Harvey, however, does not consider that this awareness impacts the construction of gender at an individual level. His theory, then, will be used in this dissertation as a foundation from which to delve into gender formation. A careful analysis of each of these loci will reveal how capital will interact with the individual and will in turn have an effect on the construction of gender.

Sallie Marston’s work on the use of scales gives some insight into how gender will function in the social construction of scales. Using 1870 as a historical moment of

analysis, Marston identifies that industrial revolution created a need for women to become “domestic professionals” and contribute to social production (237). Thus, this has reinforced the roles of women in the domestic sphere. The concept of scales is useful in considering the urbanization of consciousness as an approximation of interaction between capital and gender.

Another useful area of research is feminist geography, which is defined as “ a geography which takes into account the socially created gender structure of society” (Women and Geography Study Group 21). Within the various approaches that feminist geographers have taken to explain the position of women in society, WGSG of IBG discusses socialist feminists who “[attempt] to link gender relations to the wider framework of social relations which exist in society as a whole, and which in turn is structured by other factors as well as gender differences” (25). As an example of how this interrelationship functions, they explain “In Britain- an advanced, capitalist society- class and race are major cleavages which interact with gender to produce complex patterns of dominance and subordination. If factors such as religious or regional differences are also included, the picture becomes extremely complex” (25). These layers of identification resonate similarly to Harvey’s assertions.

According to the WGSG, feminist geographers “are currently attempting to understand the basis for, and consequences of, the separation of ‘male’ and ‘female’ spheres in cities, the division of ‘public’ activities from ‘private’ activities, and to place an analysis of the changing relationship between domestic and waged labour at the centre of a feminist urban theory” (45). While Harvey looks more extensively at capital at

different levels of society, feminist urban theory relates it directly to women and their interaction with labor. Regarding this emphasis on the division of labor and therefore the division of consciousness and expectations, WGSG affirms that “[w]omen are commonly seen first as ‘domestic labourers’ and only second as ‘waged employees.’ Contrary to this assumption, most women go out to work to support children and make an essential contribution to the household budget” (68). In spite of this contribution by women to the household economy, “the view that women’s waged work is secondary and so insignificant as a major source of income, is persistent. It helps both to maintain women’s low wages and unequal job opportunities and to undermine women’s own expectations of waged work” (68). This view on the role of women in a capitalist society will have an effect on her value vis-à-vis males. The set expectations, however, will permeate into different areas of society and social expressions, including the way they are perceived through popular culture and social technologies, such as cinema.

The WGSG has considered the role of feminist geography in ‘underdeveloped countries’ such as those represented by Latin America. Though many of the studies concerning the situation of women in Latin American countries center on the rural economics and geography of women, they also examine the situations that arise with women who immigrate into the city space, a situation faced by Latin America women that will affect their function in their societies. They state:

In the cities, women are more constrained than men in their choice of occupations. Most women go into domestic service or petty commodity production. As domestic servants, they may free upper-class women for professional employment but in their turn find it difficult to care for their own children. If they work within their homes providing services or home-produced goods, they are spared the expense of hiring babysitters.

Alternatively, women may take their daughters out of school in order to care for younger sibling and free their mother for waged employment. (115)

This is a chain that reproduce itself.

The lack of access to education of women will not allow for upward mobility: “[t]hey commonly have less education, fewer marketable skills and so have less access to capital” (115). This being the case, women have a fixed place in society, which is intensified in the lower social strata. The limited access to capital will have a direct effect on the labored employment available to them. The lack of upward mobility and this construction of expectations relates to the construction of gender. This restricted access to capital, as the feminist geographers demonstrate, is not generally a personal choice; it is an outcome of the organization of society and the perceived views of women within societies, which may also be the result of the social organization of state, family, and industrial technologies. All of these elements are evident in society and come across through cultural production, including cinema.

Literature Review

Synopsis of Latin American Cinematic Production

Beginning in the 1990s, and certainly into 2008 as I am writing this, Latin American cinema has gone through various changes of filmic production that have allowed for different conditions for the representations of women. Prior to this time period, national cinemas have seen different waves of cinema-making, sometimes positive, other times not so well-received by audiences or critics. Different movements, socioeconomic circumstances and politics have continuously shifted the focus (theme) of

cinema. In order to understand how the feminist works insert themselves in the trends of filmmaking in Latin America, a brief history of the past 100 years of cinema-making is appropriate. By presenting this, I hope to establish the specific conditions that have allowed for more critical representations of women in the silver screen. Several researchers have given themselves the monumental task of investigating the history of Latin American cinema as a whole. Amongst these critics we include the work carried out by John King and Octavio Getino.⁴

In *Magical Reels*, John King traces the development of cinema including the silent film productions, talking films of the 30s, “New” cinemas throughout Latin America, and new trends of filmmaking in the 90s. Concerning the production of cinema in the 1930s to 50s, Getino mentions that the triumph of production is in part due to the organization of the industry in those years:

Las industrias, como tales, solo tuvieron vigencia a partir de los años ‘30 en los principales países de la región, con la aparición del sonido óptico. Fue el caso de Argentina, México y en menor medida, Brasil. En estos países se realizaron importantes inversiones [...] lo que posibilitó la aparición de verdaderas fábricas de películas dedicadas a ejecutar proyectos integrales de producción, desde el diseño inicial del guión hasta la impresión de las copias para su comercialización en los cines.

Tales industrias contaron a su vez con importantes sistemas de promoción [...], logrando desarrollar en sus mejores momentos –entre 1930 y 1950- su propio *star system*. Este modelo productivo basado principalmente en el de Hollywood, sirvió para lanzar a escala regional –y en algunos casos, a escala mundial- películas y figuras de la cultura latinoamericana. (53)

⁴ Other works that have tended to the development of cinema include Ana López’s *Towards a Third World Cinema* (1986), Alberto Elena’s and Marina Díaz López’s *The Cinema of Latin America* (2003) and Michael Martin’s two volume work *New Latin American Cinema* (1997).

Understanding this growth in production, King is able to demonstrate that the popularity of specific genres of film have prevailed in these cinemas, despite the ever-present Hollywood film production, which has always kept its popularity with Latin American audiences. An example of well-received genres that have come from the national productions include the tango led films of the 1930s, which became a commercial mixture of song, dance and melodrama and constitutes what King considers “perhaps the most successful moment of Argentine film history” (38). In Mexico, the “Golden Age” during the 1940s provoked an increase in production and films became a source of national identity.⁵ Some well-established genres that stood out are the *comedias rancheras* and *cabaretera* films. At this same time, Brazilian audiences were equally captivated by the *chanchada* genre, which is described as a musical comedy (55).

The popularity of cinema during this period has eternally marked the construction of gender in these national cinemas. In the previous two decades, work has been underway to study the representations of women in filmmaking. The general consensus has been that the roles of women have been limited by pre-established conceptions of gender and social expectations of women. This view has permeated the cinematic screen and has at the same time been a perpetuator of this construction. Examples of this same situation have been seen in literature. Latin American culture, which is rooted in the

⁵ John King attributed the rise of cinema to various factors, including the help of US to produce films, and the presence of director/ cinematography giants Emilio ‘El Indio’ Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa. In addition to this, Mexico established what King calls the “star system” which would forever establish the careers of María Félix, Pedro Armendáriz, Dolores del Río, Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Mario Moreno “Cantinflas” and Germán Valdez “Tin Tan” (47-51).

dualistic Judeo-Christian tradition, has historically promoted expectations of women along the binary.

José Fuster Retali makes this argument in his essay regarding the moral codes that determined the representations of Argentine women in film. Basing himself on religious dogma, he concludes “quedan ya claramente establecidos los roles que históricamente le corresponden a la mujer, su destino único y final de esposa y madre, con una sujeción total a su marido, así como el mensaje dirigido a los hombres. La virgen salva y redime, la pecadora arrastra y trae aparejadas la condena y la muerte” (65). It is through this influence that women have been socially expected to assume intimate spaces, remaining outside the political arena to perform domestic duties. Historically, these attributes would all be characteristics of a chaste women, and ideologically desirable by a patriarchic society.

On the other extreme of the spectrum are those women who are non-compliant with the patriarchal structures and break with those expectations by inhabiting the public arena earning the definition of “bad” women whose sexuality is exposed, and therefore, undesirable by the moral standards. Fuster Retali states:

El valor exigido a la mujer dentro de la estructura familiar, y por extensión, dentro de la sociedad no es, sin embargo, la obediencia, la cual se da por sobreentendida, sino la virginidad.... la mujer que no aceptaba someterse a tales normas y pretendía ejercer libremente su sexualidad, era apartada del seno de la sociedad y equiparada a las prostitutas, pese a que éstas, en la mayoría de los casos, también eran objeto de otra forma de dominación sexual por parte del hombre. (67-68)

This construction and social expectation is evident throughout diverse artistic representations in the Luso and Hispanic worlds. A woman who is considered sexual,

then, is believed to be of less moral worth. The binary is exclusive and women are either virtuous or sinful; their sexuality is the greatest indicator. Furthermore, this construction has been repeatedly seen in different mediums and has helped organize the cultural conception of gender in Latin America.

For most of the twentieth century in Latin America, cinema has reproduced this binary, constantly reaffirming its structure and supporting the patriarchal organization of society. Currently, a body of scholarly work analyzes cinema's historical position in reinforcing those values. Such is the case of the work by Mexican critic Julia Tuñón. In her study *Mujeres de luz y sombra en el cinema mexicano: La construcción de una imagen, 1939-1952*, Tuñón discusses the stereotypes that Mexican Golden Age Cinema created in regards to women. Tuñón makes reference to the visual construction that supports the pre-established binary for women. The critic goes as far as to state that Mexican cinema produced archetypes for the representation of women where the *devoradora* and the *nutricia* were the most prevalent roles (78). Not limiting women to these categories, Tuñón also lists “la devoradora, (representada magistralmente por María Félix), la madre pura, la novia, la rumbera, la prostituta, la esposa desvalida” (78). She goes on to explain “Se trata de *situaciones* que atraviesa la mujer, de formas estereotipadas de representar una imagen arquetípica frente a la realidad múltiple que encierran las personas” (78). Joanne Hershfield confirms this conception of the images of women in her study *Mexican Cinema/ Mexican Woman: 1940-1950*. In this study she also identifies the representation of women as symbols of national identity, though the roles remained where women were inferior to male counterparts and the female

protagonists were not able to survive their surroundings and died. What these studies demonstrate is that Mexico, similar to the rest of Latin America, reproduced the same structures that have predominated Hollywood's representation of women.

Anne Higonnet states "Los *happy ends* [sic] de Hollywood ponen a las mujeres en el lugar que les corresponde en un orden patriarcal: en los brazos del héroe, destinadas a una muerte noble, o, si han faltado a los valores femeninos, a un justo castigo" (420). It becomes clear that the binary representation of women has become a constant trend in the history of celluloid images. Similar examples can be seen throughout all Latin America.

Argentina and Brazil have fewer studies that focus on the representations of women on classic cinema, though there is a consensus on this representation, which can be generalized to most of Latin American cinema. José Fuster Retali's study has confirmed this trend in Argentine filmmaking. He argues that Argentina experiences archetypes of women represented in cinema from its inception and through the 1950s.

Furthermore, Silvia Oroz, in *Melodrama: O Cinema de Lágrimas de América Latina* discusses the melodrama genre as an object of popular cultural production throughout all Latin America in the decades of the 30s, 40s and 50s (13). This well-produced style of cinema dominated the screens of the various countries and Brazil, Argentina and Mexico were the highest producers. According to Oroz, melodramas were films that followed a pre-established moral code where characters and their situations would go through trial and tribulations until moral order was established. Oroz states "O sentimentalismo conservador e a preocupação moralizante fazem parte da estrutura formal e ideológica relativa ao melodrama cinematográfico" (19-20). Again, similar to

Fuster Retali, she reiterates “A fixação de arquetipos está estreitamente vinculada aos valores da sociedade judaico-cristã e patriarcal a través desta forma cultural, o público confirma esta idéia de mundo assimilada” (38). The significance of the melodrama is that it too reinforces the expectations of the gender roles in these societies. The popularity of this genre allowed for high dissemination of these films, which will have lasting effects in culture and society regarding the expected social behavior of women. Oroz makes reference to the same gender archetypes that Fuster Retali has explained, which will be the mold that contemporary filmmakers will challenge when representing women.

Though the hegemonic representation of women in films during the first half of the century is evident, there are some instances in which women break from these molds. B. Ruby Rich references Mexican female filmmaker pioneer Matilde Landeta’s (1910-1999) *La negra Angustias* (1949), which was one of the few films of this time (and one of the first in general) to present an alternate representation to the stereotypical construction of women on celluloid.

The Revolutionary Cinemas

Cinema constantly struggled in the latter part of the century due to the conflict between the interest of national cinemas, co-productions and international interest. A short-lived period of revival was seen in the 1960s when the first round of “New Cinemas” of Latin America grew out of a desire to create a revolutionary representation in the filmic medium. These were named *Nueva ola* in Argentina,⁶ *Cinema Novo*⁷ in

⁶ Includes the works of Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, Fernando Ayala (King 82).

Brazil and *Nuevo cine* in Mexico.⁸ The directors aimed to create filmic works that reflected the avant-garde spirit of the times, which was evident by the radical changes in politics occurring throughout Latin American, most importantly, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro in 1959. Influenced by Italian neorealist cinema, directors such as Brazilian Glauber Rocha (1939-1989) took to the streets to identify new images of and for Latin America. No longer were the directors of these movements concerned with the romantic images that their predecessors had previously established. Instead, as King explains, they found

their symbolic spaces in the streets of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires or the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, going out with their cameras to capture everyday social reality, using an artisanal, flexible, low-budget form of filming.

The new cinemas began with an ‘idea in head and camera in hand’ in Glauber Rocha’s resonant phrase, adopting flexible positions which were adapted to the changing historical and political moment. These strategies can only be explored by looking at the specific development within each country [...] Yet it should also be recognized that the decade saw various attempts to achieve a movement that was Pan- or Latin American, internationalist as well as nationalist. (69)

These movements produced artistic films, which, though they were highly regarded in the artistic community, did not attract the so-called masses in the theater houses. For this reason, the hype of this revolutionary cinema quickly dwindled down. Along with this, the 70s and 80s saw more conservative political governments, many times in the form of military dictatorships. With greater content and censorship restrictions placed on these films,

⁷ Includes the works of Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Ruy Guerra, Carlos Diegues and Joaquim Pedro de Andrade (King 108).

⁸ The short lived *Nuevo cine* in Mexico during the 1970s consisted of the works and participation of José de la Colina, Rafael Corkidi, Salvador Elizondo, J.M. García Ascot, Carlos Monsiváis, Alberto Isaac, Paul Leduc and Fernando Macotela (King 132).

the impetus of the revolutionary cinemas of the 60s came to a halt. The revolutionary images that these directors brought to the screen, however, did not extend to introduce a revolutionary representation of women.

The 80s in Latin America, though it marked a return to democracy for many countries, including Brazil and Argentina, brought many difficulties for cinema making. Amongst the difficulties, different means of visual entertainment were filling the households around the world. Satellite television and cable were more accessible to the masses and this, in turn, kept people from the cinema houses (King 75). Home video viewing also brought difficulties as the public once again turned to Hollywood films, which were easily distributed to home video format in comparison to the Latin American productions.

Despite these changes in the audiovisual market, Ambrosio Fornet addresses the character of the “New Cinemas” of the 60s-80s, which, he believes, were bound to failure due to the political charge that conflicted with the cultural endeavor (xii). From the 90s until the present, various circumstances have affected the production of Latin American Cinema. Octavio Getino states

Con la implementación del modelo económico neoliberal en la mayor parte de la region, la producción filmica se derrumbó en las principales industrias latinoamericanas entre finales de los '90 y mediados de los '90. Las políticas restrictivas aplicadas en México, Brasil y, en menor medida en Argentina, redujeron la producción conjunta de estos tres países de alrededor de 200 títulos en 1985 (México y Brasil producían entre 80 y 90 largometrajes por año), a menos de 50 en 1995. Las políticas de Salinas de Gortari en México y de Collor de Melo en Brasil habían contribuido directamente a ese desastre. (57)

Despite the lower levels of filmic production, there were some notable films produced, some of which even began to openly challenge the representations of women. During this time, some feminist representations can be seen in films such as Maria Luisa Bemberg's *Mujer de nadie* (1982) and *Miss Mary* (1986) and Suzana Amaral's *A Hora da Estrela* (1985).

Barbara Morris's essay titled "Configuring Women: The Discourse of Empowerment in Latin American Cinema" discusses some of the films produced during this time and discusses the representation of women who, despite their active on-screen and behind-the-scene presence in films, continued to assume the marginalized roles they never escape. To prove this, Morris analyzed *Erendira* by Ruy Guerra (1983), *La historia oficial* by Luis Puenzo (1984) and *El norte* by Gregory Nava (1983). Though the directors place a woman as the protagonist of the film, she is not able to achieve empowerment (149). Morris goes on to conclude that "The parallel phenomenon in film production which configures women as objects of representation, yet excludes them from the very discourses that represent them, exemplifies the displacement between center and margin that is characteristic of women's conditions in the developing world and elsewhere" (150). Examples of these are prevalent in Latin American filmmaking. In the instances when women are given the opportunity to come to the forefront, their depiction is not one that breaks with the status quo and reaches a level of successful liberation.

In many of the Latin American countries, the period from the mid-90s has been marked by the growth in filmmaking, though it may not fit our notions of "national" cinema. As globalization continues spreading into Latin America and filmic financing

changes, the film industry has also made use of global resources such as co-productions. Concerning the status of Latin American Cinema in the new century, Nestor García Canclini concludes that despite the effects of the “postnational” era brought about by globalization and the hybridization of cultures, “the key problem seems not to be the risk that globalization will erase them but rather to understand how ethnic, regional, and national identities reconstitute themselves through processes of intercultural hybridization” (256). That will be the challenge as we look at specifically “Argentine” “Mexican” and “Brazilian” interpretations of women in this ever-evolving region. For our purposes, and considering the very diverse history of these countries, each nation’s cinema will be treated separately to ensure that no overgeneralizations are made in regards to each country’s cinema.

The very specific histories of these countries in these last 20 years have given way to different cinemas, one that adopts some definition of a “new cinema.” The overarching factor will be the tone of these films, which challenge long held images and views of society while at the same time receiving better home and global reception with audiences. Furthermore, the shift in economic practices in Latin America has provoked a change in cinematic production. With government subsidies and private funds being used for filmmaking, this has had an effect on the construction of cinema.

Furthermore, the growth of the programs offered by the national film schools⁹ and the fall of the film unions that had direct control over who was able to participate in filmmaking have now opened up the door to aspiring filmmakers who might have found

⁹ In Mexico, the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica was established in 1975.

it difficult to develop directorial skills (Hershfield and Maciel 250). Due to these circumstances, women and diverse representation of women have better access to desired representations in Latin America.

Despite this traditional depiction of women in cinema, currently, there are more films that take a strong feminist stance of women. In Latin America, since the 1980s, there has been an ever growing body of filmic works that challenge the traditional views of women.¹⁰ Although there have been small spurts of feminist representations in the case of Mexico including the aforementioned *La negra angustias*, these representations before the 1980's were sporadic.¹¹ It goes without say that the majority of the works that do represent a feminist representation of women are films directed by women.

There are a growing number of female directors who have come into their own and have established themselves within their national cinemas.¹² Maciel and Hershfield discuss this growing group of female directors and mention several factors that have contributed to these rising numbers. They believe that this increase is due in part to the

¹⁰ Other world cinemas have had feminist depictions since the 1940s, such as in the case of the United States and the roles played by Katherine Hepburn. Examples such as Hepburn's are more difficult to come by in Latin American filmmaking. The closest representation to feminist portrayals in Latin American cinema is reduced to the representations of the "soldaderas" in Mexican films dealing with the Revolution. In those representations we see women who are not confined to the home-space and are allowed to fight, in several instances, along with the men. That said, they are still expected to tend to domestic duties such as cooking and nurturing the male characters.

¹¹ Patricia Torres de San Martín mentions the productions of pioneer Mexican director Adela Sequeyro who in *Más allá de la muerte* (1935) and *Mujer de nadie* (1937) "anticipated a feminist discourse" (43).

¹² Latin America has always had women directors; the presence of female directors in contemporary filmmaking is not a new onset in Latin America's cinematic history. Since the silent film era in the 1930s, Mexico and Argentina's cinema have included works by women such as Emilia Saleny and María V. de Celestini in Argentina, Mimi Derba and Cándida Beltrán Rendón in Mexico (Trelles Plazaola 9-11). Luis Trelles Pazaola's investigation concluded that he could not identify women directors from Brazil during their silent film era though Elice Munerato and Maria Helena Darcy de Oliveira highlight the presence of Carmen Santos as an actress, producer and director in the silent a early talking film era (Trelles Plazaola 11, Munerato and Darcy de Oliverira 341).

changing social position of women,¹³ the growth of the programs offered by the national film schools, and the fall of the film unions, which had direct control over who was able to participate in filmmaking (250). Though Maciel and Hershfield speak in reference to Mexico, these situations are also seen in other Latin American cinemas. In some countries such as Brazil, governmental policy has established a tax break aimed at audiovisual productions (Butcher 17-18).

Luis Trelles Plazaola, while referring to the entire production of cinema by women in Latin America, also references the rising numbers of female directors and takes note of the subject matter of their films, which is of a feminist tendency: “se abren, además, estas directoras a temas decididamente feministas al centrar muchas de sus cintas en mujeres que desafían o retan las convenciones y las tradiciones en lo que respecta al papel que debe asumir la mujer en las sociedades latinoamericanas” (67). As further support of this statement, Hershfield and Maciel also mention the tendency for women directors to portray females that break with the traditional representation by stating that

these films [women’s films] contest the way in which the classical Mexican cinema has portrayed women either as virtuous and suffering mothers, seduced and abandoned young girls, or outright *malas mujeres* (bad women). Important and complex roles have finally been written for women, who are portrayed in a variety of settings and represent all age groups, social classes, and professions. Recent women characters are diverse, multidimensional, and reflective of the complexity of contemporary society. Women directors have appropriated and transformed traditional cinematic conventions in order to tell stories about and for women that pay attention to the changing nature of social relations in Mexico’s history and within current social conditions. (255)

¹³ They state: “Various scholars have postulated that one of the most profound societal changes in contemporary Mexico has been the evolving role of women and the rise of feminism. Because of the recurring economic crisis, women have had to enter the labor force in record numbers... Thus, by the 1980s women occupied certain positions and spaces which were traditionally held only by men” (250).

Although the term “Mexican” is being used here, the statement holds true if it were substituted with the word “Argentine” or “Brazilian” since the same situation occurs in those countries. Various studies concentrating on the filmic period from the 80s to 2008 analyze some of these representations of women where long held views of gender are being challenged, mostly by women directors. Such is the case of the works by David Foster: *Gender and Society in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema* and *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* (1999). Other critics that analyze film of this nature include Elisse Rashkin in *Women Filmmakers in Mexico* (2001), Oscar Robles in *Identidades Maternacionales: en el cine de María Novaro* (2005), and the already cited essay by Joanne Hershfield and David Maciel. Work in Argentina includes the investigations of Clara Fontana and her study of Maria Luisa Bemberg’s film as well as David Ouruna’s investigation of Lucrecia Martel’s *La ciénaga*.

Women’s works will not always produce feminist representations of women. When evaluating the work directed by females, it becomes clear that they have also participated in supporting the traditional binary views of women within film. Examples can be seen in the work of the pioneers, such as that by Matilde Landeta, Marcela Fernández Violente’s *Cananea* (1978) and Vlasta Lah’s *Las furias* (1960). Elice Munerato and Helena Darcy de Oliveira discuss that up to the 1970s women directors in Brazil portray females in a traditional feminine sphere. The problems of the women in these films would revolve around amorous relationships (345, 348). Furthermore, they state that while the female directors of the 70s brought the representation of women to the forefront, “the innovation is [generally] restricted to the proposal of new models of

amorous relationships while work life continues to be as circumstantial and superfluous” (349). One reason that these critics give for this situation is that there are simply no cinematic models that address any alternative views of women (350).

Trelles Plazaola considers that the rise of the feminist movement was solidified with the dissemination of theoretical works such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970), which in turn manifests itself in filmic representations (51). Despite this, even the new crop of female directors, such as Maryse Sistach with *Anoche soñé contigo* (1992), Dana Rotberg with *Intimidación* (1989) and Sandra Werneck with *Amores Possiveis* (2001), present non-feminist representations where the male point of view still predominates and women are still the objects of the male gaze; there is no attempt to resolve or expose the issue of sexual politics within the film. It is interesting, though, that as female directors develop in their capacity of *auteur*¹⁴ filmmakers, they are more inclined to portray stories centered on women with a general feminist undertone. Some of these directors even label their cinema “cine de autor,” as is the case of Mexican María Novaro who believes her body of work “reflects her individual dreams and reality while addressing gender consciousness” (Maciel and Hershfield 256).

Who’s a “Feminist”?

Though the purpose of this study is to bring about a discussion that involves feminist and urban theories, the question of “feminist/feminism” remains a sensitive term

¹⁴ I use the word *auteur* cinema here to signify cinema where the director’s vision has the most influence in terms of the cinematic portrayal, usually working with a self-written script where his/her personal ideology is that which predominates in the films.

that causes controversy in Latin America. Even when directors create a cinema that is gender conscious, many of them will refuse to identify themselves as “feminist directors.” This has been a constant in Latin America where, many times, the word “feminist” can convey a militant tone. As Argentine director Vanessa Ragoné argues: “es muy difícil decir en la Argentina ‘soy feminista’. No tengo una militancia política en este momento. La he tenido de más chica, pero acá hay muchas corrientes, y muy complicadas, y hay una gran indefinición sobre lo que es feminista” (Rangil 45). Putting aside this militant tone attributed to feminism, Ragoné considers herself a feminist when it comes to her conscious portrayal of women and women’s issues (45).

Others directors such as Argentina’s Paula Hernández do not use the term feminist, but rather “feminine” to describe their aesthetic (Rangil 45). This is the same sentiment of other directors including Susana Amaral, Eva Landeck and Busi Cortés (Trelles Plazaola 77, 208, 135). Though there is a resistance to self-labeling as feminist, these directors, for the most part, will agree that their experience as women has an impact on choosing to work with female protagonists and feminocentric storylines.

The fact that women tend to produce feminocentric and feminist representations does not mean that male directors do not produce films of this subject matter. There are feminist portrayals by male directors in the various countries we are analyzing in this study. Examples of these films include *Tan de repente* (2002) by Diego Lerman; *De noche vienen*, *Esmeralda* (1997) by Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, *Eu, Tú Eles* (2000) by Andrucha Waddington *Hoy y mañana* (2003) by Alejandro Chomski and *Domésticas* (2006) by Fernando Meirelles and Nando Olival. All of these films not only present

women in the forefront, but they also represent a non-traditional representation where she is able to break from the marginalized role established by society and have a voice to project her desires. All of these films challenge the traditional conception of women.

The View of the City

Having established the history of Latin American cinema and the representations of women within these spaces, it is also crucial to examine the work that has been done concerning the urban representations of Latin America. Various studies have analyzed the representation of the urban life –the Latin American city-- in the production of culture from literature to popular culture. The last three decades of the XXth century impacted the cultural production. Such is the case of the text *Buenos Aires: Perspectives on the City and Cultural Productions* (1998) by David William Foster. In this text, Foster explores the interaction between culture and the city space though he does not incorporate urban theory. He looks at tango, comic strips and theater to observe how these will be impacted by the construction of Buenos Aires and in turn construct Buenos Aires. Foster's study of the city and cultural production found in Buenos Aires sets a foundation that will incorporate the socio-historical and economic understanding of this regional area to explain how culture will arise from these elements.

Other studies, though not as extensive, establish a relationship between the urban representation and the meaning within film. Laura Podalsky, in "High-Rise Apartments, Arcades, Cars and *Hoteles de citas*: Urban Discourse and the Reconstruction of the

Public/Private Divide in 1960's Buenos Aires,"¹⁵ in two films. The representation of the city segregates its inhabitants based on the access to capital. This situation, will, in turn reflect the values and social organization of a Post-Peronist Argentina.

In another study, this time referencing the presence of Mexico City within the cultural representation, Foster's text *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* (2002) analyzes the depiction of the city in national cinema spanning from 1971-1999. This metropolis is explored from diverse angles, which according to the author demonstrate "how the city is created, enacted, and interpreted as part of a process of producing cultural meaning through semiotic text" (x). In Foster's analysis, the city becomes the setting and an unspoken character, which provides a different level of meaning to the visual narration. Harvey holds that "Human lives take place within geographic spaces, and the events of those lives characteristically have meaning in terms of the interaction with the space that encloses them" (xiii). The visual geography represented through the films analyzed by Foster illustrates how the characters function vis-à-vis the city.

The representation of Brazilian cities is also significant in the analysis of films such as *Central do Brasil* (1998) and *Cidade de Deus* (2002) and the various images that come about from Brazil's largest megapolis: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Pedro Butcher describes an interesting surge of films that have come about in the short span of this 21st century which have made space for the representation of Brazil's urban

¹⁵ Podalsky wrote *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires: 1955-1973* (2004), which discusses the representation of Buenos Aires as in cultural production, such as in the case of Argentine writers: Julio Cortazar, Jorge Luis Borges and Ernesto Sábato, amongst others.

environment from a less-than-desirable perspective, which includes highlighting urban violence and social misery. Interestingly, these films, as Butcher demonstrates, encouraged a growth, a *retomada*, of cinema in Brazil. He states: “A preocupação de se reconquistar o espaço perdido pelo cinema brasileiro, tanto em termos de Mercado como de aceitação social, fez com que muitos profissionais do cinema rejeitassem qualquer filme próximo a realidade do público, por medo de rejeição. A questão, sempre que abordada, aparecia como algo periférico e não central.” *Cidade de Deus*, *O Invasor*, *Madame Satã* and *Ônibus 174*, all of which appeared in 2002, present images of the Brazilian city that are far from its idyllic postcard representations of Marcel Camus’ *Orfeu Negro* (1959). The urban space is associated with violence, as Butcher makes clear, and is an image that is surprisingly well-received by Brazilian audiences.

Despite the work done on identifying the semiotic representations of the city, little attention has been placed on the relationship between gender and the representation of the city, although this has not gone completely unnoticed. Foster’s analysis of the representation of Mexico City in film does consider the question of gender though, as he specifies, there is not just one dimension with regards to gender. The films analyzed in my study reveal how different access to capital will have an effect on how the women are able to interact with their surroundings, at times achieving sexual agency.

Understanding the urban organization will in turn help decipher how people situate themselves within these Latin American urban regions and how it ultimately affects them at the subconscious level.

Cultural Artifacts

This study analyzes the following films: *Perfume de violetas* (2000) directed by Maryse Sistach, *Ángel de fuego* (1991) directed by Dana Rotberg, *Un día de suerte* (2002) directed by Sandra Gugliotta, *Hoy y mañana* (2003) by Alejandro Chomski, *Uma Vida em Segredo* (2001) by Suzana Amaral and *Antônia* (2006) by Tata Amaral.

Various factors have contributed to the selection of these films. All films are narrated from the female point of view and women are the central characters. This characteristic is commonly found in films directed by women as Claire Johnson's essay on female counter-cinema states. The other criteria for the films' selection limited feminocentric works done by men, such as *Tan de repente* (2002) by Diego Lerman; *De noche vienes*, *Esmeralda* (1997) by Jaime Humberto Hermosillo and *Domésticas* (2006) by Fernando Meirelles and Nando Olival were not considered. The only male-directed film analyzed in this study is Alejandro Chomski's *Hoy y mañana*.

The women represented in the films are females who range in age from adolescents to young adults (approximately between 13 and 23 years of age). The goal with choosing this demographic is to observe women in the process of forming and negotiating gender. Though it is understood that gender is a process that is continuously developed, this age represents the acute stage of gender construction. These films showcase females who are in a position where they look to their surroundings for validation and they imitate what they see in their own construction of gender. Representing women of a more mature demographic would demonstrate women reacting

and renegotiating their gender, something that would not show us how this factor is being created and how the surroundings will impact this formation.

The countries from which the films were chosen are: Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. Cuba, though it is also one of the biggest contributors to Latin American filmic production, is not included due to its current stance as a so-called non-capitalist society. Therefore, since this study aims to see the impact of gender through the capitalist process, Cuba is excluded.

As a final parameter for establishing the corpus of cinematic artifacts, I selected films produced between 1990 and 2007. There has been a revitalization of cinematic production throughout Latin America from the 1990s as evident in the previously mentioned study by Octavio Getino. In Mexico, this has been termed *Nuevo Cine*,¹⁶ in Argentina it has been termed the second phase of the *Nueva ola*. In Brazil, this growth has been partly the result of the Globo Filmes industry, which is using government subsidies and their television personalities to produce films that are receiving high audience reception and distribution in Brazil and abroad (Rêgo 223).¹⁷ In general, these twenty years have shown a growth in the production, distribution and attention to Latin American cinema. While this has meant a shift to higher cost production, quality of films

¹⁶ Emily Hinds makes the argument of the problematic behind the use of the term "Nuevo Cine Mexicano" since she holds that this has been a title that has been used in different moments and can span a 30 year range (1). Instead, she opts for the term "Post-NAFTA Mexican Cinema" which would encompass films from 1998-2002, though this would leave out Mexican cinematic production which have been well received abroad such as *Cilantro y perejil* (1996), and *Sólo con tu pareja* (1991). That said, I will use the term *Nuevo Cine Mexicano*

¹⁷ Pedro Butcher uses the term "Cinema da retomada" to make reference to Brazilian films from the mid 1990s. Particularly, he establishes the onset of this new cinema with *Carlota Joaquina- Princesa do Brasil* (1995) by Carla Camurati whose semi-chanchada style is attributed with gaining surprisingly large audiences in Brazil.

has dramatically improved and they have garnered a better reception both nationally and internationally (King 261-74, Shaw 182-84). Aside of the growth of production, the turn of the 21st century is also marked by shifts in socioeconomic patterns in Latin America, which impacts the organization of the urban centers and, therefore, the urbanization of consciousness. Amanda Holmes identifies these decades as “defined by authoritarianism, economic changes, its cultural significance becoming increasing important at the end of the century. The city is largely at hand in the definition of power struggles, and national subject identities, while it also forms the inspiration for cultural development” (14). Though she limits her analysis to Spanish America, the same situation can be applied to Brazil as will be evident in this study.

Methodology

To study the films and determine the impact that capital has on the construction of gender, each film is analyzed with six points in mind. The interpretation of meaning is derived from the study of the filmic techniques including mise-en-scene, shot, editing and sound. While the first of the following points assesses the social backdrop of the film, points two through six focus on the five loci of the “urbanization of consciousness” represented visually vis-à-vis the characters’ relationships. Having determined how these different loci function to build a complex sense of consciousness in the females, the sixth point analyzes the visual geography --as I have termed the geographical study of the use of space within film-- of women represented in the film.

- 1.) **Determination of the film's socioeconomic backdrop.** The most important point is to determine the interception of capital and gender resides by understanding the unique economic context that each film is set in. This comprehension will in turn help decipher how capital is being exchanged within a given city. The study of the political and economic climate of a given time and space must be understood to reach any conclusion regarding the process of urbanization. This is achieved through the visual cues present in the film that help determine both geographical location and time period to determine the social implications that the film's setting will have on the interpretation of the narrative.
- 2.) **Analysis of the family domain.** Of central importance is determining how the female interacts in a closed family economy, and how this affects her and/or her family's perception of gender. This institution, it is understood, functions as a technology that will have an effect upon the construction of gender. Thus, the narrative and the shots of the family reveal the dynamics.
- 3.) **Study of the interaction with the city.** The aim is to observe the character's interaction with the city and determine the institutional (state) technologies with which the female interacts. This includes any state institution that will have a bearing on how gender is being manipulated (eg. school, government, spaces under control of the state). Moreover, the visual depiction of these institutions is telling of the power these have over individuals.
- 4.) **Breakdown of social class.** Determining the social class and analyzing women within their specific backdrop, as well as considering the social/ individual

expectations of this group, will be significant in understanding the social values presented to the females. The notion of class, it is understood, will interact with elements found in different levels, such as the construction of the family and the individualized access to capital.

- 5.) **Analysis of community.** Though Harvey perceived gender to form a part of community, the consideration of gender as community will not be used in this study since gender rarely presents itself as a communal element in these films. In terms of community, attention will be focused on other communal elements such as religious groups, music bands, night life groups, and other groups that the females choose to partake in and that will have an effect both on capital and their gender.
- 6.) **Description of the visual geography of the women.** In order to emphasize how the cinematic medium constructs a social representation of gender, special attention will be focused on seeing where the women are visually placed within the film, in other words, her physical space in the context of the movie and cinematic placement created by the use of mise-en scène and shots that cue a specific interpretation of the female constructions in the urban setting. These elements will further reveal how these films construct the female and how this becomes intelligible to the audience that receives these constructions.

Outline and Chapters

The chapters are arranged by each film's country of origin. This organization allows for a general socioeconomic history to be presented on each of these countries to

then determine how the gender process develops within each film. Mexico, historically the largest producer of films in Latin America, is presented first, followed by Argentina and then Brazil. The fifth chapter serves as a conclusion to the study.

Mexico comes under scrutiny in chapter two in the analysis of *Perfume de violetas* and *Ángel de fuego*. In the first film, various social institutions including the family and the school environment shape Yessica's the construction of gender. Social class is visually portrayed in this film through cinematic technique. Furthermore, the lack of access to economy makes women more vulnerable to function as commodities. *Perfume de violetas* portrays a trite urban survival-of-the-fittest story where endurance in the harsh city makes for devastation and death.

Dana Rotberg's *Ángel de fuego* portrays a different institution – religion. Young Alma embarks on a metaphorical biblical journey seeking redemption only to find that that the place that promises salvation also destroys what she most desires. Wandering through a squalid environment, even the marginalized have no place in the periphery. Alma's concept of gender is constantly challenged until she is unable to survive within the given social parameters.

Chapter 3 discusses the interaction of economy and gender in the urban streets of Buenos Aires. Sandra Guliotta's *Un día de suerte* portrays the day-to-day life of Elsa who wanders around the capital city looking for work and finding only dead-end jobs. Her gender will be a major factor in the access to employment and capital and will in turn shape who she is and what she believes. Her environment does not adapt to her beliefs and she must therefore leave.

Hoy y mañana follows Paula for 48 hours as she figures out how she will obtain money to pay for her rent and utilities. To achieve this, she seeks out her friends and family and when they are unable to help her, she tries prostitution. To be successful at this new endeavor, she adjusts her image and personality and becomes a sexualized female to obtain cash. The Palermo district within the city of Buenos Aires will take center stage as Paula demonstrates that everything within this area is gentrified and for consumption.

Chapter 4 discusses the construction of gender seen in two films, *Uma Vida em Segredo* and *Antônia*. The first will be the only film which does not refer to a 21st century construction of gender, but rather the 19th century Brazil where urbanization is coming about and Biela must make the transition from her rural environment to the city where capital will interfere with expected gender codes and the bourgeoisie lifestyle established by her city-dwelling relatives. Unable to live up to the standards required of a young woman of her social class, Biela finds liberty in identifying with a lower social class.

Antônia depicts the life of four young women in the outskirts of São Paulo in 21st century Brazil. The women create a rap group and their success will help them leave their economic situation. In this way, the girls must at times compromise their art and succumb to the expectations of their public while peripherally dealing with issues of sexism and violence that form a part of their day-to-day life. Who they are, what they do, and what they are able to dream depends on the area of the city where they are.

The overall goal of this project is to analyze a level of gender formation that is seldom explored in film studies—the effects of capitalism on the individual, and particularly on women. Though I am concentrating on cinema, this study can be used in different disciplines and with diverse mediums. It is my hope that this investigation will add to the literature concerning the complexity of the process of gender in the representation of the Latin American cultures.

CHAPTER 2: DEFINED BY THEIR PESO: PRESENCE OF ECONOMY ON/IN THE REPRESENTATION OF MEXICAN CINEMA AND MEXICAN WOMEN

Summary of Mexican Cinema and Society

Street Kids and Cabaret: The Mexican Miracle in Urban Representations of Mexico

When thinking about the representation of Mexican women in cinema, a trio of actresses comes to mind: María Félix (1914-2002), Dolores del Río (1904-1983) and Sara García (1895-1980). In essence, these women and the roles that they constructed throughout the Mexican Golden Age of Cinema embody expectations of what a Mexican woman should be.¹⁸ The Mexican Golden Age of Cinema expresses the post-revolutionary idealism that was also reaffirmed in different cultural mediums. Therefore, it is no surprise that the roles of women in Mexico were also culturally reemphasized at that moment.¹⁹

Historians Colin MacLachlan and William Beezley state that “[t]he revolution in many ways provided new opportunities to females but it also empowered the macho characteristics of violence, strength and manliness that limited women’s public activities” (311). They further state that “Mexican women could not live through powerful men, but had not yet identified an independent life and career beyond the traditional expectations

¹⁸ Julia Tuñón makes reference to these archetypes which are manifested through stereotypes: “Tenemos a la devoradora..., la madre pura, la novia, la rumbera, la prostituta, la esposa desvalida. Se trata de *situaciones* que atraviesa la mujer, de formas estereotipadas de representar una imagen arquetípica frente a la realidad múltiple que encierran las personas” (78).

¹⁹ Joanne Hershfield discusses that decades spanning from the 20s to the 40s which was focused on the construction of a cultural nationalism. In Mexico, then, this was seen through the cinematic representation of the “imagined community” (borrowing from Benedict Anderson) of class race, gender relations (39).

of mother and wife. The new careers, such as teachers, had opened only limited spaces for women. Their emancipation from the home was yet to come ...” (ibid). Antonieta Rivas Mercado’s²⁰ social persona in Mexican society is an example of the image of women used for revolutionary discourse. In essence, while the Revolution promised progress and equality for Mexicans, traditional gender roles were reinforced. The popular culture manifestations of this time portrayed these sentiments.

The obvious question becomes: who were these symbolic images of Mexican women and what did their cinematic representations mean to a mid-century Mexican audience? María Felix, the face of Mexican cinema *par excellence* was best known for her representation of the sexualized woman, *la devoradora de hombres*. In cinematic representation, this type of woman leads to the destruction of the male protagonist. Felix’s best known film is *Doña Bárbara* (1943), a perfect example of the femme fatale image for which she was known; despite her strong characterization, most of her films constitute male-centered narratives (López “Tears and Desire” 450). Though Felix also represented a few more “benign” roles, such as in the case of Rosaura in *Río Escondido* (1948), the national figure most associated with this softer image of womanhood is Dolores del Río, known for her on-screen demure. Del Río’s representation in *María Candelaria* (1944) and *Flor silvestre* (1943) featured her as an innocent and humble

²⁰ Antonieta Rivas Mercado (1900-1931) was a supporter of José Vasconcelo’s 1929 presidential campaign where she elevated him as far as to call him a “messiah” figure. She was known for her promotion of vanguard art and as a cultural promoter. She was married, separated and openly took on lovers, including artists and finally José Vasconcelos. Despite the “independence” she boasted for a woman in her time, her suicide in the Notre Dame cathedral of Paris with Vasconcelos’ pistol demonstrates she is dependant on the acceptance of the male figure (MacLachlan and Beezley 311).

young woman who lived up to the standards of being a virginal incarnation of a perfect woman.

Another symbolic figure was Sara García. She was the epitome of the angelic maternal figure, sometimes tough, yet always suffering for the sake of her children. Julia Tuñón says of García's maternal representations: "Sabemos, porque la imagen de celuloide nos lo ha repetido hasta la saciedad, que la madre mexicana es un ser sufriente, que padece tormentos y dolores y que con frecuencia muere, eso sí, siempre reconocida por su bondad" (174). In essence, the figure of the mother represented in Mexican cinema is held to a divine level: "La incondicionalidad de la madre es un lugar común que el propio vínculo lo define: la 'santa' es la madre propia y ante las otras se mantiene un distante respeto" (183). Joanne Hershfield further theorizes that "in the case of Mexican cinema [the] binary symbols of woman are tied to specific mythohistorical figures: the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint, who represents the ambiguous figure of the maternal virgin, and La Malinche, the so-called traitor of Mexico" (14). These images reinforce the binary gender structures present in the literary heritage of Latin America. This cultural construction of gender was transferred to the big screen once the celluloid image appeared.

Though all of these representations give a stereotyped view of women within the Mexican society of that time, the *cabaretera* films of the 1940s provide a glimpse of the space-specific representation of gender. Hershfield states:

The films about *cine de arrabal* and the *cabaretera* were set in the poor urban barrios of Mexico City, which were expanding as a result of the migration of campesinos into the cities in search of work.... Stories for these urban melodramas, often adapted from newspaper articles and

popular fiction, focused on the lives of struggling workers and their families. (77-78)

Thus, Hershfield states, these films are a response to the failure of Mexico's plan of modernity and growth of urbanization (80), a sentiment shared with Francisco Sánchez in his study *Crónica antisolemne del cine mexicano*. The specific development of Mexico and the urban sphere became a center of attention for filmmakers within the time period from 1947 to the early 1950s. Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro addresses this situation and explains that

in order to confront its obvious crisis, Mexican cinema found a formula: the production of low-budget films that began to take place in an urban setting, preferably in working-class neighborhoods. During the early part of this period, these films sought to satisfy the public demand of the growing population of the cities (particularly the capital), whose increasing demographics were an immediate effect of the accelerated process of industrialization. (166)

Mexico's modernization project impacted cultural production. The growing urban environment was ever present in films of that time as they served to present these issues to the national audience.

The presence of Mexico City in films has been important to the national production because "film becomes available for examination in terms of how it serves to create unique or particular meanings through its visualized portrayal of the interaction between individuals and their urban space" (Foster *Mexico City* xiii). Individuals – women, as the focus of this study-- were marked by the spaces they inhabited. The expectation of this economic dynamic was that women would move in specific domestic areas. Those who would inhabit the public social spaces, specifically male-oriented

spaces without proper male accompaniment, such as bars, were not considered to uphold desirable middle class gender roles. Thus, the *cabaretera* films were the representation of those women whose socioeconomic condition led them into this urban space. The set moral codes for the behavior of women of this time and the added factor of industrialization, then, help to reinforce the perceived representation of women along the virgin/whore dichotomy. As a response, there was a growth of *cabaretera* representations, which represent the conflict of “the clash between old (feudal, Porfirian) values and modernity (industrialized, urban) life” (López “Tears and Desire” 448).

Mexican cinema representations in the 1950s were a result of the socioeconomic condition of the country that was experiencing the Mexican Miracle marked by economic growth. Essentially, Mexico was developing a dual society “one modern and technological and the other marginal, labor-intensive and archaic” (MacLachlan and Beezley 381). Statistically, the country was showing economic progress; however, the rising urban squatter settlements revealed the undesired side of the “miracle.” This was the social situation of Mexico up until the 1960s. The less developed side of its society was presented in cinematic representations and this destroyed the government’s political façade of modernity; filmmakers presented productions that highlighted lower class living under impecunious conditions in the growing urban spaces. Citizens were many times exposed to and engaged in prostitution and crime. This is the common storyline presented in the *cabaratera* films. While this genre may show urban realities, it also further stressed bourgeoisie moral codes. The manner in which the characters in those films negotiate morality takes precedence over the crime and action in the narrative.

Perhaps the most direct criticism of the social structure of the time is evident in Spanish-born Luis Buñuel's (1900-1983) *Los olvidados* (1950). The film's opening sequence establishes the concept of Mexico as a dual economy by showing the similarity between Mexico City and New York, London and Paris as centers of modernity, visually represented with the presence of skyscrapers, but then shifts its focus to the economically disadvantaged Mexican barrio of Tepito.²¹ The storyline depicts the survival of a group of boys whose social conditioning is determined by their socioeconomic conditions.

Buñuel presents a deterministic view in *Los olvidados*, which tells the story of lower-class children that are ignored by the urban society. The plot contradicts the nation's discourse of social progress. The impact of the lack of access to capital is seen in the representation of family through a non-traditional mother figure that expels her son from the home because he is not financially productive. This will be the same theme reexplored 50 years later by Maryse Sistach's *Perfume de violetas, Nadie te oye* (2001), which will be analyzed in this dissertation. Buñuel's film is as the example of the first time that Mexican cinema depicts the result of the limited access to capital and its relationship to the urbanization of consciousness. *Los olvidados* also presents brief instances in which the focus is centered on its female characters, which leaves little to analyze in an interaction between gender and capital.

²¹ Though the film was not subjected to censorship based on the negative portrayal of Mexico City, Buñuel used this opening sequence to make sure the film would "pass" the censors. His hope was that this introduction would help to demonstrate that the conditions of Mexico were not due to the failure of the Mexican government of the time, but rather to the consequences of life of any growing city (Hernández Rodríguez 102).

The two films during this period that grant the central space to women are Matilde Landeta's *Lola Casanova* and *Trotacalles* (1951). Specifically, the latter provides an urban setting for a representation of prostitution in the urban setting. Such representations, however, are uncommon in this time period.

The Mexican Miracle experienced its peak during the presidency of Adolfo López Mateos from 1958 to 1964. During this time, Mexico received international recognition as a state with strong advances of modernity. This is evident in the selection of the country to host the 1968 summer Olympics. At the same time, though, the government was dealing with constant labor strikes that revealed the true state of Mexico's social condition (Mac Lachlan and Beezley 394-99). Though the economy was superficially thriving, "[t]he social and political situation generated from the gains of 'stabilizing development' was, in general terms, a favorable context in which Mexican cinema could increase its volume in production, though at the expense of a marked decline in quality" (de la Vega Alfaro 176).²² In 1968 the country's optimism shifted and the new filmmakers took note of the change of attitude.

Moving Past the Events of 1968: *Auteur cinema*

The *Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos* (CUEC) opened in 1963 and was the first formal filmmaking school in Mexico. The *Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica* (CCC) followed in 1975. Several notable filmmakers made their debut at the time: Felipe Cazals, Jorge Fons, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Paul Leduc and

²² The trend of Mexican Cinema at this time was the production of wrestler-character movies and light comedies.

Arturo Ripstein.²³ These men redirected the focus of Mexican cinema and “proved that there was cinematic talent and imagination outside the traditional commercial industry” (García Tsao 209). Some notable examples of the innovation in themes they treated included non-traditional representations of gender. Examples of this can be seen in the work of Arturo Ripstein and Jaime Humberto Hermosillo.

Ripstein’s *El lugar sin límites* (1977)²⁴ introduced a homosexual transvestite father character and explored the interaction of homosexuality and Mexican machismo. Before this time, transvestites were never at the center of a film. While *El lugar sin límites* depicts the violent domination of machismo over homosexuality and the complex underlying discourse of homosexual desire, the film that brought homosexuality to center stage was Hermosillo’s *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* (1984) in what was “the first openly gay film in the history of the Mexican cinema” (García Tsao 222). Furthermore, *Doña Herlinda* uses Guadalajara, a traditionally conservative city, as a backdrop.

Hermosillo’s films have focused on the exploration of sexuality in films such as *La tarea* (1990). In this film, sex is explicitly preformed and there is an added element of voyeurism since the plot consists of a couple acting out an explicit sexual encounter in front of a home video camera. Other films by Hermosillo that challenge the status quo of society include *La pasión según Berenice* (1976), which delves into the liberation of female sexuality though the representation of the female is not positively represented

²³ Leonardo García Tsao does not include Jorge Fons in this crop of directors due to the fact that Fons was inactive as a director for over a decade and García Tsao’s intent is to analyze a group of directors who have remained active for over thirty years.

²⁴ This film is based on Chilean José Donoso’s novel of the same name.

because Berenice, the title character, is seen as a black widow.²⁵ Even more critical of the female role is Hermsillo's *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* (1997) set in Mexico City and based on a short story by Elena Poniatowska. This film once again challenges the gender expectations of a polygamous woman who openly weds different men, each of who complemented her desires. This break from traditional gender representations served as the foundation for the themes that would emerge in the late 80s and 90s in Mexican cinema.

With the opening of the film schools, the number of women directors rose in the late 1970s as have the quantity of feminocentric fiction films. The first of these directors was Busi Cortés who studied at the CCC. Women like Cortés have provided interesting studies of gender captured through the lens and narrated through celluloid.²⁶ In terms of more diverse representations of women in cinema, one of the most significant collaborations in Mexico is the *Colectivo Cine-Mujer* which first appeared in 1978 at the inception of Mexico's first feminist journal, *Fem*. "The women's collective had substantial impacts. For the first time, women's problems were presented realistically, and female pleasure was made visible" (Iglesias 235). Margara Millan describes the ideology of the project in the following manner:

El Colectivo se planteó como fundamental la denuncia de la opresión femenina en la sociedad capitalista; abordó los temas hasta entonces prohibidos u oscurecidos por una opinión pública sometida a una

²⁵ Though María Félix used her sexuality, her characters usually succumb to the male order. In Hermsillo's film, *La pasión...*, the protagonist has full control over her sexuality and her own liberation by causing a total destruction of her surrounding through the arson of home in which she lives.

²⁶ As has already been mentioned, there have been feminocentric representations of women which break the images established in the Golden Age, though what I am emphasizing is that from the 80s onward, there is a body of work, a collaboration between women directors, who are achieving this purpose.

moralidad mojigata; fue contra la culpabilización del placer femenino, de la expropiación del cuerpo de la mujer por ley y por la Iglesia y de la actitud común que afirma que toda mujer violada es culpable o por lo menos sospechosa. (115)

The interesting aspect of this group is the rejection of the capitalist system which, they hold, has an effect on the condition of women, therefore supporting the notion that the structure of a capitalist society will have hegemonic forces which are impacting the individual and group consciousness of the inhabitants. Though the *Colectivo* was a product of the international “boom” of feminist cinema, the group was short-lived and disintegrated in the 80s (119).

Despite the *Colectivo* disbanding, some of “their achievements are clearly visible: a questioning of gender roles; of movies as an entertainment industry; of [the] meaning of ‘the popular’; and of the formulation of new strategies for distribution and accessibility of films in schools, lower-class *colonias*, and factories” (Iglesias 236). No longer working from a generalized ideology, the female directors in Mexico concentrated on the personal experience of women and presented a more intimate analysis of female characters. “Se trata de mujeres que se interrogan a sí mismas. Y a través de ello adquieren tanto la historia como la imagen fuerza y realidad” (Millán 123). However, more specifically related to this study, some of the women directors have not completely abandoned, as I will show, some of the original foundations that they believe have had an effect on the current construction of women; which is to say the capitalist process.

From Salinas to Today

Current cinematic trends in Mexico consist of co-productions and independent projects such as *Amores perros* (Dir. Alejandro González-Iñárritu 2000), *Y tu mamá*

también (Dir. Alfonso Cuarón 2001), and *El crimen del padre Amaro* (Dir. Carlos Carrera 2002) have reached national and international popularity. This list continuously grows. Still, these films reflect the complex social development, politics and economy of the last 20 years. To understand the backdrop of the two Mexican films analyzed in this dissertation, I will now present a summary of the historical sociopolitical and socioeconomic events that have shaped current-day Mexico.

Two blows to the State's economy have marked the backdrop for the current socioeconomic conditions in Mexico. Under the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1989 1994), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed by Mexico, Canada and the United States in August 1992 (though the initiation was already present in the previous de la Madrid presidency). The contract allowed for US and Canadian companies to set up their production plants in Mexico to benefit from the lower wages paid to workers. The treaty also allowed for a free trade between the countries, including the import of goods needed by Mexico and the exportation of Mexican products to its northern neighbors. Though the plan has worked accordingly, it has also had a negative impact on Mexican citizens who are working for minimum wage²⁷ -- hardly a sustainable salary in Mexico.²⁸

²⁷ At the moment of this study, the current minimum wage in Mexico is approximately MX\$53 per day, which is roughly equivalent to US\$5 per day (Comisión Nacional de Salarios Mínimos).

²⁸ Due to the dynamics of low paying salaries, many of the workers who are employed by these maquiladoras are younger women, therefore creating gendered labor dynamics. The majority of these factories are concentrated on the border states, though many are found throughout Mexico, including central and southern regions such as Puebla, Guanajuato and Yucatán. Due to the dense urbanization, maquilas are not allowed in the following three places: Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey, though these can be located in surrounding communities.

At first glance, NAFTA does not appear to impact the urban centers of Mexico, yet the big cities have been affected indirectly in different ways. Such is the situation of the economic crisis of 1994-95 where the Mexican peso had an overnight devaluation from an exchange rate of MX\$3 = US\$1 to MX\$10=\$US1. Added to this is the 1.2 million unemployment mark that the government could not satisfy despite the economic growth (González Gómez 42).²⁹ When the US agricultural industry competed with Mexican agriculture prices, Mexican farmers, a large part of the rural community, suffered unable to compete with their northern neighbors' prices. Due to this, many rural workers sought out the big cities for working opportunities (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 102-03). This created a crisis in Mexico as access to goods became more difficult. Mexico found itself unable to import goods and the people were unable to purchase those goods even when they were imported. In general, while Salinas de Gortari had boasted of economic growth, he left behind economic devastation for the country, which has had a continued effect until the present day.

Since the 1994-95 economic disaster, presidents Ernesto Zedillo and Vicente Fox were faced with high external debt and faltering prices of Mexican goods. This has had an impact on the social life of Mexicans: "Life deteriorated for the great majority of Mexicans. A crime wave, with an estimated increase of 20 percent of violent crime in Mexico City, swept the nation. Crime became the preoccupation of the general public who saw it as an indication that order and authority had broken down" (MacLachlan and

²⁹ Please see González Gomez's study for a more in depth study of the economic inheritance in the Ernesto Zedillo presidency (1995-2000).

Beezley 476). Added to this is a public health crisis provoked by a spread of disease, widespread malnutrition and escalating drug trafficking, which became another economic subsystem.

Mexico City is currently one of the largest cities in the world, continually expanding due to the ever-growing population. Though it is the center of economic and political power for the entire country, this city has also become a place rigged with violence, and poverty more than ever before. While discussing Latin American urban areas, Yves Pedrazzini and Magaly Sánchez have said that the urban space is “un deterioro en las condiciones de la vida de la mayoría de los sectores trabajadores, como consecuencia de una crisis urbana” (26). With an ever-shrinking middle class, Mexico City, like similar cities throughout the world, offers a binomial of extremes where the majorities are the “have-nots” who work to attain the basic necessities. This state of poverty lends itself to the corruption of individuals who rely on any means necessary to obtain material goods. This, then, is the current backdrop which still marks Mexico in 2008 that must be kept in mind in order to understand how capital will interact with the construction of gender as represented in contemporary filmmaking.

Locating Gender Construction: Women, Violence and Survival in

Perfume de violetas, Nadie te oye

Maryse Sistach’s film *Perfume de violetas (Nadie te oye)* presents a reality lived by people, specifically Mexican women, in the urban area. The film highlights 21st-century lower-class girls while at the same time demonstrating how the urban space, in this case Mexico City, creates locations that set up its inhabitants for violence. Critics like

Diego de Pozo have pointed out specifically how the street children have been represented in Latin American films³⁰ and how they represent a culture of urgency (as theorized by Pedrazzini and Sánchez). *Perfume de violetas* shows how the city and its economy interact, which in turn has an effect on individuals as manifested in family and social interaction and expectancies and including the constructions of gender. All of these elements are intensified in the broad lower class. Sistach's film becomes a representation of how the urban setting, with its limited access and drive to attain capital, provokes sexual violence against females and transforms these citizens into agents of violence to secure survival.

Through the use of cinematic technique, Sistach constantly stresses its protagonist's position in chaotic surroundings and alludes to the girls' inability to break free from and survive the destructive conditions of the urban environment. With the use of 16mm film, the director blends narrative and image to capture a documentary-like realism in a gritty portrayal of the girls' life in Mexico City.

The idea for *Perfume de violetas* came from a reading of a *nota roja* (police report) in 1985 about a young girl who murdered her friend after an argument over perfume. Sistach decided to develop the story into a film when she began noticing the injustices being committed against adolescent females (Ciuk np). The film narrates the story of Yessica (Ximena Ayala) and Miriam (Nancy Gutiérrez), two fifteen-year-olds who become friends after Yessica transfers into the same school. Yessica begins having

³⁰ Del Pozo analyzes the following films: *Pixote: A lei do mais fraco* (1981), *Juliana* (1988) and *La vendedora de rosas* (1998).

problems at her new school as her teachers and other students harass her. In addition, she is constantly trying to flee from the sexual assaults and rape facilitated by her own stepbrother, Jorge (Fernando Peña), and carried out by an inner city bus driver, Topi (Gabino Rodríguez). The rupture of their friendship ultimately leads to the two girls fighting and escalates to the accidental murder of Miriam by Yessica. This film explores the conflicts that women experience when forced to follow a culturally-determined structure of gender. Their physical surroundings serves to shape, modify and punish females, young women in this case, who do not abide by the social constructs for women in their society.

In the urban area, gender codes are altered by an economy in which the value of the female is affected by her capacity as a producer of capital. This can lead to the exploitation of her sexuality in order to attain capital as evident in *Perfume de violetas*. Given this scenario, the dominant discourse of this society permits the abuse of women's sexuality, and social factors contribute to the acceptance of these violations. This permissibility is created and reinforced in social institutions and exemplifies a process of the urbanization of consciousness.

The film centers around three main geographical spaces where the two girls interact within the urban space of Mexico City. These locations demonstrate different levels from public to private space: the streets, their school, and their homes. The most public area is the city streets and the marketplace where both girls and the general public navigate. Foster explains that films can represent how "individuals relate to the specific social and physical dimensions of their urban space and how their urban lives are shaped

by the material and emotional conditions of their lives in the city” (45). For the two teenagers of *Perfume de violetas*, the public locations prove to be the most violent. While all three spaces share a degree of violence, the street space is where the greatest violations occur.

It is important to understand the context of Mexico City in the year 2000. Political agreements affect economic factors which in turn shape the urban landscape of one of the world’s largest cities. As previously mentioned, the NAFTA agreement went into effect on January 1st 1994. Since then, Mexico has seen quick growth of several regions as laborers migrate to the city in search of work in *maquiladoras*. While not everyone works in *maquiladoras*, there has been a general growth of these cities as *maquiladoras* also cause the expansion of the service sector and related industries. Mexico City, itself, has grown to 25 million inhabitants, many who form a part of the lower class. This rise of population has increased the growing gap in the access to money. Discussing the urban changes experienced from 1980-2000 in Mexico, Marina Ariza notes that “El bosquejo de la situación salarial de los distintos grupos de trabajadores deja a los empleados en el servicio doméstico y en los micro negocios como los que se encuentran en una situación más desventajosa; mientras los asalariados, los empleados en establecimientos de seis o más personas, y los gerentes, estarían mejor retribuidos” (Ariza 19).

Other factors that add pressure to the growing disparities in the economy include the economic collapse of December 1994 (also known as the *error de diciembre* and the Tequila Effect) where the economy collapsed as the peso suffered a devaluation of 44% and a general inflation of 52% (Ariza 18). The already struggling urban lower class

experienced more vulnerable as they try to survive in the city. Unemployment quickly rose drastically during this period as investors decided to close industries. Because of these conditions, “El sector informal empezó a absorber una parte importante de la fuerza de trabajo urbano” (20).

The girls navigate *delegación*³¹ Coyoacán in the proletariat community of *colonia*³² Santo Domingo, which has construction-ridden streets and humble, deteriorating housing, revealing an image far from idealized. This space points to a lower class surrounding where some of the poorest reside. This specific area of Mexico City, in fact, is the ground of the largest land invasion in Latin America. In 1971, lower class individuals from the city and around the country took these lands and began building their homes here, as seen in the film. “Es un error pensar que Santo Domingo está terminado; se construye a sí mismo cada día” as evident in the shots seen in the film by Sistach (Díaz Encino 15). *El pedregal de Santo Domingo*, as it is formally known, was built atop volcanic rock and “useless lands” therefore already situating homes in a non-productive site. From its colonization, this space points to a lower-class surrounding where some of the poorest classes reside. Ariza states that “el hecho de vivir en una delegación con alto desempleo eleva la probabilidad de ser objeto de agresión” (Ariza 31). In this public space, Yessica is subject to rape and Miriam is held up by the marketplace mob after Yessica steals a bottle of perfume and leaves her to take the blame

³¹ The governmental structure of Mexico City is broken up into zones named *delegaciones* which function as autonomous governing zones.

³² *Colonias* are neighborhoods within a city and are abundant. Due to the sheer size of a city, people tend to identify more with their *colonia* than with the city. The characteristics of each of these neighborhoods are derived from their economy and the social stance of the population.

for the theft. The camera mimics this violence with its unsteadiness and the oversaturated frames filled with activity where the viewer feels overwhelmed. The composition of this shot elicits the feeling that this is the most dangerous space for the girls.

Santo Domingo in the posh neighborhood of Coyoacán presents a microcosm of Mexico City. This borough is traditionally regarded as an upper class neighborhood and a touristic area visited daily by tourists who visit Frida Kahlo's blue house. The central square of Coyoacán is a gathering space for middle and upper class youth who dine alfresco. Still, Santo Domingo is also a part of this community, forming a part of the laboring sector who does not have access to commodities.

Yessica finds that she must proceed with caution in this public space composed of streets and the marketplace since she is the most vulnerable there, as others, like her brother, try to make money off of the girl. Her family's impoverished condition provokes her stepbrother, Jorge, to establish a predatory ritual against Yessica and, when captured, he panders Yessica to Topi who then sexually abuses her inside an empty city bus. At the end of each encounter she has with Topi in a remote area within the city, the bus driver pays Jorge who buys commodities such as shoes with the money. The entire situation demonstrates a ritual which, though Yessica does not accept, she is subject to. In the metropolis, the female is objectified and reduced to the value of her sexuality. Jorge sits by a fire in the middle of an abandoned land site, completely detached from the violence that occurs next to him, while he waits as Topi rapes his step-sister. Here the city reveals a different side of itself, a contradictory desolate space which the residents might need to fear more than the densely populated city markets and streets. The space reflects the

mercilessness of a public space in which women are abused and sexually exploited in exchange for money. Yessica is reduced to a sexual item for both Topi who periodically possesses her and Jorge who is there for profit.

The cinematic shot captures the violence against the feminine in a close-up of Yessica's school supplies in a knapsack scattered on the floor of the bus after Yessica is raped. There is a vivid sea of red glitter and crushed make-up on the floor that represent the girl as a shattered young woman who has just been assaulted and stripped of these feminine attributes. At the same time, her few school supplies, which would represent an opportunity of social progress through education, lay on the floor as she flees to school. After occasions like this, she adopts an aggressive personality that is confused with masculine attributes. This personality seems to arise as a defense mechanism against assault. In fact, as sociological research with young girls in the South Bronx has shown, young women will often take an aggressive stance to avoid the appearance of weakness or fear in a depressed and congested urban space (Freudenbergh 790). Yessica's aggressive personality is a reaction to her space and social condition.

The exploitation of female sexuality in the film recalls a similar case previously seen in *Los olvidados*, of which Saul Austerlitz says that: "sexuality consistently gives way to violence as a driving force of society" (2). Although this can be generalized to all sectors and social classes, in the lower class where the economic need is more prevalent, this violence intensifies. As is the case with Yessica, in *Perfume de violetas* she becomes a sexual commodity. Yessica's sexuality is exploited so that her brother can buy himself shoes.

Although not sexually violated, Miriam is also subject to aggression when she is in the public space. Usually she is accompanied in the city streets by her mother who fends off any attackers, but when she navigates the space with Yessica, she is vulnerable. In a market scene, Yessica steals a bottle of perfume and flees, leaving behind Miriam, who is then confronted by an angry mob pulling at her hair. The overhead shot of Miriam in the middle of an enraged crowd screaming and tormenting her gives the impression of her being devoured by the space and people. Miriam's slight financial solvency, however, is enough to liberate her. She pays for the perfume and is set free. Unlike Yessica, Miriam does not have to remain an object. The difference in economic status creates a difference in each girl's urbanization of consciousness.

The cinematic portrayal of actions committed inside the semi-public school space reveals its function as a site for a disciplinary institution. The establishing shots of the school depict high cement walls and higher wire fencing to keep out intruders who attempt to jump over this barrier. The entrance gate is monumental and gives the impression of prison bars closing off the school from the outside world. This functions as an "enclosure," as Foucault mentions (*History of Sexuality* 141). When Yessica first arrives at school in the opening sequence, she is outside and therefore behind those bars. As the Prefect lets her in, she is introduced into the school space. The imposing image of the physical space alludes to the site of a disciplinary area which has an effect on the construction of gender within this location.

With the high walls and restrictive entrance, it would seem that violence is controlled in this contained space. In fact, every time Yessica gets into a fight, the Prefect

stops her. Though this space should inspire less aggression than the mean streets, their school is run-down. The graffiti-filled rooms reflect the chaos that occurs in these institutionalized places. The camera often reveals the students in a classroom behind scratched window glass suggesting a disorderly space. Like many public inner-city schools of metropolitan areas, the lack of funds for maintaining the school stands out and reflects on the students who mimic the surroundings. This school reveals itself to be a hostile environment where girls spend most of their time and reinforce their friendships through mutual support like note swapping and how they defend one another against other classmates who pick on Yessica for her tomboyish personality.

The school setting also demonstrates how the educational system serves to impose a hegemonic view of gender and at the same time represents a microcosm of what Yessica faces in different spheres of her social life. The first time Yessica walks into her school she is told to remove the make-up she is wearing and the Prefect calls her a clown. Her expression of femininity, based on physical appearance, is being repressed by the hegemonic construction of the feminine that the school as an institution represents. This space functions as what Foucault calls “technology” which aims to produce the ‘docile bodies.’ The school in *Perfume de violetas* implements a construction of gender that satisfies the civil definition of feminine. When Yessica violates that construction, she is immediately punished.

Yessica’s classmates directly participate in imposing a strict binary view of gender through peer pressure. She becomes the object of scorn after she has demonstrated her aggressive personality, which other students have defined as “macho.” Yessica

physically defends herself, which then characterizes her as noncompliant with the socially accepted gender structures. This leads to her being marginalized and ridiculed by her classmates and punished by the school authorities who consider her attitude inappropriate for a female. In another situation, Yessica meets a boy and begins a relationship. He is first excited by her openness to kissing but is later on turned off by her aggressive personality and lack of feminine attributes, especially as she comes in disheveled after being raped by Topi. These reactions teach Yessica which behaviors and appearance are desirable as she is developing her female heterosexual personality. By defining which behaviors are correct and which are reasons for being shunned by her peer group, this space functions as a moderator of gender.

The school as a place of disciplinary technology works as a tool of repression against female youths. On one occasion, after being assaulted yet again by Topi, Yessica finds her way to the school where she seeks refuge from the victimizing streets. While attempting to participate in a dance class, other classmates notice that she has blood on her skirt and assume that she is menstruating. The students begin to call her dirty and foul smelling, and the teacher then makes a spectacle of her menstruation. The students are shown dancing in unison as directed by the teacher while they assault Yessica with name-calling. As the teacher shouts out dance steps, the students immediately react to follow the dance sequence. The synchronization of the dancing gives the illusions of robotic behavior which corresponds to their automatic assumption about Yessica's stained skirt. In the same way, as the students are seemingly programmed to follow dance steps, they

are conditioned to call out when gender behaviors are not being upheld. The teacher's response validates their critique of their schoolmate.

Yessica's blood-stained skirt becomes the reason for another visit with the principal, who is a woman. While being confronted by the principal, the shot gives us a close-up of Yessica, and the camera circles around her following the point of view of the principal who is punishing her and acting as the token torturer.³³ The filmic zoom in of the shot takes the position of another punishing viewer. The camera's circling around the young girl indicates the panopticon of surveillance. The principal then gets directly in the girl's face, which intensifies the authoritative verbal assault. The disciplinarian judges Yessica based on her lack of personal hygiene and reprimands her by making her write out "Cada 28 días debo prevenir mi menstruación" This punishment points to a need to repress her female condition where menstruation indirectly points to an active sexuality. She is being asked to "prevenir" which has two different meanings in the Spanish language: to prepare for and to prevent. This act demonstrates how the school functions as a way to educate and to impose repression on female youths in terms of their sexual development. The female principal serves as an adult role model for women as servants of the prevailing social notion of gender.

Yessica is being taught that her menstruation--and therefore her sexuality--is undesirable and should be prevented or punished. This sexual repression and the lack of

³³ Mary Daly in her seminal text *Gyn/Ecology* discusses the role of women as token torturers of other women. Specifically, she comments on the field of gynecology and the female doctors that have been trained in medicine through patriarchal education (277). Thus, though they have no other knowledge than to implement the same torturous acts as men. This is the same case seen with the principal in *Perfume de violetas*.

social attention to the violent acts being committed against young women can help explain why she does not speak of her repeated sexual violation by Topi.³⁴ Instead, she tries not to show any signs of assault, asking Miriam to evaluate how she smells and hiding the scratches going up her legs. When the school personnel do discover that she is being sexually abused, she remains quiet when prompted to say who is abusing her. Her face is stoic and she refuses to speak. The repression inculcated by society requires her to remain silent. Though the educational sphere is perpetuating this repressed view of her femininity, these aspects are first introduced in the much more private family sphere.

The most intimate space we see in the film is the home, where the structures of the family are contained. The two different households of the girls represent distinct social levels within the lower class stratified in this metropolis, and have correspondingly different impacts on the girls. While Miriam's household is supported by her mother who makes enough to pay the rent for a tiny two-bedroom apartment with a gate to provide some security, Yessica lives with her mother, stepfather, and stepbrothers in a shack with bed sheets serving as doors. The manner in which Sistach establishes the visual location of each home emphasizes the social level of each family. Miriam's situation allows her to have more than the basic necessities of shelter, and her house is, therefore, located on the *altos* (superior level) of an apartment house, with a high gate and a huge chain and lock to keep out intruders. Yessica's family members cannot even make ends meet to pay for

³⁴ In the previously cited study concerning the role of violence in the lives of South Bronx adolescents, young girls' response to being victims of a sexual assault would report that it is a condition based on luck. Although they do not consider it socially acceptable, the girls do not consider the acts surprising within their environment (Freudenberg 790). Indirectly, there is some social acceptance as is the case in *Perfume de violetas*.

the shack they live in. They must access the home by climbing down a ladder into an area which is lower than the ground level of the surrounding buildings. Their descent to reach their home represents their place in society; in the film, they make up the lowest class since their home is spatially lower than everyone else's. The visual setting of the homes emphasizes the girls' location on the social ladder. These economic settings have a direct effect on the way others perceive the young women. These perceptions feed into the gender constructions that are created and reinforced within the family.

The root of the violence and the women's tolerance of it stems from the behavior established by the family. Yessica becomes the victim of her mother's neglect. When her mother does pay attention to her, it is with an aggressive attitude. Yessica herself mentions that her mother cares more about her stepfather and keeping him happy than about her. This contradicts the socially-held belief of the nurturing mother, which is an idea rooted in society's tie to Catholicism and the figure of the Virgin Mary, which was often reinforced in Mexican Golden Age Cinema through the binary of the mother/whore representations. Yessica's mother acts in the interest of the male provider.

Despite the fact that Yessica's mother works, her economic contribution is overlooked. According to Marilyn Waring, the International Labor Organization has traditionally qualified domestic work as economically inactive labor (30). She further discusses this point and stresses that "the international economic system constructs reality in a way that excludes the great bulk of women's work- reproduction (in all its forms), raising children, domestic work, and subsistence production" (ibid). Thus, the mother's contribution is undervalued and only the men's work is valid. The stepfather further

stresses the men's (his and Jorge's) contribution to the household, and this reaffirms the inequality in monetary pay between genders during this period: "A lo largo de la década de los 90 el ingreso real por hora disminuyó para el conjunto de los trabajadores urbanos, y los salarios de las mujeres se mantuvieron por debajo de los obtenidos por los hombres (Ariza 9). The mother, restricted by her need to tend to the smaller children, has limited access to capital which makes her dependant on the step-father and compliant to his demands. To alleviate this condition, the mother turns to Yessica to act as the caregiver and domestic helper. This limits the young girl from leisurely activities such as visiting Miriam or doing school work, which is seen here as a superfluous use of time. The mother demonstrates no real interest in Yessica other than as a domestic servant and establishes this as a gender role.

Sistach's camera reveals the lack of an intimate relationship between mother and daughter since they are shot always looking purposefully away from each other, even when they are in a confined space. However, when Yessica is unable to fulfill her mother's expectations, her mother slaps, shoves, and screams at her and calls her a burden. This is the same condition we see with Pedro in *Los olvidados*, where the mother refuses to feed him when he does not serve a productive purpose. Pedro begs his mother for food and affection only to be turned away and told he is unwelcome until he helps support his family. Yessica, like Pedro, is being taught that she is loved only when she is of economic use to the family.

The dynamics of the household economy forms a part of the urbanization of consciousness. The only occasion when the mother shows kindness towards her daughter

is when Yessica is sitting at the family table making a gift collage with pictures of herself and Miriam taken at a photo booth. Her mother sits next to her to admire the artwork and asks whether they can sell it. This short scene, though it initially shows the mother being kind towards Yessica, reveals her persistence in making her daughter into a commodity as she sees the possibility of obtaining money from her daughter's crafts. This act demonstrates the mother's devaluation of the friendship and everything that friendship offers to Yessica-- stability, love, and reinforcement of self-- in favor of cash.

Besides treating family members as commodities, Yessica's family is a source of violence and repression when dealing with the construction of gender. There is an expected role for the woman that limits social progress and reduces the value of the woman to her domestic use. As her mother's household helper, Yessica must tend to children, tend to dishes, and even participate in the care and grooming of her stepbrother. She is being taught domestic duties which she is expected to carry out. Higher value is placed on her domestic skills than on her progress in school. On one occasion, when she is trying to catch up on class work, the mother interrupts her activities and demands that she iron her step-brother's shirt so that he can go to work. Though Yessica says he is capable of carrying out the task, the mother reinforces the female role by throwing the wrinkled shirt in her daughters' face after the young girl mentions that she is busy doing her homework. The mother is establishing a pattern of behavior, one which involves her daughter learning domestic duties as a means of survival. Yessica is slowly being schooled with the idea that a woman's productive purpose in her society is of a domestic nature while her formal education is less valued.

Beyond the family's expectation of physical labor, sexuality is punished with violence in this family unit. The mother constantly badgers Yessica for her incontinence, a possible consequence of her sexual abuse. For the mother, the daughter's condition is perceived as a childish act and punished by slapping. In another scene, Yessica's mother waits nervously by the window for her daughter, who has been sleeping in the streets, to come home. When Yessica finally arrives, she is received by her mother whose concern turns to anger. The mother calls her daughter a *puta* (whore) and accuses Yessica of prostituting herself with Topi, based on information from Jorge. Further, the mother shatters the perfume bottle Yessica has in hand and attacks her viciously.

The blue filters introduced in this scene as Yessica makes her way home from the streets give the impression of coldness and desolation, a site for violence. These filters extend into the home where Yessica's mother repeats the violence, this time physically and verbally. The film thus parallels violence in the public area with violence occurring in the home. The mother allows Jorge to identify, without question, Yessica's whereabouts, which again stresses the authority of the male over the female, especially when the male is contributing more to the household economically. Sistani repeats the family structures that Buñuel exposed at the middle of the century in terms of the disintegration of the family as a social institution. Both films highlight how economic conditions intensify violence.

Yessica's dire conditions lend themselves to violent repression and to the assumption of more sexual activity than is the case with Miriam. In contrast to Yessica, Miriam's family's (comprised of her and her mother) economic situation creates a much

less hostile environment. Alicia, Miriam's mother, makes enough money so that her daughter does not need to depend on anyone and still has enough to save for leisure goods, such as replacing a television set. The family's economy does not affect Miriam, who is told to stay at home after school all afternoon entertaining herself with television and music. This girl and her mother share a loving relationship in which Miriam massages Alicia's feet and their exchange of words demonstrates maternal love and care. Sistach portrays Miriam and her mother looking at each other lovingly and Miriam embraces her mother's legs while maintaining eye contact in their conversation. This harmonious situation is challenged when Yessica begins to intervene in their home environment.

Miriam's family contrasts with Yessica's on several levels marked by Alicia. When Miriam reveals she has a new friend and mentions her name, the mother's face suggests disgust as she snotes that her friend's name is "exotic." Alicia's characterization marks a difference between the two girls and identifies Yessica as the Other. The most obvious contrast that has been noted is between their economic levels, which Alicia also identifies. While at her job in a shoe store, Alicia helps Jorge pick out a pair of trendy tennis shoes. She notices the raggedy shoes worn by the young man as he tries on his new pair, and she also sees the holes in his socks associating him with poverty. When Alicia recognizes Jorge in a bus and remembers that she has previously sold him the shoes he is wearing, Miriam tells her that Yessica and Jorge are related. The mother responds: "A esa

escuincl³⁵ y a su parentela no les tengo nada de confianza, ya te lo dije” [“I don’t trust that brat or any of her relatives, I’ve told you”]. The insulting tone communicates Alicia’s assumption that people in a lower class are not to be trusted. After she says this, the camera shows how she arranges the heavy chain on the high gate, as if trying to keep people of a lower social level out of her home. Alicia protects her daughter from Yessica and her family.

Alicia takes direct interest in her daughter and in her daughter’s affairs as evidenced in her concern over her friendship with Yessica and reproduces a socially held machista mentality. As Sistach mentioned in an interview,

las mujeres reproducimos valores que acaban afectándonos. El caso de Alicia, la madre de Miriam, es triste, por defender su espacio con su hija provoca una tragedia. Es víctima y victimaria al mismo tiempo. (Vértiz 82)

On one occasion, Miriam runs home and tells her mother that she has just seen Yessica being taken away by Topi and Jorge. Alicia’s reaction is to comment that she must be a *puta* and that she probably provoked them. Alicia here portrays “mujeres como reproductoras... de una mentalidad machista [women as reproducers of a *machista* mentality]” (Vértiz 82). Alicia assumes sexualized women must be inviting sexual advances and are never victims of assaults. Alicia’s skewed characterization of women is grounded in patriarchal culture and imposes it on her daughter.

Alicia’s repressive attitude towards women does not stop at marking differences between the girls but identifies gender and sexual role expectations. She makes a direct

³⁵ “Escuincelo/a” is a colloquial and derogatory form to refer to children. The word derives from the Nahuatl “itzcuintli” which signifies “hairless dog” and a figure of the Aztec tradition represented by a small dog who served as a guide towards death. In Alicia’s context, the use of the word is derogatory towards Yessica.

connection between menstruation and sexuality after Yessica leaves a stained pair of panties in the trash bin of Miriam's bathroom. Upon discovering them, the mother expresses anger and questions whether her daughter has begun menstruating. The natural process of menses is associated with sexual maturity and, therefore, sexual activity, which prompts Miriam to immediately deny that she herself has begun menstruating. Female sexuality, or any allusion to it, is less tolerated and more repressed moving up the social ladder.

Miriam herself completely denies her mother's and her own sexuality. While Yessica's mother is comfortable with the fact that she lives with a man, Alicia constantly tries to hide any allusion to sexual partners from her daughter. This is further demonstrated in a discussion between the two girls in which Yessica says that her mother only cares about her *ruco*³⁶ and then asks whether Alicia has a *ruco*. Miriam immediately says "no," signaling the social taboo of a woman having a sexual partner out of wedlock. Though the birth of Miriam points undeniably to the fact that Alicia has been sexually active, strict morality and repression prevent Miriam from considering her mother as a sexual being.

Despite the differences in the socioeconomic positions of these two girls, they make their friendship work as they are still trying to learn the social expectations for sex and gender. Miriam's intimate family space becomes a haven for Yessica and a space where the girls develop their friendship. Inside Miriam's home, Yessica is able to escape

³⁶ *Ruco* colloquially signifies someone who is older, more mature. In this context, it makes reference to a man as lover/husband. The use of this term by Yessica would signal that she is not related to the man.

from both the public home spaces where she has access to her basic needs and can even enjoy some luxuries. The first time that Yessica visits Miriam's house, she is surprised to see food, candy and even a bathtub, which provokes the most exquisite scene in the entire film. The girls bathe together in Miriam's bathtub and there is a constant panning of each girl as she speaks. The shots show the two girls stripped of their clothes, and yet there is no explicit sexuality connected to their encounter. Their naked playful bodies reveal their innocence and escape from a vicious environment, their detachment from sexuality and perhaps an unconscious exploration of homosexuality, as Yessica constantly gazes at Miriam and later on at Alicia.

The space of Miriam's home is sharply contrasted with Yessica's whose home is a place of aggression while Miriam's offers comfort and refuge. *Sistach* shows how carefree and happy Yessica can be and how her personality is truly that of an innocent girl when she is in a safe environment. In Miriam's home, Yessica has access to luxuries such as music, sweets and Alicia's perfumes, which fascinate her. She is able to take Miriam's panties from the clothesline when hers are bloodstained; she secretly uses Alicia's perfume, takes her money and remains in the home until she is forced out. In addition, she expresses her innocence and her femininity when the economic needs of her own family do not haunt her. This space, and only when Alicia is away, is the one where Yessica can dominate. After she accidentally kills Miriam, Yessica returns to this location to seek comfort and relishes Alicia's embrace when the mother mistakes Yessica's body under the covers for Miriam. The shot shows Yessica under the sheets

smiling eerily towards the camera and self-satisfied for having substituted Miriam for herself, though Alicia is unaware of what has happened.

The film's narrative structure and filmic shots juxtapose the three different geographical spaces and their effects on women. Sistach provides a realistic view of how the girls interact with society in different urban locations: intimate, institutional, and public. The girls' portrayal reveals complex women with complex constructions of the feminine define tradition, a growing trend in Mexican filmmaking. About films after the 1970's, film critic Alex Saragoza states:

the representation of women inverts the tropes of the Golden Age....Where there was once a sacrificing, asexual, *guadalupana* Mexican mother figure in the Golden Age, there are now depictions of sexual women....In brief, women represent the capacity to cope with the crisis of the dominant order. Equally important, these women are complex figures and cannot be reduced to the simplistic, dichotomous categories of whore/virgin and the related archetypes characteristic of Golden Age cinema. These women defy facile explanation, condemnation or vindication. (Saragoza 30-31)

In *Perfume de violetas*, Sistach represents women who blur the dichotomy of traditional representations. Yessica herself is victim and victimizer; she is a victim of aggression who becomes the aggressor.

After her debut *Los pasos de Ana* (1988) and *Anoche soñé contigo* (1991), *Perfume de violetas* is Sistach's third feature film. This representation challenges the optimistic family structures cultivated during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Thus, regarding the inclinations of turn-of-the-century Mexican filmmaking, Joanne Hershfield and David Maciel state "[t]he disintegration of the family and values is strikingly visible in recent films.... A concern with individual survival, and the loss of optimism for the

future seem to be the norm for these new women characters” (256). Revisiting Buñuel’s devastating conditions of the urban young in Mexico City, Sistach updates the setting to the turn of the last century and shows the impact of this complex capital-driven metropolis on the society and the girls.

Perfume de violetas denounces the governmental and societal ignorance which affects females in Mexico. The protagonist interacts with a dominant culture and an urban space that provoke sexual violence against the female subject. The home and school spheres create the construction of gender which result in violence when females enter the public space. Foster’s study of the representation of Mexico City in Mexican films of the past thirty years describes how the city plays a role in the composition of its inhabitants. For girls in the lower class, as is evident in *Perfume de violetas*, their experience also encompasses tragedies in the form of rape, assault and even death. The girls in Sistach’s film demonstrate the impact of the urbanization of consciousness that produces a culture of urgency, one which also encompasses gender. The individuals in the lower class of this metropolis seek to survive even when their survival provokes violence, even murder. The economic and social crises create a struggle for survival especially among young people who cannot be integrated into a society that is designed to perpetuate the corruption of individuals. Yessica is one of those individuals who seeks survival at all costs.

Alma dócil: Religion and the Family as Seen in *Ángel de fuego* by Dana Rotberg

As evident in the previous analysis of *Perfume de violetas*, women can function as a commodity when they do not have the means to obtain their own capital, but what

happens when the female body is used for a far superior commodity, one having to do with spirituality? “Whether we are personally religious or not, whether we deplore it or not, all women in contemporary Western cities are affected in many areas of our lives by the disciplinary function of what counts as religion in modernity” (Jantzen 44).

Spirituality, as this quote states, impacts individuals and interacts with the construction of gender. So, how do women interact with a highly gendered technology such as religion? Dana Rotberg explores this relationship in *Ángel de fuego*, which takes place in Mexico City during Mexico’s *salinista* government.

Rotberg’s film shows how when faced with no money, individuals become commodities that allow the access to goods whether they are in the form of monetary goods or divine acquisitions. Through the use of the visual image, Rotberg is able to present the conflict that arises when the pre-established role imposed on Mexican women intercepts with a lack of access to capital. The female’s agency will suffer as she confronts different technologies in her search for a space of belonging.

Ángel is Rotberg’s second feature film, she herself a student of the CCC film school where many Mexican directors studied in the 1980s. Her first film was *Intimidación* (1989), based on Hugo Hiriart’s dramatic piece. Prior to the filming of *Ángel*, Rotberg participated in Felipe Cazal’s *Los motivos de Luz* (1985)³⁷ and then she produced the documentary *Elvira Luz Cruz: pena máxima* (1985). *Ángel* represents Rotberg’s first attempt at screenwriting and was well received by critics and accepted at festivals

³⁷ This film is based on the real life story of Elvira Luz Cruz who was arrested after it was speculated that she had murdered her four children after she testified she did not remember the occurrence.

including Cannes and the Cine Latino Festival in New York. Nationally, the film was listed among the top 100 movies of all time by *Somos* magazine.³⁸ Her most recent film is *Otilia Rauda* (2001) based on a novel by Sergio Galindo.

Ángel de fuego has received scholarly attention from Elissa Rashkin's whose study highlights the use of religion and circus as allegory for social critique. Rashkin's study of this film points exactly to the non-idealized images that *Ángel* presents, which reflect the failure of the neoliberal strategies introduced to the country by the technocratic president. Paradoxically, the Salinas government revived aspects of culture such as filmmaking of which this film was an outcome. Rashkin states that "although benefiting fully from the cinematic renaissance encouraged by Carlos Salinas de Gortari's government, Rotberg does not use 'surreal' imagery to sell exotic visions of Mexico but rather to undermine the illusory pretensions of *salinismo*, by showing the results of its modernization strategies" (213). Andrea Noble also considers this film to be a representation of a failed project of modernity expressed through the symbolism of incest (43-44). This film was made in the 1990s during the Salinas presidency, which is historically remembered as a time of failed economic progress. Though the president at the time promoted programs such as the *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* aimed at reducing poverty, these seemed to work exclusively at the marketing level, but failed in demonstrating a real difference in the general population.

³⁸ This list was compiled in 1994 for a special edition issue and appears in the *Más de cien años de cine mexicano* website supported by the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores Monterrey (ITESM).

For some, a film like *Ángel* does not constitute feminist cinema due to the negative attitude represented towards the woman. Even the director, Dana Rotberg, refuses to label her filmmaking as feminist (Quiroz Arroyo). Nonetheless, *Ángel* bring a non-traditional feminocentric point of view to the screen that calls for reconsideration. In this film the woman is both victim and victimizer. Her role does not oscillate in the traditional binary; rather, it is totalizing.

Ángel depicts a 13-year-old trapeze artist, Alma (Evangelina Sosa),³⁹ who works in a decaying circus. When her father Renato (Alejandro Parodi) dies, she learns she is pregnant with his child – the product of their incestuous relationship (note the obvious reference to the story of Lot and his daughters in the book of Genesis). The circus director, Rito (Salvador Sánchez) gives her the ultimatum: abort the child or leave. Alma opts to keep her child as a memory of her father and takes to the streets making money by spitting fire in exchange for tips from passing cars. She stumbles upon a traveling religious puppet theater, which is directed by a mother, Refugio (Lilia Aragón), her son Sacramento (Roberto Sosa) and the orphan boy, Noé (Noé Montenegro). The puppet theater troupe moves around the periphery of Mexico City professing their syncretic faith and signing people up in the Book of Forgiveness that will determine salvation on judgment day according to the Book of Revelations. Alma is enticed by the promises of human resurrection and joins their cause. Though she seeks refuge in the faith, she is told

³⁹ Note the allegories established by the use of the characters' names. Alma = soul, Renato= rebirth (stemming from the expected resurrection that Alma expects), Malena= Mary Magdalene (the woman who was shunned from society because she is traditionally considered to be a prostitute), Refugio= refuge, Sacramento= sacrament (a religious rite in which one accepts a divine grace following the examples of Christ), Noé= Noah, the biblical figure who received the covenant of God and was asked to save his family and the animals from the Deluge which marked God's destruction of mankind.

that her child was conceived in sin and her divine forgiveness will require strict penance, something that would hurt not only her body but her fetus until she inevitably aborts. Alma returns to the circus but is unable to reinstate her trapeze act nor does she accept giving in to prostitution. In an act of vengeance, she seduces Sacramento and then ignites herself inside the circus' tent. By doing this, she destroys everything and fulfills the Biblical prophecy of apocalypse, thus doing away with a morally corrupt world where individuals are used for the gain of others.

The analysis of this film demonstrates that women are subject to various technologies that manipulate their bodies and their womanhood. Alma attempts to form a part of three different spaces in the following order: 1) the circus 2) the open streets and 3) the Biblical puppet theater. All three spaces present a degree of the interaction between capital and gender. Both units will have power in determining who Alma can be, what she is allowed to do, and more importantly, they have a direct say in how she uses her body. In essence, it is a consciousness based on the exchange of capital to obtain social and spiritual worth. Alma, who is in an economically vulnerable position after the death of her father, must comply with the social expectations established by others. In doing so, the young girl must constantly compromise her desires and renegotiate her construction of self. Foucault mentions that each person “is born [...] out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint” (*Discipline and Punishment* 29). The institutions of family and religion, as I will show, further intensify the construction of self when the grander space of residence --the periphery of Mexico City reserved for those who do not have access to capital—is taken into consideration. In a space of economic need as is the case

with the Mexican megapolis, Alma seeks refuge in the spaces that help those who feel marginalized and yet, given no options, she will determine that a self-imposed apocalypse is her only escape.

The different spaces and activities that occur within those spaces are culturally intelligible. Mexican audiences, a culture that is traditionally fervently Catholic, can easily understand the religious cues, which allows for symbolism to be directed into a different meaning, one that is critical about the Mexican time-space. This is emphasized in the opening sequence that establishes the grander space of the film. Before an image is shown, noises of patrol cars and barking dogs are presented in the dark emphasizing the desolate space and, more importantly, highlighting the insecurity that one experiences in the city and more intensely in the periphery. Circus music then fades upon the city noises while the image is still pitch black. Finally, an image of a raggedy circus is presented and the camera then directs itself inside the tent where an ailing clown gives a pitiful performance. Rito, as the circus leader, establishes himself as the hegemonic force, the leader of the group who directs his employees, his family, to make fools of themselves in front of a scarce audience. The performers are all spectacles, and at the center is Alma, the angel of fire who rises above the rest and spits fire dressed in a red outfit. The circus mimics the city and becomes a representation of the lumpen society that makes up this part of the space.

The peripheral location within Mexico City demonstrates inner urban migration trends experienced in Mexico City. The lower class populations have been continuously moving away from the center and finding more affordable housing in the margins of the

metropolis. This situation is due in part to the deindustrialization that was experienced in the city since the 1980s: “la evolución física de la ciudad se llevó a cabo a partir de procesos contradictorios de desindustrialización y expansión del comercio y los servicios” (243). In the 13 years from 1980-1993, Mexico City’s industrial workforce was reduced by 55% and was further reduced to 19% by 1996 (Gobierno del Distrito Federal 42). The expected free trade agreement prompted many local companies to close at the end of the 80s and find better lands closer to the northern part of the country where they can have easier access to the North American markets. Furthermore, many companies closed because they would no longer be able to compete with companies that were importing products (44- 45). This complex situation perpetuated the move to and growth of *colonias populares* (unplanned settlements) that, in 1990, housed 62.4 of the Mexico Valley’s metropolitan zone (289). This complex demographic shift becomes the primary space for these characters.

The circus space is reminiscent of the popular culture of entertainment during the Mexican Miracle from the 40s to the 70s. The circus represents a period when Mexicans had disposable income, still, the visual representation of the ailing circus demonstrates the shift in cultural consumption. Alma was raised in the circus environment so this space is her home-base, her perceived family institution. In the circus space, social vices are observed and these make part of the set expectations within this institution. All sexual practices that would traditionally be repressed by the higher social classes are permissible. References to homosexuality, prostitution and incest are allowed as long as they do not interfere with the financial interests of the circus. In fact, these are

encouraged in order to secure profit. Foucault mentions that incestuous repression becomes a point of departure for establishing a culture because it secures the growth of the culture (*History of Sexuality* 109). Here, however, this act is allowed, though maternity is shunned because it limits a woman's physical capacity to produce capital. In Alma's case, a child born out of incest is the only means to establish culture since her father is dead and there is no apparent lineage. This revisits the paradox first represented in the biblical story of Lot whose daughters sleep with their father once they have fled from Sodom. Without the ability to find husbands, they seduce their father by giving him wine and the sisters become impregnated. In this biblical parable, similar to the situation seen with Alma, incest is not a taboo, but rather a way to continue a civilization. Biblical allegory re-asserts the norms in this circus culture. Still, for the traditionally Catholic Mexican audience, this remains taboo and is not easily accepted.

Child entertainment turns into a space for adult pleasures. The circus space becomes a Bakhtinian carnival⁴⁰ where the socially established taboos become permissible so as to keep the social order of economy. While mainstream culture holds perceived societal norms, these are flexible in the circus environment as the circus represents a space for release from mainstream reality. The state of the economy leads the marginalized circus inhabitants to delve into non-traditional conceptions as a means of economic survival. To further capture how this circus does not form part of the "mainstream" society, a day shot of the circus shows the tent atop a hill with the urban

⁴⁰ In *Rebelais and his World* (1968), Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the folkloric festive Carnival where traditional order is subverted and hierarchies are vanished due to the permissibility that involves this celebration.

city as a backdrop. There is a clear distance of the inhabitants from the social class from the dominant culture, a peripheral location held both physically and metaphorically.

One behavior that is observed closely by the hegemonic institutions is sexuality. Foucault discusses that sexual practice is controlled by hegemonic forces in order to protect the interests of the state—the patriarchal control. Under her father's protection, Alma does not have to explain her sexuality to anyone else except her father, a patriarchal figure. Furthermore, since her incestuous relationship with her father does not limit her from carrying out her act on the trapeze, Rito does not have a say in her sexual practices. For this downtrodden circus, Alma is the main act and the reason for the circus' revenue. The exploitation of her performance secures her agency. She is visually shown in the center of the circus crew as she is of highest importance for the income of the show further emphasized when Rito tells her "El circo es tuyo. El público sólo te quiere a tí." As long as she performs, nobody interferes with the manner in which she expresses herself sexually; after all, her body is already being used as a spectacle in the big top. When Rito asks her to prostitute herself after the performance, she refuses and opts to stay in bed with her father. Since Alma is under the dominion of her father, Rito cannot require her to work the after hours requested. Nonetheless, Alma is a commodity, an object that the circus can profit from and at times she is the reason for envy by the others who notice that she receives special treatment.

Alma's body is property of the establishment that financially supports her. Her suspected pregnancy prompts the administrators to touch her breasts to scrutinize and evaluate the possible gestation. After the circus determines that her pregnant state will

limit her performance, she loses her status as a commodity and becomes an economic burden for the circus. In this situation, the institution, in the form of Rito, attempts to negotiate with her by allowing her to remain in the circus at the cost of aborting her child so that she can earn her pay through performance or prostitution. The circus master warns: “Yo no estoy pa’ mantener putas, así que ya sabes, si te vas, te olvidas del dinero, y si te quedas, te sacas al hijo.” Ultimately, Alma must decide between controlling her own body or allowing the circus to financially profit from it.

Alma’s maternity becomes an interest of this institution as it will hinder the overall access to capital. The entire institution depends on her and her willingness to turn her sexuality over to the circus. By controlling her pregnancy, she can secure the financial well-being of her circus family. Unwilling to lose her child, Alma must leave. Her control over her own body is not tolerated as it is limiting. Furthermore, when she fails in other social spaces and loses her child, she returns to the circus. Having left the circus in the first place, she is replaced by another spectacle, another young woman with a snake’s body. The circus emphasizes the exploitation of the females by exoticizing and capitalizing on them. Alma stares at her replacement act while the voiceover announces her return as the angel of fire. She can no longer carry out her air defying angel of fire performance triggering Lino to comment: “a este angelito ya se le rompieron las alas.” Thus, she is no longer profitable based on her capacities to perform in the show and so she must access capital through the use of her sexuality. She concedes in allowing the circus to use her body, succumbing to prostitution within the circus in order to survive. As with other spaces, Alma must earn her keep through any means. Thus, she is a

commodity to the circus. The main emphasis of this institution is capital and female gender construction must first answer to financial needs instead of preset social norms.

The city streets will also be a space where Alma's gender is compromised to obtain money though the visual representation of this space constantly places Alma at a distance from mainstream society. Alma heads towards the city when she is expelled from the circus. This scene is captured with a shot of her walking way into the grandiose city space to integrate herself to the mainstream society that may not accept a person with her background. The distance between Alma's social reality and the main city is evident in this shot. In a following scene, Alma is sleeping in the streets in the floor outside of a wedding/quinceañera dress shop. The camera first pans revealing the white wedding dresses and then pans down to reveal Alma huddled on the floor outside of the glass window. Alma does not meet the social expectancy of purity as conveyed by the *quinceañera* dresses nor does she comply with the social expectations of virginal marriage since her incestuous out-of-wedlock-child constitutes sin within the greater society. Since she is excluded from wearing the white dress representing virginity and chastity, the shot stresses her distance from the sexual and gender practices present in this society. She is also unable to obtain these because of her financial position. She is in an inferior visual position in comparison with the dresses.

In order for her to function in that public space, she must depend on being a spectacle to obtain capital. While walking around the city, Alma dons her angel of fire costume and spits fire in the streets in exchange for tips. The shot of her doing this emphasizes her marginality. Nonetheless, her option to wear this costume demonstrates

her acceptance of herself as an oddity in exchange for money. She makes enough money to buy a pineapple, perhaps the most impractical item she can purchase as sustenance.

The screenplay for film describes the pineapple by saying “tiene en sus manos una enorme piña que no puede pelar ni comer” (29) therefore proving her inability to survive.

This also demonstrates the growing informal commerce that is rampant in the city. A study on this urban condition in Mexico City states that

El fenómeno del comercio en la vía pública de la Ciudad de México tiene sus antecedentes en el periodo prehispánico. Sin embargo, en la actualidad se convierte en un problema estructural, ya que es producto de la crisis económica, el desempleo, los bajos salarios, la falta de políticas sociales y económicas efectivas para los grupos de bajos ingresos o desempleados.... (Gobierno del Distrito Federal 280).

The Federal District’s governmental report points to the exact social problems that Rotberg is representing in *Ángel*. The negative economic problems that affect Mexico City during the 1990s are those mentioned above, which the government has failed to resolve. Thus, Alma, as is the case of those involved in the informal economy, must resort to selling anything, even her self.

To further emphasize the failure of the government to support the population, the shot of Alma walking through the city shows vacant lots and half-built buildings that have begun falling. The half construction reveals the unsuccessful social programs that at one point promised to provide housing and resources in these peripheral areas. Due to the unavailability of credits, the classes in need of public housing were unable to qualify, hurting the construction of these areas as seen in this shot (289-90).

Alma attempts to adapt to this environment though she cannot overcome her position of spectacle wearing her red outfit. Five men surround her and proceed to inspect

her, touch her clothing, see the picture of her father around her chest, and then allow her to leave. She is seen as an exotic being and is “othered”⁴¹ in this society. In the mainstream, she does not fit into the norms and presents herself as a costumed display. Though her sexuality is not aggravated, her construction of gender is under scrutiny. For those who observe her, Alma is not a young girl, she is a strange creature set apart by her flamboyant red garments. Her position as a marginal character is reinforced by her constant movement within the public social space. She is excluded from forming a part of this society and instead must find an institution that will take her in despite her marginal condition. Unable to integrate to traditional means of accessing capital, she seeks an institution similar to that of the circus since she knows how to access capital in those marginal spaces.

Religion becomes a place of refuge for the wayfaring girl who stumbles upon a traveling religious puppet theater where she hears the parable of the resurrection of the dead. A voiceover is heard: “Que los muertos se levanten de sus tumbas y busquen a sus seres amados. Que los padres se reúnan con sus hijos, y los hermanos con sus hermanas, y las esposas encuentran a los esposos. Los he perdonado a todos y vivirán eternamente en los jardines del Edén.” The shot closes in on Alma who is immediately drawn in by the possibility of seeing her dead father again. Through these puppet presentations, Alma begins to accept the religion as a technology. By accepting these promises of

⁴¹ I use here Edward Said’s construction of Other as proposed in *Orientalism* (1978) where he references the Other as those who do not fit into a given society. Said makes reference to the colonizing effects of the conception of the Other though in the case of *Ángel*, the Other works at a more local level within a society.

resurrection, Alma is indirectly also accepting the subsequent dogma that will be implemented by Refugio.

Rotberg displays the theater in the same manner as the circus and Alma is able to immediately relate to it. Alma stresses the similarity between the two spaces by stating that the theater ropes are tied in the same way as the circus ropes. Through its similarities, Alma can easily replace the circus bigtop with the puppet theater truck. Furthermore, the backdrop of the puppet stage shares the vivid colors seen in the circus. It is clear that both of these spaces use the colors to make their spaces inviting and entertaining, though the puppet theater goes a step further and uses these visual cues not only to entertain, but to instruct. The messianic group uses the medieval tradition of *docere delectando* -- teach by entertaining--, which is a primordial characteristic of medieval literature and highly used by the Church to get its message across to the masses (Kinkade 13).

Individuals searching for escape or comfort react similarly to the religious theater as to the circus. The fixed gaze of the parishioners is similar to the gaze of the scarce circus audience; both groups seem to be absorbing the visual entertainment. The circus and theater spaces are alike in that they attract audiences by entertaining though the puppets serve the extra purpose of being religious-didactic. Refugio and her sect serve as a religious technology-- a disciplinary technology where the promises of eternal salvation are reached through the practice of a code of conduct. Incorrect behavior translates to sin and only those who are free from sin can be a part of this select kingdom of God while the rest will be condemned and punished. The symptomatic meaning of the film highlights Mexico's sacrifice of the most vulnerable inhabitants for the self gain of those

in power. This points to the Salinas' government policy of privatization that provided investors with wealth at the expense of the lower class masses.

The puppets in this film are of extreme symbolic importance because they depict the power that both Refugio and Sacramento have in manipulating the figures. These marionettes are the clearest example of "docile bodies" and are an illustration of the way the parishioners are directed towards specific behaviors. Through the use of puppets, the audience is learning their behaviors according to how Refugio and Sacramento direct them. Alma will prove this point since she will be subject to the actions determined by Refugio.

The most significant sequence to the narration of the film is the representation of the parable of Abraham by the puppet theater.⁴² Through the representation of the parable, Refugio, Alma and Sacramento project their desires and fears through allegory that resonates with Alma's sacrifice of her fetus. Refugio is the main puppet master who impersonates Abraham's voice. The camera focuses on Refugio and Sacramento who are moving the puppets and Refugio looks over at her son and states "Dios cuidará de que haya cordero." Though they interpret the parable with puppets, it is also clear that the subtext of these words refers to a real-life sacrifice of Alma's unborn child that both Refugio and Sacramento seek. Alma is being manipulated by these two and her fetus is the collateral that they need in order to obtain their divine intervention.

⁴² In the parable, based on the Old Testament, Abraham is tested by God who asks him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in Moria as an offering to God. Abraham, a pious man, takes his only son to the mountain. As he is about to kill his son, an angel appears and tells Abraham that he has proven his faith to God by being willing to sacrifice his only son. In exchange, the angel says that the sacrifice of a lamb would be a sufficient sacrifice for God.

Alma, serving as a stage hand in the representation of the biblical story, is moved when Abraham is about to sacrifice his son. The shot shows a face of displeasure as she sees the puppets dramatize the events. She interjects in the narration as the Angel who carries the voice of God and screams “No lo hagas, Abraham. Haz demostrado que tienes temor de Dios pues no te negaste a matar a tu hijo. Sacrifica al cordero que con eso Él se conforma.” She, herself, is projecting her own beliefs. Afterwards, while talking to Noé, she tries to reason with the rules of this religion. Though this religion promises resurrection, it comes at the cost of sacrificing children. Survival in this decaying landscape requires sacrifice; religion is the means to accomplish this. Alma, herself, is living out the parable of Abraham and Isaac by also subjecting her unborn child to torture through penance. Unknowingly, she is subjected to being a live puppet for Refugio. In order for Alma to remain within this group, she must contribute in the form of forfeiting her child to be used as collateral for her keep since she has not other access to pay her stay with the group.

Economically disadvantaged individuals are subjugated. Alma is warned that since she is now a part of the group, “Ahora ya no te mandas sola. El supremo es tu patrón y por mi voz te dará órdenes.” As she hears these words, Alma turns to look for Sacramento for solace, which provokes Refugio to grab the girl’s face toward her and caution: “Ten cuidado, Dios todo lo ve y todo lo oye.” With these words Refugio emphasizes that she is the disciplinarian and a God-like substitute for the girl as the redeemer and that she exercises a panopticon therefore threatening Alma into

submission. In order to achieve acceptance by Refugio, and therefore God, Alma must be the docile body who allows herself to be disciplined.

Refugio constantly emphasizes her supremacy, which is mimicked by the positioning of the camera. After one of the puppet presentations, Refugio sits on a stage and has the parishioners walk up to her, give an offering, and then Refugio signs their name in the Book of Forgiveness. The shot shows her on a superior plane to that of the parishioners. This higher visual level is symbolic of her divine power to determine who is granted forgiveness. The offerings serve as an economic means of compliance and merit the eternal salvation of the believers. The scene shows a shot of Alma kneeling before Refugio requesting that her name be added to the book. Refugio, who is on a visual level higher than Alma, does not grant her plea. An offering by Alma is not sufficient. Thus, the visual representation corresponds to the division of power. Instead, Alma's offering must come from bodily penance since the subjection of her body to pain will provide a higher economic return than offering baked goods as is the case of the other followers.

The questions remain: what interest does Refugio have in altering this young girl's behavior? Is it purely a selfless desire to see her abiding by godly conduct? Foucault argues that "Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (*Discipline and Punish* 138). Disciplining Alma, then, must bring about economic gain in the form of spiritual attainment.

Alma experiments directly with self-affliction. In order to achieve purity, she becomes docile to Refugio's demands. Refugio sees that the young girl awakens sexual

urges in Sacramento. The mother decides that the girl is a threat and therefore qualifies her sin as grave as an excuse to impose stricter penance as evident in the following script and images of the scene:

Refugio: Dios me habló de ti. Me dijo que tu pecado fue muy grande.
(Takes the girl by the hands – the shot is a medium long shot)
 Alma: Sí, *(takes her hands away from Refugio)* pero yo ya hice mis penitencias *(The shot becomes shot reverse shot)*.
 Refugio: Mancillaste tu cuerpo y eso no se limpia tan fácil
 Alma: Pero usted me dijo que con obediencia y fe Dios me perdonaba.
 Refugio: Demuéstrale que crees en Él y obedécelo.
 Alma: Y ahora que tengo que hacer.
 Refugio: El me pidió que te purifique para asegurarnos que de veras estás limpia.
 Alma: ¿Y si no quiero?
 Refugio: Te condenarás para siempre.
 Alma: *(shot returns to medium shot)* Después de que me purifique tampoco va a quedar contento.
 Refugio: Yo me encargo de que su perdón no te falte jamás.... Ni a ti, ni a tu hijo *(Refugio places her hand over Alma's womb)*

The redeemer makes use of religious discourse to convince Alma to do as she says.

Failure to follow what Refugio requests will bring about eternal damnation. The shot reverse shot applied to this discussion reflects the argument and the distancing in the belief systems. Still, every shot captures a deteriorated industrial site in the backdrop.

This is a site of a once promising booming industry and now it is downtrodden, as are the other sectors of this community. Left without any material wealth or possibility of monetary acquisition, the inhabitants instead expose themselves to seeking redemption by being subservient to those who proclaim divine powers.

The penance that Refugio requests from Alma will substitute the economic offering that the other followers gave to this religion. Having nothing else but her body,

Alma sees no other option but to give in to Refugio's whims in order to succeed in having her child. Refugio seeks the young girl's child acquired through the manipulation of Alma's pregnancy. What follows in the film are diverse physical punishments through which Alma expects to achieve divine atonement. One shot shows Alma in the middle of a barren area of the city, an industrial junkyard, wearing a tunic with her arms outstretched. The young girl's face is that of anguish in her Christ-like crucifixion.

The next shot of Alma is standing within a ring of fire, exposed to the flames. She is crouched on the dirt with a facial expression that demonstrates that she is being hurt by the heat. Behind her, the long shot captures the broken down railroad tracks and old buildings that emphasize she is in a desolate place, which also corresponds to her emotional state of mind and the urban space's social condition. The flames, she was told by Refugio, would serve to purify her tarnished body; thus, she endures them. She must remain in the circle until the fires are completely extinguished. This leaves her on the floor, naked and vulnerable holding a puppet that she carries around like her child. This image of a nude Alma on the floor becomes ambivalent. Is this a young girl with a doll as a security blanket or is this a woman with a representation of her unborn child? Does she know the difference?

Though Alma herself is unsure of what these acts of mortification are doing to her, Refugio is making use of Alma's fertility as an offering to achieve her own interest. The final shot of the sequence of penance is an altar of sacrifices that make reference to ancient Hebrew rituals. Regarding the various religious rituals seen in this film, Susana López Aranda comments:

[...] conviven las resonancias bíblicas y los rituales paganos, con la naturalidad del sincretismo más arraigado. Y si la historia de Alma y la secta de Refugio parecen extrañamente verosímiles y convincentes, es porque ese sincretismo en nuestro país, es algo que se pierde en la memoria de los tiempo. (19)

Rotberg incorporates these factors because they are representative of actions and objects that are culturally intelligible for the Mexican audience that comes from both the sacrificial indigenous traditions to the catholic rites. The use of fire points to a type of *olah*, a fire offering where an animal had its blood drained and was then consumed completely by the fire. Alma is an example of this having had her fetus and fortitude drained. This image is then duplicated by the shot of the dead goat on the altar.

The surrender of a fetus is used as a sign of divine acceptance. Noé tells Alma: “La patrona le explicó [a Sacramento] que Dios quería un sacrificio... para poder otorgarle la gracia y aceptar su amor.” The parable of Abraham, in this case, is carried out for the sake of the young prophet. In the same way the puppets were manipulated so too was Alma’s body. After Alma’s maternity has been used, Refugio no longer finds value in the young girl. Her pregnancy was the only aspect from which Refugio could extract any gain. Therefore, Alma is sent back to the streets and she returns to the circus, though, as has been stated, she has been stripped of her productivity and of her ability to have a child.

The constant manipulation of Alma’s body leads her to seek the destruction of those forces that have had control over her and caused her to physically corrupt her female body. She recuperates some of her agency in her vengeful pursuit. She first goes after Sacramento and seduces him therefore demythifying that he is a prophet and chosen

child of God. By having sex with Sacramento, Alma not only shows her sexual power over the young man, she also disrupts the religious premise that Refugio has created. As she leaves she tells Noé, “¿A poco de veras creías que Sacramento nació limpio?” In essence, Alma’s seduction demythifies Sacramento’s sanctity.

Without capital, without her child, and without hope, Alma continues her apocalyptic journey and destroys the other space that controlled her—the circus tent. She incinerates the tent and climbs up the tightrope in order to fulfill one final prophecy—that of the angel of fire who would bring about the apocalypse of the unjust world that subjugates the female. Her final act of agency would be that of destroying herself unable to function in this space. Mexico City becomes an apocalyptic space having reached the point for divine destruction. Though the threshold for annihilation has been achieved this only impacts the lowest social class-- those that are doubly marginalized, both by the greater society and by those living in the periphery. The destitute situation of some of the citizens of this metropolis leaves them with no options. The lack of capital provokes the individual to use themselves, their body, to obtain physical and spiritual sustenance. In Alma’s case, her gender comes under scrutiny since the construction of this is being manipulated to achieve gain for either sustenance of spirituality.

The outskirts of Mexico City in the early 90s prove to be a hostile space where individuals are worth only as much as they have and this is determined by the difficult access to capital. As individuals deal with the changing economy and corresponding urban landscape, they resort to the exploitation of both the physical and divine subjects. Religion becomes the only source of hope though this institution demonstrates that it too

needs to meet its own interest at the expense of the individuals with which it interacts.

Though the other individuals who participate in Refugio's faith have some access to capital, they do not have to subject themselves in the same way that Alma does in order to seek salvation.

Following a line of films that includes the previously analyzed *Perfume de violetas*, Rotberg brings to the screen the negative condition that lower class women are faced with in an urban environment where they are subjected to disciplinary technologies. Directors such as Rotberg and Sistach reuse the personification of the growing city, as had been seen in Buñuels' mid-century *Los olvidados*, to demonstrate the social ills that come about with the modernization of Mexico and the failure of the governments to protect those that are most vulnerable. For this reason, it is no surprise that even the critics at the Cannes Film Festival noted the "espíritu buñueliano" in Rotberg's film (Pérez Turrent). Rotberg and Sistach achieve a visual exploration of the urban space to identify the root of the urbanization of consciousness and how the various institutions participate at different levels to the point of shaping the individual and his or her gender.

The effects of uneven economic development in turn of the 21st century Mexico are ramified to every sector of society. As seen in these films, lack of access to capital not only interacts at the level of obtaining material goods; it also has an effect on the construction of consciousness to the level of gender consciousness. Females are placed in a position of subservience in order to financially and corporally survive. In this metropolis, money is power, and capital attainment has an effect on social perceptions of gender.

CHAPTER 3: DEFINING GENDER IN THE MIDST OF ECONOMIC COLLAPSE: INTERACTION OF GENDER AND CAPITAL IN CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINE CINEMA

Summary of Argentine Cinema and Society

Tango passion and Buenos Aires filmmaking of the 1930s

Images of Buenos Aires function as a synecdoche for all of Argentina. In fact, the differentiation between *civilización* and *barbarie* has been a reoccurring concept rooted in the distinction between the urban and rural areas of Argentina's vast territory.

According to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845), Buenos Aires exemplified civilization in the form of modernity and progress while the rural areas of Argentina, the majority of the national soil, represented backward barbarism. Sarmiento states: "Buenos Aires está llamada a ser la ciudad más gigantesca de ambas Américas. [...] [Buenos Aires] sola, en la vasta extensión argentina está en contacto con las naciones europeas; ella sola explota las ventajas del comercio extranjero; ella sola tiene poder y rentas" (59-60). The symbolic and economic importance of the capital of this Southern Cone country will also be seen in cinema where financial factors interact with the production of cinema and representation seen within Argentine films.

When thinking about classic Argentine films, images of Carlos Gardel and Libertad Lamarque singing tangos come to mind. The light tango operettas of the 1930s established an image that was well received by audiences and well reproduced by national cinema. These song and dance representations of the Buenos Aires *arrabales* came to be regarded as the absolute image of Argentina on celluloid and were exported

for popular consumption (King 37). Yet, what image was perpetuated? Tango, as is well established, traditionally conveyed feeling of sadness and despair and most times was representative of the urban setting. According to David William Foster, tango is closely associated with the capital city: “If there is anything that is known about Buenos Aires, is that it is the home of the tango” (*Buenos Aires* 53). Furthermore, he stresses that “Concomitantly, there is a Buenos Aires imagery that defines itself in terms of the tango: the tango is Buenos Aires, and Buenos Aires is the tango [...]” (*Buenos Aires* 54). Though the tango itself is not the focus of this study, the stress on this cultural art form is important because of the gender politics that it references, which have made their way into cinema. Martha Savigliano states the gender relations expressed in tangos in the following manner:

Tangos are male confessions of failure and defeat, a recognition that men’s sources of empowerment are also the causes of their misery. Women, mysteriously have the capacity to use the same things that imprison them-including men- to fight back. Tangos report repeated female attempts at evasion, the permanent danger of betrayal. The strategy consists basically in seducing men, making them feel powerful and safe by acting as loyal subordinates, and in the midst of their enchantment of total control, the tamed female escapes. (57)

In terms of gender relations, the tango conveys a macho spirit where the woman, by her presumed nature, will provoke his fall. In essence, the same Judeo-Christian motif that is seen in Mexican filmmaking is also present in Argentina.⁴³ The effect of the Argentine *época de oro* is similar to the impact of its Mexican counterpart. It is at that time that gender relations are established and reproduced throughout the end of the century and

⁴³ This element has already been discussed in the introduction as part of the foundational elements for gender construction in Latin American cultural representations.

into the 21st though not in a homogenized manner. Cinematic gender representations in Argentina will, too, depend on the process of urbanization that is reflected in each film. The unique historical background of this country has shaped its culture and the identification of self of its citizens as will be seen further ahead.

In order to understand the interaction between art and politics, a recap of both the cinematic and the sociopolitical history of Argentina are helpful as well as an examination of the frequent economic crises that have had an impact on the citizens. In this way, we can identify the development of urbanization and its translation into the cinematic representations of gender and representations of Buenos Aires.

Unlike the situation experienced in Mexico, Argentina's cinema during the 1930s was not determined by the political climate at the time (Barnard 443). Nonetheless, the films of this time period presented "popular genres in a characteristically national style" (444). Thus, the rise of the *cine de arrabal* and the tango melodramas made Argentine cinema popular. Octavio Getino identifies two veins of cinema evident in this period:

La una, de inspiración burguesa, que influyó evidentemente en el grueso de la producción. La otra, de inspiración popular, que tuvo a su vez importante presencia y fue uno de los factores fundamentales para el éxito de la producción nacional en los países de habla hispana. (*Cine argentino* 29)

Socially, Argentina was experiencing a period of political turmoil, what is known as the *Década infame*. While the world dealt with an economic depression, General José Urriburu took control of the country from Hipólito Yrigoyen. Throughout this decade, the Argentine military government limited Yrigoyen supporters from gaining power through election fraud and helped in securing General Agustín Justo's election. In 1937 the

Radicals were allowed to participate in the elections and they won back Congress. In reference to economy, Argentina became a dual society:

El país comienza una etapa de “Estado rico” y “pueblo pobre”. El oro, se decía, desbordaba los pasillos del Banco Central, pero las masas proletarias se hacinaban en “conventillos”, deambulaban en las habituales “ollas populares” o buscaban afanosamente un espacio dentro de la ciudad que culturalmente las rechazaba. (*Cine argentino* 26)

Because of the increase of urbanization, the growth of the city population helped secure the success of the film industry. Furthermore, this shift was clearly played out in the films of the era as many of them featured the tango, originally considered lower-class music.

This popular genre of cinema is easily compared to the *cabaretera* films in Mexico. In both countries, the urban environments highlight the melodrama where the narrative involves the characters in a debate of morality. Silvia Oroz’s study on Latin American melodrama makes reference to Argentine films of this period and points to a construction of gender roles that comply with audience expectations and that abide by acceptable gender norms of the time. José Fuster Retali, in his study of the female in Argentine cinema, has studied Argentine Golden Age cinema to effectively demonstrate the fixed role of women in 1930s and 40s cinema. In fact, one clear example of this binary is seen in *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* (Dir. Enrique Carreras 1936) where the main female character has a sexualized role and the tango lyrics talk of her redemption, thus demonstrating how she oscillates between the two extremes. The transformation of gender in the cultural production is evident during this period of urbanization and modernization. Many films during this time period were set in Buenos Aires and included films by José Agustín Ferreyra including those with titles such as

Muñequitas porteñas (1931), *Calles de Buenos Aires* (1934) and *Puente Alsina* (1935).

Ferreya is also one of the main producers of the tangomelodrama, “which narrativized tango lyrics in which the hero or heroine is always plagued by misfortune and melancholia” (Falicov np). This is not surprising since the country’s capital had grown exponentially during this time period; rural workers came looking for jobs in the industrialized Buenos Aires because agricultural exports were suffering. These films, then, explored social malaise of the capital at this time.

Argentine Film and the State under Peronism

The 1940s experienced a decline of the once plentiful Argentine cinematic production. The causes go hand-in-hand with the governmental control of Juan Domingo Perón. Perón came into power in 1943 and this coincided with a diminishing national cinema. Several factors were to blame for this. Among them, Argentina’s neutral position in the World War, which the US perceived as an opposing position. Therefore, the US limited the amount of celluloid that was sent to the southern country. Mexico, having claimed alliance with the US, received 11 million meters of virgin celluloid (as opposed to the 3.6 million received by Argentina) and was able to produce higher quantities of film, thus helping the Mexican Golden Age (Getino *Cine argentino* 38).

Aside of the limitations placed by the US, the quality of Argentine films suffered as artists who disagreed with the Peronist government went into exile or even decided to self-censor.⁴⁴ Perón’s attempts to control this national industry through censorship were

⁴⁴ Famous singer/actress Libertad Lamarque (1908-2000) had left for Mexico where she enjoyed a flourishing career. Carlos Gardel died in 1935.

not well received. Though the cinematic industry was not doing well, the lower classes, which gained access to capital at the expense of the wealthier sector of society, favored Perón's populist government. The many economic changes implemented by Perón included the nationalization of industries such as the telephone, railroads and docks. Even more so, working class wages grew and social benefits such as medical care were becoming accessible to the citizens. With a short-lived success, the country's economy would once again be troubled by inflation and the effects of drought in 1949. This situation would have an effect on Perón's popularity. As Jonathan Brown states, "The Peronists were discovering that inflation had become the Achilles' heel of populism" (210). Corruption within the government was also prevalent. By 1952, the government was dealing with huge labor issues including frozen workers' wages and 65,000 lay-offs in the textile and meat industries (Brown 212).

From this time period, few cinematic works stand out. On the one hand, the state supported cinema began producing films based on classic novels; on the other hand, Leopoldo Torres Ríos stood out as the director "dedicado al mundo de los problemas ciudadanos del hombre medio o de los sectores populares" (Getino *Cine argentino* 40). Few other productions were made during this time. In fact, production was half that being produced by Mexico.

In the social sphere, women were slowly advancing in different efforts. At this time, Eva Perón, General Perón's wife, was very popular, especially amongst women. Her humanitarian efforts were well received by the lower sectors of society. Such was her charisma that the public called her "Evita," a loving diminutive of her name. The figure

of Evita, however, once again re-emphasized the role of women in society. She is the epitome of a fairy tale story with the twist of being considered a prostitute by some. Eva Perón's background was always under scrutiny since she was accused of doubtful moral standards. Many questioned her rise of social status and her relationship with Perón. What can be said is that she was a minor radio star when she met Juan Domingo Perón, and she then made it into the Casa Rosada. Her charitable work while she was first lady has made some refer to her as a saint and served to redeem her questionable past. Once again, as is socially constructed, Evita's image oscillates between the saint/whore binary. Though there were not too many influential representations of women in cinema and other mediums of popular culture, the visual construction of Eva Perón was a clear representation of the desired construction of women for the time. While at first her image was soft and feminine, and a symbol of glamour to be desired by women, her image was modified as she acquired political agency. Her hair was pulled back tightly and her attire became stiffer including structured suits therefore diminishing the identification with feminine.

In 1952, Eva Perón died of cancer. By 1955, Perón went into exile. The country was left in the hands of the military and the constant change in government became a set precedent to follow until 1973. There was, however, a revitalization of the arts manifested in the consumption of literature, theater, and cinema (King 79-80). Eduardo Jakubowicz and Laura Radetich explain this growth in the arts: "...durante el peronismo, los intelectuales no se vieron favorecidos por las políticas de gobierno. Esta ausencia de

libertades hizo que los sectores de la cultura tuvieran una actitud reactiva hacia el peronismo y favorable al golpe de Estado” (91).

The *Nuevo cine* made a debut with directors including Fernando Birri and Leopoldo Torre Nilson, the son of 30s famed director Torres Ríos. The group began incorporating Italian neorealist trends. With Birri, experimental cinema grew in the form of the short film. This time, however, the production space was not centralized in Buenos Aires since Birri moved his production to Santa Fe. Many important projects came about though not all were commercially successful. Regarding the overall perception of this cinematic time period, many, as John King notes, considered this style of cinema as ‘elitist’ because it moved away from populist representations and traditional filmmaking (82-83). Though politics was financially supporting filmmaking through exhibition laws and the National Cinematheque Institute, national audiences still favored foreign cinema (ibid).

Several other cinematic groups came about in the time period between 1955 and Perón’s second government in 1973. Towards the end of the 1960s, cinema became much more militant as evident in the production of groups such as the *Grupo Cine Liberación* and *Cine de la Base*. *La hora de los hornos* (1968) by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino was the film of this tendency that stirred the most emotion. Moreover, the groundbreaking essay by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino “Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World” called for a renewal in the cinematic ideology to find an alternative to filmmaking that would meet one of the following requirements: “*making films that the*

System cannot assimilate and which are foreign to its needs, or making films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the System” (42 author’s emphasis). In this way, the authors propose a revolutionary cinema. Such was the militant ideology of *La hora de los hornos* that the film was banned from screening, though it still managed to make its way to the intellectual sectors of society through clandestine screenings (King 88). Despite the revolutionary proposal for films, the role of women does not represent an approach much different than the established binary images. Concentrating on class divisions, the authors do not address other divisions such as gender.

After 1973, the country, in its constant shift between political and economic instability, was under the power of Perón once again, though, this too would be short-lived since he died of heart failure in 1974. His wife, Isabel Perón became president, the first female chief executive in Latin American history. Notwithstanding, her presidency proved ineffective and the economy plummeted. Foreign investment diminished and over inflation hurt the citizens (Brown 235). In the brief period that Juan Perón was in power, cinema experienced growth, though under Isabel Perón, artists fled the country fearing the threats of the Triple A.⁴⁵ Because of the growth of opposition against Isabel Perón, she enlisted the help of José López Rega to maintain control. Not only were artists held to the scrutiny of the Triple A, different groups were targeted all of which led to a growth in violence in the country. By 1976, another military coup would come to power.

⁴⁵ The Triple A refers to the “Argentine Anticomunist Alliance,” which is described as: “Thugs with the Triple A undertook a positively Rosas-type reign of terror in the country, killing suspected guerrillas and leftist politicians, threatening left-of-center actors and folksingers, and leaving mutilated bodies indiscriminately along suburban roads in burning cars near Ezeiza airport” (Brown 235).

El Proceso Political Tactics and Filmmaking

1976-1983 marks one of the most repressive periods of Argentina, which is a significant statement for a country that has had a tumultuous history including various military coups and economic difficulties. During this time, the *Proceso* was instated to reorganize the country. The two main targets of this military junta were to resolve inflation and guerrilla violence (Brown 238). Due to the economic strategies of economist José Martínez de Hoz, the economy experienced growth, though government officials' corruption depleted funds (238-39). In spite of the pervasive violence in the country, the middle class benefited; families saw the opportunities to travel and spend. The repercussion of this overspending, however, would cause yet another economic crisis for Argentina.

In terms of the other issue at hand, guerrilla violence, the military government took on an extremist approach by “disappearing” non-conformists and left-wing inclined individuals. The number of those killed is unclear though the official numbers exceed 19,000 while human right organizations such as Proyecto Desaparecidos commonly reference over 30,000 disappearances. It is also believed that close to 2 million Argentines left the country at this time (Brown 240). The number of jailed, tortured and/or raped citizens by the *junta* is uncertain, though because of the atrocities committed, it has been labeled as the “Dirty War.”

While the Junta was in power, cinema, limited by extreme censorship, produced light comedies and musicals. In addition to the national cinema, the US film market was able to enjoy a raise in spectatorship within Argentina. Some notable films in this era that

challenged the status quo were by María Luisa Bemberg (1922-1995) who released *Momentos* (1980) and *Señora de nadie* (1982) both of which challenge traditional female roles. In the former, adultery and female sexuality with a younger man is explored in a nonjudgmental space. In the latter, the themes of marriage, divorce and women's liberation are presented in unconventional ways. Even more, an openly gay character is presented for the first time in Argentine cinema. While the *Proceso* tried to instill a conservative ideology, Bemberg managed to release her films and, more importantly, make a sizable profit while winning international critical acclaim.

Return to Democracy and Subsequent Economic Downfall

The return of democracy was experienced in 1983; nonetheless, many issues brought about during the period of the *Proceso* had yet to be resolved. The matter of the *desaparecidos* needed attention, as did the issue of inflation. Trying to raise the confidence in the new democratic government, president Raúl Alfonsín promoted the arts. What came from this was the rise in the “cine de democracia” as Octavio Getino refers to it. From this time period, significant films such as the Academy Award winning *La historia oficial* (1985 Dir. Luis Puenzo) premiered. This film belonged to a growing trend that directly explored the political history of the nation. Without the censorship of the *Proceso*, directors delved into the themes of politics, sexuality, drugs and violence (Getino 86). Another significant film of this time period includes Bemberg's third film, *Camila* (1984), which references Juan Manuel de Rosas's XIX century dictatorship.

The country's economy during Alfonsín's government underwent several projects in an attempt to control the hyperinflation that would culminate in a financial crisis in

1989. The Austral Plan, launched in 1985, printed new currency, called the *austral* and subsequently froze wages and negotiated the price on goods to keep costs down. The IMF recommendations requested the privatization of companies and the reduction of bureaucracy (Brown 257). Though the measures of the Alfonsín government were initially successful, by 1988 the economic situation worsened. From 1988 to 1989, inflation rose from 343 to 3,079 percent (263).

It was until Carlos Menem's presidency in the 90s that the economy would once again perceive economic stability and gain. Though a Peronist politician, Menem's strategies moved away from populism. By adopting neoliberal tactics, Menem's presidency began privatizing companies and lowering inflation at the cost of rising rates of unemployment. The privatization of companies included oil companies, railroads and airlines (261). Furthermore, Menem's government eliminated the *austral* and promoted a convertibility plan backed by the US dollar. This process promptly reduced inflation from 3,079 to 25% (Brown 263). The downfall of privatization was evident in the high numbers of unemployment. Public demonstrations grew against the national employment condition, culminating in 1997 with a march of over 40,000 unemployed workers in Buenos Aires. Adding to this, the high levels of corruption grew to be the demise of national stability (266). Despite the fact that the country showed economic strength, many were affected and the Peronists lost the upcoming election.

In 1998, Fernando de la Rúa was elected and followed the same neoliberal trend established by Menem. The Argentine peso had gained too much strength for its own good as trade and tourism were affected by the rising cost of Argentine goods. On the

other hand, the high levels of unemployment made the attainment of goods difficult for the general Argentine population. After heavy protests by citizens, de la Rúa resigned in December 2001, leaving the country with no leader. What occurred then was the most dramatic economic situation faced by Argentina. In response to the growing withdrawal of depositors from national banks, president Eduardo Duhalde froze bank accounts. Many depositors lost part of their assets, some up to 40 percent (Brown 270). Having fallen into deep economic crisis, the presidency of Duhalde and the subsequent presidency of Néstor Kirchner worked on fixing this situation in Argentina. One of Kirchner's most impressive accomplishments was paying off the IMF debt in 2005. Though the country's economy has reached a certain level of stability, inflation slowly grew throughout his presidency. Such has been Kirchner's perceived effectiveness that he left office in December 2007 with over 70 percent approval ratings. His wife Christina Kirchner assumed the presidency in December 2007 and is expected to continue the similar policies as her husband.

The dramatic changes in the sociopolitical situation also meant changes for the sectors of cultural production. Under Menem's government, laws were created to support the production of state cinema. The audiences, though incomparable to the turnout for Hollywood films, showed a growth in spectatorship of national films. The most recent trend in filmmaking can be observed from 1997 to the present-day where co-productions are not only common, but rather expected in order to produce a film. According to Octavio Getino, the neoliberal strategies applied by Menem translated into the steady growth of cinematic production. However, due to the volatile economy and social

conditions, especially the 2001 crisis, the themes dealt in cinema began reflecting social chaos as they also produced the neoliberal trends present in the country. Getino warned, however, that he would not qualify contemporary filmmaking as a “new” style of cinema. Rather, it is a renaissance of the different social conscious cinema of the country:

Esta es una situación que no remite a algo “nuevo”, sino que reconoce articulaciones muy claras con la experiencia de otros momentos del cine nacional (y por ende, de la cinematografía mundial), tanto por el abordamiento crítico de la realidad social –[el cine argentino] tiene importantes ejemplos del mismo a través de [la] historia- como de una mirada muy particular, por momentos casi autocomplaciente, sobre imágenes de la desintegración de un grupo social, familiar, personal o inclusive, del cine mismo – tema que también ha estado presente en algunos títulos del cine realizado en el país. (302)

What is undeniable is the growing success of national filmmaking in the new century.

Ana Amado states: “Coincidente con el cambio de siglo, el nuevo cine argentino vive una pequeña aurora que tiene resonancia internacional gracias a los festivales y a una producción creciente que suma realizadores y títulos en una generosa lista de recién llegados y de cada vez menos desconocidos, junto a nuevos y antiguos productores” (“Cine Argentino” np). Social critique has become prevalent in national cinema. It is perhaps this space that will allow for a much closer exploration of the physical space of Argentina, a space left with many unanswered questions after the return of democracy. This may also be the reason for a deeper introspection into the Argentine psyche.

The two Argentine films that are analyzed in this chapter depict the problematic relationship between space, economy and gender. In a socioeconomically unresolved Argentina, every day brings about historical events with which youths interact. Their

lives, who they can be, and how they behave will all be the result of the urban environment of Buenos Aires.

The *Peso* as a Defining Point: Gender and Middle Class Structures in Sandra Gugliotta's *Un día de suerte* (2002)

It is not difficult to sympathize with the economic crisis that Argentina went through in 2001; as I write in 2008 in the United States the overall price of living is going up, and the consumer confidence index is constantly dipping, it is easy to comprehend what a weak economy can do to a society and to each individual who is negatively affected by it. Though, I in no way imply that the situation faced by the United States will be as severe as that faced by the Southern Cone country, I do see similarities, if only at the level of inevitable changes that occur within a society that undergoes economic difficulties. When faced with a volatile economy, traditional parameters defined within a society, such as social class and gender, are re-evaluated. In the case of 21st century Argentina, the question becomes: In such economic turmoil, how will these changes redefine the different sectors of society and the individual consciousness of the persons that inhabit that space? Even more so, how does the changing economic environment have an effect at the level of gender construction as the individual participates in the urban environment?

The opening sequence of Sandra Gugliotta's *Un día de suerte* (2002) begins with shots of Elsa (Valentina Bassi) in an agglomeration of people on a busy Buenos Aires intersection. The sequence is shot in alternating black and white and color images. The constant movement of the camera, a handheld camera, provides a documentary feel. In

the black and white images, the city noises are faint and make her appear isolated and unattached from her surroundings. The young girl runs around as part of her job, which is conducting surveys. The camera follows her in a constant close-up, not revealing those she speaks to and only showing us her face upon being rejected. The camera cuts to every time she is rejected emphasizing the passerby's complete disregard for what is perhaps the most important question of that moment: "¿Cree que las cosas mejorarán?" This question is the driving force for Elsa. Her lack of optimism towards the Argentine socioeconomic condition will ultimately lead her to escape from this dead-end environment where she feels that there is no access to life improvement, nor the possibility of a lucky break. And yet, going back to the original question, "¿Cree que las cosas mejorarán?," in situations such as the one experienced by Argentina, a better question will be: "How will things change?" Undoubtedly, the abruptness in the situation of the State's economy will impact the urbanization of consciousness, which is constantly adapting to social changes.

The film depicts a young woman in Buenos Aires trying to financially survive with demeaning jobs, including handing out flyers in the street while wearing skimpy uniforms and other jobs that are equally humiliating. She hopes to gather enough money to run off to Italy, her grandfather's (Darío Vittori) homeland, where she wishes to reunite with an Italian lover she met in Buenos Aires and with whom she had a one-night stand. She feels this trip will help her attain happiness, something she cannot have in Buenos Aires. After all, as she states, "Acá no hay nada. No tengo nada." Though the neighbors' protests surround her, she and her best friend, Laura (Lola Berthet), distance

themselves from these events, even mocking Elsa's grandfather's involvement in the social upheavals. Instead, she chooses to concentrate on her own difficulty, making money. Unable to find a job that can help promote her social progress, she delves into illegal activities with a young man, Walter (Fernán Mirás), who falls in love with her, and his friend Toni (Damián de Santo). Still unable to achieve her financial goal in order to leave, she resorts to theft and using her sexuality by indirectly charging for a sexual encounter with her boss. Alas, she leaves, only to discover that the paradise that she thought awaited her in Italy may not exist; though, as she states, she is hopeful that Italy will provide her the desired 'break' she deserves.

Un día de suerte is Sandra Gugliotta's first film and was well received by audiences. The film did well at international festivals, receiving awards from festivals such as the Berlin Film Festival and a nomination to the Spanish Goya awards as well as several national award nominations. One of the important aspects of *Un día de suerte* is that it provides a representation of the urban environment during a period of growing crisis, with a documentary-like effect. Equally important, Gugliotta's film analyzes how the citizens, specifically Argentine women, experience the changing urban environment.

Critics have noted the cinematic style of this film, which includes the use of black and white cinematography, documentary-like shots and even dream-like sequences that provide deeper layers of understanding with regard to the aspirations and difficulties that Argentine youths face in the tumultuous socio-economic environment. Silvina Rival stresses the genius of the documentary-like effect of the film and notes that the film produces a constant conversation between documentary and fiction. She states that this

film addresses the fictionalization of documentaries and the documentarization of fiction (“Ficción testimonial”). In fact, the film in part documents the *cacerolazos*⁴⁶ that were frequent in the capital district in February 1999 when the privatized electric company (EDESUR) failed to provide power to over 600,000 inhabitants, 8,000 of which remained without electricity for over 10 days (CRISMART “The 1999 Buenos Aires Blackout”).

Regarding Gugliotta’s portrayal of Buenos Aires’s youth, critic Adolfo Martínez states, “es una radiografía de esos jóvenes a los que el presente los enfrenta a la incertidumbre” (“Viaje a la tierra de los abuelos”). Furthermore, Octavio Getino situates this film within the same ideological trend seen in the 50s that represented disillusioned middle class youths and the apathy towards any mobilization due to the pessimism of progress (316). Getino references Ana Amado who also believes that *Un día de suerte* represents the feelings experienced by this sector of Argentine society:

Atrapados en "un tiempo que se estira entre un pasado terminado y un futuro sin salida" (Deleuze), los personajes de la nueva generación se encuentran sometidos a la repetición de situaciones, absortos en una nada que priva de sentido a sus acciones, tras la búsqueda de algo o alguien que los contenga, un vínculo, un lazo, pero sin llegar a acompañarse, a encarnar un cuestionamiento, a poner en causa la realidad de esos vínculos, o a la realidad misma. (Amado)

Little other mainstream criticism is available on this film and there are no scholarly studies available that explore this film in its entirety. Furthermore, there is no criticism that addresses the issue of gender and the manner in which the economy interacts with the construction of gender in this film.

⁴⁶ *Cacerolazo* refers to a form of protest where individuals bang on pots and pans to produce noise. This is typically done in protest to the lack of attainment of basic needs of survival, such as food items.

The social backdrop of the film is a crucial moment in recent Argentine history. Specifically, the setting is during the 1999 Buenos Aires blackouts that affected hundreds of thousands of urban citizens. As the CRISMART report states, “What started out as a local technical problem in fact developed into a social and political crisis at the transnational level.” The citizens affected by this situation joined together and demonstrated against EDESUR, a privately owned power company that serves the greater Buenos Aires area. Primarily, the citizens were concerned about their access to electrical power. On a deeper level, they were protesting Menem’s presidential policies that allowed for the privatization of national companies, such as the electric companies. The importance of those policies begs reiteration. As part of Menem’s economic reforms, the president took a neoliberal approach to the country’s economy. Amongst the many changes, privatization was a reoccurring strategy used by the government. Due to this, the restructuring of these companies resulted in layoffs of many workers. Furthermore, though hyperinflation was under control, the vast government corruption proved to be detrimental to overall progress (Brown 250-72). These events culminated in De la Rúa’s presidency and his December 2001 resignation after one year in office. The socioeconomic situation depicted in Gugliotta’s film is the beginning of this period of downward spiraling. These events had a direct effect on all citizens, but most clearly evident in the middle class. This situation provokes a modification in the process of the urbanization of consciousness.

The State’s economic decisions had effects that led to the organization of community groups in the sectors that were feeling the most impact, as it is seen in

Gugliotta's film. Neighborhoods, and for the sake of this study specifically Boedo, which is the main *barrio* where the girls move around, unified to protest against EDESUR. In the film, the neighborhood citizens are organizing and arranging meetings. Protests are carried out, yet both Elsa and Laura remove themselves from this activity, passing directly in front of the demonstrations without establishing any alliance to the cause.

Boedo is significant because it represents one of many middle class neighborhoods throughout Buenos Aires that have needed to adjust their social conditions because of the State's economy. In addition to the economic difficulties, Boedo and several other neighborhoods were subject to extensive blackouts resulting in community uprisings. There was a shared feeling of discontent among the neighborhood dwellers and the community serves as a means to voice those frustrations. Yet, the only characters who actively participate in constructing the community alliance are the grandfather and his friends, mostly first generation immigrants who left their home countries because of their political views and sought a better life in a promising Argentina. Having left their country due to their inconformity with the social conditions, they seek to make the situation in Argentina work in their favor.

For urban youths, the aspect of community is rejected and, instead, they identify with the material gratification that they can achieve as individuals, of other spaces. It is clear that they disassociate from the communal groups since they spend their leisure time in various neighborhoods with Walter and Toni. Other areas they transit include San Cristobal, Puerto Madero, Barrio Norte, Palermo and the outskirts of Buenos Aires, all of which are areas that have been recently gentrified and have become spaces of

consumption. Furthermore, Elsa and her grandfather have different ideologies of community. The older immigrant is invested in improving life conditions in the city while those raised in the social climate of Argentina (like Elsa) are not only disappointed with the system, they no longer care for it. Instead, they disassociate with the formed community and, in its place, seek to secure their own access to goods and progress by means of their casual relationships established throughout the city, whether they are pharmaceutical and drug hustlers or the sleazy employer, Alejandro (Claudio Gallardou).

While the community is a representation of the middle-class, this can be better observed in the specific dynamic seen in the family unit. The negative effects of the stagnant economy are evident in the family's portrayal. The economic downturn in Argentina reached its nadir in 2001, but by 1999-- the backdrop of Gugliotta's film— the effects were already felt. In reference to the changes experienced by the middle class, historian Luis Alberto Romero states:

Las clases medias, lo más característico de la vieja sociedad móvil e integrativa, han experimentado una fuerte diferenciación interna, particularmente en sus ingresos. Los límites de la clase media están desdibujados; hoy es difícil saber qué actividades indican pertenencia [...] [E]n conjunto las clases medias han perdido su prestigio. También cambiaron los valores que la estructuraban. En un mundo darwiniano y cambiante, las clases medias perdieron la capacidad de proyectar su futuro o el de sus hijos. La previsión- una de sus virtudes- deja lugar a una suerte de vivir al día, aprovechando las ocasiones cuando se dan [...] (304)

Romero defines, with precision, the situation of the middle class as represented in Elsa's family. It is clear that the family faces financial woes, unable to pay the mortgage and unsure of when the father will receive his next paycheck. The mother, on the other hand,

has some work, though it also appears to be inconsistent. Elsa's father mentions his desire to assist Elsa with the cost of her trip though he is not in a financial position to do so.

Despite the lack of present access to obtaining goods, the family keeps some vestiges that marked their middle class upbringing. Elsa's father and grandfather proudly speak of the Fiat 1100 model car they own, which the grandfather stresses is purely Italian and was bought brand new in the 1960s. This shows the level of acquisition available to this social class in other periods of Argentine history. While making up information on some surveys, Elsa invents a citizen who owns a 550 model car and has just bought his wife a Fiesta model automobile, an ironic name considering the general social situation in the country that is anything but festive. Though an insignificant gesture, Elsa is projecting middle-class desires that she and her family can no longer access.

The dynamics within the family unit are also altered with the shift of economy; this produces disjointedness in the once unified institution. While seated in the family home awaiting lunch, Elsa converses with her father about the household financial conditions. The father is absorbed in fixing a lamp and does not pay attention to the conversation. The shots cut from one character to another and the silences show the uneasiness of communication, where the father struggles to answer any questions regarding his income. Within the same sequence, the shots cut to the grandfather who goes through his memorabilia and sings song of anarchism and "death to capitalists." The wife, in disagreement with her father-in-law, goes into the room where the grandfather sings and turns around images of Catholic saints which, we can assume, have been placed

face down by the iconoclastic grandfather. The sequence shows the different generations and diverse political points-of-view that make up the family. In this fickle economy, the institution of family is tested. Without the stability of capital, each of the family members create their own identity, whether it is the grandfather's disdain for capitalism, the father's dislike of Peronism or Elsa's complete disregard for any involvement in politics.

The traditional gender roles are clearly altered as is evident with Elsa's family. While the mother is cooking, she makes mention of the father needing to take over the duties in the kitchen. As the woman becomes the primary household provider over the male, he takes on the domestic duties therefore restructuring the traditional family gender roles. In another scene, the father proudly cooks, though he burns the food, demonstrating his uneasiness in the kitchen as gender roles are redistributed.

To further complicate the dynamics of family structures, Elsa does not live with her family. The shift in the access to capital lends itself to a changing consciousness and therefore a reorganization of the construction of family. Elsa does not depend on her family, nor do they exercise any control over her, which is evident in her decision to leave for Italy. Though she is concerned with letting her parents know, she never seeks permission to leave.

She, as a self-supporting individual, also has her own accommodations, though they are not by any means representative of middle-class living. Instead, she and Laura live in a small shack in a building's roof terrace with only the basic necessities. What this conveys to the viewer is how the turn-of-the-century youths do not have similar opportunities as those enjoyed by previous generations. In fact, their accommodations

prove their marginality as they are not even inside a building, but rather in the rooftop, away from traditional shelter. Furthermore, Elsa reconstructs her family to include her best friend, Laura, who keeps her grounded and with whom she works. This family dynamic, however, is not exempt of figuring capital into the relationship. Laura feels she can tell Elsa what to do with her life so as to insure the economic stability for both. Even Elsa's relationships come under Laura's scrutiny as they are both trying to secure access to employment and money. While the parents do not have a say in Elsa's use of her sexuality, Laura does because she is directly impacted by Elsa's decisions.

In order to keep their independence during these difficult times, the girls vie for temporary employment to obtain capital. It is significant to point out that Argentina experienced high levels of unemployment during this time period, which helps explain Elsa's instability in attaining more suitable jobs. The following statistics give a glimpse of unemployment rates experienced in the country: 6.3% unemployment in late 1990 to 13.2 by the late 90s and reaching its peak of 18.4% in 1995 (Toledo and Bastourre 7). Therefore, the only jobs available are temporary such as those handed out by Alejandro with irregular pay and fluctuating salaries. In fact, the United National Data Retrieval shows that beginning in 1992, the unemployment rates for youths jumped into the 12% rate from 4% in the previous years; more so, the numbers remained high constantly throughout the rest of the decade and into the new millennium. Women's unemployment rate was consistently lower, though this is due to the availability of jobs such as those given to Elsa, which keep her employed but provide little capital towards social progress. Thus, she is officially employed though not in a job that provides social advancement.

The aforementioned sequence is of Elsa trying to conduct surveys though very few people care to respond. Due to the lack of participants, she is unable to earn sufficient money for her needs. The lack of interest that her society demonstrates in the social conditions has direct ramifications on her paycheck. Unable to find enough people who wish to complete her survey, Elsa makes up the information and fills out surveys with false information of Argentine citizens that do not exist-- citizens that have economic assets and means to attain luxury goods. Since the surveys are rejected by the company that hires her to conduct them-- probably because of the inconsistency in the false information provided by Elsa--, she begins to work on the street intersections handing out flyers promoting vitamins, "Vitalife." She is asked to run up and down major street corners handing out flyers and telling the drivers the slogan for the product: "disminuya el estrés, estimula el rendimiento." The girls are promoting the magic pill that promises to help a society that is stress-ridden due to the financial backdrop. Yet, is a pill the cure-all of social ills?

Because of the conditions that must be endured in order to carry out the job, Elsa abandons her job and states "Odio la vitamina. Tengo sobredosis de vitamina." Like the rest of her society, Elsa is uncured by the magic pill. Though the vitamin is supposed to resolve stress and promote energy, it has the opposite effect on Elsa. Laura responds to Elsa's fit stating "si ya sabés como es esto, ¿[para] qué te hacés la princesa?" and previously also told Elsa "Te lo dije, boluda. Te la aguantás o no te la aguantás. Otra vez quilombo." Laura makes it clear that their options are limited and the work conditions,

though undesirable, are all they have. There is a level of conformity that the girls must accept because they have little access to much else.

Their gender is central to being granted jobs. The co-workers are always women; furthermore, they are all young attractive women chosen by Alejandro. They are chosen to interact with motorists, mostly male drivers, which constitute the greater part of taxicab and bus drivers. The uniform required for the job consists of tight orange spandex shorts, which makes for ridiculous, yet enticing, attire. The young women's clothes, like the girls themselves, are strategically chosen to call attention to themselves and attract passersby. The job entails moving around the streets as spectacles where male motorists and passengers assume that they can freely consume the young girls; hence, some men grope Elsa as they pass in a car. In another moment, when Elsa angers a car passenger after shoving some flyers into his car, the man steps out of the vehicle and accuses the girl of being crazy and wearing 'immodest' attire, even mentioning "mirá como estás vestida". Elsa responds by screaming that she does not dress in that manner and that her garments are part of her uniform, not a personal choice. Yet, it is clear that the uniform the girls wear is a marketing strategy, the old "sex-sells" approach.

On another occasion, Elsa and Laura do promotion for an entertainment company and hand out balloons to people walking by in the main Coronel Díaz Avenue, which divides two affluent neighborhoods: Palermo and Barrio Norte, known for upscale shops and boutiques- in any case, transited mainly by those who could afford luxury items such as the product the girls are promoting. In this case, the girls are removed from the streets though they are now on the sidewalks in the public view. Their outfits, once again, call

attention, but this time they consist of rainbow inspired colors in order to promote “Pretty’s,” an entertainment company. Feeling humiliated by her job, Elsa leaves in the middle of her duties and runs off with Walter. She refuses to carry out the dead-end jobs given to her by Alejandro so she leaves with a person who can also serve as a means to capital.

Elsa does not limit herself to temporary jobs. She inquires about full-time positions in a department store, specifically in the lingerie section that also has make-up and perfume counters. Elsa gravitates towards jobs that tend to be gender-oriented, and yet she cannot attain them because she does not have her high school diploma. In itself, the lack of a diploma limits Elsa’s access to a full-time position. The manager explains the work hours to her, which consists of working over 11 hours a day, 6 days a week with an alternate day off. The camera closes up on Elsa’s face while she hears the information, completely uninterested in the details. The zoom-in centers on her face to stress the apathy on behalf of the young girl when looking for a job since this is not a job position that she wishes to pursue because, though it provides employment, the long description of responsibilities seem daunting. When secure employment is available, she finds it undesirable.

Because Elsa does not earn sufficient money for her needs, Laura and she join Walter and Toni in the business of pharmaceutical smuggling and fraudulent credit card purchasing. These jobs allow the girls to supplement their salaries, and it gives them access to drugs for their recreational use. With the young men, after a day’s work, they go out to the countryside to smoke weed and distance themselves from the urban chaos.

Their time with the boys before and after hustles is spent leisurely. Though their sexuality is not the center of this employment, they are given the opportunity to partake in these hustles due to Water's interest in Elsa.

The relationships formed by both girls revolve around the direct access to capital. In essence, the girls establish relationships with men who have a positive impact on their economy, though the established relationships are sexual. There are three men in particular that Elsa is associated with sexually throughout the film. Ultimately, her goal is to reunite with Candy,⁴⁷ an Italian tourist who seduced the young girl and went back to Rome leaving her a message recording of an open invitation to visit him. Though Candy does not promise her much else, for Elsa, he signifies an escape from her bleak future in Argentina, given the country's social conditions at the time. Elsa assumes that anything and any place is better than Buenos Aires since there are few chances for social advancement. The other two men with whom she associates in the city, then, will function as a means to get to Candy.

Alejandro works with young women and takes advantage of his economic position to seduce them. When Elsa finds that she is pressed for money, she goes to his apartment and asks him for a favor. Unknowing what the favor is, Alejandro hands her a beer and then begins making sexual advances towards the young girl. She reiterates

⁴⁷ Candy's name produces much mockery by several characters, which make reference to his name sounding like a domestic appliance. The reference is, then, to the British company that specializes in major home appliance and demonstrates the economic importation of goods following Menem's neoliberal economic tactics. Elsa will also stare at a billboard advertising Candy brand clothes washers. It becomes ironic then, that Elsa's presumed happiness has to do with an object that she cannot obtain. Like a child, she is looking for candy, which she cannot have. Again, this is the representative of the middle-class's inability to purchase items such as a new clothes washer.

continuously that the reason for her visit is to request a favor. Alejandro knows that she is in need of money, though he assumes she wants to access it by means of employment; nonetheless, she does not resist his sexual advances and assumes she must surrender to him in order to obtain money. Her sexuality, in this occasion, is used in exchange for capital. Though he never gives her any money, he inconspicuously watches Elsa leaving his home in the middle of the night with the money from his wallet. Elsa steals his money as if receiving compensation in exchange for sex.

Elsa's relationship with Walter poses a similar situation. Walter drifts from city to city looking for work and quickly establishes friendship with the girls. They form a small group that works together. Though Walter is infatuated with Elsa, her only interest is receiving money from the scams they complete. He openly tells her that he is interested in her romantically; she, however, tells him that she is not interested and she continues associating with him exclusively for business purposes. Walter's small hustles provide enough money for him, his friend and the girls. Driven by his 'love' for Elsa, he decides to execute one last heist in an attempt to earn enough money for Elsa's trip to reunite with the Italian lover. While in the middle of a drug deal, Elsa sees the dealer's girlfriend, an over-the-top addict. It causes a negative impression on the young girl. The woman, providing herself as an example of an abused woman, warns Elsa to be careful with how Walter may treat her. Of course, the woman assumes that Elsa is Walter's girlfriend. As if seeing a reflection of what a future with Walter might be, Elsa ruins the deal by throwing the cocaine packets in water. By spoiling the drug transaction, the young girl also destroys any possibilities of a relationship with Walter. Staying with Walter, as she

sees is the case of the other woman, would signify a life of abuse; this is something she does not accept.

In both instances, Elsa rejects both men who are representative of her opportunities in Buenos Aires. Despite this, she uses her sexuality to obtain capital from each. Gugliotta makes use of the male gaze within the film to accentuate the sexual desire of both men. When Elsa meets Alejandro, he compliments her and then stares at her body, even requesting a kiss, though innocent, from her. When Elsa is helping Walter obtain medical prescriptions, the camera shifts to emphasize Elsa's body and Walter's fixed gaze on it. In both of these cases, her sexual appeal is insuring her access to money.

Elsa deals with her economic instability by using her social relations; nonetheless, it is also evident that the economy not only impacts her social relations, but also her individual consciousness. The greatest impact of the declining economy is felt at the most intimate level. Elsa's psyche is revealed through her desires and fixations. Throughout the film, Elsa looks for a lucky break stating "yo puedo tener buena suerte." The importance in her statement is that she goes on to look for this throughout the film. Being in a place that promises little luck, she finds it necessary to dream so as to survive. When she first walks into Toni's grill, she asks him what he dreams about when he goes home every night. He mentions that he doesn't think he dreams, which makes Elsa tell him that of course he dreams. She states "Loco se vuelve el que no sueña." Lacking any physical resources, Elsa nurtures her hopes with dreams in an attempt to overcome the social conditions she faces in that urban environment. This, as she states, is the one thing that

keeps her sane. For her, her dream of leaving to Rome and reuniting with Candy drives her.

Though Elsa seeks money in her various ventures, she hopes that this will lead to her attainment of happiness. She makes constant reference to different aspirations that she has as a middle class youth, aspirations that are inaccessible in the given time period. She tells Laura that her life expectations include being with someone who makes her happy and having some money; therefore, her happiness can be resolved by her access to capital.

The person she loves, however, is not accessible; Candy is far away and his memory serves to feed an illusion of a better life. Such is her fantasy that she listens repeatedly to the last recording of Candy where he sends her kisses. Each time she listens to Candy's voice sending her kisses on the recording, she rewinds and fixates on those words. When she tries to contact him in Rome, she is unable to locate him. While the voice-over of the operator recording lets Elsa know that the customer she is trying to reach is unavailable, black and white flashbacks of Elsa's love affair with the Italian fill the scene. The unavailability extends to Candy and her desires. Her search for love in this space is also unavailable. After leaving a message, Elsa remains behind the glass partitions of the private calling booth where she places the call. The camera zooms in on her face, which is filled with discontent because she was unable to locate him. Still, within that space, she thinks about Candy as if the call and the cubicle contain his memory. The cubicle is a rented space that allows her to access her fantasies. Thus, capital provides her with a location to daydream about her most intimate desires, which

are a commodity in this society. When she leaves the cubicle and opens the door to the street, she once again faces her reality and no longer thinks of the Italian lover. The phone booth, if only for an instance and through the desire to make a connection, provides a place to nurture Elsa's dreams of escaping.

Elsa wants to be in love with Candy because he represents all that is not her current life situation. She assumes that anything must be better than her surroundings. More so, she is obsessed with the idea of having something fascinating happen to her even telling Laura "¿No te pasa que a veces sentís que no te va a pasar nada en la vida?" Elsa's aspirations make her want to escape her reality. Laura, however, is perfectly content with her social conditions and desires to make a life in Buenos Aires. Laura tells Walter and Toni that, if she had money, she would build a chalet in the *barrio* where she now lives. In contrast to her friend, Laura accepts her surrounding reality.

Elsa's other obsession has to do with cows, which she visualizes in several occasions. In a scene where Elsa and Walter are in the countryside, she makes reference to a recurring dream where cows graze the *pampas*. Walter responds: "No hay más vacas, Elsa. No hay más nada." What follows is a surreal scene of cows grazing through the grass and a door leading nowhere. In this society, cows have always been an important source of economy as the ultimate symbol for wealth. Argentina, throughout the years, has been the world's third largest exporter of beef. In the late 90s, however, the rise of the peso made exportation expensive therefore hurting the cattle industry. Elsa's recurrent dream, then, makes reference to the hope for an improvement in the country's economy, of which she is a victim. The cow signifies her continuous dream of wealth to which

neither she nor her society has access. In another scene, after Elsa and Walter have identified a cloud in the shape of a cow, there is a shot of a bovine walking through an empty street in Buenos Aires, through a downtrodden sidewalk with graffiti-filled streets, and finally through a rundown park. In contrast to the plentiful countryside, the animal has little to graze on in the city; lush green fields have been replaced with the city that can no longer provide for its inhabitants. This shot re-emphasizes Walter's words to Elsa: "Aquí no hay nada." To stress this point, the following shots cut to citizens living in tents on the streets and people obtaining water from a water truck.

Sarmiento's concept of *civilización y barbarie* comes to mind when considering Gugliotta's portrayal of Buenos Aires as a demythification of the XIXth century thesis concerning the city's call to greatness. Reiterating Sarmiento's 19th century seminal text that has come to define this society, Buenos Aires was to exemplify civilization in the form of modernity and progress. The wandering cow in the middle of the city demonstrates the failure of this city as a productive space and uses the ultimate symbol of wealth to exemplify the lack of societal progress.

Elsa achieves her goal of leaving to Italy—the place of lost lovers, at least for her and her grandfather. She struggles with her luggage as she moves around the city packed with tourists seeing the sights. Like many tourists, she comes searching for the postcard image of Rome, but she is clearly an outcast in this space. Nonetheless, she continues sightseeing and even tosses a coin into the famed Trevi fountain, which will be a recurrent scene at the end of the film. Even in Italy, she continues to focus on her dreams. Her illusion of reuniting with Candy is lost when his roommates let Elsa know that he is

back home in Sicily. She assumed he is Roman, and yet, the revelation that he is from Sicily brings her closer to her roots since her grandfather is a Sicilian from Palermo. Unequivocally, Elsa is completing the return voyage that her grandfather was unable to finish.

While Rome is a symbol of advancement and an urbanized city in the same manner as Buenos Aires, the Sicilian city of Palermo is quite the opposite. The establishing shots of Palermo's skyline differ greatly from the tall buildings of Buenos Aires and the urban qualities that those buildings convey. Palermo's panorama is also filled with mountains that give it a rural quality. The concept of *civilización y barbarie* applies to this space and establishes the comparison between the two seemingly different countries. Once in Palermo, which conserves its small town character and congested markets, Elsa can see the situation that her grandfather once tried to leave behind, but in contrast to the situation her grandfather left, there are shots of food abundance, which are unattainable in Buenos Aires.

The cinematography establishes a juxtaposition between the two spaces. Elsa calls from Palermo and lets her grandfather know that she is in his homeland. Meanwhile, the grandfather leaves the call and goes to take part in the social manifestations in the streets where the neighbors are shouting for electricity. The grandfather gave up his love and went to Buenos Aires in order to improve his lifestyle. Half a century later, he finds himself in the same struggle of social progress. Elsa, on the other hand, goes in search of love and social progress though finds neither of them in Italy.

The slow motion documentary-like black and white images show growing civil unrest in the final scene. Urban dwellers are in the streets, starting bonfires where they burn images of government leaders. The background is filled with police sirens and then culminates in a gun shot as the image fades with the image of a little boy staring straight into the camera. Unknowing who was just shot, the viewer can only assume it might have been the young boy, representative of the new generations of Argentines and of the withering hope for progress. The shot cuts to the film title and then to a shot of Elsa throwing a coin into the Trevi Fountain in Rome while the sounds of the protests continue in the background. The significance of the coin makes reference to the superstition that if a tourist drops a coin in the fountain, it will secure their return. For Elsa, however, what does a return mean? Is she fulfilling her grandfather's desire to return to his homeland looking for his lover? Or perhaps it signifies Elsa's return to a different place, which begs the question: to where will she return? Rome? Buenos Aires? Sicily? And just as importantly, how will that space define her construction of self?

Sandra Gugliotta presents a relevant representation of the social situation experienced in Argentina at the turn of the new century. Though different sectors of society were struck differently by the changes of the ever-volatile Argentine peso, youths proved to be the most affected since their opportunities for progress were severely limited. Gugliotta's film also focuses on how this constant economic adjustment interacts with the conception of the urbanization of consciousness at the personal level—the construction of gender and value of sexuality. For Elsa, her sexuality, of which she has

complete control, is used in order to attain her ticket out of the country to more prosperous conditions.

**Prostituting Middle Class Desires: Analysis of Alejandro Chomski's
Hoy y mañana (2005)**

Prostitution is a common practice seen in urban centers as a means to access capital throughout the centuries. This activity has contributed to Argentine popular culture in its best-known art form, the tango. Immigration in the turn of the 20th century brought men to the port city where there were few women, and prostitution was a manner in which men satisfied their sexual desires. The growth of prostitution was so extreme that legalized prostitution went into effect in 1875 as a form to “control” and “monitor” this female profession (Guy 39). The mythical outcome was the development of the tango; waiting to have their turn with a woman, men danced together to pass the time. A century and a half later, Argentina still exercises prostitution though due to the urbanization, the logistics are different. The foundation remains the same—sex in exchange for money; however, the recent history of Argentina has created a situation where the number of prostitutes grows as the city and opportunities change.

The *Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices Argentinas* (AMMAR) conducted a study that concluded that prostitution grew by over 40% in the period from 1994-2004, which correlates with the growth in poverty due to the nation's economic changes (“Argentina: crece la prostitución”). This industry is diverse in that Buenos Aires has female, male and transvestite prostitution as a part of their nightly landscape. Nonetheless, women and girls still make up the greater part of the ‘streetwalking’ population. There are many reasons

for choosing such employment and it is a repercussion of the lack of access to capital. This is the subject matter of Alejandro Chomski's film *Hoy y mañana* (2005). How can a young *porteña* obtain AR\$300 in a time span of 36 hours to avoid eviction and maybe even pay her gas bill? What can she sell? If she has nothing, will her body suffice? In the Palermo district of Buenos Aires, everything is for sale and human sexuality is a sought after commodity.

Chomski's film follows Paula's (Antonella Costa) two-day odyssey. She is an actress living in Palermo Viejo and does not make enough money to pay for neither her gas bill nor her rent and is fired from her job as a waitress. She struggles to obtain AR\$40 to pay her utilities and yet her gas gets cut-off. Her landlord gives her one day to pay for at least one of the month's rent she owes or he will have her evicted. Unable to obtain this money from her father or friends, she seeks out her high school friend Claudia (Romina Ricci) who works as a prostitute. Claudia gives her the basic rules for streetwalking: "No hay reglas" except not mixing business and pleasure. In order to carry out this job, Paula assumes an alternate personality- a character she names Ana. She assumes it will be another role she is trying to play. Throughout the course of a night, she learns the procedures of the industry and negotiates different prices for various sexual services she will provide. Always moving throughout the streets of Buenos Aires, Paula/ Ana are confronted with abundant images of poverty, and yet her survival rests on her body and the construction of gender. While Paula is unable to gain access to capital in the daylight, her alter persona, Ana, comes across several opportunities to make money at night. Manual labor brings about little money, but selling the human body is a much more

lucrative enterprise. She uses her public and private guise to survive in Buenos Aires. In the end, the experience shakes her to the core and she admits, “Toda ha salido mal.”

Hoy y mañana constitutes Chomski’s first feature film, which received high critical acclaim. Amongst the various recognitions, the film was part of the selection for the Cannes Film Festival under the *Un Certain Regard* prize, which aims to recognize pictures that provide “innovative and audacious works” (Festival de Cannes “The organization”). Furthermore, the distribution of the film was obtained as it was a part of the Global Film Initiative Series in 2004, which, through the Global Lens series, screens and subsequently distributes films through First Run/Icarus Films. After this initial success, Chomski steered towards US productions including directing films such as *Feel the Noise* (2007) For Nuyorican Productions (a film company owned by Jennifer López and Mark Anthony). Having received his cinematic instruction from the American Film Institute (a product of being a Fulbright Hays recipient), Chomski has found work in the US and his more recent production is directing a piece written by acclaimed writer Paul Austen tentatively titled *In the Country of the Last Things*. This is the only example of a US educated director throughout the course of this study.

Within Argentina, *Hoy y mañana* did well and Guillermo Nieto’s fresh cinematography achieved praise as has the acting of Antonella Costa in the role of Paula. Nieto’s work is known from films such as *El bonaerense* (Dir. Pablo Trapero, 2002), which received prizes for its cinematography. *Hoy y mañana* uses a documentary –like camera that is seen more commonly in recent films as has been the case in two other films explored in this study including Maryse Sitach’s *Perfume de violetas* and Sandra

Gugliotta's *Un día de suerte*. Nieto's documentary shots, however, seem to be the most aggressive in terms of the proximity to the main character. In almost all sequences, the camera reveals close-ups of its main character and therefore reveals Paula's emotions or lack thereof. In other scenes, the camera is constantly keeping up with Paula, even if it reveals only the back of her head as she makes her way through the main streets of Buenos Aires or barely captures her as she flees from a supermarket. According to the director: "No se trata de una puesta de escena clásica. La cámara va siguiendo al personaje por la ciudad de Buenos Aires y sus alrededores y transmite al espectador una sensación de urgencia, que es la misma que tiene la protagonista" (Marirrodriga "Alejandro Chomski retrata la clase media argentina"). In essence, the camera is an onlooker trying to capture the action and the fact that the characters don't play to the camera alludes to a more realistic and naturalistic imagery as has also been noted by critic Ezequiel Schmoller who uses the phrase "naturalismo urgente" to describe the tone of the film ("Hoy y mañana").

The critics have noted the relevance of this film to the socioeconomic situation faced in post-2001 Argentina, a period of economic depreciation. As is the case with Gugliotta's film, Chomski also explores the issue of the disenchantment of the middle class in 21st century Argentina though he does not resort to representing marginal characters. Instead, he portrays what he calls the new poor, a demographic with which he can relate (Blejman "Quise hablar de nosotros, nuevos pobres"). Furthermore, the director has stated that he consciously addresses how women, young girls, will deal with a given economic situation. In an interview he points out

En el siglo XIX se decía que el proletariado lo único que tenía para ofrecer a cambio de un salario era su cuerpo. Esa idea marxista de la plusvalía no tiene nada que ver con la película, pero sí con que a las mujeres lo único que les queda como intercambio es su cuerpo. A partir de ese concepto me pareció correcto utilizar el cuerpo, relacionado con la dignidad de una persona, como última herramienta. Era un conflicto muy interesante para plantear en una chica que no se dedica [a] la prostitución y cuyo origen social no es humilde. Es de clase media y tienen aspiraciones artísticas y profesionales. Como toda una generación. Era un muy buen material de trabajo para desarrollar un guión. (Yolis “Alejandro Chomski, director”)

The city’s cinematic representation has been referenced by some critics, and the director has highlighted the impact on gender. Carolina Rocha also comments on this film in reference to the changing face of globalization and the presence of the foreign businessman; this will also be studied more in depth in this analysis. With these considerations, I will demonstrate how the film, through the aesthetics and narrative, gives us a glimpse of the social conditions of youths who try to make do with the given environment and social structures. When their construction of self is not sufficient to provide them with capital, they reinvent themselves to gain access to money. For women, the construction of gender will be negotiated.

As previously discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the economic downfall and extreme inflation of 2001 are the backdrop for this film. After the presidencies of Menem and de la Rúa, the citizens had to reconfigure their financial status. All social classes suffered. The middle class sank into poverty and the poorer classes became even poorer. Paula, the film’s protagonist, is part of that middle class that is now struggling more than ever to gain access to basic necessities.

At the most personal level, Paula preserves her middle class desires. Her heart is set on acting though this does not provide economic gain. Yet, in the theater space she is

able to project her most intimate emotions regarding her situation. Acting in an experimental play with five women, Paula's character is the rebel. While the other women sew, Paula's character taunts another regarding infertility and is cautioned not to speak of it. In this circle of women, there are certain gender codes that should be obeyed and Paula's character, like Paula in her life, breaks from the norm. Both Paula's character and Paula herself are liberated from sexual taboos. This stance, however, creates marginality and ultimately destruction of her spirit. In the play, her character states, "Siento zumbidos incesantes. Estoy cansada. Rastreo todo el tiempo y no te encuentro. Estoy demasiado flaca. Me estoy achicando. Estoy tan... tan sola." Like her character, Paula is being consumed by her life situation. She does not eat, has few genuine friends and is always on the run trying to look for money. She gets rave reviews on her artistic work, though in reality she is projecting her day-to-day difficulties. These skills will be useful when she uses them for profit when she cannot resolve her financial situation with her family's assistance.

Family, part of the equation involved in the urbanization of consciousness, creates a burden on the girl. Once again, those with access to capital will have a bearing on her behavior. The only two people that we see representing her family are two men, her uncle and her father. The relationship with her father is estranged. He, a lawyer, wants his daughter to seek out more practical and profitable careers while Paula opts to pursue acting. The only conversation the two have is in his law firm office where she interrupts his work and asks for money. The shot of them is crowded and yet, the father turns away

from Paula unable to look at her in the face therefore establishing the distance between the two despite the proximity.

The paternal figure's access to money determines his control over the young woman. In this time of economic underdevelopment, certain artistic expressions are not valued since it is not a viable means to capital; therefore, the father chooses not to assist his daughter by refusing to support her artistic endeavors. Paula chooses to not please her father and leaves. Family unity functions only when capital is facilitated and all the members contribute to the general economic well-being. Since Paula wants to maintain her agency, she opts for ignoring her father's requests, but she maintains her independence and, therefore, has control over her construction of gender.

The other family member that Paula interacts with is her uncle, an owner of a small-scale restaurant in the city. Paula calls and asks to borrow AR\$40 pesos in order to pay her gas bill. Their relationship remains intact because the uncle believes in his niece's acting talent even inquiring about her next theater presentation. Furthermore, because he aids her financially, he assumes he has some control over her even at the level of persuading her to fix her relationship with her father. Paula declines her uncle's suggestion and leaves. He himself is staying afloat, though barely. Paula takes AR\$40 from the cash register and lets him know that she is leaving him without money. The amount of money he lets her borrow correlates to the amount of power he has over her. As the amount of money she needs grows, she loses agency.

Paula's interaction with her surroundings will reflect and shape her construction of self. These places will have an effect on her as an individual as can be seen when we

analyze her private space and compare it with the public space that she inhabits. Her apartment will be a reflection of her self-perception while the city streets and public spaces will shape her into a different woman. As I have shown, her middle class necessities cannot be fulfilled by her family or the skills she possesses so she will need to expose herself to the public spaces in an overt manner. Though, the location of her home setting has an impact of her consciousness because it is situated in the constantly changing Palermo Viejo.

The Palermo district of Buenos Aires and its history will have a bearing on Paula's self-perception since the *barrio* almost becomes a character with whom the protagonist interacts. Palermo, and all of its divisions, is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Buenos Aires and it has experienced constant transformation. Though only a neighborhood, Palermo conveys a complex demographic of wealthy *porteños*, artist colonies and immigrant populations. With the immigrant population, Palermo Viejo had industry and was a very affordable part of the city. With lower prices, it attracted artists, and it acquired a bohemian vibe, housing well-known literary figures such as Jorge Luis Borges. However, in the past 15 years, the area of Palermo Viejo has undergone a process of gentrification. Upscale boutiques, nightclubs and fine dining have taken over some areas of Palermo Viejo and created the sub-neighborhood of Palermo Soho. Multinational companies such as Nike now have prime real estate in this area as a sign of the neoliberal attitude adopted by Argentina. What this gentrification has done is made the housing market more expensive and less accessible to the immigrant and artist class inhabitants.

Furthermore, this area is becoming a space for yuppies, which is reflected in the upscale markets. In essence, Palermo has become a place of consumption.

Paula calls a tiny apartment in Palermo Viejo her home. She is directly affected by the gentrification of her neighborhood and is being edged out of her space, unable to afford it. Once an inexpensive artist area, Paula tries to keep up with the changing landscape though she cannot maintain a job and is unable to make any profit from her acting. Paula, like youths of her age, is marginalized by the fluctuating economic situation of Argentina. The downtrodden studio apartment is a reflection of Paula. The apartment is rundown and bleak; scruffy bare cement walls make up most of the dwelling. Little decoration, a poster of Audrey Hepburn, and a plain bed in the middle of the room comprise the living space. All elements are disorganized mimicking Paula's constantly disheveled mental state. It is as though her apartment is merely a place to rest a bit and not her home. This is the only space where Paula remains still, if only for an instant. Throughout the entire film she rests only twice, and both those times she is in her home. While she tries to rest, she is interrupted either by the landlord, phone messages or a deadbeat boyfriend; she is forced to once again run out to the streets in order to resolve her financial situation. Her constant motion is representative of Buenos Aires inhabitants whose socioeconomic situation no longer allows for any leisure. Her home, then, is a place where she can perch, but not completely inhabit, unless she has money. Similarly to the situation experienced by other artists and lower waged inhabitants of this neighborhood, as the area is gentrified, they can no longer remain there.

Throughout the course of the film, the landlord and the boyfriend are the only two people who enter Paula's private space. Incidentally, both wish to obtain something from Paula—money or sex. This womb-like space, then, is penetrated by the men who represent the two factors that continuously haunt Paula throughout the film. Yet, her negotiations in this environment are more successful. She is able to convince her landlord to give her a day's extension on her rent and not evict her. She partakes in pleasurable sex with her boyfriend, something which does not willingly occur in the other settings. Though Paula has more control in this environment, she must face her surroundings and that is where the attainment of money becomes conflictive.

Nico is one of the few individuals that make it into Paula's inner intimate circle. Their relationship is one based on licentiousness. Their meeting space characterizes their relationship. They meet at Club 69, which is also in Palermo Viejo on the corner of main streets Niceto Vega and Humbolt. Though Club 69 is housed in the Niceto Club discotheque, on Thursday night it transforms into what they describe as "Un encuentro que fomenta el hedonismo, el goce y el sentido del humor [...] atmósfera única de graciosa lujuria" ("Club 69"). The name of the bar tips off the characteristic of their relationship, one based on non-reproductive sex. Inside, they are barely able to speak due to the loud noise and distracting lighting. Paula is unable to see Nico through the agglomeration of people. Once they do meet, their chatter is superficial and they dance. In this space, the focus is on pleasure whether it is dancing or doing drugs in the bathroom stalls. The camera and lighting cut to Paula and the crowd dancing; frenetic images are frantic and though Paula and Nico speak, there is little communication, and

that is what comprises their relationship. Paula's body appears fragmented as the lights and dancing distort her. She is dehumanized and pieced off much like the johns and men see her, caring only for a piece of her body. The representations of the fragmented female body is a common practice where female sexuality is represented as fragmented to allow for pleasure in order to deny women their subjectivity. The focus on Paula's fragmented body emphasizes the lust of those that surround her. They too can have a piece of her body in this space.

For Nico, this space meets his needs since he desires Paula for pleasure. Together they drink, do drugs and have sex, though their relationship has no real intimacy. He himself is strapped for cash and he makes this known to Paula on the phone before asking her to meet him; therefore, he does not provide any financial help to the girl. Furthermore, he hinders Paula's attempts to progress. She has AR\$250 taken from her by a corrupt undercover police officer who raids the two as they do drugs inside a bathroom stall in the discotheque. Paula tries running after the man, but Nico holds her back. He becomes added weight to Paula's already difficult situation. In the short time they are in her apartment, he scans through her belongings and takes a beer from her refrigerator. After they have sex, he lets her know he does not care whether she is faithful to him. That being said, he is using her for his sexual gratification. Nico demonstrates that his interest rests solely on using her for sex, yet Paula is able to have pleasurable sex with him. He is not interested in achieving any level of intimacy or permanence with the girl, so his behavior is similar to that of the johns who surround Paula with the exception that Nico

does not pay her. After seeing that he is similar to the other men who use her for sex, she opts for leaving him and going back to the streets to restart her search for AR\$300.

Aside of her family and her boyfriend, Paula reaches out to her friends for money such as when she calls a wealthy friend of hers, Luchi, who lives in a luxurious home tended by servants. Luchi is married, pregnant, and spends her days relaxing at home. Asked for money, Luchi replies that she must check with her husband. Luchi has access to capital, but is dependant on the male provider. As she states, she would gladly lend Paula the money, though Oscar, her husband, is the ultimate decision maker when it comes to money. Luchi has chosen a traditional marriage life complete with stay-at-home privileges and maternity, but she loses some of her agency since she does not obtain capital, she is limited. She is granted access to capital only as long as she successfully fulfills the traditional societally-constructed gender roles. This makes her dependant on her husband. Paula is the complete opposite of this situation; she keeps her independence and agency, though is still affected by her inability to produce her own capital.

Professionals, even the theater director, try to make use as Paula's body in exchange for capital. He offers Paula money in exchange for a sexual relationship and states, "Vos me atraés, Paula, y lo sabés. Y si querés podemos hacer algo con ese deseo.[...] No quiero parecer desubicado pero una relación así no da. Pero si vos me permitieras algún otro tipo de ayuda, algo con retribución, como para por ejemplo para que pagués el gas." Noticeably, as he is pitching this proposal to Paula, the shots zoom in on his hands as they gesture and as they touch Paula. This proposition is removed from emotions and feelings on the director behalf and his hands emphasize his body and his

desire to attain Paula in exchange for money. Paula is first introduced to the idea that commodifying her sexuality will help her financial acquisition.

Intimate relationships even friends become a means to capital. Paula calls upon her friend Claudia as a last resort. Seeing that the theater director offers her money to sleep with him, Paula decides to attempt prostitution alongside Claudia. The friend makes use of her femaleness, her sexuality, in order to obtain capital. She, however, will not give Paula money. Instead Claudia provides her friend with a means to capital—prostitution. Such is Claudia's success as a prostitute that she affords paying rent and is able to gift various toys and treats to her young daughter. Claudia, like others, does not believe in Paula's artistic endeavors and demonstrates scorn when asking about Paula's acting career. Claudia considers her choice of employment more practical since prostitution allows her to provide for her daughter.

In order to carry out the role of the prostitute and relieve some of the cognitive dissonance that arises from this endeavor, Paula alters her persona and creates a sexually overt construction of gender. Unable to make money from acting in experimental theater, she makes use of her body as her asset and takes on a more lucrative character, Ana. As Paula reasons, if she is going to sleep with someone for money, she would rather do it with a stranger and as a stranger. To carry out her transformation and begin her performance as a prostitute, she applies heavy makeup, skimpy clothes, and high heeled shoes, thus transforming into Ana. She leaves behind her military boots and motorcycle jacket. Femininity sells while her day-to-day persona does not. She is assuming the hyper characteristics of sexuality that create a grander illusion of femaleness by maximizing her

sex appeal. In this way, she becomes a sexual object to be consumed by men in the streets of Buenos Aires.

Once she has transformed into a prostitute and goes to the streets, she will face different spaces that are foreign to her, and yet these places are a part of the typical Buenos Aires district still concentrated along the Palermo neighborhood. As Ana, she will see her share of back alleys, shady nightclubs and no tell motels known formally as “hoteles íntimos” and informally as “telos” by *porteños*. In addition, the camera captures dirty trash-ridden streets filled with graffiti. This is hardly the pleasant streets that are associated with Palermo in the daytime. The image zooms out far enough so as to capture Paula’s body in the midst of the urban night, and it travels with her as if the camera were the johns who watch her pass by at times zooming in on body parts such as her legs. She is being consumed by the gaze, the male gaze that Laura Mulvey has spoken about, and she is assessed as a product in a market, thus reduced to a sexual object. Her clothes and physique come under scrutiny of each john who determines whether she fits an individual pre-established sexual desire. The placement of the camera and the use of the gaze make the audience johns that are evaluating Paula.

Establishments that cater to sexual consumption are visited as a means to interact with potential clients. Paula enters Cocodrilo, which is a Buenos Aires staple and includes table dancers and the opportunity for women to solicit johns (a twist on the prostitution where the ladies come directly to the men). This space is one for the consumption of females whether it is by watching them and paying them to dance, or paying them directly to carry out sexual services. As she walks in, a waitress tells her

“tenés que consumir” and emphasizes the consumption that takes place- everyone must consume whether it is alcohol or women. Women, too, must consume in order to sell themselves. Cocodrilo is a place for the women to market themselves, though, like everything, at a price. Investing in drinks will give them access to profit. Here, too, they are a commodity waiting to be selected by the visiting men.

The business of prostitution must be learned in order to understand how this market functions and to identify the expectations. Paula meets various johns, fellow prostitutes and even working transvestites each of who will teach her the ropes of the business. She learns by observing the behavior of other prostitutes. Though she exercises her sexuality in her personal life, she must learn how to do this commercially in Palermo Viejo where prostitutes are unofficially divided into social groups including a group of transvestite prostitutes who tell her to move away from their corner. Thus, prime commercial settings factor into this business since this must be negotiated. Ana is learning to use her body, her femaleness, to make money though she must learn how to highlight her sexuality. The transvestites are examples of this same situation as they perform an expected gender by transforming into women. These too dress up in the same manner that Paula does. They transform from male to overt sexual females by emphasizing their makeup and bright tight fitting clothes. Female sex sells and these men dress the part to be on par with feminine competition, which is what Ana learns to do.

The negotiation of capital in prostitution has preset conditions that must be learned. Prostitution helps Paula obtain money though her first attempts are without success and leave her with little financial gain. With Claudia, she gets in a car with two

men and Claudia negotiates the service of oral sex. Unable to follow through, she leaves and attempts to work by herself and finds her first client, Miguel. She performs oral sex on him and afterwards asks for AR\$100. Miguel immediately disagrees telling her “los precios son otros” and gives her only a fraction of what she requested. Miguel has power over Ana (Paula) and is able to assign the worth of the girl’s sexual performance. Paula, as Ana, is angry though when she expresses her anger with another prostitute she learns that the price negotiations must occur upfront along with advance payment. Nonetheless, the prices have been unofficially established with little room for negotiation, as evident by Miguel’s reaction.

She establishes the official cost of her body when dealing with her most compassionate john, Raúl- a Spanish businessman. As soon as she gets into his car, she negotiates a steep price of AR\$200. Aside of this initial expense, she also has him invest in a *telo* to carry out her service and they agree on a luxury intimate hotel. Paula distances herself from her clients and their personal lives. She does not reveal any information about herself and only finds out basic information from her clients. Once in the hotel, Raúl still courts Ana and offers her a drink and attempts to ask her personal question. He is not only trying to pay for sex but rather also intimacy. Paula, on the other hand, is very focused on what her AR\$200 entails –her body--, and she is quick to begin the sexual interaction. The camera zooms in on her stoic face as Raúl caresses her body and she turns away from him. He only has access to her body, but not her face. The camera then quickly cuts to Paula getting dressed. Though Raúl asks her to stay, she sees that her

duties are done and she leaves the hotel room quickly, therefore making her interaction with him completely financial.

Raúl's access to capital and his economic capacity to obtain sex is represented in the hotel they visit. He takes her to the famed Hotel Nuevos Vientos situated in an area bordering Belgrano and Palermo. This hotel is an upscale luxury no tell motel with hourly rates and even has a website where they boast of their service's quality and discretion. With information on the World Wide Web, this hotel markets to foreigners with higher disposable income and re-emphasizes the neoliberal trend of the country that similarly whores itself to foreign capital as a means to survival, serving as an allegory for the state of the country.⁴⁸ The red filters seen in this sequence create the feeling of a sex motel. Raúl is able to afford this type of establishment and Paula's high prices because he owns an advertising agency with offices in Spain and Argentina. Raúl is an example of foreign capital that Argentina came to depend on after the crisis of 2001 as is the case of the cinematic industry. Following the financial events of 2001 with little money available for the arts, Spanish co-productions were sought to finance films because Spain was in a much better economic position than the South American country. Raúl, then, does not find it difficult to meet Paula's expensive rates since his capital is from abroad.⁴⁹ As a businessman, he is able to consume anything he desires, and in this case he consumes the young girl.

⁴⁸ Carolina Rocha states that Paula represents Buenos Aires as a city that seduces foreign men, thus emphasizing the neoliberal climate.

⁴⁹ Part of the agreements in co-productions requires for actors from each country to be involved. This can also help explain the inclusion of the Spanish character in the film, which further emphasizes the dependence on foreign capital.

Raúl becomes an established source of income for Paula. She seeks him out Raúl once again knowing that he will meet her fee. Once again, the allegory is reinforced as the Argentine seeks out foreign nationals for income as a reflection of the neoliberal tendencies. They meet at his apartment, which has views of the city that re-emphasize the luxuries that Raúl can afford. This time, though, he insists on providing her with pleasure and wants her to spend the night. Paula elevates her price to AR\$300. Against her will, Paula feels sexual pleasure; after sex, she rolls over and buries her head in pillows. She has not only given him access to her body, but also to a more intimate sexuality. She has broken the only rule that her friend Claudia had warned her not to break. Different to any of the other occasions when she has been with a man, Paula's inert body lies in Raúl's bed after sex.

Sexual pleasure equates to the loss of agency. She flees his home in the middle of the night and breaks their initial agreement of spending the night together, but he catches up with her. Their confrontation in the elevator becomes aggressive. The blue filters mimic the coldness in Raúl's tone of voice. He grabs her bag and takes back most of what he paid her telling her, "No vales más que eso." Though he felt he paid sufficiently to be intimate with her, his actions dehumanize her into a sexual object-- a product, which Raúl no longer feels is worth the price they established. Initially he paid Paula's fee, but her actions have caused him to devalue her sexual worth demonstrating that he has the power since he controls the capital.

Paula's final client of the night is a gentleman from Cocodrilo. As they are negotiating, the camera cuts and pans to the table dancers emphasizing women as sexual

objects. He takes her to a cheap motel unlike the one where she stayed with Raúl. Different to her previous client, this john pays her upfront demonstrating that he is all too aware of the rules of the business, which is also evident as they walk into the seedy motel and he requests a room. This client reveals nothing about himself and instead orders her to perform oral sex while he watches an animal documentary of a tiger pouncing on a deer. The juxtaposition of alternating shots creates a similar relationship between Paula and her john. The man assumes the position of the powerful tiger and she is his prey. He climaxes as he sees images of the tiger capturing his prey. Paula runs to the bathroom to wash up while images of the tiger feasting on his prey crosscut. She, then, is that victim. As she tries to leave, the man lets her know that he is in control and that he has the power to tell her when she may leave, “Terminamos cuando yo diga,” and he proceeds to slap and rape her while she screams “¡No soy puta! ¡Pará!”

The dynamics of the relationship between the product and the consumer have turned. As the night progresses, Paula has lost her agency to the point where the man dominates her completely. While she was able to reject her first client and later on establish her demands with Raúl, she progressively lost her power after the second encounter with Raúl. This last client proves to her that he, as the paying customer, has authority over her. Having paid his fee, he feels entitled to do with Paula as he pleases. The red filters in the room and the constant movement of the camera as Paula's face remains buried in the red bedcovers heightens her weakness.

The lighting adds a level of meaning to Paula's perception of her various sexual encounters. She leaves the red hued room that created a sense of the illicit prostitution

world and moves to the blue toned streets that convey coldness and isolation as it dawns in the city. Paula watches as she passes through the city. There is a lot more activity than a few hours ago as the city awakes to a Friday morning. In the taxi, her cabdriver tries to console her after he sees a concerned look on her face to which Paula simply responds “Todo está mal de repente.” Paula is expressing the disenchantment of many Argentines of the time who are unable to progress given the nation’s conditions. While Argentina was a progressive society, these characters can no longer make ends meet. Furthermore, she is alone in this urban environment since she does not have the support of family, friends, nor a significant other. For a young woman, the only way out is making money in any way she can, even if the only thing she has is her body. To do this, she must reinvent her gender identity. Paula’s gets off the taxi, walks along the sidewalk on the riverbank of the Rio de la Plata and, for once throughout the entire film, she cries as she stares into the water. As the camera captures her from behind, the shot allows for the city lights to sparkle in front of her across the river, removing her from all the chaos. These are the conditions that she must face if she is to survive the conflict that arises between her desires and the present economic conditions of Argentina.

In the turn of the 21st century, Argentina is not fulfilling the expectations of grandeur that Sarmiento had first explored in the 19th century. Though Buenos Aires was destined to socioeconomic prosperity and cultural greatness, the country’s financial activity hindered this position throughout the 20th century culminating in the last decade. Years of continuous changing of power and constant modification of economic approximations have created a large gap between the Argentine city and the rural

landscape. For this reason, Argentina has seen a reverse migration in several instances both during the 1970s as a result to the government dictatorship and then at the turn of the 21st century as a response to a dwindling economy. Thus, civilization does not always prove to advance accordingly.

The financial instability not only affects the economic finances of the citizens, it also modifies the individual self-consciousness of each individual as he or she re-evaluates their position within the urban environment. While not only the definition of social class is renegotiated, gender construction, too, is affected. As money becomes scarce, women find that they must revert to a binary construction of gender in order to attain access to capital and therefore negotiate between who they want to be and what they have to be in order to survive.

CHAPTER 4: DEFINED BY LABOR: THE MEANS TO CAPITAL AS A DEFINITION OF GENDER IN THE DEVELOPING BRAZILIAN CITY

Summary of Brazilian Cinema and Society

Brazil has had a constant filmic production throughout the 20th century and has made a significant contribution to world cinema through artistic innovations, including the *Cinema Novo* project in the 1960s. Nonetheless, filmic representations of Brazil at the international level center on the images of Carmen Miranda and samba from the 1930s, Marcel Camus's *Black Orpheus* (1958), or more recently, the violence of the *favelas* (shantytowns) (Johnson and Stam 19). Still, Brazil's cinema has seldom been a highly lucrative industry because it has struggled with national audience acceptance of the films it produces similarly to other Latin American countries (King 247-49). The prevalent images produced during the 1930s of carnival and Carmen Miranda⁵⁰ reached a high level of transcendence and have become the same images that some contemporary cinema contests. Recurring images of samba and Carnival present a challenge to many current filmmakers as they seek to appeal to a national and international audience by creating contemporary images of present-day Brazil while still struggling with dominant notions of culture, social structures and, of specific interest to this study, gender. A brief summary of the State's control of cinematography and the conception of gender in

⁵⁰ Miranda's images are more prevalent in Hollywood filmmaking; yet, these have become closely associated with representations of Brazil.

Brazilian film will aid in understanding present-day interactions between capital and gender in the national filmmaking of these past two decades.

Birth of Brazilian Cinema

Brazil was undergoing a period of little economic expansion when cinema arose in the turn of the century. The young republic soon found its growth in the export market, concentrating on coffee and rubber, and making São Paulo the richest state in the country (Smith 113). Randal Johnson and Robert Stam indicate that film viewing was not widely accessible in its beginning largely due to the unavailability of electricity in urban and rural areas (20).

The rise of cinematic production grew during the first decade of the 20th century, as did the exhibition with over 100 films produced yearly (Johnson and Stam 20). National audiences responded favorably to Brazilian films, evident in box office revenues. Themes of films varied and included crime dramas, while genres also expanded to musical comedies. The Brazilian *Bela Época* enjoyed a short-lived three years of flourishing cinematic industry from 1908 to 1911 (20). This period of cinematic growth mirrored the country's industrial growth; the urban areas were growing and higher rates of European immigration meant that the industrialized cities along the Brazilian coastline grew, including Bahia, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.⁵¹ To reflect the growth and modernization between 1903 and 1906, extensive renovations took place to recreate a European-inspired city center in Rio de Janeiro, which included Parisian-styled streets "in

⁵¹ Over 3 million European immigrants arrived in Brazil from 1889-1930, where 80 percent of the immigrants were from Italy, Portugal or Spain and concentrated in São Paulo (Smith 120-21).

the latest *belle-époque* style” architecture (Smith 122). While these areas seemed to show Brazil’s urban advancement, the city workers dealt with below average living and economic standards, which created a dual-society within the progressive Brazilian city. The cinematic *Bela Época* promoted the social conception of Brazil as a modern society, therefore agreeing with the European image that the government was trying to promote while ignoring salient social issues related to the lower classes.

Brazil’s decline in economic growth during World War I mirrored the diminishment in national cinematic production, which allowed for US and European films to thrive. The attractiveness of Brazil’s *Bela Época* lasted until US businessmen introduced their films into the Latin American market in 1911. The North American films became lucrative while the national film industry lost its popularity during this period.

The Estado Novo and the Chanchada

Brazilian cinema experienced a revival of national audience appeal in the 1930s with the production of the *chanchada* genre, light-hearted song-and-dance comedies that became a staple of Brazilian filmmaking and usually included the participation of Oscarito (1906-1970) or Grande Otelo (1915-1993). Domingos Demasi suggests that the idea to create an industry based on this genre should be attributed to Grande Otelo (29).⁵² The *chanchada* became representative of Brazil in the same manner the melodrama and tango represented Mexican and Argentine filmmaking, respectively, during the same time

⁵² Domingos Demasi recounts the story of a meeting that included director José Carlos Burle, sound technician Moacir Fenelon, cameraman Edgar Brasil, and rising actor Grande Otelo. Their intention was to “criar uma cooperativa para realizar filmes baratos e populares ‘dramáticos, mas bem-humorado e musical. Como o povo carioca’” (29).

period. Johnson and Stam state the following feature of the *chanchada*: “Although [this genre] fostered an idealized and inconsequential image of Brazilians, crystallized in a perpetually playful Rio de Janeiro, the *chanchadas* had the virtue of establishing an authentic link between Brazilians and their cinema” (27). The *chanchada*, then, was an attempt to portray an idealized and escapist image of an easy-going life of Brazilians, though it was far from reality for many of the inhabitants. Nonetheless, cinema served the purpose of creating national images while the state formally promoted cultural activities such as soccer and carnival (Smith 183).⁵³ That being said, the *chanchadas* helped foment the images of *brasilidade* as carnival song and dance were blended into these cheap productions. Films were representative of the socioeconomic growth; yet, the fallacy of the economic bounty was evident in the living conditions of the migrant workers that moved from rural areas to the urban centers where they experienced low wages and lived in the sprawling *favelas*. Furthermore, despite the success of the *chanchadas*, they were not always seen positively. As Demasi states, this genre “sempre incomodou a elite e a intelectualidade, insatisfeitas por ela representar a brasilidade nas telas do cinema. Muitos, principalmente os paulistas, não admitiam o jeito carioca de ser dos personagens, a molacagem reinante e o fato de tudo acabar em samba” (38). Thus, *chanchadas* were frowned upon by the intellectuals and considered vulgar by others while they were widely accepted by popular audiences.

⁵³ The government of Getúlio Vargas officially supported the national soccer team and the Carnival celebration in Rio de Janeiro and promoted them as national symbols. The triumph of the national team helped to promote the politics of Vargas. Similarly, the support for Carnival allowed the government to impose censorship measures by having samba school register and abide by certain government requirements in order to participate in Carnival events. (Smith 183).

Though *chanchadas* dominated the screens, it was not the only genre produced in the late 40s. Brazil's first two women directors, Carmen Santos (1904-1952) and Gilda Abreu (1904-1979), each produced a drama in the late 40s: *Inconfidência Mineira* (1948) and *O Ébrio* (1947), respectively. Female directors experienced difficulty with the management of crews, mostly men, who were uncomfortable taking orders from women (Munerato and Darcy de Oliveira 341-43). With little permissiveness to move out of conventional female representations on screens, the filmic constructions of women by female directors reflected traditional gender roles. Films such as those released by these women directors were a minority and the gender determining representations of *malandragem* present in the *chanchada* was the norm.

In response to the *carioca*-centralized filmmaking, a group of investors from São Paulo opened the Vera Cruz Studios in 1949 with the intent to create Hollywood-type filmmaking in Brazil. These new studios adapted similar cinematic techniques and styles seen in US filmmaking to Brazilian films including likenesses in sets, lighting, film shots and even actors with fair complexions (Johnson and Stam 28). Despite the success of some of these films, including *O Cangaceiro* (Dir. Lima Barreto 1953), the project failed. Johnson and Stam note that Vera Cruz: “[Was] a tropical Hollywood, it setup an expensive and luxurious system with contract stars and directors, but without the economic infrastructure on which to base such a system” (28-29). These studios depended on Hollywood for the distribution of their films, though this, too, was unsuccessful.

The Vera Cruz project dovetailed with a period of economic growth experienced in the country following World War II as the concept of *desenvolvimento* was adopted, making Brazil one of the fastest growing economies with a seven percent growth of the Growth Domestic Product; the country's economic strength also shifted to industrial production. Smith describes *desenvolvimento* as “an economic ideology that aimed to achieve a modern industrial economy and was very much in vogue during the 1950s” (175). The Vera Cruz project coincides with Brazil's pursuit in becoming a strong industrial power along with its European counterparts; however, national cinema failed at producing images that appealed to Brazilian audiences. Johnson and Stam comment that “in [Vera Cruz's] attempt to create a ‘classy’ cinema with glossy production values, it completely ignored the tastes, interests, and real situation of the Brazilian people” (29). This style of filmmaking prompted director and critic Carlos Diegues (b. 1940) to manifest “Vera Cruz was founded, a bizarre structureless monster, without roots in our culture, nourishing itself on the dream of a European cinema in an illiterate and impoverished Brazil” (65). This project released a mere eighteen films from the late 40s to the mid 50s and marks a dramatic decline in production from the overabundant *chanchada* genre of the previous decade.

Rethinking Brazilian Cinema and Modernity

Juscelino Kubitschek's presidency from 1956-1961 marked a five-year national improvement pledge and included advances such as a growth in employment, the construction of the new federal district of Brasília and the promotion of the automobile industry centered in São Paulo; this attitude translated into cultural production.

Kubitschek was successful in delivering many changes to the country but the developmentalism ideology brought inflation that future governments would have to control. Regarding Brazilian society as a whole, Johnson and Stam state that “[w]e are dealing, then, with a period of apparent economic expansion based on foreign investment, a period of political militancy, strong nationalist sentiments, and increasing social polarization” (30). Kubitschek’s implementation of reforms created a strong sense of nationalism while different social classes dealt with growing governmental opposition to the economic inflation; cinematic production reflected these inconsistencies.

Traces of *Cinema Novo* started appearing during Kubitschek’s presidency. The European-trained Brazilian directors that formed a part of this new cinematic movement had experienced the disastrous results of the Vera Cruz project. These young filmmakers sought to bring about a different ideology to Brazilian filmmaking that would encompass a raw expression of society. Hence, directors incorporated Italian Neorealism⁵⁴ and French New Wave⁵⁵ elements into local filmmaking. For Brazilian directors, this new style of filmmaking was a response to the big-studio productions of Vera Cruz with which national audiences did not identify. *Cinema Novo*, they hoped, would provide an

⁵⁴ This trend originated in the 1940s in Italy when the lack of filming sets due to the war, which created financial and social devastation, created a need to use on-site sets. Filming, also, was inclined towards more documentary-like realism. Actors were many times non-professionals. Overall, the cost of production was diminished and the output was considered to be a more authentic representation of society. The Italian Neorealist movement attempted to be a socially charged cinema that would favor “slice-of-life plot construction” (Bordwell and Thompson 419)

⁵⁵ French New Wave cinema came about in the 1960s. Bored with traditional filmmaking, young critics of the *Cahiers du cinema* journal criticized consecrated directors of the time. Instead, they favored *auteur* cinema. In their own production, they preferred the natural settings and lighting used by Italian Neorealists with a moving camera that could enter into small spaces. Aside of these filming preferences, they also included references to other films and their storylines many times “lack goal-oriented protagonists” (Bordwell and Thompson 419-21).

expression to which Brazilian audiences could relate. To achieve this, they opted “to take the people as theme, to give human form to fundamental conflicts, to make the people the center and master of the cinematic instrument” (Diegues 66). To emphasize the ideology guiding this filmmaking, Glauber Rocha (1939-1981), one of the main proponents of *Cinema Novo*, wrote a series of manifestos (“Estética da fome,” “Tricontinental,” and “Estética do sonho”) where he emphasized Latin America’s need to re-invent local cinema and included the need to reject commercial Brazilian cinema and traditional Hollywood esthetics in national filmmaking.

Cinema under Dictatorship: Flourishing *Cinema Novo*

The onset of the military dictatorship in 1964 had a direct effect on the national cinema. Up until that time, the Cinema Novo project, as a whole, had been consistently producing films but these were not financially successful due to the lack of audience appeal. The downfall of this project, according to critics, was its intellectualism, which did not resonate well with popular audiences (Johnson 8). Though Cinema Novo boasted of placing “the people” (meaning masses) on the screen, the spectators who were able to view these films (many of whom were middle class) were not interested. Thus, some directors felt that the audience was still too bourgeoisie to understand the “popular” dynamic behind their themes (Rêgo “Cinema Novo...” np).

According to some Brazilian film historians including Johnson and Stam, 1972 marks the end of the Cinema Novo, which had been active during the greater part of the military government (40). Censorship became an issue to continue production. Directors found it necessary to modify some elements of their filmmaking, which indirectly made

the films more appealing to the national audience. The various military leaders placed the arts under lawful scrutiny through the *Ato Institucional Número Cinco* (AI-5) that went into effect December 1968. Under this act, there was a heightened level of censorship that provoked government officials to repress films with political undertones that opposed the dictatorship's revolutionary efforts including Marxist ideology or negative representations of the country.⁵⁶ Cinema Novo moved towards a phase known as *Tropicalismo*,⁵⁷ which borrowed from Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago* written in 1928. Andrade's original text invokes the vanguard Brazilian esthetic of the early twentieth century though, in the 1960s and 70s, it was revived to reconceptualize Brazilian culture. The *Cinemanovistas*, including directors Glauber Rocha, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade (1932-1988), Nelson Pereira Dos Santos (b.1928) Rui Guerra (b. 1931), and Carlos Diegues had a political agenda that they were able to transmit through the use of allegory in films, which allowed them to pass strict censorship laws unperceived. Some of the most successful films from this time period were politically charged, attacking the government in power, such as is the case of *Macunaíma* (Dir. Joaquim Pedro de Andrade 1969).

⁵⁶ Robert Stam reprinted a translation of the form that censors filled out for every film released in Brazil during the military dictatorship. The questions on the form included the following: "Does [the film] include Marxist propaganda: -[is the propaganda] ostensive? - [is the propaganda] subliminal?," "Does [the film] attempt to demoralize or disfigure the activity of the police or the Armed Forces?" (Stam, "Censorship in Brazil" np).

⁵⁷ *Tropicalismo* refers to the ideas embraced by the "Manifesto Antropófago" originally written in 1928 by Oswald de Andrade and it discusses cannibalism in the figurative sense. Musical artists adopted the attitude of cultural cannibalism by incorporating different elements from popular and high culture to create something unique that reflected a critical representation of society as a whole. (Johnson and Stam (81-82). See Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's "Cannibalism and Self-Cannibalism" to identify the cultural cannibalism present in the film *Macunaíma*.

Cinema Novo dwindled in the early 70s when funding and censorship made filmmaking difficult for the directors; this political environment provoked the brief exile of Glauber Rocha, Rui Guerra and Carlos Diegues in 1972 (Johnson and Stam 40). Against this political backdrop, directors began producing *pornochanchadas*, light erotic comedies, which also adopt the name *chanchada* but have little to do with the musical comedies of the 40s.⁵⁸ Politics, it seems, was more taboo than sexuality since these films passed censorship. Although, as Johnson and Stam note, these films deliver nudity, they promote a traditional moral code present in the constant interruption of sexual activity throughout the film (ibid).

The Reign of Embrafilme and the Return to Civilian Government

Embrafilme is another institution that changed the face of Brazilian cinema and is described as “Criada pelo governo militar, a Empresa Brasileira de Filmes era uma companhia mista com participação de capital privado, que funcionava sob controle do governo” (Butcher 17). In 1974, this government institution appointed Roberto Farias as its director. Under his management, the production and distribution of Brazilian films grew by implementing co-productions with independent producers. Still, directors debated whether Embrafilme was an appropriate institution for the promotion of national films citing favoritism towards specific regional filmmaking and commercial super

⁵⁸ Johnson and Stam describe these as a “cinematic portrait of the sexual alienation of the Brazilian petite-bourgeoisie; they exalt the good bourgeois life of fast cars, wild parties, and luxurious surroundings, while offering the male voyeur titillating shots of breasts and buttocks” (40). In contrast to the 1930s *chanchada*, Johnson also states that it is “the *chanchada*’s debased offspring—usually a poorly made film featuring a vulgar sort of eroticism” (*The Film Industry in Brazil* 162)

productions. What is certain is that Brazilian Cinema and audience reception grew with Embrafilme, which continued until the late 80s.

Cinematic production mirrored the financial health of the state, which experienced a “miracle” in economic growth from 1968-1974 and included a rise in the production and exportation of agricultural products, steel weaponry, and automobile production (Brown 217). During the period of the economic miracle, Embrafilme was able to produce over 382 films, and averaged approximately 74 filmic productions per year (Johnson *The Film Industry in Brazil* 143). The number of films produced rose and so did the length of exhibition on national screens. By law, Brazilian films had to be exhibited on national screens for a minimum of ninety-eight days, and at one point one hundred and twelve days in order to ensure the productions received adequate exhibition (123,149).⁵⁹ This meant that several films were economically successful.

As part of the ongoing growth of Brazilian cinema, the Cinema Novo directors began training a new crop of filmmakers, which also included an increasing amount of women such as Ana Carolina Teixeira Soares (b.1943), Tereza Trautman (b.1951), Maria do Rosário (b.1951), Tania Quaresma (b.1950), and Suzana Amaral (b. 1932). However, as Elice Munerato and Maria Helena Darcy de Ribeira point out, this did not mean that there were feminist filmic works during that period. The critics analyzed the films produced in the 70s by these women directors and found that the plots in most of the productions analyzed adhere to the presence of love triangles that end with the

⁵⁹ In practice, this number would vary according to the size of the cities and the number of days in which a theater functioned. The 112 days was determined based on 28 days of compulsory exhibition per quarter (123).

consolidation of the couple (341). These films reinforce traditional gender roles where a woman was allowed to be at the center of the plot if she was physically beautiful.

Munerato and Darcy de Ribeira suggest that the difficulty in creating feminist works (defined as breaking from the female conventions of beauty, male dependence, and amorous relationships as self-fulfillment) was due to the lack of models of feminist cinema in Brazil; this, the critics believe, led Brazilian women directors to produce representations of feminine submissiveness in the films of the 70s and 80s (350).

Due to the presence and productions of new Brazilian directors, film production during the 70s thrived though the economy experienced a large external debt that was coupled with decreasing imports, which fueled rising inflation. The civilian government of José Sarney took office in 1985 and dealt with the rising levels of inflation through the *Cruzado* plans, which temporarily aided the economy by freezing prices and interest rates in 1986. This brought immediate economic relief to the country, but it was short-lived. Once the abrupt freeze was relaxed at the end of that year, the economy experienced a collapse in 1987 (223). These would be the challenges of the next decade that would also impact cultural production.

Brazil from 1990: Lula, *Cinema da Retomada* and Rising TV Globo

Embrafilme was the main source of cinematic production up until 1989 when television viewing and the home video market led to a decrease in theater viewing. Some of those causes include the rising popularity of Brazilian *telenovelas* from the TV Globo conglomerate which begin to dominate at this time (King 270-71). Embrafilme soon lost its force: “O modelo centralizado da Embrafilme começou dar sinais de desgaste no

começo da década de 80, quando muitas salas do interior não resistiram à competição da TV e começaram a fechar” (Butcher 18). Added to this shift in cinematic popularity, the presidency of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1995) withdrew support from state cinema (King 270). The consequent period beginning in the 90s has been labeled by Lúcia Nagib as “Cinema da Retomada.” Accordingly, Butcher defines this term as “o processo de recuperação da produção cinematográfica no Brasil depois de uma de suas mais graves crises, no começo dos anos 90” (14). As the critic states, this cinema is not defined by a totalizing esthetic nor is it guided by a specific political agenda.

The *retomada* was also due to the reimplementation of the cinematic support from the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2000), whose legislation promoted growth in filmic production, including the *Lei de Incentivo à Cultura* (Lei Rouanet) (N.8.313/91)⁶⁰ and the *Lei do Audiovisual* (N.8.695/93)⁶¹ that were passed in the early 90s (Butcher 19-20). Thus, filmmaking became more accessible to co-productions and independent producers, increasing the number of films produced during the 90s while also supporting a neoliberal paradigm for cinematic production. Although more films were being produced, they were not widely exhibited due to a lack of attention to the process of exhibition and distribution that was a part of the aforementioned laws. Cacilda Rêgo states: “os filmes da retomada encontraram, em grande parte, inúmeras dificuldades para chegarem às salas de exibição do país, o que contribuiu para que muitos deles

⁶⁰ This law allowed for companies, private and public, and individuals to claim expenses concerning national filmmaking as tax deductions.

⁶¹ Under this law, qualifying producers received up to a 3% tax break for investment in films.

permanecessem comercialmente inéditos“ (224). Adding to this, the foreign cinema market still dominated the nation’s cinematic screens.

Cardoso’s official presidential report on his own accomplishments from 1994-2002 boasts of the increase of film production by 372% and the growth of the number of spectators at the national level (Cardoso 133). This is due in part to the creation of ANCINE (Agência Nacional do Cinema) in 2001. This organization, housed under the Ministry of Culture, was formed to support and regulate national cinema. Other economic policies introduced by Cardoso included the *Real* plan to replace the *Cruzado* plan of 1986; the *Real* plan, according to the presidential report, helped raise family income and increase the “heightened sense of material well-being” for the population as a whole (19). Though not all presidential policies remain in effect, ANCINE has endured.

Recently there is another main cinematic producer in Brazil that has grown and created successful films with high audience reception-- Globo Filmes, a subsidiary of the Rede Globo media conglomerate. Globo Filmes was created in the late 90s and considers that it “contribute[s] to the cultural formation of Brazil, in its effort to strengthen the national movie industry and to value the Brazilian culture” (GloboFilmes.com). The production company describes its strategy in the following manner:

Globo Filmes’ activities are based on partnerships with independent producers and national and international distributors, combining competences to develop the best cinematographic productions. Always associated with the credibility and quality standard of Globo TV, Globo Filmes collaborates with the maturational process of the sector and creates a new form of making cinema in Brazil... Technical perfection associated with the talent of the best professionals and Globo TV’s expertise have provided great results for the Brazilian cinema. (Ibid)

The Globo system is one where storylines are fed from television series to films. By testing their storylines in mini-series or soap operas with television audiences, Globo is able to then choose thriving small screen productions to secure successful films on the silver screen. This has been the case of recently films such as *Cidade de Deus* (Dirs. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund 2002), *Orfeu* (Dir. Carlos Diegues 1999), and *O Auto da Compadecida* (Dir. Guell Arraes 2000). In essence, Globo is in a powerful position regarding the success of films because it is able not only to test the market before the production of films, but the conglomerate can also promote them via the highest watched television station in the country and through other print mediums owned by Globo.

Brazilian society and its cultural production continue evolving under the leadership of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva since 2003. Under president Lula, as he is known, Brazilian cinema continues to thrive perhaps in part to the work done by ANCINE (Agência Nacional do Cinema).

The policies of the Worker's Party (*Partido de Trabalho- PT*) president has helped increase Brazil's national economy by 5%. According to Richard Bourne, Lula is "arguably the most significant [president] since Getúlio Vargas" (209), emphasizing his improvement in providing the poorest classes with access to income and opportunities, though the researcher does understand that his assessment may turnout to be premature (210). The middle class⁶² has also increased by 8% under Lula's presidency (Padgett and Downie np). Some sectors of society have benefitted from social reforms such as the

⁶² Marcelo Neri defines middle class as households with a monthly income of BR\$1064-4561 (26). This number represents a simplified range from a very complex analysis. Further details in terms of details concerning this definition and limitations given this salary range are presented in Neri's full study.

Bolsa Família, a government welfare program that supplements family wages by requiring the family to keep children in school and vaccinated. In turn, families can receive up to BR\$20 a month per child for a maximum of three children. *Bolsa Família* has produced many skeptics that argue that handing out money only solves social issues in the short term (“Brazil poor feel benefits of Lula’s policies”). Still, there are many unresolved issues such as the educational system, the use of their natural resources, and attention to those without access to land. All of these elements continue to be a struggle for Brazil and these difficulties are often manifested in cinema.

Brazil’s current social problems are further highlighted in films and have great audience reception in the country and abroad. Jorge Didaco believes that the combination of a Worker’s Party president and the appointment of Gilberto Gil as the Minister of Culture signifies that “our country has a cultural and political agenda that is finally willing and able to maintain alive and well a national cinema” (“The Rise of the *Mandacaru*” np). The hyperbolic reality present in many recent films represented in the excessive violence and the camera style that highlights the dire living conditions of some Brazilians demonstrates that Brazilian directors are committed to a critical representation of their culture.⁶³ For international audiences, these films are now replacing the passive idyllic Carnival representations associated with Brazil that had come to embody Brazilian images abroad.

⁶³ Films that come to mind that show the hyperrealism include *Carandiru* (2003), *O Homen do Ano* (2002), *Amarela Manga* (2002), *Cidade de Deus* (2002).

Singing Womanhood in the City's Periphery: Analysis of *Antônia* (2006)

by Tata Amaral

As Brazilian films such as *City of God* reach national and international fame, representations of the lower classes in the Brazilian metropolis' are common in the current cinematic production. Tata Amaral's 2006 film *Antônia* portrays a rap group from Brasilândia, São Paulo. Through music, analyzed here as gendered artifact, the girls hope to gain access to capital by compromising their music and self-representation. The space of Brasilândia, known for its hip-hop social music and also the location of the girls' homes, will allow them to express a different ideological stance than when they are in mainstream São Paulo society; they must negotiate their music and gender to gain access to mainstream capital. *Antônia* captures how the urban sphere creates differing locations for accumulation of capital and this is represented through the camera's *mise en scene* of the city as backdrop.

The film traces the lives of four young women from the peripheral *favela*-ridden Vila Brasilândia. The girls are back-up rap singers for an all-male hip hop crew; the females hope to launch their group named Antônia and become economically prosperous with the guidance of local music promoter Marcelo Diamante (Thaide). He introduces them to different venues in city spaces that provide more access to capital. However, one by one, the girls begin leaving the group and those remaining continue to modify the original focus of the band. Each girl must deal with different situations that will make her examine her life circumstances and position as a woman within her community. The first to leave the group is Mayah (Quenylah) who is shunned from the group for flirting with

Preta's (Negra Li) husband. Lena (Cindy Mendes) decides to separate from the group after discovering she is pregnant and her possessive boyfriend gives her an ultimatum—she either chooses the group or him. The quartet becomes a duo with only Preta and Barbarah (Leilah Moreno) remaining, but Barbarah is imprisoned after a fight that results in the 'accidental' death of a neighborhood boy who has previously hurt Barbarah's brother and killed her brother's boyfriend. Aside from this, every time the girls perform, they compromise their art leaving behind the self-expression of rap and instead opting for ballads and Brazilian *música brega*. After re-evaluating the original ideals of the group, Preta decides to gather the girls and return to perform rap in Brasilândia.

Antônia is Tata Amaral's third film in a feminocentric trilogy including *Um Ceu de Estrelas* (1996) and *Através da Janela* (2000). In her previous films, as the director herself states, she has explored different ages of the lives of women:

I was involved in shooting a trilogy about the three main phases in the life of a woman: birth, maturity, and death. [...] These three phases represent the cycle of life that repeats itself endlessly. My first film was about a woman in a mature age, the second was about a woman and death, and the third, *Antônia*, about the birth, the youth, the moment when a woman is awaking to life. (Indiewire.com)

With this film, Amaral completes a decade-long project consisting of a commitment to filming her hometown and always including it as a character in her films, though in the case of *Antônia*, she has personified the peripheral Afro-Brazilian areas of the city (Indiewire.com). In her other representations, Amaral has demonstrated the violence that women experience in a relationship, such as is the case of *Um Ceu de Estrelas* where a woman is held captive by her boyfriend when he learns that she wants to leave Brazil and

him. This type of work by Amaral has earned her national and international awards including recognitions from the Havana Film Festival, which promotes Latin American filmmaking.⁶⁴

Though *Antônia* is Amaral's least critically-lauded film, it has been her most commercially successful with about 80,000 movie theater spectators in Brazil, the 15th most watched film of approximately 80 releases in 2007 (ANCINE). Considering Brazil's constant struggle with national film spectatorship, this number is significant. Aside of theater spectatorship, *Antônia's* impact in popular culture is not only limited to the big screen since a miniseries version based on the film was also aired on TV Globo. The project is similar to other TV Globo productions that are television and feature film ventures where a miniseries is first aired for home-viewing audiences before it premieres in theaters. Amaral sold distribution rights to the telecommunications conglomerate and Rede Globo. Through the exposure of the miniseries, over fifty million people were able to preview the plot. The director states that ratings for the miniseries were high and prompted Globo to sign a second TV season (Golbarg). Such was the success of the series that it received international recognition and was nominated to an International Emmy award in 2007. In part, the success was also due to the actors of the film, many who are known musicians and artists such as singers Leilah Moreno and Negra Li and rapper Thaide. Since Globo also has an extensive system of merchandising, the

⁶⁴ Some of the specific awards Amaral received include: Recife Film Festival award and Miami Film Festival award for Best Screenplay and Best Film for *Através da Janela* in 2000, São Paulo Association for Art Critics award for Best Director for *Um Ceú de Estrelas* in 1996, São Paulo International Film Festival award for Best Picture for *Antônia* in 2006, Brasília Film Festival for Best Director for *Um Ceú de Estrelas* in 1996, and an International Emmy For “Antônia” (miniseries) in 2007.

soundtrack of the film, with songs performed by the actors, was released as a CD, thus emphasizing the popularity of this production with mass audiences and adding another layer of consumption to the film. This highly lucrative film also found international distribution through US-based, Netflix-affiliated Red Envelope Entertainment.

The literature on this film is still limited to newspaper reviews, including national and international press partly due to the recent release. Because of the popularity of the film, journalists have tended to a growing interest in learning more about Brasilândia through investigative reports on the area, the people and the music. Only one academic study has been done on this film to date by Melissa Fitch in her book *Side Dishes: Latina American Women, Sex, and Cultural Production* (2009) though it does not address extensively the issue of capital, which is the focus throughout my study.

Antônia incorporates documentary-like realism that is now commonly found in Latin American films produced since the turn of the 21st century. Amaral attributes her neo-realist techniques to the influence of Nelson Pereira Dos Santos's *Rio, 40 Graus* (1955). This style of filmmaking allows for the representation of small spaces, thus, the entire film was shot on location in Vila Brasilândia without the production of sets, allowing for an 'authentic' representation of the urban area. The actors also added some elements of neo-realism through the use of improvisation since there was no written dialogue in the script. Instead, detailed instructions of what was to occur in every scene led the actors to develop their own dialogue and therefore achieve more 'accurate' vernacular dialogue than if the film was scripted (Alves de Souza "Making of *Antônia*").

The music was composed by the actors and, in this way, they were able to further highlight their own relationship to rap music and convey that to audiences.

Brazil has been a musical center that has given the world the rhythms of the samba and Bossa Nova, which have become the musical staples of Brazil abroad. These distinct sounds come about from two different time periods and are associated with contrasting social expressions. Samba has long been linked to the struggle of marginalized populations of society and was popularized in the early 20th century. In contrast, the Bossa Nova rhythms of the 1950s functioned as expressions of the middle and upper classes that emphasized Brazil's modernity. Both rhythms are ideological apparatuses expressing social class, political stance and gender structures.

Though there are many other rhythms in Brazilian music, samba and Bossa Nova have been known for transcending the national market, while regional folkloric styles such as forró remain relatively unknown to foreigners. New popular musical developments such as pagode, axé and the umbrella term MPB have received wider reception though their popularity also remains mostly national. Furthermore, social music projects such as Tropicália, associated with the city of São Paulo, were created to express the complexity of Brazilian culture and the syncretism of local cultures.⁶⁵ All of these styles of music form a part of Brazilian-created sounds. A recent addition to the Brazilian music scene is rap music-- an imported musical form— that has been re-adopted and re-

⁶⁵ São Paulo society had already been the home of several artistic expressions including the *avant gard* Modernismo, which was initiated in the city in 1922 during the Semana de Arte Moderna. In the 1960s, the psychedelic rock group Os Mutantes promoted a new rhythm in São Paulo associated with the Tropicalismo movement, which revived the early century Manifesto Antropófago written by Oswald de Andrade in 1928. According to Lisa Shaw, “[t]he Tropicalists’ contact with rampant modernity and pervasive consumerism in the industrialized city of São Paulo clearly molded their musical output” (33).

politicized into the Brazilian space and reflects the original political association of class and race even while in Brazil. More so than other cities in Brazil, São Paulo has been the main producer of rap and has an estimated two hundred thousand hip hoppers in this urban area (Pardue 2).

In Brazil, rap is cultivated mostly in the peripheral areas of the main cities. One of those areas is the far north in the area of Brasília. The complex structure of this economically disadvantaged district has made some compare it to New York's Harlem and Bronx, which are historically spaces with low-income populations and high rates of violence. Brasília shares other cultural similarities with the New York boroughs in that the Brazilian "City Bronx"⁶⁶ is also associated with the cultivation of rap as social expression.

Rap music arose in the United States in the 1970s as an expression of social marginality of the urban African-American lower class and has found its space in mainstream culture under the cultural term of Hip Hop.⁶⁷ Rap lyrics initially narrated the difficulty of crime and violence in the marginalized areas of the big cities and many expressions concentrated on the social environments of New York—highlighting Bronx county-- and Philadelphia, then spanning throughout the United States. Gwendolyn Pough explains that "Rappers bring wreck: they disrupt their way into and make themselves visible in the public sphere with the goal of not only speaking for

⁶⁶ One of the lyrics in the film specifically call out "Brasília City Bronx" and make a direct comparison between the Brazilian *bairro* and the New York City borough.

⁶⁷ Hip hop, as Gwendolyn Pough summarizes, "is a youth movement, a culture, and a way of life. Hip-Hop is the culture; rap is the music" (3).

disenfranchised people but also claiming both a voice and a living for themselves in a society bereft of opportunity for them” (27).⁶⁸ In Brazil, as Derek Pardue states in his study *Ideologies of Marginality in Brazilian Hip Hop*, this musical form also coincides with lower class, marginalization and periphery. The marginal space, however, does not always coincide strictly with *favela* populations. Pardue comments on the divide of space and access to economy:

Favelas are spaces of drastic socioeconomic measures. In fact, most performing hip hoppers do not live in *favelas*; they rather reside in surrounding neighborhoods characterized by more conventional architecture featuring houses (*casas*) over shacks or shanties (*barracos*). [...] Despite this gap, which theoretically divides *periferia* communities, hip hoppers explicitly include the *favela* as an original point of narration and sociocultural activity through their work in posses and other organizations. The point is that the *periferia* is a heterogeneous space, which nevertheless hip hoppers seek to unite through discursive protagonists such as the “marginal” and rhetorical tropes such as violence and crime in order to establish a new and different “system.” (66).

In *Antônia*, rap is always associated with the periphery as evident in the focus on the geographical space of Brasilândia and a stage presentation in a female prison. These spaces are accepting of the lyrics of struggle sung by the women. Furthermore, Derek Pardue concludes that “the performativity of gender in Brazilian hip hop primarily concerns that making and mediation of masculinity. In hip hop the articulation of femininity is normally a subaltern voice, a position of reaction, if active at all” (129). Rap presents several difficulties for the construction of gender in terms to the negotiations that

⁶⁸ Pough explains that ‘wreck’ is “a Hip-Hop term that connotes fighting, recreation, skill, boasting, or violence. The Hip-Hop concept of wreck sheds new light on the things Blacks have had to do in order to obtain and maintain a presence in the larger public sphere, namely, fight and bring attention to the skill and right to be in the public sphere” (17).

must be expressed between ideology and social norms. For some, it is a liberating expression where they do not have to abide by social expectations despite the public criticism, while for others it presents a conflict because they do not abide by the social expectations with gender. For the girls of *Antônia*, the process of transgressing gender roles and acquiring agency is slowly achieved within the space of Brasilândia.

Understanding that music is gendered is crucial to recognizing how femaleness is negotiated in the subgenres of rap. US ‘Gangsta rap,’ for one, highlights crime, violence and misogyny in the lyrics. It has been this US subgenre that has created a strong impression in the hip hop portrayal of women through objectification in the lyrics and images. To counteract this attitude, female rap artists in the US, including the Grammy-winning Salt N’ Pepa, expressed rap songs from a female perspective in relation to sexuality and societal views of women.⁶⁹ Other prominent female rap artists that do the same include Queen Latifah who manifests female equality,⁷⁰ Missy Elliott and Lil’ Kim among many others.

Within Brazilian rap/hip hop, similar issues of gender politics arise. The construction of the hyper-masculine thug-like character in rap is the *modus operandi* in the US and the so-called global hip hop culture, including Brazil. But, there are also many notable Brazilian female rap groups including *Atitude Femenina* and *Visão de Rua*; both groups have opposing constructions of gender in their performance and lyrics. *Visão*

⁶⁹ Considering the many hits of this musical duo, some of their most popular songs have to do with the agency of females such as their first hit “My Mic Sounds Nice” where they make a claim for women MC’s. The assertion of female sexuality is evident in several of their songs including “Let’s Talk about Sex” and “Push It.”

⁷⁰ An example is Latifah’s 1987 hit “Ladies First” featuring Monie Love.

de Rua non-compliant femininity allows for the females to adopt a masculine pose through the pitch of their voices and masculine attire for which they have “lost respect within the hip hop community for not being ‘real women.’ They have ‘sold out’ their femininity to imitate hip hop men” therefore emphasizing the gender expectations associated with the music (Pardue 141). Further emphasizing the intersection of gender through rap, Derek Pardue states:

For the most part, hip hoppers reckon gender in accordance to the hegemonic discourses and practices of Brazilian machismo. That is to say that while hip hoppers may mediate race and class in relatively unacceptable ways, *they generally reproduce typical males and females within the matrix of contemporary urban sociality [in their artistic expressions]*. (Pardue 126, my emphasis)

Groups such as Atitude Femenina prove Pardue’s point; these female rappers not only fulfill the visual representation of femininity, their music also incorporates other gendered music such as the ballad as evident in their song “Rosas.” The production of Brazilian rap is deeply embedded with heterosexual norms regarding gender as will be seen with the four girls of *Antônia*.

The space of São Paulo is important to the film because of the complex economic divisions that are present in the metropolis. As the largest city in South America with a population of 11 million people and historically Brazil’s major economic industrial site, the division of social class and social issues of race and gender are clear in São Paulo. In the 1970s, São Paulo experienced gentrification in the urban centers and laborers were forced into the outlying areas where they inhabited inadequately built housing (Câmara, et al. 231). *Favela*-ridden areas such as Brasilândia grew. In contrast, the regions that reflect the wealth in this metropolitan area include the central neighborhoods of Bixiga,

Itain Bibi and Jardins, which are glimpsed at in this film as the girls try to inhabit those spaces. The historic process of capital is clearly identified in this city as space is also used as a determination of social class and access to capitalist accumulation.

Furthermore, the *mise en scenes* used throughout the film convey images that reassert the access to capital or lack thereof in the different sectors within the city. The presence of the space of Brasilândia is established in the initial scene as the camera pans down from a blue sky to a panoramic view of the hillside covered with lower-class housing. Cars and pedestrians cross through the streets and, walking up the hill, the four girls walk into the frame. The association is made between the space, the young girls and the dynamics of location that will play into their consciousness. The shot emphasizes the immensity of the space in relationship to the girls and they are but four more inhabitants of this small-scale megapolis, appearing on the screen to be consumed by the surroundings.

Brasilândia is located in the northern part of the *paulista* metropolis. The foundation of this district dates back to 1946 in what were sugarcane fields. In the decades of the 50s and 60s, Brasilândia experienced an influx of migrants from the northeastern part of the country that were escaping the severe droughts of the Northeast and searching for employment in the industrialized city. The population of Brasilândia in the year 2000 was approximately 250,000 inhabitants in a space of 21 km². Brasilândia also has high violence rates including one of the highest incidences of violence against women and children. The rate of adolescents cited for crimes is one of the highest in the city and also has a high incidences of juvenile homicides as well as violent crimes that result in death (Movimento Nossa São Paulo np). According to María Isabel de Assis, a

researcher of Brasilândia, this district has the lowest levels of human development in São Paulo (Freguesianews.com). This community makes up the lower social class of São Paulo and the citizens find themselves limited in terms of their social mobility. Due to the lack of capital, resources are scarce in this community and the individuals must learn to survive at any cost.

Social and spatial divide is experienced in the large city; the girls inhabit the peripheral area, which is filmically emphasized by the sequences that depict the difficulty in reaching their homes from the main city space. They must walk, depend on car rides or wait for the metro until dawn to reach Brasilândia. Once they are near their homes and in the general area of their *bairro*, there is a ritual of changing their shoes from their high heels into their walking shoes in order to walk through steep hills to get to their homes. Those with private transportation can easily move, but these girls must rely on limited means of mobility and their footwear is a reflection of their social class. Because of the lack of adequate public and/or private transportation, they have few means to leave the area of Brasilândia and are somewhat entrapped. Their traveling limitations reflect their lack of social mobility. In the same way that they are unable to leave the unescapable physical space of Brasilândia, they are also confined to their social situation. The recurrent panoramic shot of the *bairro* is a motif that not only helps the audience to visually locate the characters, but it also serves as a constant reminder of the entrapment of the megapolis.

Within the neighborhood, the physical space of their private homes is also important in establishing marginality. The homes of the neighborhood do not have access

other than a gate that opens up to shacks that are built atop each other. The difficulty of reaching the homes is highlighted in a scene when Barbarah's brother, Duda (Chico Santo), comes home from the hospital and the girls struggle to carry him up many steep stairs. The camera has the stairs in the forefront to capture the vastness of steps and Duda being carried by Barbarah and pushed by Preta. They struggle with each step, physically and metaphorically, as they try to ascend to their desired destination. The camera then pans up to reveal Barbarah and Duda's home on the highest level to emphasize the difficulty the people in this area face. The lack of accessibility intensifies the lack of exit from the *bairro*; for not only are they challenged in leaving their borough, but they find it difficult to get around within it. At every level, citizens of this space are physically and socially limited by the layout of their surroundings and it relates thematically to the difficulty in social progress.

Gender is an ever-present structure found in this community through economic and social factors that establish norms. Barão, a neighbor that helps the girls whenever they need transportation, refuses to have any contact with Duda when he finds out that his childhood friend is a homosexual. Despite the difficulty encountered by the girls as they try to carry Duda up to his house, Barão makes it clear that he feels betrayed by Duda and is being harassed by the neighborhood males who associate him to homosexuality because of their friendship; hence, he refuses to assist. Compulsory heterosexuality is the norm and homosexuality means further marginalization within the already peripheral space. In another occasion, Preta finds herself without work and helps Barão with his bus route. Between the subdivisions of Brasilândia and Freguesia do O, there is a high 15%

rate of unemployment according to statistics from 2006, the year in which *Antônia* was made. This statistic, though, does not take into consideration the factor of underemployment.⁷¹ Gender inequality is also present in the division of labor experienced in this part of the city. While the average difference in male vs. female employment is 1.34⁷² (1.00 indicating equal employment), Brasília has the widest difference of men vs. female employment with an index of 1.44 (Movimento Nossa São Paulo np). When Preta asks for an advance on her paycheck, Barão teases “você está sendo o homem da casa, não é?” The statement references the disruption of gender norms, which require the male be the major provider of capital in household. This scene re-emphasizes that Duda is further disassociated with being a “real” man, in spite of the fact that statistics demonstrate that women tend to find odd jobs and means to access capital more so than men and are major financial contributors through unofficial employment in Brasília (Brum “Um país chamado Brasília” np). Barão’s few interjections serve to establish the strict cultural construction of gender and the ties to economy.

The precarious access to capital will also have an effect on the perceptions of traditional families. In this space with little economic security, the concept of the traditional family does not always function well. Preta’s family, all musicians, disapproves of the daughter’s rap music. The mother, played by Brazilian MPB singer Sandra de Sá, sings evangelical music, an acceptable female genre. The father, played by Brazilian sambista Thobias da Vai-Vai, is an aged samba musician. These musical forms

⁷¹ Underemployment refers here to informal employment or part-time employment for individuals who seek full-time employment.

⁷² This ratio means, then, that for every unemployed male, there are 1.34 females unemployed, a 34% rise.

are also tied to location, as both evangelical music and samba will be highly reproduced in areas with lower income levels. The representation of these two musical genres is also significant when understanding Brazilian rap. According to Pardue, hip hoppers conserve elements of being *crentes* (believers) (3). In fact, there is a growing presence of ties between evangelical churches and hip hop through the expression of “positive” rap (85).⁷³ While there can exist an association with evangelical music, Brazilian hip hop also rejects samba. Pardue gives the example of rapper Necaf and how the artist believes that

hip hop “saves” one from “falling into samba” (*cair no samba*) – an expression, in this case, symbolizing a step backward into mainstream notions of black, periphery males, namely *malandros* or hustlers . . . Hip hoppers are, in effect, deconstructing this phrase and recasting it with contemporary criticism of what they are told to be national ideologies of race, class and citizenship. (5)

Preta’s family, then, is a microcosm of the relationship between Brazilian musical genres in the peripheral space.

The family further demonstrates a lack of interest in music as a source of access to capital and instead values music as emotionally fulfilling expression that is not meant to be lucrative. For this reason worship music is favored. The girls each choose the group Antônia as a substitute for their family relationship. Preta leaves her husband to move in with Barbarah and her brother. The musical group functions as an alternative family unit since the group both nurtures the means to access capital through a shared ideology of singing rap music and functions as a support network. Lena breaks from this substitute family in an attempt to construct a traditional family with her overly jealous boyfriend.

⁷³ Some of the rap artists associated with an evangelical-based discourse include Xis, Sistema Racional and Família 7 Taças (Pardue 85-87).

When she does separate from the group, she becomes dependent on him for capital, and is subject to social restriction that leads her to rejoin the Antônias. Thus, traditional families do not function well in a space where capital is insecure. The desire to break from the social norms and achieve a level of independence functions as a catalyst that prompts those inhabitants to recreate familial connections.

The performance of rap music brings about different considerations in terms of gender dynamics. Following the initial shot of the girls in their neighborhood, the scene switches to their first performance as back-up singers. The social dynamic is clear; the shot shows them clearly behind the male MCs named “O Poder,” who sing and dominate the central stage area. O Poder’s name is significant as a point of reference of the hegemonic order where the male MCs have the power to express the experience of the periphery, and the name the girls propose for the group, Antônia, is also problematic since they identify based on a male figure, their grandfathers. O Poder’s rap lyrics emphasize rap’s capacity to express revolutionary ideology regarding the marginalized position of hip hoppers as evident in the lyrics. Issues of race and periphery are important in this presentation and gender is not an issue. The girls’ dress mimics the ideology of the men and the concerns that they express in their songs. Preta wears pants and a t-shirt and her hair pulled back. Her attire is non-sexualized. Lena wears a Bob Marley shirt and her hair is in a traditional African head wrap, emphasizing race and social struggle. The feminist agenda is non-existent. Furthermore, the males of O Poder have power over the career of the girls and are able to determine whether the girls can perform in center stage. Only Mayah uses her sensuality to obtain an opportunity to be the opening act for O

Poder. Thus, the exploitation of femininity by one member, as they see, provides them with access to musical success.

In their debut as independent performers, the girls modify their physical representation of gender. Preta plays up her appearance and sex-appeal by opting for a tank top and Lena downplays her ethnicity by doing away with her Bob Marley shirts, which is also significant because Marley's image signifies opposition therefore signaling that the Antônias' rap does not have the same expression of resistance "O Poder." Gender dominates over race in their visual representation. Mayah is the most sexually explicit when she wears a miniskirt and *salto alto* (high heels), and her sensuality provokes misinterpretations amongst the girls. After the performance, she is shunned from the group for being flirtatious and using her femininity to attract men, specifically Preta's boyfriend. Since the girls, at this point, are not exploiting their femininity, they do not tolerate Mayah's use of sensuality, though they forget that it was originally Mayah's daring flirtatiousness with one of the MCs that allowed them access to a solo performance.

As rappers, the Brasilândia stage allows for the expression of gender as an articulation of marginalization, which gets rearticulated once on stage. Their on-stage presentation has to do with their femaleness and empowerment, and the lyrics encompass the ideology of gender, sexuality, race and social class. Their energy-driven performance has the crowds dancing and praising their lyrics of "Não Vou Desistir" beginning with Preta:

Essa sou eu, sim
Mulher, sim

Com muito orgulho, sim
 Guerreira, eu não nasci pra servir
 Confira, de fibra,
 Preta leal e voz ativa
 Nem feminista, nem pessimista
 Sou satisfeita.

Followed byayah’s and then Barbarah’s lyrics that further emphasize:

Tenha medo pois sou Barbarah.
 Forte, corajosa, curiosa, envergonhada
 Índia, africana, européia, miscigenada
 Mas não confunda pois eu não sou leviana
 Te mostro minha adaga de Iansã
 Essa é minha fama.

The song’s chorus, which emphasizes the social struggle they must endure, identifies them as peripheral women, associating them with the message of a fight not only of gender, but also of race and class. The scene captures the girls on stage represented through cross-cuts with the upbeat audience, demonstrating the identification with their ideology. Gwendolyn Pough states that “Black women’s speech and expressive culture have been limited in the public sphere due in part to circumstances [...] such as maintaining community, promoting Black manhood at the expense of Black womanhood, and constantly vindicating Black womanhood against misrepresentation” (79). When given the opportunity, the Antônias exalt femaleness and miscegenation with pride. They use the platform to change the discourse from male hegemony to female pride where, as Pough states, they defend female misrepresentation.

The stage area has graffiti art as the background and the lighting consists of fluorescent lighting emphasized by blue filters that make the space appear run-down and

gives the feeling of marginality, which coincides with the peripheral expression of hip hop culture. The shots of the girls in this space include an unsteady camera and tight shots that emphasize a crowded area, a sense of masses. This stage is an appropriate place for their anthem of liberation. Furthermore, the audience's positive response emphasizes the approval of these values. Within Brasilândia, this discourse is appropriate and well-received since a consciousness of marginalization is a common topic for these inhabitants. Nevertheless, the girls do not profit economically from these performances because they perform at the mercy of the male group. So, although they are receiving exposure, there still does not exist a monetary exchange for their ideas in the same way that the group O Poder receives compensation for their performances.

This same song will stir a different reaction in an upper class São Paulo neighborhood. Once again, Harvey's concept of residential differentiation applies as this neighborhood has a different economic backdrop and therefore different consumption habits ("Class Structures and Residential Differentiation" 118). Marcelo books a performance for the wedding anniversary of an affluent couple. Their powerful song, "Não Vou Desistir" is performed as a soft pop song. While the audience in the Brasilândia stage sang and danced to the empowering lyrics, the partygoers of this affluent setting are passive to the girls' performance. The camera pans slowly through the room emphasizing the lack of energy in the crowd while the group sings and is ignored cocktail-drinking rich *paulistas*. In addition to class, the issue of race is once again present as the girls, keyboard player and Marcelo are the only Afro-Brazilians in the party, establishing an association between class and race. However, the ideology that the

girls choose to represent through their lyrics is not readily accepted. They receive attention only when they harmonize and sing the English language pop culture hit “Killing Me Softly.” It is after they cover songs that represent female sentiment and the so-called First World—not Brazil-- that they gain the recognition of the crowd and are heavily applauded by what had previously been an apathetic audience. As they feminize their image and begin assuming softer music, ballads, they are better received and receive more exposure. Even more, these new songs reflect a more traditional stance on representations of gender. Thus, artistic expression interacts with gender and is commodified.

Every time the girls perform, their music continues to change, as does their appearance. Reduced to a duet when Lena decides to leave, Barbarah and Preta are booked at the posh Coppola Music nightclub, one of the best-known live-music spaces in the immense city attracting the higher class in trendy Vila Madalena. Unlike the previous presentation at the private party, this time the attention is on the two girls. Thus, the scene highlights their musical skills and a song with a soft melody and lyrics that speak of a mystified woman that is both extremes of the female dichotomy: a gentle lover and a sorceress sung as “uma diosa, uma louca, uma feiticeira.” As they finish the song, the camera pans to the audience that readily accepts both the girls and the music that they are presenting. Mainstream approval is achieved when compliance with gender expectations is respected, musical lyrics are not radical and the melody is soothing—the opposite of rap music. Instead, they function as torch singers. The place itself is reminiscent of the stage in Brasilândia with dark lighting, though different to the energetic oversaturated

shots and quick cuts in the Brasilândia musical scenes, Coppola Music is shot with a steady camera that also mimics the lack of movement in the audience. The difference in the filmic representation of these locations emphasizes a difference in perception in these places of urban consumption.

A symbolic BR\$20 tip is an added gesture of approval that emphasizes the capital worth achieved when the music shifts to socially expected expressions of gender and ideology. A man at the nightclub meets with the girls and lets them know that he wants to start a fan club, which is sure to provide more income. The hypothetical fan club is another demonstration of approval that encompasses mainstream culture and capital. Though their rap expression of black womanhood never made them any wealth, the love ballads make them money and allow them more exposure to a wider population. It is not only Marcelo that provides access to money; it is now the audience members giving money directly to the girls and not through pre-negotiations. Thus, obeying socially established gender codes leads to financial prosperity.

As a solo act, Preta is still successful and continues to develop her music and on-stage persona. Her blouses are scantier and give a sexier image of self that is associated with the music she is singing. Her song is nostalgic and full of longing emotion, an acceptable genre reserved for women. Moreover, such is Preta's sensualized transformation that Marcelo attempts to woo her by singing the 1970s pop brega hit "Na sombra de uma arvore," which states "Larga de ser boba e vem comigo/ Existe um mundo novo e quero te mostrar." In this manner, Marcelo establishes the gender dynamics where Preta is the ingénue female who needs to be led by the male and his love

for her. In the scene, Marcelo comically acts out the lyrics and then pulls her towards him and begins leading her in a slow dance. Romanticism and surrender is expected from the female as she is guided by the all-knowing male who can ‘explain’ the world to her. The underlying dynamics of gender in this song are prevalent.

The male figure, Marcelo, is still the means to access capital for these girls. He negotiates venues and prices for performances. He sees the opportunity exploit their sexuality and then figures their talent is useful in marketing them. After the girls harmonize well in a performance, he tells them “Com esas vozes que vocês têm aí, o, sabe, eu consigo colocar vocês em lugares melhores para vocês cantarem. [...] Com esse talento de vocês isso vai ser com o que vocês vão conseguir resolver os problemas de vocês e os meus também, claro.” As he speaks this, the camera cuts to a sign on the road that designates the direction of Brasília. The reference to space at this moment in the conversation asserts the difference in ideology between rap, associated with Brasília, and the singing of ballads, which supports hegemonic constructions of gender. Access to capital requires compromise of their art in favor of mainstream musical rhythms. Preta reasons “A gente pode continuar cantando rap e pegar uma grana cantando outras músicas.” It is apparent that rap expresses their desired ideology though it is not lucrative. Other rhythms, though they are profitable, make the girls adjust their construction of gender.

The need to obtain capital has provoked a complete transformation in the ideological framework under which the girls developed their group. Negotiating the original principles of female empowerment through the use of rap relieves this cognitive

dissonance. When given the opportunity to express the hardship of losing their self-identity, the communicative tool chosen is rap. Once again, capital, gender and artistic expression are reevaluated and re-prioritized to achieve a profitable balance. Thus, the girls concede to the exploitation of sensuality in order to be popular. They wear over-the-top feminine attire, including mini-skirts, sequined tube tops, thigh-high boots and pink clothes. These clothes are a heavy contrast to the clothes they wore in their initial debut in the Brasilândia stage.

The first reunited performance is in the prison for the female inmates, a space that functions as a technology of gender. The rehabilitation that is supposed to occur here is a societal process of creating 'docile bodies.' Inmates are expected to modify the behavior that is not socially acceptable. Barabarah's socially unacceptable behavior consisted of defending her brother by using violence against a young boy, but she is expected to soften her behavior while in prison, taking on a more appropriately feminine representation, which is also represented in her performance image. The significance of performing in this space is that it reflects that the girl group has modified the construction of self in order to be successful; they too are docile bodies that have conformed. Amongst the group of inmates in yellow pants and white T-shirts, the Antônias stand above them. The hyper-feminine performers create a visual divide between the convicts and the group. They all seek their liberation as reflected in the female anthem of independence. The girls, having overcome social factors that keep them from their emancipation and desires, now become figures to be imitated by the group of women that are still being oppressed. In actuality, the Antonês' liberation is limited as echoed in the location of the

performance, a prison. The Antônias negotiate music, space and gender allowing them to create a balance where they have musical exposure and center stage but only in the confines of a prison—an all female space. So, the emancipation ironically sung to women who are physically, socially and culturally confined, is limited by their gender.

A paradox exists between the lyrics and the location where the song is performed. They sing about conquering space by stating “quem quer conquistar seu lugar, tem que lutar.” Though the reference to space may be suggestive of physical space, considering the girls’ presence inside a prison, a confined area, there is also a layer of signification that refers to their space within the hip hop world in Brasilândia. To achieve the acceptance in Brasilândia, the girls have to re-work their construction of self in order to be successful. The group is promoting liberation through negotiation. Gender has to be re-evaluated to be accepted by mainstream and rap is only readily accepted in spaces of marginalization, such as the prison and Brasilândia.

The concept of liberation functions well with gender, but also within the local space of Brasilândia. The scene of the girls in the prison cuts to the girls on the same Brasilândia stage where they performed in the beginning of the film. The scene shows shots of screaming fans that sing along with the girls, equating the experience lived by the citizens in both spaces. Brasilândia is a space that limits the mobility of its citizens and therefore rap lyrics are a preferred expression of human struggle. The final song speaks of liberation within this space and the fight needed in order to survive in the periphery. Furthermore, the lyrics equate the experience of the girls to the citizens of the neighborhood, and they even go on to state that their songs serve to “representar a gente

da gente.” Accordingly, the experience sung is that of the community. The lyrics of female strength only find space in this peripheral area since it is not well-received in conventional society. Rap music and expressions of female emancipation are only successful in this region, which is less lucrative than the Coppola Music bar in central São Paulo. The girls have negotiated their access to capital to gain their desired musical expression.

Music, as a gendered cultural form, is negotiated in different social spaces to reflect the allowed ideology of those inhabitants. The film ending is problematic and somewhat ineffective especially because of the drastic cut from prison to local stardom. Though the narrative structure of the film was established as a voiced-over recount of the Antônias’ attempt at success based on their own desired construction of gender (from Barbarah’s perspective), the ending is voiced over by Marcelo who manipulated their initial musical expression and representation. The male, once again, dominates in their lives as does his hegemony in determining gender construction in music to achieve success. In *Antônia*, the girls must rethink their construction of gender with their desired musical expression so that they are profitable, even if only in a regional market. Art, ideology, and gender are all commodified within the city space; musical expressions, as evident in this study, must be negotiated and factored into the urbanization of capital of the 21st century megapolis.

Poor Little Rich Girl Goes to the City: The Influence of Wealth on Gender as seen in *Uma Vida em Segredo* (2001) by Suzana Amaral

A late 19th century Brazilian city is hardly the image that comes to mind when uttering the words “Brazilian urbanization” and yet these are the images presented by Suzana Amaral’s film *Uma Vida em Segredo*. Brazilian urbanization went through a different process than is the case of the Spanish-American countries because, in Brazil, the rural landowners and not the rich urban dwellers held much of the power during the colonial period (Greenfield 66). Nonetheless, the bourgeoisie society of city life was fundamental in establishing the dominant social norms of a given society. Though the Judeo-Christian binary was implemented in this territory from the period of the Colony, the rise of the bourgeoisie class used it to specify gender codes. Suzana Amaral’s *Uma Vida em Segredo* represents the individual’s transition from rural to city life and the contrast of perceived gender codes present in the city. While financial attainment does not modify the construction of gender in the rustic landscape, individuals must adapt to the new gender codes in order to form a part of bourgeoisie city life. The filmic shots continuously stress Biela’s negotiation of self to first create her upper-class persona and then destroy it as an act of liberation.

Amaral is considered a late bloomer in the film world, having directed her first film at the age of 57. With *Uma Vida em Segredo*, she returned to the director’s chair 15 years after the release of her critically acclaimed *opera prima* feature film *A Hora da*

Estrela (1985), which earned her several awards.⁷⁴ Previous to this release, she had worked in the documentary genre for 15 years. Since the release of *Uma Vida em Segredo*, Amaral is currently in post-production of her third fiction film tentatively titled *Hotel Atlântico*, and based on the novel by João Alberto Noll.

Uma Vida em Segredo is based on Autran Dourado's novel written in 1964. Critics have pointed out that Dourado's narrative portrays characters whose psychology and introspective nature is explored (Bosi, 422, Silverman 46). In this novel, Dourado recounts a similar story to the film adaptation though the time span is longer in the original text and the narrative character grows old. There are considerable differences in the main character, Biela, who forms clear relationships with the family members in the novel version of the story. The film remains true to the space of Minas Gerais, a constant location for Dourado's works.

The film version of *Uma Vida em Segredo* concentrates on Gabriela da Conceição Fernandes (Sabrina Greve), “‘Biela’ pra os da casa,” as she states. The young orphan girl leaves her rural Fazenda do Fundão and heads to the city, which the audience can make out is somewhere in Minas Gerais, to live with her cousin and tutor Conrado (Cacá Amaral), his wife Contança (Eliane Giardini) and their two children Mazília (Nayara Guércio) and Alfeu (Iuri Saraiva).⁷⁵ Biela stands out from the rest of the city women both

⁷⁴ Her awards include prizes three wins in the Berlin Film Festival in 1985, six awards from the Brasília Brazilian Film Festival in 1985 and another award from the Havana Film Festival in 1986.

⁷⁵ The film version varies much from the novel in that several characters present in the novel are eliminated in the cinematic representation, including more children in the family. Furthermore, the film version also eliminates the relationship between Mazília and Biela, which provides for a queer analysis on the novel. Finally, while the literary text version stresses Biela's aging, the filmic version does visually portray the aging of the family members.

because of her appearance and her social behavior, which prompts Constança to teach the young girl to become a proper bourgeoisie urban lady. Though Biela attempts to conform to the style, behaviors and expectations set by Constança, the young girl decides to abandon this lifestyle because she feels humiliated after her fiancée, Modesto (Eric Nowinsky), flees and leaves her with the wedding preparations. Biela resolves that she will no longer obey the social expectations and will instead partake in the activities that she finds more comfortable, being an urban servant and partaking in visits to the neighborhood housing staffs and receiving compensation for her help with cooking and baking. Though content at last, Biela does not survive and dies after a bout with pneumonia, therefore proving that the young rural girl cannot survive in the harsh urban environment.

This film has much in common with Amaral's *A Hora da Estrela*, something noted by the director and critics (Guerra "Diretora do Suceso," Pires 199). Though there have been no formal studies conducted on this film due to its recent release, there have been significant reviews, including a recent scholarly review by Alessandra M. Pires where she states "não podemos negligenciar a sua primeira leitura de uma personagem inadequada à vida social, como foi o caso do filme *A Hora da Estrela*" (199). Another parallelism is that Biela, like Macabea, originated from the rural sphere and tried adapting to urban life and failed. Perhaps the main difference, as noted by Suzana Amaral, is that Macabea tried to fit in up to the time of her death and Biela, on the other hand, chose to become a social recluse to live her country life in the city (Guerra

“Diretora do sucesso”). Other scant reviews emphasize the lack of success of the film, given the film had only 15,000 national spectators (www.ancine.com.br)

The spaces that will be explored in this analysis are the city and the domestic space. Within the latter, the front of the house and Biela’s private living quarters, both the room assigned by her cousin and Biela’s own accommodated bedroom, will be studied to determine how society expects the girl to act when inhabiting each space. Her access to capital will determine how she constructs gender in each location. Unlike the other films that form a part of this study, the female character in *Uma Vida* has plentiful access to capital. Biela has inherited the riches of her late father’s *fazenda*, but the repercussions of this access to capital are examined as Biela must then meet the social expectations of someone of her social class.

To understand the film, it is important to outline the period in which the film is based, the turn of the 20th century in a juncture of rural and urban life. The film is situated in Brazil during the Old Republic, which spanned from 1889-1930. The political situation at the time allowed for both São Paulo and Minas Gerais to be the main centers of power with the alternation of presidents from both these states which prompted the name “*Política Café-com-Leite*” (Coffee-with-Milk Politics) based on the two main products produced in these regions. Brazilian economy was undergoing several adjustments due to the dependence on the price of coffee, its major export. Thus, as the price of coffee fluctuated, so did the national outlook between 1889-1930.

Minas Gerais, specifically, experienced several changes. The state capital had been Ouro Preto, but by the end of the 19th century the decision was made to move the

governing city to Belo Horizonte because the new capital provided more accessible terrain. The choice was to model it after the architecture of cities such as Washington D.C. and the capital of Buenos Aires's province, La Plata (Greenfield 79). Though Amaral's film does not directly identify the city represented, it is clearly not Belo Horizonte since the architecture is not consistent with turn of the 20th century architecture expected of that city. This leads us to believe that perhaps it was one of the other cities undergoing constant immigration flux, perhaps Ouro Preto. The continuously changing economy of Minas Gerais during this time period is noted here in order to assess how gender and capital intersect in this society at this time. The significance of a space that resembles Ouro Preto more so than Belo Horizonte is that it shows that Biela is not in the progressive capital, but rather in a city that conserves the values of traditional Mineiros. Still, Belo Horizonte represents a society where wealth determines social class and the division of classes is rigidly set based on the individual's access to the lucrative goods produced in the state.

The social expectations of women in the nineteenth century society represented in the film are complex. The bourgeoisie modified the role of women at the time as stated by Maria Ângela D'Incao:

Presenciamos ainda nesse período o nascimento de uma nova mulher nas relações da chamada família burguesa, agora marcada pela valorização da intimidade e da maternidade. Um sólido ambiente familiar, o lar acolhedor, filhos educados e esposa dedicada ao marido, às crianças e desobrigada de qualquer trabalho produtivo representavam o ideal de retidão e probidade, um tesouro social imprescindível. Verdadeiros emblemas desse mundo relativamente fechado, a boa reputação financeira e a articulação com a parentela como forma de proteção ao mundo externo também marcaram o processo de urbanização do país. (223)

While there was a clear delineation between private and public space in urbanization, not all women in this society were kept in private quarters. Some women participated in the labor force, as Eni de Mesquita Samara states “Evidências de que uma parcela representativa de mulheres das camadas abastadas viviam reclusas ou entregando-se à indolência, gerou um contraponto à mulher mais participante e ativa, à testa da família e dos negócios contribuindo com recursos para a manutenção da casa” (27). Biela exists in the middle of a societal transition from a Colonial past that was marked by the division of activities where the elite classes could partake in leisurely activities and a newly surging working class where women of different classes participated (26). In this new binary, Biela must decide between following the traditional expectation for a woman of the upper class, or breaking from this trend.

The opening sequence of the panoramic shot of the fertile lands and a group of people on horses moving away from the farm space establishes Biela’s transition from the rural to the city space. The sounds of barnyard animals are amplified so that the audience grasps the environment of the *fazenda* as does the green color palette where Biela stands out as she carries a palette-contrasting red umbrella. Conrado, Biela and a house worker make their way to the limits of the farm and a shot closes in on Biela who looks back to emphasize her identification with this environment. Different shots of Biela during the trip show that she is her mannerisms are hardly refined or those expected of an upper class lady. Thus, in the rural sphere, where there is less stress on the constant exchange of capital, social norms regarding gender are less stringent. Furthermore, since Biela has access to capital in her *fazenda*, she does not feel the need to modify her

appearance to comply with codes that provide access to money. We must also consider that she was raised by a man, her father, who did not enforce these norms on the girl.

The centrality of religion within this urban society is established in the shot entering the city; church bells ring as if bringing awareness to the fact that Biela is being physically introduced through that space, first walking through a river establishing ceremonial baptismal waters before entering the Catholic-driven community. The first person from the city with whom Biela interacts is the city priest who immediately reminds Constança that she has not taken Biela to his church. Religion is a formative part of this environment and part of Constança and Biela's responsibility as well-to-do females within that society consists of participating in religious practices. The priest is surprised to know that Biela is not accustomed to practicing religious rituals, such as praying. Forming part of this society means adhering to social practices and community expectations, such as religion, a guiding institution in Brazilian life.

Though Mineiros were generally very religious people, the reverence and ritual religious women traditionally hold practice more fervently. John Wirth, discussing the state of Minas Gerais during the Old Republic, makes note that this state was considered the most Catholic in all of Brazil (145). The neighboring São Paulo, with its progressive ideas, became a place where elite Mineiros would go study and where their religious viewpoints would often be challenged. Nonetheless, those who formed a part of the governing body of the Catholic Church, including laypeople, held the social power in Minas Gerais. Biela, away from the city, was not subjected to this disciplinary technology, though as an aspiring member of elite urban society, she must subscribe to

the priest's expectations. This is the same situation seen with the young daughter, Mazília, who is sent to the town of Mariana to attend a Catholic secondary school with a national reputation where wealthy Mineiros sent their children to study. Alfeu is also sent to a religious school, but his is known for harsher conditions, which a young boy is expected to endure while the young girl does not. The church serves as a technology of gender that functions from an early age to shape individuals to the specifications of their social class.

The first time Biela arrives in the city, the family awaits with anticipation at the windows of the house. Mazília expresses to her mother that she wonders what color Biela's dress will be; thus, gender and femininity are immediately being considered. As Biela clumsily gets off her horse, the shot zooms in on her clunky shoes and simple attire using Mazília's gaze that is clearly evaluating Biela's representation of the feminine. The newcomer is subject to scrutiny. The entire family stares at her, whether from the windows of the house, or on the street, apart from her, but her tense face demonstrates that she is uncomfortable. She latches on to her umbrella as the shot zooms in to reveal the family's focus on watching the young girls focus in her fumbling hands trying to straighten out her raggedy clothes. The shot cuts to Biela in the middle of a public city space therefore she is presented in an urban environment in which she is already an outcast because she does not fit in with the norms.

In this society, the populace creates a panopticon in order to regulate social behaviors. According to Foucault, the panopticon is used to keep behaviors under surveillance where the effect is to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and

permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (*History of Sexuality* 201). Constança and Biela walk down the streets and the neighbors, also staring from their house windows, watch as Biela strolls gracelessly down the street; the women shake their head in disapproval and the shot then zooms in on Biela’s long skirt and old boots. By wearing tattered farm boots, Biela is noncompliant to the social graces expected of women in the city and the staring women make this known.

Biela has to go through a socialization process that will allow her access to other social venues such as visiting women in neighborhood homes, an activity common amongst upper class urban society women. Women at the time would meet for coffee and chat about domestic life. The ritual consists of entering the private domestic spheres of other families and bonding with female friends. Biela attempts to do this but fails. She correctly offers a gift to her neighbor, but afterward does not engage in conversation. The dialogue becomes static and the entire scene is uncomfortable for the hostess who leaves the girl in the sitting room to place a broom behind her door and toss salt into the stove, both rituals used to drive away bad visits and bad luck from entering the home. To further emphasize Biela’s inadequacy, the woman leaves the girl sitting silently while she gets to work on some sewing in another room. Although Biela does attempt to satisfy gender codes of her class, she fails and is indirectly told by the hostess to leave. Biela then initiates a gender performance where she exaggerates her mannerisms to convey that she has enjoyed herself therefore satisfying the protocol of these visits. Another scene between Constança and two friends shows the appropriate behavior expected in this gendered space.

Biela's public persona is first groomed within the household. The private home space for women has partitions that establish a social divide between the front and back of the home. D'Incão explains this spatial divide, "O desenvolvimento das cidades e da vida burguesa no século XIX influiu na disposição do espaço no interior da residência, tornando-a mais aconchegante; deixou ainda mais claros os limites do convívio e as distâncias sociais entre a nova classe e o povo, permitindo um processo de privatização da família marcado pela valorização da intimidade" (228). The front of the home is reserved for the activities of the upper class family and the back of the house is reserved for the domestic servants while the salon is where the women meet to carry out their public activities. Though Biela feels more comfortable in the back of the house, her social position based on capital attainment requires that she modify her behavior to the activities outlined by Constança. Since Biela is wealthy, she is not allowed to partake in the activities reserved for females among the kitchen staff.

In contrast to females, men of the higher social class are allowed to participate in more public spaces, such as bars, where Conrado presumably spent his time before being involved in a quarrel. To continue his social relationships, he invites other men into the domestic sphere to play cards but even then, men are kept separate from female spaces and from communicating with women beyond what is necessary. Biela and Constança remain in another room and when Biela peeks over, there is a trellis that separates the spaces. Conrado has more access to the public space because he is also the one with the financial control. This control extends to power over the women in the home, and Conrado attempts to exercise this when Biela is disobedient. However, after Constança

reminds him that his control over Biela is superficial—he, after all, is not required to oversee her finances—, he changes his attitude towards the girl and allows her to exercise more agency.

Biela's wealth, which should be a means for her liberation, serves instead as a limitation as her activities become controlled. Though Biela enjoys eating and cooking with the domestic helpers, Sá Joviana and Gumercindo, the kitchen helpers, she is told that her place is in the front of the house, and that she should not consort with the kitchen staff in such a friendly manner. Social division is established between Sá Joviana and herself, and it is emphasized by Constança when she sternly asks Biela to leave the kitchen stating, “Seu lugar é na sala com a gente, não na cozinha com os criados.” Biela does not have the option of choosing. Her location within the household is predefined by her financial assets. She must assume the new activities and spaces identified by Constança as socially appropriate as she states “Agora você tem que aprender outras coisas, né? Costurar, bordar. Não fica bem você ficar enfiada o dia inteiro lá na cozinha com os criados, né, Biela?” The two spaces contrast to represent the social classes that inhabit them. While the front of the house has expensive furniture and fine china, as seen in the dining room setting, the back kitchen is rustic and not presentable to visitors, filled with sticks, logs and dirt floors to emphasize it is a location reserved for servants.

The female models for imitation are Constança and Mazília. The young daughter is a perfect embodiment of the gender expectations placed on Biela because the child is acutely perceptive to Biela's gender faux pas since she herself is learning these rules. For this reason, the child makes note of Biela's wealth and the inconsistency with her style of

dress saying “Pra ela que pode, um vestido de pobre daqueles?” The young girl directly relates capital to self-representation. The expectation is that Biela be dressed to reflect her affluence. Since Biela is unaccustomed to the ties between capital, social class and gender, she struggles to conform to this new system.

Biela’s wardrobe, hair and manners also undergo visually changes that are physically restrictive. Seeing Constança’s hairstyle, Biela imitates her and exchanges her loose braids with a tight hair bun that sits restrictively on the top of her head. This emulation is greeted with positive reinforcement from Mazília and the family as acceptable behavior. By wearing her hair like Constança, Biela is thus considered “pretty” by the family, and this translates to fitting-in. The female is subjected to scrutiny by others as a way to also assess men and the family as a whole as D’Incao states: “...a família em especial a mulher, submetia-se à avaliação e opinião dos ‘outros’” (228). She then goes on to emphasize, “Os homens eram bastante dependentes da imagem que suas mulheres pudessem traduzir para o restante das pessoas de seu grupo de convívio. Em outras palavras, significavam um capital simbólico importante, embora a autoridade familiar se mantivesse em mãos masculinas, do pai ou do marido” (D’Incao 229). Conrado agrees to allow his wife to transform Biela so that she fits in better with their social class because he understands that Biela’s physical appearance reflects on him.

The family invests in expensive luxurious fabrics to symbolically demonstrate Biela’s wealth and creates completely new wardrobe to go along with her new upper class female persona. According to Loise Gunther, researching the attire of British and Brazilian women in Bahia at the turn of the 20th century:

Clothing is an obvious vehicle for expressing group affiliation and/or identity in general, thus serving the function of immediately including or excluding others from the group. Partly for that reason, details of dress are often carefully recorded in historical sources. Also, clothes affect the wearer's health, as the body is freed or constrained in systematic, gender-specific ways over long periods of time. (17-18)

Biela experiences the physical constraint of her new clothes, as Amaral underscores repeatedly throughout the film. In a scene where Constança and a seamstress gather to make Biela's new wardrobe, the camera emphasizes Constança grabbing at Biela's neck to fashion a lace appliqué for the young girl's clothes. Biela's frightened face demonstrates her discomfort in the binding garments, which relate to repressive nature of females in all aspects, starting with their physical attire. In another shot in this scene, Biela is completely covered with fabric and is trapped inside the velour cloth held by Constança, her gender disciplinarian. All of the clothes made for public wear incorporate a high neck. This contrasts with the loose fitting clothes that she arrived wearing, which allowed more mobility and were not restrictive.

The developmental stage of self-identification, as established by Lacan's interpretation of the mirror stage is presented (Hayward 293). Biela stands in front of the mirror scrutinizing her new clothes and the way she looks. Gazing at her own reflection, Biela accepts that this is the new woman that she must become in the city, however unfitting this image is. She stares at the woman that she is expected to portray; consciousness and performance interact. Through clothes, gender is established in a performative manner. Biela dresses the part of a high society female, though her movements contrast with her clothes. When she walks, she is comically stiff and appears

unbearably uncomfortable, though she agrees to wear these clothes and trusts that her cousin knows best when it comes to making her fit in. According to Sá Joviana, the clothes are the key to Biela finding a husband and being happy, the desired social life for a woman of her rank. Though Biela's life expectations were different in the *fazenda*, in the city she must dress corresponding to her social class with the ultimate goal being marriage under the patriarchal organization. Still, she cannot help but remember when she was a child in the *fazenda*. A shot of Biela daydreaming in the middle of trees that crowd the shot cuts to a shot of her as a child playing in the dirt next to the river in an open space. These two shots contrast to highlight the freedom of space, activities and attire that Biela was accustomed to in the rustic landscape. In the city, her hair is tightly gathered and representative of the limitations on her actions as well as the restrictive space.

Marriage is an important social arrangement that reaffirms social status. Emotions are not as important as the business deal that can be struck when two men decide on the future of their families in an engagement. In keeping with the social expectations, Constança persuades Biela to marry Modesto, a young man that comes to their house to play cards with Conrado. Although Biela is not keen on the idea of marriage, she is told that as a woman of the upper class she must do so especially if the union is to duplicate wealth since relationships are also tied to her inheritance and the possibility of him not having to make his own money. A scene captures this as the two sit stiffly in opposite extremes of a loveseat though they each sit tightly on the extremes of a loveseat and Modesto's conversation becomes a financial review of Biela's financial

assets. Modesto asks about the head of cattle that she owns as well as the amount of milk that these can give. Biela replies by giving him a list of the production on the farm, which includes cotton and coffee plantation. This prompts Modesto to specifically ask about the profit that is made from the farm. Women are judged as marriage material based on their access to capital as would be the case of an investment deal. Her wealth compensates for her lack of social grace, which she is slow to acquire. Modesto runs away with money destined for a business deal, leaving his pending engagement. Having acquired money by another means, he leaves Biela and the engagement is called off. Thus, once he no longer needs her money, Modesto rejects Biela, proving his interest was never romantic, but rather, of financial convenience.

In the same manner that the young girl accepts who she is becoming, a mirror shot also demonstrates how the self reverts. After the scene where she finds out that Modesto has abandoned her, Biela once again contemplates her changed self in the mirror to reevaluate her self-perception after feeling deceived by the expectations of her new social status. This time, her image is reflected in three adjoining mirrors to magnify different angles of the persona that she has been forced to adopt. She rids herself of all the norms that she has come to accept by ripping off her confining high necks, tight clothes and hair bun. She is liberating herself from the gender norms that have not served her. She returns to wearing her clothes from the *fazenda* in order to further emphasize her rejection of cousin Constança's expectations and of this social class as a whole.

Biela's regression is greeted with disapproval, expressed in the dining room scene where Biela has just rejected sitting with them to eat. Biela refuses to interact with the

family in this part of the house. Thus, she chooses not to inhabit the front of the house, the space appropriate for the upper class. In retaliation, Constanças not only accepts Biela's decision, she states that Biela is no longer to be served at the table, therefore making the rejection of the young girl clear. The family is defined by social class, which is dependant on capital. This system, then, delineates allowed social interactions. By choosing not to interact with the family, Biela is able to freely socialize with individuals from a lower social class.

The spaces where Biela moves must also be redefined to correspond with this rupture from mainstream society. Since the girl does not want to live in the style of the wealthy class, she cannot inhabit those spaces either. She symbolically sits with the servants in the back of the house. She also modifies her living quarters and opts to live in a shack behind the house, which is more representative of where she places herself in society. By doing this, Biela is doing away with the social expectations tied to her wealth, specifically the gender norms. Her exit from the main house is marked by a dim-lighted space. The exterior of the shot shows Biela moving past the barred and fenced interior house. She is freeing herself not only from this space, but also from the social expectations of the wealthy inhabitants of the front of the house. In contrast, as the shot shows the shack she has chosen to inhabit, it is well lit, thus asserting a more positive attitude and liberation for Biela.

The shack becomes Biela's most intimate space. She enters a womb-like area that is at first dark. She opens a window and natural sunlight shines on her face as she smiles. The lighting establishes that Biela is being born again and she is in complete control of

her actions. As Biela sits to admire her surroundings and unpack her old clothes, the soundtrack changes, marking a shift in Biela as a new woman. The space is non-gendered and she will be able to do as she pleases. It becomes a haven from the main house in which Constança had tried to control her.

By breaking with her social class, Biela is free to associate with those of a lower social class. The girl's new freedom allows for this. With the new acquisition of space, she can partake in cooking with the servants, which was limited in her previous position as an upper class female. Her associations with the kitchen help also change. Biela acted awkwardly when she visited upper class women before, yet now she is able to speak freely when she interacts with the neighborhood's working women. Furthermore, instead of entering other homes through the front of the house, as a woman of the upper class, Biela begins entering homes through the *fundo*, therefore bypassing any association with the well-to-do women of the home and instead visiting the housemaids. This act highlights her new-found agency to act as she pleases.

Biela's rejection of her assigned social class in the city is a carnivalesque act of masquerade. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the representation of carnival as a "suspension of hierarchical precedence" (10). During the festival of carnival, individuals can assume different identities that do not abide by the socially established ranks and norms; that is what Biela is doing. Though she assumes that she can act like a peasant, it is still noteworthy that she does have capital to support herself so her peasant persona is a social farce. Her wealth permits her to act like a member of this lower class and still have a say in what she wishes to be because she is self-sufficient. There is no doubt of her financial

worth. Harvey states “The holding and command of money confers tremendous social power” (“Urbanization of Capital” 22) and this is what Biela is practicing; she is rich enough to feign being poor. Others, such as Sá Joviana, conform to their social position and do not question it nor try to move outside of it because they have no option. Sá Joviana and the other kitchen helpers cannot give in to freely restructuring their gender because they must uphold the social order as this is a means to access capital. Social mobility, whether it is up or down, is a luxury for Biela that others cannot access. While her cousin embraces their upper class status, Biela embraces downward mobility.

The apparent lack of social mobility in the representation of this town is due to the strong holding over capital by the elite class. In contrast to 21st century depictions of Brazilian larger urban centers, as is evident in Tata Amaral’s *Antônia*, capital in the XIXth century flows through fewer sectors allowing for different conditions for social mobility and a different process in the urbanization of consciousness.

Biela demonstrates that small-scale independence is acquired by females through unofficial labor. Though she herself states that she never asks for money when she visits households and assists with cleaning and baking, she also mentions that she does not turn down compensation for her work when it is offered. Constança whose face stiffens sees receiving coins and other daily payments like a servant insulting and offensive and the filmic shot zooms in when she hears of Biela’s work. Conrado confronts the girl. The camera juxtaposes Biela’s behavior to that of peasant worker Chico. In a scene where Conrado pays Chico for 15 days of labor with coins—establishing the hierarchy of power--, as Chico leaves, Biela walks into the frame on the opposite side as if replacing

the space by Chico, thus establishing a parallel on the social perception of these two characters. Though Biela belongs to Conrado's social class, the girl voluntarily equates herself to Chico's stratum, though earning her own money allows her to acquire greater agency.

The ritual of receiving money is one that marks a difference in access to capital for Biela. Though she has never been impoverished, and she knows that she is financially supported by her inheritance, the large sum of money she came into is attached to social expectations and set structures with which she must comply. The wages from her own labor as a peasant woman are free of social expectations and are tied to a self-made woman, something she accomplishes through her access to money and her decision to reject gender norms. Earning money is a source of empowerment for Biela and further emphasizes her self-sufficiency. Money serves to constantly re-emphasize her freedom. When Conrado offers to grant her money upfront so that she does not have to work for it, Biela refuses and emphasizes that she prefers earning the coins from her housework. Her physical work enables her liberation while the inheritance condemns her to her social position.

Physical money ensures agency and this relationship is emphasized in the filmic shot. Back in her shack, Biela lays across her bed while playing with her money. She counts it and makes designs with the coins. The sunlight streams through the window and the ray of light hits the coins directly, making them shine. She places the coins in water vestibules under her bed. Like water, the coins inside the jugs represent Biela's source of

life without which she cannot survive. With time, the quantity of water jugs increases and represents Biela's growth in this alternative society and her accumulated independence.

Biela rebuilds her self within this social class, creating a new family by adopting a stray dog. The pet is symbolic of her alter ego. Vismundo, as she names the dog, comes to her in the same way that Biela arrived to her cousin's house. The dog becomes a mirror of Biela's history in the city as he is taken in and groomed to fit with Biela's standards in the same manner that she was taken in by her cousins and socialized. Biela can project her desires on her dog but promises it that she will not be restrictive and she will allow it freedom. In addition, she also begins to train the dog to obey orders and to perform tricks by jumping from one wooden box to another. She is grooming and training him much in the same way that she this was done to her by her cousins. She socializes the dog and tries to modify its behavior to conform to her expectations. Similar to Biela's actions, Vismundo responds by escaping one night in the same manner she had done. Biela's search for the dog causes her grave physical illness.

Her illness proves that she is not self-sufficient because she is placed back in the main house where Constança's rules apply. Though Biela believed she would be able to endure living in this society with her reformed behavior, she dies of pneumonia and her death signifies that a creature like her cannot survive. The city dwellers that wish to recreate themselves according to their wishes are unable to do so because of the elaborate set expectations on the individual. Though it is not logically expected to see a person with means to capital unable to survive in the role of the upper class, Biela's death shows that those in the upper class are as restricted by social expectations, and their means to capital

is not necessarily liberating. The social hierarchies in the beginning of the 20th century were rigid and unbreakable.

Both *Antônia* and *Uma Vida em Segredo* show representations of women that challenge traditional representations of gender and allow these female characters to explore an alternative to social expectations. In both cases the characters must negotiate their self-identity when faced with the “money talks” attitude of their society. At first glance, the films are seemingly very different, but a careful analysis reveals that the process of urbanization has a similar result in the sense that it handicaps their agency. The double standard evident in the lack of or excessive access to economy varies in these films. In the timeframe of the 19th century, the access to capital will bring about negative conditions for Biela’s since wealth brings about social subjugation.

As societies continuously develop and the world enters the 21st century, the same intersection of gender and capital can be analyzed but will vary depending on the effects of the other factors of urbanization of consciousness, including the consideration of complex family structures, division of social class, presence of the state, and construction of communities. Gender, an already multifaceted concept, undergoes even greater levels of complexity in the construction of this system.

More and more, contemporary Brazilian audiences are presented with critical perspectives of their realities, an idea that was first introduced through the *Cinema Novo* movement of the 1960s. More so, Brazilian audiences are viewing more of their own films, experiencing a popularity that had not occurred for over 60 years, due in part to the government’s support of exhibition laws, state funding through sources such as ANCINE

and private industry productions such as TV Globo productions. The cinematic industry in Brazil has changed in this past decade. This has allowed for higher cinematic quality and for more directors to have the opportunity to work through co-productions both national investors and international production agencies and distributors. In terms of the production and cinematic representation, women have benefited from this contemporary cinematic dynamic since they have more access to producing and working on films and have a stronger presence behind the lens and in front of it. Despite the growing presence of complex representations of women in film, the challenge lies in the social construction of Brazilian society, a structure established for centuries, as evident in the filmic representation, that limits women as they negotiate between capital accumulation and their self-perception, construction and will.

CONCLUSION: THE COST OF SELF-APPROPRIATION (LIBERATION)

At the beginning of this study, I mentioned the popular *Sex and the City* program that constantly referenced the chic Manhattan neighborhoods including the Upper East Side and the areas of Fifth Avenue, Madison, and Park Avenue and the gentrified Meatpacking district. The women highlighted in this show belong to a favored social class with a high level of disposable income. For many seasons, HBO-paying US audiences were able to live vicariously through Carrie Bradshaw's countless adventures where she created her life around sex, men, friends and high-end designer goods. Female viewers were expected to relate to Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte. Still, the appeal targeted the middle to upper class (one who could afford paying for HBO and *oohed* over expensive clothing and style) and heterosexual women, implied by the clearly defined sexual orientation of the main characters.⁷⁶ In 2008, when the movie finale of *Sex and the City* was released, the film prompted parties across the nation. Mass media encouraged fans to plan '*Sex-and -the-City*' themed parties, see the film on the premier night, and drink Cosmopolitan cocktails afterwards.⁷⁷ The film itself provided the delayed gratification that fans expected: Carrie marries her Mr. Big, and the prosaic heterosexual storybook ending is achieved. Still, I cannot help but wonder: does this

⁷⁶ Though a few episodes in the series delved into the exploration homosexuality, the outcome consisted of confirming their heterosexuality. It is interesting to note that Cynthia Nixon ("Miranda" on the show) publicly revealed her homosexuality only after the series was over.

⁷⁷ There are many Internet sites that provide instructions on how to create a *Sex and the City* party including ehow.com, ivillage, about.com, suite101.com. One need only type in keywords into an Internet search engine in order to see countless examples. Furthermore, at the time of release, radio stations across the country promoted these parties and even raffled party packages that included limo rides to the theater and private parties at nightclubs after the screening.

depicted society indicate that money will ultimately lead to a clichéd concept of happiness, and only those with sufficient disposable income and leisure time to spend it are at liberty to determine their construction of self? What is the cost of self-appropriation—that is, at what point do women have enough money to freely define their concept of self?

Shifting to Latin American representations, soap opera melodrama (which commonly reinforce traditional gender binaries) has been a constant presence in the region, and these shows similarly promote the “love conquers all” ideology of the good girl ending up with her prince charming who conveniently happens to be wealthy, thus solving all of her economic issues. However, this situation can only happen when the economy is stable. After all, most *telenovelas* end at the high point of the relationship when the relationship and any lingering financial problems are resolved.

Different to this condition seen in other cultural productions, this dissertation has focused on films’ representation (both visual and narrative) of insolvent women to analyze how they interact with the cities in which they live, including Mexico City, Buenos Aires and São Paulo. Though these cities are often times promoted as the center of the country’s vivacity, “chicness,” and wealth, the perception of the less affluent citizens is much different because they experience the city as a location of unequal distribution of capital.

These urban centers upon which I focus in my study represent the process of the interchange of capital and the manner in which this will manipulate the individual’s construction of consciousness. In this system of consciousness, the construction of

gender is also influenced; all of this is the end-result of an individual's interaction with its free market society. Throughout this study, I have explored the manner in which the access to capital will interact with what can be termed the urbanization of gender. In all instances, the lack of access to capital triggers the assimilation of traditional conceptions of gender. That is, the females' lack of monetary attainment reinforces a traditionally docile, passive, and sexualized position. The institutions with which the females interact will further stress and reemphasize these expectations and behaviors. Females abide by these set expectations because conforming is their only means to gain access to capital. In the end, the cliché of money equaling power prevails.

In all six films explored, domesticity, submissive sexuality, and even the sacrifice of a fetus have been required to keep a level of capital or to obtain any amount of money when none is available due to the economic circumstances of class, state, family and community. This study, then, has gone beyond the exploration of the individual constructions of gender in order to get to the core of how cities are structured to manipulate the behavior and construction of women. Though I have used film as a medium, this same concept can be applied to diverse representations and studies. Furthermore, in an effort to present a concise representation, the study has been limited to the three main countries of cinematic production in Latin America.

My analysis has encompassed women in poverty, women that belong to the once-solvent middle class, and, finally, those of the upper class, all of whom negotiate their sense of selves within the urban sphere. Despite this attempt to bring about various conversations on this complex topic, I realize that this study is barely the beginning when

it comes to considering the relationship between urban capital and gender. There is never a fixed construction of either because it is part of a process of the constant exchange of capital.

The Mexican macho and the submissive woman

Mexico has its idealized representation of rich Polanco-based *telenovela* representations that constantly present a society where everyone has access to riches and a happy ending, much in the same way that *Sex and the City* functions. The social reality of the majority of Mexicans is very different. The two films analyzed here identify the failure of the Neoliberal project instituted by technocrats in the last two decades of the 20th century and well into present-day Mexico. The socioeconomic divide continues to grow and the polarity is further emphasized as the lower-class uses all means possible in order to advance in their society.

In Sistach's *Perfume de violetas*, the lack of available resources at different levels of society provokes citizens to use females as commodities. A young girl's body is used in exchange for capital so as to purchase a pair of sneakers. Due to the relationship that the females have with the state and family institutions, breaking from this relationship is difficult. Thus, young Yessica is forced to comply with these definitions of gender permitting sexual assault, as well as adhering to the requirements of domesticity and potential physical abuse carried out by various forces of power. For Yessica, the only way to break free from this condition is to assume a different identity of someone whose economic environment is less fragile, much in the same way that Miriam does. For an instant, Yessica usurps Miriam's body in the hopes of alleviating the conditions set forth

as a result of her family's financial status and her position as a female in that environment. Throughout the film, the mise-en scene captures various sections of Mexico City's *colonia* Santo Domingo to emphasize the location and underlying conditions that make Yessica a consumable product. The camera movement and editing further highlight the chaotic setting that the young girl must endure.

Dana Rotberg's *Ángel de fuego* presents a similar situation of further marginalizing the margins. Alma is able to experiment with maternity, though this female condition is further manipulated to satisfy the spiritual needs of the traveling religious group. Refugio and Sacramento see the opportunity to capitalize on Alma's motherhood so as to satisfy their godly plans. Unable to make a living otherwise, Alma pays her way with the group by unintentionally sacrificing her fetus for Sacramento's divine gain. Lacking any hope of creating her own capital, she surrenders her unborn child so as to secure divine and earthly salvation. The constant visual cues captured in the shots are symbolic as they accentuate the religious allegory that Rotberg is using to recreate an apocalyptic turn of the 21st century space. The act of burning down the space of capital is symbolic of Alma's refusal to accept those institutions, yet, she also incinerates herself, understanding that her own survival in these ominous lands is impossible.

Both films demonstrate the extreme effects of economic failure where bodies become the only source of capital when projects of modernization have failed in society. Though pessimistic views of the urban society, these cinematic representations use culturally intelligible cues to represent the institutions that have power over the individuals of their societies.

Argentina's Re-structured Gender

Argentina has recently faced a long period of social change, not only politically, but also economically. Once a prosperous nation, Argentina's economic turmoil since 1989 has created a need to restructure society. The sociopolitical situation since 1995 has created a society that longs for advancement and stability in the neoliberal climate in which the country finds itself. Thus, the situation of economy is ever more present as individuals in the country's capital try to survive within a volatile financial environment. As seen in both films analyzed, this situation has provoked a re-evaluation of social class, which in turn reflects in a redefinition of self.

In *Un día de suerte*, Gugliotta presents a vision of both youths and adults seeking survival. While the grandparents' generation sought to use their political expression in the form of social revolt, the parents looked for odd jobs and resorted to changing the family dynamics so that the mother could work while the father stayed home. Youths, on the other hand, pursued illicit jobs that also formed a part of the urban capitalist structure. Middle class desires are expressed filmically through surrealist sequences that depict abundance. Contrasting sequences of urban decay are presented to visually convey the discrepancy between middle class aspirations and the surrounding urban reality. The middle-class space of Boedo contrasts with the locations used for recreation, including the gentrified Puerto Madero. Individuals are limited in their social and physical mobility due to the lack of capital. Thus, for women, capital and agency are only acquired through the exchange of their body, though paradoxically they lose agency when they compromise their body.

A similar situation occurs in Chomski's *Hoy y mañana* where the main character, Paula, cannot make a living as an actress. In need of basic necessities, she seeks selling off possessions and eventually resorts to prostitution. A once middle-class individual and bohemian artist living in Palermo Viejo, an artist colony, she is now forced to become a commodity in the already gentrified and commercialized Palermo district. The individual recreates her self, assuming a different person, "Ana," to perform gender's expected roles and, in that way, receive money. The Buenos Aires landscape is constantly referenced visually to accentuate the various economic spaces, including the nocturnal businesses of prostitution. The final shot is of Paula facing the lights of the city across the Río de la Plata. She looks towards the urban space that has created the situation where only her sexuality has value.

Economic instability has been common in Argentina throughout the 20th century. Still, the move towards neoliberal policy and its effect on the country is evident in these films. In this changing financial climate, elements that must also be factored into the urbanization of capital include foreign businessmen, commodities or tourism. For the two main characters of these films from Argentina, their position as traditionally middle class individuals has fueled their dreams of emigrating or moving up on the social ladder, and yet, the economic landscape does not support this aspiration. That being the case, they must modify their sense of selves in order to survive.

Brazilian economic landscapes

Two different geographic areas of Brazil have been explored in this study and help round out the panorama in terms of demonstrating the agency that a woman acquires

as she comes in contact with capital. *Antônia* depicts women who take on traditional feminine dress and manner in order to gain access to capital by means of wider audience acceptance of their musical performance. The area of São Paulo has clearly defined neighborhoods that also represent affluence, so the girls' conquering of those demonstrates their ascension into mainstream. The filmic shots accentuate the social classes that inhabit each space and the limitation of physical and social mobility in Brasilândia. In the end, they acquire agency by conforming to the social expectations, but their desire to sing rap music will ultimately confine them back to the area of Brasilândia. In the process, they have also adopted an image that emphasizes their sex appeal; thus, they compromised their sense of self in order to secure fame and ultimately, as they put it, "pegar grana" (make a buck).

Uma Vida em Segredo serves as the best contrast to the aforementioned films because in it the main character is wealthy and regresses into the life of a lower-class individual. Though, as it was demonstrated, her wealth is sufficient so as to allow her to assume the role of a servant, which otherwise would not be possible. Biela was expected to comply with the status of her pre-established social class in the urban space, as is the case of the other women represented in this study. For Biela, however, conforming to upper-class expectations was repressive as conveyed through the filmic shots constantly emphasized captivity. Unlike the other women in the film, the difference lies in the agency that a woman with capital can exercise.

The women were forced to modify their expression of gender to obtain or comply with consumers. In both cases, the women modify their behavior, appearance and

expression according to the expectations of the different institutions to which they wanted to belong. Under the capitalist structure of Brazil, as evident even in representations that deal with the beginning of the century, the urban space has set gender and social boundaries that are not easily crossed by its inhabitants.

Further studies

An area that remains to be studied refers to this interaction of capital and gender in societies that do not implement this economic system. I call attention specifically to Cuba, a country that for 50 years has theoretically implemented communism. The success and failure of this model is debatable since it is known that the government has been unable to stop micro capitalism within the country. The interaction with gender and capital in this landscape will be different, as will be the case of spaces that are moving towards this paradigm such as Venezuela.

While this study has been focused on identifying the female construction of gender, an exploration of the degrees of masculinity can also shed light on the complicated constructions of machismo. To this effect, Sabina Berman's cinematic adaptation of her play *Entre Pancho Villa y una mujer desnuda* (1996) analyzes the interference of the pre-existing socially permitted *macho* identity in the face of the 21st century self-sufficient women. Machismo, as Berman establishes in her representation, is difficult to overcome when it has been cemented through historical cues, including the prevailing images of figures such as Pancho Villa. Berman's film effectively juxtaposes two time periods through cinematic cuts that also correspond to distinct socioeconomic landscapes, the second being neoliberal Mexico where some women are represented as

having direct access to capital. Berman's film supposes that men must also readjust their construction of male when in the form of machismo in order to adhere to the changing power structures of a woman with agency and capital. This interaction has an impact on traditional gender codes.

To further complicate this notion of gender construction, I realize that I have been working from a dichotomous construction of male/female, representations of homosexuality need to also be addressed in its diverse dimensions. Thus, I propose that capital will have the same effect in broader queer representations of capital where sexual liberation and permissiveness is dependent on the economic access of the individual. Some examples of films where this can be explored include the films *Tan de repente* (2002) by Diego Lerman and *Vagón fumador* (2001) by Verónica Chen as well as the novel by Luis Zapata *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (1979). In these examples, capital and distribution of power in homosexual relationships intersect and its analysis is telling of the complexity of the urban space and how it will relate to the individuals who do not fit into the restrictive binary model of gender.

Final remarks

One final question remains, though it may not be easily answered, but rather represents an issue to consider when exploring these elements in future studies: Will societies be able to overcome the manipulation of gender as it relates to the capitalist production? If capital defines power and hierarchies, then there is submissiveness, which often takes a female form. Though, as the markets evolve, will men more commonly find themselves in this state of submissiveness if they are no longer the main source of

capitalist accumulation within the urban environment, and if so, how would gender be constructed in the city? As societies modify national and globalized economies in order to secure wealth, the effects ramify to the constructions of selves.

So, returning to the glorification of disposable income and romantic love that series such as *Sex in the City* promote, from this study we can further conclude that the contemporary urban environments present greater challenges for women that go beyond the accumulation of designer goods; instead, women who do not belong to the privileged social class must first resolve their survival in the city.

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