

# Some Things Never Change: Attitudes about the Foreign in *Y tu mamá también* and *Rudo y Cursi*

Sheila Casalett

*Meredith College*

*Faculty Mentor: Kevin Hunt*

*Meredith College*

## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines representations of foreign elements as part of modern, or post-Revolutionary, Mexican national identity in two recent Mexican films, Y tu mamá también and Rudo y Cursi. While the filmmakers succeed in presenting modern realities about the pervasiveness of the foreign in Mexico, traditional attitudes prevail throughout. To facilitate interpretation of the films, the paper begins with an historical framework that includes a brief history of modern Mexican national identity, highlighting contributions by traditionalist scholars Vasconcelos and Paz as well as modern critics Bartra and Monsiváis. While Mexicans have historically denied foreign influence, going as far as to do so by legal means, the realities of globalization have made its removal from the country impossible and lend weight to the idea of a Mexican identity in transition. While both films demonstrate this reality, suggesting an inevitability of the impact of the foreign, the overall treatment of such elements suggests a negative, traditionalist outlook, alluding to Mexico's reluctance to adopt progressive attitudes in the face of its changing cultural landscape.*

Wetriednottomakeajudgment;wejusttriedtomakeanobservation.Forus,thismovieisaboutidentity...anobservationofacountrythatinour opinionisateenagecountrylookingforitsidentityas agrown-upcountry...Thistransitiontowardanew identityispartofwhatMexicoisgoingthroughnow. –AlfonsoCuarón, Director, Ytutamámátambién

In various interviews, Alfonso and Carlos Cuarón, the filmmakers behind *Y tu mamá también* (And Your Mother, Too) and *Rudo y Cursi* (Rude and Tacky), have signaled their intention to accurately reflect Mexico's national identity. In highlighting aspects such as a unique relationship with death, a cynical view of politics, and appreciable mestizo

(mixed European and indigenous) cultural influences, the Cuaróns perpetuate a carefully constructed idea about mexicanidad ("Mexicanness") that has been cultivated since the Revolution of 1910. To whatever extent they succeed in presenting these ideas as accurate reflections of mexicanidad falls outside the scope of this paper, however, as this study exclusively examines the role of foreign influence in Mexico as presented in each film. The analysis establishes that while the films do appear to reflect a changing Mexican identity in a general sense, they fail to let go of traditional sentiments with regard to the foreign.

This paper focuses on the foreign as a

key element to the presentation of Mexican national identity in each film. While some scholars (e.g., Hind, Acevedo-Muñoz, Saldaña-Portillo) have alluded to this facet of identity in their studies of *Y tu mamá también*, such consideration has yet to be given to *Rudo y Cursi*. Further, while extant analyses of *Y tu mamá también* tend to focus on a broader picture of national identity or on combinations of more well known themes (e.g., sex, class, gender roles), this study exclusively considers the lesser-acknowledged but foundational role of the extrinsic and its representations in each film.

A general understanding of the role of foreign influence in Mexico's modern, or post-Revolutionary, national identity is vital to best interpret such representations. As such, this paper first provides a brief historical overview, citing contributions made by leading Mexican cultural figures Vasconcelos, Paz, Bartra and Monsiváis and focusing their opinions about the foreign that have helped shape this vital feature of *mexicanidad*. This historical framework, as well as a brief introduction to each film that includes critical and popular reception, makes way for an informed analysis of how foreign elements are presented in each film and whether such representations take a traditional or modern view.

Just after the Revolution of 1910, in the early 1920s, Mexico's ruling elite identified the need to unify the country as a means of preventing further uprisings. To accomplish this, they set to constructing a new national identity that would give the country a shared sense of history and culture, incorporating the country's attitude toward the foreign as a major component. Since the Conquest, Mexico had always been influenced by external forces, first as a Spanish colony for 300 years and then as an independent nation greatly influenced by Western Europe and the United States. During the century between Independence and the Revolution of 1910, Mexico

welcomed foreign investment, and its elite maintained a long-standing tradition of sending their children to be educated in Europe and the United States. Under dictatorial president Porfirio Díaz, in power from 1876 to 1911, the government opened up large parts of Mexico to foreign investment, a major contributing factor to the Revolution. After thirty years of dictatorship and seeing their rights diminished and their lands stripped in favor of foreign investment and industrialism, Mexico's working classes revolted.

By the time the Constitution was ratified in 1917, the power elite had recognized a shared distrust of the foreign as a way to help unite the country. A common resentment toward the foreign would translate into a political rejection of it, a cause Mexicans of all races and cultures could embrace, despite their differences on socio-economic and other levels. Excerpts from the Constitution of 1917, as published by the Organization of American States, illustrate the effort:

...Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization and Mexican companies have the right to acquire ownership of lands, waters, and their appurtenances, or to obtain concessions for the exploitation of mines or of waters... Under no circumstances may foreigners acquire direct ownership of lands or waters within a zone of one hundred kilometers along the frontiers and of fifty kilometers along the shores of the country... (art. 27)

...Mexicans shall have priority over foreigners under equality of circumstances for all classes of concessions and for all employment, positions, or commissions of the Government in which the status of citizenship is not indispensable. In time of peace no foreigner can serve in the Army nor in the police or public security forces... (art. 32)

...Foreigners may not in any way participate in the political affairs of the country.

(art. 33)

Long since rid of Spanish imperialism and now also free from the foreign influence of the more recent past, Mexico would stand on its own for the first time.

To help lead the transition of the new national identity from idea to policy, Mexican philosopher and educator José Vasconcelos was appointed head of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in 1924. As head of the SEP, Vasconcelos oversaw not only the nation's education system but also the national arts and libraries, making him the *de facto* minister of culture. Perhaps the single most influential person in Mexico when it came to forming a nationally recognized cultural identity, Vasconcelos's philosophy about Latin American cultures became foundational to the SEP's work. This philosophy – outlined in his highly influential work *Larazacósmica* (The Cosmic Race) – touted Mexico as a standalone culture that was to reject “white” ways. North Americans, as Vasconcelos saw it, were “mere continuators of Europe in the region of the continent they occupied” (21). By contrast, Latin Americans were creating an entirely new race and culture inspired from within.

Under the direction of Vasconcelos, the SEP built schools, printed books at astonishing rates, implemented literacy programs among the poor and indigenous, started the Mexican Muralist movement, and initiated a revival of indigenous arts and music that ultimately flourished. In school, children were taught Mexican songs and dances while they learned about the great indigenous contributions to their culture and the mestizo leaders who helped shape their country into the sovereign nation it had become. Apart from acknowledging the Conquest and colonization, little mention was made of the tremendous foreign influences that had shaped the country in reality, making it seem as if Mexico's national identity were being re-discovered

rather than created.

The dissimulation on the part of Mexican elites vis-à-vis their personal involvement with foreign education and business went unchecked at the time, and the new national identity began to flourish. The lasting effects of this cultural reinvention can easily be spotted today in the murals that adorn public buildings, the “native” Mexican handicrafts that fill tourist markets, and the structure of Mexico's educational system. Much of the credit for this goes to Vasconcelos and the ideas set forth in *La raza cósmica*. Decades later, another work would come along that would prove instrumental to sustaining post-Revolutionary ideas about Mexicanidad through the twentieth century.

By the time Mexican Nobel laureate Octavio Paz first published his influential set of essays *El laberinto de la soledad* (The Labyrinth of Solitude) in 1950, he was already a well-known author, poet and culture critic. Today Paz's work – like that of Vasconcelos – figures into the education of all Mexican students in one form or another, indicating how influential these two men's ideas still are. The essays that comprise *El laberinto* examine different aspects of Mexican culture, all of which Paz asserts are influenced by an underlying sense of inferiority to white cultures that has been in the works since the Conquest. The “labyrinth of solitude” that gives the collection its title refers to a complicated and lonely history in which Mexican notions about culture have always been at odds with those of European-descended cultures, what Paz calls the “white” or “Western” cultures. Throughout, Paz demonstrates that the Vasconcelos-inspired, post-Revolutionary push to distance Mexico from the foreign other has had a lasting impact.<sup>1</sup>

1 In his chapter “The Day of the Dead,” for example, Paz distinguishes between attitudes about death in New York, London and Paris versus those prevalent in Mexico (57-58).

Among the several passages reinforcing the idea of Mexico as a stand-alone culture is Paz's exploration of the legacy of Malinche.<sup>2</sup> Her legacy, argues Paz, is two-fold: she is the traitorous tramp who betrayed her own people by interpreting for Cortés and living as his lover, and she is the betrayed mother-figure used and abused by her Spanish oppressors. The Mexican word *malinchista* also comes from the legend of Malinche. An insult for a person who prefers foreign things, *malinchista* labels Mexican xenophiles as little more than traitors, exhibiting an us-or-them mentality that again echoes Vasconcelos's ideas of separateness.

Mexican policy has also been arguably hostile toward the foreign since the Revolution, always giving preference to the internal over the external, in an effort to restrict outside influence. Some provisions have changed over the years, but many policies are as strictly adhered to today as they were in 1917. In May 2002, for instance, seventeen American college students and their professors saw their visas revoked and were on their way home one day after attending a political demonstration (Eskenazi). Though they insisted their interest in the demonstration was purely academic, the government quickly acted under the authority of Article 33 of the Constitution, which bars foreigners from participating in politics in any way and for any reason. Such cases of visa revocation and visitor expulsion make clear Mexico's continued take-no-chances approach to foreign influence in political matters and underscore Revolutionary Mexicans' effectiveness in making it a permanent part of the country's national identity.

Owing to more recent changes in Mexico's policy about land ownership,

opinions vary about whether this effort will see continued success, but it is clear that Mexico did see a significant decline in foreign investment between the Revolution and the 1990s and that Mexican identity is still closely associated with indigenous influences. The doubts that come into play regarding Mexico's continued cultural sovereignty primarily come from two significant changes that have taken place since the 1990s. In 1992, the government enacted constitutional reforms intended to increase foreign investment, and two years later saw the ratification of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. The combination of these two events continues to have a marked impact on Mexican culture. According to modern culture critics, these changes have led to a national identity in transition, lending weight to what scholars call a hybrid culture – a mix of urban and rural, traditional and modern, internal and external.

NAFTA has been cited as a major contributor to these changes in the Mexican cultural landscape and to the idea of an emerging hybridity, as much of Mexico's economy has become NAFTA driven, not to mention the accessibility of foreign goods such as fashion, music, movies and other cultural instruments. As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo points out, NAFTA has "radically altered...the character of Mexican sovereignty," a key component of Mexican national identity extending back to the Constitution of 1917 (753). Two of Mexico's foremost modern culture critics, Roger Bartra and Carlos Monsiváis, bolster this perspective.

Bartra, Mexican sociologist and anthropologist, argues that what was presented in the first half of the twentieth century as a unified Mexican identity cannot exist organically. Regional and cultural differences throughout Mexico make the idea of a unified, monolithic Mexican culture nothing more than a constructed myth, what

---

2 The chapter "Sons of La Malinche" discusses the legacy of Malinche, a legendary (but real) indigenous woman best known for her role in history as interpreter and lover to Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés.

he refers to as “un espejismo,” or “mirage” (Moore 498). Instead, he points to what he calls the “post-Mexican condition,” summed up by Josh Kun as a “post-NAFTA reconsideration of the basis of Mexican identity and re-visioning of Mexico as a multicultural constellation of multiple traditions that do not necessarily add up to a singular, integrated whole” (273).

Monsiváis, Mexican writer and culture critic, also promotes the view of a Mexican identity in transition toward hybridization. He argues that long-held ideas about Mexican identity have been broken down thanks in large part to globalization and a greater awareness of the plight of indigenous Mexicans, often calling attention to the whitewashing of history for which the education system under Vasconcelos is now criticized. In a 1999 interview with *The Journal of American History*, he asserts that the old ideas of nationalism ignored contemporary indigenous groups in favor of a unified Mexican front that rejected Americanization and idealized an indigenous past. Now, says Monsiváis, young Mexicans want the internet, technology and American fashions: “Youngsters are fed up with tradition... all of this is transforming and eroding what we used to know. And that is unavoidable” (qtd. in Thelen 618).

Given this background, there are currently two dominant, contrasting schools of thought regarding Mexican national identity, both of which are examined here in the context of the films *Y tu mamá también* and *Rudo y Cursi*. The words “traditional,” “modern” and “hybrid” are applied throughout to describe the dominant points of view. For the purpose of this analysis, “traditional” refers to a Vasconcelos-Paz model of Mexicanidad that rejects the foreign and views foreign influence in a negative light, while “modern” or “hybrid” synonymously refer to recent ideas about hybridity and an identity in transition that is more

accepting of the foreign, as supported by Bartra and Monsiváis.

Written by brothers Alfonso and Carlos Cuarón, and directed by the former, *Y tu mamá también* was released in Mexico in 2001 to critical acclaim and commercial success. Nominated for more than 40 awards – over half of which it won – today *Y tu mamá también* holds the distinction of being one of Mexico’s top-grossing films of all time. The basic plot centers around two Mexican best friends – Julio and Tenoch – and Luisa, the Spanish wife of Tenoch’s pretentious cousin. The boys, each about 18 years old, see their girlfriends off to Italy for the summer, and a few days later they meet Luisa at a family wedding. Because Luisa is new to Mexico, the three make small talk about things for her to do while her husband goes to a conference. In trying to impress the alluring 30-year-old, Julio and Tenoch tell her they know of an idyllic beach that hardly anyone visits and that she should join them on a trip there. A few days after this conversation, Luisa’s husband confesses infidelity by telephone, and the next day she desperately accepts the boys’ false invitation. Stunned by her sudden acceptance, they scramble to put together a road trip to the fictitious beach and the three take off in a matter of hours.

A couple of days into the trip, Luisa has sex with Tenoch, and Julio catches them in the act. He becomes terribly jealous, threatening his lifelong friendship with Tenoch. The next day, Luisa decides to even the score by also having sex with Julio, and the boys tell one another that they have slept with each other’s girlfriends. In the end, they discover that the fictitious beach they were looking for is actually real, the three participate in an alcohol-saturated ménage à trois, the boys discontinue their friendship, and Luisa is out of the picture for good, having died of cancer. Throughout the film, the boys’ relationship is tested and some recurrent Mexican themes of

sexuality and masculinity come into play.

Such a reductive summary substantiates the popular view of the film, which includes descriptions of it as a “lighthearted, risqué romp” (Puccio) and a film featuring “frivolous exploration of sexuality” (Keller). Other critics, meanwhile, deride it as little more than soft-core pornography, with one reviewer suggesting that potential viewers “skip this mild stuff and rent some honest-to-God porn” (Scribbs). These perceptions notwithstanding, Mexicanists view the film as a treasure trove of *mexicanidad*, as it showcases such well known Mexican themes as a prevalence of death, challenging gender roles, and the cultural disparities between urban and rural Mexican populations. Also notable in the film, as this paper examines, is the role of foreign influence on the characters and on Mexican culture in general.

*Rudo y Cursi*, released in Mexico in 2008, was written and directed by Carlos Cuarón, co-writer of *Y tu mamá también* and also opened to critical acclaim and commercial success. According to Cuarón, the ideas that would become *Rudo y Cursi* began to develop during promotional tours for *Y tu mamá también* (El Meikin, Cuarón). Because the films share several cast and crew members, as well as a few basic themes, *Rudo y Cursi* is often referred to as the follow-up film to *Y tu mamá también*, though the two share no characters or storylines (Arroyo). Both films, however, were written by Carlos Cuarón; both star Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna; both saw involvement by famed Mexican filmmakers Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo del Toro; and both also saw a concerted effort on the part of the filmmakers to accurately depict Mexican life and society.

The story follows two talented, soccer playing half-brothers who live and work on a banana plantation. Beto, the older of the two, is an unbeatable goalkeeper with a passion for soccer and gambling who,

thanks to his crude personality and playing style, becomes known as Rudo (“tough” or “rude”) Meanwhile, his brother Tato, a talented striker with a passion – but not talent – for music, is dubbed Cursi (“tacky” or “corny”) by the media, thanks to his silly post-goal dances and garish personal style. After a chance meeting with a scout who recruits them, the brothers rise to short-lived fame as soccer players, and it is against this backdrop that the viewer experiences the main themes of the brothers’ love-hate relationship and their rise and fall from working-class rancher to top-seeded soccer stars and ultimately back to rancheros. Also prevalent in this film, however, are the marked influences of the foreign over the characters, the story and Mexico itself.

Throughout both films, representations of foreign influence are evident, beginning with the character of Luisa in *Y tu mamá también*. Luisa’s symbolic connection to the Conquest in *Y tu mamá también* becomes clear almost immediately from the time she is introduced. Best friends Julio and Tenoch first meet her at a wedding held in a bullring, “[emphasizing] her Spanishness and the Mexican nation’s cultural heritage” (Acevedo-Muñoz 42). In a Pazian fashion that recalls the “labyrinth” that is *mexicanidad*, Luisa is presented throughout the film as a symbol of two seemingly oppositional roles: that of the Spanish conquistador and that of Malinche-as-mother. Luisa’s representation as Spanish agent of conquest lies in her Spanish nationality and surname of Cortés, which she shares with Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, famous for leading the conquest of the Aztec empire as well as for being Malinche’s lover.

It is Luisa who seduces the boys and captivates their imagination, sparking the actions that will ultimately destroy their friendship. In this regard, she is associated with the Spanish conquistadors whose aims were not initially understood by the Aztecs but who eventually toppled their

empire. This same explanation can be used to justify Luisa's representation of Maliche-as-mother: "she is the one who shows the boys their true desire... she is the one who births their consciousness..." and brings together old world and new (Kemet). And just as historically it is difficult to separate Cortés from Malinche – or Spain from Mexico – so is it difficult to separate them in the character of Luisa. Her death and the disintegration of Tenoch and Julio's friendship, however, create a final separation, suggesting Mexico's independence from Spain. Her influence does last, however, as the boys never speak again, indicating Spain's lasting impact on Mexico even after Independence.

That Luisa has had cancer throughout and later dies from it alludes to what Emily Hind calls the "contaminated character" whose removal is necessary to facilitate a "return to order" (108). This suggests the foreign influence that has helped shape modern Mexico, but whose interference has been halted, allowing for Mexico's own return to order, just as the framers of the Constitution of 1917 and identity architects like Vasconcelos sought to guarantee. In this case, a complete break has been made not only from Mother Spain, but also from the United States and the "contaminating" influence they exerted, allowing for an "independent national identity" (Hind 108). This sets Mexico free to stand on its own and, as writer-direct Alfonso Cuarón would say, to grow up.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of another foreign character, this time from Rudo y Cursi, no such break is made, though his end also suggests a negative view of foreign influence on the protagonists. The character of Darío "Batuta" Vidali enters Rudo y Cursi for the first time some ten minutes into the film as his cherry red Corvette has a blowout just outside the

town where Rudo and Cursi are headed to a soccer match. Here the narrator, none other than Batuta himself, says, "... and this... is where I enter into this story:"<sup>4</sup> Leaning on the car next to Batuta is a younger, voluptuous woman, who we soon find out is one of his many female companions. Throughout, he is featured with no less than six such women, all noticeably younger than he, all of different races, and all seemingly uninterested in anything deeper than being seen with him in public. Batuta's entry with the red Corvette is the first time any bright color is featured, an intentional move on the part of the filmmakers, as pointed out by Artistic Director Eugenio Caballero in the film's DVD making-of featurette. This classic American status symbol, and its noticeable contrast to the color scheme, serves to emphasize the excitement and modernity of the foreign. His many women, on the other hand, point to a fast-and-loose foreigner who lacks stability and takes advantage of the land in which he inserts himself.

At their first encounter, the blue-eyed Argentine – smiling enthusiastically and donning an aloha shirt and a straw fedora – asks the brothers for help, using decidedly Argentine vocabulary to explain that he has a flat tire. He uses the word *goma* for "tire" – which Mexicans use for "chewing gum" – so when Batuta asks if there is a *gomería* ("tire shop") where he can get the tire repaired, Rudo asks if he is planning to fix it with gum, as *gomería* in Mexico would be something akin to "chewing gum store." He chuckles at the thought as he asks, but it is also clear by his face that he does not understand the stranger's real meaning. Batuta explains himself and, with ample cash in hand, offers to "pay well" for their help, though unnecessarily. Cursi has welcomed his presence from the beginning

3 This phrasing borrows from Cuarón's comparison of Mexico to an adolescent looking for its identity, as noted in the opening quote of this paper.

4 Throughout this analysis, all of the English quotes from dialogue and narration in the films come directly from the films' subtitles on their respective DVDs.

and gladly leads him into town to get the tire repaired.

Batuta's appearance alone draws an obvious contrast between the well-to-do foreigner and the homely Mexican rancheros. The difference suggests a poorer, less-educated Mexico in comparison with a tantalizing, worldly foreigner. The mere foreignness of Batuta, underscored by the verbal exchange between the characters, also speaks to the difference between the protagonists and their new acquaintance. Batuta's noticeable Argentine accent and use of colloquialisms – and the brothers' failure to understand them – serve to emphasize Batuta's otherness and the cultural distance between Mexico and the foreign.

In the cases of both Luisa and Batuta – white outsiders<sup>5</sup> – the foreign characters lead the characters down a path of self destruction. In both films, a desire to experience their respective journeys already exists in the protagonists, but it is the foreign characters that help make these journeys possible and act as enablers for their behaviors. In *Y tu mamá también*, Luisa encourages the boys to experience their fantasies of having sexual relations with her while in *Rudo y Cursi*, Batuta opens the door to professional soccer for both men. In both cases, however, things turn out badly for the protagonists as well as for the foreigners. Julio and Tenoch are so embarrassed over their experience that they never speak again, and Rudo and Cursi end up back on the banana plantation, minus half a leg in Rudo's case. Luisa dies of cancer and Batuta loses everything, including the red Corvette – suggesting long-term negative

consequences of foreign influence on Mexico. But in contrast with Luisa in *Y tu mamá también*, the Rudo y Cursi character of Batuta will repeat his actions, perhaps several times.

Luisa, like Mother Spain and the Conquest, will continue to have a psychological impact on those whose lives she affected, but her death precludes the possibility of her repeating her actions, making her future direct influence limited in comparison with that of Batuta, who is alive and well. Luisa's influence – not unlike Spain's – remains strong, but at least she cannot not build upon it or continue with her actions in an active capacity. In Luisa's case, Mexico can begin to heal and move on while living with her memory. Batuta's influence, however, may continue actively and repeatedly for years to come, leaving Mexico to struggle with his continued presence. The last couple of scenes of *Rudo y Cursi* provide a final comment on this future.

While Rudo and Cursi stand peacefully on a beach singing Cursi's ranchera cover of "Quiero que me quieras" ("I Want You to Want Me"), Batuta is shown driving the countryside in a red Volkswagen Beetle that looks to be a 1980s model or older – still red, but definitely not the status symbol of the Corvette. The age of the car and its ubiquity in Mexico could be interpreted as a humbling of the foreign character, but its color and the events to come render it more a statement about the persistence of the foreign. Here Batuta-as-narrator explains that though he lost everything, he is still "gallivanting around" looking for "diamonds in the rough." The last scene shows him looking on with interest at a rural soccer field, not unlike the one where he found Rudo and Cursi, asking another onlooker who two of the players are. Upon being informed that those are the Morales twins, the best players in the state, Batuta looks directly into the camera with a mischievous

---

5 Though Luisa and Batuta are part of the Hispanophone world, it is worth noting that Luisa is wholly European and Batuta, while South American, is European descended, as indicated by his physical appearance and Italian last name. While both characters speak the same language as the Mexican protagonists, the two foreigners are part of what the Vasconcelos-Paz model of *mexicanidad* would call "white" or "European-descended" cultures.

smirk and raised brow, shrugging his shoulders as if to say, "Hey, what can I say?"

From this action, we instantly infer that Batuta will repeat his actions at least once more – and that possibly Rudo and Cursi were not his first exploits – indicating the active influence the foreign will continue to have on Mexico and the disruption it will cause, perhaps mirroring the inescapable post-NAFTA influence of the United States and suggesting negative future consequences. By contrast, the peace the brothers find together on the beach connotes a happier Mexico without the foreign, despite being unable to ascend economically, and gives an optimistic view of Mexicans' ability to overcome the devastation the foreign can bring if they can ever rid themselves of it.

Both films present other post-NAFTA aspects to Mexican culture, sometimes suggesting commentary and sometimes simply presenting it as a reality of Mexican life. One obvious commentary on this influence is found in the character of Chuy in *Y tu mamá también*. During a boat ride toward the protagonists' camp, the narrator explains:

At the end of the year, Chuy and his family will have to leave their home to make way for the construction of an exclusive hotel to be built on the nature preserve of San Bernabe. They will relocate to the outskirts of Santa Maria Colotepec. Chuy will attempt to give boat tours, but a collective of Acapulco boatmen, supported by the local tourism board, will block him. Two years later, he will end up as a janitor at the hotel. He will never fish again.

The boat then pulls up to shore where we see that the camp has been overrun by pigs, which the narrator explains had recently escaped from a nearby ranch. He tells us that fourteen of them will be slaughtered over the next two months and that three will cause an outbreak of trichinosis in attendees at a local festival.

That Chuy and his family will meet such a life-altering fate at the hands of developers speaks to the negative influence of foreign investors on local populations. Though the film does not specifically recognize the developers as foreign, it is reasonable to surmise that most of the money for the project will be, an intended result of the 1994 changes in the Mexican Constitution aimed at boosting foreign investment in the Mexican tourism industry and economy at large. It is also likely that a great many of the tourists visiting the hotel will be foreign as well, given Mexico's widely recognized status as an international tourist destination known for its beaches. In this scene, the developers – as well as perhaps the future tourists – are embodied in the pigs that take over the protagonists' humble camp and leave it an uninhabitable mess (Acevedo-Muñoz).

The detail that the hotel will be built on a nature preserve is notable as well, as here a parallel to Mexico at the time of the Conquest is apparent. Given that a nature preserve is generally an undeveloped swath of land set aside to preserve the indigenous flora and fauna of the area, this land parallels the ostensibly pristine Mexico of the Aztecs. That investors would be willing to destroy a nature preserve in the interest of economic gain suggests a foreigner who takes without considering the lasting local impact, further emphasized by the fact that Chuy will never fish again. Not only will he be forced to succumb to the foreigners on an economic level, becoming a janitor at the hotel, but he will be so affected by it that he will never fish again. This emotional and economic toll reflects the burden that such foreign investment has on Mexico's poorer populations, again suggesting an emotionally healthier Mexico when left on its own.

Further commentary is made in *Y tu mamá también* as well on the negative impact of post-NAFTA foreign influence as the narrator reveals the fates of the bricklayer

from Michoacán and Luisita, the girl represented by a stuffed mouse, both of whom are suggested to have died indirectly due to the impact of Mexico's post-NAFTA economy. As Saldaña-Portillo notes, several hundred thousand jobs were lost in Mexico, mostly in the agricultural sector, as a result of NAFTA, forcing an in-country migration of many rural workers into the cities as well as an influx of workers headed north to the United States and Canada looking for work (756). The bricklayer, a "migrant worker from Michoacán" whose body is not identified for four days, and Luisita, who "had died of a heat stroke... crossing the Arizona border with her parents, seeking a better life," represent both sides of this post-NAFTA migration, while their tragic deaths suggest the devastating impact such influence has on Mexico's working poor.

Rudoy Cursi, while less editorial in its post-NAFTA commentary, makes use of story line to suggest a certain inevitability of foreign influence in Mexico. The opening scene depicts a dirty, sweaty Cursi in soccer gear running through a banana plantation with a large, heavy bunch of bananas toward a truck. As he gets there, Rudo tells him not to run because he will bruise the bananas. "These are for export," he says. Here we are presented with a look into the reality of many Mexican lives. The filmmakers remove any doubt that this produce is for export, indicating the economy of the Mexican countryside. Later in the film, the protagonists both fail to make a lasting career in Mexican soccer and they return to the banana plantation, destined to live out their lives there, suggesting a stronghold of foreign interests that is unavoidable in the lives of many rural Mexicans.

Other indicators of the prevalence of foreign influence come in the many allusions in both films about the reality of the foreign in the daily lives of Mexicans. And while Ytumamá también places most of this

influence among the urban in 2001, Rudoy Cursi offers a more widespread view seven years later. Examining the soundtrack of Ytumamá también partly reveals its urban-only foreign influence, as nearly half of the songs featured in the film are from English-speaking artists, but in the film it is the urban teenagers who listen to this music. Once out of the city and in rural settings, all music becomes Mexican.

Several details about Tenoch and his family also suggest an elite Mexican class significantly impacted by foreign influence: Tenoch's choice of music, his intermittent use of English words where Spanish ones would be equally appropriate, his family's vacation to Tahoe, their stint in Vancouver when his father – the Harvard-educated Undersecretary of State – was forced into exile. These examples, especially in light of Tenoch's professed support of the Zapatista movement, suggest the extent to which Mexico's elite are still influenced by the foreign and recalls the post-Revolutionary leaders' similar ties to the foreign and thus hypocritical actions. Other details showing the prevalence of foreign influence include minor ones such as the teenagers eating Ruffles potato chips in the car, rather than a Mexican brand, and the boys' nicknames of Charolastra, which comes from their friend's misunderstanding the lyrics of an English-language song.

These details combine to lend weight to the idea of an increasingly hybrid Mexican culture. Taking a Bartra-Monsiváis view, it is the small details in particular, such as the potato chips, clothing and music, which reveal this hybridity. The foreign is so ingrained in the minutiae of daily life that it is almost unnoticeable and therefore a true part of everyday culture. Where eating Ruffles potato chips might have been rare in 1960s Mexico, now it is just one of several brands available that no one thinks twice about.

Rudo y Cursi also provides several

examples of the prevalence of foreign influence, though such influence extends into the rural as well as the urban. The theme song to the film is Rudo's Spanish-language ranchera-style cover of "I Want You to Want Me" by American band Cheap Trick. Early in the film, before moving to the city, Rudo asks his friends if they would rather him play "Tea for Two" or "Goodbye Girl" on the accordion, rather than a Mexican tune, of which there are many written for the accordion. Later, Cursi buys his girlfriend Maya a Hummer, Rudo's wife, Toña, sells WonderLife products back in their rural town, and nearly all of Rudo's gambling takes place at the club of a Mexican bookie-entrepreneur who provides what he calls "entertainment tipo Vegas" ("Vegas-style entertainment").

Several characters, such as the Rudo's bookie and Cursi's girlfriend, also use English words where Spanish ones would suffice, and Rudo goes to the store with his bookie looking specifically for Pampers, an American diaper brand. The bookie is under instruction from his wife not to get any other brand and ends up having to look at another store because the one he goes to first is out. Again these details are presented in passing, as part of everyday life, and serve as indicators of how pervasive this influence has become throughout

Mexico since just eight years prior, when such examples were revealed only in the urban settings of *Y tu mamá también*.

In the end, a study of both films in view of Mexico's post-Revolutionary identity building suggests that overall, the filmmakers portray foreign influence in a negative light and thus, cling to a traditionalist attitude about this aspect of Mexicanidad. While some representations of foreign influence in *Y tu mamá también* and *Rudo y Cursi* are presented in a neutral fashion, seeming to acknowledge a reality rather than commenting on it, there is still an overall sense of the negative impact of foreign influence on Mexico. The several tragic deaths, the dismantling of friendships and livelihoods, and the mostly self-serving nature of the foreign characters and entities presented in the films maintain a nationalistic, post-Revolutionary negative outlook regarding the influence of the foreign in Mexico. While not ignoring a modern, *Monsiváis-Bartra* style reality of a hybrid identity in the works thanks to unavoidable foreign influence, the *Cuaróns* ultimately present a dominant traditional *Vasconcelos-Pazian* attitude regarding the effects of such foreign influence. With this in mind, it is safe to say that at this time, while Mexico's reality may be changing, its perception of foreign influence has yet to follow suit.

WORKS CITED

- "A Conversation with Director Carlos Cuarón." Weekend All Things Considered 9 May 2009: Gale: Literature Resource Center. EBSCO. Web. 27 Sept. 2010.
- Acevedo-Muñoz, Ernesto R. "Sex, Class, and Mexico in Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*." *Film & History* (03603695) 34.1 (2004): 39-48. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 15 Sept. 2010.
- Arroyo, Chiara. "México en un platanero." *El País*. 29 June 2007. Web. 16 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cine/Mexico/platanero/elpepuculcin/20070629elpepicin\\_4/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cine/Mexico/platanero/elpepuculcin/20070629elpepicin_4/Tes)>.
- Bartra, Roger. *The Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Character*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992. Print.
- "Constitution of Mexico." OAS - Organization of American States: Democracy for Peace, Security, and Development. Web. 06 Apr. 2011. <[http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/en/mex/en\\_mex-int-text-const.pdf](http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/en/mex/en_mex-int-text-const.pdf)>.
- Cuarón, Carlos, Gael García Bernal, Diego Luna, and Alfonso Cuarón. "Rudo Y Cursi + In Conversation." Interview by Geoff Andrew. In *Conversation Series*. British Film Institute, 22 June 2009. Web. 14 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/live/video/29>>.
- Eskenazi, Stuart. "Mexico Expels Evergreen Students; Group Accused of Violating Political activities Ban." *The Seattle Times*. 4 May 2002. Web. 23 Apr. 2011. <<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=20020504&slug=expel04m>>.
- Hind, Emily. "Post-NAFTA Mexican Cinema, 1998-2002." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 23.(2004): 96. MasterFILE Premier. EBSCO. Web. 20 Nov. 2010.
- Keller, Louise. "Y Tu Mamá También Movie Review." *Urban Cinefile*. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.urbancinefile.com.au/>>.
- Kemet, Mateen O. "Y Tu Mamá También (And Your Mother Too, 2002): An Examination of Race and Class in Modern Mexico." *Runaway FilmworX*. 2009. Web. 12 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.runawayfilmworx.com/theory/Ytumama.htm>>.
- Kun, Josh. "File Under: Post-Mexico." *Aztlan* 29.1 (2004): 271-77. EBSCO. Web. 24 Mar. 2011.
- "El Meikin: Making-of Featurette." *Rudo y Cursi*. Dir. Carlos Cuarón. Perf. Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna. Cha Cha Chá Films, 2009. DVD.

Moore, M. "From Reflection to Refraction: Rethinking Paradigms of Cultural Interaction and Identity in Peru and Mexico." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 21.4 (2002): 490-506. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 6 Apr 2011.

Noble, Andrea. *Mexican National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Paz, Octavio. *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*. Trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, and Rachel Phillips Belash. New York: Grove, 1985. Print.

Puccio, John. "Y Tu Mamá También (Unrated Version) Movie Review." *DVD Town*. 18 Oct. 2001. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.dvdtown.com/reviews/>>.

*Rudo y Cursi*. Dir. Carlos Cuarón. Perf. Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna. Cha Cha Chá Films, 2009. DVD.

Saldaña-Portillo, María Josefina. "In the Shadow of NAFTA: Y tu mamá también Revisits the National Allegory of Mexican Sovereignty." *American Quarterly* 57.3 (2005): 751-777. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Web. 20 Nov. 2010.

Scribbs, Martin. "Y Tu Mamá También Movie Reviews." *Rotten Tomatoes*. 7 July 2004. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/y-tu-mama-tambien/>>.

Thelen, David. "Mexico's Cultural Landscapes: A Conversation with Carlos Monsiváis." *Journal of American History* 86.2 (n.d.): 613-622. *Literary Reference Center*. EBSCO. Web. 6 May 2011.

Vasconcelos, José. *The Cosmic Race: a Bilingual Edition*. Trans. Didier Tisdell. Jaén. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997. Print.

Williams, Phillip. "From Mexico to Hollywood and Back." *Movie Maker*. 3 Feb. 2007. Web. 22 Apr. 2011.

*Y tu mamá también*. Dir. Alfonso Cuarón. Perf. Gael García Bernal, Diego Luna, and Maribel Verdú. IFC Films and MGM, 2001. DVD.