

Con el viento solano: The Figure of the Criminal 'Gitano' in the New Spanish Cinema

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Introduction

The question underpinning this paper is whether and how the New Spanish Cinema of the 1960s introduced an aesthetic rupture into the Spanish representation of *gitanos* in film narratives. The paper is divided into three sections: the first section describes the basic elements of antigypsyism in the early post-civil war period and their connections to the fascist-folkloristic cinema (1939–1959); the second section introduces the realist turn deployed by the aesthetics of the so-called New Spanish Cinema in the 1960s; the third section presents a case study: *Con el viento solano* (*With the East Wind*) (1965), a film by Mario Camus that features a *gitano* character and that is a concrete outcome of the New Spanish Cinema.

Antigypsyism during Franco's Dictatorship

In the post-civil war period (1939–1959), the symbolic power of National-Catholicism was the main source of Franco's ideological project: rebuilding the unity of Spain after the social and political fragmentation that led to the civil war (1936–1939). Haunted by the spectre of liberal republicanism, Franco resurrected the foundational myth of the birth of the nation embodied by the Catholic Kings¹ (1475–1516): the unified identity of all regions of Spain under the moral leadership of Catholicism. For this purpose, Franco created a *new intelligentsia*; and one of the main figures in this new intellectual elite was the psychiatrist Antonio Vallejo-Nájera.

Vallejo-Nájera was the director of the national psychiatric services during the Spanish civil war. After the war, during Franco's dictatorship, he was

1 Edwards, John: *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs 1474–1520*, Cambridge 2000.

appointed head of the military psychiatric services. In his book, *Eugenics of Hispanity and Regeneration of Race*,² he dedicated a chapter to the definition of the concept of “Hispanity,” where he blames two centuries of liberal revolution for the decline of Spain’s ethics. To bring back the ethics of Imperial Spain, he proposed the creation of a National Body of Inquisitors. Parallel to the courts of justice, this religious-medical institution would be in charge of judging cases of crimes against the moral and spiritual health of the nation. Eventually, Vallejo-Nájera failed in his aim.³ According to Vallejo-Nájera, liberalism and its evolution into communism were diagnosed as the main ideological pathogens threatening the moral and spiritual health of the nation. Considered as foreign civilisational projects, liberalism and communism were banned and treated as sins and social vices. In this regard, he said: “The perverse democratic regimes favour resentment and promote social failures with public policies, unlike aristocratic regimes where only the best characters can reach social success.”⁴

Liberal and communist intellectuals were regarded as part of a foreign rebellion enacted by the global Judeo-Masonic conspiracy.⁵ Along with the condemnation of social mobility and social equality, Vallejo-Nájera also criticised the liberal and communist tendency towards materialism, sensuality and leisure. Advised by Vallejo-Nájera, to counteract the impact of liberal thinking, Franco aimed to revive the spirit of social surveillance and moral control established by the Catholic Kings during the birth of Imperial Spain. In this context, the “Law of Vagrants and Thieves” was restructured in 1943, by referring to the treatment of vagabonds, nomads and any other ‘antisocial’ element. It should be stressed that one of the main intellectual influences on Vallejo-Nájera was the conservative judge Antonio Sabater, who already in 1933, in his book *On Vagrants and Thieves*, had defined ‘gitanos’ as “a population, which constitutes a special race, characterized by their aversion to work, refusal to submit to the social order and living mainly from theft, scam and other punishable acts.”⁶

Many of the Civil Guard documents show that ‘gitanos’ was included as a specific category of vagrants.⁷ This law was in force from 1943 until 1978,

2 Vallejo-Nájera, Antonio: *Eugenesia de la Hispanidad y regeneración de la raza*, Burgos 1937.

3 Huertas García-Alejo, Rafael: *Una nueva inquisición para un nuevo Estado: psiquiatría y orden social en la obra de Antonio Vallejo-Nájera*, in: Huertas, Rafael/Ortiz, Carmen (eds.): *Ciencia y Fascismo*, Madrid 1998, pp. 97–109.

4 Vallejo-Nájera, Antonio: *Psiquismo del fanatismo marxista*, in: *Revista Semana Médica Española* (1939).

5 Fontana, Josep (ed.): *España bajo el franquismo*, Barcelona 2000.

6 Sabater, Antonio: *Gamberros, Homosexuales, Vagos y Maleantes*, Barcelona 1962.

7 The ‘Civil Guard’ is the Spanish military police founded in 1844 under the reign of Queen Isabel II.

during which time it deployed special measures of surveillance and control towards *gitanos*, and suspended the presumption of innocence of this group and others identified as nomads or vagabonds. The law was translated into the internal regulations of the Civil Guard code through Articles 4, 5 and 6:

Article 4 the *Gitanos* will be scrupulously watched, taking rigorous care to recognise all the documents they have, confront their particular signs, observe their customs, find out their way of life and whatever leads to an accurate idea of their movements and occupations, investigating the destination and the objective of their trip.

Article 5 given the fact that this people does not have a fixed residence, it is convenient to take from them all the necessary information to prevent them from committing robberies of horses or other types of animals.

Article 6 it is ordered that the gypsies and horse-dealers carry, in addition to the personal identity card, the document of the treasury that authorises them to exercise the trade of horse-dealers. For each one of them [the horses] they will carry a guide with the class, origin, age, brand and markings, which will be given to the buyer. The annotations that are made in this document for changes and sales will be authorised by the mayors of the towns or by an inspector of public order in the capitals and for the herd of cattle by the municipal veterinarians. Those who do not have these documents or where examination or verification proves that they are not in order, will be arrested by the Civil Guard and brought before the competent authority as violators of the law.⁸

These measures translated into episodes of police persecution and police brutality against *gitanos*. This legal framework was accompanied by a strategy of mass propaganda, projecting a public image of *gitanos* as being lazy, dishonest, superstitious, antisocial, stateless, unpatriotic and sexually passionate.⁹ In the folkloristic national cinema, this repertoire of stereotypes was embodied

8 Boletín Oficial de las Cortes, Proposición no de ley aprobada en el Pleno de la Cámara sobre la situación de la población gitana española, 18 de mayo de 1978, accessible at: http://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L0/CONG/BOCG/BOC_096.PDF. [Accessed: 27.4.2020].

9 Rothea, Xavier: Construcción y uso social de la representación de los gitanos por el poder franquista 1936–1975, in: *Gitanos/Roma: auto-producción cultural y construcción histórico-política*. Revista andaluza de antropología 7 (2014), pp. 7–22, DOI: <https://>

in films, such as *Morena Clara* (1954) and *La danza de los deseos* (1954). Both are musical films starring the flamenco singer Lola Flores. In the film *Morena Clara*, a young *gitana* called Trini and her uncle deal in a ‘gypsy’ business of stealing. At the trial, the prosecutor accuses them of committing a crime, but they do not fully understand the nature of the crime and the justice applied to them by an “external culture.” Trini ends up serving in the prosecutor’s house, and the prosecutor eventually falls in love with her, enchanted with her exotic beauty and her sensual dancing skills.

In the film *La danza de los deseos*, a man flees the country from the persecution of the Civil Guard in the company of his daughter. He is mortally wounded in the flight and finds shelter on an island inhabited by a blind man and his assistant. The father dies and the blind man looks after the girl who becomes an indomitable woman: strong, brave, determined, and difficult to frighten but also an expert singer and dancer. She returns the favour to her benefactors by running a show on the island. Many visitors are attracted to see her exotic beauty and majestic dance. These two films show a double mechanism of orientalisation¹⁰ and criminalization towards the *gitanos*. Following this logic of cultural distancing, the material misery of the *gitanos* was portrayed as a logical result of their deviant moral condition.

The New Spanish Cinema

In the 1960s, the directors of the so-called New Spanish Cinema (*Nuevo Cine Español*) initiated a transition to a different film language in portraying Spanish society by distancing themselves from the previous film folklorism of the 1950s and looking at the mirror of Italian neorealism. Within the tight limits of Franco’s censorship,¹¹ the aesthetic principles and theory of the New Spanish Cinema were articulated by the journal of film criticism *Nuestro Cine*,¹² which aimed to enter into a dialogue with the intellectual legacy of

dx.doi.org/10.12795/RAA.2014.i07.01, accessible at: https://institucional.us.es/revistas/RAA/7/xavier_rothea.pdf. [Accessed: 27.4.2020].

- 10 On the notion of ‘orientalisation,’ see Said, Edward W.: *Orientalism*, New York 1978. Edward Said defined the term ‘orientalism’ to describe a cultural technique of misrepresenting ‘outsider’ peoples. In relation to the notion of ‘citizenship,’ orientalism has rendered the concept of citizenship as a problem of epistemology, because citizenship originated as an institutional category that implies not only policies of inclusion and protection for ‘members’ of the community, but also mechanisms of stigmatization and exclusion for the ‘others.’
- 11 Gubern, Román: *La censura. Función política y ordenamiento jurídico bajo el franquismo (1936–1975)*, Barcelona 1981.
- 12 It is very symptomatic that the first issue of the journal was dedicated to the Italian film director Antonioni: *Revista Cinematográfica: guión de la “Aventura” de Michelangelo Antonioni*.

the journal *Nuestro Cinema*, guided in the pre-civil war period by the Soviet aesthetics canon.

Considered as the first cinematographic platform of the Spanish Marxist left, *Nuestro Cinema* was founded and directed from Paris by one of the most extraordinary Spanish film critics and essayists, Juan Piqueras (executed by Franco's army in July 1936).¹³ Rated as the best journal of film theory and criticism of the Spanish Second Republic, its first issue appeared in June 1932 (printed in Barcelona). It published thirteen numbers until October 1933. It reappeared in January of 1935, indicating a "second epoch," publishing four numbers until August (printed in Madrid and Seville). Appearing monthly, it also published several bi-monthly issues.¹⁴

The journal *Nuestro Cine* connected literature and cinema through a reflection of neorealism in Italian cinema and Spanish literature. Being monthly, it published 106 numbers between 1961 and 1970 (printed in Madrid). Its founder and director was José Ángel Ezcurr, who was also in charge of the Spanish newspaper *Triunfo*,¹⁵ that embodied the intellectual resistance to the Franco regime.¹⁶ *Nuestro Cine* counted on internationally well-known contributors, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard or Luís Buñuel.

As a famous contributor of the journal *Nuestro Cine*, Carlos Saura was considered the national master of the New Spanish Cinema. With his first film *Los golfos* (*The Delinquents*) (1959), he had already initiated a new aesthetics by analysing the social difficulties facing a group of youngsters trying to make their dreams become true in the suburbs of Madrid. With his third film *La caza* (1965), translated into English as *The Hunt*, he became internationally well-known: presented at the 1966 Berlin Festival, the film won the Silver Bear for best director. It was defended by Pier Paolo Pasolini, a member of the jury, "for the courage and indignation with which he presented a human situation characteristic of his time and society."¹⁷ This film is an allegory of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), a psychological thriller with three hunters, outdoors scenography in an arid landscape and highly contrasted black-and-white

Nuestro Cine 1 (1961), accessible at: <https://www.c1n3.org/REVISTAS/NuestroCine/NuestroCine001/index.html>. [Zugriff: 27.4.2020].

13 Gubern, Roman/Hammond, Paul: *Los años rojos de Luis Buñuel*, Madrid 2009.

14 Pérez Merinero, Carlos/Pérez Merinero, David (eds.): *Del cinema como arma de clase. Antología de Nuestro Cinema 1932–1935*, Valencia 1975.

15 Alted, Alicia/Aubert, Paul (eds.): "Triunfo" en su época, Madrid 1995.

16 García Galindo, Juan Antonio/Gutiérrez Lozano, Juan Francisco/Sánchez Alarcón, Immaculada (eds.): *La comunicación social durante el franquismo*, Málaga 2002.

17 Gubern, Roman: *Notas sobre el cine clandestino en Catalunya bajo el franquismo*, in: Vidal Beneyto, José (ed.): *Alternativas populares a las comunicaciones de masas*, Madrid 1979, pp. 177–180.

photography.¹⁸ While out hunting, the three main characters suddenly turn their intimate friendship and camaraderie into criminal hostility against each other.

The New Spanish Cinema found in the national literature of the 1950s a source of inspiration, especially in authors such as Jesús López Pacheco, Antonio Ferres, Armando López Salinas or Ignacio Aldecoa.¹⁹ One of the film directors who best explored the relation between literature and cinema is Mario Camus. He won the Golden Bear at the 1983 Berlin International Film Festival with *La colmena* (*The Beehive*) (1982), an adaption of the novel with the same title by Camilo José Cela.²⁰ In the 1960s, he adapted two novels by Ignacio Aldecoa: *Young Sánchez* (1963) and *Con el viento solano*²¹ (1965). In 1975, Camus also adapted Aldecoa's tale *Los pájaros de Baden-Baden* (*The Birds of Baden-Baden*). Aldecoa's literature focuses on the lives of losers, of people worried about surviving in conditions of poverty. It has been considered that his literature lacks political commitment, probably because the wretched protagonists in his films do not show any signs of rebellion against the existing order.²²

Con el viento solano: Deconstructing Antigypsyist Stereotypes?

*Con el viento solano*²³ is a novel by Ignacio Aldecoa featuring a Gitano character: the criminal fugitive Sebastian. The narrative structure is divided into three parts. **1) Action:** the first part focuses on the core action, the (involuntary) murder of a civil guard, while he is drunk at a local fair in the town of Talavera de la Reina (Toledo). **2) Dialogues:** the second part focuses on his escape from justice running from Talavera to Madrid and Alcalá de Henares. In this part, he has several encounters with his friends and relatives who deny him any kind help due to fear of reprisals. **3) Reflection:** the last part shows his inner thoughts, his internal reflection about a miserable personal and family destiny. After the last visit to his mother in his birthplace, Cogolludo, he eventually becomes desperate and confesses his crime at the police station.

18 D'Lugo, Marvin: A New Spain for Old Spaniards, in: id.: *The Films of Carlos Saura. The Practice of Seeing*, Princeton 1991, pp. 67–68.

19 Quesada, Luis: *La novela española y el cine*, Madrid 1986.

20 Cela, Camilo José: *The Hive*, translated by J. M. Cohen and A. Barea, London 2001 [orig. in Spanish, 1951].

21 It was entered into the 1966 Cannes Film Festival.

22 Sánchez Noriega, José Luis: *Mario Camus*, Madrid 1998.

23 Aldecoa, Ignacio: *Con el viento solano*, Barcelona 1956.

The novel combines an existential and a social dimension by showing how the inner process of self-making/self-destruction is the result of his intimate ties to a very poor background that limits his life's opportunities. In the adaptation for the cinema, Mario Camus stays loyal to this narrative and puts into play very eloquently, reflecting facts, feelings, dialogues, memories and inner thoughts. The majestic ability of Mario Camus to translate into audio-visual language the intimate relation among actions, thoughts, personal encounters and social scenarios, must be clearly stressed. In fact, Aldecoa himself was very satisfied with the adaptation of the novel.²⁴

In terms of aesthetics, Mario Camus introduced a significant rupture in the way *gitano* characters used to be represented in the folkloristic cinema, which reduces the performance of *gitanos* to singing and dancing in taverns and at fairs. Actually, Camus chose a flamenco dancer (Antonio Gades)²⁵ to interpret the protagonist (Sebastian), and broke the public imagery by placing him in social settings others than taverns and fairs. Indeed, in the whole film, there is only one scene (at the beginning, five minutes in length) dedicated to an improvised flamenco party in a flat. During the rest of the film, Antonio Gades does not dance any more. On the contrary, he has to face critical ethical dilemmas after the unintended killing of a civil guard at a fair. These dilemmas are manifested in a dual manner: internally, through inner monologues, and externally, through dialogues with his friends and relatives.

In this work, the film language is not interested in conveying a sense of joy, lightness, relaxation or laughter, instead it shows rather the opposite, depicting desperation, agony, decadence and misery. The poor shape of the characters' clothes, the fact that the majority of them represent the underclass, the arid landscapes and the deteriorated social scenarios, all these elements together reflect the constant struggle of the poor to merely survive and the constant fear of the police and military authorities. In aesthetic terms, it is also relevant to highlight that there are no jokes in the dialogues; the silences are as meaningful as the conversations. Camus purposely designed this *mise en scène* to underscore the difference between the 'intellectual cinema' oriented towards an expert public (represented by the New Spanish Cinema) and the 'industrial cinema' oriented to the masses (represented by folkloristic cinema).

All these described aesthetic and script innovations, introduced by Mario Camus regarding the representation of *gitano* characters in films, could allow us to think that he has succeeded, at least partially, in deconstructing the

24 Sánchez Noriega, José Luis: El cine de Mario Camus: compromiso con la realidad, in: id.: Comunicación, poder y cultura, Madrid 1998, pp. 117–127.

25 Antonio Gades was the most famous flamenco dancer of those times. In 1964, he represents Spain at the New York Exposition, where he was welcomed as a flamenco icon.

myth that Franco's propaganda aimed to manipulate the public image of *gitanos*. With his film *Con el viento solano*, Camus moved beyond the orientalist 'gypsy' world of sensual pleasures, exotic dances and servile attitude towards the ambivalent 'gadjo' figures of authority, represented simultaneously as benefactors and persecutors. This film shows the crude misery that the protagonist and his family have to face, with their living conditions of absolute economic and social ostracism.

At the end of the film, Camus presents the core moral dilemma that challenges the ethical attitude of the *gitanos* portrayed as the wretched of Spanish society: 1. One may respond to exclusion and marginalisation with violence (like the protagonist Sebastian). 2. One may respond to exclusion and marginalisation with pacifist resistance (like the mother of Sebastian). This dilemma is embodied in a setting among abandoned ruins at the outskirts of the town, where Sebastian's mother lives with his two daughters and three sons. She grabs Sebastian by the jacket and shouts at him: "What have you done, Sebastian?"

Despite the aesthetic ruptures that Mario Camus introduces in the film representation of *gitanos*, we can still criticise him for reinforcing the image of the *gitano* as a fugitive criminal: the eternal "fugitive" / "nomad" living at the margins of society, attached to a life of sins and vices. As Derrida analysed using the concept of "spectres," when the original fetish is not properly buried, the phantom re-appears in its different variations and repetitions.²⁶ This film narrative and aesthetic of the 'criminal *gitano*' will later in the 1980s influence the so-called '*Cine Quinqui*,' a film genre focused on the life of a criminal, (often starring a *gitano* character), and his experiences of police persecution. Some of the first films in this genre, are: *Los últimos golpes de "El Torette"* (de la Loma, 1980) and *Colegas (Pals)* (de la Iglesia, 1982).²⁷

26 Derrida, Jacques: *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, New York 1994.

27 Sánchez Noriega, José Luis: *La ciudad filmada como testigo de conflictos sociales y del devenir histórico*, in: *Actas de las I Jornadas Internacionales Arte y Ciudad*, Madrid 2012.