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## El Paseo by Harold Trompetero: Approaching Popular Film from Colombia in a North American Classroom

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### Abstract

This article explores the manner in which popular films from Colombia—

specifically comedies, such as the movie *El paseo*, directed by Harold Trompetero in 2010, which has been the highest grossing movie to date in the history of movies produced in Colombia—may be used in the classroom in the context of a World Language, Literature, and Culture department in the United States. It is the contention of this study that such a choice is far from common due to diverse issues, which include the limited access to international distribution of the majority of the so-called “national film” or, in this case, “Colombian film.” As a consequence, the reception of these films is conditioned by what British visual art historian Kobena Mercer has characterized as a “burden of representation;” that is, the fact that any product not coming from the heart of mainstream western culture is burdened by the implication that its content will be considered as representative of the identity with which it has been associated, regardless of how nuanced its position may actually be in its original context. Furthermore, many foreign films arrive in North America by way of festivals, which may impose an additional layer of expectations. This analysis also examines the need to complement, modulate, and separate from some trends common in the study of Colombian film, as discussed by film scholar Juana Suárez in her volume *Cinembargo Colombia: Critical Essays on Colombian Cinema* (i.e. the omnipresence of “violence” as a determining narrative, the false dichotomy of “good/bad” film without making explicit the criteria for such a taxonomy, among others). The article reviews some of the challenges involved in teaching the film with attention to intercultural communication. Classroom readings include legislative documents (such as Law 397/1997 and Law 814/2003), miscellaneous film criticism from Colombian newspapers and blogs, and critical concepts by film scholar Andrew Higson, Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, and Spanish communication specialist Miguel Rodrigo Alsina, among others.

### Keywords

film, film teaching, Colombia, Trompetero, El Paseo, popular film

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### **Abstract:**

This article explores the manner in which popular films from Colombia—specifically comedies, such as the movie *El paseo*, directed by Harold Trompetero in 2010, which has been the highest grossing movie to date in the history of movies produced in Colombia—may be used in the classroom in the context of a World Language, Literature, and Culture department in the United States. It is the contention of this study that such a choice is far from common due to diverse issues, which include the limited access to international distribution of the majority of the so-called “national film” or, in this case, “Colombian film.” As a consequence, the reception of these films is conditioned by what British visual art historian Kobena Mercer has characterized as a “burden of representation;” that is, the fact that any product not coming from the heart of mainstream western culture is burdened by the implication that its content will be considered as representative of the identity with which it has been associated, regardless of how nuanced its position may actually be in its original context. Furthermore, many foreign films arrive in North America by way of festivals, which may impose an additional layer of expectations. This analysis also examines the need to complement, modulate, and separate from some trends common in the study of Colombian film, as discussed by film scholar Juana Suárez in her volume *Cinembargo Colombia: Critical Essays on Colombian Cinema* (i.e. the omnipresence of “violence” as a determining narrative, the false dichotomy of “good/bad” film without making explicit the criteria for such a taxonomy, among others). The article reviews some of the challenges involved in teaching the film with attention to intercultural communication. Classroom readings include legislative documents (such as Law 397/1997 and Law 814/2003), miscellaneous film criticism from Colombian newspapers and blogs, and critical concepts by film scholar Andrew Higson, Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, and Spanish communication specialist Miguel Rodrigo Alsina, among others.

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## 1. Introduction:

This paper explores some of the challenges involved in teaching the Colombian film *El paseo* by Harold Trompetero in the context of a department of languages, literatures, and cultures in the United States, with special attention to the role played by the concept of “intercultural communication” in this task. Miguel Rodrigo Alsina defines “intercultural communication” in his book *La comunicación intercultural* as “communication among those people who have such diverse cultural referents that they perceive themselves as belonging to different cultures” (p. 12),<sup>1</sup> a situation that involves overcoming the artificial expectation of singularity and difference that is frequently associated with cultural production that crosses borders and frontiers.

*El paseo* has previously been part of a survey course of Colombian film for fourth-year majors and graduate students, and also of a survey course of films from Latin America with a focus on film genre with a similar student population. Among the learning outcomes listed for these courses was included: “By the end of the semester students ... Will develop a deeper appreciation of film as a valid genre to understand peoples and their cultures.” Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) was not explicitly included as a goal but rather implicitly assumed as a skill that students would develop in the classroom as a consequence of their contact with the materials. However, analysis of data after the course revealed a clear lack of specific data in this regard; there were no specific questions on assignments that would allow a clear account for this improved competence. Thus, the need for clear data (such as the one provided by the questionnaire anchoring this monographic issue) and the need to reformulate the teaching approach became obvious. It is necessary to shift from a model in which intercultural communication is a spontaneous and occasional occurrence in the classroom to a model in which ICC is at the heart of the curriculum and is successfully integrated in course planning. This paper works as a proposal based on current data taken from students’ assignments, and a second part will be submitted for publication when implementation data (both stemming from the questionnaire and additional student assignment data) are available.

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<sup>1</sup> Original quotation in Spanish reads as follows: “la comunicación entre aquellas personas que poseen unos referentes culturales tan distintos que se auto-perciben como pertenecientes a culturas diferentes” (Rodrigo Alsina, p. 12). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

This paper identifies and discusses aspects in which an intercultural communication approach may enrich classroom discussion and the way in which improvements will be implemented. Among those, I would highlight explicitly addressing intercultural communication competence in syllabus and course materials such as new pre-screening and pre-assessment activities, dedicated short reflection papers, and specific questions on tests. In order to measure progress, the questionnaire will be used in a continuous manner throughout the semester. Establishing clear and explicit expectations as well as implementing tools for measuring student growth will be key to assess whether classroom discussion has resulted in more mature intercultural communicative competence.

## **2. Background and Method:**

In particular, this paper focuses on the manner in which the instructor may lead classroom discussion on the representation of four issues: Corruption, the place of women in Colombian society, violence, and the geography of Colombia as a touristic destination (and, as such, a source of wealth). These topics have been thoroughly discussed in Colombia and beyond its frontiers with a focus on either the singularity of Colombia or its relevance in a Latin American context. The aim of this paper is different, however, as it discusses the manner in which addressing certain data and cultural clichés in the classroom may lead students to expand their knowledge of Colombian culture and to establish links with their own cultural background and everyday experiences. According to the *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value Rubric* of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, activities associated with effective intercultural communication should help the students develop certain skills (verbal and non-verbal communication, and empathy), attitudes (curiosity and openness) and knowledge (cultural self-awareness and cultural worldview frameworks). The following discussion of the cinematic representation of corruption, women, violence, and tourism aims to provide ways to respond to these challenges and expectations at the capstone and graduate levels. It also shows at which points formal and informal assessment of student growth in ICC are to be incorporated in the future.

Previous experience shows me that students may need assistance in connecting what they perceive as foreign issues with their own experiences at home. These figurative border crossings provide essential foundations for impelling students to more advanced stages of ICC. Therefore, the discussion of the movie begins with pre-screening and, in the future, pre-assessment activities focused on providing knowledge of the cultural

framework and assisting the student in the process of making connections between the target culture and their own. It continues with a discussion of the content of the film focused on expanding students' worldview in a contextualized manner. I would also like to assess whether the perception of these subjects at the local level in Colombia is substantially different from the perception that our students have.<sup>2</sup> An example of this kind of information aimed at fostering empathy and self-awareness is the use of information related to employment, violence, corruption, and tourism for both the United States and Colombia as a point of departure for the analysis of the film. Although an open attitude towards others and empathy may come naturally to certain students, it is important to make sure that students reflect on their own culture and can operate back and forth between cultures, making meaningful comparisons and establishing enriching connections. Cultural self-awareness is key to understanding how people in other cultures may share some of the challenges that the students are experiencing in their own culture, and it should not be taken for granted.

While watching the movie and during post-screening discussions, students participate in the analysis of the movie beyond the discussion of verbal communication between characters and look for extralinguistic cues. A review of the basics of filmmaking during the first week of the semester keeps students interested in gestures between characters, physical distance, body language, and the position of the camera, among other aspects. Finally, watching clips from other films in the post-screening discussion has been another effective tool for achieving the aforementioned objectives. Two key movies have provided a meaningful context for *El paseo: Little Miss Sunshine* by Valerie Fariss and Jonathan Dayton, and *Retratos en un mar de mentiras* by Carlos Gaviria. The former helped the students in tracing back the road movie as a meaningful genre to both North American and Colombian audiences.<sup>3</sup> The latter helped the students in contextualizing the places in which the action of *El*

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I assume that there is not a unique or normative reception of each film. I support Juana Suárez's adoption of Janet Staiger's notion of the "perverse spectator," that is, "a spectator who does not do the expected and who restructures hierarchies according to his or her own expectations" (Suárez, p. 4) as a challenge to the notion of "normative viewer" as coined by David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson. However, this work supports the need for providing contextualized comment and analysis of each film through carefully prepared lesson plans including diverse pre-screening and post-screening activities, as well as the need for a baseline idea of each student's point of departure in growth of ICC, an aspect in which the implementation of the questionnaire will be helpful.

<sup>3</sup> Trompetero has identified this film as one of the inspirations for *El paseo* (Harold).

*paseo* unfolds.<sup>4</sup>

In order to provide further context for the students, the analysis of these four topics begins with viewing public information readily gathered by international and local institutions as well as academic studies on the attitudes towards these subjects. When teaching this course again in the future, I will use the questionnaire at the heart of this monographic number so I can assess and measure to what degree the preconceptions that the students bring to class about foreign film and the culture of Colombia. These preconceptions may be challenged or deepened by watching and critically commenting on the film. Furthermore, this approach to the films takes into consideration the miscellaneous objectives that a film course fulfills in the aforementioned academic environment: That is, classroom assignments and activities involve a combination of the analysis of aspects related to cinematic expression; the discussion of social, cultural, and historical context; and the improvement of the students' skills in their command of the Spanish language (including their awareness of the Spanish of Colombia, technical vocabulary associated with film, and writing a research paper.) These objectives are consistent with the "cosmic vision of language,"<sup>5</sup> which Rodrigo Alsina considers to be at the heart of "intercultural studies," a discipline that prevails upon the will to make sure that "when one language is studied, [its study should not be limited to] acquiring a linguistic competence, or even a communicative one, but rather [the aim is] achieving a cultural competence" (p. 24).

The first intercultural challenge does not come from the film itself but rather from the places where films produced in Colombia are actually studied. The majority of research on film made in Colombia comes from an institutional background on communication, whereas in the United States departments of languages prevail. These have become departments of language, literature and cultures; they have become a locus for the study of a variety of cultural products, including film, television, popular music, internet trends, and memes, among others. Although many faculty members have branched out into new areas of research, most of them have been trained in the field of literature. As a result, most of the research coming from Colombia has favored a sense of continuity between the

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<sup>4</sup> For those readers not aware of *El paseo*'s plot, the movie portrays a trip to the coastal city of Cartagena by the Peinado family, who lives in the capital city of Bogotá. The film has many of the ingredients traditionally associated with a road movie, in which the main characters are taken to the limit of their comfort zone and beyond by the many events that happen during the trip. Those events are presented in a comedic and light-hearted manner.

<sup>5</sup> Original quotations in Spanish read as follows: "visión cosmogónica de la lengua" (Rodrigo Alsina, p. 24) and "cuando se estudie una lengua no sólo se adquiera una competencia lingüística, o incluso comunicativa, sino que se consiga una competencia cultural" (Rodrigo Alsina, p. 24).

praxis and the research of film, but a substantial amount of the research coming from the United States favors textual analysis in which the spoken word and the discussion of the plot are privileged over other methodological choices. Juana Suárez has discussed this matter in her volume *Critical Essays on Colombian Cinema and Culture. Cinembargo Colombia*:

When specialists in cultural studies and literature examine film, the consequence in some cases is a greater attention to those elements most closely related to literature: Narrative, characters, and temporal and spatial framing, for example, without paying careful attention to the language of the camera. (p. 6)<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence, divergent canonical choices and practices emerge. Whether the criteria focus on purely cinematic matters or on dialogues and narrative, the amount of critical attention that films such as *El paseo* have received in Colombia is limited and mostly negative (the repetitive nature of its approach to genre clichés and the fact that it has become a franchise are some of the underlying reasons for criticism). However, in an environment in which intercultural communication is an objective, the fact that the audience has favored this film and it has become the most popular movie in the history of film production in Colombia legitimizes its selection.

As Andrew Higson states in his article “The Concept of National Cinema,” “the question of audiences has to be crucial for the study of national cinemas. For what is a national cinema if it doesn’t have a national audience?” (pp. 65-66). And yet, most studies favor the discussion of film production and authorial intent over audience, distribution, and exhibition patterns. Some of the challenges faced by the study of the cinema of Colombia in the United States are not particularly original or country-specific. Among the most typical challenges, one can list the difficulties in reading an operative definition of what “national cinema” is or, when it comes to Colombia, what Colombian cinema is. This is the kind of subject in which it is not strange to have a conversation in

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<sup>6</sup> For an alternative and more critical view of the historical work on film coming from Colombia, one may see Pedro Adrián Zuluaga’s *Cine colombiano: Cánones y discursos dominantes*, where Zuluaga expresses concern over the manner in which “social concerns and confidence in the referential nature of film and its mimetic nature when it comes to reality [...] have displaced the analysis of elements of cinematic language to a place that, most times, is a secondary one” (Original quotation: “las preocupaciones de orden social y la confianza en la referencialidad o el carácter reproductor de la realidad que posee el cine [...] desplaza el análisis de los elementos del lenguaje cinematográfico a un lugar la mayoría de las veces secundario”) (p. 92).



which speakers have not previously agreed on a common definition of what they mean by “national cinema.”

As Higson has stated, because this concept of national cinema “has been appropriated in a variety of ways, for a variety of reasons, there is not a single discourse of national cinema” (p. 52). For Higson, these attempts to monopolize the meaning of the term stem from the fact that definitions of national film work as a sort of wish list. That is, this term “is used prescriptively rather than descriptively, citing what *ought* to be the national cinema, rather than describing the actual cinematic experience of popular audiences” (p. 53). Prescription rarely happens in a vacuum, but rather is commonly a symptom of the underlying tension between what Colombian filmmaker Sergio Cabrera characterizes as “our movies, the movies that we make with our nails, with our actors, with our conflicts, with our directors” (Casamérica) and the threatening shadow of Hollywood and its cinematographic industry.<sup>7</sup> All of these aspects have been part of the traditional discussion about the seemingly reversible concepts of “foreign film” and “national film.” However, they neglect to address directly the fact that introducing the audiences—and particularly classroom audiences—to comparative data associated with the topics of the films and growing visual literacy—and particularly that of college learners—may result in increased cultural competence.

For many students in the aforementioned courses, this is their first contact with a cultural product coming from Colombia, whose industry only recently has begun to obtain international distribution, as a result of efforts associated with recent national legislation.<sup>8</sup> Limited access to films coming from Colombia may potentially result in what Kobena Mercer has characterized as “the burden of representation.” That is, the manner in which a certain cultural manifestation is uncritically presented as representative of its cultural background. Suárez questions whether this could be the case in Colombia due to the bad press that the country has had for years: “Colombian cinema is barely distributed abroad; its fame is certainly no greater than that of the country’s violent history, so it is not at all clear how Colombian filmmaking can be blamed for all bad propaganda” (Suárez, p. 11). From an intercultural communication perspective, Rodrigo Alsina supports Suárez’s position on the subject, emphasizing the manner in which intercultural communication has

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<sup>7</sup> Original quotation reads as follows: “nuestras películas, las películas que hagamos con nuestras uñas, con nuestros actores, con nuestros conflictos, con nuestros directores” (Casamérica).

<sup>8</sup> Although researchers and filmmakers frequently quote Law 814/2003 as a turning point for the industry, this legislative effort can be traced to an earlier beginning with Law 397/1997, focused on the support of Colombian national culture. Furthermore, Law 814/2003 has been followed by a series of decrees approved in 2009 and 2013 (Proimágenes).

frequently started with some negative journalistic coverage of a certain culture:

... it is not enough for media to speak about other cultures, [but] it is very important in which manner this cultural diversity is shown. Journalistic information usually highlights those elements that are more inassimilable or despicable in a certain culture, resulting in the effect of rejecting all of that culture and not, simply, those concrete aspects. The known tendency of this medium to highlight the negative should be tempered when it comes to describing cultures. (p. 11)<sup>9</sup>

In this context, there are many challenges associated with intercultural communication. One of the most significant areas of study in this field is the resolution of the many “intercultural conflicts that seem to multiply in world geography” (Rodrigo Alsina, p. 10).<sup>10</sup> In any case, Rodrigo Alsina insists on the need to avoid “the fallacy of believing that all conflicts labeled as intercultural do not have other political, social or economic causes which, sometimes, are more important” (p. 10).<sup>11</sup> Among these causes, some of them have received more attention than others.

In truth, a combination of language learning issues and nationalistic thinking underlies a substantial amount of applications of the notion of intercultural communication in North American colleges and universities. Becoming proficient in intercultural communication frequently means training for the contextualized acquisition of a certain language during a study abroad stay in a certain country. Thus, the adaptation and context of the customs of the country are emphasized, disregarding their normative and homogenizing nature. Consequently, matters such as minority ethnicities, gender issues, and differences of class, among others, become secondary. In other words, looking at class syllabi in a department of languages, literatures and cultures, it is more

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<sup>9</sup> Original quotation in Spanish reads as follows:

no basta con que los medios de comunicación hablen de otras culturas, es muy importante cómo se muestra esta diversidad cultural. Las informaciones periodísticas suelen destacar los elementos más inasimilables o deleznable de una cultura, provocando un efecto de rechazo de toda esta cultura y no, simplemente, de estos aspectos concretos. La conocida tendencia de este medio a destacar lo negativo debería atemperarse cuando se trata de describir culturas. (Rodrigo Alsina, p. 11)

<sup>10</sup> Original quotation in Spanish reads as follows: “conflictos interculturales que parecen multiplicarse en la geografía mundial” (Rodrigo Alsina, p. 10).

<sup>11</sup> Original quotation in Spanish reads as follows: “la falacia de creer que todos los conflictos a los que se pone la etiqueta de interculturales no tienen otras causas, en ocasiones más importantes, políticas, sociales o económicas” (Rodrigo Alsina, p. 10).

common to find the discussion of examples and so-called “critical incidents” associated with the arrival of a student to a new country than the local implementation of intercultural communicative best practices. Nor is it the most common terminology to discuss and act upon the difficulties of adaptation faced by internal refugees in Colombia, the “desplazados,” when they arrive in the urban environment. When it comes to the discussion of “intercultural communication” and cultivation of intercultural communicative competence in the context of language and culture study, the logic of picking a certain nation-state and successfully adjusting to its most emblematic national traits still prevails while other potential implementations remain latent.

### 2.1. Corruption: Police:

The discussion of *El paseo* from the perspective of the representation of corruption may begin with the discussion of relevant statistics on this subject both in Colombia and the United States. According to the international barometer of corruption gathered by the non-governmental organization Transparency International, the public perception of corruption has some common ground both in Colombia and in the United States. The majority of people in both countries perceive corruption as an increasing threat (56% of the people of Colombia; 72% in the US). Actually, there are more Colombians who think that corruption is in decline in their country (20%) than people with this view in the United States (6%). Furthermore, only a third of the population in either country (29% in the US and 35% in Colombia) thinks that the fight against corruption in their countries of origin is effective. Once established that corruption is an increasingly worrisome subject for both societies, a discussion of the representation of corruption in *El paseo* as an everyday phenomenon, rather than something exceptional, can follow. The class can also focus on the moral attitudes towards corruption represented in the film and the manner in which it may affect the students’ perception of Colombia. In order to spearhead a discussion of corruption in Colombia, post-screening analysis and discussion of two elements of the film must occur: The interaction between a traffic policeman and the Peinado family and the relationship between the patriarch of the family, Álex Peinado, and his boss, Doctor Benítez.

The traffic-stop scene stems from Peinado’s driving his vehicle a little bit faster than the speed limit, a situation far from being singularly Colombian. Peinado initially attempts to establish some complicity with the officer. When he fails to do so, he switches to aggressive behavior, which results in an additional punishment, the impounding of the car. Up

to this point, the policeman's behavior is exemplary, even if Álex's is not. This episode is also representative of the disdain that Colombians have for traffic stops, which has resulted in the country's current president, Juan Manuel Santos, calling for the punishment of those who try to use derogatory language with officers and make excuses for avoiding fines, the so-called "you-do-not-know-who-I-am" situation ("Detengan"). When things seem about to end poorly for Peinado, his wife, Hortensia, gets out of the car and flirts with the policeman, resulting in the reduction of the fine to the initial speeding ticket. The policeman is thus presented as a benevolent figure but also as someone whose behavior is not particularly rigorous. The perception of the police as part of the issue of corruption is high both in Colombia (on a scale of 1 through 5, with 5 being the maximum level of corruption, Colombians give a 4 to their police force) and in the US (3.3 of 5). Through the use of humor, the film presents a morally ambiguous situation in a relatively positive light. In any case, the discussion of this episode calls the students' attention towards an equally problematic issue for both Colombians and North Americans.

Development of nonverbal aspects of ICC often end at the superficial level, and thus from a non-verbal communication point of view, the visual treatment of the episode helps emphasize Peinado's discomfort with the resolution of the event, as he has to see his wife talking to the police through the rear mirror of his car, presented as a frame within a frame. From a local point of view for U.S. college learners with an urban background and, specifically, students living in Cleveland, this matter has special relevance, as the city has made national news in recent months for its problematic relationship between the local police force and the less privileged members of the community. Debating this episode in class may develop both empathy and a critical attitude, as U.S. college learners may wonder whether the outcome of the episode might have been different, had the social background and ethnicity of the Peinado family been less privileged.

## 2.2. Corruption: Employer/Employee:

Another issue in which fostering cultural self-awareness of the students and increasing their knowledge of other cultures may be easily combined is the representation of the relationship between employers and employees as a frame for institutional corruption and abuse. Thus, when the questionnaire is applied to the group in the future, one of the matters to review is whether the affinities more easily identified by U.S. college learners relate to institutional and structured systems. The perception of business corruption in both countries is 2.9/5 in Colombia and 3.6/5 in

the United States, which is lower than the perception of corruption in the police force but still significant.

The film shows the manner in which the “meritocracy” in which Peinado participates relates, not exclusively to the undertaking of his explicit job duties, but also to personal favors to his boss, such as changing the tire of his personal car. The Peinado family perceives this submission to a corrupt and unfair system negatively, which characterizes Álex as “arrodillado,” that is, a person who is on his knees. Although Peinado seems to initially surrender to the demands of his boss, spectators eventually learn that he agrees with his family’s negative assessment of the abuses of his boss. At this end of the movie, he calls his boss a “porquería,” that is, something or somebody associated with trash. At this point, he is applauded by the members of his family without any kind of moral ambiguity. Students can compare this scene with what they know about corruption in U.S. workplaces with which they are familiar.

### 2.3. Treatment of Women:

Data show that the situation of women in Colombia presents numerous challenges, many of them shared with the United States (for example, the incorporation of women to the workforce), and many of them specific to the Colombian context (i.e. forced displacement). According to the report “Global Employment Trends for Women,” produced by the International Labor Organization, both in Colombia and in the United States, the percentage of women who are a part of the workforce is between 50 and 60%. In order to study the role of women in Trompetero’s film, it is important to understand that he favors the presence of elements from family melodrama, a traditional film genre, in his characterization of the Peinado family. Both U.S. college learners and a Colombian audience will be familiar with some of the traits of this genre. This commonality helps to meet the goals of creating self-awareness and learning about new cultures.

Relying upon elements of this genre results in depicting certain power relationships between the characters. The first scene, in which the family is introduced, takes place around the dining room table, which has been associated by Jean Baudrillard with placing the male patriarch in a setting where his position of power becomes obvious. The scene simultaneously reinforces and mocks the power structure of the patriarchal family. Yet, Álex Peinado, the head of the family, presides over the table. He chooses such an auspicious place for the family melodrama to inform the other members of the family that they will be going on a “paseo,” that is, on a family trip across the country. His authority as a

father, a husband, and a provider is marked by the manner in which the remaining members of the family complete his sentences and words. However, their reluctant support undermines his attempts at asserting such an authority. Basically, they either try to cancel the trip or to change its nature by including other people, such as Peinado's mother-in-law and his daughter Milenita's multiple boyfriends.

The screenplay does not provide the spectators with great psychological insight, particularly when it comes to women. On the contrary, it aims to caricature certain archetypes through the marriage of hyperbole and reiteration. The daughter constantly falls in love (three different sentimental interests are mentioned in the course of movie) and demonstrates that life cannot come to fruition without marriage and children. The mother-in-law, as expected, is an unwavering critic of Álex, constantly questioning his authority and intentions. The only character who shows certain psychological depth is the wife, Hortensia de Peinado. From her last name "de Peinado," that is, "belonging to Peinado," (a very conservative and traditional way of forming last names), it is possible to assert that she happily accepts her subaltern role. She is the one who facilitates dialogue between the different members of the family and the only one on whom her husband may count during the most challenging moments of the film.

Women in the film do not seem to have either ambition or a salaried position. Their stereotypical femininity is used for problem-solving purposes. However, these strategies are always filtered by the implicit acceptance of an order of things in which women must constantly negotiate their identity according to a masculine and heterosexual lens. By flirting with the policeman Hortensia negotiates the removal of traffic ticket that Peinado had received. When the family rescues Benítez from his armed captors, they exploit the sex appeal of Milenita, who exhibits her body in order to distract the guards. The film allows women to have a certain level of agency as long as they accept that they must meet the expectations of their male counterparts. In this sense, the film is so conservative that women in it are behind the everyday practice in Colombia, where a majority of younger women are part of the workforce. The movie does not aim to challenge the expectations of the spectatorship, as it is behind the actual *status quo* of women in Colombia.

Among the most positive aspects of the representation of women in *El paseo* is the solidarity between the characters of Hortensia and Milenita (and, to a lesser extent, also with the mother-in-law). According to Marcela Lagarde, "sorority," that is, a particular kind of solidarity among women is defined as follows:

It is a women's experience that leads to a quest for positive relationships and the existential and political alliance, body-to-body, subjectivity-to-subjectivity with other women, thus contributing with specific actions to the social elimination of all forms of oppression and to [women's] mutual support [in the process of] achieving gender power for every [woman] and to the life empowerment of each woman.<sup>12</sup>

The representation of feminine characters in the film falls short of such standards but, at least, in the limited frame of family relationships, goes in this direction. The screenplay presents Hortensia, the mother, as someone who directs her efforts towards both giving her mother a chance to enjoy the trip and allowing her daughter to step out of the flat caricature of her role in the latter sequences of the film. Nevertheless, this solidarity is not extended to women outside the family. Specifically, the Peinado family maintains a negative attitude towards Benítez's lover, who is represented as a heartless gold digger. The historical background associated with the forced displacement of Afro-Colombian population is not introduced to the audience in any meaningful way. Thus, in a country with an important problem of forced displacement affecting inhabitants of departments such as Chocó,<sup>13</sup> whose rural population ends up in the city occupying almost invariably subaltern positions, the movie explores the stereotype of the "morenaza," lacking any kind of critical consciousness of the underlying social and economic circumstances.<sup>14</sup> In the end, the only underlying commonality when it comes to the women in the movie is their willingness to satisfy its masculine and heterosexual perspective to the point of caricature.

#### 2.4. Violence:

The third subject to study as a focus for effective intercultural

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<sup>12</sup> Original quotation reads as follows:

Es una experiencia de las mujeres que conduce a la búsqueda de relaciones positivas y a la alianza existencial y política, cuerpo a cuerpo, subjetividad a subjetividad con otras mujeres, para contribuir con acciones específicas a la eliminación social de todas las formas de opresión y al apoyo mutuo para lograr el poderío genérico de todas y al empoderamiento vital de cada mujer.

<sup>13</sup> For a quick reference of the causes, the circumstances, and the effects of forced displacement on women in Colombia, the article "Forced Displacement among Rural Women in Colombia" by Flor Edilma Osorio is extremely valuable.

<sup>14</sup> For a more nuanced view of the reality of the population of Chocó, both at home and in the city, two excellent sources for a classroom debate are the feature film *Chocó* by Jhonny Hendrix and the documentary *Mamá Chocó* by Diana Kuéllar.

communication is the representation of violence, which has been a constant presence on the controversial debates about identity and film in Colombia. In this context, historical circumstance seems to feed subjects to a film production, which is perceived by many as eschewed towards the representation of this subject.<sup>15</sup> This information, which could encourage a judgmental attitude towards Colombia, can be easily contextualized by discussing crime rates. In certain cities in Colombia, such as Medellín and Bogotá, these rates have been on the decline, and they are comparable with crime rates in certain cities in the United States and, most certainly, with those rates in certain neighborhoods in cities such as Cleveland.

Looking at the “Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014” issued by the World Health Organization, the main difference between the United States and Colombia, in regard to violence, comes down to the implementation and enforcement of the law, which seems to be stronger in the United States. In any case, the representation of violence in Colombian films is a polarizing subject, and the audience frequently asks for movies to pay less attention to this topic. As Suárez states, “the chronic violence that has plagued the country seems to define the course of what is known as ‘Colombian cinema,’ while other subjects it has broached evoke little comment” (p. 1). María Paula Martínez (2012) underlines that “One of the hypotheses about the limited popularity of Colombian films has to do with [the fact that] it would seem pigeonholed, [limited] to comedy and violence as the only two ways to discuss Colombian culture.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, she places *El paseo* in the first category, using it as an example of a film that strays from the representation of violence and conflict. Nevertheless, a careful look at the film shows how violence, conflict, and crime are far from absent. Thus, the characters actually go through some areas where it was not safe to drive in the late 1990s. The movie does not deny that some challenges may still exist, but they are minimized by the manner in which they are presented. For example, robberies still happen. However, the thieves are not the dangerous BACRIM, an acronym for the criminal gangs whose activities fill the crime sections of newspapers. On the contrary, they are children.

The only reason that the Peinados’ belongings are stolen is that

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<sup>15</sup> For a contrary view, see the videoclip “Perro come perro, entrevista al director de la película,” (Casamérica) in which film director Carlos Moreno challenges the preconception that the majority of Colombian films are about violence, indicating that “most Colombian movies are about family or comic issues” (original quotation: “la mayoría de las películas colombianas son de temas familiares o de humor”).

<sup>16</sup> Original quotation in Spanish reads as follows: “Una de las hipótesis sobre la poca popularidad del cine colombiano tiene que ver con que pareciera estar encasillado en la comedia y la violencia como las dos únicas maneras de hablar sobre la cultura colombiana.”



Milenita, the person in charge of keeping an eye on the car, is distracted while she is on the phone. Hence, the theft becomes a crime of opportunity, and fault is shifted away from the thieves, landing squarely on the family. A similar transformation happens towards the end of the movie when they meet an armed group. The armed men are characterized as quite different from the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the paramilitary, or the ELN (National Liberation Army). Thus, the leader of the armed group is more interested in finding inner peace and balance than in obtaining a ransom or making a political statement. When the mother-in-law annoys them with her constant whining and complaining, they just let the family go. Therefore, although the movie does not ignore the existence of kidnapping and violence, it shows them as harmless. In other words, death and extortion are trivialized. At this point of the discussion, it would be useful to have the students brainstorm regarding concrete situations in which they have noticed diverse media manifestations trivializing violence in their own communities and whether both cultures share the same evasive maneuvers (chiefly, blaming the victim and using satire as the main way to approach the daily consequences of structural violence) in addressing such matters.

## 2.5. Tourism:

When it comes to filming the diversity of the Colombian geography, several filmmakers have recently chosen to focus their work on areas of Colombia that are not among the most commonly filmed. In doing so, they aim to provide a sense of the challenges, conflicts, and difficulties faced by those who live or lived there. Thus, films such as *El vuelco del cangrejo* by Óscar Ruiz Navia, *La sirga* by William Vega, *Los viajes del viento* by Ciro Guerra or *Chocó* by Jhonny Hendrix, meet these criteria.<sup>17</sup> Colombian landscapes are also highlighted in *El paseo*, but its look is focused on tourism. According to the World Bank, the United States is the second most popular destination in the world, receiving almost 70 million people in 2013. In the meantime, Colombia registered around 2.2 million arrivals. The Colombia that Trompetero recreates seems to be in almost perfect alignment with the Colombian government campaign known by its slogan, “Colombia es pasión.” Among the objectives of this campaign, one can find a more positive view of Colombia, related to an attempt to increase the

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<sup>17</sup> These films allow audiences to become acquainted with places such as both Colombian coasts, and “departamentos” (the Colombian word for internal administrative divisions) such as Chocó, Magdalena, and César, among others, which do not always receive as much local and international attention as cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali do.

amount of foreigners coming to the country for business and tourism.

Wherever in the film one looks, the director uses a lively palette of colors that is superimposed over the places that the characters visit. The colors of the car, the outfits of the characters, even some of their hairstyles are artificially imposed over the more moderate colors of the landscape. Note, for example, the fiery orange that characterizes the mother-in-law or the bright pink of Milenita's clothing.

Occasionally, some of *El paseo*'s images seem to aim for the audience's complicity by taking advantage of the language of advertisement. One can see this when the director individually focuses on some of the characters relaxing as the wind hits their faces in the same manner as in a car commercial. Just as an advertisement would suppress anything that is not helpful in selling the product, the everyday reality of Colombian people who travel by car is almost completely removed from the movie, and the Colombian conflict is trivialized. Also, nearly at the conclusion of the film, it celebrates some of the products that the country aims to sell. As the characters get closer to Cartagena, they start, figuratively speaking, experiencing the souvenirs that they will take home when they leave. They arrive in the tourist city in a brightly colored "chiva," in which they pass by a "palenquera," a colorful local character. Both the "palenquera" and the "chiva," or rather, their small-size reproductions, will end up on their shelves at home.

Furthermore, the characters are not the only ones enjoying Cartagena, as it is a foreign tourist who takes their picture, hence providing legitimacy for Peinado's claims that Colombia compares favorably with any other tourist destination in the world (for example, he claims that the Chicamocha Canyon is better than the Grand Canyon). Furthermore, emphasizing the national branding efforts in the film, the arrival of the characters to Cartagena is not accompanied by regional music, for example, "cumbia." Instead, the audiences listen to a pop song by Juanes, who is, with Shakira, the Colombian singer with the most commercial success both domestically and abroad, a "national champion" of sorts for the Colombian national brand. The subject of activities done as part of everyday life and activities performed while traveling for leisure provide possible gains in both empathy and an increase in self-knowledge. In his article "La comunicación de los destinos turísticos," Konstantin Stanishevski summarized some of the challenges involved in the imposition of a social and economic model focused on tourism:

- Tourism has some traits shared with colonialism, thus depriving local people of their autonomy of decision.
- [...] Tourism offers new opportunities and favors social change.

- On one hand, tourism provides socio-economic benefits, but on the other hand causes dependency and worsens social differences.
- [...] There is rarely an authentic understanding/communication in tourist-resident interaction.<sup>18</sup> (pp. 247-248)

Thus, this last item exposes the challenges of having a national advertisement campaign focused on tourism, as communication related to tourism frequently challenges the expectations associated with intercultural communicative competence.

### 3. Data Analysis and Implications:

The analyzed class consisted of 4 graduate students and 15 undergraduate students. Data used for analysis were one set of essays (a film description paper) and the first course exam, which contained 2 possible questions on the film of a total of 6 possible questions (students had to choose 5 of these). Content analysis of each set of papers reveals that my prompt for the essay contained no explicit mention of any element that would cause students to reveal insight on intercultural communicative competence. Further, of a total of 32 (13 and 19, respectively) papers collected, all students successfully discussed the 4 themes of the film. However, no student mentioned any ideas relevant to ICC. No questions regarding the film explicitly required students to reveal insights or skills in ICC, and thus, 0 of the students mentioned them. Despite the fact that students had participated in lectures and discussion that were expected to foster growth in ICC, it is clear that the course needs a complete reconfiguration of its assignments and its instruction when it comes to ICC: Implementation of new pre-screening and pre-assessment activities, using the questionnaire on each movie during the semester as a way to meaningfully assess students' progress towards improved ICC, and revamping assessment so ICC growth and connections might truly become a focal point for the course.

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<sup>18</sup> Original quotation reads as follows:

- El turismo tiene características propias del colonialismo, pues priva a la población local de su autonomía de decisión.
- [...] El turismo ofrece nuevas oportunidades y favorece el cambio social.
- Por una parte, el turismo aporta beneficios socioeconómicos, pero ocasiona dependencia y agravamiento de las diferencias sociales, por otra.
- [...] Rara vez se produce un auténtico entendimiento/comunicación en la interacción turista-residente. (pp. 247-248)

#### 4. Implications and Conclusion:

The implications of results are clear. If one is not meaningfully assessing for growth, one may not be focusing enough on it during instruction. Even if one has focused on it during instruction, there is no guarantee that it will occur without determining whether the instruction is appropriate. Finally, even if instruction seems to be appropriate, we have no indication whether it has engendered the desired results if it has not been assessed. Although students might show basic success regarding their understanding of the material, there is not a meaningful way to assess whether the actual ICC growth associated with border-crossing experiences has begun. In other words, the learning objectives that had anything to do with ICC were sold shorter than expected. It is a strong illustration that, even though we are teaching with a cultural component, if ICC is not addressed directly we cannot be certain that we affect the students as lifelong learners who will apply and continue to expand their growth in their own communities and beyond.

Rodrigo Alsina indicates that there are four main wishes supporting the everyday advancement of intercultural communication: “the desire to know” “the desire to learn” “the desire to break cultural barriers [... that ...] would force us to be willing to change,” and “the wish to recognize ourselves, know ourselves again, that is, rebuild our identity” (pp. 240-241).<sup>19</sup> In the next courses that include *El paseo*, I hope that we, as a class, will work hard to fulfill this expectation while avoiding as much as possible an ethnocentric look and cultural narcissism. In doing so, the class will help students keep a dynamic approach towards cultures perceived as different from one’s own while allowing for students to take an enriching intercultural *paseo* through their lives. Using the questionnaire that anchors this monographic number and the aforementioned changes will provide control data and hopefully allow for fruitful comparisons with data stemming from teaching experiences associated with other cultures.

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<sup>19</sup> Original quotations read: “el deseo de conocer” (p. 240), “el deseo de aprender” (p. 240), “el deseo de romper las barreras culturales [... que ...] nos obligue a estar dispuestos a cambiar” (p. 240) and “el deseo de re-conocernos, de conocernos de nuevo. Es decir, de reconstruir nuestra identidad” (p. 241).

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