

POLITICAL AND PERSONAL: PILAR TÁVORA AND CINEMA OF ROMANI REEXSISTENTIA*

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INTRODUCTION: THE DECOLONIAL OPTION AND CINEMA OF REEXSISTENTIA

Gypsy¹ imaginaries have played a key role in cinema throughout its history and continue to feature in films that have earned critical acclaim both in Spain and internationally, such as *Carmen & Lola* (*Carmen y Lola*, Arantxa Echevarría, 2018), *Between Two Waters* (*Entre dos aguas*, Isaki Lacuesta, 2018), and *Last Days of Spring* (*La última primavera*, Isabel Lamberti, 2020). However, members of this racialised community have traditionally been studied as objects of an external gaze rather than as narrators of their own stories on screen.² This reality, which reflects a broader historical process of colonialism that is both internal (through extermination, marginalisation, and silencing) and internalised (in the bodies and subjectivities of people labelled *barbarian* or *primitive*),³ has been underpinned by a colonialist discourse that has foreignised the *Rroma* in their own homelands, on

the assumption that they have always remained outside national or global dynamics. This process, combined with the *gendering* of racialised bodies, has meant that the predominant “gypsy woman” stereotype constructed by white feminists is characterised by submissiveness: “When, as a result of the activism of the Western feminist movement, women begin gaining a voice as individuals with civil and political rights and integrating into the labour market [...], the Other-woman cannot be a public figure of relaxed sexual morals; she must be reinvented” (Filigrana, 2020: 127).

However, although the stereotype is the most visible face of symbolic antigypsism,⁴ it is important to acknowledge that there are forms of ethnocentric rhetoric that “can treat complex cultural phenomena as deviant without recourse to a character stereotype” (Shohat & Stam, 2002: 209), ultimately resulting in the negation of identities and world-views that fall outside the ethnocentric framework, or in other words, the *subalterni-*

sation of “new legitimate spaces of enunciation” (Mignolo, 1995: 39). In this way, the voices of *internal Others* have traditionally been silenced in the hegemonic institutions, and the institution of the cinema is no exception, although it is at least a privileged space for negotiation. Consequently, even today studies of the category of *Romani cinema* exclude the perspectives and voices of the *Rroma* themselves, continuing instead to pursue a historiographic construction of Spanish cinema that ignores them: “In other words, they don’t tend to talk about *gitano* cinema, made by *gitanos*, but *gadjo* cinema, made by non-*gitanos* about what they consider to be *gitano*, which is really just a distorted reflection, the projection of their own prejudices. And meanwhile, films made by *gitanos* are ignored, as are *gitano* stories and characters” (Agüero & Jiménez, 2020: 154).

In the case of contemporary *Rroma* filmmakers in other countries, there is a more extensive bibliography of research on the work of directors like Laura Halilovic (Italy), Sami Mustafa (Kosovo), Katalin Bársony (Hungary), and Tony Gatlif (France) (Ippolito, 2019; Rucker-Chang, 2018; Jordanova, 2008, 2001; Dobрева, 2007; Naficy, 2001). Although there are numerous studies analysing the representations of *Rroma* in Spanish cinema from a perspective critical of stereotypes and mimetic distortions (Arranz, 2015; Villarrea Álvarez, 2009; Santaolalla, 2005; Garrido, 2003; Smith, 2000; Nair, 1999), anti-colonial readings of these representations are relatively recent and still quite limited (Cortés, 2020; Woods Peiró, 2012; Labanyi, 2004). This also suggests that academic studies of non-white Spanish filmmakers in general, and *Rroma* in particular, are virtually non-existent (Moya Jorge, 2020; Smidakova, 2016). The challenge of decoloniality, which as Catherine Walsh points out is not “a theory to follow but a project to take” (Walsh, 2013: 67), and which involves a reassessment of historical power relations not just between nations and continents but also within nations towards their *internal Oth-*

ers, is still unexplored territory in Spanish scholarship. In an effort to take up this challenge, this article considers an object of study conceptualised from a decolonial perspective as *Cinema of Reexistencia*. *Re-ex-sistencia* entails resistance—from the Latin *sistere* (holding firm, repeatedly opposing without giving up ground)—in the present and never giving up the gains in the area of human rights made by peoples who have been historically marginalised for ethno-racial reasons; but it also includes the idea of a *new, outward existence*—a denotation added by the prefixes *re* and *ex*. In this type of filmmaking, associated with processes of decolonisation led by Latin American indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, the emergence of new symbolic universes may serve somehow to restore the political dimension through a generational contract founded on situated knowledge. This approach brings into play a kind of epistemic insurgence through which to question the forces that have sustained the coloniality of power, being, knowledge, and life that have structured the realities of their people. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that the *decolonial option* (Garcés, 2016) adopted by this article needs to be understood as just that, i.e., not as the mere application of a theoretical framework, but as a praxis, a method in itself that situates the research epistemically and determines the tools to be used to analyse the object of study: “Here, theory, as knowledge, is understood as incarnated and situated, something that the university too often forgets. Theory—as knowledge—derives from and is formed, molded and shaped in and by actors, histories, territories and places that whether recognized or not, are marked by the colonial horizon of modernity” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018: 28).

THEORY, AS KNOWLEDGE, IS UNDERSTOOD AS INCARNATED AND SITUATED

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main strategies that colonialist discourse has made use of in cinema to stigmatise ethnicised peoples in general, and racialised women in particular, have been the “civilizing mission” and the “denial of coevalness” (Mignolo, 2003), discursive operations that have materialised in a “positing of lack” (Shohat & Stam, 2002). The aim of this article is to contribute to the bulldozing of both of these strategies in the case of the *Rroma* community in Spain. Taking the work of the filmmaker Pilar Távora as a case study, this aim is pursued in two specific ways: first, by identifying points of cinematic enunciation based on “situated epistemologies of feeling” (Periáñez Bolaño, 2016); and secondly, by analysing operations in her films that contribute to processes of decolonisation of ethno-racial modes of representation. To this end, the specific research conducted has included a review of the literature and of Távora’s filmography, an in-depth interview with the filmmaker herself, and an analysis of her latest film, *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición* (Helios Gómez: Ink and Ammunition, 2019).

The in-depth interview, conducted in December 2019, constitutes a key element of this research, based on the view that filmmakers “are not just textual structures or fictions within their films; they also are empirical subjects, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices, who exist outside and prior to their films” (Naficy, 2001: 4). The film analysis follows Shohat and Stam’s suggestion to try to go further than examining stereotypes when exploring notions of *ethnicity* and *race*, and instead make use of discourse analysis. From this perspective, cinema is understood not only as mimesis or representation but also as enunciation and, as such, the logics of verisimilitude in relation to a homogeneous and immutable ontological reality are less important than the discourses articulated around that reality, and especially their capacity to intervene in

the territory of the real: “A predilection for aural and musical metaphors (voices, intonation, accent, polyphony) reflects a shift in attention from the predominantly visual logical space of modernity (perspective, empirical evidence, domination of the gaze) to a post-modern space of the vocal (oral ethnography, a people’s history, slave narratives)” (Shohat & Stam, 2002: 218).

PILAR TÁVORA: CINEMA AND ROMANI REEXSISTENTIA

As one of just a handful of Spanish female directors who made their first films prior to the 1990s, Pilar Távora is a pioneer in her field. She was born in the working-class neighbourhood of Cerro del Águila in Seville, into a family immersed in the world of bullfighting. As the daughter of Salvador Távora, director of the recognised theatre group La Cuadra de Sevilla, from a young age she was involved in flamenco and the stage, in an artistic atmosphere of opposition to Franco’s regime in the final years of the dictatorship. Her first feature film, *Nanas de Espinas* [Thorny Lullabies] (1984), is a film version of the play of the same name created by La Cuadra and inspired by Federico García Lorca’s play *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de sangre*, 1931). Her first documentaries explore different aspects of popular Andalusian culture: *Sevilla, viernes santo madrugado* [Seville, Good Friday at Dawn] (1981), *Andalucía entre el incienso y el sudor* [Andalusia between the Incense and the Sweat] (1982), *Úbeda* (1985), *Costaleros* (1985) and *Antonio Divino* (1986) are a few of the short films that reflect Távora’s interest in filming Andalusia from an anthropological perspective: “When I say ‘authentic’ it is because I know what is authentic, because I have lived it as an Andalusian and I know I have the authority to talk about this because it is part of my heritage, part of my lived experience” (Camí-Vela, 2005: 211).

It was because of these early productions that Távora decided to create her own film studio (now

Productora Arbonaida) to be able to develop her own projects and the work of other directors in her hometown: “The only way I could get things off the ground was by producing them myself. There was nobody in Madrid who was interested in anything from Andalusia that wasn’t what was expected of Andalusia. And in Andalusia, producers were busy producing their own things; they didn’t produce other directors.”⁵ The filmmaker defines her work as a defence of Andalusia and of women, topics that overlap in her films and that converge allegorically in the film *Yerma* (1998), her second feature film, and another personal adaptation of one of Lorca’s plays. The gender perspective is also at the heart of other films that she has directed with different themes and in different formats: *Nosotras, femenino plural* [Us, Plural Feminine] (1987), *Mujeres rotas* [Broken Women] (1999), *Eternos interiores* [Eternal Interiors] (2004), *Brujas* [Witches] (2007), and *Madre amadísima* [Beloved Mother] (2008).

Over the course of her career, which has also included work on numerous television programs, plays and flamenco shows, Távora has represented other perspectives on Romani identity, which is always present in her iconographic elements and in the characters she gives a voice to as part of Andalusian identity, that *other* Andalusia of stories that have been silenced and buried under myth. This work is closely related to the activism that has led Távora to participate in political organisations (as an Andalusian Party candidate for Seville’s city council), professional associations (as president of the Association of Independent Producers of Andalusia, and as a member of the Association of Women Filmmakers and Audiovisual Media and of the Audiovisual Council of Andalusia), and social movements (as a public supporter of different causes related to human rights).

Notable among the titles that explore the contributions of *Roma* through topics that intersect with the world of flamenco is the series *Cavilaciones* [Musings] (Canal Sur TV, 1995). This series

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offers an overview of historical documentation on the origins of *cante jondo*, positing a view of this artistic expression as an idiosyncratically Andalusian phenomenon and the flamenco world as “vernacular knowledge” (Periáñez Bolaño, 2016). In *Tablao flamenco: cara y cruz* [Flamenco Stage: Pros and Cons] (2003), Távora makes a clear effort to deconstruct the official history of the world of flamenco venues, exposing a system of exploitation of female bodies (Moya Jorge, 2020).

Two titles that focus on realities of the *Rroma* or the notion of Romani identity as a central theme are *Fregenal, gitanos en romería* [Fregenal, Gitanos on a Pilgrimage] (Pilar Távora, 1989), one of the episodes included in the Televisión Española series *De año en año* [From Year to Year] (1989), and especially the documentary series *Gitanos andaluces* [Andalusian Gitanos] (2012), which offers various portraits of *Rroma* men and women who share their life stories, offering perspectives from different contexts and different positions of contemporary Andalusian society. The discourse of this series is a clearly explicit condemnation of racism, a deconstruction of deep-rooted stereotypes and a call to normalise diversity in Spanish society. Among Távora’s films, the *Rroma* community is featured in *El Mozart gitano* [The Gypsy Mozart] (2012), a portrait of the musician Diego Amador, and in *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición* (2019), the title analysed below. Discussing the evolution towards a more pronounced visibility of the *Rroma* in her films and of her own consciousness as a *Rroma* filmmaker, Távora eloquently explains her personal experience:

When you start working [...] you realise there are no voices, there are very few and the few there are have a responsibility to speak for something that has been poorly told [...]. And your internal process also opens up new directions so that, without leaving behind your Andalusian identity, which is always where I frame everything, you start talking about things you didn't talk about before because you thought the mere fact you did things differently was enough; the fact that you made a *Yerma*, or that you made a series about the history of flamenco, that you made *Costaleros* [...]. But you realise that it isn't, that there is something still missing, that forms part of you, that still hasn't appeared, that you always hope that others will do but nobody does it, and then you start opening that direction of the topic too.⁵

In other words, Távora's cinematic enunciation through embodied knowledge and situated feeling as a *Rroma* filmmaker constitutes a political choice, a decision: "Asserting identity is a political decision, it has nothing to do with having a bigger or smaller percentage of *Rroma*. It has to do with you, but you could also decide to wash your hands of it and make a different life."⁵ Thanks to her decision, adding to the numerous national and international awards that Távora has received over the course of her career as a filmmaker and producer, in recent years she has received awards like the Premio Andaluz Gitano (2012), the Premio Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2016), and tributes in Filmoteca Española in the context of the *O' Dikhipen* film cycle organised by Spain's Romani cultural institute, Instituto de Cultura Gitana (2008-).

HELIOS GÓMEZ, TINTA Y MUNICIÓN: ROMANI CULTURE AS A POLITICAL DECISION

Helios Gómez, tinta y munición is Pilar Távora's most recent film, and it is also the most political of the works in which she has explicitly explored the question of Romani identities. In narrative

terms, this exploration is expressed in two ways. Firstly, she found it necessary to position herself within the story, with recourse to performativity (Nichols, 2013). This is a strategy she did not use in her previous feature film, *Salvador Távora: la excepción* [Salvador Távora: the Exception] (2017), even though that film was about her father. With *Helios...*, however, Távora felt the need to take a more personal approach to tell the story of the avant-garde artist, poet and intellectual, a great unknown not only to the *Rroma*, but in Spanish history in general.⁶ And secondly, the political dimension is evident in the fact that in this film the character's Romani background is not explored as just one more aspect of his identity, but as a central feature of the portrait.

Thus, although the documentary is presented as a biography of Helios Gómez (1905-1956), from the introduction to the film the iconographic dimension of the character is made patently clear. It would be a conventional documentary with a participatory approach and a historical theme if not for the added subplot that operates as a frame story: the tale of a fictional self-reflexive character representing the filmmaker herself in search of inspiration to find a "unifying theme" for her film about Helios Gómez. With this in mind, she sits on the banks of the Guadalquivir River with a book of the writer's collected poetry (Figure 1).

A second character, anonymous and unknown to Távora's protagonist, appears before her, claiming that he also knows about Helios Gómez. Indeed, in her conversation with this character, who at the end of the film will be revealed to be an illusion, he provides her with biographical information about Helios that suggests omniscience. In other words, this character possesses more information than either the narrator-protagonist or the documentary research, giving the story a metaleptic dimension. Viewers soon realise that this mysterious character is intended to function as a kind of mirror for the identity of the filmmaker's character, adding another layer for interpreting



Figure 1. Still frame from *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición*

her process of political consciousness and identification with everything that Helios represents. This interpretation is supported by the confrontational position in which the two characters are placed in the frame, but also by the performance of the actor chosen for the role, whose resemblance to Helios in the extant photos of the artist is more than obvious. Finally, the lighting chosen, which enhances the reflections of the sun, and subsequently of the overhead lamps on the water of the river, contributes to the creation of an ethereal atmosphere and the visual metaphor of a mirror (Figure 1).

The frame story then leads into the more conventional documentary part of the film, based on personal interviews combined with archive footage, this time without the use of a narrating voice-over. The presence of the first interviewee, Helios Gómez's son, keeps alive the family memory of the artist, who died in the 1950s. In this first interview, the character is positioned ideologically as a *Rroma*, an Andalusian, and a supporter of the Spanish Republic. This last aspect is

underscored by the music chosen for the visual transition to both historical and contemporary archive images: "*Banderas republicanas*," a tangos sung by the *cantaora* Carmen Linares. The song's lyrics make reference to the Triana neighbourhood of Seville: "*Triana, Triana, qué bonita está Triana, cuando le ponen al puente las banderas republicanas*" ["Triana, Triana, how pretty Triana

is, when the Republican flags are raised on the bridge"]. In this way, the pre-Franco past and the contemporary era are fused together into a single diegetic time-frame.

It is thus clear that the setting for the fictional subplot was purposefully chosen. In addition to the diegetic justification that Helios Gómez lived in Triana, this part of Seville is a very specific location that triggers a whole iconography associated with the *Rroma* community. The bridge that connects this working-class neighbourhood with the rest of Seville evokes a memory which, like the memory of the character in question, must be recovered through the culture of the district itself. The Triana neighbourhood was an old ghetto lo-

Figure 2. Still frame from *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición*



cated on the left bank of the Guadalquivir River, a place known historically for the intermixing of different marginalised racialised groups—*Rroma*, Arabs, and sub-Saharan Africans—and poorer non-*Rroma* families. This is the place where “ethnomusicologists locate the origin of the first flamenco *tonás*, derived from the first *soleá* songs,” the place where, in short, “Andalusian folklore was first expressed in flamenco” (Filigrana, 2020: 82). This is referred to explicitly by the character who represents Helios at the end of the film: “This bridge, a witness to our history, with the mighty Guadalquivir, great and deep in Andalusia and like the dark-sounding *cantes*.”

However, in addition, by adding the pro-Republican political dimension, Triana in particular and Seville in general are semantically distanced in the film from the connotations this setting subsequently acquired under the Franco regime (1939–1975).⁷ In the documentary, the Andalusian capital is redefined as a synonym for modernity prior to that episode of Spanish history, and as a cultural hub that produced some of the most important avant-garde artists of the early 20th century.

EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE AND SITUATED FEELING

The first mention of Helios Gómez’s Romani background returns us to the documentary’s fictional subplot in which the character representing Helios and the character Pilar discuss their Romani identity:

“The *gitanos*, that clear central pillar; the cellars of Triana. The *gitanos* of iron and fire, of the *cante*, of communal living and solidarity.

“What was it that Lorca said? That they were ‘the most elevated, the most profound, and the most aristocratic.’ And Helios Gómez, as a *gitano*, you have to feel him, it isn’t enough just to know him.

This conversation, in addition to invoking Romani mythology, also identifies a key point of reference: Federico García Lorca, an author who

has marked Pilar Távora’s oeuvre since her first productions but who at the same time triggers a memory of identity not only of the *Rroma*—as he was one of the *Rroma*-phile writers of the so-called Generation of 1927⁸—but of one half of Spain, i.e., the victims murdered by Franco’s Nationalists. However, Pilar’s character also introduces another important element: “as a *gitano*, you have to *feel him*.” This appeal to ways of understanding the world through empiricism and not solely through rationalism is a recurring trope in her work, appealing to what Iván Perriáñez Bolaño argues is the need to understand flamenco culture as an “epistemology of situated feeling.” For Perriáñez Bolaño, this involves “recognising the capacity of feelings and experiences in the production of knowledge [...], a different knowledge that overcomes the dualities of objectivity/subjectivity, as subjectivity connects with shared experiences and not with methods of validation and the objectives of rational Western science” (Perriáñez Bolaño, 2016: 32). In this case, this epistemology emerges through the symbolic function served by the character played by the actor who, as he forms part of a reality perceived only by Pilar’s character, although his presence appears physical, alludes to the mythical as a valid dimension for knowledge. In a way, the strategy of establishing a conversation between the filmmaker-character and the Helios Gómez character exemplifies the need for an epistemic operation that approaches knowledge through conversation as a form of “learning in relation to others.” The explanation offered by Perriáñez Bolaño in relation to writing could thus be applied to the process undertaken by Pilar Távora as the extra-diegetic filmmaker faced with the task of making a documentary about this artist:

The relational is relevant insofar as it shifts the importance from the writer to the level of those who participate in the conversation: at least, of the voices and positions of the co-protagonists who take part in it, of the narratives and perspec-

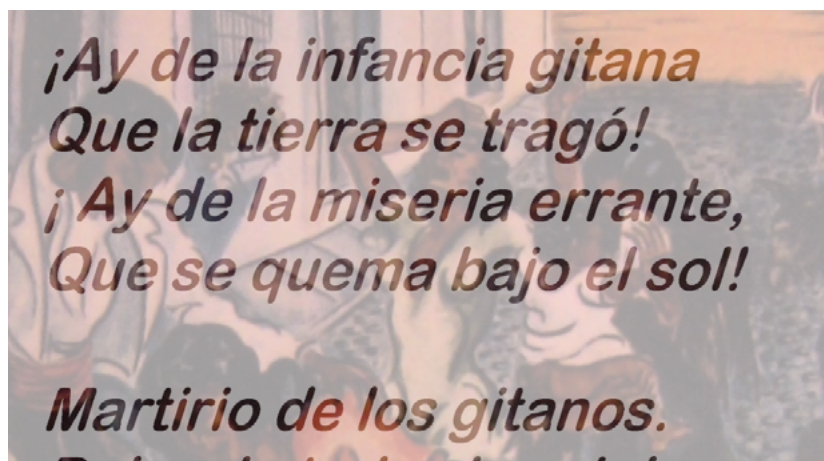


Figure 3. Still frame from *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición*

tives of the authors who appear in the text, of the author's voice; in this case, through a collective self to which I ascribe myself and through which I represent myself (Periáñez Bolaño, 2016: 33).

As this same author suggests, this epistemology of situated feeling requires a language "that acknowledges the plural nature of feelings" (Periáñez Bolaño, 2016: 33), which are not limited to the visual. This could be the reasoning behind the recurring technique used in the documentary of overlapping meaningful elements in different languages and formats, such as the interviewees' voices, flamenco music, archive photographs, paintings, sculptures, posters, newspaper headlines, moving images and written text (Figure 3), as if, in effect, the character's contribution could only be revealed through synaesthetic operations of knowledge.

HISTORICAL MEMORY AND THE DECOLONIAL OPTION

All of the biographical dimensions of the Helios Gómez character intersect in the film discourse with his status as a *Rroma* artist understood as a political choice. This involved standing up for the poorer classes and for Andalusia, but it also entailed theorising about Romani identity, as an activist stance that could constitute an alternati-

ve to the internal conflicts of the left. As one of the interviewees mentions, for Helios the Spanish Civil War would serve to liberate the *Rroma* from their traditional condition as a marginalised community. From a sociological point of view, it is worth noting the interpretation given to one of the bleakest episodes in Helios Gómez's life: his time in a concentration camp and his many incarcerations. As Diego Fernández, Director of the Instituto de Cultura Gitana, recalls in his interview: "The cell he had in Modelo [Prison, Barcelona] was eight metres, and it held eight inmates. Anyway, the mantra he always used in extreme situations was 'it's all the same, I'm a *gitano*.' His own cell-mates couldn't understand his resilience, but when he said that, what he was really saying was that they can't kill the *gitanos* twice; we are survivors and so he could bear it all with an enormous resilience."

This observation, which begins with the view of the speaker on screen, changes to a voice-over while we cut to archive footage (Figure 4) that evokes the memory of the *Rroma*, referring not just to the historical repression of Spain's *Rroma* community, but also to another episode contemporaneous to the diegetic timeframe: the *Samudaripen*, or Romani genocide during the Holocaust. The Romani's transnational identity is made equally clear in various ways. One example of this is when the character representing Helios in the fictional part of the film refers to the European context of the inter-war period as "that *gitano* Europe," extrapolating the repression in Spain to other countries. But another is the transnational dimension of Helios Gómez himself, who lived in various European countries and immersed himself in different avant-garde movements. Finally, the commitment to this transnational identity is made patently clear with the inclusion of the official Romani anthem "Gelem, Gelem" at the end of the film.



Figure 4. Still frame from *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición*

The discourse that serves to explain Helios's attitude as described in this part of the narrative is related to what the sociologist Nicolás Jiménez González identifies as one of the foundations on which Romani cultural values are built: *biophilia*, or a love of life. As the author explains, "the set of biophilic values include our playful attitude towards existence, our vitality and optimism. Biophilia is what makes us live in the present because, as a traditional Hindu proverb puts it, 'life is a bridge to cross over, not a place to build a house.' Here we have a principle in opposition to the pessimism and self-denial of the Western Christian tradition: life is not a vale of tears, but a bridge to cross" (Jiménez González, 2002: 18).

This semantic field related to linguistic metaphors alluding to the *passage* of human beings through the world, in addition to being reinforced by a *mise-en-scène* that positions the bridge over the Guadalquivir as another character in the story, is also present in the characters' conversations:

"Art is so important for blazing new trails, and it is so important to start with what is yours."

"With your own tools, with your own cultural, symbolic and experiential codes."

"The universal is always more when it starts from your own roots."

"And in Helios that was clear: he never abandoned the universe of his own identity to communicate with the world."

The dialectical process unfolding over the course of these fictional sequences makes it clear that this mirror-character resembling Helios is the culmination of the process of identification with Pilar's character. Indeed, the filmmaker and the artist share more than just a common homeland and ethnic background: while he was a "Sevillian pioneer" of avant-garde art in the early 20th century, she holds the same status in the field of filmmaking, and the two also share a political commitment and a way of understanding art as a tool for social activism, as well as an

interest in new forms that draw on traditional signifiers of Andalusian culture. The shot that concludes the fictional subplot, and also the documentary—which ends with the appearance of the film’s producer on screen—renders this mimetic connection between the filmmaker and the Helios character explicit through overlapping images that fuse their two gazes (Figure 5). The idea of re-incarnation through the recovery of memory, i.e., of somehow restoring his image, is also made explicit at this point when the artist’s son concludes: “My father didn’t die when he died.”

This film contributes to the strategy of promoting *positive models* launched by *Roma* community associations as a way of transcoding the gypsy signifier, a campaign that Távora herself has taken part in: “I feel that blazing the trail with Helios is blazing a lot of trails, because Helios also understood his *gitano* identity as a political matter, a social matter, and that is essential, because otherwise you’re stuck in ethnicity and you never get out of it.”⁵ It is also important because it constructs a discourse that restores the character of Helios Gómez to the narrative not only of Romani history but also of anti-Francoist history, as a way of bulldozing the discursive strategy of the denial of coevalness by exploring the participation of *Roma* men and women in a key episode in Span-

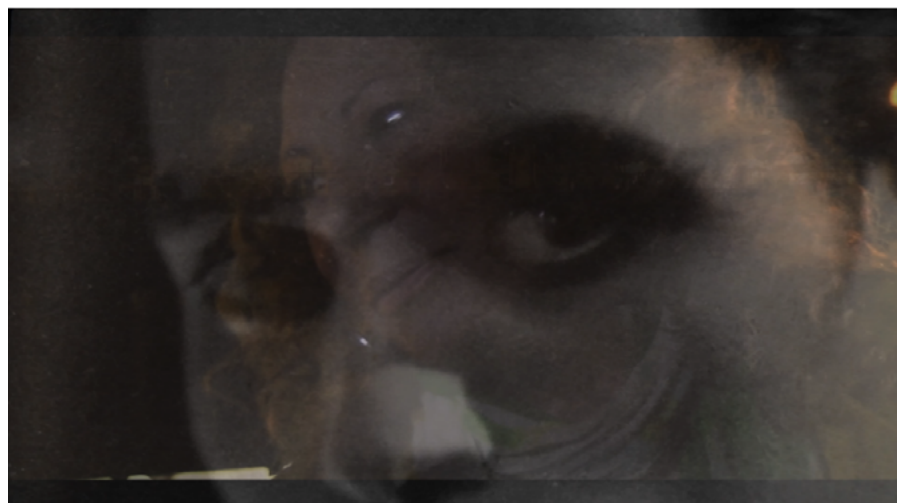
ish history like the Civil War. This is made clear in the dedication included in the final credits: “Peoples who lose their memory are doomed to repeat their mistakes. In memory of all those buried in the unmarked graves of oblivion.”

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The analysis of *Roma* self-representation in cinema can shed light on discourses founded on epistemologies of feeling situated in this community, a question that has so far been largely unexplored in Spain. This can contribute to a problematisation of the phenomenon of *Spanish women’s cinema* by considering Other gazes on and from those who have been constructed as historical alterities (Moya Jorge, 2020). In this sense, what is being described here is a kind of act-cinema with a decolonising function on two levels: external and internal. Through its recovery of memories, its exploration of contemporary struggles and its reflections on the future visibility of the *Roma*, the film *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición* contributes to processes of national decoloniality. But at the same time, it forms part of a decolonisation process undertaken by its director, who, through her enunciation based on an awareness of the embodied knowledge of the I/we of the *Roma* woman/women,

deconstructs the effects of internalised coloniality on bodies and subjectivities. Citing Mignolo once again, it could be argued that by feeling the colonial wound, i.e., by becoming aware of “our places in the normative systems that regulate ‘normality’ through racial classification” (Mignolo, 2015: 446), the filmmaker studied here engages in a *detachment* process that constitutes a resurgence characteristic of *Cinema of Reexistencia*. By constructing discourses on the historical memory of Ro-

Figure 5. Still frame from *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición*



mani realities through situated feeling and embodied knowledge, Távora's films contribute to what Filigrana describes as the need to "free ourselves from the colonisation of our identities in order to construct forms of struggle through them that can lead us to the emancipation and sovereignty of our lives and the territory we inhabit" (Filigrana, 2019: 273). In this sense, Távora's *Cinema of Reexistencia* takes up the line of argument pursued by decolonial feminisms of the global South, of "thinkers and activists committed to processes of struggle, resistances and/or of women together with their communities" (Ochoa Muñoz & Garzón Martínez, 2019: 15) for whom thinking, feeling and doing all form part of the same struggle. ■

NOTES

- * This study forms part of the research project *Cartografías del cine de movilidad en el Atlántico hispánico* [Cinematic Cartographies of Mobility in the Hispanic Atlantic] (CSO2017-85290-P), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and co-financed with funds from the ERDF. The research has been made possible by a University Professor Training (FPU) scholarship from the Government of Spain.
- 1 The term *gitano* ("gypsy") is the general name with which the *Roma* self-identify in Spain and a few other countries. This community is considered the biggest ethnic minority in Europe in general, and in Spain in particular. Around one million Spaniards are *Roma*, and close to 40 percent of them live in the Andalusia region (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, 2016).
- 2 It is worth noting here the comparison made by Carlos Aguilar and Anita Haas in their book *Flamenco y cine* (2019) between processes of cultural legitimisation of jazz and the African American population in the United States and of flamenco and the *Roma* in Spain.
- 3 It is important to distinguish here between the notions of colonisation and coloniality, as the latter, applicable to our time, "refers to old patterns of power that emerge in the context of colonialism and redefine culture, work, intersubjective relations, aspirations of being, common un-

derstandings, and the production of knowledge" (Mendoza, 2019: 57).

- 4 The European Alliance against Antigypsyism describes this concept as a specific form of racism targeting the Romani population. This notion encompasses the systemic disadvantages faced by *Rroma* in Europe as a consequence of historical and structural racism (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2016).
- 5 In a personal interview on 4 December 2019 in Madrid.
- 6 For more biographical information about Helios Gómez and the importance of his political discourse for the Romani movement, see Agüero & Jiménez (2020), or Sierra (2018).
- 7 The Francoist historiographic narrative posited a historical line of continuity between the Franco regime and the *Reconquista* of Spain in the 15th century, which sought to erase the Muslim past of the country's south. See Wheeler's analysis of Sevillian imaginaries in 16th-century theatre and painting: "significant intellectual, physical and emotional labour was nevertheless invested into disavowing this Islamic heritage. Hence, for example, there was a marked tendency to refer to the river as the Betis rather than the Guadalquivir in order to stress the city's Roman as opposed to Arabic past" (Wheeler, 2020:15).
- 8 Following Román Gubern, it could be argued that the association between Federico García Lorca and Helios Gómez was related to the position of the latter among a small group of intellectuals who situated their work about the poorer classes in a context in which most Spanish intellectuals, although "against the traditional-absolutist Spain responsible for the massacre of North Africans [...] at the same time lived disconnected from the Spain of the common people," and were thus effectively a "sociologically pure elite" (Gubern, 1999: 10).

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POLITICAL AND PERSONAL: PILAR TÁVORA AND CINEMA OF ROMANI REEXISTENTIA

Abstract

While gypsy imaginaries have played a key role in the representation of a certain idea of national identity throughout the history of Spanish cinema, the social subjects, i.e., the *Rroma*, have traditionally been relegated to the position of object of the gaze rather than narrators of their own filmic discourses. This research considers contemporary self-representations in cinema based on an epistemology of situated feeling (Periáñez Bolaño, 2016) among the *Rroma* people and analyses the operations evident in films that contribute to processes of decolonisation of ethno-racial modes of representation. To this end, this article approaches the work of the Spanish filmmaker Pilar Távora from a decolonial perspective and contextualises it in what is described here as *Cinema of Romani Reexistentia*. The methods used to achieve these objectives include a review of the literature and of the director's filmography, an in-depth interview with the filmmaker herself and an analysis of her latest film, *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición* (2019).

Key words

Self-representation; Decolonial feminism; Racism; Antigypsyism; *Rroma*; Spanish cinema; *Reexistentia*.

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POLÍTICO Y PERSONAL: PILAR TÁVORA Y EL CINE DE LA REEXISTENTIA GITANA

Resumen

Mientras que los imaginarios gitanos han jugado un papel fundamental en la representación de una cierta idea de identidad nacional desde los comienzos del cine español, los sujetos sociales pertenecientes al pueblo gitano han sido tradicionalmente relegados a la posición de objeto de la mirada pero no atendidos como enunciadores de discursos filmicos. Esta investigación atiende las autorrepresentaciones cinematográficas contemporáneas que parten de una *epistemología del sentir situada* (Periáñez Bolaño, 2016) en el pueblo gitano y analiza las operaciones inscritas en las obras cinematográficas que contribuyen a los procesos de descolonización de los modos de representación étnico-raciales. Para ello el artículo aborda la obra de la realizadora española Pilar Távora desde una perspectiva descolonial y la inscribe dentro de lo que hemos denominado un *cine de la reexistentia gitana*. La metodología utilizada para alcanzar estos objetivos es la revisión bibliográfica y filmográfica, la entrevista en profundidad con la cineasta y el análisis filmico de su última película, *Helios Gómez, tinta y munición* (2019).

Palabras clave

Autorrepresentación; Feminismo descolonial; Racismo; Antigitanismo; Pueblo gitano; Xine español; *Reexistentia*.

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