

## National Stereotypes as Means in Two Commercial Comedies: *Guten tag, Ramón* and *Perdiendo el Norte*

*Los estereotipos nacionales como resorte  
de dos comedias comerciales:*

Guten tag, Ramón y Perdiendo el Norte

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Cinema participates in the spreading of national stereotypes that shape part of our perception of the otherness. *Guten tag, Ramón* (Ramírez-Suárez, 2014) and *Perdiendo el Norte* (Velilla, 2015) are two popular comedies, Mexican for the first one and Spanish for the second, which narrate different cases of migration to Germany, providing various stereotypes of this country and its inhabitants with diverse purposes.

**KEYWORDS:** national stereotypes, box-office comedies, migrations, otherness, comicality.

*El cine participa de la divulgación de los estereotipos nacionales que forjan parte de nuestra percepción de la alteridad. Guten tag, Ramón (Ramírez-Suárez, 2014) y Perdiendo el Norte (Velilla, 2015) son dos comedias populares, mexicana la primera y española la segunda, que relatan distintos casos de migración a Alemania, brindando diversos stereotypes de este país y sus habitantes con diferentes fines.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *stereotypes nacionales, comedias taquilleras, migraciones, alteridad, comicidad.*

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Submitted: 18/09/17. Accepted: 23/11/17. Published: 12/11/18.

## INTRODUCTION

Numerous films on the welcoming of economic migrants and political exiles in Spain (Elena, 2005), or on Spanish economic migrants (recently more focused on young people), as well as films on the migration of Latin-Americans to the United States, particularly –lately– illegal aliens (García & Petrich, 2012) have been made for some time.

These creations are a reflection of a reality that filmmakers interpret to witness, denounce and tell. Clot and Aguilar Pérez (2012) say:

These film works, as audiovisual documents that address reality, through their own language and objectivity demands other than those in social science. While cinema is a medium that contributes to the spreading of ideas, it also has a commercial and entertainment *raison d'être* (p. 2).

Through this medium, we aspire to study how somebody else's national identity is perceived, and what “truncated” vision of reality –in this case German– the films we will analyze critically and comparatively offer. Hence, we have selected two blockbuster fiction films representative of the phenomenon of young migration to Germany, as we will see below. Indeed, *Guten Tag, Ramón* (Ramírez-Suárez, 2014) and *Perdiendo el Norte* (Velilla, 2015) offer a double approach, Mexican and Spanish, through national stereotypes that seek to make the audience understand it through laughter.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We must remember that stereotypes tend to be the means of many comedies among which we aim to study. According to Bardin, a stereotype is:

A customized semantic composition, generally very concrete and visual, created around simple symbolic elements, (that) replace or guide objective information or real perception. A cognitive structure that is acquired and is not innate –subject to the influence of the cultural environment, personal experience, and privileged influential instances like mass media–, a

stereotype takes root in affection and what is emotional, because it is linked to prejudice that rationalizes and justifies or engenders (1980, p. 51).

It is the image that spontaneously emerges when talking about a specific group of people or situations. This automatic association replaces objective information, regardless if it reflects the truth or not. In effect, their source cannot be found. They propagate through mass media that either reinforce preexisting stereotypes or create new ones by pigeonholing. Moreover, they evolve more slowly than the models they aim to represent because “once crystalized, stereotypes –and the judgement their facets constitute– tend to persist mainly through key words and slogans” (Maisonneuve, 1973, p. 134); only political and economic events of great impact can lead to their transformation.

Now, if we apply this definition to the national stereotype, it is worth highlighting the close relationship between “stereotype” and “national identity” (Galeote, 2016, p. 12). Auto-stereotypes, the image one has of our national group (Us), and hetero-stereotypes, the representation we have of other national groups (Them), are different. They take on a reductive, generalized form as they are widely applied to members of a particular national group, privileging a spectacular and folkloric dimension of the tradition of others. They also include opinions or judgments derived from the character and customs of Germans, Mexicans, Spaniards, etc. They end up being a mental construct from which one perceives the world as being the only truth, without nuances. And so, they filter our perception of what is real, of otherness and favor an exaggeration of differences with respect to the other’s perception.

They often present under the automatic association between a national group and certain symbolic attributes: places and monuments (the Berlin wall, Madrid, Teotihuacan, etc.); typical food (paella, tacos, sausages, beer, etc.); famous people (Angela Merkel, Francisco de Goya, Emiliano Zapata); emblematic elements (Volkswagen, mariachis, parties, etc.); among others. Some hetero-stereotypes are blurrier than others because of physical, cultural or political distance, despite the media. It has also been proven that perceptions of stereotypes can vary more within the same nation than between nations (Thomas, 1978, p. 42). These divergences are explained by the “habitus” of class (Bourdieu

& Passeron, 1970), age groups, academic level, among others. Auto-stereotypes allow the safekeeping of the specificity of a national group, while hetero-stereotypes tend to justify a particular behavior towards a specific group or nation. Villaverde considers thus that “in times of crisis, they emerge and serve as social agglutinators that enable consensus building and taking exceptional measures” (2016, p. 34).

Now, what role do national stereotypes –auto and hetero– fulfill in our cinematographic narrations? Comparing these two films that offer hetero-stereotypes from Germany and its inhabitants should shed light on whether they are similar or have notable differences. Does the closeness of Latino cultures, of media, favor the hetero-stereotype itself? Will geographic and social distance mark, on the contrary, a trench in these representations?

#### SYNOPSIS OF TWO COMEDIES

*Guten tag*, Ramón tells the odyssey of a young man from northern Mexico who failed five times in crossing the border. His family wants him to emigrate as soon as possible to support them financially. A friend mentions about his aunt’s case, who is married, living in Germany and doing very well for herself. From one day to another he leaves his ranch and goes to Germany in search of that aunt. Everything will become complicated when he doesn’t find her, is mugged and does not speak German. As an illegal immigrant and penniless, he will have to come up with something to survive in a country whose language and culture he does not know. But thanks to a chance encounter with Ruth, a retired German lady, he will be able to get ahead, establishing with her a genuine friendship.

Far from the drama of the documentary *En tierra extraña* (Iciar Bollaín, 2014) or *Hermosa juventud* (Jaime Rosales, 2014), *Perdiendo el Norte* addresses with humor the topic of the migration of young Spaniards. Hugo and Braulio choose to leave their country because it does not provide them with the professional future that lives up to their expectations and high academic level. A television program makes them want to go to Germany, a type of El Dorado where apparently there is work for Spaniards. They arrive in Berlin convinced they will

quickly find “what they deserve.” But the reality is not that, and they will discover they are not alone in aspiring for work when they bump into fellow Spaniards with different styles and from other generations.

After this brief presentation, it is worth linking the success of these two films with the triumph of recent and box-office comedies based precisely on national stereotypes and even auto-stereotypes (regional, cultural, ethnic, etc.). Let us cite the success in France of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (Boon, 2008) and *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu?* (De Chauveron, 2014). On the other hand, *Ocho apellidos vascos* (Martínez-Lázaro, 2014), third highest grossing European film with 9 322 010 tickets sold, exceeded all box-office records for a Spanish film. In 2015, according to Berrendo Pérez, Serrano Fernández and Encinas Puebla (2016, p. 53), “the accumulated ranking of Ibero-American premieres of 2015 was headed by Spanish film *Ocho apellidos catalanes* (Martínez-Lázaro, 2015), with a total of 5.1 million viewers,”<sup>2</sup> making USD \$35 623 888. Lastly, in 2016, Berrendo et al. said: “Regarding the ranking of national premieres ... we must mention the film that came in third place, *Perdiendo el norte* (Nacho G. Velilla), with 1.6 million viewers”<sup>3</sup> just behind *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu?* that sold over 15 million tickets. These comedies have had great commercial success. However, they were not nominated in festivals, which indicates a gap between *auteur* cinema and commercial cinema.

García (2015) has described *Perdiendo el norte* as a “comedy of manners” of intrigue, which knew how to leverage these regional, national, north/south antagonisms. The very choral cast of this comedy whose distribution is exceptional,<sup>4</sup> participates in its success since the public knows them all too well, be it from television or cinema.

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<sup>2</sup> With a total production cost of USD \$7 006 070.00 (p. 245).

<sup>3</sup> Grossing USD \$11 538 769.00, with a total production cost of USD \$4 541 950.00 (p. 245).

<sup>4</sup> Cast: Yon González (Hugo), Blanca Suárez (Carla), Julián López (Braulio), Úrsula Corberó (Nadia), Miki Esparbé (Rafa), Malena Alterio (Marisol), Arantxa Aranguren (Juana), Elena Rivera (Nuria), Younes Bachir (Hakan), Javier Cámara (Próspero), Carmen Machi (Benigna), José Sacristán (Andrés).

According to Brunet (2015) the “cast has important names for mass audiences –Carmen Machi, Javier Cámara–, for young people –Yon González, Blanca Suarez–, and the film buff and adult audiences alike –José Sacristán–” (s.p.). For García (2015), *Velilla* has developed:

Two strategies learned from television productions. The first one is *multi-target*, that approach through which films are projected so everyone identifies with them, from your grandfather to your youngest brother. And the second, the presence of familiar faces; this film has many, starting with Javier Cámara and Carmen Machi (s.p.).

Regarding *Guten tag, Ramón*, its tone is more dramatic, but viewers laugh on several occasions. It does not cast actors as famous<sup>5</sup> as those in *Perdiendo el Norte*, but it does have features of a commercial comedy. It is simple, modest and slow (two hours long with little action) and showcases a sincere performance. The Mexican-German co-production was seen in Mexico by over one million people and was screened in 250 movie theaters. In the United States, it attained a similar success.<sup>6</sup> Lira Hartmann (2015) notes that in Germany:

The film premiered on February 5<sup>th</sup> (2013), was distributed in 52 German cinemas and is still being shown, something unprecedented for Mexican cinema in this country, because the screening of Mexican productions here is usually concentrated in one of the many film festivals that take place during the year (s.p.).

Furthermore, in 2015, *Guten tag, Ramón* was nominated in six main categories for the Ariel awards, that is, it gained undeniable recognition that also fully justifies why we contemplate its success.

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<sup>5</sup> Cast: Kristyan Ferrer (Ramón), Ingeborg Schöner (Ruth), Adriana Barraza (Esperanza), Arcelia Ramírez (Rosa), Rüdiger Evers (Karl), Hector Kotsifakis (Güero).

<sup>6</sup> The United States is a reference in this particular case, not only in terms of cinema, but also because it has a large Mexican population that is worried about similar problems (migration, integration, etc.).

## THE COMMONALITIES

Following a comparison between the two films, we can clearly see that both share a series of clichés and elements that favor laughter through some characteristic figures (repetition, inversion and interference of series) as well as the comicality of gestures pointed out by Bergson (1900).

### *Forced Emigration*

In both cases, the current economic crisis suffered by their respective countries with direct consequences on the protagonists, is the initial common point of the filmic narration. The comedies clearly reflect this reality.

Let us remember that Spain exceeded the European record of emigrants (400 400 in 2014) and on the other hand, as Gómez (2013) points out:

The significant increase in Spanish emigration is striking. We need to go back to 1973, when the oil crisis led Germany to cancel the migration agreements it had signed, to find similar figures. However, the almost 30 000 Spanish immigrants to Germany –among which there can also be foreigners with a Spanish residence permit– does not come close to figures from the years of the massive emigration due to the dictatorship. The departure of Spanish workers to Germany was quite significant ever after the agreement between the Franco's Government and Berlin was signed in 1960. In that year, already, there were 31 145 Spaniards. The peak was reached in 1965 with 82 324. ... Today, the bulk of emigrants from other countries who arrived in Germany comes from Eastern Europe. ... Despite these increases, the main source of immigration from the European Union to Germany is Poland (s.p.).

The comedy *¡Vente a Alemania, Pepe!* (Lazaga, 1971) reflects the time when migrating was the only way out for many, who, like in *Perdiendo el Norte*, would lie to their loved ones so long as they fulfill their respective families' expectations. It is worth noting that José Sacristán worked in that comedy.

Regarding Mexican emigration, the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (Institute for Mexicans Abroad) registered that “11 913 989 Mexicans live outside of Mexico; 97.79% live in the United States of America”. But, unlike this emigration, only 14 204 Mexicans live in Germany and it is a very skilled group of people.

Hence, the character of Ramón is a different case; he is the typical migrant in the United States, but transferred to Germany, where he will not be able to rely on the help of fellow countrymen.

Both films offer, then, perfectly identifiable representations of emigrants (auto and hetero), which surely provokes laughter. This possible “recognition” through auto-stereotyping is fundamental, because the viewer can identify with the characters thanks to their manners, language, mannerisms, etc. Perhaps the caricaturesque representation of Spaniards is more “elaborate” than that of Mexicans. Indeed, the accumulation and confrontation of different Spanish subjects favor laughter. Regarding Mexicans, their auto-stereotype is a comedy tool because the Mexican viewer –though not from Durango, not living on a farm, not an emigrant, etc.– “recognizes” the manners, the kindness, the mannerisms, and more. The same could perhaps apply to the figure of Spaniards through their *joie de vivre*, food, loud speaking, touching and going up to people. And so, any *gaffe* from the Mexican or Spaniards with respect to the German “normality” (hetero-stereotype) favors humor (Bergson, 1900).

However, Andrés (José Sacristán), introduces a nuance in terms of the image of the “modern” emigrant, remembering the times when his character, a stereotype of the Spanish emigrant from the previous generation (1960s and 1970s) arrived in Germany and had a very tough time. All of this triggers empathy from Spanish viewers who also “identify” with this auto-stereotype. To the audience’s amusement, Andrés ironically evokes a new migration movement, that of German tourists to Spain and simultaneously the migration flow of Spaniards to Germany: “Between the Germans who move to Mallorca and the Spaniards who emigrate here, the only thing left to do will be to change the countries’ names, right?” To which Hugo responds, “We are skilled itinerant workers” (thus denying their identity as migrants). The dialogue continues, “I would say, rather, that you are a couple of

idiots / I need Germany as much as Germany needs me / I give you two months, little prince, you won't last more than two months here”.

It is worth noting also that there are other emigrated communities, the Turkish one in particular. According to the CIDAL, 2 793 million migrants of Turkish origin<sup>7</sup> live in Germany. Velilla reduces the representation of Hakan –the Turk, bar owner– and that of his fellow countrymen, to a caricature (hetero-stereotype): they use gold chains, gaudy clothes, the women are veiled, they are merchants, and speak in a peculiar way. It is a Turkish neighborhood<sup>8</sup> identifiable by flags, stores, advertising, food, where the protagonists arrive and Hugo asks, “Hey, what did it say on the tickets, Berlin or Istanbul?”

### *The Impossibility of Communicating*

All protagonists encounter the language barrier when mastering the other's language is indispensable to be integrated and to work. How do the directors present the linguistic problem? They ridicule the Other's language by exaggerating bad pronunciation, the inability to articulate and reproducing models correctly.

In *Guten tag, Ramón* there are many examples in which practicing the other's language will be funny for the audience. Thus, “el Güero”, who does not speak German, spells out key words for his trip, articulating excessively, syllable by syllable: “I don't know how the hell you say this, but that's how you write it”. Not being able to answer Ruth's questions about why he went to Germany or speaking to the salesgirl, two alternatives will emerge: to draw and mime. Obviously, despite this strategy, they will not necessarily make themselves understood, which will favor juicy misunderstandings for viewers. Indeed, gestures

<sup>7</sup> According to Eurostat Statistics (2017), “The country welcoming more immigrants in 2014 was Germany (884 900), followed by the United Kingdom (632 000), France (339 900), Spain (305 500) and Italy (277 600). Spain is the country that reported the highest number of emigrants in 2014 (400 400), followed by Germany (324 200), the United Kingdom (319 100), France (294 100) and Poland (268 300).”

<sup>8</sup> We can see there some sort of local “bilingualism” and “biculturalism”: Fleischerei & Lebensmittel –butcher and food– Al Mustafa Halal, etc.

speak and translate one's own language, they are not universal. Also, neither Kristyan Ferrer (Ramón) nor Ingeborg Schöner (Ruth) knew each other's lines, giving the scenes a touch of authenticity. There are many close-up shots of Ramón that illustrate this incomprehension, highlighting thus the "lack of communication" between the protagonist and the other characters. Ruth will even teach him manners and cultural codes. Ultimately, in the dinner scene at Ruth's place, a great complicity will unfold despite the linguistic obstacle. The long shot that zoom in gathers them around this propitious moment for personal confessions. The dinner ends with a funny reciprocal language class, where they articulate, pronounce and repeat words by making faces.

In *Perdiendo el Norte*, the other's language is a communication barrier; obviously, comical consequences ensue. Hugo's positive comments to his father about Germany are funny because the images that go with them are in total contradiction, deceiving him about the reality he is suffering and amusing, hence, the audience. The things he tells him about his linguistic learning are a good illustration of this. You hear him in voice-over (reading an e-mail), "And regarding the language, you just have to get on it. After a few days, your ear gets used to it". The director delights in filming an endless number of grimaces and misunderstandings through close-up or medium shots, thus highlighting how the main characters are making fools of themselves because they do not understand the language. Then, when Braulio is interviewed in German for a job: "Do you speak German? / *Ja ja...* / Where did you learn? / *Ja ja* (with alternating close-up shots of Braulio's astonished face and the interviewer's friendly face) / *Ja ja* ... The scene ends with a comical situation because of the systematic answering with "Ja" to all questions and because of the protagonist's ingenuity, "You're not saying yes to everything like a dummy because you don't speak German, right?" With a sly smile and then laughter he answers, "*Ja ja...*" The following comical movement is the change in the characters' expressions, when one becomes serious after having mocked the Spaniard, and Braulio realizes he has failed.

The protagonists also do not master key cultural codes to communicate and be integrated appropriately, another reason to laugh. Ramón does not let passengers off of the train before going in. Ruth,

the fairy godmother, will teach him some manners and cultural codes. As soon as they arrive in Berlin, Hugo and Braulio knock a cyclist over because they did not respect the cycling lane, the viewer laughs because of the “Latino character” of their action (auto-stereotype). Likewise, Hugo’s voice-over comments the following scene like a skit: “It seems unreal that after only one month we have adapted to the German character”. Meanwhile, in another interview, Braulio makes a cultural *faux pas* by hugging a female colleague who immediately jumps back –highlighting, in passing, the coldness of Germans according to the classical hetero-stereotype– and he then shakes her hand with an exaggerated scared look asking for forgiveness in some sort of Spanglish, “Sorry, sorry, we are Latinos... very *besucones* (we like to kiss people)”. At the same time, we see a disgusted look on the woman’s face. This figure of inversion (voice-off comments in contradiction with the image), key to comedy according to Bergson (1900), will be then one of the constant resources used to make viewers laugh.

Lastly, Hugo and Braulio, modern-times rascals (auto-stereotype of Spaniards), manage to survive by stealing from stores. The voice-off speech also highlights this reality: “Also here in Germany, if you know what and where to buy, the standard of living can be much cheaper than what we think”.

### *Symbolic Attributes*

Attributes are another facet in the construction of stereotypes. Thus, the essential topic of food, an identity trait, is explained. Indeed, everybody misses national homemade food:<sup>9</sup> chili peppers, tortilla, beans, tequila or sausages, Spanish tortillas. Rafa, in a scene that showcases some vulgarity allegedly causing laughter, suffers from digestive problems and says, “One does not miss the Mediterranean diet until it’s gone”. On Christmas Eve they bring out the chorizo, the ham. Rafa gives Franz –his sister Carla’s boyfriend– the nickname “the stupid sausage eater”. As for the Turkish community, Hakan has set up a Turkish

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<sup>9</sup> As in *¡Vente a Alemania, Pepe!*, when Pepe unpacks his food (ham, sausages, wine) everybody’s (the Spaniards around the table) mouth waters when comparing it to the German food that is on their plates.

food business and his neighborhood is full of Turkish restaurants. The Spanish-Turkish Christmas Eve dinner is a good illustration of cultural exchange around food, but there is no trace of German food.

Most of *Guten tag, Ramón* unfolds in a grocery store where Ramón increasingly buys “Mexican” products according to his budget; apples and bread, then beer, tequila, chili peppers, tortillas, cilantro, beans, tomatoes, etc., and he makes some tacos with many of these ingredients. Some high angle close-up shots will highlight, from Ramón’s point of view, the ingredients and stages in the food preparation that will be shared with Ruth. Later, she will return the courtesy with a dinner at her house, in a long scene (over eight minutes long) with many close-ups of them or super close-ups of the food, of the forks Ramón will learn to use... He will appreciate the food, “mmm, it’s very tasty; I had never tasted anything like it”, as opposed to the protagonists of *Perdiendo el Norte*. The food, here, is a walkway to get closer to the other, it will partake in the exchange. The final advancing traveling shot of the scene will unite both characters around the table, reinforcing their complicity.

In both cases, the somewhat harsh weather is grossly exaggerated; both films take place in winter, precisely at its coldest, thus reinforcing this image. Ramón cannot stop shaking, even in an over-the-top manner, and he is given warm clothes. The Spaniards come better prepared, although as soon as they arrive, they will start complaining about the cold. In the television interview in front of the emblematic Brandenburg Gate, the young Spaniard will explain why he came, “I came to Germany because of its food and weather (emphasizing negative hetero-stereotypes of Germany and laughing out loud). No, seriously, I have found here opportunities that I couldn’t find in my country... For Germany we are a bargain, they ask for skilled labor at the expense of our taxes”.

And obviously, the Spaniards—on Christmas Eve—imitate a bullfight.

### *Representation of the Germans*

As for their character, they are kind, generous, smiling towards Ramón, although sometimes serious and strict. According to the Spaniards, they are square minded; nevertheless, they are generous with the emigrated. Thus, newcomers, Braulio and Hugo ask a lady for information,

explaining that they are Spanish; she –with a pitiful look– gives them money, a gesture they do not understand. They never shout at or mistreat them, except for the one who will end up reporting Ramón, a disturbing element of the film that will allow the action to move forward and reach its climax (the deportation) and outcome, after almost two hours of film.

Regarding their physique, “all” Germans are tall (as well as, for example, the girl in the grocery store, compared to Ramón), blonde, blue eyed and very fair. However, *Perdiendo el Norte* offers an evolution in the hetero-stereotype through the figure of young people, who have garish colored hair and sometimes extravagant haircuts, providing an alternative identity.

### *The music*

The extradiegetic music is typical of each portrayed country (Mexico, Spain and also Germany), hence allowing all parts to be identified. We thus hear *norteña*<sup>10</sup> or *marimba*<sup>11</sup> music in front of a tourist agency with advertising to visit Mexico. On the other hand, when the dinner gives rise to Ruth’s confessions, a melancholic melody<sup>12</sup> accompanies them. As for German music, various types follow Ramón in his adventures (work, meetings) when he is doing well, and it becomes dramatic when he goes through bad times.<sup>13</sup> In *Perdiendo el Norte*, Spanish songs “Mi querida España”,<sup>14</sup> “Berlín”<sup>15</sup> dominate to illustrate the romance between Carla and Hugo; only at the beginning do we hear “The Blue Danube”<sup>16</sup> very fast, comforting his closeness to the welcoming country.

The diegetic music Ramón listens to in his building, “Mexico lindo y querido”, a national culture emblem, unleashes absolute happiness in

<sup>10</sup> A genre of Mexican music related to polka and *corridos*. As its name indicates, it is the typical music of northern Mexico.

<sup>11</sup> A percussion instrument consisting of a set of wooden bars struck with mallets to produce musical tones.

<sup>12</sup> Mozart’s Piano Concerto, No. 20 in D minor.

<sup>13</sup> Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, No. 2 in A major.

<sup>14</sup> Song by Cecilia, interpreted by Rozalén and Kiko Veneno.

<sup>15</sup> Interpreted by Rozalén.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Strauss.

him. It will give place to meeting the neighbor, researcher of popular Latin American music, then to organizing dance classes, a sign of a social integration. The musicologist will give him a device to listen to *norteña* music, in order for him to regain his identity. Also, when he first prepares Mexican food, other emblematic songs are heard thanks to the borrowed device, returning him to his homeland.

## THE DIVERGENCES

The type of emigration is different in both films; one is highly skilled, unlike the other one. Hence, when people suggest he goes to Germany, Ramón asks, “Where is Germany?” demonstrating he does not have a pre-established idea, not only because of lack of education, but also because both cultures are so far apart (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). However, Ruthn—his German guardian angel— knows exactly where Mexico is, and even distinguishes it from Peru and Ecuador: “Mexico is very far”. And yet, they all end up with an unskilled job like waiters, kitchen assistants, looking after people, which is typical of countries with an increasingly elderly population, a topic addressed in *Amador* (León de Aranoa, 2010). Velilla denounces in a funny way the disillusion of a “lost generation,” using Hugo’s lies to his parents as a guiding thread, thus creating a comical discrepancy with reality. For example, “And I have a say in the most important issues of the company”, while he rubs the kitchen stove. Velilla remembers through Andrés that lying was a way of reassuring family: “emigrating and lying to the family is the same”.

In *Perdiendo el Norte*, the Turks symbolize a stigmatized emigration prior to that of the young Spaniards, the latter having to “submit” to the former, feeling somewhat humiliated. Ramón, the Mexican, is instead a migration case that is absolutely “unheard of”.

### *Work: From High Hopes to the Harsh Reality*

At the beginning, before their respective job interviews, Hugo boasts his two bachelor’s degrees and his master’s degree, an insidious way of pointing out the auto-stereotype of haughty Spaniards. They —so well prepared at an academic level— expected to find a job quickly.

However, in his first job interview, the German manager laughs out loud at Hugo, who intends to apply for an financial manager position. Then Hugo will comment, “After all, the differences between north and south are only in our head, really”, and in another interview, “And we are not unreliable as they say, nor are they so square” (mentioning in passing two reciprocal hetero-stereotypes), while the very serious and displeased director constantly looks at his watch and at Braulio. “Guten morgen / You are late (looking at the clock on the wall where it says the time is 11:10) / I got lost in the metro (sitting down) but as they say in Spain, it’s the 10-minute grace period (the director stands up) / You haven’t been in Germany long, have you?” (he stands up and leaves). In this sequence, the scenes are increasingly short shots and reverse shots alternate emphasizing the opposition through the inversion figure (Bergson, 1900) between two cultures and end up absolutely ridiculing Hugo.

There is constant underlying social criticism through mockery in *Perdiendo el Norte*. After their unsuccessful interviews, the protagonists end up in an office for the unemployed. The scene begins with a close-up of a stack of résumés, emphasizing that they are not the only ones affected: “We are finally no longer last in line, here” (thanks to a backward traveling shot and an overview shot, we have a glimpse of many people waiting with their documents in hand). And as always, against the flow, Hugo declares in voice-over, “Come on, coming to Berlin is the best decision we could have made”. A uniformed, blonde and formal lady asks them to wait. So, Hugo confesses ironically that they have only known Spaniards, Greeks, Italians, and Portuguese who are looking for work like them, highlighting the crisis in southern European countries: “We have all found the lost generation in the same place”.

However, after Ramón does not find his adjuvant –Güero’s aunt– and since he does not have high expectations like Hugo and Braulio but only those of surviving, he will start in an “honest” way (far from the caricature of the “evil” Mexican), from “the bottom”, begging. He will then help the elderly (carrying groceries), and finally collaborate more (handing out newspapers, throwing away the heavy trash, etc.) until he ends up giving dance classes.

*Shattering Stereotypes: Between a Fairy Tale and a Nightmare*

Ramón is a good guy, he does not get into fights, not in Mexico—where his grandmother tells him “he needs to grow a pair”, taking as a reference the Mexican male chauvinist stereotype— or in Germany. Unlike the main characters of *Perdiendo el Norte*, who in a way inbreed, he pushes himself to interact with the natives in order to survive. This will enable him to live a true fairy tale in his own country and with his family whom he will finally be able to help, which is the initial purpose of his migration. He “won the lottery” with Ruth from whom he inherits one million Mexican pesos, to the point that at the bank he must justify himself when opening an account. The scene becomes comical, since it is based on the social auto-stereotype that a peasant can only be poor. It is an obvious way to show that a Mexican can get ahead by being legit, as opposed to many stereotypes circulating in narcocinema, for example. Ramón moves away from the reductive cliché of Mexico, land of cartels (Lira Hartmann, 2015): “The German viewer has surrendered to a story that is not linked to drug trafficking or the violence that invades Mexico’s image in this country, both in fiction and in real life”. From the beginning, his encounters with Germans are positive, shattering the most common hetero-stereotypes (coldness, indifference, etc.).

Indeed, optimal representations of the Germans dominate. Kindness emerges from migration (numerous close-up and reverse shots oppose a fearful Ramón in a slight high angle with a smiling customs officer in a slight low angle) that even helps when it comes to buying his train ticket in the airport machines (go from a long shot with a disoriented Ramón to a medium shot of him along with a reassuring assistant who teaches him, step by step, how to get his ticket). Ruth is welcoming, generous and kind, as is the salesgirl or the musicologist. Ruth’s neighbors will also collaborate. Obviously, the “classic bad guys” oppose him, like the other beggar (verbally and physically violent); the “adulterous” aunt’s jealous ex; the person who stole his backpack; the suspicious blonde salesman in the store, a caricature of a xenophobe, who smiles hypocritically at him saying, “You don’t look like a tourist, what the hell are you doing here?”; and of course, the stingy Bavarian neighbor (auto-stereotype), who will report him as an illegal alien.

On the contrary, in *Perdiendo el Norte*, it seems that the protagonists live a nightmare. Indeed, in the end, they will have no choice but to continue emigrating: Braulio, thanks to a scholarship, will go to China and truly suffer a radical change of culture there. As for Hugo, he will have to return to Spain (a sign of defeat) because his father-in-law hires him, but without any prospective promotion; in short, he has gone backwards rather than forwards. However, since it is a comedy, everything will have an almost fairy tale ending: Hugo breaks off his wedding engagement to be with his true love; while Braulio will continue “comically” learning Mandarin just as unsuccessfully as he did German (the viewer establishes a forced, comical parallel between the learning of these two languages).

### *Nazism, Holocaust*

*Guten tag, Ramón* does not focus on the social representations that permeate the collective imagination regarding Nazism or the Holocaust. Ramón seems to be oblivious to this part of German history. Ruth, a young girl during the Nazi era, will evoke war and the Nazis through her father, who was deported and executed for helping Jewish families. In a way, Ramón facilitates her resilience since it is the first time she talks about this. It is a way to atone for a collective guilt, that of the German people, not all of whom supported the regime, as Ruth points out. Lira Hartmann (2015) says that Germany liked this:

We are a bit tired of this image people have of us abroad and the stories related to the Holocaust and Nazi Germany, something that is repeatedly said in different forums in this country (s.p.).

In a moment of migratory crisis, the director chooses to convey a humanist, utopian message. Ruth reproduces her father’s model, a very current value in our times of migration problems, true to what many Germans have thought in recent years.

On the other hand, in *Perdiendo el Norte*, the television interview of the young Spaniard is biased because it reveals prejudices and common clichés that supposedly make viewers laugh. “Do you think you’re ever going back? -Well, would you go back if you earned in a week here

what you earn in a month in Spain? I'm not leaving even if there was another holocaust" (he laughs, but you can tell somebody off camera is trying to tell him something), "Hey, it was a joke, I have a lot of Jewish friends" (his smile freezes). This answer manifests the insidious and latent racism that Guillaumin (1972, pp. 151-152) denounces not only because of the jokes regarding Jews, but also because of the justification that tries to show one is not racist, revealing in reality a common anti-Semitism.

### *Characterization of Space*

*Guten tag, Ramón* starts in a "typical" miserable ranch in the middle of nowhere; the film is then set in a small, peaceful provincial German city on the Rhine river; and ends in a full circle, in his town. The building where the main characters live reveals the life from the inside, the stairs, the attic, Ruth's home, the "typical" customs, the relationship between neighbors. There are no tourists or foreigners in his provincial "village". On the other hand, *Perdiendo el Norte*, is set in Berlin, the cosmopolitan capital. Therefore, many views of Berlin are shown as a transition between sequences, along with the indispensable city tours, typical of the representation of the otherness reduced to its tourist function. It is worth noting the quality of the photography (bird's eye, high angle, etc.), the result of a significant budget. As for the protagonists, they live in the Turkish neighborhood, but in a building occupied by Spaniards; this type of autarky does not favor either the integration or the evolution of the hetero-stereotype.

### CONCLUSION

While the two films are based on some common national stereotypes, they are also differentiated by the film narration. In both cases, migration becomes an initiation journey with a happy ending. The evolution – or not– of the representations draws attention. Indeed, Ramón has distanced himself from his hetero-stereotype of Germany: "I imagined a country with many modern buildings, but with soldiers on horseback, I thought they would make me take care of some of their fine horses, but, it's so different, isn't it?" Upon his return, his grandmother asks,

“What’s Germany like? / It is an irrigation surrounded by very old castles with very fair people”. Of course, his ranch is in the middle of a desert, while in Germany he lived on the Rhine, and so he creates a new hetero-stereotype based on his experience.

Through Ramón an unusual emigration is addressed. Indeed, there is already a lot of literature on Mexican unskilled emigration to the United States, but little to Europe and even less to Germany. The director thus proposes success not through drug trafficking, which seemed to be the only possible alternative at the beginning of the film. It highlights the ability of people to build themselves in otherness, in order to survive. Thanks to the character, changes in the building are triggered (sharing newspapers instead of each person receiving their own, thus allowing for a social bond to emerge). Otherness and migration can benefit everyone, that is the message. The film shatters auto and hetero-stereotypes: Mexico (success through drug trafficking) / Germany (rigid, cold, Holocaust) offering an unknown facet of retired Germans and a reciprocal fairy tale.

*Perdiendo el Norte* has all the characteristics of a commercial comedy with national stereotypes that almost do not evolve, based on the crisis suffered by a generation of young people who have no choice but to emigrate and the consequences for their families (evictions, bankruptcies). Humor is used without considering an alternative or reflection, but rather, a happy ending.

And last, we saw that through stereotypes we learn more about who issues them than about whom they talk about. Likewise, the traditional hetero-stereotypes of Germany and its people, serve essentially to emphasize auto-stereotypes, in particular of Spaniards, a source of laughter for the viewer. Indeed, this point of view is that of a Spanish director who knows how to make people laugh (he knows a lot about his national audience) and that of a Mexican director, based in Germany, who wants to reflect on his personal experience.

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