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zum Thema:

The representation of the prostitute in Mexican cinema:
a comparison between *Santa* (1931) and *El Callejón de*
Los Milagros (1995)

vorgelegt von

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Abstract

The representation of the prostitute has been one of the most prevalent female characters in the history of Mexican cinema and provides a unique vision to analyze gender roles and the position of the female in Mexico. This thesis will specifically deconstruct the myth of the prostitute through a comparison of two distinct filmic representations: the archetype of the prostitute in *Santa* (1931) and a more modern representation in *El Callejón de Los Milagros* (1995), exposing to what degree the representation of the prostitute has changed over the course of a century. A direct analysis of key scenes in the categories of romance, family, and redemption will demonstrate similarities and transgressions. This comparison is developed under the theoretical framework of the position of “the woman” in Mexican cinema, alongside interviews with significant figures in the Mexican film industry. This investigation will shed light on the symbolism of the prostitute in a patriarchal and religious society, including gender relations, power structures, the concept of sin, Mexico’s confrontation with modernity, and female stereotypes in popular media.

Keywords: Mexican film, gender studies, stereotype, archetype, the prostitute

Abstracto

La representación de la prostituta ha sido uno de los personajes femeninos más frecuentes en la historia del cine mexicano y proporciona una visión única para analizar los roles de género y la posición de “la mujer” en México. Esta tesis específicamente deconstruirá el mito de la prostituta a través de una comparación de dos representaciones filmicas distintas: el arquetipo de la prostituta en *Santa* (1931) y una representación más moderna en *El Callejón de Los Milagros* (1995), para mostrar a que la representación de la prostituta ha cambiado a lo largo de un siglo. Un análisis directo de escenas clave en las categorías de romance, familia y redención demuestra

similitudes y transgresiones. La comparación será desarrollada bajo el marco teórico de la posición de "la mujer" en el cine mexicano, junto con entrevistas de personas importantes de la industria del cine mexicano. Esta investigación se concentra en la discusión sobre el simbolismo de la prostituta en una sociedad patriarcal y religiosa incluyendo relaciones de género, las estructuras de poder, el concepto del pecado, la confrontación de México con la modernidad y los estereotipos femeninos en los medios populares.

Palabras clave: Cine mexicano, estudios de género, estereotipo, arquetipo, la prostituta

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INTRODUCTION

The complicated and ever changing relationship between women and Mexican cinema has only recently become an important topic of discussion in the Mexican film community. The role of women, both character representations on screen and creative positions behind the camera, is finally taking a front stage in both national and international cinematographic discourses in recent decades. Nevertheless, women have been an integral part in the formation of the varied cinematic periods since the foundation of the film industry in Mexico. Despite significant collaborations by women in technical and creative aspects, the Mexican film industry has, for the most part, been predominantly driven and controlled by men. This had led to a significant machistic vision that has been ingrained into the majority of film productions in Mexico. This male-dominated outlook is clearly apparent in the on-screen representations of women. These clear-cut female depictions have laid the groundwork for some of the most prolific stereotypes and narrative schemes in the history of Mexican cinema, the majority formed during the Golden Era of Mexican cinema. Since the 1930s, these stereotypes have continued to persist in numerous manifestations until the present day, helping to establish three classic female canons of Mexican cinema: the mother, the virgin, and the whore.

It can be said that Mexican cinema is infamously obsessed with prostitutes (Fortes, 191: 2011). This fascination with the prostitute has deep mythical roots in Mexican lore and Judeo-Christian religious tradition, producing a type of infatuation with the prostitute in popular media. This master thesis will focus on the representation of the prostitute in Mexican cinema, specifically through a comparison of two distinct filmic representations: the archetype of the prostitute in *Santa* (1931) and a more modern representation in *El Callejón de Los Milagros* (1995).

Analyzing cinema exposes the various media representations that are consumed worldwide. Cinema as a social and cultural phenomenon is a testimony to the degree of historical development of a country and, at the same time, reflects what is currently

happening within the society (Al-Rifai, 58: 2003). Key themes continuously manifest themselves in cultural products, subconsciously internalized by a larger public that molds itself to the societal expectations and norms reproduced in cinema. The analysis of the classic character type of the prostitute will provide a unique lense to analyze gender roles and the position of the female in Mexico. The specific comparison between the characters of Santa and Alma will show to what degree the representation of the prostitute has changed over the course of a century, shedding light on the symbolism that the prostitute represents in a patriarchal and religious society, including gender relations, power structures, the concept of sin, Mexico's confrontation with modernity, and female stereotypes in popular media.

Although a considerable amount of academic research has been conducted on the prevalence of the prostitute in Mexican cinema, there lacks a direct comparison with the archetype in *Santa* to a more contemporary representation of the prostitute. This work aims to identify the specific character type of the prostitute, deconstruct its beginnings in the 1930s creation of the archetype in *Santa*, and exemplify a contemporary representation from 1990s Nuevo Cine Mexicano. This investigation will be conducted through the three analysis categories of family, romance, and redemption, in order to specifically compare the representation of the prostitute from two distinct time periods. This comparison will give foundation to significant changes, adaptations, and consistencies in the representation of the prostitute in Mexican cinema. In conclusion, a reflection on the Mexican public's perception of the prostitute in Mexican cinema will reveal the deeper implications of female representations in mass media. This work aims to prove how the constant depiction of the prostitute in Mexican cinema over the last century has helped to frame the Mexican conscious of the prostitute as a necessary canon in the Mexican national identity.

Multiple research questions are proposed in this work: What does a comparison between the archetype of the prostitute character in *Santa* and a newer representation in *El Callejón de Los Milagros* say about the representation of the prostitute in Mexican film? Is there a shift between time periods based on historical or filmic context? Through

a comparison of the analysis categories of family, romantic life, and redemption, what are the similarities, differences, and adaptations of the two representations? What has been the importance and influence of the prostitute in Mexican cinema? What do these representations say about the Mexican film industry's relationship with its traditional female characters and their influence in Mexican society?

The initial proposed hypothesis of this work revolves around the significant changes, adaptations, and consistencies in the representation of the prostitute in Mexican cinema. Through a direct contrast between Santa and Alma, I hypothesize that the two representations are noticeably similar in their narration and character development, proving that the stereotype of the prostitute continues to dominate within female representations in Mexican cinema.

The research questions and hypothesis will be responded to through various theoretical frameworks, including theories of gender in cinema, female archetypes in Mexican cinema, nation and gender, the male gaze in cinema, and female filmic representations in a patriarchal society. The methodology utilized in this comparative analysis will be separated into the aforementioned categories through concrete examples in specific scenes in each movie. These scenes will then be juxtaposed in direct correlation to evaluate resemblances and transgressions; an initial conclusion will be drawn from this comparison and later expanded upon in the conclusion of the thesis.

A variety of sources will be consulted in this work, divided into two main categories: primary sources are the films analyzed and personal interviews with figures in the film industry; secondary sources are books, journal publications, websites, and newspaper articles concerning the given topics. I consider that the main focus of this work are the primary movies analyzed, for that I categorize them as primary sources. The accompanying texts, including scholarly articles, movie reviews, and theoretical background are secondary sources that interpret these primary sources. I have translated all original Spanish sources, documents, and interviews into English and, therefore, all quotations will be cited directly in their English translations.

One of the difficulties I encountered during the research phase of this thesis was narrowing the scope of this project. Given that the two principle films are based on literary novels, with their own long history of modifications and reincarnations, I struggled to choose a specific focal point that did not necessarily depend on their adaptations. Although both films, *Santa* and *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, have been inevitably developed and influenced by their literary counterparts, in this thesis, I have determined that the films are sufficiently independent from their adaptation. They have both taken on their own individual influences from the Mexican society and film industry in order to be analyzed separately from their inspirational novels. Of course, given the importance and complexities of their adaptations, I suggest this aspect as a future research suggestion in the thesis conclusion.

Personal interviews have been conducted with two significant figures in the Mexican cinema industry during in-field research in Guadalajara: María del Carmen de Lara and Martha Vidrio. The first interview conducted was with de Lara (hereafter referred to as Maricarmen de Lara), one of the most important and prominent documentary filmmakers in Mexican cinema. She has been working on documentary films for more than 40 years as a means to educate the public about the most important issues that affect women and, in essence, humanity. Prominent themes in her filmic work focus on human rights through a very particular feminist view of the world. As a consequence of the long history of patriarchy and machismo in Mexico, she is an important example that subscribes "to feminism and art in Mexico" (Bartra, 163: 2008). She graduated from CUEC in 1983, specializing in film making; at this time, she presented her final work of the documentary *No es por gusto* (1981), which chronicles the daily life and work of real-life prostitutes who work in Mexico City. Among her best-known documentaries are *No pedimos un viaje a la luna* (1986, Colón de Oro en Huelva, Spain; Ariel and Diosa de Plata, among other awards), *La vida sigue* (1995), and *Paulina en el nombre de la ley* (2000). *No me digas que esto es fácil* (2002) is a short-film related to *No es por gusto*, following up on the situation of prostitutes in Mexico City over 20 years later.

The second interview was with Martha Vidrio, who belongs to the National System of Researchers, whose research is divided into two lines: the cinematographic script and adaptations of literary works into cinema. As a professor, she has specialized in the field of the audiovisual script, adaptation of literary works to film, and film narrative. In addition to teaching classes in the Master's Degree in Comparative Literature at University of Guadalajara, she has also taught courses at Bielefeld University. She herself is a director and script writer of fiction feature films and documentary films. Vidrio was the founder and coordinator of the Master in Film Studies at the University of Guadalajara and Coordinator and director of the Espacio Multimedia production company of the UDG, which supported the production of several feature films, including *El Callejón de Los Milagros*. These interviews prove essential for insight into the production side of the film industry in Mexico, focusing on the perspective of gender in the formation of the representation of the prostitute.

The format of this thesis is divided into the introduction, four content chapters, a conclusion, and works cited. The first chapter, entitled "Relationship of Women and Cinema in Mexico" provides the theoretical context for the position of "the woman" in Mexican cinema. Authors such as Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler, and Patricia Torres theorize on female representations in film and others like Charles Ramirez Berg, Julia Tuñón, Martha Vidrio, Sylvia Oroz, and Eva Parrondo Coppel provide theoretical context of nation and gender in the Mexican film industry, including Mexican myths and archetypes, female representations in a patriarchal society, and the cinematographic importance of the prostitute.

The second chapter, "Creation of the archetype of the prostitute in *Santa*," delves into the first representation of the prostitute in Mexican cinema, *Santa*. This chapter provides filmic context of 1930s Mexico, specifically focusing on the Golden Age and the influence of the melodrama. The 1931 version of *Santa* is the focal point of this chapter, which created the prostitute archetype and narrative. An analysis of selected scenes in the categories of analysis provide specific examples of characteristics of the prostitute in *Santa*.

“Representation of the prostitute in *El Callejón de Los Milagros*” is the third chapter, similarly structured to the second chapter. It narrates the filmic context of *Nuevo Cine Mexicano* in the 1990s and the production and success of *El Callejón de Los Milagros*. The construction of the prostitute character Alma as a more contemporary representation of the prostitute will be supported by selected key scenes.

The fourth chapter utilizes the selected scenes from the classifications of romantic life, family, and redemption in an analysis and comparison of Santa and Alma. This evaluation of the correlations and transgressions will provide an initial conclusion on the relationship between the two representations. This preliminary conclusion will be utilized and further developed in the Thesis Conclusion.

CHAPTER 1: Relationship of Women and Cinema in Mexico

1.1 “The woman” in Mexican cinema

Although a critical and academic examination has only recently concentrated on female and gender roles in Mexican cinema, the problematic relationship between women and Mexican cinema has been present since the creation of Mexican cinema and has continued to evolve throughout its history. In short, cinema has always been a mirror that reflects the prevailing state of patriarchy in Mexico, where filmic characters become constructed symbols that later become part of the system of values that culture continues to validate. Cinema has become a qualified place for an examination of this unique combination of political, economic, and cultural codes (Rivera, 4: 2013). Filmic characters particularly highlight bias gender roles in the traditionally patriarchal society. Women are oppressed not only economically and politically, but also in forms of rational, significant, and symbolic exchange in culture.

Every society construes its ideal woman, who is later transmitted to the big screen through moving images and sound, which helps a society define and recognize its own self (Tuñón: 1998). The filmic semantization of women was built under the umbrella of a patriarchal ideology which was then assimilated into a privileged place in cinema and deemed the official discourse. Machismo functions, rather than a mere cultural tradition, as an ideological force. Since the foundation of this cultural industry, its production and consumption have set a patriarchal vision in which the roles of women, issues, and problems defined as "feminine" have alluded to situations of domestic life, family, children, motherhood, and sacrifice. The construction of female beauty has also become an image of consumption. These categorizations have continued to work as a central agent of social transformation. A system of gender representations has been recreated, in which women have become glamorous objects to be emulated and consumed as moral cannons for society (Torres, 13: 2016).

“The woman” can be considered as an abstract concept, due to her various shapes and forms. She is both a myth and a symbol that has been constructed from

reality, but becomes problematic when analyzed in the cinematographic world. On the big screen, the woman searches for desire, subliminal morality, and the unattainable facade of female protagonists. The woman in celluloid demonstrates the eternal female and the ideal to achieve, created from selective characteristics of real woman (Tuñón: 1998). More than just an object of desire, she has been the architect of a cinematographic discourse in her primitive form where, in a veiled form, her figure is eclipsed by masculine influences in a patriarchal setting. "The woman" has become a type of myth that both reflects the actual female position in society, as well as influences her future adaptation.

To understand the mythical meaning of women in Mexican society, it is necessary to think of patriarchy as a system that, through a network formed by tradition, myth, law, pressure, and division of labor, places the woman in the private and emotional sphere, while the man belongs to the domain that is public and of reason. "The subordination of the feminine is aggravated by the rigid confinement of women to private spaces. The terms masculine/mobile/active and feminine/immobile/passive were interchangeable with masculine/public and feminine/private primarily because women were traditionally limited to the home, the convent, or the brothel" (Ramírez, 56: 1992). Therefore, the woman becomes inferior, since she only fits into the world of personal realization, while the man corresponds to the universe of professional suitability (Oroz, 64: 1995). Western culture gives these illusions a value outside of time and culture, thereby universalizing them. In the mythical female universe, inferiority works alongside the established order of a society. Hence, these patterns refer to what is considered "normal." Any change in value produces a disorder that does not respond to the economic interests of the social structure, and therefore to socially assimilated values. The cinematographic institution has been competently responsible for reinforcing these values through a narrative and syntax that has helped in the development of its own market (Oroz, 76: 1995).

The illusionary concept of "the female" has led to the concrete image of "the woman." This feminine image was framed in a world of patriarchal domination, where

the woman was seen more as an object, a decorative figure, who only needed to be admired (Tuñón: 1998). Female characters do not tell their own stories nor do they control their own images. There is a type of “subjectivity” in the creation of the female character. It is not guaranteed that the construction of the woman in cinema, or other types of discourses, relates directly to “real women.” The significance of “the woman” does not come from the reality that she represents in a movie, instead she comes from the construction of “the woman” in a concrete discourse (Parrondo Coppel, 3: 1995).

As has been thoroughly discussed in numerous academic works and will be further applied in the next paragraphs, gender identities have been defined as social constructions and culturally established. The symbolic constructions of these identities arise from the actions that are generated in the social, political, and cultural sectors of a society (Torres, 10: 2001). Characters reconstruct the discourse of gender out of monolithic and dominant perspectives. This is evident in the filmic representations of female types and characters, where there is a repertoire of meanings that has its origin in an order established by the Judeo-Christian religion, in which the woman serves as savior and protector of the community, or as the bad, perverse, and dishonored (Torres, 13: 2016). Female characters inherently incarnate a vice or a virtue, good and bad, love and hate (Tuñón, 117: 2000). She establishes the moral of the society and searches for redemption through sacrifice, negating her own happiness and pleasure for her male counterpart. The creation and development of these female representations is further discussed in the following sections.

1.2 Theory of female representations and Mexican myths

The myth and the creation of “the woman” in Mexican cinema has developed various theoretical frameworks that discuss the importance (as well as the perceivable *unimportance*) of women in Mexican cinema. This section will delve into these theories that attempt to understand the *why* behind the construction of the classic female character stereotypes, specifically focusing on the prostitute. Among other aspects in Mexican cinema, the feminine point of view has been completely ignored until very

recently. Most recently, feminist film studies have diversified their approaches and objectives: In general, attention is paid to the axes indicated by the so-called "intersectionality feminism" (gender, race, sexual identity, class), but always with specific objectives, such as pointing out the constant invisibility of women in films or modes of representation that are still stereotyped (Rivera, 3: 2013). The denaturalization of the concept of gender has developed a key role in research on structures and power relationships. Judith Butler (1990) proposes that biological sex works only in relation to the conceptual effects linked to our way of understanding the idea of gender. In this way, biology and gender are constituted in relation to the ideology of sexual difference. Butler follows a feminist trajectory that proposes that one cannot assign a sex to the body without previously defining the gender concept. Gender is not a biological fact that is solely reduced to the body; neither masculinity nor femininity are natural, transparent, universal, and invariable essences, but are actually subject to processes of complicity, domination, and resistance.

Gender is a social practice reproduced by social institutions and technologies, such as cinema, that structure the field of meaning. Laura Mulvey (1975) theorizes on the gender representations in cinema and how, in the case of her work, Hollywood films project masculine fantasies about the image of women. Supported by the works of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Christian Metz, she explains how this division between *active* and *passive* controls the narrative structure of a great majority of filmic dramas. Her work in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1975) has laid the foundation for the dominant theoretical debates of the following decades, posing problems that have since become central to feminism and film theory: the question of women's pleasure and the questions that refer to reception of films and the role of the spectator. She summarizes much of her feminist work around the politicization of women's representation, femininity, and sexuality in cinema, and the cinematic codes that position the viewer as a subject through the process of vision and visualization. Classical cinema owes its "magic" to a visual pleasure that is based on sexual difference, because it makes woman a simple spectacle (*to be looked-at-ness*) and an object of desire (Mulvey:

1975). It examines the connection between the cinematographic gaze and the process of identity formation, affirming that the masculine subject, in establishing the woman as the visible *other*, finds the legitimization of the male position of dominion and control in society in the cinematographic image. This confirms and encourages male desires of unity and supremacy, and maintains that cinematographic enjoyment resides in their condition of escophophylic or voyeuristic pleasure (Rivera, 3: 2013).

The theoretical model of Mulvey divides the system of representation into dichotomies: man is the active and omnipotent agent that controls the narrative, advances the plot, and serves as the central axis of identification; the woman is the passive, exhibitionist, masochistic, and narcissistic object. She is equivalent to a show, that is only looked at and controlled by means of visual fragmentation and body fetishism. According to Maricarmen de Lara, “the woman has been a character that has been taken as a way to portray a male imaginary and views women from that perspective. Really for a long time women were not seen as people, they were seen more as sexual objects. These characters were actually not subjects of their stories, but objects of the stories” (de Lara, Interview).

Voyeurism and fetishism are highly apparent in the representations of the female in classic cinema, where she is often viewed as an object of anguish. Men cannot help but feel drawn by their own desire that the woman awakens in him. For example, the concept of virginity is charged with morality and linked to the paradigms of decency and virtue that has marked social values for many decades. In this way, feminine corporeality and the body should be hidden from the eyes of men. The body, when observed with lust, is allowed to be violated or tainted. This leads to the virginal maiden marrying according to family tradition, thus maintaining order and social welfare (Torres, 14: 2016). On the other hand, the woman in classic cinema can also appear as an image of danger or a menacing object. The more desirable a woman is, the more dangerous she becomes. Eventually, the woman must be controlled and finally punished. To repeat the famous motto: femininity is investigated while masculinity is measured (de la Mora, 54: 1998).

This feminist theory, along with the new Latin-American and other avant-garde film practices, has changed the perception of cinema as an instrument of entertainment by emphasizing its political function as a transmitter of specific ideologies and naming cinema as a key institution for the conscientization (de la Mora, 54: 1998). Women are observed with contempt or with love, subliminal or horny, but they do not look on their own. Viewers, whether they know it or not, rarely understand the development of female characters that seem unchangeable, totally predictable, or mere additions to the landscape, adding to their resistance to individualization (Monsivais, 79: 1992).

In addition to the universal theories on the female representations of women in classical cinema, Mexican cinema has its own unique cultural heritage that has highly influenced the historical and current female representations in film. The filmic myths of the so-called “weaker sex” is filled with a strong repertoire of misunderstandings, atrocities, and prejudices (Barba, 45: 1994). According to Ramírez Berg, “History and mythology provide unique role models for the Mexican woman, which Mexicans have internalized” (Ramírez, 56: 1992). Two of the most influential female myths have been the Virgen Guadalupe and La Malinche. These two starkly contrasting female figures have led to a type of identity confusion that has preoccupied Mexican writers and thinkers to this day. The legend of La Malinche, the mother of mestizo Mexico, has become the symbol of betrayal of *la Mexicanidad*. She was an Aztec princess who was sold into service of the Spanish conquistador Cortés as an interpreter and eventually became his mistress. She is “regarded as the primeval traitor of her nation, the indigenous Eve who voluntarily consorted with the Spanish conqueror and caused the psychological and political fall of Mexico” (Ramírez, 56: 1992). La Malinche, often referred to as *La Chingada*, who herself was violated and also violated her people, introduces another dimension to the concept of women as a sex object. From La Malinche, the Mexican woman is expected to be “sensuous, alluring, and perfectly fulfilling - the ideal whore of every man’s fantasies,” yet viewed with a constant sense of distrust or danger (Ramírez, 56: 1992).

On the other hand, the myth of the Virgen Guadalupe incarnates a vision of La Malinche purified. She has become the most beloved symbol of and for Mexico by giving the Mexican people a maternal heritage equilibrium for the mestizo race. Between these two contrasting female images, a pattern has arisen that delineates the Mexican woman into either one of two options: the embodiment of the Virgin of Guadalupe who is virtuous, pure, untouched, and modest who will be his bride; or the sexualized female to be seduced for sexual relations, like La Malinche (Ramírez, 56: 1992).

For Mexican women, this madonna/whore double bind is now quite familiar and has remained the most ubiquitous juxtaposition of female identities. It is important to note that these cultural and intellectual discourses are nearly exclusively dominated by males, showcasing yet again how womanhood is “handled” by men in Mexico. “As Mexican history is interpreted by males and mixed with folklore to perpetuate male dominance, it is one-sided, unfair, and self-aggrandizing” (Ramírez, 57: 1992). The madonna/whore complex determined by these myths has infiltrated into Mexican cinema completely. The next section will further develop the concept of female stereotypes, especially that of the “mujer mala” and her great prominence.

1.3 Cinematographic importance of the prostitute

Cinema throughout the world unquestionably responds to certain clichés and well-defined stereotypes. Many of them emerged almost exactly at the time that film was born, over a hundred years ago. Mexican cinema does not escape convention, it assimilates and transforms it by making it uniquely its own. Over time, Mexican cinematography has exploited these emerging conventions to become specific classic celluloid characters (Barba, 45: 1994). In the filmic representation of female types and characters, there is a vast repertoire of significances, which has its origin in the moral order established by religion and traditional family values. Mexican cinema, basically since Silent Cinema (1917-1929), knew how to perfectly categorize the woman by her moral conception. Mexican cinema of the 1940s and into the 1950s took up the gender

representations imposed by Hollywood cinema and replicated the equivalent stereotypes in Mexican films: virgin, mother, and whore. Amid a historical social moment in mid-20th century Mexico, during which the discourse of modernity had a double connotative charge, “the woman was seen as a sexual object (a bad, active, attractive woman) or a maternal object (good, passive, not sexually attractive)” (Torres, 13: 2016).

This repertoire of cinematographic images and myths created during these times determined cultural perceptions and shaped the ways of seeing and understanding the world. However, the air of modernity of these years showed the suitable conduct of the image of a “modern” and “transgressive” woman in cinema. This guaranteed an identification with the audience that needed to be convinced that Mexico lived in new times, but also warned women of the possible fatalities that could happen to them if they upset the traditional values (Torres, 14: 2016). This image of “the woman,” herself torn between social duty and personal pleasure, speaks of the struggle between tradition (and backwardness) in which people lived, and the threat of progress and modernization of the traditional lifestyle (Rovirosa, 23: 1998).

No other female representation better incarnates this clash of ideologies than the prostitute. In effect, the prostitute is *the* classic character in Mexican cinema. As Jorge Ayala Blanco puts it, “The national sound cinematography begins by relating the biography of a prostitute and since then it has not been able to free itself from the tutelage of this character” (Rovirosa, 22: 1998). The figure of the prostitute has been read as an allegory of modernization in regard to the mythical elaborations of Mexican identity. Her association with the powerful historical character of La Malinche and the mother/prostitute dichotomy permeates the essentialist interpretations of the Mexican character (Fortes, 191: 2011). Most of the renowned Mexican actresses (Andrea Palma, María Félix, and Dolores del Río) in the so-called “Golden Era” (*Época de Oro*, 1940-1950s) interpreted the character of the prostitute once or several times throughout their film careers.

Through these portrayals, the character of the prostitute was established in Mexican cinema as one of the most representative of a social prototype (Al Rifai, 60). Prostitution in cinema is “noble because everyone wants it because it relies on biological instincts. The issue is not bad per se, the most important thing has been the abuse that kills sensitivity [to the prostitute]” (Tuñón, 126: 2000). From the melodrama of prostitution and its various permutations in *fichera* and *cabaretera* movies, through remakes and even in popular literature and music, “the prostitute has had a prominent place in the cultural imaginary” (Fortes, 192: 2011).

There exists a conductive thread throughout the films that feature prostitutes, but this journey in Mexican cinema is marked by a series of ruptures, rediscoveries, reiterations, recreations, homages, genre transgressions, and deviations. The cinema of social denunciation maintained the issue of prostitution on the sidelines in a symptomatic way; its protagonists managed to incarnate the prostitutes of the “world apart” of misery and exploitation that defined the Mexican reality of the 1930s and has survived in a certain manner until today (Roviroso, 22: 1998). The prostitute has been represented prominently in a variety of genres, including the *melodrama prostibulario*, *ficheras*, and *cabaretas* (B-Girl), which tell the tale of a woman living the marginal life of a prostitute in order to obtain some selfless good that would otherwise be economically and socially beyond her grasp (Ramírez, 59). Despite the seeming variety of the representations of the prostitute, there is a severe lack of “reality” in her image when relying on patriarchal stereotypes that gloss over the complexity of the character. Maricarmen agrees that,

the problems that these sex workers face [such as violence, risks, abuse, exploitation, etc.] is not reflected in Mexican cinema any more than through stereotypes. It is society that places women in a situation to be bought and sold, a situation that has become increasingly serious. And it has to do with the *machista* vision, a vision that has lasted in Mexican society because Mexican cinema often reproduces, strengthens, or unconsciously values this type of situation because it still retains a vision where the only thing that women are is an object. (de Lara, Interview)

Many times, the prostitute becomes a metaphor: that of the lost and oppressed nation or even of life itself. Obviously, the genre of the prostitute has its roots in the sociocultural development of the Mexican people, who have organized their society around the family and its moral values, considered a fundamental institution. The theme of these films is based on an authoritarian reality: the violation of the moral values on which society is based (Al-Rifai, 59: 2003). The prostitute generally embodies the "bad" character and, through her sexual nature which directly contrasts the image of the mother, always redeems herself through suffering or death (Torres, 85: 2001). "The prostitute's ends justify and transcend her socially marginal means. Like La Malinche, these women are living by their wits - and their bodies. Also like her, these women seek redemption and atonement - primarily from the male-dominated society - by sacrificing their lives for the benefit of others" (Ramírez, 60: 1992).

Given the skewed interpretation of reality projected in the representation of the prostitute, the general fallback is the portrayal of a stereotype that is easily implemented in a movie, without further development of her complexities. Since the creation of the archetype of the prostitute in the early 20th century, there have been over 100 Mexican movies with the main character of a prostitute, leading many to categorize these movies as its own genre. In order to escape the vicious cycle of generalizations surrounding this theme, I propose to redefine the term "genre" through an analysis of the character not only as an emblem or prototype, but as a variety of possibilities relating to the content of the stories. This analysis will incorporate an intertextual perspective by considering the cinema of prostitutes less as a genre and more as a *cinematographic form*. The so-called "genre" of prostitute films rather configures a tendency, a thematic recurrence that at some point achieves a certain autonomy and imposes its own rules, but even so, does not achieve more than distinguishing certain elements around a perfectly defined narrative genre such as the melodrama. Hence, some critics call the cinema of prostitutes, if not accurate at least an approximate title, a "subsidiary genre," rather than a genre in itself (Roviroso, 23: 1998). "The genre" - when analysts talk about the cinema of prostitutes - has been an evolutionary process that refers only to the dominant

tendency and not to the different proposals that have been made on the subject throughout the history of cinema in Mexico.

CHAPTER 2: Creation of the archetype of the prostitute Santa

2.1 Filmic Context of 1930s Mexico

Before diving into the creation of the archetype of the prostitute, it is important to review the profound significance of the melodrama in Mexican cinema, and more specifically the melodrama *prostibulario*, beginning in the late 1930s. Mexican cinema of the 1930s-1950s presents itself as a consolidated industry and constitutes a reference point of national culture, including the so-called Golden Age (Época de Oro) from 1945-1950. Cinema occupied a space in the constitution of key characteristics of Mexican culture: the identities of the nationalistic and popular as well as of the urban and modern. In the moment of Mexico's stark transformation from a highly traditionalistic society to an emerging modern one, cinema intervenes and demonstrates this exact transition to a modern way of life, imposing a very particular vision of social and gender order. With the premiere of the first sound films, Mexico created a previously unavailable ambassador of its history, folklore, and landscape. The Mexican film industry saw cinema as a way to export its redefined image to the rest of the world, as well as impose social norms upon its own citizens.

During this time, the national film industry had two key components to guarantee success at the box office: generic formulas implemented through the filmic structure of the melodrama and a popularly recognized star-system influenced by Hollywood. This star-system introduced illustrious actors such as María Félix, Dolores del Río, Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, Andrea Palma, and many more (Corona, 2009: 2012). In general, the melodrama portrays a Manichaean world divided into "good" and "bad," the triumphant and the defeated (Millán, 74: 1999). The melodrama is a distinctly Mexican expression of human behavior that is not controlled by unearthly forces. Instead, the tragedy of melodrama can be changed or avoided because the narrative conditions are imposed by the people themselves. There is always enormous suffering, but behind the tragedy there is an awareness that situations are changeable, dependent on personal

actions. This social determinism that can be altered in a shifting society is typical of the Mexican melodrama.

In the classical melodrama, there is no possible compromise between good and bad characters. The genre is designed to protect the family, reminding the public of the dangers of the secular world, for example: adultery, rebellious children, dangers of seduction, or estrangement from the traditional. There exists a game of confrontation between stereotyped behaviors that are applied in a conventional ritual, whose rules are well known by society. The intention of the melodrama is to move the public, showing, in a personal manner, the good and bad in extreme situations of sadness or joy. The villains of the melodrama are those who reject their moral and civilized function; the victims are those whose innocence is persecuted (Vidrio, 12: 2001). The public will be happy because the movie ends with the triumph of justice, the triumph of virtue over evil, and the triumph of good over bad (Vidrio, 9: 2001). The melodrama of these years is the best sentimental school that Mexican society has created (Corona, 208: 2012).

Through this immortalization of basic human types, Mexican cinema has become an agent of history, as well as a living experience of shaping common identities and the country's self-image. Here we see the creation of "character archetypes" that later permeate themselves into the collective memory of Mexican cinema. This fixation on archetypes and narrative forms of cinematographic melodrama are closely linked to Judeo-Christian values and a patriarchal society: love, passion, incest, and "the woman." Through the cultural form of film, the public confirms the normative ideas of the assimilated world (Oroz, 42: 1995). The importance of stereotypes in mass culture lies in the symbolic figure they represent. All of the archetypes refer to socially accepted values, hence conditioned to the historical context (Oroz, 42: 1995).

During the first decades of sound film in Mexico, female characters form the classic mixture of archetype and stereotype, which will be of particular interest to this work. The six basic female prototypes of melodrama are: the mother, the sister, the girlfriend, the wife, the bad one (*la mala*) and/or the prostitute (*la peligrosidad*), and the lover. Everything happens to "the women": she lacks will, she is exalted by passion or

love, she is mistreated, and she is undermined. She “must take on the sins of the world (because who else would?), and thus she herself incarnates sin and suffers for it” (Monsivais, 79: 1992). The female figures established between the parameters of "saint" and "prostitute" are tied to a specific symbolism: the selfless and suffering character of the faithful wife or mother and the prostitute who is a victim of destiny and redeemed by suffering and misfortune. At another level, cinema exalts “the woman” in an inconceivable way: it mistreats and minimizes to the woman by glorifying these feminine archetypes (Monsivais, 79: 1992).

Turning to the subgenre of the melodrama prostibulario, a succinct revision produces the following conclusion: the cinema of prostitutes is a return to the Mexican melodrama of the purest essence (Roviroso, 22: 1998). The character of the prostitute and the melodramas in which she stars are the perfect example of the objective of the melodrama: teach Mexican society how to (not) act and the consequences for those who do not follow its well-defined path. The melodrama of prostitution presented an alternative discourse of modern Mexican identity, censured by the official nationalism of the early 1930s; they functioned as a kind of behind-the-scenes zone for the nationalist projects sponsored by the state (Fortes, 200: 2011). The figure of the prostitute in relation to the topology of nationalism and the changing social spectrum of Mexican modernity found value in representational practices like cinema. In the years following the Revolution, cinema’s relationship with social and institutional practices sought to redefine the space of the nation with the intention of unifying an economic and racially polarized population. The melodrama of prostitution serves this mission precisely because it dramatizes the compression of (social) space, through the violent displacement of the protagonist who abandons the idyllic countryside for urban clandestinity (Fortes, 194: 2011). Since these melodramas are usually located in the neighborhoods and suburbs of the capital, gender roles serve as the formation for citizens to learn modern and urban customs. The figure of the prostitute, linked to the new transnational phenomenon of the modern female, implies a desire for

cosmopolitanism and seeks to reconstruct the relations of propinquity explicitly in terms of gender (Fortes, 195: 2011).

The melodrama prostibulario is the favored genre of Mexican cinema's traditional and masculine viewpoint to present the ideal place for "the woman" in society. The genre inserts itself between the vulgarity and ridiculousness encompassed by this viewpoint, which loves to strip down the woman, take away her innocence, punish her, and condemn her to tragedy- because if she does not marry, there is no other option in life (López: 2013). Within this genre, there is an aspect dealing with prostitution that is, despite its social denunciation, characterized by metaphysical stylizations between sin and salvation, and thus builds a stereotyped image of women (Schmidt-Welle and Wehr, 9: 2015). The prostitute, as an active subject within the framework of an established social and moral order, unbalances this, because she breaks with the dramatic structure that is governed between good and evil. The female characters of these film stories become the bad or the perverse, those that left their family nucleus to become an economically active subject, which places women as a threat to patriarchal ideology (Corona, 211: 2012).

The journey of this cinematographic form is marked by breaks, repetitions, tributes and even transgressions, but in the end it has always returned to its purest essence (Torres, 90: 2001). The main character of the prostitute embodies the *other* face of the female heroines of Latin American cinema of these years. She is perverse and devours men, yet possesses a tangible glamorous and physical presence, almost always exalted in a well-formed body, a beautiful face, and an implicit sensual appeal (Torres, 88: 2001).

The melodrama prostibulario was technically born in 1918 with the first version of *Santa*, based on the homonymous novel by Federico Gamboa. This silent *Santa* was the origin of the films about a good-hearted female character who will prostitute herself, not out of desire, but because she has no other choice. The novel and film was a commercial success since the time of publication because it evokes issues that touch the soul of Mexico, including poverty and sexuality, through an unattainable and

pure-hearted woman (despite her being a prostitute, of course). This film laid the groundwork for shaping one of the most important archetypes of Mexican melodrama: the victim prostitute has accompanied the national cinema from the silent film era until today. This type of female character currently appears in Mexican cinema, not necessarily always as a prostitute, but as women characterized by her purity and capacity for suffering in adverse situations, caused by third parties or the tragic dismemberment of the traditional family (López: 2013). The creation of the archetype in *Santa* will be discussed in the next section in more detail.

2.2 *Santa*

The story of *Santa*, the small town girl forced to move to the capital and prostitute herself, was born in the novel *Santa* written by Federico Gamboa and published in 1903. It was later adapted to the celluloid four times: a silent version 1917 and three sound films in 1931, 1943, and 1969. The last Mexican novel written in the 19th century and the first published in the 20th, *Santa* became a national bestseller: between 1903, the date of its publication in Barcelona, and 1939, the death Gamboa, more than 60,000 copies were sold. Interestingly enough, the novel was forbidden in “high-class” families due to its graphic sexual nature and salacious content. Nevertheless, it was an instant hit with a largely female audience and young women were forced to read it in secret, hidden from their families.

The book’s dedication, written by Gamboa in the first-person voice of *Santa*, is of particular interest to this work:

You are not going to believe that I am a saint, but that is what I was named... Evicted by the people of good conscience, I cherish the hope that, feeling sorry for me, you palpate me until I stumble upon a thing that I have carried deep inside, that I guess would be my heart, for how much it palpated and hurt with the injustices that made me a victim... Do not tell anyone- they would laugh at you and be horrified at me- but imagine: in the health inspection, I was a number; in the brothel, a rent payment; in the street, a rabid animal, which anyone persecuted, and everywhere, a wretch. When I laughed, they scolded me, when I cried, they did not believe my tears, and when I loved, the only two times I loved, one terrorized me and the other villainized me. Tired of the suffering, I rebelled

and they imprisoned me... I will now confess my story. And you'll see how, even if you convince yourself that I was guilty, just hearing it, you'll cry with me. You'll see how you forgive me, oh, I'm sure. God has forgiven me just as I am! For now, the heroine... (I am conscious that this book was made to be austere and chaste, not a single page escapes the delicate and ardent nature of my subject, and will never bring anything else to the mind of my reader other than a sad meditation)... (Gamboa, Preface: 1903)

This intimate look into the mind of Santa provides the reader with a starting off point for the tragic creation of this iconic character. The story of Santa, a prostitute but pure of soul, narrates the desperate causes and fatal effects of a woman living a gallant life. Santa (poignantly meaning *Saint* in Spanish) is a beautiful young woman from the small town of Chimalistac, who is raised by her mother and brothers. A military troop comes to town and she is quickly seduced by the soldier Marcelino. Despite his declarations of love and their weeks together as lovers, Marcelino abandons Santa and leaves town with the army. Santa, alone and with her reputation ruined, is thrown out of her house by her mother and brothers, since she has become a disgrace to the family and cannot work. Santa emigrates to Mexico City and finds work in a brothel under the care of Doña Elvira. There Santa grows up and becomes a woman of confidence, comfortable with her sensuality, passion, and carnality. A Spanish bullfighter named Jarameño falls in love with her and they begin a relationship. It seems that everything might turn out well for Santa, but precisely then comes her downfall. Her brothers track her down at the brothel and tell her that her mother has passed away and that she forgave Santa for her sins before her death. Then the soldier Marcelino returns and tries to seduce her again, to no avail. Unfortunately, Jarameño enters the room, discovers them, and leaves Santa. Santa is alone again, Doña Elvira throws her out of the house, and eventually Santa discovers that she is sick and is going to die. The only person who stays by her side is her loyal blind friend Hipólito, the only one who has shown her true love. In the end, Santa dies alongside Hipólito and finally obtains redemption for her sins.

Santa's tragic story was first adapted in the era of silent films in 1917, directed by Luis G. Peredo and starring Elena Sanchez Valenzuela. This first version unknowingly made history, since *Santa* went on to be the most adapted movie of Mexican cinema. The silent film consists of framed quotations and borders on a Art-Nouveau style that somehow manages to illustrate key aspects of the novel. Classic sequences between Santa and Hipólito, like their last meeting full of failed caresses and lost love, showcase a deep feeling of sadness in the film.

This version of Santa is a model for life, of moral and aesthetic references for the community. In Revolution times, "*la puta*" became the personification of the Mexican nation and a national emblem. The only way to save Mexico from decay was in the return to a simple traditional patriotism, rural life, and Catholic norms (Hahn, 30: 2015). This particular Santa has been crucial in the creation of the archetype character and still conserves the mythic aura of being the first personification of the novel's infamous character (Vidrio, 15: 2001).

The second filmic version of *Santa*, however, will be the focus of this work, as it truly led to the creation of the prostitute stereotype in the Mexican melodrama. In 1930, Mexico adventures into the world of sound films, without much technique and only a brief cinematographic tradition. The second version of Santa was released in 1931, starring Lupita Tovar and directed by Antonio Moreno, who sweetened the story of Gamboa in favor of the melodrama: its film poster even promised, "You will cry a lot." In this second version, a clear phenomenon is noticeable: the Mexican melodrama sees its most poignant symbol in Santa. The woman who sinned because of hunger and misery, to whom love reigned and consumed, becomes the essence of the fundamental character of "the suffering Mexican woman." She is a woman who will listen, her eyes flooded by purifying tears, and the woman who will take to the streets at dawn in the impossible search of a noble passion. Santa essentializes the destiny of women in the Mexican melodrama: a silent, eternal suffering, without reproach, a smile of total self-denial, constant tenderness, and generous suffering. Here, Santa inevitably becomes the symbol and destiny of Mexican cinema (Monsivais: 1965).

The movie's release, both nationally and internationally, was met with widespread rave reviews. The newspaper *Cine Mundial* describes its strong impact at the international release party in Los Angeles on April 27, 1932:

It was an extraordinary event. The critics claimed that Mexico had created a masterpiece. There were days of extraordinary enthusiasm, the national film industry had taken its first step and achieved an amazing economic and artistic success. Dozens of businessmen began to think that it was time to make movies, investing large amounts. The road was wide open. (*Cine Mundial*: 1932)

Santa's popularity helped catapult the Mexican national film industry into the international limelight and encouraged two more filmic adaptations. *Santa* (1943), directed by US-American Norman Foster and Alfredo Gómez de la Vega and starring Esther Fernández, portrayed how the "women of *la vida alegre*" takes Santa as an example of womanhood and path to perfection, still evident in the 1940s. In the words of Gamboa, they see in Santa "the rumor of shared kisses, reciprocating caresses, the imposing and triumphal anthem of the flesh" (Monsivais: 1965). The last version in 1969, directed by Emilio Gómez Muriel and starring Julissa, is considered to have the lowest cinematographic quality of all of the *Santa* films, mostly based on the incorrect casting decision for the role of Santa. The differences in *Santa*'s versions inevitably have to do with the individual film's historical context in pre- and post-Revolution Mexico and the developing national relationship with modernity.

2.3 Creation of the prostitute archetype and narrative scheme in *Santa*

This section will explain the construction of the archetype of the prostitute and the classic narrative scheme of the prostitute character canon created in the 1931 version of *Santa*. Santa can be seen as the origin of a cultural agreement who has persisted in the cinema of prostitutes in Mexican cinema and became the origin of the "predominance of the misogynistic character" in the history of the melodrama (Rovirosa, 23: 1998).

Santa is a small town girl who is seduced and abandoned, plunged into sadness, dishonor and humiliation, and her only way out is to seek the trade of prostitution. This moral scheme - becoming bad and perverse, abandoning the family nucleus, and being an economically active subject - was seen as a threat to the order of the patriarchal ideological structure, because the prostitute has power, dominates, and, in a certain way, recreates the ideal of an independent woman. The prostitute essentially unbalances the dramatic structure. Nevertheless, this character is a marginal social subject which prevents her from assuming liberating behavior. She occupies a certain role of importance because she serves as compensation for the instatisfactions of the Mexican male (another archetypal figure) and, by extension, she will exercise her presence in the sentimental formation of the men (Torres, 89: 2001).

The prostitute represents a form of female rebellion within patriarchal patterns. Hated, feared, and desired, she not only triggers the drama but, additionally, is entitled to a privileged *mise-en-scene* and differentiated syntax than the rest of female characters. This prototype is deeply connected to the position of the church that maintained the double moral of attacking the prostitute but also defending her, since she was a necessity to safeguard the honor of the married woman and the virginity of the single women.

An important aspect of the construction of the character is the difference between her body and her spirit. Santa is violated physically but purified in spirit through her punishment and suffering. Santa's body changes throughout the story; it is born pure but ends with illness and death, wholly contaminated. From here, the public sympathizes with her but learns that one must repent for their sins. The protagonist's redemption is through her punishment and suffering. Her redemption symbolizes the country's redemption: she is the mythologized woman necessary to submit to the sublimated patriarchal power. Santa goes from a tainted girl to the humble heroine of the Mexican people (Hahn, 38: 2015).

This typification of heroines is inscribed in a narrative structure where the prostitute is merely a part of an already constructed dramatic scheme. The way in which

the prostitute or the perverse woman works within a cinematographic argument responds to different causes: an element of suspense, crime or sublimation, an escape, or as a counterpart of the masculine roles, not only within the cinema of prostitutes (Torres, 89: 2001). The narrative scheme follows a predetermined path to the decay of the female character through the structure of *Purity-Sin-Redemption*, utilizing at least one of the Manichean conflict models of good vs. bad, moral vs. illicit, or honest vs. perverse. To become the character of the prostitute, first she has to show that she is inherently good; second, her virginity is not merely given away, it is taken from her; and third, she is seduced and then abandoned. Once she is a prostitute, she must seek redemption to be accepted within a strictly patriarchal ideological order (Ramirez Berg, 168). The prostitute must be punished for her excessive sexuality, vices like alcohol and cigarettes, dancing, independent lifestyle, and relationships with men. She only has two paths to redemption: she is crowned as saint and savior of the town after her punishment of blindness, paralysis, or death; or she becomes “good” through a romantic love and marriage with the male “hero” and succumbs to his control.

Martha Vidrio describes the classic character canon of the prostitute and its lack of evolution since its creation:

I think we've already realized that in all movies, in general terms, [the prostitutes] are women with few economic resources, who are forced [into prostitution], either because their boyfriend cheats on them and their families kick them out, that's the general scheme. Families force them to leave and they do not have a way to live. Some are deceived or betrayed by somebody and they get into prostitution. And in [the prostitute's] moment of triumph, where she learns a moral lesson, then comes her fall from grace and death. This is the same scheme that is repeated in one film after another, after another... There is no development, there is no evolution. It would have been very interesting to work the prostitute from other perspectives and not so schematic (Vidrio, Interview).

This archetypal scheme led to the creation of the stereotype of the prostitute, which has since been unable to break the bonds to its origin in Santa.

The prostitute is different from the other stereotypes of female characters in the physical space that she occupies. She is one of the only female characters who is

allowed in public spaces and outside of the house. She showcases a woman functioning outside of the traditional private spaces like the home, which is why she is the only woman related to danger and who introduces drama and action into the narration (Oroz, 35: 1995). The brothel itself also counts as a space for prostitutes. It not only exemplifies the bad or the dirty, but also a microcosm of society and community for the women who live there, where friendships are formed between prostitutes, differences between social classes are maintained, and the prostitutes feel at home in some way (Hahn, 38: 2015). "The representation of the brothel in the film is linked to the expressions of a masculinity far from the revolutionary ideals of discipline, moral integrity, or national pride" (Fortes, 200: 2011). Here, men could come together and share ideas and cultural and social notions, creating a public space where men and women were integrated in some way, which was previously not accepted.

There is a certain enigma about the permanence of Santa on the big screen. We can say that Mexican cinema begins by telling the story of Santa and therefore remains forever faithful to the character. Santa has become more than a simple movie character, she is a unique part of Mexican popular culture. Through Santa, and in effect every prostitute that came after her, Mexican cinema has unified its public by presenting the basic idea that they have in themselves and their communities, such as attitudes, style of speech, common places, and traditions. An unknown film critic wrote in 1918,

The national film *Santa* means the realization of a beautiful ideal, to create the idea that Mexico is a civilized and eminent artistic country to the rest of the world. We firmly believe that the film *Santa* deserves to cross the borders of Mexico to enter those countries that are interested in knowing the aspects of our culture and our national life. From this point of view, the aforementioned film can be conceptualized as a means of cultural propaganda Contrary to the beliefs of some people, the film is not of absolute morality. *Santa* is a film that is of basic morals. (*Cine Mundial*, 1918)

For better or worse, the archetype created in *Santa* created a long lasting rubric for the formation of the prostitute that has since become an inescapable stereotype.

2.4 Scene Analysis

This work will analyze selected scenes that demonstrate critical aspects of the character's development through three categories of investigation: romantic life, family, and redemption. These scenes will demonstrate key points in the film in which the character of the prostitute is defined and developed.

In the category of romantic life, we can observe how the heroine is seduced, her virginity taken from her, and then abandoned by her lover. The scenes between Santa and the soldier Marcelino are imperative in understanding the chain of reactions that force Santa to move to Mexico City and become a prostitute. The affair between them begins when Santa gives Marcelino water after his troop arrives to the village and he invites her to meet later and talk. The spectator gets a glimpse of foreshadowing when a bundle of white flowers is trampled by the soldiers' horses after their meeting, indicating that Santa's pureness will soon be in ruins like the white flowers. The next shot cuts to Marcelino seducing Santa in the forest and an intimate close up of Santa's beautiful face as she is about to be kissed by Marcelino. The camera follows the viewpoint of the male character, the "cinematographic male gaze" as described by Mulvey. An ellipsis states, "And so it was that day and many weeks after..." and we cut back to the couple again in the forest, when Santa tells Marcelino that she is embarrassed to be in her house now, supposedly because of their affair and her fear of the repercussions. He responds, "Don't tell anyone what happened. Not even your shadow!" She begs him not to abandon her and he simply replies, "Don't be such a coward, no one knows anything." The discontent in her face is obvious, but Marcelino simply kisses her and ignores her pleas. Back in town, Santa discovers the soldiers are leaving and rushes to find Marcelino on his horse about to ride off. She begs him not to leave her, and he simply says, "I will be back." The last shot of them together is the whole troop riding out on their horses and a desperate Santa clinging to Marcelino's horse and yelling "Don't abandon me!" She falls to the ground in desperation as her lover rides away. She cries into her hands, knowing that her life has essentially been ruined.

According to social norms, once a woman has been touched by a man, she has become used property and cannot be married off. What she naively thought could be a lifetime romance with Marcelino was a mere sexual affair that he was able to freely walk away from without any consequences. Unfortunately for Santa, the community is not so forgiving to women in the same situation, and she is socially ostracized. Santa is now abandoned, heart broken, and with no future romantic prospects which prohibits her ability to financially maintain herself.

In the second category of family, the family's rejection of Santa for her actions and eviction her from the house is another factor that leads Santa to leave her town and move to the capital. During the romantic scenes with Marcelino, we notice the increasing worry of Santa's brothers and mother. When Santa's brothers suspect she is having an affair with a soldier, they warn her, "There is a lot of gossip about you. If it is true, we will have to do something. We would kill any man that was involved with you." Despite their warnings, Santa still innocently believes Marcelino will marry her and start a life together. After he abandons her, her brothers look on with dismay, knowing there is little that can be done for Santa now. Unlike in the 1917 version where we see Santa's family physically kicking her out of the house, this version merely cuts to her new life in Mexico city, leaving the viewer to suppose that she could not continue living at home.

The next scene involving Santa's family is when her brothers track her down at the brothel to tell her of their mother's death. Santa is now a grown woman, elegantly dressed in a tight black dress and sensual make-up. The brothers scorn her for her profession and for her lifestyle in the brothel, not acknowledging that she is only there because she could not live at home anymore with her family. When the brothers relate their mother's death, they tell Santa, "Our mother blessed you and called out your name before she died. Mother, because she is your mother, did not curse you. But we do! Don't ever try to see us again." Santa is left in tears but is immediately comforted by her lover Jarameño, who consoles her by saying, "You must be in great pain. One's mother is the most precious thing in the world. When she dies, one's heart breaks in two. Poor

girl, promise me you won't go back to work at Doña Elvira's. Move elsewhere and pray for your mother. Pray to the Virgin of Macarena for your mother's soul." This statement perfectly places in contrast the dichotomy of the mother/whore complex. Santa, now a tainted prostitute, must pray for the soul of her beloved and pure mother, who forgave Santa for her sins before her death. Only a mother, essentially good in her soul and body, could forgive the sins of her daughter's prostitution. To repay her mother for her forgiveness, Santa must leave prostitution and confess her sins. Her brothers, of course, could not forgive Santa for her sins and condemn her to a life outside of their family, symbolizing the male patriarchal system that in essence rejects the prostitute to the marginalized sector of society.

Her mother's forgiveness is the first step in Santa's downfall to death and her final redemption. Now that she has somehow reconciled her sins with her mother and prayed for her, she has now purified her soul. All that is left is to purify her body, ultimately through her death. After finding out that she is sick and will die very soon, Santa finally finds redemption in her death. She dies in the hospital alongside Hipólito, the only man who truly loved her and never abandoned her. It is critical to mention that Hipólito, a blind man, is essentially deformed and also lives outside of the mainstream patriarchal society and thus able to truly love her, even though an able-bodied man could not. On her deathbed, Santa makes Hipólito promise to bury her in the cemetery of Chimalistac next to her mother's grave. We overhear the nurses comment, "Poor girl, she was the prettiest girl in Mexico," while preparing for surgery. In another conversation, Hipólito asks his helper Genarillo if he thinks Santa will die. Genarillo responds, "Why would she die? She is such a good person." These small comments help the viewer understand that Santa is slowly being forgiven for her sins and is now perceived as a beautiful and good woman. Before being wheeled into surgery, Hipólito prays for Santa and she pleads for him to wait for her. However, the surgery does not go well and Santa eventually dies on the operating table. The doctor claims, "Unfortunately, the force of science has not been enough," leading the spectator to believe that God has condemned Santa to death for her sins. Hipólito utters the last line of the film,

praying at Santa's grave, "Santa! Mother of God Mary, pray for our sins..." We can see a clear connection between religion and Santa's redemption: faith that those who have sinned must be punished. Only through her death can Santa's spirit be cleaned and become pure again by the Virgin Mary, the ultimate symbol of female purity.

These key scenes help create the framework for the narrative structure that will become ubiquitous with prostitute characters for the decades to come. The next chapter will focus on a more modern representation of the prostitute of Alma from *El Callejón de Los Milagros* (1995) and an analysis of key scenes in the same categories to facilitate a direct comparison of the two characters.

CHAPTER 3: Representation of the prostitute in *El Callejón de Los Milagros*

3.1 Filmic context of *Nuevo Cine Mexicano* in the 1990s

The transformation of the Mexican film industry during the period from the end of the *Época del Oro* in the 1950s until its rejuvenation in the beginning of the 1990s was marked by a decline in film production, viewership, and economic prosperity. An economic crisis of Mexican cinema persisted for several decades, during which the production of movies decreased because limited funding was available. The general Mexican public stopped watching national movies in movie theaters and turned primarily to Hollywood for its entertainment.

It is important to note for this work that the representation of the prostitute did manifest itself in a new genre of films in the 1970s and 80s: *el cine de cabareteras y ficheras*. This genre essentially repackaged “the prostitute” from the Golden Age and turned her into “the *illusion of a woman*, seen more as an object and whose personal background no longer mattered. The script did not care if the girl came from a family; there was essentially no concrete story. They showed nothing more than women undressing. There was no more evolution [of the prostitute]” (Vidrio, Interview). This genre broke away from the classic narrative scheme as described in the previous chapter and merely focused on the protagonist’s body, face, sexual prowess, and dance skills, never addressing the woman as someone who was worth more than her body. “These are films that in some way foster what the Mexican state is, foster their way of viewing women which has nothing to do with the real situation that sex workers experience” (de Lara, Interview). The height of the *cabareteras* in the 80s slowly lost its appeal at the turn of the decade as a new wave of young filmmakers took to the scene.

Fortunately for Mexican cinema, this revitalization of the film industry precipitated a shift towards auteur cinema (*cine de autor*) and an emphasis on making quality and experimental films. The so-called “Nuevo Cine Mexicano” or “New Mexican Cinema” is

actually divided into two phases: “La gran ilusión 1966-1976” (“The grand illusion”), and “Volver a empezar 1977-1997” (“Start over”) (Schmidt-Welle, 185: 2015). This work will, however, focus on the second phase and will hereby refer to this time period as New Mexican Cinema.

The influence of New Mexican Cinema was comprised of young people who represented a resurgence that manifested itself in the quality of new melodramas and other Mexican genres. Directors were mainly dedicated to introducing new themes and new ways of narrating, taking extra care with the stories, structures, and characters in their films. They brought about a revival of a cinema with greater thematic and technical quality which resulted in the return of the general public to national cinema in Mexico (Vidrio, 50: 2001).

Mexican cinema of the 1990s is characterized by an apparent paradox. Despite the fact that the national film industry was once again in one of its deep crises in terms of production, infrastructure, and dissemination, this period is precisely one of the most fruitful decades of Mexican cinema. This is reflected not only in the growing international commercialization of some of these films, but also in a series of national and international awards for several films produced at this time (Schmidt-Welle, 186: 2015). This generation of filmmakers tried to reach a more international aesthetic and audience, while at the same time encouraging its Mexican public to also join in its revival.

It appears that the public that liked the aesthetics of the New Mexican or Latin-American cinema was not interested in the conventional aesthetics of Hollywood nor avant-garde experimental films, but instead declared themselves in favor of auteur cinema (so in vogue in the previous decades in Europe). New Mexican Cinema retakes many formal elements of a more sophisticated auteur cinema, however the way of telling the stories was quite different from the trends of the past. In contrast with the European trend, these films maintained the specific characteristics of the history of cinema in Latin America, while at the same time adapting to certain procedures of international cinema, such as a sophisticated camerography, non-linear narration, and

the introduction of several frames with multiple protagonists. Nevertheless, there still existed the melodramatic elements that made the New Mexican Cinema accessible to a national audience accustomed to the melodrama of the classic cinema of the Golden Age or the melodramatic forms of Latin-American soap operas (Schmidt-Welle, 188: 2015).

A few major thematic preferences emerged in this period: violence, difficult family relationships, and problematic sexuality. Virtually all relationships between men and women, and especially sexual relationships, are permeated by acts of violence and a process of capitalization. Love is sold and becomes a commodity (Schmidt-Welle, 192: 2015). These exact thematics and the cinematographic trends of New Mexican Cinema are essential in an analysis of *El Callejón de Los Milagros* (1995). There are two noteworthy aspects in the connection between this particular film and the filmic tendency of the time: first, the relative commercial success of the film and positive effects on the image of New Mexican Cinema, both nationally and internationally; second, the aesthetics of the stories that intersect in the script will become the basic structure model for several later Mexican films (Schmidt-Welle, 186). The next section will introduce this film, its production, plot, and representation of the prostitute in relation to the cinematographic context of the New Mexican Cinema.

3.2 *El Callejón de Los Milagros*

El Callejón de Los Milagros, directed by Jorge Fons, was filmed in 1994 and released in 1995. The script, written by Vicente Leñero, is based on the novel *Zuqāq al-Midaq* (*Midaq Alley*) by Naguib Mahfouz. It was originally written in Arabic in 1947 and is one of the best-known and most important novels by the Egyptian author. He later received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988. This novel was not the first adaptation that Mahfouz inspired in Mexico; his novel *Principio y Fin* (1949) was also adapted into the film directed by Arturo Ripstein (1993).

Mahfouz's realistic work in *Midaq Alley* focuses on the daily life of the popular classes and petty bourgeoisie in a small neighborhood of Cairo in the 1940s, who follow a life influenced by conservative Islamic thought. However, the characters are universal representations of humans that are found in all societies across the globe. Therefore the characters, although they come from an Arabic society, are relatable to characters of any other society (Vidrio, 47: 2008). The novel centers on popular issues with a social dimension: popular speech, urban setting, and social denunciation.

Jorge Fons and his screenwriter Vicente Leñero transferred Mahfouz's novel to the big screen by setting the story in the historic center of Mexico City during modern-day 1990s. Jorge Fons (1939-) comes from the first generation of directors of CUEC and has worked in filmography for more than 30 years, becoming one of the most celebrated directors in Mexican cinema. Fons is known for his talent in directing his actors, while taking care of the details in the construction of the characters. Vicente Leñero (1933-2014) was one of the most important figures in the world of Mexican art. He wrote many screenplays and plays, but he was also the author of essays and novels as well as a scriptwriter for radio and television, reporter, columnist, and film critic. Most of his screenplays were adaptations of novels, because Leñero saw a special relationship between film and literature and treated his scripts as if they were novels made for cinema.

Leñero took special care in the adaptation of the novel *Midaq Alley* into a movie script. Leñero believed that "the way of telling a story is more important than the story itself. In order to tell a melodrama, the most important thing is *how* it is told and not the anecdotes of the melodrama" (de la Torre, 69: 2007). Therefore, Leñero decided to change the way the story was told, instead of following the same slower plot development of the novel. This particular script went through many revisions during half a year, including debates about the narration style and organization of scenes, until Alfredo Ripstein (who owned the original rights to the screenplay) suggested splitting the film into sections based on the characters. Neither Fons nor Leñero would let the

film be made until they were fully satisfied with the script and the artistic direction of the production (de la Vega, 206: 2005).

The prostitute character Alma, the focus in this work, was interpreted by Salma Hayek in her first major motion picture after working in Mexican telenovelas. Fons commented on Salma's participation in the film, "Salmita was very happy because she knew that she was making an important movie and was aware of the level of actors and actresses she was surrounded by. Salma is very responsible, hardworking, and perceptive. Throughout the filming, she continued to improve and ended up doing inspired work" (de la Vega, 209: 2005). Hayek has gone on to become one of the most famous Mexican actresses in the world, with a long career in Hollywood as a director, actor, and producer.

El Callejón de Los Milagros won multiple Ariel Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, and various international awards. For a long time, no other Mexican film had this great of a resonance with Mexican viewership. Since its commercial premiere in Mexico on May 5, 1995, the film held a spot in the most important movie theaters in Mexico and did not leave the billboards throughout the entire summer. The success was apparently due to word of mouth and personal recommendations among the general public (Lazcano: 1995). Needless to say, the film was also a huge success internationally. Box office success in Mexico and abroad, considered the film "cine de calidad" (quality cinema). Local film critics at the time raved about the movie:

It is a film in which a large majority of the public recognizes themselves, with impeccable photography, an "interesting" plot without complications, recognizable actors, and a vision of reality that appeals to easily identifiable "models." In a narration owed to Leñero's script, characters appear to be entangled and serve as a narrative scheme in which different stories are developed with the same characters, who end up being secondary characters or protagonists in the various stories. (Arias: 1995)

The movie's characters represent symbolic figures in a microcosm of society that reflect many neighborhoods around the world. In the small alleyways of *El Callejón de*

Los Milagros, the audience enters into a sector of society without perspective, doomed to failure and tragedy (Vidrio, 48: 2008). Thematic elements such as the cruel and caricaturesque portrait of popular characters recover the themes and prestigious characters of the Golden Age (Arias: 1995). The commercial success and societal identification with the characters in *El Callejón de Los Milagros* will be important aspects utilized in analysis later in this work.

The film's plot is divided into four parts. The first three parts (Rutilio, Alma, and Susana) are intersecting stories, yet in some way are autonomous, narrated from the point of view of the protagonists. In these short stories that begin the same Sunday afternoon, we watch the personal drama of the protagonists one by one. All those who live in the alley participate in the local daily life and relate to each other for better or for worse. The non-linear script allows the protagonist of one story to later become a secondary character in the other stories. This structure permits the stories to enrich each other, because we can view the same incidents from different points of view. Although each of these characters is individualized in their own stories, they never cease to belong to the collective life of the alley. All together, the movie narrates the common routines of a group of people who live in the same daily life. The neighborhood itself can even be seen as the true protagonist of the film that represents a microcosm of Mexican society: its values and internal conflicts (Vidrio, 155: 2008).

"Rutilio" is the story of the owner of the cantina in the neighborhood. He is a 50-something year old man, who they call Ru and lives in the neighborhood with his wife Eusebia and his son, the young man Chava. Don Ru becomes interested in a friendship with a young salesman. The salesman and Don Ru begin a romantic affair, however his lack of discretion undoes his whole life when his wife and son discover the homosexual affair. Chava catches his father bathing with the young man and Chava almost kills his father's lover. Chava decides to escape punishment and leaves to the U.S. with his friend Abel, a hairdresser that works in the neighborhood. Don Ru is both angry and hurt about losing his son and vows to never lose him again.

“Alma” is the story of the beautiful young woman Alma (poignantly translated to *Soul* in Spanish) who lives in the same neighborhood. She lives with her widowed mother, Dona Catalina, who works as a tarot card reader and natural healer. Alma is the beauty of the neighborhood and is pursued by both younger and older men. Abel, the hairdresser, is in love with her. At first, Alma likes Abel but she considers him too poor and lower class for her ambitions. She prefers a better match, a suitor who will take her out of the neighborhood and improve her economic condition. However, Abel’s insistence finally convinces her and she ends up falling in love with him. Nevertheless, Abel decides to leave to the US with Chava, because he believes he needs to earn more money in order to marry Alma, however Abel’s subsequent absence depresses Alma. Encouraged by her mother, Alma accepts an engagement to Don Fidel, an older man in good economic standing and the owner of a bazaar in the area. When they are about to marry, however, Don Fidel dies unexpectedly, leaving her nothing. Alma’s third suitor, Jose Luis, dazzles her, although she never stops thinking in Abel. Jose Luis is a man with a gallant air who takes Alma to expensive dinners and fancy events. In reality, however, he is a pimp who manipulates her to fall in love with him in order to convert her into a prostitute in his high-class brothel. Alma falls into his world of sin and disappears from the *barrio*. No one, not even her mother, ever sees her again.

“Susanita” is the story of the spinster of the neighborhood who yearns for younger men. She first falls in love with Chava, without positive results, and later with Guicho, whom she marries. Guicho ends up taking advantage of Susanita by stealing her money and she kicks him out.

In “El Regreso”, the fourth part and conclusion of the movie, Chava and Abel return from the U.S. Chava returns defeated, with a wife and small child, whereas Abel returns with money - it went well for him working as a hairdresser in the US - in order to marry Alma. After finding her missing from the neighborhood, he finally tracks her down living as a high-class prostitute. Pain and anger consume him. Alma is also suffering from the immoral life that she is trapped in, but it is impossible to revive their relationship- too much has changed in their lives. In an act of revenge, Abel sneaks into

the burdel and attempts to kill Jose Luis, but Jose Luis ends up stabbing Abel. Alma accompanies Abel outside, where Abel dies on the street in her arms.

3.3 Construction of the prostitute character Alma

Alma is a beautiful and poor young woman, two aspects that strongly influence her metamorphosis into a prostitute. Since blossoming into the neighborhood's beauty, her mother Dona Cata continuously tries to sell her off to the highest bidder for money. Although she loves Abel, he abandons her and she is left without love or money. Alma transgresses the life laid out for her by her mother and instead is lured into the depths of prostitution and drugs, believing that it will lead to a free and luxurious life. Despite achieving her goal of "selling" Alma out of the neighborhood, her mother suffers immensely from the disappearance of her daughter. Upon Abel's return, Alma, disillusioned by the life of a prostitute, sees her last salvation in Abel, but neither can be saved. Alma only manages to understand Abel's idealized love at the end of the story. Abel dies at the hands of her pimp, breathing his last breath into Alma's arms while she weeps (Vidrio, 158: 2008).

This succinct revision of Alma's main plot lines shows that she in fact still quite faithfully mirrors the schematics of the Mexican prostitute. Salma Hayek is presented in the manner of the divas of the classic cinema, with a character that reproduces the girl seduced and corrupted by the "unscrupulous man." These events help form the character of Alma who, despite the more modern setting and time period, adheres to the classic narrative scheme of the prostitute: *Purity-Sin-Redemption*. First, she is initially presented as *pure*, the local beauty from a lower economic standing who innocently falls in love with her neighbor. Second, she is abandoned by her lover and lured into the world of *sin*, driven by her desire to make a living for herself and desperate enough to sell her body. Finally, her *redemption* is the death of her beloved, instead of her own death, in effect her own heart and soul. Vidrio states it as a matter of fact, "Alma is a cheeky girl, an ambitious girl, who ends up losing everything. Like all of [the prostitutes],

she must be punished. That break with the scheme of punishment, in a Catholic society, I think it is difficult. It is a cultural thing. The bad girl has to die” (Vidrio, Interview).

Alma's actions and personality traits determine her character as a prostitute: she is vain, lacks self will, and lets herself be carried away by economic interest without thinking about the consequences. Dona Cata, who has worked hard to support her daughter, instills in her that money is the most important thing in life (Vidrio, 158: 2008). Alma's story is that of a young woman who does not know who she is, what she wants to do in life, nor who she wants. She lets herself be carried away by her external environment, what she has learned in her childhood, which translates into her dangerous behavior and misfortune (Vidrio, 159: 2008) The emotional side of her story lies in Alma's inability to recognize her own feelings and act on them instead of following her mother's own ambition. Nevertheless, this break with expectations brings its own consequences.

In essence, the prostitute is also a symbol, an element of social criticism, that is forced into her situation due to the circumstances of the society she was born into (Roviroso, 26: 1998). As usual, prostitution becomes the only path for beautiful women without economic resources. She represents her poor neighborhood, in which all characters act in desperation for money, giving up their own hopes and dreams in order to rise above their preordained social class. As usual, the prostitute emerges here as a natural result of a social group in crisis rather than the her own characteristics.

3.4 Scene Analysis

Once again, the three categories of analysis (romantic life, family, and redemption) will be utilized to obtain a clearer picture of the filmic representation of the prostitute in *El Callejón de Los Milagros*. Alma's romantic life, although often seen as a commercial commodity, as in the case of Don Fidel and Jose Luis, is mostly centered around her “true love” with Abel. Abel is the opposite of Alma, loyal and devoted, who slowly manages to find his way into her heart. After a cat and mouse game between the

two, Alma finally accepts her feelings for Abel and the two share a passionate kiss on the rooftop. Their kiss is interrupted by the arrival of Chava, desperate to escape to the U.S. after the violent incident with his father and father's lover. Abel leaves with Chava and later returns to Alma to deliver the bad news: he is going to accompany Chava to the U.S. He explains that he won't be able to earn enough money in his hair salon to support them, so he wants to go the U.S. to make money for their marriage and future together. He confesses his love for her, "I love you more than the whole world," and she responds, "It doesn't show. Don't leave!" He vows to be gone only a short while and makes her promise to wait for him. Alma gives him a photo of her and promises to wait for him for the rest of her life. They share one last desperate kiss and Abel takes off into the night. Alma is abandoned by her lover, left to wait for him without knowing when he will be back.

Interestingly enough, Alma does not lose her virginity to Abel. This is a break in the prostitute scheme, where her virginity is taken from her and then abandoned by the same man. In fact, these events take place the other way around. Alma is abandoned by Abel, but later her virginity is forcibly taken by Jose Luis, who rapes her and then manipulates her into working at the burdel with him. This is an interesting twist, as the viewer grows to trust Abel more and despise Jose Luis. Nevertheless, although the man who abandons her is not the same as the man who takes her virginity, both men end up hurting her and leading her towards the path of prostitution.

Alma's relationship with her family almost exclusively revolves around her relationship with her mother. Dona Cata is a young woman, who was as beautiful as her daughter when she was younger. She feels that she was wronged in her life and tries to make sure that her daughter does not make the same mistakes, so she continuously advises her to marry a rich man. Dona Cata's desire to feel still wanted by a man leads to a misunderstanding that works like a dramatic twist in the script. Don Fidel has Alma try on a necklace and earrings in his store and he sends them to Alma as a present. Dona Cata receives the present and believes that they are for her and becomes overjoyed at the prospect of having Don Fidel as a suitor. Silently disappointed when

she realizes they are not for her and instead are for Alma, she still does everything she can to have her daughter marry Don Fidel. When his death ends the engagement and Alma meets Jose Luis, Dona Cata becomes afraid by Alma's relationship with Jose Luis and tries to prevent it. Nevertheless, Alma follows the advice her mother has always given her, to use a man to leave the misery of the *callejón*. Alma leaves with Jose Luis and Dona Cata is left speechless, never to see her daughter again (Vidrio, 161: 2008). Although Dona Cata does not actually kick Alma out of her house, she essentially creates the circumstances where Alma feels like leaving is the only way she can survive.

We can see that Alma is not the true owner of her own self, but rather controlled by what others want from her. This is how her mother raised her and Alma can not help but be influenced by the desires of others, which leads to the destruction of her own life. The relationship between Alma and her mother influences the greatest decision of Alma's life: money or romantic love (Vidrio, 158: 2008). The credibility of the prostitute plotline is based on the fact that Alma behaves according to how her mother has made her see life. The desires and motivations are of her mother, who after all was going to sell her to an old man, which is basically what Jose Luis proposes to her. Alma's only personal decision is to face the dilemma that presents itself: choose the "easy" life or wait for Abel (Vidrio, 159: 2008). She seeks to transgress her destiny, breaking away from her fear of living in poverty, only to fall back on what she has learned her whole life and is lured into the world of prostitution. When given the opportunity to leave Jose Luis, she returns to him and offers herself to him as lover and sex worker, giving away her personal freedom and abandoning her love for Abel.

Unsurprisingly, the final scene results in tragedy because Alma's sins (and, in essence, the sins of all of the characters in the film) must be redeemed. Following the stereotype, it falls to the prostitute to be punished and alleviate herself and society of the sins they have committed. After tracking Alma down at the burdel, Abel returns with a plan of vengeance and stabs Jose Luis. This act of revenge is mainly symbolic to show his dedication to Alma, since Abel goes into the brothel unprotected and has very

little chance of surviving the fight against the brothel's security men. After being stabbed, Abel is held up by Alma as they stumble out into the street. In his dying breaths, Abel relates their imaginary wedding and how beautiful Alma would look in a wedding dress. They would celebrate with everyone from the *callejón* where they all could see their love for each other. Abel breathes his last breath in her arms and she kisses him on the cheek and slowly rocks his dead body. Although Alma herself does not die, she is left as a ghost within the shell of her physical body. She has left her family, lost her lover, and is imprisoned in the violent and abusive world of prostitution without any other means to survive. For all intents and purposes, Alma is dead.

Alma's redemption is not a singular act, but rather in conjunction with the actions and faults of others. In *El Callejón de Los Milagros* everyone is aware of what happens to each other and either supports or discourages their actions. Such is the case of Alma. First, everyone is happy if she is to marry Abel, except her mother. Later, when she is going to marry Don Fidel, the neighbors justify it because he has money. When Don Fidel dies, they pity Alma because she is left without a penny. Alma is constantly being influenced by the desires of others, basically taking on their hopes and fears as her own. What the neighbors cannot tolerate is if someone leaves their little *callejón* to better their lives. Alma abandons her neighborhood and for this she will suffer a castigation (Vidrio, 156: 2008). Alma is punished because she in fact has other options, yet chooses to leave and live a life that no one can support. Her loss of "life" is paying for the misery of her little community, who placed their own ambitions and failures in Alma. Since they cannot escape their misery, neither can Alma.

Director Jorge Fons himself acknowledges the victimhood of the prostitute, along with the other characters from the lowest classes in Mexican society in *El Callejón de Los Milagros*:

[They are] all good, endearing, [but] without an idea of their own selves... [They have] indiscernible dreams, victims of an oppressive and dismal system, who suffer and rebel in the face of immediate [problems], without class consciousness, without the ability to unite around a resolution for liberation that allows them change, that shows them a way out of the labyrinth. (de la Vega, 208: 2005)

This dreary reality in which Alma and her neighbors live does not allow for a way out. Most will be born and die in the same house or street, never realizing dreams they aren't even allowed to have. Alma's quick-lived escape from her neighborhood to the burdel only drags her further down into the dredges of the lowest classes of society, into the world of sins and sinners. Her attempt for "freedom" inevitably leads to her ultimate redemption and final downfall.

CHAPTER 4: Analysis and comparison of Santa and Alma

This chapter will draw on direct comparisons in the categories of analysis between Santa and Alma to evaluate the similarities and differences between the two representations in their romantic life, family, and redemption.

4.1 Romantic Life

Romantic life is a crucial aspect in the formation of the representation of the prostitute. Although her laboral work and lifestyle are defined by *sexual acts*, the matter of love and personal pleasure are usually separate. Without a doubt, the romantic relationships between the character of the prostitute and her boyfriend(s) are defining relationships that affect her decision to enter into the world of prostitution. Santa and Alma both find love, if not once, but several times. Nevertheless, they do not achieve their “happily ever after” with any of their lovers; in fact, their lovers only bring the women unhappiness and destruction.

Santa’s first love, the soldier Marcelino, pursues her, seduces her, and then abandons her. Alma’s first love, the sweet Abel, pursues her, tries to seduce her, and then abandons her. We can confirm that the narrative schemes of both womens’ first relationships are similar, except for the fact that Alma and Abel did not consummate their relationship. As mentioned earlier, Alma breaks with Santa’s archetype when it comes to her first seduction. Here enters Jose Luis, who forcibly takes Alma’s virginity and solidifies her path to prostitution. I consider this break from the stereotype as a way to help a more modern public understand how a relatively innocent young girl like Alma could fall so easily into the world of prostitution. In the 1930s, with Santa’s reputation in her small town ruined, she truly had relatively few options to support herself without the help of her family, prostitution being one of the most common. However, in the 1990s, women had more laboral options than prostitution, and the audience needed a stronger reason to believe how Alma could possibly decide to be a prostitute. Jose Luis then

takes on the role of “the villain,” and the audience sees his manipulation and abuse, both mental and physical, as the masculine influence that pushes Alma into prostitution.

Both Alma and Santa had secondary boyfriends that appear to provide a way to escape their condemnation in life, but neither relationship succeeds and only leads to further disappointment. Santa’s affair with the Spanish bull fighter Jaramaño provides a glimpse of happiness for Santa and a small hope of leading a normal life outside of the burdel. However, he quickly ends their relationship once he believes she is still sexually involved with Marcelino, never giving her a chance to explain Marcelino’s fruitless advances. Alma is briefly engaged to the rich Don Fidel, who could provide her with money and a comfortable lifestyle. He too leaves her, although this time through his death before their wedding. These false romantic hopes lead the women to feel that they have no chance at escaping their predetermined paths other than through prostitution.

Santa and Alma do feel true love from one man in their lives who accompanies them in their moments of redemption, although in different manners. Hipólito, the blind helper, stays by Santa’s side in the hospital until he receives the news of her death. He prays for her and pleads for the world to see her as he saw her: an innocent, good hearted woman who was dealt a bad lot in life. Although their love was never specifically romantic, his devotion to Santa shows that she is capable of being loved wholeheartedly, albeit by a blind man. Alma’s “true love” is still Abel, which breaks away from Santa’s stereotype. Although he is the man who abandons her, he is also the man who truly loves and comes back to save her. He sees Alma as the love of his life and he accompanies her at the time of her redemption, which unfortunately is symbolized by his own death. The most important facet of these men is the idea of true, unconditional love they show towards Santa and Alma, which can never be fulfilled because of the women’s inability to fully accept this love into their lives due to their lives of sin.

These three men in their lives (the seducer, the secondary boyfriend, and the true love) show how Santa and Alma are only allowed small glimpses of happiness from

the men in their lives, but are mostly simply abandoned or used. The prostitute is not allowed to fall in love, she is only allowed to use her body to please others. Her sins of the flesh prohibit her from her own personal fulfillment, and thus, she is incapable of loving someone.

4.2 Family

The role of the family is incredibly prominent in Mexican society, and it is no exception in lives of Santa and Alma. Both are heavily influenced by the expectations of their family, especially their mothers. The greatest difference in their families is the lifestyle and values of a family that lives in the countryside and a family that lives in the working-class neighborhoods of the capital, with a time period difference of 60 years. The variation in setting influences the personal motivations of each family.

Santa's family is "macho, a misogynist family, and the mom wants her daughter to marry in a traditional way" (Vidrio, Interview). 1930's Mexico was just beginning its journey to modernization and traditional gender roles were still strongly enforced by both men and women. The shame of having a daughter "touched" by a man who abandoned her left Santa's family humiliated. They choose not to protect Santa as a family member and rather follow society's expectations of them to excommunicate her. Alma's mother, on the other hand, wants Alma to be happy and loves her with all of her heart. However, she wants money too and thus encourages her to marry a rich man. Despite this constant encouragement to use her beauty to find a way out of poverty, Alma's mother is devastated when Alma turns to prostitution and leaves home. In both cases, the women have fundamental issues with their family: both greatly disappoint their families' expectations and eventually severe communication and escape from their family.

The relationships with their mothers is of particular interest, given that both mother and daughter live and operate in a patriarchal society and continue to reproduce the societal norms defined by patriarchy. Neither mother encourages her daughter to be

self-sufficient or independent; their daughters' future depends wholly on a successful marriage. Marriage, for both Santa and Alma, is the only acceptable way to be a respectable woman in Mexican society. Once their daughters have rejected the path of marriage (or are no longer eligible for a proper marriage), the mother cannot stand by a daughter that does not marry. Once again, the dichotomy of the mother/whore complex dictates that the mother is the "good" woman who follows the machistic rules of the Mexican society, while the "bad" woman breaks away from these norms and falls into a life of sin. This unique relationship between mother and daughter shows that it is not only men who perpetrate a patriarchal society, but also women that replicate its customs, traditions, and punishments.

4.3 Redemption

The redemption of the "bad woman" is crucial in her character development; the prostitute cannot escape from her past and must atone for her sins. As discussed in Chapter 1, the only way to salvation for the whore is through her downfall. This redemption can manifest itself in various ways, usually through illness, death, blindness, or loss of a loved one. Her redemption is the "logical element that concludes the story" (Vidrio, Interview). Santa naturally defines the most traditional path for the prostitute through her own illness and death. On the other hand, Alma "falls into drugs and remains without anyone, left alone in the world. Here she does not die, but the love of her life dies. She remains like a zombie, without a spirit, walking the streets" (Vidrio, Interview). Although Alma herself does not die, she suffers a terrible loss that certainly presents itself as a punishment for her transgressions.

Although they both become prostitutes, which Mexican society considers the ultimate sin, both women are nevertheless *victims*. "Alma is a victim of her mother. And Santa is a victim of the man who abandons her and her family who rejects her. Both are victims of a society and its culture. Women, especially those from lower social classes, continue to be victims. There is still a long way to go in that direction" (Vidrio, Interview).

Despite the tragedy of their victimhood, the only possible conclusion of Alma and Santa's stories is through their final castigation.

4.4 Conclusions of Comparison

A comparison of the representation of Alma and Santa shows more similarities than differences, given that the three analysis categories follow the same narrative and schematic elements created by the archetype of the prostitute. We see the pure and innocent woman who is compelled towards the "bad path," driven by individual choice as well as societal expectations (Molina: 1995). Both women are used and abused by men in their lives, rejected by a family that operates within a patriarchal system, and forced to carry the burden of their sins until their ultimate judgement day. At this point in the history of Mexican cinema, Alma could be considered the reincarnation of Santa: "The protagonist meets herself again after more than six decades of trials and tribulations in film" (Roviroso, 26: 1998).

The most notable explanation for their great similarities is the cinematic style and genre of the two movies: the melodrama. We observe in *El Callejón de Los Milagros* a homage to the melodramatic cinema of the Golden Age of cinema, including a near replica of the representation of the prostitute. In the film, the characteristic themes of melodrama are employed, including family structure, love, sexual repression, and the internal contradictions in the relationships between the protagonists (Schmidt-Welle, 193). The cinema of the 1930s and 40s symbolically represented the national Mexican identity in a mestizo society impregnated by processes of modernization. In a nostalgic way, it emphasized the rural aspects of this identity, placing its protagonists in an urban context in which they would have to learn the new ways of social life in the metropolis, exemplified by Santa's move from her pueblo of Chimalistac to Mexico City.

Essentially representing a patriarchal society, the melodrama also inherently minimizes the development of female participation. Within the segments of film assigned to women, the only spaces that they occupy are the brothel or the home (yet

again, the whore/mother dichotomy), thus allowing their role in society to be reduced by patriarchal power (Uribe, 141: 1999). These elements constituted the basis of the melodrama and can be seen in multiple manifestations *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, through the interactions of the neighbors, family structures, morals and values, and romantic relationships.

Like *Santa*, *El Callejón de Los Milagros* subscribes to traditional values due to the presence of melodramatic elements that follow the ideological proposals of the Golden Age of cinema. Nevertheless, the melodramatic function in *El Callejón de Los Milagros* greatly differs than that utilized in the movies of the first half of the century. In the Golden Age, the melodrama often served to reinforce the constitution of national identity, in the sense of building a national allegory in which patriotism and erotic love present themselves as two intimately linked passions; nonetheless, in *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, love of the homeland is seemingly non-existent and erotic love is perceived as merchandise and dominated by capitalist relations, as is in the case of Alma's prostitution (Schmidt-Welle, 194: 2015). Her body is sold to benefit herself and get out of economic misery and sexual repression. In this context, the final scene of the film is significant. "At the moment of his death, Abel maintains the illusion of a romantic and innocent relationship with Alma in the context of a fictional collective harmony of his neighborhood, evoking rites from the past that do not coincide with the new ways of relating to others in his neighborhood" (Schmidt-Welle, 194: 2015). Nor do we see the protagonists move to the big city, they are already in fact living there and have adapted themselves to life in the metropolis, along with its modern (capitalistic) values.

Due to the differences in historical context between the two movies, the melodrama function in *El Callejón de Los Milagros* differs from *Santa* in its *presentation* of these ideals. It certainly does not denounce the stereotypes of urban mythology or hyperbolic situations, which are characteristics of the melodrama. Fons fully assumes this melodramatic style of narration, nevertheless in a discreetly comedic and satirical way (Celin, 6: 1995). The film manages to incorporate the values and attitudes of present-day Mexico with all of its harshness, but does not lack a sense of humor, which

makes it entertaining and self-deprecating (Molina: 1995). “We see similarities in the features of the two characters, but the difference is *how* the stories are told, and the public thus has a different reaction. *El Callejón de Los Milagros* moves the audience differently than the traditional melodrama of *Santa*” (Vidrio, Interview).

Therefore, due to the time period and variation in film production, the representations of the prostitute are distinct because, according to Vidrio,

Jorge Fons is very different than the directors of the various *Santa*'s. Fons is very cinematographic and there is a great improvement in the film and screenplay; the way of telling a story that differs according to the point of view of who tells it. In some way, the viewer is an accomplice and complements the story. If it follows more or less the same path as the story of *Santa*, in terms of culture and tradition, we see a radical change between the narrative of the first Mexican filmmakers and filmmakers like Jorge Fons, who uses his filmic style in an extraordinary way. This brings a sense of value to the story and it helps us to reflect even more on the question of prostitution through the film narrative. In *Santa*, it is as if we have seen a play that moves us but does not bring us to reflect on it. Jorge Fons employs a lot of darkness and cinematographic language to bring about reflection. (Vidrio, Interview)

This space for reflection about the stereotyped characters appears to be the core of the difference between *Santa* and *Alma*. In *Santa*, we are introduced to the prostitute who follows the path of *Purity-Sin-Redemption*, without considering the *why* or *how* behind her narration. However, *El Callejón de Los Milagros* gives the viewer a way to see behind the stereotype of the prostitute and her decisions, whether right or wrong, that culminate in her succumbing to the same course of *Purity-Sin-Redemption*. The melodramas of prostibularios and cabaretas have indeed evolved; in some cases they became the commercial cinema of ficheras and in others they have managed to present traditional stereotypes in a different manner, such is the case of *El Callejón de Los Milagros* (Vidrio, 44: 2001). This work shows the break with the thematic vision of the melodrama of prostitutes, in the sense that it reflects human beings interacting with their circumstances, emotions, and feelings.

Fons presents a small nucleus of society in which the homogeneous identity concepts and harmonious family relationships established in the original melodrama no longer apply. Through this divergence, *El Callejón de Los Milagros* questions patriarchal relations at various levels, including the theme of homosexuality, domestic abuse, and, of course, prostitution (Schmidt-Welle, 195). The melodrama shows the dominant culture through its stereotypes and the current morality of the time, therefore these components have evolved throughout different moments of the Mexican melodrama. The melodrama continues, but at the same time as society itself suffers transformations, innovations, and evolutions (Vidrio, 51: 2001).

The commercial success of *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, a homage to the classic melodrama, precipitates the question of what the Mexican public is looking for in its cinema. Film critics at the time of the release commended the film, "The performance is excellent, especially because Fons has a a kind of love for the places and the characters, which reminds us of the best cinema of the past. It means that *El Callejón de Los Milagros* reminds us that, in spite of everything, Mexican cinema is not dead: they are killing it, which is different" (Celin, 7: 1995). These acclamations show the glorification of the return to the Golden Age; they are even more poignant considering that the audience, completely "hollywoodized," had moved away from Mexican cinema in recent years and other important films that in principle should have been commercial successes, did not endure more than a few weeks on the billboard. In the context of the New Mexican Cinema, when young filmmakers were looking for a new cinema capable of offering an alternative to the collapse of the models of the Golden Age, the success of *El Callejón de Los Milagros* draws even more attention, since it seems to indicate that a large part of the public is grateful for the return to the most classic schemes (Arias: 1995).

THESIS CONCLUSION

This thesis conclusion will demonstrate why the prostitute character has been so prolific in Mexican cinema, while acknowledging the various consequences for the Mexican society. As this work is fundamentally limited in the scope and depth of its investigation, I will propose final suggestions that would be fundamental in future research projects relating to the prostitute in Mexican cinema.

This work has focused on the investigation of the similarities and transformations between the archetype of the prostitute and a newer filmic representation as a way to analyze the Mexican film industry's relationship with a traditional female character. The initial hypothesis stated that the two representations continue to hold great similarities in their narration and character development, proving that the stereotype of the prostitute continues to dominate within female representations in Mexican cinema. However, due to the transgressions mentioned in the "Conclusions of Comparison," this hypothesis has only partly been proven correct: Given the nostalgia for the return of the melodrama in *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, it appears that the grander Mexican public *does* accept the traditional societal roles that are replicated and reinforced through character stereotypes. However, the results of this analysis still show contradictions: traditional stereotypes have not exactly changed, they merely intersect in different ways, with the occasional transgression. The prostitute still does not live out her happy ending; however, in *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, the public is now allowed to acknowledge her victimhood and reflect upon it in a broader sense than the traditional melodrama has allowed.

This work intends to view, therefore, the melodrama from the perspective of gender studies and the how the specific role of the prostitute demonstrates the evolving relationship with Mexican society and female representations in film. Since the 1970s, there has been a push for a revision in the portrayal of women in Mexican film: reevaluating stereotypes, redefining roles, and examining the assumptions upon which those stereotypes are based. "The stereotypes continue to exist, but in new and different ways. These stereotypical roles may be parodied, combined, or made more or

less sympathetic or realistic” (Ramírez, 61: 1992). Nevertheless, a total breakdown of the stereotype of the prostitute has still not been accomplished.

The idea of a genre entitled cinema of prostitutes alludes to a general and dominant tendency in the melodrama, which is characterized by a hesitant and slow process in its conformation; it creates its own rules through moments of consolidation and expansion. Due to the lack of progression in the development of the representation of the prostitute, it appears that the Mexican film industry continues to be tied to the original archetype of the prostitute. Maricarmen de Lara cannot acknowledge change in the representation of the prostitute in cinema of fiction:

I really do not really remember seeing anything that has made me think, ‘Well here they are really presenting the prostitute from another perspective.’ In the case of *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, it’s a new way to see the Mexican family. I think there are great characters in the movie, but it’s everything that has to do with the adaptation of Mahfouz’s novel, along with that vision. It sometimes resembles the Mexican family, given the machismo in some oriental cultures. But from the perspective of the prostitute, I do not see anything different in commercial cinema. *Las Elegidas* (2015) speaks a bit of a difference in the character of the prostitute, but it is still rather submissive. I still see that there is a male point of view. Actually, the issue of the sex worker as such has been worked very little in Mexican cinema. I do not see that they are making new material. (de Lara, Interview)

Martha Vidrio also agrees that, despite minor changes and improvements in the representation of the prostitute in the last 60 years, there has been a severe lack of evolution of the character. Since the birth of Santa in Gamboa’s novel and subsequent success and popularity, the prostitute has been an illicit character that has widely captured the attention of audiences. Filmmakers decided to replicate Santa exactly as in the novel in the first filmic version in 1918, continuing this representation through the three subsequent filmic versions that solidified the schematics of the prostitute. Vidrio comments:

They could have evolved the role [of the prostitute] more, collaborating with feminists who were working hard to defend the right of the prostitute. It could have worked in many ways, but it continues to be the same role that has not evolved. [Even in New Mexican Cinema,] young people did

not return to this character and did not cultivate it. I remember that Hitchcock said, 'When you want to be original, most likely you'll end up making a cliché. On the other hand, if you start with a cliché and work on it, you can make something original.' I think that was missing in our Mexican cinema, retaking the character of the prostitute and working it until we turned her into a human being, of flesh and blood. People need to hurt, so that they feel what that character is feeling. Yes, that is missing. (Vidrio, Interview)

Given this conclusion, what does this fidelity to the representation of the prostitute say about the Mexican society's attraction to stereotyped female characters in cinema? "Hypocrisy," says Vidrio. "I believe that one of the characteristics of our society is hypocrisy. By accepting this, we can begin to analyze the behavior and actions of Mexican society" (Vidrio, Interview). Women in Mexican cinema are placed as sexual objects, objects of desire, not as people who make decisions. The fact that filmmakers have opted for certain film constructions to "symbolize gender relations in a given space and time also responds to patterns of social and cultural behavior of a society to which they represent. These acts of representation are also linked to the social and cultural changes that have taken place in the structures of the national entity" (Torres, 123: 2001). Machismo still exists, neither defeated nor supported by the public.

The figure of the prostitute establishes the inflection of desire and affirms the degraded institution that protects the family under the patriarchal umbrella of the Mexican society. There exists a series of ideas where the heroine is based on her sexuality and not on her personal formation or her way of thinking: a way of stereotyping women. "These women are not women who lead or propose a story that allows them to be subjects of their own stories and decide things" (de Lara, Interview).

Jaime Sabines famously wrote, "Canonize the whores," and throughout the course of a century from Santa to Alma, the prostitute in film responds to more than the heterodoxical "ex-votos" of the industry. "If the idea of 'the heroine' continues to lose its meaning, the antiheroine now eclipses it. This does not mean the sudden disappearance of prostitutes who *deserves* verbal violence" (Monsivais, 82: 1992). The antiheroine is brutally attractive, fickle, prone to sacrifice, and monumental. This

mentality is emblemized in the prostitute in her dimension of "fallen angel" and the indispensable saint (Monsivais, 80: 1992).

The denigration of prostitutes in fiction films as a cultural product has produced consequences not only for women, but also for Mexican society in general. The cinematographic realization is a complex situation, because it shows the *symbolic violence* of prostitutes, which cinema itself perpetuates: "prostitutes are symbolized as evil, sin, or social scum. The prevailing double sex moral establishes a division between decent women and whores through stigmatization" (Lamas, 103: 1993). The negative perception of the prostitute has infiltrated the social conscience of Mexican society on many levels, including insult words like "hijo de puta." The name of the prostitute is associated with a stigma that generates great social vulnerability and reinforces the division between the "good" and the "bad" woman. This symbolic violence continues to build a devalued identity, where buying sex is a necessity, but selling it is considered abominable. This double morality values masculine sexual activity and denigrates feminine. Worse, it considers a woman who seeks pleasure as a whore (Lamas, 129: 1993).

The way to confront this double morality, these rigid definitions for women, is to redefine symbolic and cultural terms, especially in Mexican cinema. It requires an awareness of how the symbolization of sexual differences operates in practices, discourses, and cultural representations, so that political-cultural action can be implemented (Lamas, 105: 1993). Alongside the feminist struggle for political, economic, and social equality, there is also "cultural work: a re-symbolization of sexuality and its valuations. A struggle to establish better social conditions must include the task of deconstructing this symbolization of prostitutes as evil or sinners, linked to religious thought so far from democratic and libertarian aspiration" (Lamas, 122: 1993).

Mexican cinema must allow female representations *humanization*. The majority of female characters, at their most extreme, are caricatured stereotypes; at their most inferior, they are mere supporting characters to male representations. The public "does not accept women of unpredictable reactions and autonomous nature; they want fragile

heroes, virtuous, happy because they cry, sad because their resistance to seduction contradicts the laws of obedience of the female spirit” (Monsivais, 80: 1992). The protagonists of melodramas prove this. If cinema is modernity in its essence, the heroines of Mexican cinema are the opposite of the contemporary spirit, and that is why they “inhabit the anachronistic space: that of sentimental blackmail, that of congenital helplessness, of virtues only employable in the bedroom and kitchen” (Monsivais, 80: 1992). If they are not grotesque, marginalized women must assume the stereotype of dishonor-- a trap in itself.

Despite the great female heroines in Mexican history who have broken from these series of stereotypes, such as the Zapatista women during the Mexican Revolution or female student activists, female representations are cultural subjugations that continue to be excluded in the vision of cinema. These women,

who have their own stories, who have stories where they make decisions and where they are nothing more than victims of society, Manichaeian products, only respond to that marginalization. What happens is that they become invisible, to the extent that even politicians do not care about generating public policies that improve the lives of women. In that sense, I think that cinema always reflects this. (de Lara, Interview)

What can be done to evolve the representation of the prostitute and other marginalized female stereotypes in Mexican film? Many events are involved in this transformation: taboos are weakening, moral censorship is almost non-existent (political censorship is a different story), and the number of women who want to make films is increasing. Some already now have this opportunity, who were previously denied, to choose subjects and attitudes without needing to justify themselves. They create characters neither "liberated" nor "traditional," they simply trust in a cinema without mythologies (Monsivais, 81: 1992). The entrance of women into the film industry, especially women in film schools, de Lara responds, has allowed greater participation in the female cinema collective “by questioning our rights as women and trying to translate it onto the screen. I think it is still a big concern of young women in the movement, the distribution of this type of material, because it continues to deal with a misogynistic

macho vision. The work within this sector always becomes contradictory, because the exploitation becomes more serious” (de Lara, Interview).

Bringing the prostitute of flesh and blood to the screen, showing her daily life, exposing her struggles, challenges, together with her joys and strength, will help to create a new social image of the prostitute. This cultural reformulation and revaluation is necessary to continue breaking the classic stereotypes of women in Mexican cinema in order to produce a mass-media cultural product that more accurately reflects Mexican society.

Given the inherently limited scope of this work, future research suggestions include a deeper look into the effects of the literature adaptations of *Santa* and *El Callejón de Los Milagros*, the relationship between the mother, virgin, and whore stereotypes, a comparison between various representations of the prostitute in different time periods in Mexican cinema, and the representation of the prostitute in the documental. Through a deeper understanding of the causes of gender imbalance in Mexican film, the societal consequences will be easier to identify and can pave the way for the necessary development of future female filmic representations.

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Erklärung

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