

MEXICAN FILM

FROM NATIONAL TO TRANSNATIONAL AND GLOBAL

■ PABLO R. CRISTOFFANINI

FROM NATIONAL TO TRANSNATIONAL AND GLOBAL

– A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Second modernity,¹ supermodernity² or hypermodernity³ are concepts used to explain the deterritorialization of culture, the growing mobility of capital, finance and persons and the proliferation of non-places like super- and hypermarkets, international hotels, fast food chains and global icons like Lady Gaga and Shakira. These changes associated with late/super-/hypermodernity have turned the idea of the nation state as a closed sphere facing other spheres (nations) into an illusion, because globalization implies transnational actors with a variety of identities and access to power who have crisscrossed and undermined the nation. Transnational processes have existed for a long time, but under globalization they assume a number of new characteristics: a) their influence on the geographic space has never been as extensive, b) their influence on time is more stable and persistent and, c) the density of transnational relations and networks has increased. Ulrich Beck has elaborated the concepts of cosmopolitanism and globality to account for transnational processes that challenge not only the common vision of culture as an isomorphism of the nation but also to the world of academia, where the study of society and culture tends to be confined within the geographical boundaries of the nation.⁴

In the Age of Globality, everyday life and interactions across the borders of a nation have become heavily affected. Community, work and capital are not anchored in a particular place, and natural borders no longer exist.⁵ These changes have created a self-perception of transnationalism in areas such as media, consumption and tourism and a growing awareness of the transcultural “others” in our lives. The global cultural industries circulate at an unprecedented level, and we may notice an increased number and force of transnational actors, agree-

¹ Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2005, pp. 1-113.

² Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, London: Verso 1995.

³ Gilles Lipovetsky & Jean Serroy, *La Pantalla Global. Cultura Mediática y Cine en la Era Hipermoderna*, Barcelona: Editorial Anagram 2009.

⁴ George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill 2011, pp. 556-558.

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1998, p. 77.

ments and institutions. The premise of the first modernity that we live in closed nation-states is no longer usable. In second or late modernity, people are not rooted in an already given cosmos, but have their roots in different cities, territories, ethnicities, hierarchies, nations, regions, etc. Zygmunt Bauman affirms that in globalization, there are winners and losers in terms of a struggle for space. The capacity of mobility has become the most important factor regarding stratification in a global world. The winners in this struggle are business and academic elites (or other elites) who are able to move freely and unhindered across borders. They can settle wherever they like and are welcomed. Often they live in (using the terminology of Marc Augé) “non-places”: hotels or gated communities segregated from the losers. The losers are those who are not able to move from the crowded spaces, or when they move, they have been forced to do so, often without choosing the place of destination. They are not welcomed, and they suffer the consequences of globalization rather than experiencing them.

According to Anthony McGrew, a new form of global capitalism (late or transnational) has extended and deepened its reach across the globe.⁶ We are experiencing a simultaneous process of transnational integration and national disintegration, and those who are excluded or resist these transformations become further marginalized. The most visible agents of this process are the transnational corporations, which are causing production, trade and finance to become increasingly organized on a transnational basis to reap the highest profits in an increasingly competitive world. The idea of sovereign national states with their own economies and cultures that interact with each other is not a realistic picture of the Age of Globality. To illustrate this thesis, it might be mentioned that a significant part of the industrial production of Brazil is generated by German industries. In fact, the largest German industrial town today is Sao Paulo.⁷

If we cast a glance at Mexico, we can affirm that Mexico and the USA today are not two separate nations with their own cultures, economies and politics. Capital, finance, people, images, information and products are moving permanently across borders. Decades ago, anthropologists wrote about the way in which Mexican workers who have immigrated to the USA still contribute financially and participate socially in their original communities. In fact, they constitute a community across national borders.⁸

In Mexico, as a result of neoliberal reforms, the State’s support of film production fell sharply from the 1980s and onwards. Nevertheless, those reforms also opened new ways of making films that take advantage of new transnational spaces (such as those arising from economic blocs and regional markets like

⁶ Anthony McGrew, “A Global Society?” in Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (eds.), *Modernity and Its Futures*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2001, pp. 62-116.

⁷ McGrew, “A Global Society?”, p. 80.

⁸ James Clifford, *Itinerarios Transculturales*, Barcelona: Gedisa 1999, p. 301.

NAFTA or the European Union) and constitute an answer to the changes and transformations generated by globalization. Larger, faster and more efficient movements of people, images and information have created new opportunities for filmmakers from the former periphery. They are under pressure to produce for global markets, but few of them have the access, means and opportunities to do so and to become part of the global culture.

The new ways of film making allow us to better understand the importance of transnationalism for the production of cultural objects, the dialectics between local and global, and the tensions created between the production of films for a national market and those for global audiences. To elucidate these questions, I wish to follow the career of Alejandro Gonzales Inárritu (AGI) and analyze and interpret two films he has created which are important for the issues that are central to this article: *Amores Perros* (2000; *Love's a Bitch*) and *Babel* (2006). As has been written, AGI is "one of the most powerful voices in the cinema of the new century".⁹ His career and the content of these films also constitute an outstanding example of the way in which the process described above works. Therefore, the aim of the present article is not so much to use the process of transnationalism and globalization to better understand AGI's path and films but rather the reverse: to use the path of AGI and his film as empirical material to better understand how transnationalism and globalization work today. For these reasons, the article is within the tradition of cultural studies and especially sociology and the study of cinema rather than aesthetics studies.¹⁰

The career of IGS is closely linked to the careers of two other Mexican directors, producers and screenwriters: Guillermo del Toro and Alfonso Cuarón. The first is the director of (among others) *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), *Blade 2* (2002), *Hellboy* (2004 and 2008), *El Laberinto del Fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth*; 2006); the second of *Tu Mamá Tambien* (2001; *And Your Mother Too*), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2001) and *Children of Men* (2005). These three are the most powerful filmmakers in Mexico today and they are, above all, transnational and global. Because of their global impact, they have acquired a dominant position in the national Mexican film industry.

MEXICAN FILMMAKERS

– FROM NATIONAL TO TRANSNATIONAL AND GLOBAL

A number of circumstances facilitated the rise of filmmakers such as those mentioned in my introduction. It is not so that in the past we could not find Mexican filmmakers with a global impact. We may refer, for instance, to Alfonso Arau and

⁹ Ana Moya & Gemma López, "Alejandro Gonzáles Inárritu, Celestino Deleyto and María del Mar Ascona", in *Miscelánea: a Journal of English and American Studies*, No. 44, 2011, p. 157.

¹⁰ Jean-Anne Sutherland & Kathryn Feltety, *Cinematic Sociology: Social Life in Film*, 2010, pp. 1-18.

his film *Como Agua para Chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*; 1992), a very popular movie at an international level that presents a magic realistic vision of Mexican culture. However, there are some significant differences between previous filmmakers like Arau and those of the present, represented by Guillermo del Toro, Alfredo Cuarón and AGI. To illustrate this, the variety of topics their films deal with might be mentioned; many of them are not related to issues from Mexico or Latin America. For example, *Hellboy* movies directed by Guillermo del Toro deal with a fictional character based on a comic written by Mike Mignola. The plots of these films are apocalyptic battles against the forces of darkness represented by mythological creatures or Nazis obsessed with occultism as a weapon to defeat the Allies. In spite of his demonic nature, Hellboy fights for the forces of good. Cuarón, for his part, has directed *Children of Men* (2006), a futurist film localized in a fragmented London with warring nationalist sects and violence. Furthermore, he directed the third film in the successful Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, in 2003.

However, the most important difference between previous Mexican filmmakers and Cuarón, Del Toro and AGI is the fact that the latter share with Hollywood's industry and American independent cinema a number of features that attract global and young audiences in particular. The central question is how it has been possible for Mexican filmmakers to develop a style, narrative and practice that appeal to global audiences, and to attract the attention of the American film industry? A number of factors facilitated their entry into the global cultural arena where, as I will demonstrate, they have contributed with new perspectives.

The circumstances which made possible the emergence of transnational and global filmmakers from Mexico were linked to a range of changes at a macro level. Here I will focus in particular on the changes in discourses about economy and politics inside Mexico. These changes are closely linked to the breakdown of the communist block and to globalization, which means (amongst other things) the penetration, without (or with few) restrictions, of western capital and industries into countries from the margin and the hegemony of neoliberal ideology.¹¹ Both factors constituted the main drive for considerable changes in the society, economy, politics and culture of Mexico and the rest of the countries of Latin America, with Cuba as a partial exception.¹²

As is well known, during most of the last century, Mexico was ruled by the political party that emerged from the revolution (1910-1920), the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). All of the presidents of Mexico until 2000 were members

¹¹ Brent Smith: "Re-narrating Globalization: Hybridity and Resistance in *Amores Perros*, *Santitos* and *El Jardín del Edén*", *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 2 (3) 2010, pp. 268-269.

¹² Patricio Silva, "The new political order in Latin America: Towards technocratic democracies?", *Latin America Transformed: Globalization and Modernity*, London: Arnold 1999, pp. 51-65.

of this party. They based their legitimacy on nationalism as an ideology, and an important ingredient of this ideology was the contrast between Mexico and the United States that helped to develop a sense of identity and unity among Mexicans. Like the majority of the countries of Latin America, Mexico implemented the so-called import substitution policy, to strengthen national development. From the 40s to the 60s of the last century, Mexico experienced a time of political and economic growth and stability. Urban industrial activities became more substantive than farming. One of the conditions that allowed the substitution of the import of manufactured products was a series of rates and regulations protecting domestic industry from cheaper and often higher quality products from industrialized countries like the United States.¹³

From the 40s to the late 50s of the last century, under the social, political and economic circumstances which I have outlined, Mexican cinema experienced a boom, becoming a major cultural export industry primarily to the Spanish-speaking world. Prominent instructors, singers and actors enjoyed strong popularity not only in Mexico but also in Spain and Latin America. Singers and actors such as Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, actresses like Dolores del Río and María Félix, comedians like Cantinflas and Tin Tan became stars in the Spanish world.¹⁴ From this Golden Era, The Mexican cinema has influenced the image of Mexico abroad. The films from the period spread some of the stereotypical images that became associated with Mexico: the big “sombrosos”, “mariachi” musicians and environments with cactuses. Furthermore, in this period a number of important mythologies from Mexican national culture were created and disseminated: rural innocence, the importance of the neighborhood, the Revolution, the strong “macho” and the submissive woman.¹⁵ In addition, Mexican cinema and the radio created an imagined community in which all Mexicans could recognize themselves above all the ethnical, social and regional divisions.

A number of changes followed the downfall of this Golden Era. Fewer movies were produced and the audiences’ enthusiasm for Mexican movies decreased. The nationalist discourse that had constituted the legitimacy of the state’s financing and support of national film production lost its hegemony. Some of the reasons for this were the failure of the governments to face up to the economic challenges, political and social struggles for democratization and the economic situation at the global level. In Latin America, the 1970s and the 1980s witnessed

¹³ Meyer L. & Vázquez J.Z. Meyer, *The United States and México*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1985, pp. 53-154.

¹⁴ Germán Martínez Martínez, “The Changing National Identity in Contemporary Mexican Cinema”, in Nico Carpentier & Erik Spinoy, *Discourse Theory and Cultural Analysis*, New Jersey: Hampton Press 2008, p. 101.

¹⁵ Christina L. Sisk, “Entre el Cha Cha Chá y el Estado: El cine nacional mexicano y sus arquetipos”, *Contra corriente: A Journal on Social History and Literature in Latin America*, 8 (3), 2011, p. 165.

the failure of the popular and nationalist experiments and their substitution by the discourses and projects of neoliberal ideas. In Mexico, the neoliberal project was implemented by three administrations (1982-2000).¹⁶ As in other parts of Latin America, this meant that the State relinquished its important role of promoting economic development and social welfare. Instead, the economies were oriented outward, towards international and global markets. For that purpose, liberalization and deregulation of production, commerce and finance were implemented. Furthermore, in 1994 Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and the United States. As a consequence of this agreement, the Mexicans' vision of the United States began to be transformed. Formerly an enemy or an imperialist power, it could now be seen as (at least in the eyes of Mexican power elites and among the middle class) an economic partner. These changes created a new context for Mexican film industry and filmmakers. To begin with, the government of Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) supported not only nationalist or art films in the same way as the former governments had done, but also entertainment movies. Focus on the audiences and pleasure became key words. This is the context which allowed the emergence of filmmakers such as Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro and AGI.

I intend in the following to focus on the path of Alejandro Gonzales-Iñárritu from Mexico to Hollywood. I wish to do this because his trajectory contains the most important issues I have mentioned until now: the development of a peculiar style that attracted attention from American film industry, the production of a movie, *Amores Perros*, that deals with Mexican issues but was able to attract globalized audiences, his later production in Hollywood of movies like *Babel*, which deal with globalization and present citizens from other nations from a different perspective than the supposed universalism of Hollywood, and finally, a transnational movie, *Biutiful*, a Spanish-Mexican coproduction which depicted the dark side of globalization and big cities, in this case Barcelona. I will also address the discussions that have taken place about the form and content of his movies: traditional values in a new form or transgressions?

I will begin by outlining some factors that made *Amores Perros* (Love's a Bitch) an international success. This movie, which was released in 2000, has been described as a resounding hit in Mexico and abroad.¹⁷ The film grossed 5.4 million dollars in the United States alone and was screened in 187 movie theatres of this country, where over a million people saw it.¹⁸ Many factors contributed to the success of a film like *Amores Perros*. Authors such as Martinez contend that this

¹⁶ Francisco Salazar, "Globalización y Política Neoliberal en México", *El Cotidiano*, 20 (126), 2004, pp. 5-12.

¹⁷ German Martinez Martinez, "The Changing National Identity", p. 97.

¹⁸ Toby Miller, "National Cinema Abroad: the new international division of cultural labor, from production to viewing", in Natasa Durovicova & Kathleen Newman (eds.), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, New York: Routledge 2010, p. 148.

was mainly due to changes in social conditions and discourses on national identity in Mexico. Ana Lopez, for his part, stressed the fact that the imperatives of producing for global markets are also enforced in the world of cinema. In my opinion, a combination of both processes is in play, but undoubtedly, the driving force that led to changes like those in question here was globalization. This has created transnational spaces in which the new Mexican filmmakers could develop. Thus, the experiences of AGI are related to the emergence of a new type of filmmaker linked to social changes promoted by the Mexican governments and inspired by neoliberal ideology. Inárritu is not a schooled filmmaker but comes from the communication industry in Mexico. He began his career in 1980 as a radio speaker and disk jockey for a commercial radio station in Mexico City, and with great success. Working in this station, WFM, AGI appealed to a young audience with music in English, and disseminated a variety of eclectic musical styles and rock among young Mexicans. For five years, this radio station was the most popular in Mexico City aimed at young audiences. In addition, to generate the interest of audiences, he created oral narratives and characters like *El Pavo Asesino* (*The Killer Turkey*) transmitted during Christmas. There were complete stories, but with suspense that made the audience wait for the next Christmas for the outcome. After that, AGI was appointed creative director at Televisa, a Mexican mass media company and the largest in Latin America and in the Spanish-speaking world. He was responsible for creating an image for a new Channel to the youth with cartoons, movies and series from the USA. In carrying out this work, he developed the competence to create commercials with narratives that lasted a few seconds and conveyed the message quickly. This experience influenced his style and connected him with the youth of Mexican cities, and contributed to the development of a new media discourse in Mexico. Finally, in the 1990s, AGI created Zeta Films, which had three branches: audio, film, and advertising.

The films of AGI have experienced a huge success in Mexico and abroad, and they exert enormous influence on national cinema. Nevertheless, researchers do not agree on how to evaluate his influence. Some of them highlight his innovative capacity and speak about a turning point as regards previous Mexican cinema, especially with the tradition of magic realism, others find that the changes AGI introduced are of a formal character, whereas the content of his film reproduced Mexican mythologies from early literature and cinema, and represents a new form of Latin American exoticism which appeals to global audiences. His first film, *Amores Perros* (*Love's a Bitch*), was indeed a new concept in many ways. For instance, it was totally privately financed, which meant that AGI was not bound by the restrictions applying to movies financed by the state. The film was also the most expensive movie in the history of Mexican cinema until that date. The high production costs led to a number of strategies of how to retrieve the money invested. For example, the music of the film was entrusted to the most popular rock band in Mexico, with fans especially from the middle class youth, who are

fond of music in English. After the premiere of the movie, a CD was released with the soundtracks and other tracks inspired by the film, and this became a commercial success. D'Lugo wrote about this feature of *Amores Perros*, highlighting that the soundtrack created, in a firm way, a transnational context, and that the transnational context of the movie created a visual representation of Mexico not as an exotic, isolated other place but an urban area familiar to audiences outside of Mexico.¹⁹

Other features of the film were also conceived to attract global audiences, for example the dynamic and fast pace. The filming strategy reflects the trace of the influence of MTV and is closer to the video clip than to the slow pace of the Mexican auteur cinema. The plot does not consist of a linear story but of three episodes intertwined by a formal event: a car crash. This structure came to characterize the next movies by AGI made in Hollywood: *21 grams* and *Babel*. This is a style that is easy to recognize since it was popularized by Tarantino in *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* and used later by Paul Haggins in *Crash* (2004). Another innovation in this movie was the localization. While previous Mexican movies financed by state institutions had a tendency to represent the agrarian Mexico with its people and traditions, *Amores Perros* constitutes a frame picture of one of the biggest cities of the world: the overcrowded, chaotic and colorful Mexico City. In spite of all these innovative features of *Amores Perros*, there has been some debate about the film content. Some critics find that the content of this film is conservative, and point to some features. Violence, for instance, which is the central narrative of the film, is essentialized, i.e. presented as something natural and constitutive of Mexico and Mexicans, blurring the political and social transformations (the breakdown of the paternalistic post-revolutionary state and the emergence of a neoliberal and transnational Mexico) that are some of the causal factors behind this new revival of violence. Furthermore, a recurring theme in the film is adultery, which has negative consequences for the characters from all the social groups involved. There is no distinction in the movie between the different causes that lead people to commit adultery or to leave their families. Finally, a main character, a former revolutionary, is imprisoned because of a bomb attack, and later becomes a criminal, a paid assassin, and in a country where the leftist movement did not generally follow a path characterized by revolutionary violence.²⁰

I find this part of the critique to be justified, but we may argue that in *Amores Perros*, the effects of globalization and the application of neoliberal ideology are present. For instance, the car crash links together people from different social groups; those who are well integrated in the world created by globalization and

¹⁹ D'Lugo, M.: "Amores perros (Love's a Bitch)" in M. Díaz López & A. Elena (eds.), *The Cinema of Latin America*, London, New York: Wallflower Press 2003, p. 227.

²⁰ Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, "Amores Perros: violencia exótica y miedo liberal", *Casa de las Américas*, No. 240, 2006, pp. 1-18.

those who are not. The latter issue is a central theme in Bauman's book about Globalization and its consequences. The movie also depicted the different faces of Mexico, one in which skyscrapers and European luxury cars dominate the landscape and, at the other end, the world of popular suburbs. The fact that *Amores Perros* represents Mexico City as a place where people are living together, often without contact with others, but in different conditions, reveals the aporia of the neoliberal version of globalization with a narrative in which globalization means better conditions for all people. Even more important is the fact that the movie itself is a brilliant expression of the way in which culture works in a transnational world. It is a hybrid cultural object with elements from the Mexican literary and film traditions and all the influence of American popular culture which I have mentioned.

The next film produced and directed by Iñárritu, *Babel* from 2006, was filmed in the United States and famous American movie stars, Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, are principal characters in the movie. This is a strategy that movies from Europe and Latin America have begun to adopt in order to reach global audiences. *Babel* had its premiere in Cannes in 2006 and received many awards, was nominated for six Oscars and won one for Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Picture. The film weaves together four stories that take place in the U.S., Mexico, Morocco and Japan. The story that takes place in Morocco involves an American couple (Pitt and Blanchett) who, in order to overcome their problems and lack of communication, visit the country with other American tourists in a bus. They have, as Bauman suggests, the liberty to move where they want in search of pleasures and experiences. But they become totally dependent on the locals when the woman is shot (by accident) by a Moroccan shepherd boy with a rifle that his father received as a gift from a Japanese tourist. Because of their situation, the couple are forced to communicate with the locals, and in spite of all the barriers between them, they succeed, especially due to the locals who help them, showing empathy and interest. This attitude is in contrast with that of the other American tourists, who consider the locals (in Morocco) as material and cultural inferiors, regarding them with suspicion and abandoning the couple because of their fear of being attacked by the locals.

In the United States, a Mexican nanny is taking care of the couple's two children. She is invited to attend the wedding of her son, but the children's parents cannot come back in time, due to the accident. The nanny takes the children to the wedding in Mexico. A nephew of the nanny drives them back to the USA under the influence of alcohol and gets into trouble with the police at the border. He escapes from them and leaves the nanny with the two children in the desert in a desperate situation. She manages to get help and rescue the children but is accused of taking them illegally to Mexico, and then the nanny is expelled from the States, in spite of the fact that she has been working there for sixteen years and has taken care of the children all their lives, totally dedicated and sacrificing her own family.

The only help she receives from the parents, the American couple, is that they will not prosecute her. *Babel* paints a fresco of hypermodern globalization, which is conveyed by the narrative style and by the fact that the stories take place in three different continents: Africa, America and Asia. It diverges from the classical Hollywood movie and has similarities with Tarantino movies or other American movies such as *Crash*. Weaving together four stories around a rifle shot, it shows how globalization works and the different effects it has on the people from the center and those in the margins, tourists and vagabonds, using the terms coined by Bauman.

The family of the shepherd in Morocco experienced the brutality and violence of the local police, the father is beaten, and one of the children is killed. The American couple is rescued, in spite of their communication problems. The most advanced transportation and the best medical technology are finally made available to them. In America, the Mexican nanny, who has served Americans for sixteen years, loses everything, due to a situation which she is not responsible for. Those who cannot move (the family of shepherds, the people in the village in Morocco) suffer the negative side a globalization. The capacity to move and the ways in which to do so are the most important factors behind social stratification in the global world, writes Bauman. This is also true for the nanny who immigrates to the USA, but she belongs to the transnationals from below (immigrants) and not to the top like the rich American tourists. The nanny symbolizes in the movie the vagabond, in the terminology of Bauman. She has been forced to move and get work in the USA, living in Mexico in an environment of uncertainty and without economic possibilities. She (as opposed to the tourist) is not wanted and welcomed. She has been tolerated and suffers unjustly the consequences of decisions made by her employers, "the tourists".

In this way, *Babel* is an artistic illustration of the thesis of Beck, and Bauman. But *Babel* depicted not only the way in which we are interconnected in the global world and the consequences of neoliberal globalization for people from the margins, it also provides us with an understanding of the communication problems that people from the center can experience, exemplified by Chieko, the hearing and speech impaired girl from Japan. Despite the highly advanced technology and communication techniques of the advanced Japan, she feels isolated and tries to escape her situation by offering sex. She is isolated, not despite the technology, but especially because in a highly economic and technological society like the Japanese, with high performance requirements, there is no room for people who, in one way or another, are different from the normal.

Through the above examples, *Babel* constitutes a representation of barriers of all types, physical, linguistic, ideological, social and cultural, etc., which keep people separated from each other in a world that it is becoming still more interconnected because of globalization.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined the path of Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu and his films as outstanding examples of the way in which culture, society and economy work in the era of second or super modernity. First, the ideas of Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony McGrew on the closely associated phenomena of transnationalism and globalization were outlined. The approach of these theorists demonstrates the weakening of the Nation-State and the development of networks across borders to allow the free and unimpeded movement of goods, capital, finance, and, to some extent, people. The effect of these transformations is that if we wish to understand cultural and social processes in more advantageous ways, it is better to do so from a transnational perspective. The ideas of the theorist mentioned have given us a framework within which we can examine Mexican cinema in recent decades, using mainly the path and two films of the globally renowned filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, who along with two other filmmakers, Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro, have come to constitute the hegemonic trio of Mexican film production by being transnational and having a global impact.

We have analyzed how the Mexican cinema was fostered by the state for most of the last century with the aim of strengthening the nationalist ideology that legitimized governments after the revolution. The film was instrumental in creating a national identity above all the huge social, regional and ethnic differences in Mexico. Furthermore, during the so-called Golden Age, Mexican cinema achieved great success and acceptance in the Spanish-speaking countries providing themes, images, shapes, genres and myths which, even today, are associated with Mexico. However, in line with global processes and political transformations in Latin America (the transition from national and popular to neoliberal governments), the state's role in film production declined along with the public interest in the types of films made with state funding. Mexico and other nations of the continent became global and increased dramatically their economic and cultural exchanges with the world. The North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) formed in 1994 between Canada, Mexico and the United States resulted in the increased traffic of goods, products and people between the latter two nations. Filmmakers like AGI, del Toro and Cuarón then emerged in a well-defined context. This was a context in which the role of the state financing of films was diminishing and where the state began to require being involved in considerations regarding the dimensions of pleasure and entertainment and the taste of audiences in state-financed films. We have to add the increasing participation of Mexico in the globalization and the emergence of transnational spaces. Filmmakers such as those mentioned are becoming aware of the possibility of substantially higher profits in producing films for a global reconfigured movie market driven by global tastes and the greater prestige associated with this market compared with production only for a national or regional market.

The new conditions led filmmakers such as AGI to seek private funds for his movies, which at the same time became (*Amores Perros*) the most expensive movies in Mexican history. What is new and unique is that he produces and directs movies which deal with Mexican issues and can appeal especially to young global audiences because of their narrative style, structure and music; in other words, he is able to handle the language of global cinema. Therefore he has succeeded in attracting the attention of American film industry and get invitations to direct and/or produce movies that do not deal with Mexico but with narratives that have a global appeal, like *21 grams* (2003) with the participation of famous American movie stars as Sean Penn, Benicio del Toro and Naomi Watts.

Amores Perros explores the subject of violence in Mexico City. The revival and escalation of violence have been linked to the decline of the post-revolutionary paternalistic and nationalist political and social system because of the impact of the forces of globalization and neoliberal ideology. The movie shows the uneven effects of globalization, depicting how different life conditions are for those people who are well integrated into globalization and those who are not. Furthermore, these effects can also be observed through the scenes that focus on the supermodernity of the city with skyscrapers and European luxury cars that dominate the landscape and, at the other end, the world of poor densely popular suburbs.

In its form and content, *Babel* has as central issues globalization and its human consequences. The story takes place in four different locations (Morocco, The United States, Mexico and Japan), but these stories are woven together. The actions of the characters in one place have profound effects on the lives of other persons located in distant continents. As we have suggested, *Babel* is, in many respects, an artistic illustration of Bauman's ideas about the inequalities and asymmetries of globalization: Tourists with their ability to move and choose in order to experiment with new experiences, and the locals and vagabonds who suffer the effects of globalization and the actions of the tourists. On the one hand, the Japanese tourist and, on the other, the Moroccan shepherds. On the one hand, the American couple as tourists and, on the other, the Mexican nanny who works for them. Beyond that, *Babel* voices a critique of supermodernity through one of its characters, the hearing and speech impaired girl from Japan.

The influence of Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu has been criticized, due the content of his movies. It has been argued, for example, that his movies show the fears from the Mexican middle class after the downfall of the PRI and its paternalistic state, and that they sell an exotic image of violence in Mexico that will satisfy the tastes and expectations of global audiences. I have provided evidence, on the basis of my analysis of *Amorres Perros* and *Babel*, that the films by AGI sometimes show traditional and negative images of the marginalized, but this is a feature that is linked to the director's use of Mexican melodrama. Nevertheless, the two movies both contain a critique of globalization and neoliberal ideology, since we see the world and society from the perspective of those who are well integrated

into the global economy and culture and those who are marginalized for different reasons: social, economic, linguistic, cultural or physical. In this sense, his movies are artistic illustrations of the theses of great sociologists and researchers like Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman and Marc Augé. Thus, AIG's movies provide an excellent laboratory for studying the second or super modernity and globalization.

PABLO R. CRISTOFFANINI

LEKTOR

INSTITUT FOR KULTUR OG GLOBALE STUDIER

AALBORG UNIVERSITET

ABSTRACT

Mexican Film: From National to Transnational and Global

The Mexican state played a central role in the development of a national film industry for the major part of the last century. Films should promote the nationalist ideology on which the post-revolutionary government built its identity. Thus movies contributed significantly to the creation of a national identity which symbolically reconciles all Mexicans despite of the enormous social, ethnic and regional differences. This article shows that globalization and neoliberal reforms, which among other things meant a withdrawal of state support for cinema, created new conditions for film production. These forces opened for Mexico (with the formation of NAFTA in 1994) ways for a new type of filmmakers who create and produce films aimed at global audiences. First, the article present some core ideas on globalization and transnationalism, which illustrate the processes that have weakened the nation state, making it more appropriate to study cultural and social processes from a transnational or global perspective. Then the article follows the career of Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu as a filmmaker. With *Amores Perros* (*Love's a Bitch*, 2000) he created a film that, although it is about violence in Mexico City, appealed to a global audience by using a transnational language when it comes to music, narrative and pace. This film gave him access to the American film industry and he could now produce and direct films such as *Babel* (2006). The article argues that these films represent relevant and innovative, social theory about transnationalism and globalization. Because of his success as a transnational and globally oriented filmmaker, Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu (together with Guillermo del Toro and Alfonso Cuarón) now has a dominant position in Mexican film production. This situation has sparked discussions about the relationship between national and global films in Mexico, and the article also addresses these debates.