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# The Missing “X” in Ethnic and Cultural Acceptance

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### The Missing “X” in Ethnic and Cultural Acceptance

“My America is continent (not a country) which is not described by the outlines on any of the standard maps [...] Quebec seems closer to Latin America than its Anglophone twin. My America includes different peoples, cities, borders, and nations”.<sup>1</sup>

In our modern world of heightened wall building, we are confident more separates us than brings us together. Added to our intrinsic differences, we find distinctions amongst people of our same gender, ethnicity, and race. These separations, in the long run, can turn into acts of miscommunication, create discomfort and animosity; and thus begins a tragic cycle of thinking in binaries. The inspiring works of Alejandro González Iñárritu in his top-grossing film *Babel*, and the book *Codex Espangliensis: from Columbus to the Border Patrol* written and composed by Enrique Chagoya, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Felicia Rice can be described as “interrelational.” The concept of interrelationality is defined by Juan Velasco as “the incorporation of multiple layers of identity, and extraordinary space of representation.”<sup>2</sup> It is a way of consolidating everything we think separates us into one entity. These artists urge us to

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<sup>1</sup> Gómez-Peña, Guillermo, et al. *Codex espangliensis : from Columbus to the Border Patrol* (City Lights Books, 2000)

<sup>2</sup> Velasco, Juan. *Collective Identity and Cultural Resistance in Contemporary Chicana/o Autobiography*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 80.

form interconnections in efforts to bind the ruptures of our world that have been crippled by exclusivity, fear, and discrimination.

Ideas of cultural imperialism and Anglo hegemony are explored in *Codex Espangliensis* and *Babel* where composers and filmmakers provide insight on the importance of reclaiming our history and taking pride in our personal and collective identities. First, *Codex Espangliensis* is an experience of “border politics,” an intense juxtaposition of pop culture and historical references, to potentially create a new “American reader.”<sup>3</sup> Second, Iñarritu redefines the curse of Babel and separatism in his film by creating four unique stories that prove language, culture and class systems are all interconnected.

I will argue that by reclaiming rhetoric traditions Latinx creators have continued a hesitant social move to refashion the aggregate memory of bondage and discrimination that began in colonial times. These creators are not blaming a particular sociocultural group for what they have had to endure. Their work transcends a traditional social commentary or protest. With their work, they want to reshape the way we think about Latinx minority groups.

I will continue to prove that by rejecting cliché depictions of Latin Americans, a new “American reader” will sympathize with the struggles of the oppressed people and understand that Latin American thinking is the way to the future. Long-established cliché depictions of Latin Americans have tendencies to generalize the stereotypical drug lord, impoverished and violent oppositions to an entire community. However, this text and movie resist homogeneity in culture by revamping the ways in which we interpret media and our surroundings. They help us understand that Latin-American thinking is not just a “minority thing.”

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<sup>3</sup> Gómez-Peña, Guillermo, et al. *Codex espangliensis : from Columbus to the Border Patrol*.

If we can find ways to relate to one another instead of rejecting our differences we can prevent the propagation of inequalities and “the intercultural split will heal.”<sup>4</sup> By examining these works through an artistic lens, we will hopefully work towards shifting paradigms of marginalization that Latinx creators have been promoting through their work.

## BACKGROUND

It is important to understand the background discussions regarding this topic. Throughout this paper, I will be referring to Latinos and Latinas as “Latinx.” This is a term that has been trending recently as it has become a part of a “‘linguistic revolution’ that aims to move beyond gender binaries and is inclusive of the intersecting identities of Latin American descendants.”<sup>5</sup> Not only is the term a gender-neutral alternative to Latin@s but it includes the LGBT+ community as well as those who identify as gender non - conforming, and anyone who wishes to recognize their Latin American roots. Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands La Frontera* “Chicanas use the word *nosotros* [us] whether we’re male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.”<sup>6</sup> If the term “Latinx” would have existed when Anzaldúa wrote her book in 1985 it would perfectly embody her ideas of inclusivity and cultural hybridity. I’m hoping to convey in this paper, a part of what Anzaldúa achieved through her conception of *la nueva mestiza*. That is, that the words Latinx and hybridity are interchangeable, as one leads to another and both can be used to label ourselves as intersectional and interrelational.

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<sup>4</sup> Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. (Aunt Lute Books, 1985), 59.

<sup>5</sup> Ramirez, Tanisha Love and Zeba Blay, “Why People are Using the Term ‘Latinx’,” *Huffington Post*, Fall 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 27.

For the purpose of this essay, the foundations of my research are based on Peter Wade's article "Liberalism and Its Contradictions: Democracy and Hierarchy in Mestizaje and Genomics in Latin America" and Gloria Anzaldua's book *Borderlands La Frontera*. To be most effective in my analysis, I will organize my findings the following way: first, I will provide meaningful interpretations of the other two main sources for my paper; *Codex Espangliensis: from Columbus to the Border Patrol*, and the film *Babel*, where I have two points to discuss. Second, I will outline issues of cultural imperialism and how the unconventional bookwork in the *Codex* is meant to represent a form of cultural resistance to reshape our perceptions of Latinx minorities. Second, I will focus on why it is important that we think in a more empathetic way and how the film *Babel* continues to explore what the "new American reader" would embody. I will conclude by wrapping up my main points and alluding to potential recommendations for future research regarding my particular topic.

The article "Liberalism and Its Contradictions: Democracy and Hierarchy in Mestizaje and Genomics in Latin America" analyzes mestizaje under the umbrella of genomics and the "inherent contradiction between equality and hierarchy"<sup>7</sup> that is brought up when referring to this term. Genomics is a scientific field concerned with the evolution and structure of genomes, a field of study that remains very "conservative" in Latin America until this day. Mestizos and mestizas are traditionally the offspring of a Spanish father and Indigenous mother. This makes them geographically, and ethnically diverse in every sense of the word. According to Wade's article, Latinx minorities are portrayed as the "spatiotemporal other" and that is one of the main reasons racial marginalization is reinforced. The "spatiotemporal other" is a product of

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Wade, "Liberalism and Its Contradictions: Democracy and Hierarchy in Mestizaje and Genomics in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 4 (2017): 9.

conservative perceptions on power structures, with the intention of separating the subaltern from the hegemony. Wade argues that ideas of hybridity and mestizaje can be seen as the “antidote” to echelons of race, class, and power. Something I will continue to explore in this essay is how mestizaje in Latin America can alleviate social tensions and serve as a “mediator” between the differences in hierarchy and equality, as opposed to becoming a border between people of the same community.<sup>8</sup>

The theoretical approach I will be using is based on Anzaldúa’s envisioned ideal, “*La Nueva Mestiza*.” Traditionally, a *mestiza* is the female offspring of an American Indian and Spaniard. In this essay, *la nueva mestiza* will be referred to as the bridge between two races and identities. In the struggle of borders, where people can experience everything simultaneously, *la nueva mestiza* owns her mestizaje. The Borderlands are at the center of identities. When living in between borders arbitrary labels determine “us,” the hegemony, the dominant culture, the colonizers; from “others” or “them,” the subaltern, the oppressed, the colonized. Here, *la nueva mestiza* becomes a bridge, the epitome of a hybrid analysis. She has the power to revisit rhetoric traditions and archetypes, as well as completely reappropriate them to create a powerful identity. She has the power to reverse colonialism by demonstrating that reconnecting with our roots, our heritage, and our language are key aspects of self-empowerment.

In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” the fifth chapter of *Borderlands la Frontera*, Anzaldúa aims to present an internal conflict that juxtaposes her Anglo and Hispanic heritage in an effort to demonstrate that “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity”<sup>9</sup> for her. On a more personal perspective, she expresses that bilingualism and multicultural representations

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<sup>8</sup> Wade, “Liberalism and Its Contradictions,” 12.

<sup>9</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 67.

should not be discredited, but looked up to and, more importantly, respected. *La nueva mestiza* consciously determines the importance of synthesizing all that was once separate and therefore she exhibits the traits of a new consciousness in the making.

In order to create the “new American reader” our dualistic thinking must be dissolved. Anzaldua writes, “Whites should help rid themselves of race hatred and fear, allow whites to be our allies. So that when they set up committees to help, they will come to see that they aren’t helping but following our lead.”<sup>10</sup> The “new consciousness” Latinx works create would help *gringos* understand and be truly empathetic of other cultures. It would rid them of their guilt, their superiority complex, and need to “fix” everything that doesn’t come in their same shape color of form. If people from all over the world stop looking for reasons to justify all the oppression and mistakes that have been made in the past everyone will benefit from the creation of a more collective identity.

In *Borderlands La Frontera*, Anzaldúa credits José Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher and his theory of inclusivity, as the basis for the concept of *la nueva mestiza*. In Vasconcelos’ book, “he envisioned *una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color - la primera raza síntesis del globo - la raza cósmica.*”<sup>11</sup> He argues that the greatness of Latin America lies in the mixture of all of its races: *Argentino, Pastuso, Cholo*; a global mestizaje of the best qualities of each race. Furthermore, Vasconcelos suggests the creation of a 5th race. A race of hybridity: one that is above all. As Gloria Anzaldúa mentions in the final chapter of her book, “... this mixture of races rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool.”<sup>12</sup> These foundations of

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<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 107.

<sup>11</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 99.

<sup>12</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 104.

inclusivity shape a new consciousness in the making, *la conciencia de la mestiza*, the consciousness of the Borderlands. *La nueva mestiza* dissociates from thinking in opposites and integrates all that she is in her cognition. She “sees through serpent and eagle eyes.”<sup>13</sup> She learns how to “juggle cultures.” She creates a “plural personality,” where nothing is left out and all is internalized.<sup>14</sup>

Anzaldúa defines the *mestiza* consciousness as an insurgent way of thinking that provides solutions to the structural issues that have been in place for too long:

The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking... is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.<sup>15</sup>

An article from the Pew Research Center written by Jens Manuel Krogstad and Gustavo Lopez analyzes a survey related to racism in America where results proved that “about half of Hispanics in the U.S. (52%) say they have experienced discrimination or have been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity ...” Anyone who struggles to “find themselves” or fit into a particular ethnocultural group is faced with an internal conflict.<sup>16</sup> In the fifth chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa explains that Chicanx and other minorities of color suffer not

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<sup>13</sup>Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 62.

<sup>14</sup>Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 100.

<sup>16</sup> Krogstad, Manuel and Lopez. “Roughly half of Hispanics have experienced discrimination” *Pew Research Center* (June 2016).



only psychologically but economically for not acculturating. She writes, “This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity.”<sup>17</sup> A point she makes throughout her book is that there is no need to choose sides or pick between two cultures, but rather she provides an solution by inspiring people to label themselves with a hybrid identity.

While changing the way we think about each other is a step towards creating change, a more practical way to start embodying the concepts of interrelationality is by modifying the way we talk about one another. By doing so, we will learn to be more tolerant of each other’s differences.

For example, there is a history of discrimination in the way we talk to and amongst people of other cultures. Edward Said was an academic in the field of postcolonial studies who wrote about the Palestinian exodus. In his essay, “Orientalism” he critiqued Western perceptions of the Orient or the Middle East. To the British and French the “East always signified danger and threat.”<sup>18</sup> Over time the concept of Orientalism became a Western concept to “dominate, restructure, and hold authority over the Orient.”<sup>19</sup> In the long run, it became a form of power to differentiate the colonizer from the colonized, and therefore an increased use of the terms “us” versus “them,” created a language of “othering.” This was a dehumanizing way to set the hegemony apart from the subaltern. A less pronounced form of the language of “othering” is still used today to reinforce stereotypes on minority groups.

A resolution to this problem is made evident through Latinx films. Jose Vasconcelos’ counterpart in filmmaking is the Mexican film writer and director Guillermo del Toro, whose films embody the spirit of the Esperanto language. Esperanto was a language invented at the end

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<sup>17</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 33.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)

<sup>19</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

of the 19th century, created for international use.<sup>20</sup> The purpose behind the creation of this language was to form a network of interconnections and help pave the way for a new consciousness in the making. This new consciousness would include everyone willing to reach out of their comfort zones and empower one another through unity. These composite films manifest the idea of reshaping language to become an intercultural bridge as opposed to a border.

In his article titled, "Creating Cinematic Esperanto," Alec Morgan describes Guillermo del Toro's films as "developed and hybrid cinematic résumés."<sup>21</sup> Toro's productions, such as *Mimic*, *Cronos*, or *El Laberinto del Fauno*, demonstrate his ability to play with pictorial language through a "hybridization of genres, employment of ambiguity of art cinema, and the utilization (and subversion) of the modes and conventions of the classical Hollywood style."<sup>22</sup> Alongside other Chicana directors and producers, including González Iñárritu, Lourdes Portillo, and Alfonso Cuarón; del Toro et al are known for creating these hybrid films. Chicana directors have worked to adapt to multiple needs and objectives in efforts to submerge their audiences in a pluricultural world.

In addition, Latina films, as well as contemporary autobiographies and literature, encourage revolutionists to dismantle ideas of separatism in language, race, gender, religion, and more. Ana Louise Keating, Anzaldúa's longtime editor, and friend, further delves into her mentor's pedagogy as a tool to reform our way of thinking. Keating comments on Anzaldúa's book *Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*:

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<sup>20</sup> Velasco, *Collective Identity*, 99.

<sup>21</sup> Alec Morgan, "Creating Cinematic Esperanto," *Film International* 15, 88-103.

<sup>22</sup> Morgan, "Creating Cinematic Esperanto," 88-103.

Anzaldúa transitions through multiple visions and realities. Most importantly, she calls for “spiritual activism.” She asks us to move to adopt a “metaphysics of interconnections.” In our contemporary world of profound binary thinking, Gloria Anzaldúa’s insights provide an inspiration and hope moving forward.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, by gaining a better understanding of our singularities, and learning to communicate with one another through open-mindedness and empathy we will come to the realization that there are more factors that unite us rather than disconnect us.

Next, I will provide accurate examples from my two main primary sources, *Codex Espangliensis*, and the movie *Babel*, and expand on how they epitomize cultural resistance and bring forth new perceptions on how we choose to define ourselves and appreciate others.

## “COMIX/CODEX”

To start off, in the introduction to *Codex Espangliensis*, Jennifer Gonzalez describes the book as a “metaphorical recuperation of textual heritage, and a reminder of what has been lost or transformed in the fusion of European and indigenous cultural contact.”<sup>24</sup> The creators of the codex combine texts, imagery, and a unique bookwork that unfolds to 21 feet. Guillermo Gómez-Peña combines poetic Spanish, slang, prose, and eccentric pictography in a “catalectic text” or a story told in a non-linear perspective. Academics have argued that *Codex*

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<sup>23</sup> *Latin America Otherwise*. Duke University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Gómez-Peña et al, *Codex espangliensis*.

*Espangliensis* seeks to redefine stereotypes of the Chicanx community by presenting an honest and modern depiction of history, unlike anything we have ever read in a textbook before.

The narrative of the story manifests the despotic relationships between Mickey Mouse, Superman, several Spanish saints, La Virgen de Guadalupe and the indigenous population, in “Mock-Mayan hieroglyphs.”<sup>25</sup> For the first time, we can visualize the Latinx population as protagonists, with Superman and other Disney “heroes” depicted as antagonists, or colonizers. Chagoya’s imagery remains unchanging in the “red fingerprints” marking every single page, and the recurrent theme of the “slaughtered indigenous population.”<sup>26</sup> These images of coercion are meant to represent the hurtful process of colonialism and acculturation overall.

This creative type of media is curated in a way that resembles an ancient pre-Columbian Mayan Codex and creates borders of language, art, and perception that must be crossed in order to fully understanding its purpose.

Something I want to address from this source is the painful process of cultural imperialism, or as Gloria Anzaldúa describes it “cultural tyranny.” *Codex Espangliensis* addresses issues of acculturation, hoping to delve into ancient history in Spanglish in a way that no textbook has attempted ever before. Kat and Montiel’s publication, “Codex Espangliensis: Neo-Baroque Art of Resistance” explains how this text is a representation of political and social matters concerning the Chicanx culture and the pre-Columbian World. It assesses the “historical tension between the Western and indigenous worlds back then and how that continues to shape the way we perceive the world today.”<sup>27</sup> By looking into the pre-Columbian past and analyzing

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<sup>25</sup> Philip Krayna. "History, Unfolded: The pre-Columbian codex served as a model for a modern-day letterpress book on Chicano history." *PRINT-NEW YORK*-, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Gómez-Peña et al, *Codex espangliensis*.

<sup>27</sup> Kat Austin and Carlos-Urani Montiel, "Codex Espangliensis: Neo-Baroque Art of Resistance," *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 3 (May 2012): 88-105

problems that existed back then we are able to form better ideas of what needs to change in present times.

A particular section in the Codex reads, “The audience is segregated, based on language skills and race, the left of the theatre, the bilinguals, the people of color and the immigrants. To the right, the rest of the audience.”<sup>28</sup> The cultural marginalization that is implied in this text ensures separation and makes minorities feel like the only way to escape their constant neglect is through assimilation. This is a perfect example of the pain endured by the subaltern for not acculturating. Similarly, Gomez-Peña creates a fictional encounter between an oppressed Aztec and his American employer. He is forced to dress like a salesman in a “three-piece suit and blond wig.” He says, “Bienvenidos a NAFTA LANDIA damas y caballeros lovers/consumers of pura bi-cultura, a new transcultural breeze ricochets from Monterrey to Manhattan [...]” Mid recital he gets scolded via walkie-talkie for saying “Gringolandia” instead of America; “No slang amigo, remember!”<sup>29</sup> We understand the Aztec is being put on the spot. He is rebuked for his mannerisms, aspects of himself that he cannot control, and in his nervousness, he ultimately forgets his lines. He says to his employer, “I am having an identity crisis on stage, I don’t know what I’m saying.”<sup>30</sup> Anzaldúa defines the process of acculturation as “linguistic terrorism,”<sup>31</sup> an extremely hurtful and tyrannical experience.

In an article titled "Alternatives for Latin American integration: beyond racial fusion and Multiculturalism," Juan Granada-Cardona argues that there is a fundamental issue with acculturation. He points to an alternative approach regarding integration in Latin America that

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<sup>28</sup> Gómez-Peña et al, *Codex espangliensis*.

<sup>29</sup> Gómez-Peña et al, *Codex espangliensis*.

<sup>30</sup> Gómez-Peña et al, *Codex espangliensis*.

<sup>31</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 29.

focuses on perceiving the “hybrid status as a path toward overcoming internal colonialism.”<sup>32</sup> Acculturation is built on the “unification and the transgression of power”<sup>33</sup> working towards eliminating any and all existing differences amongst a single community. It would be ideal to believe that as human beings we are willing and able to negotiate our contact zones, but more often than not we unconsciously seek to limit the spaces where we encounter one other and dismiss our differences because we lack open-mindedness. Granada-Carona’s article reminds us of the importance to have a more critical understanding of the people this process of integration affects.

The concept of bilingualism in the codex intersects ideas of cultural hybridity. In her article "Painted (Hi)stories: The Subversive Power of Codex and Comics Elements in Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol," Daniela Miranda mentions the hybrid nature of *Codex Espangliensis* as a “comix/codex.” She emphasizes the importance of considering the *Codex*’s “subversive nature” to understand how it serves as a critique of ancient and present-day colonialism.<sup>34</sup> The author defines both “codex” and “comix” and argues that these artifacts serve as a medium of communication “capable of generating meaning through non-discursive means.”<sup>35</sup> She juxtaposes both these terms to analyze *Codex Espangliensis* as opposed to focusing on each individual element. By intersecting the messages behind a pre-Hispanic codex and a more modern and relatable form of art like a comic book; a diversified perception of our histories is created.

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<sup>32</sup> Juan Granada-Cardona, "Alternatives for Latin American integration: beyond racial fusion and Multiculturalism" *Latin American Perspectives* 45, no. 2 (March 2018): 107.

<sup>33</sup> Granada-Cardona, "Alternatives for Latin American integration," 111.

<sup>34</sup> Daniela Miranda Loría, "Painted (Hi)stories: The Subversive Power of Codex and Comics Elements in Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol," *International Journal Of Comic Art* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 55-76.

<sup>35</sup> Daniela Miranda Loría, "Painted (Hi)stories," 55-76.

While reading *Codex Espangliensis*, a monolingual audience struggles with the mixture of language and colloquialisms in Spanglish. Similarly, a bilingual audience struggles with the juxtaposition of pop culture and historical references in the text. The masterminds behind the Codex ironically comment on the patronizing idea that bilinguals should accommodate to monolinguals, “Where is the fuckin interpreter we asked for? Where is the Mexican consulate when we need them.”<sup>36</sup> This urgency for assimilation infuriates our authors when what should be expected from those who surround us is respect for our different languages and identities. Anazldúa shares a personal anecdote in her book, “At Pan American University, I and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents. Attacks on one’s form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment.”<sup>37</sup> Who must give in? And why is the default we have entrenched as a community that the Spanish speaker should accommodate to the English speaker; when both languages are just as valid?

To many people, language is closely tied to their collective identities. The message behind the Codex proves that if the “New American reader” is willing to crossover and try to understand something that is so different; anyone can find ways to relate their personal histories to the text and to the people whose stories it represents.

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<sup>36</sup> Gómez-Peña et al, *Codex espangliensis*.

<sup>37</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 26.

## FILMX

On the other hand, in the film *Babel*, the fragmented stories of four very diverse protagonists; Chieko Emilia, Yussef, and Richard are presented in four different languages in distant parts of the world. To give an overview of the movie, Chieko is an alienated deaf teenager who lives in Japan with her father. Her father gifted Abdullah a rifle in appreciation for his services as a tour guide in his recent trip to Morocco. Abdullah sold this rifle to the Moroccan goat herder Hassan, the father of Yussef and Ahmed. To help their father protect their goats from jackals, and other predators Yussef and Ahmed practice their shooting skills out in the open. One of Yussef's bullets hits a moving bus on the highway injuring Susan, Richard's wife. Meanwhile, in the U.S, Emilia, Richard and Susan's housekeeper and nanny illegally cross the Mexico - U.S border with Mike and Debbie (Richard and Susan's kids) because her son was getting married. However, she was responsible for taking care of Mike and Debbie with their parents traveling abroad.

The Mexican filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu creates an eccentric film using montage and hyperlink cinema to demonstrate that despite differences in class, language, and culture, everything is interconnected. The movie does not follow a traditional chronological order but allows us to see scenes in themes rather than in linear perspective. Using this unique method, Iñárritu successfully conveys the idea of cultural interrelationality in time and space. Elizabeth Anker explains that *Babel* illustrates a particular kind "aesthetic experience" that does more than merely critique the structures of privilege and paradigms of injustice.<sup>38</sup> She redefines

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<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Anker. "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty: The Politics of Enclosure in Alejandro González Iñárritu *Babel*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 950-973.



“sovereignty” through a complex logic of closed spaces and borders, as opposed to our thinned perceptions of sovereignty as “individual and juridical.”<sup>39</sup> Her article is analogous to *Babel*’s approach to merge the individual and the collective by demonstrating that our relations to power intersect larger ideas.

Equivalently, in its atypical conception, the triptych film *Babel* embodies resistance by allowing us to reconsider the way cinema is created. As mentioned in an article by Todd McGowan, our common thought is that “contingency has no place at all in cinema [...] almost every film has been structured by a filmmaker intent on providing the spectator with a prearranged experience in which each occurrence necessarily follows another.”<sup>40</sup> A problem we face is that we no longer listen or stay true to ourselves, and we don’t recognize our ancestors. In order to better comprehend ourselves and fulfill our personal goals, we must also recognize a world-wide struggle. Regularly, we tend to focus on ourselves, our motivations and personal goals, but *Babel*’s concepts of contingency allow us to adopt a new mindset. We are emotionally frustrated with Chieko in Japan, we empathize with Emilia’s ultimate deportation, we suffer for Richard and his wife, and we share Yussef’s impotence and guilt. The metaphorical cross-cutting of borders in Iñárritu’s filmmaking techniques help rid us of our dualistic thinking. We are able to see different perspectives of related stories, and, thus, we are unable to separate who is good from bad or who is guilty of innocent. All characters in the film transcend these simple characteristics. When switching from scene to scene, Iñárritu pans the surroundings, in shots of commotion to establish the ambiance and help the audience understand what is going to happen

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<sup>39</sup> Anker, “In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty,” 950-973.

<sup>40</sup> Todd McGowan, “The Contingency of Connection: The Path to Politicization in ‘Babel,’” *Discourse* 30, no. 3 (2008): 401–418.

more holistically. The transitions in *Babel* from one story to another bridge gaps between stories to make it more cohesive.

The film *Babel* proposes the idea that language does not have to be divisive. In every scene, Emilia, the Mexican nanny, communicates with Mike and Debbie in Spanish or Spanglish, and they understand her perfectly well. In their final encounter, the kids are asleep in the desert with Emilia, and she leaves them safely under a tree's shadow, while she goes off to search for help. Emilia sees a police car and signals for assistance but the officers offhandedly apprehend her. Meanwhile, Mike tenderly asks, "You're bad?" Emilia responds with "I'm not bad I just did something stupid"<sup>41</sup> Throughout the entire movie, there is a mutual connection between the three of them. These kids demonstrate no ill judgment towards her; in fact, she seems to be closer and more like family to the kids than their own parents. She loves them like her own.

Iñárritu creates a quadrilingual cinematographic experience that changes the way we think of ourselves and others. He redefines the curse of *Babel* and makes us understand that as humans we will never be able to communicate effectively unless we work towards understanding those who are different from ourselves. That is why we must work towards adopting a more empathetic mindset and think twice before judging people who don't share our same beliefs, practices, or cultures.

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<sup>41</sup> Iñárritu Alejandro González, director. *Babel*. Paramount Vantage, 2006.

## CONCLUSIONS

Gomez-Peña, and Iñarritu challenge ideas of American-English predominance and conflicted identities in their works. By purposefully intertwining prose and poetry, as well as Spanish and English, these text and movies invoke similar feelings of internal conflict for monolingual readers. These Latinx creators want their audiences to understand the subtle ways in which their communities are diminished every day.

In conclusion, the deep message in Latinx literature, autobiographies, and films will allow us to transcend dualism. By proposing a different way of understanding ourselves and the world, by going against societal labels and giving us the power to label ourselves as intersectional and interrelational, Iñarritu, Chagoya, Gomez-Peña, and Rice truly epitomize the beginnings of a new consciousness. By stating unequivocally that their voices will not be subdued, they are making a statement. If we refuse to imagine our surroundings as light or dark, good or bad, we will realize for ourselves and help others understand that someone's personal problems can become global issues. By adopting a more open mindset and seeing the world interdimensionally people of all races, genders, religions, and sexualities will come together in the Borderlands and think differently. If we allow ourselves to maintain a "cosmic" sense of our ethnic and spiritual harmonies, our self-imposed boundaries will be more easily dissolved.

Potentially, for future research, something that would continue the academic conversation of creating a more inclusive identity would be delving into Latinx feminist theory, mestizaje, and

sexuality. Like Anzaldua, other queer Latinx academics have shared their experiences of living in the Borderlands, and embodying some sort of “spiritual mestizaje.”<sup>42</sup>

However, for now, the pedagogy Iñarritu and Gomez-Peña bring forward will help transform the way we talk about one another. With hope, the deep message expressed in Latinx creative communication will allow us to redefine the Latin American cultural identity for the better.

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<sup>42</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*.

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