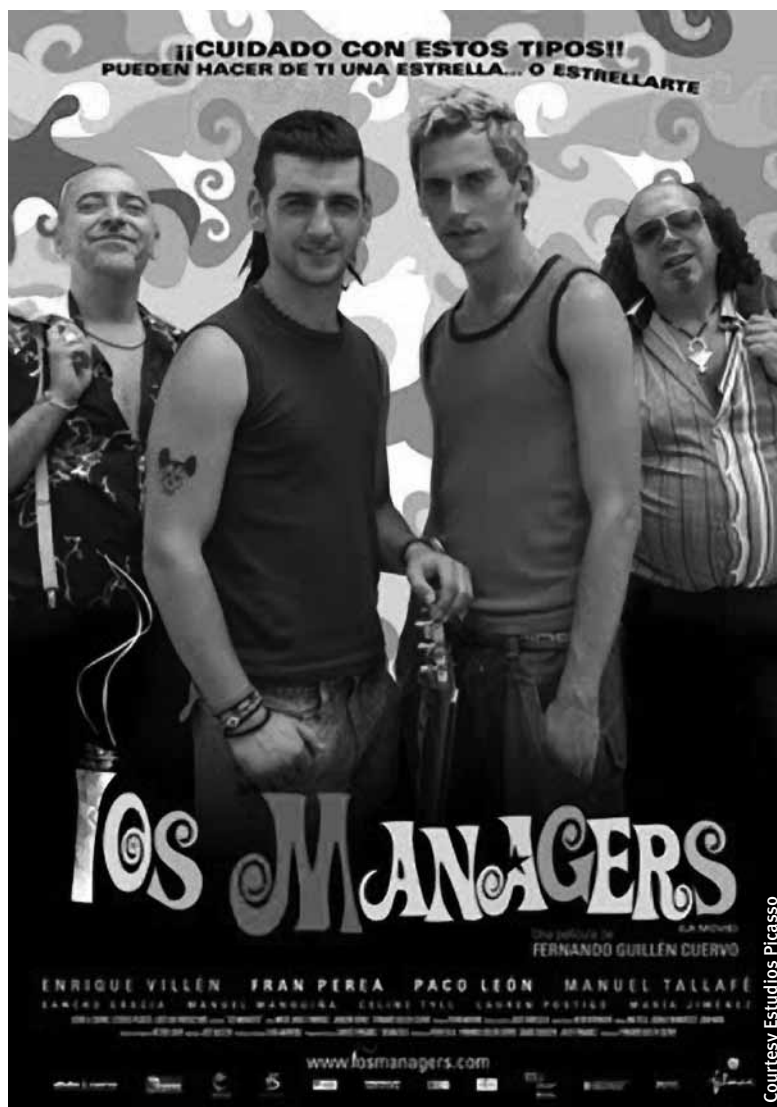


Luis Guadaño

When Thesis Films Don't Work—

Representational Strategies and Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Film



If we take a look at Spanish films for the period 1975-2007, about seventy-four deal with immigration in Spain. This is a large number, though it includes documentaries, shorts and feature films. Thirty-eight of these films, which I will call "films about immigration," have followed three approaches: films that show immigration from the immigrant perspective; films that illustrate Spaniards' reaction toward immigration; and films that deal with problems faced by Spaniards and immigrants alike. Those approaches can be exemplified by three movies: *Las cartas de Alou* (*Letters From Alou*, Montxo Armendáriz, 1990) describes the life and problems faced by an illegal immigrant, from his own perspective, while he is trying to establish and make a living in Spain; *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996) presents the Spaniards' reaction during their first contact with a newly-arrived illegal immigrant; and *Flores de otro mundo* (*Flowers from another World*, Icíar Bollaín, 1999) deals with the problems faced by both Spaniards and immigrants while trying to establish a lifelong relationship through marriage.

Since the turn of the century, other films like *Poniente* (*Sundown/West*, Chus Gutiérrez, 2002), *Illegal* (*Illegal*, Ignacio Vilar, 2002) or more recently *14 Kilómetros* (*14 Kilometers*, Gerardo Olivares, 2007), the short feature *Usar y tirar* (*Use and Dispose*, Daniel García Pablos, 2003), and the documentaries by José Luis Tirado *Paralelo 36* (*Parallel 36*, 2004) and *La liga de los olvidados* (*The Forgotten's Soccer League*, 2007) have explored similar issues on immigration. Although differing in their approach and narrative style they all share, as Inmaculada Gordillo notes, a very negative representation of intercultural relations between Spaniards and immigrants, leading her to conclude that solidarity

and equal relations as shown in Spanish films appear to be isolated cases (14).

I disagree with Gordillo in terms of how she characterizes Spanish film and its portrayal of immigration because her analysis does not take into consideration another cluster of films that deals with the same topic. One possible explanation for this exclusion might lie in the fact that, since these films are not directly dealing with immigration issues, the presence of foreign characters in them can be understood as purely ancillary and thus not elaborating on or advancing the debate.¹ A more likely cause for such an omission derives from the critical tendency of favoring a high-brow, educational, propagandistic, and aesthetic/artistic conceptualization of cinema. As the director of *Paralelo 36*, José Luis Tirado has noted the purpose of films depicting the existence of racial, ethnic, and cultural tensions and confrontations is to "question reality and the dominant ideology through the media, based on the poetry the media expresses."²

I partially agree with Tirado's idea since cinema has proven, in some cases, to be a good propaganda tool to promote (for good or bad) social change. However, in order for a film to be successful in its questioning of both reality and the dominant ideology, it requires an audience that is willing to watch it. If we check the domestic box office figures, the combined audience for those thirty-eight films reached roughly 1.7 million moviegoers. If this number is low in terms of viewers attending Spanish films over a one-year period — the annual average for the period 1998-2008 is around 20 million — what happens if we stretch those numbers over a thirty-year period? We end up having roughly 56,000 viewers per year or around 75,000 per film which, in neither case,

is a solid box office success. A film with no audience is like the proverbial tree falling in the middle of the woods. Do these films make any “noise?”

The answer is yes. Many films about immigration have found a receptive audience within intellectual and academic circles because they are “good educational examples” that illustrate how a film, or a specific auteur, questions and criticizes politically incorrect reactions and feelings towards immigrants. In the process such films establish a connection with the Spanish social context and thus validate themselves, as Gordillo explains, by promoting the views expressed in them as “a reflection of the extra-cinematographic reality taking place in some Spanish cities... [or]... a representational model which might influence the audience individually and socially” (2). The problem with this position is that it isn’t the true audience, but select intellectuals, scholars, or government officials who validate a film. And why are these groups taken into consideration, instead of everyday moviegoers? Well, we can say that, when an idea or a film is trying to be validated as a sound representation of a real situation, securing the support of the experts is best. What happens, however, when expert opinions are not shared by the public? Can we still maintain that those movies have an influence on individuals and society? Or should we just claim, if anything at all, that they only validate the “extra-cinematographic reality” for/of a specific social group?

What happens, however, when expert opinions are not shared by the public? Can we still maintain that those movies have an influence on individuals and society?

It seems that “films about immigration” receive attention and institutional support due to political correctness and hegemonic ideological reasons related to issues of discrimination and racism within the Spanish democracy. They reflect the “official view” as well as part of the filmic canon because of that support, hiding the failure of their representational strategies to convey the intended politically correct “message” to the audience. The latter, which should be enough to question the representational validity of “films about immigration” — as well as their link to an extra-cinematographic reality, and the relevance of their message — brings forward the question: do Spaniards really care about immigration?

RETHINKING THE CONTEXT:
LOOKING IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION

Moving away from this conceptualization of cinema as an educational, propagandistic, and aesthetic/artistic vehicle, one can identify another group of about thirty-seven films that, instead of strictly focusing on the problems posed by immigration, include immigrant characters that share with their Spanish counterparts a common goal, situation, or problem. If we compare the films produced under this category — which I call “films with immigrants” — with the previous one, “films about immigration,” there is not a great disparity in the number of films in the thirty-year period we are examining here. The box office figures,

however, tell a different story: “films about immigration” reached a total of 1.7 million viewers, while the audience for “films with immigrants” climbed to 25.5 million. That situation is not new in Spanish Cinema.

As Nuria Triana Toribio and Isabel Santaolalla have noted, this disparity in public attendance can be compared to what happened in the 1960s and early 1970s between the NCE (New Spanish Cinema) and the so-called *Tercera vía* (Third Way) films. NCE, following an auteur approach, received international attention at the time because of its opposition to the Franco regime, while in Spain those films did not have much public success. On the other hand, the *Tercera vía* movies also touched on sensitive social and political topics, but from a commercial and popular point of view. Nonetheless, *Tercera vía* films were largely ignored inside and outside of Spain by intellectuals and left-wing critics alike, yet became the blockbusters of their time because the audience perceived them as being culturally more relevant than NCE films.³

“Films about immigration” share with NCE films their asynchronicity in relation to the topics and narratives they present. While NCE still criticized the Franco regime, the Third Way was already aware of the factuality of those changes and was cashing in on them. In a similar manner, the 1990 release of *Las cartas de Alou*—considered the first Spanish film about immigration—seems to suggest that there was

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either no immigration flow to Spain until then, or that nobody had paid any attention to it. This is, of course, far from the truth. The immigration phenomenon in Spain was already well underway in the 1970s, as *El Puente* (The Long Weekend, Juan Antonio Bardem, 1977) attests in relation to Northern Af-

rica immigration, and as was acknowledged socially in the 1980s when a Moroccan and a Philipino character were included in *Moros y cristianos* (Moors and Christians, Luis G. Berlanga, 1987), and when *El vuelo de la paloma* (The Flight of the Dove, José Luis García Sánchez, 1989) featured Sub-Saharan characters.

In addition, it can be argued that, since the 1990s, the strategies of representation used by “films about im-

migration” have had no impact on the audience. It seems that stressing skin color, origin, cultural differences, lack of language skills and education has not eased the process of assimilation of these “new Spaniards.” On the contrary, they have instead strengthened the differences between both groups, which could help explain why Gordillo concluded that Spanish cinema shows deficient intercultural relations and why “the search for differences [between immigrants and Spaniards] might not be the right path to follow” (14).

THE “OTHER” IS NOT SO “OTHER”

Not searching for differences has been the path followed by “films with

immigrants" from *El Puente* (1977) to *Los managers* (2006). If we take a quick look at this cluster of films, they seem to share strategies of representation that have been present in popular Spanish film since the 1930s: a mix of genres; recognizable or popular characters, spaces and locations; the use of street

language; and, more importantly, the interlacing of daily life topics following a narrative structure in which the central character or main plot are hard to determine. On the one hand, the combination of all these factors in "films with immigrants" might explain why they have not been given critical attention. They do not seem to display the clear-cut dualistic approach characteristic of

"films about immigration." On the other hand, it is precisely the combination of these representational strategies that facilitates the incorporation of "sensitive topics" in a way that is not overly evident, mainly by integrating immigration matters or immigrant characters in a non-threatening way because they are at the same level as any other topic or character in the film.

In some cases, immigrant characters and immigration appear to be mere footnotes or digressions that do not relate to what we perceive as the main narrative in the film. A barroom scene in *El Puente* features a bartender verbally attacking an Algerian immigrant, who tells Juan, the main character, that

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"Moors are like Gypsies" because the Algerian has no money and asks only to have three empty bottles filled with tap water. The scene does not stick out because it appears as just any other of the 21 tableaux that compose the film commenting on the general situation in Spain. Its inclusion is not ancillary,

however. On the contrary, its juxtaposition with the next tableau—in which Juan runs into a friend who emigrated to Germany—compares the two immigrants and suggests that, in 1977, an Algerian in Spain could be seen as one of the one million Spaniards that left between 1959 and 1973 to work in other parts of Europe. As if to confirm this mass migration of North Africans to Spain, in 1978, a year after the movie's release, a Royal Decree was

passed to regulate working permits for guest workers in Spain.

Another law to regulate immigration, the *Ley de Extranjería* (Foreigners Law), passed in 1985 under the first Socialist government, might have been the cause for the inclusion of immigrant characters in *Moros y cristianos*. In the film, Cuqui, an important candidate running in the Madrid local elections for a conservative party, has decided to hire a Philipino cook, Manulín, and a Moroccan maid, Jofaifa, as a way of increasing her electoral chances by showing her support for legal immigrants. The relation she has with them is relaxed. She treats them decently and

takes care of them. But although she herself keeps the stipulated relation between master and servant, the rest of her relatives do not care much about etiquette and relate to the cook and maid on equal terms.

In terms of labor and social rights, *El vuelo de la Paloma* moves a step forward in the homogenization of immigrant and Spanish characters. It does so by giving a voice to a group of Sub-Saharanans working as film extras in a TVE (Spanish public television) production about the Spanish Civil War, allowing them to act as the rest of their fellow Spanish co-workers. Their story appears mixed in with that of a love pentagon between Paloma; her husband Pepe; Juancho, the neighborhood fishmonger; Toñito, a right wing extremist; and Luis Doncel, the star of the production. Both story lines are further complicated by the relationship between Paloma's father, who lived during the Civil War, and the historical consultant of the movie, who does not care that the extras representing Moorish troops are Sub-Saharanans instead of Moroccans. In the film, the filming is taking place in a downtown square in Madrid on the same day that the 1988 general strike is scheduled by the Union. The extras, while remaining on the set as do many other employees, demand food and water until a decision about cancelling the production and joining the general strike is reached. At first, the show's executive producer reacts by asking police to keep the Afri-

cans "under control," but after inconclusive negotiations, the Sub-Saharanans, like the rest of the workers, decide to join the strike and leave the produc-



Still from *El Vuelo de la Paloma* (1989), © Ames Films and Lola Films.

tion. They do so with the permission of the executive producer, who ends up identifying himself as a member of the union.

FROM STRESSING DIFFERENCES TO UNDERLINING SIMILARITIES

The release of *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (*Torrente, the Dumb Arm of the Law*, Santiago Segura, 1998) marks a breakthrough in the portrayal of immigrants in Spanish film. This is the first time, and I believe the only time, a film is populated almost exclusively by immigrant characters, in one way or another, even though the movie is not about immigration itself. *Torrente* is the story of a cop who, kicked out of the force, decides to become something of a vigilante in his own Madrid neighborhood. During one of his night patrols, he discovers that an international gang, managed by an Argentinian, Mr. Mendoza, and aided by a man nicknamed



Still from *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (1997), ©Andrés Vicente Gómez.

“The Frenchman,” is using a Chinese restaurant as a cover-up for their drug trafficking operations. In order to end their racket, Torrente forms his own anti-vice squad, recruiting one of his neighbors, Rafi, whose family just settled in the neighborhood, and three of his best friends: “El Malaguita” (The Malaguenian), Toneti, and “El Bombilla” (The Lightbulb or Smart One). Although the movie is about good guys and bad guys, the division between the two cannot be established based on race, color or origin. What we have are good and bad immigrants, and good and bad Spaniards. To prove the point that motives of good and bad are not based on ethnicity, the film also includes a love story between Rafi and Lio-Chi, who works as a waitress in the Chinese Restaurant where the drugs are being produced.

Torrente presents a view of the relations between immigrants and Spaniards that is well-balanced. It is true that the film sports some instances when

Torrente himself could be seen as being anti-immigrant, such as when he breaks the pinkie finger of Moreno (Santiago Barullo, one of the first black actors in Spanish TV), or when he mocks Lio-Chi about using chopsticks instead of a fork, telling her that bamboo shoots are for panda bears, not people. However, I think that all these actions cannot be understood as properly anti-immigrant because Torrente behaves the



Still from *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (1997), ©Andrés Vicente Gómez.

same towards relatives and friends. He lives off his father’s disability pension and uses Amparito, Rafi’s cousin, as his sex toy and personal maid. Torrente mistreats everyone equally.

The inclusion of Rosa Zidhan, an actress from Spain but of Chinese origin, in *Torrente*, illustrates extracinematically what *Se buscan fulmontis* (*Full Montys Wanted*, Alex Calvo Sotelo, 1999) incorporates as part of its narrative: the life of first generation immigrants born in Spain.⁴ *Se buscan fulmontis* deals with the problem of unemployment and personal relations, although in this case the film centers on young adults. A group of friends is so

desperate to find jobs that they decide to start their own strip-sex business as a last resort. The interest of this movie lies in the fact that one of the friends, Felipe, is the multicultural offspring of a Spanish woman and an African-American soldier who was stationed at a U.S. Army base near Madrid before dying in Vietnam. Even under such circumstances, Felipe's mother takes care of him until he earns a Ph.D. in Spanish Philology. After three years without a job, Felipe becomes an example of the situation lived by many other young Spaniards: a college degree does not guarantee employment. What is important is that Felipe does not lack a job because of his color, which causes him problems every other day with the cops and with a neo-Nazi group that ends up burning down his home. Even when he seeks work in construction and the foreman tells him that there is nothing for him, it is clear that the response is not due to his skin color. Half of the workers at the site are Moroccan immigrants, after all. Furthermore, Felipe is a Spaniard in "every aspect" except his skin. He speaks with no accent, dresses normally, has a college degree, and a white girlfriend. In fact, Felipe acts as the leader of the group of friends—the one who seriously challenges and exposes the stupid questions they are asked every time they go to the employment office.

THE FIRST SEVEN YEARS of the 21st century have produced seventeen major immigrant films, which have largely followed the representational strategies of the films from the previous decade, except that they show more depth in their portrayal of some of the topics and characters. *Los lunes al sol* (*Mondays in the Sun*, Fernando Leon de Araona, 2002) explores the problems faced by

a group of middle-aged Spaniards and their families when there are no jobs available, a situation that also affects the immigrant population in the area. In this case, we have Sergei, a Russian astronautics engineer who left his country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union because his space program was cancelled. Although we do not know much about Sergei's private life, we can assume that he faces the same dilemmas as the rest of his buddies in the shipyard where he works.

More interesting are *Tapas* and *El penalti más largo del mundo* in that they develop and reframe two topics that have appeared in previous movies: abusive relations and the multicultural family. Set in Barcelona, *Tapas* (*Snack Bar*, Juan Cruz and José Corbacho, 2005) combines the stories of different people whose commonality is their relation with a tapas bar. One of the plots explores the relation between the owner of the bar, Lolo, his wife Rosalía, and an Asian immigrant, Mao, and illustrates how immigrant and Spanish characters suffer the same type of problems and situations, making them in effect interchangeable. When Lolo becomes abusive, Rosalía decides to leave him. To cover up Rosalía's disappearance, Lolo hires Mao, a recently-arrived Asian immigrant, as a cook, but Lolo seems more concerned about hiding Rosalía's absence than the reasons for her departure. As a result, Lolo reproduces the abusive relationship he had with his wife, but now uses Mao as his target. Later, after Mao resolves a series of problems in the bar kitchen, Lolo stops being abusive and starts seeing him as a human being instead of a stereotypical "Chinese." Lolo then realizes that the reason Rosalía left was because he only viewed her as wife and employee, not as a person and partner.

El penalty mas largo del mundo (*The Longest Penalty Shot in the World*, Roberto García Santiago, 2005) uses amateur soccer as a platform to explore the life of three characters: Fernando, the second goalie for Estrella Polar, interested in the coach's daughter; Bilbao, a married man who has lost his job but has not told his wife; and Kahled, a Moroccan immigrant who is going out with Fernando's sister Ana. What is striking about Kahled is that he seems to be completely integrated in the grocery store where the majority of the soccer team works: he is a single parent and, though Muslim, works in the meat section dealing with pork every day. He also plays on the team and has had a long-term relationship with Ana, although no real commitment has come out of it. Kahled never comes across as a foreigner trying to marry as a way to legalize his situation. What his relation with Ana exemplifies is how a lack of commitment to planning a future together can seriously threaten a relationship. Kahled represents a man who needs a push in order to commit. Indeed, once Ana urges him on, he starts saving money to buy a house where they can live together.

LOS MANAGERS: FROM SPAIN AS POINT
OF ARRIVAL TO SPAIN AS POINT
OF DEPARTURE

Some of the movies I have been discussing, such as the all-immigrant cast of *Torrente*, have implicitly questioned Spain's economic standing or wealth through the personal situation of some of its characters. Others, like *Los lunes al sol*, have suggested the possibility of migrating to other countries, such as Australia, where life appears to be easier and better. *Los managers* is the first Spanish movie to put both of these

ideas together: it is the first to suggest emigration from Spain and to question the idea of Spain as a land of opportunity.⁵ In itself, the film is not criticizing immigration or the presence of immigrants in Spain. In fact, the film is not even concerned about discrimination or intercultural relations and solidarity in the way films about immigration usually are. What *Los managers* seems to be questioning are the representational strategies used in many Spanish films that stress the differences between Spaniards and immigrants, and the very idea of Spain as a suitable place for living for immigrants and Spaniards alike.

Los managers tells the story of two jobless middle-aged men, Maca (short for Macario) and Rena (Renato), who devise a plan that will make them rich: work as managers for David and Pipo, two young brothers with good voices who are working in their family junkyard. To prepare them for their performance on the Spanish version of *American Idol*, Maca and Rena take them on tour around the most isolated and remote areas of Southern Spain. Maca secretly uses the tour as a cover-up to distribute the drug that a certain La Rota—a retired singer controlling much of the distribution in Southern Spain—has given him. During their tour they share the stage with Josete and his partner Irina, an Eastern European girl who falls in love with David. In the midst of all this, a Moroccan-looking guy named Alfonso tries to befriend David and Pipo. After the cops accidentally discover that Maca is trafficking in drugs, Maca, Rena, Pipo, and David escape from the Spanish police, only to be arrested by the U.S.M.P. for trespassing onto a U.S. naval base in Southern Spain. Eventually they flee the naval base and decide to go to Africa. Mean-

while, Rena is abducted in a flying saucer commanded by Alfonso, who, it turns out, is not Moroccan but an extraterrestrial. Alfonso tells him to have faith and wait for a sign. After Rena returns to earth and tells the group about his close encounter, they receive a phone call inviting Pipo and David as contestants on *Spanish Idol*. They win the contest and, together with Irina, move to Miami to start their singing career, while Maca and Rena remain behind in Spain as they were at the beginning: broke and thinking about either moving to Miami or Africa.

In order to eliminate any interpretation that could lead to a grouping of characters based on origin, which would make the movie resemble the structure of a “film about immigration,” *Los managers* establishes a common link between all the characters from the beginning, creating a context that fits them all. The

movie opens with Alfonso’s voice-over telling an old story about a little boy named Mustapha. “He reached his arm out so far he touched a star with his hand. Poor boy! Little Mustapha didn’t know stars are always shooting, like dreams.” This introduction gives the audience a general idea of what they are going

to watch before it happens. Alfonso’s accent and the name in the story suggest that the voice-over is spoken by a native Moroccan who wants to realize his dream of moving to Spain. But such

an assumption is misleading. If the first part of the little story might seem to present Spain as a desirable destination for a Moroccan immigrant — touching the star, after all, might signify crossing the Strait of Gibraltar and reaching Spain — the second half warns that the star might not be what Mustapha thinks it is, but rather something as short-lived as a shooting star.

During this voice-over, what we see on screen is not a decent Moroccan kid, but two nasty-looking Spaniards, Maca and Rena, sharing a bunk bed. While this juxtaposition of voice and image directly debunks the notion of Spain as a suitable place of immigration, it does not erase the fantasy of what Spain has become for many people living in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America or Asia: a place where the grass is going to be greener than in their own countries.

Nevertheless, and reinforcing the



David and Pipo in still from *Los managers* (2005), © Altube & Cuervo and Estudios Picasso.

first scenes in the film, the Spain appearing in *Los managers* is not the one viewers have become accustomed to. It is true that on several occasions we see a map of Andalucía showing the



Rena and Maca in still from *Los managers* (2005), © Altube & Cuervo and Estudios Picasso.

route followed by Pipo and David, “Los Reyes del King” (the kings of King), pinpointing with well-known symbols the location of important towns and cities, like a bottle in Jerez or a bull in Seville. But it is also true that they never get close enough to any of them. The towns and locations where the action takes place have nothing to do with the marvelous vistas appearing in tourist brochures and posters. What we see is precisely the opposite: a countryside completely depopulated, arid, and full of wind turbines producing electricity; small towns with few people in them, and very simple arrangements for celebrations that have nothing to do with, say, the splendor and color of the April Fair or the Holy Week in Seville; and, finally, beaches without restaurants or any other type of services, so isolated and deserted that they have become ideal landing places for boats arriving from Morocco full of illegal immigrants.

This feeling extends also to the housing we see pictured on the screen, like Maca’s home or the road hotel where they stay. In fact, the film features only three brief instances of the official Spain. One is when Rena looks

through a telescope, from the roof of Maca’s house, to spy on his wife and new husband. The second is at the wedding where Maca and Rena meet Josete for the first time. The third is on the TV show where David and Pipo sing at the end of the movie.

This critique of Spain’s popular tourism image does not stop there. Other

groups of foreigners in the film also lack a realistic idea of what Spain is. The first group, from Morocco, reinforces Alfonso’s opening story by depicting their arrival on the coast by boat. They rush across the beach to avoid being caught by the border police, only to step on Maca, Rena, Pipo, and David, who sleep “outdoors” to save money. The other group is formed by Colonel Frankenheimer, the commanding officer of the U.S. naval base in the area, and Sargent Mortimer, who is in charge of security. While Frankenheimer represents the stereotypical view of Spain as the country of the flamenco and the bullfight, Sargent Mortimer behaves as if he were in an uncivilized non-western country. After arresting the friends for trespassing onto the base, he treats them as if they were Guantanamo detainees, holding them incommunicado, dressing them with orange jumpsuits and covering their heads with bags, certain that Spain supports the Taliban and oblivious to the fact that they carry Spanish IDs and do not speak Arabic.

If these scenes debunk the traditional and clichéd representation of Spain, the idea of Spain as a better place to live quickly vanishes due to the negative economic situation presented in the film: Maca is jobless and lives off of his mother's retirement pension; his friend Rena, in addition to being jobless like Maca, is living with him after the divorce from his wife; and David and Pipo work in the modest family junkyard, making only enough to have some fun every once in a while. In addition, working relations between employers and employees also show signs of discontent. Maca treats David and Pipo, at least until they encounter the police, the same way Josete treats Irina: exploiting and abusing them as much as he can, on the assumption that even such treatment affords them a better life than the one they had before.

CONCLUSION:
STRATEGIES ARE THE MESSAGE

Los managers ranked seventh in 2006 box office earnings for Spanish films, reaching an estimated total of 400,000 viewers. The movie's success can, at least partially, be explained on the grounds of its interesting combination of representational strategies, which characterize much of Spanish popular film and "films with immigrants:" a mix of comedy and drama; characters that are easily recognizable as either lower or lower middle-class, or as belonging to other specific groups, such as immigrants; TV personalities, or even drug dealers, with distinctive accents that define their ethnicity; plots with characters from various countries of origin whose lives are interlaced; action placed in unknown but identifiable locales; and finally, situations facing the characters that are related to contem-

porary issues, ranging from economic hardship to immigration and career aspiration. Additionally, *Los Managers* incorporates two extra elements that have proved successful in Spanish film in recent years: music from a popular band, in this case Patanegra, and a road movie configuration.

What these representational strategies underscore is that "films with immigrants" present a completely different perspective about immigration in Spain, one that cannot be understood if we only take into consideration "films about immigration." The relevance of "films with immigrants" is, of course, not limited to the incorporation of immigrants or to giving immigrants the same status as Spanish characters. As *Los managers* shows, a number of films included in this group question reality and the dominant ideology, which is what Jose Luis Tirado suggests "films about immigration" should do. Following Isabel Santaolalla, such films are also connected to an important extracinematographic reality. Although these similarities might seem to suggest that "films with immigrants" follow the same pattern as "films about immigration," the target of their critique is not confined to political incorrectness or anecdotal racial conflicts that might happen in some Spanish cities, as Santaolalla pointed out. What they do show is that, to convey such a message, a thesis film might overshoot the mark and further alienate its intended audience. It is easier to stick to those representational strategies that the audience knows and understands well. Indeed, films based on popular strategies of representation can have the same, if not more, social leverage than auteurist films grounded in intellectual critique.

ENDNOTES

¹ An exception is Isabel Santaolalla's book *Los Otros, etnicidad y raza en el cine español contemporáneo* (2005), which takes into consideration films not directly related to immigration.

² In Rubén Díaz's interview with José Luis Tirado, "Paralelo 36 - Documento y ficción en la frontera sur de Europa."

³ See, for example, Ramón Buckley's *La doble transición* and *The Return of the Civil Society* by Víctor Pérez Díaz.

⁴ This first generation of "new Spaniards" was not showcased in depth in Spanish newspapers and magazines until 2003 by *El país semanal* in "Españoles de toda la vida."

⁵To be precise, *Suspiros de España (y Portugal)* (José Luis García Sánchez, 1995) ends with two of the characters leaving Spain for a better life in Portugal.

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