

# Cruces y bordes la voz de la otredad

*El inglés y el español  
en contacto en los Estados Unidos*

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in)(between.

Me gusta el español vario, incorrecto, múltiple, vivo, en el que a veces me cuesta entender en la boca de los taxistas neoyorkinos, también el limpio y cadencioso de Fray Luis y Cervantes, de Borges y Paz. No me gusta el español muerto y disecado de dómines meticulosos.

— RICARDO NAVAS RUIZ (2004)

La presente serie editorial pretende tratar el encuentro entre el inglés y el español en los Estados Unidos en todas sus variantes y vertientes en un momento de su historia particularmente delicado. En este panorama global y mestizo, de particular interés es el territorio estadounidense porque las continuas migraciones de hispanos hacia el Norte han cambiado el perfil de los Estados Unidos, no solo desde el punto de vista cultural, social y económico, sino también debido al contacto entre el inglés y el español que se produce cuando esas poblaciones se encuentran. La relación entre estas dos lenguas en esa peculiar realidad se caracteriza por muchos contactos e intercambios, generando una situación de compenetración y, se podría afirmar, de mutua dependencia.

Es necesario reflexionar acerca del hecho de que la lengua no está hecha porque cambia constantemente. En general, la sustitución lingüística se produce dentro de un proceso complejo de mestizaje social, cultural y lingüístico. En este ámbito deseamos reflexionar sobre las diferentes posturas de los estudiosos, y acerca de los retos, dilemas y complejidad de la situación lingüística, cultural, literaria *hispanounidense*.

Todo esto, sin olvidar el papel del translenguar como método pedagógico, y considerando las variedades que se denominan español estadounidense general y *espanglish*, también desde un punto de vista identitario, precisamente como indicio y símbolo de la construcción de una nueva identidad *in-between*.

Por lo tanto, la serie tiene la intención de albergar estudios filológicos, lingüísticos, literarios, lexicográficos, pedagógicos que pueden ayudar a la comprensión de los diferentes aspectos que esta "íntima" relación presenta.

La serie adopta un sistema de evaluación de texto basado en la revisión por pares (revisión por pares anónimos). Los criterios de evaluación se centrarán en el rigor metodológico, la calidad científica y la singularidad de los temas propuestos.

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# CONVERSATIONS ON MIGRATION IN LITERATURE AND VISUAL ARTS

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## STORYTELLERS ON MIGRATION: EXPRESSIONS OF RESISTANCE AND NEW ARTISTIC IMAGINARIES

INGE LANSLOTS, AN VAN HECKE\*

Casi todos los países, antiguos y modernos, han sido hechos por extranjeros. Basta pensar en los Estados Unidos, o en la Argentina, para no hablar de Inglaterra, o Francia, o España, cuando les tocó ser hechas por “extraños”. Realmente, yo no creo que nadie sea extranjero, pero sin pensarlo, la gente se deja llevar por estos conceptos superficiales.

– AUGUSTO MONTERROSO, *Viaje al centro de la fábula* (1989)

El pequeño mundo que uno encuentra al nacer es el mismo en cualquier parte que se nazca; sólo se amplía si uno logra irse a tiempo de donde tiene que irse, físicamente o con la imaginación.

– AUGUSTO MONTERROSO, *Los buscadores de oro* (1993)

This volume is the culmination of the research project entitled “Éxodocs. The Representation of Migration from Latin America to the United States: Documentary Filmmakers as New Storytellers on Border Crossing”<sup>(1)</sup>, which analyzed how theories of cultural (self)translation

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\* KU Leuven.

(1) The four-year project *Éxodocs* (éxodocs.com) was funded by KU Leuven (2017–2021) and directed by Inge Lanslots (promoter) and An Van Hecke (co-promoter). The research led to many publications, in particular the special issue *Multilingualism and Cultural Transfer, Cadernos de Tradução* 40 (Van Hecke and Lanslots 2020). We would like to express our gratitude to all the colleagues with whom we had the opportunity to exchange ideas and to collaborate during this project.

apply to documentaries on Latin American migration to the United States.

As it is widely known, immigration into the U.S. along the Mexican border has a long and complicated history going back to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The Treaty altered the southern border of the U.S., and border disputes as well as (trans)national tensions continued amplifying feelings of displacement of those who had become U.S. citizens overnight. The migration of Mexicans into the U.S., which can be divided into various flows, has produced the largest number of U.S. immigrants, whereas immigration from other Latin American countries is more recent and on a different scale.

Given this background, it comes as no surprise that the impact of this type of border crossing on space and people is constantly redebated in today's mediatized society. Immigration into the U.S. along the Mexican border has been described in terms of a traumatic experience, whereas the identity of these immigrants and their spatiality, and in particular of Mexican-Americans, has been explained in terms of difference, otherness, and multiplicity of borders. The history of these Latinos continues to test «the limits of social configurations and [to] articulate [...] the formation of a culture in transition» (Pérez-Torres 1998: 173). In current debates, migration into the U.S. is still highly associated with discrimination and racism, illegal trafficking of humans and drugs, and other criminal activities.

Within Migration Studies and related domains, scholars have addressed intercultural relations, local social phenomena in the border zone, the discrimination and stereotyping of Latinos, their invisibilization and de-identification, and their dehumanization, but also the problematic

representation of different aspects of migration in various art forms. Ample studies have been conducted on the representation of migration in literature and on the big screen as well as on the imaginaries underlying that representation, whereas, as we realized some six years ago, too little attention had been given to the way migration is being represented within documentaries, particularly within recent ones.

In the 1980s, Film Studies picked up how migration processes and migrants are further shaped by their filmic portrayal, categorizing films according to the ethnicity of the protagonists. From the mid-90s onwards, critics note a considerable shift. Films on migration tend to make a strong social statement, including non-Mexican characters to interweave different perspectives. Films continue to emphasize the violation of human rights of migrant workers and social injustice but also focus on the justification and the sacrifice of immigrants as well as on human traffickers and minutemen. Filmmakers visualize various aspects of the struggle along the border, such as the illegal crossing, human trafficking, (drug) smuggling, border control, but also the fact that immigrants move further away from the border, raising a myriad of social and ideological questions.

Regardless of the thematic choices of the filmmakers or the ethnic categorization of films on migration, in-depth analyses of late 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century films on migration bring to light the specific use of aesthetic and narratological devices such as fairy tale, mythological, or religious elements (the Hispanic value of our Lady of Guadalupe, for instance), along with a rich imagery, circular storytelling, polyphony, and/or Manichean structures. The frequent use of circular motifs which symbolize death, relate to the

mother figure, or to the pull factor to migrate is striking. Filmmakers overtly draw upon literature and artistic expressions (ranging from the visual arts, over music, to body art), which explains the numerous intertextual references. These devices add to a positive portrayal of immigrants and of the various ethnic groups in the United States. In doing so, filmic narratives counter the normalization of stereotypes or cliché images, which have (and still do) largely contributed to a negative depiction of immigrants (Rodríguez 1997, Ramirez–Berg’s eleven hypotheses, 2002, Vila 2000).

While studying artistic authorship and form, scholars observe that filmmakers increasingly tend to blur the distinction between different types of film. Filmmakers, for instance, insert archival audiovisual footage or create reenactments of such materials. They also use voice–over, as in the expository mode of documentaries, copying the so–called objective tone of documentaries as described in Nichols’ conceptual scheme of documentary film styles (Nichols 2010). In these films, boundaries between fiction and facts seem to fade due to the elaborate use of the modalities of documentary language. This type of storytelling might ensure a more truthful documentation of reality but mainly questions it in order to raise or increase awareness among the audience.

Conversely, late 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century documentaries on migration seem to explore the frontiers between fact and fiction as opposed to earlier documentary films, which clearly had a more authoritative and expository narration. These recent documentaries, which visualize the migration of different ethnic groups, progressively move towards a poetic–performative mode (Nichols 2010). On the one hand, they present a subjective interpretation of reality within an experimental storytelling, which comprises

associative spatial juxtapositions and a varying temporality; on the other, the subjective storytelling appeals to an audience but also to the documentary filmmakers themselves, emphasizing the reality of ethnic minorities. Of particular relevance is the recent tendency in documentaries towards a renewed interest in foundational master narratives or in indigenous people and their specific backgrounds and traditions as in the documentaries by Yolanda Cruz: *Sueños binacionales/Binational Dreams* (Mexico/USA, 2006) and *2501 Migrants: A Journey* (Mexico, 2010). These documentaries have an explicit open-ended and polyphonic structure.

Recent documentaries seem to be much more concerned about giving the spectator various perspectives on the phenomenon of migration. These documentaries sample a broad set of audiovisual materials and written texts to represent the migration processes and all the social actors involved in real time as, for instance, the migrant, the U.S. citizen, the border patrol, the coyote, the minuteman, the criminal, or the penitent, but they are remarkably mixed with fictional elements. In line with other new artistic expressions, documentaries are rather situated at the margins of reality, being the result of an intricate process of narrativization based upon a heterogeneous textual corpus and a varying focality. In this creative process, which scholars often define in terms of hybridization, documentary filmmakers mix reality with fiction, and documentary modes with other genres, art forms, or technologies, borrowing from different cultural fields such as performance art.

In doing so, documentaries redebate territorial questions, which were first raised in the early 1990s, as they still visualize the sense of displacement produced by the crossing of a national border, the transition, and a settling

process with heterogeneous patterns. Documentary films are now explicitly set in an interstitial zone, a borderland (Soja 2000) within an experimental storytelling (Trujillo 2013). The depiction of the act of border-crossing broadens thus to the portrayal of the traverse of a frontier (Anzaldúa 1999; Anderson and O'Dowd 1999). The Border Film Project, a collaborative art project, for instance, intends to capture the essence of border-crossing by associating sequences of undocumented migrants who try to cross the desert into the United States and scenes which focus on the American minutemen who try to stop them.

In documentaries, the “Border” mixes the notions of border and borderlands/frontier, which in a Spanish context are often rendered by the same word: *frontera* (Van Hecke 2012). This translational ambiguity further illustrates the issue of interstitiality but also the limits of communication, which in documentaries (as well as in films such as the emblematic *Babel*, 2006; Van Hecke 2016) is expressed by various types of language-mixing (Pérez-Torres 1998).

This shift in documentary-making seems to go back to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when President Felipe Calderón initiated the so-called Mexican War on Drugs, which further enhanced the problems related to the border zone and to the perception of migrants. Scholars have not yet categorized these documentaries according to the ethnic provenance of the portrayed migrants but do suggest that filmmakers (Foster 2012) might have found an adequate tool to raise awareness opting for aesthetic experimentation and different formal approaches.

As stated earlier, systematic research on this new dynamism had not yet been done to encompass the specificity

of the representation of migration within visual arts. Our project's aim was to fill that gap in research on today's documentary filmmaking by enabling the comparison between film and documentary. This novel poetic–performative approach of the documentary genre required careful academic investigation.

From 2000 onwards, documentary filmmakers seem to have switched towards a more poetic–performative mode, which enables them to present a subjective and authorial/artistic interpretation of reality to an audience as in the 2011 *Lessons for Zafrah*, by Carolina Rivas and Daoud Sarhandi. This is a key documentary within our project outline, in which the story of the dangerous traverse of Mexico on top of the Beast (freight trains) is associated with the biblical Fall in Michelangelo's frescos, juxtaposing different places and moments in time.

Along with other documentary filmmakers, Rivas and Sarhandi renegotiate not only the consensus on the genre but also foreground the “fuzzy” boundaries (Ward 2005, 12) with fictional storytelling. They emphasize the hybridity migration entails on a spatial and identity level. The representational strategies of contemporary documentary filmmakers are novel and innovative compared to previous documentary filmmaking. With this in mind, we used a corpus and a counter–corpus, which was further completed in the doctoral thesis by Alexandra Sanchez (2022).

As a research group, we looked for the markers on migration while examining the specificity of today's documentaries and we explored the documentaries' topography, which leads to a spatial hybridity. The analysis of spatiality focuses on settling patterns as well as on the description of the relationship between mono– and pluri–ethnic

geographies dictated by power relations and a set of processes (behavioral, transactional, social, and political) which may evolve in time and have become even more complex in the digital age. Attachments to place may weaken (de-territorialization) or become stronger (reterritorialization) (Soja 2000, 151–152), thus redefining social spatiality and territoriality. Paraphrasing the 2022 volume edited by Luce Beeckmans and others: migrants make home(s) in displacement (Beeckmans e.a., 2022).

We considered it necessary to study the identity construction of migrants, which confronts the intended audience with the issue of otherness and the (in)ability to communicate. Migration has been frequently described as the crossing of cultural boundaries, an act that seems to put migrants in a state of interstitiality (Piedras and Lie 2014), so it was important to unravel how the documentaries under scrutiny represent the traveling between different cultures and give voice to people from both sides of the border who speak different languages. Directors incorporate a myriad of techniques (synchronization, subtitling, comments on screen...) to present the phenomenon of multilingualism enhancing the (in)ability to communicate. Recent documentaries often bring «discontinued stories and multiple subjectivities» (Pons 2003, 84), visualizing how social actors of migration express themselves on the issue and interact with others.

In analyzing our corpus and parallel corpuses, such as graphic novels, we privileged the aesthetic devices and the literary narrative strategies storytellers resort to in the representation of migration blurring the boundaries with fiction. As Keath Beattie observes, these «documentaries use techniques and conventions more readily associated with

fictional storytelling» (2004, 7), the essence of which resides in the use of aesthetic and narratological devices borrowed from other artistic expressions. This type of analysis goes beyond the study of cross-modal patterns and of the interplay between word and image to unveil the documentaries' poetic mode.

Furthermore, we zoomed in on the amplitude of the poetic-performative mode of documentaries. The filmmakers seem to be constant border-crossers themselves, traveling between different cultures and giving voice to people from both sides of the border in order to raise awareness among the intended audience. The performative dimension of the documentaries' storytelling (Nichols 2010) is further integrated across different platforms in the new mediascape, engaging other audiences and mobilizing new communities via social media (Trujillo 2013). As testified in one of our Symposia, "Documentaries: focus on transculturalism, migration and multilingualism" (KU Leuven, Antwerp, 18/11/14), and in our analysis of the novel and documentary *The Brick People*, by Alejandro Morales (Lanslots and Van Hecke 2016), our research revealed the narratological strategies used by documentary makers in their presentation of the topics of integration, preservation, and construction of the own cultural identity and of cross-cultural dialogue. The narratological changes and other issues dealt with above urged us to question and rethink the concepts of cultural transfer, border, and identity.

These traits explain the acronym of our project: *Éxodocs*, which echoes the Spanglish interlanguage often associated with the Latinx community of the United States. *Éxodocs* is a portmanteau word that consists of the Spanish lexeme [éxodo] and the informal English abbreviation for

documentaries [docs]. The project's logo reflects the hybridity and ambiguity of the Latinx who produce, direct, and/or star in the documentaries of the project. The universally-known EXIT stick figure is now a border-crossing, camera-wielding migrant whose lens points both forwards and backwards (see website *éxodocs.com*).

During the official timeframe of the ÉXODOCS project, we organized two follow-up symposia to our 2014 symposium. We took part in several screenings such as the 2019 Global Minds edition at KU Leuven with Isabel Alfonso, director of *Rethinking Cuban Civil Society. Something Deeper than the Truth*. This documentary opens up a space for public expression of political and ideological differences in a new Cuba, topics frequently neglected and unreported by mainstream media. We had various lectures for peers or the wider audience, and a “mid-term” conference, *Polyglots and Polysystems*, dedicated to multilingualism, a duo conference with the FWO project *Lives in Translation*, supervised by Ilse Logie (promoter, UGent) and An Van Hecke (co-promoter, KU Leuven).

In addition, this volume brings together contributions from the concluding conference held on 24–25 September 2021, and forms, as it were, a synthesis of our work that will continue to grow in other projects and collaborations. The conference served as a forum for discussion, during which academics and documentary makers shared their knowledge on migration — be it as a trope, a concept, or a phenomenon. The symposium elaborated on the project's hypothesis that documentary makers become border-crossers themselves (in terms of genre, content and form) when they tell stories on border-crossing. By applying this approach to all possible renditions of migration,

ranging from documentaries, over journalism, to literature, the core concern of our conversations was trying to unpack the complexity of migration.

The volume consists of three main parts: the first one, dedicated to literature, comprises three articles; the second one, on visual arts, also counts three articles; while the third part comprises two short essays and an interview with two documentary filmmakers.

The first part opens with a contribution by DIANA CASTILLEJA and SALMA REZZOUKIA, who reconsider the cartography of the U.S.–Mexico border in “Reescribir la frontera: *La travesía de Enrique* de S. Nazario”. Castilleja and Rezzoukia argue that the focus on this border is such that the border that lies in the South has become virtually non-existent, taking Sonia Nazario’s *La travesía de Enrique* (2014) as an example of a work that pushes back against this trend. The novel offers a vast repertoire of testimonies supported by a rich paratext consisting mainly of photographs and maps. In overlapping these materials, Nazario takes us from North to South while also defying the not so obvious borders between documentaries and testimonies, as well as those between objectivity and subjectivity. The author provides thus a balanced view between official history, living testimony, and the experience of the reader, as our contributors will demonstrate.

In her contribution, MARIE SCHOUPS analyses multisensoriality in the representation of violence in two Mexican novels: *La fila india*, by Antonio Ortuño, and *Las tierras arrasadas*, by Emiliano Monge. The border is no longer a mere line dividing Mexico and the United States; through migration, it has become a site of enormous complexity that, among other things, has seen the growth of a human

market where immigrants are exchanged as nothing but commodities. This system of *gore* capitalism (Valencia), or necropolitics (Mbembe), has extended to the rest of the country and serves as a foundation for Ortuño and Monge's novels, which shed light on the journey of Central American migrants through Mexico and the violence they must endure while on it. Schoups presents a thorough analysis of this violence and especially of the way in which it is experienced and transmitted to the senses. Ultimately, these sensorial references pose a challenge to literature and lead us to question if horror is not impossible to represent.

Our third chapter, by DIEGO VENTURA CEBRIÁN GARCÍA, will take us to an exploration of the migratory experience on the other side of the world. In this text, Cebrián García analyzes the novel *Australia. Un viaje* (2008), by Jorge Carrión, a work that belongs to the genre of travel literature but that dialogues with the topic of migration and its cultural representation. The author of this novel narrates a trip he made to Australia with a double purpose: first, to follow on the footsteps of relatives that migrated to the island during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and second, to study the traces of the Spanish migration by missionaries to that land during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even though these are very specific migrations, Carrión uses them as a platform to discuss migration in general as the result of identity wounds that remain open. The chapter's main focus will be on the motivation of the journey as well as on the explanation of the sociological reasons that lie deep within and its cultural representations.

The second part of this volume is dedicated to migration in documentary film and visual arts. ALEXANDRA SANCHEZ leads us in a new direction in her chapter entitled "Documentary makers as translators: depolarizing the