Mundo Villa:

Informal Settlements and Marginalization in Argentine Film

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Contents

Abstract

Argentina's informal settlements, commonly referred to as *villas*, are home to over 2 million people who are severely marginalized in Argentine society. This thesis begins by mapping the history of *villas* and the volatile relationship between their inhabitants and the state. It then examines the evolution of the representation of *villas* in an increasingly globalised film industry, showing how images of violence, drugs, prostitution and other forms of crime in these neighbourhoods have been appropriated and reappropriated to defend or denounce different governments, ideologies and regimes. Particular attention is paid to conflicting portrayals of villa inhabitants who are marginalized not only because of their socioeconomic status, but also because of their gender. These portrayals are reflective of a society that is simultaneously liberal and oppressive. Lastly, the thesis analyses the ways in which filmmakers from informal settlements respond to stigmatization and attempt to create a new vantage point from which audiences can view the crimes committed by villa residents as manifestations of their oppression and economic marginalization. Significantly, these marginal films often re-employ the images of gangs, drugs and violence seen in the mainstream. Using postcolonial theory as a framework for analysis, this research questions whether this mode of self-representation mimics damaging stereotypes and reinforces social fragmentation or rewrites the standard narrative to create a new understanding of poverty and dismantle the barriers between the villas and the rest of Argentine society. It concludes that, even though marginal cinema is often subversive in its approach, by continuing to define villa communities by their relationship to certain forms of crime, it has yet to capture the diversity within marginalized spaces and the complexity of poverty in Argentina. Signs of progression are also highlighted, however, in a discussion about filmmakers who have re-imagined their *villas* through the science-fiction genre. These filmmakers have empowered the economically marginalized by transforming them from victims into heroic characters, thereby establishing a new model for marginal filmmakers in Argentina and beyond.

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Thesis Introduction

i. Argentina's Villas

In *Planet of the Slums*, the Marxist scholar Mike Davis gives an unsettling, yet eloquently written, account of the continuing exponential growth of urban poverty around the world. Davis draws on literature published by the United Nations (U.N.) to define the 'slums' where this poverty is manifest as being 'characterized by overcrowding, poor or informal housing, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, and insecurity of tenure' (Davis 2006: 23). According to the author, the process of 'urbanization without industrialization' behind the expansion of so-called slums is driven by the social inequalities created by neoliberal capitalism (Davis 2006: 14). The spaces discussed by Davis exist all over Latin America. Informal settlements can be found throughout the region. Brazil has its *favelas*, Chile its *callampas*, Colombia its *comunas*, Mexico its *ciudades perdidas* and Peru its *pueblos jovenes* or *barriadas*. In Uruguay, one encounters *cantegriles*, while *ranchos* are the Venezuelan equivalent. In Argentina, such spaces are called *villas de emergencia* or, for the less politically correct, *villas miseria*. Also referred to simply as villas, the number of these settlements currently in existence is generally estimated at about 2,000.[1] Almost half of these are located across Greater Buenos Aires, the urban agglomeration made up of the autonomous federal capital and its surrounding provincial *partidos* [districts]. The remaining settlements are situated in other provinces, mostly in and around cities such as Córdoba, Corrientes, Mendoza, Paraná, Rosario and Santa Fe. It is estimated that Argentina's villas are home to over 2.5 million *villeras* [female villa residents] and *villeros* [male villa inhabitants] (Salvatori et al. 2013: 3; Giambartolomei 2013: 1). As María Cristina Cravino et al. point out, however, the precarious and irregular nature of the settlements – new villas regularly appear and others are eradicated or abandoned – makes it difficult to determine precisely how many there are and how many people inhabit them (Cravino et al. 2006: 1).[2] Although some are more developed than others, these unofficial *barrios* [neighbourhoods] are often characterised by their unpaved streets, lack of running water and illegally-tapped electricity supply. They have been described as densely populated labyrinths, where narrow passageways contrast strikingly with the organized blocks of the 'outside' city. Their dwellings demonstrate varying degrees of precariousness, while inhabitants often work in the black market and are highly stigmatized in Argentine society. The sense of otherness that the inhabitants of villas experience is evident in the language used by them and others. Débora Gorbán observes deep-rooted notions of 'acá' [here] versus 'allá' [there], a dichotomy suggesting that cities are made up of villas and

[1] For the purpose of brevity, this study will henceforth use the term villa to describe the communities mentioned and villera/o to refer to the residents of these areas.

[2] Cravino has written extensively on the development and stigmatization of villas (Cravino, 1998; 2001; 2002; 2009; Cravino et al., 2002).

everywhere else. The frequent use of the verbs 'entrar' [enter] and 'salir' [leave] by those who pass from the villa to 'el otro lado' [the other side] shows how this dichotomy has been internalized by villa dwellers and others, and further highlights the segregation of informal settlements in Argentina (Gorbán 2008: 55). This thesis considers the ways in which cinema addresses such understandings of villas, analysing widely distributed films produced by 'outsiders' and low-budget films produced by villera/os.

ii. Overview: Critical Framework, Literature Review, Methodology and Outline of Chapters

Few detailed studies of Argentina's villas have been carried out, especially in languages other than Spanish. Even fewer have concentrated on representations of these marginalized spaces. A notable exception to this is a chapter in James Scorer's book *City in Common* (2016), which outlines the history of villas and analyses two literary texts and some examples of *cumbia villera*, a musical genre developed in villas. Like the works studied in this thesis, the villa-centred narratives examined by Scorer either reinforce social fragmentation or emphasize commonalities between villas and the 'outside' to deconstruct the barriers between the two and express a shared sense of humanity. Scorer's chapter about villas forms part of a wider study about how cultural production fosters or dismantles a shared identity in Buenos Aires, a capital city that, due to its history of colonialism and mass immigration, is extremely diverse racially, culturally, and socioeconomically. This thesis is comparable to Scorer's work, although it focuses specifically on the villa, filling a gap in academic research by offering a close narrative analysis of filmic portrayals of the areas.

By examining the history and representation of villas, I hope to make an original and insightful contribution to the field of Argentine cultural studies, which is located within the wider field of Latin American Studies. This research also has implications for other disciplines, however. To understand the way villas are screened to reinforce or counteract official political rhetoric that either vilifies or seeks support from villa communities, I draw on significant theories and studies from anthropology, communication studies, gender studies, history, postcolonial studies, and sociology. Therefore, while dealing with a specialist topic, this project aims to interest a variety of readers through an interdisciplinary approach.

The first chapter begins by examining the origins of the villas, framing their expansion within the larger context of Argentine history and outlining the changing relationship between villera/os and the state. This will provide a useful insight into the evolution of the class-based stigmatization that will be assessed throughout. Key sociological and anthropological texts such

as *Villeros y villas miseria* [*Villera/os and Villas*] (Hugo Ratier, 1985), *Merecer la ciudad* [*To Deserve the City*] (Oscar Oszlak, 1991) and *Prohibido vivir aquí* [*Living Here is Prohibited*] (Eduardo Blaustein, 2006) will provide a framework for analysis. While Ratier's ethnographic study is recognised as the first of its kind, Oszlak provides a useful insight into how mass media have been used by military dictatorships to justify the violent expulsion of those experiencing poverty from urban zones. Blaustein provides an additional account of the uncompromising eradication plans implemented by the state. Cross-referencing such definitive texts will allow for a comprehensive analysis of the origins of the villas, which will in turn provide a sociopolitical context for the examination of screenings of these marginal spaces in subsequent chapters.

Chapter two examines the history of villas in film. Since the theme of the informal settlement is quite specific, it is within the scope of this chapter to map their representation from the silent era through to Argentina's transition to democracy in 1983. This allows for a detailed examination of the development of stereotypes about villas, which have been employed for decades to promote a range of different political and sociological ideas. When Walter Lippman first referred to stereotypes in psychological terms in *Public Opinion* (first published in 1922), he described a representational short-cut capable of condensing the complexity of the world to better understand it (Lippman 2004: 49-50). Film studies scholar Richard Dyer interprets Lippman's work as implying, 'that it is not stereotypes, as an aspect of human thought and representation, that are wrong, but who controls and defines them, what interests they serve' (Dyer 2002: 11-12). According to the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, the stereotype is a colonizing tool: a 'major discursive strategy', the repetition of which is used to articulate difference and pave the way for cultural intervention and oppression (Bhabha 2004: 94, 129). That is, stereotypes can be used to reinforce existing power structures based on race, class, gender, and other characteristics. Thus, the employment of stereotypes, which commonly suggest that the villa is a chaotic space outside of an orderly city, and that all villera/os are violent criminals or helpless victims, can be understood to reinforce their marginalization. This point is rooted in cultivation theory, which was pioneered by the communications studies scholars George Gerbner and Larry Gross. In 'Living With Television: The Violence Profile', Gerbner and Gross examine the effects of mass media on audiences and conclude that 'ritualized displays of any violence […] may cultivate exaggerated assumptions about the extent of threat and danger in the world and lead to demands for protection' (Gerbner and Gross 1976: 194). Gaye Tuchman supports this argument, finding that mass media both cultivate and reflect social opinion (Tuchman 1978: 9, 38). Other research lends further credence to the cultivation theory by finding that stereotypical portrayals of minority groups as harmful can evoke contempt towards them (Behm-Morawitz and Ortiz 2013: 258-261). These arguments have also been applied in a Latin American context. Lucia Dammert and Mary Fran Malone have examined Latin

American media and shown that over-representing crime and violence – ritualized themes of villa-centred narratives – can fuel public anxieties to the point of hysteria. These preoccupations can, in turn, influence social policies that, as is demonstrated in chapter one, have caused great suffering in Argentina's most disadvantaged areas (Dammert and Malone 2003: 79-101; 2006: 27-51). Given that repetition is a key aspect of cultivation theory, diversity and nuance in portrayals of villas is important. As chapter two highlights, however, a lack of diversity is often found when it comes to representing villas, although there are exceptions.

Chapter three maps contemporary representations and continues to explore the extent to which the plurality of villas has been recognised in film. This chapter harnesses Marxist theory to demonstrate how the evolution of villas on screen reflects the dramatic political, economic and social shifts that occurred after Argentina's transition to democracy in 1983. The employment of the informal settlement as a space from which to critique right-wing authoritarianism, neoliberalism and economic crisis is explored through close narrative analyses. The Marxist framework is justified by the links between extreme capitalism and the existence of informal neighbourhoods, as is discussed at length by Davis in *Planet of the Slums*. Davis argues that the growth of so-called slums around the world is connected to the global rise of neoliberalism (Davis 2006: 22-26). In Argentina, as will be shown, the violent, state-sponsored demolition of villas and the dislocation of their inhabitants have been driven by the value of the land on which settlements are built. Crises of capitalism have also led to the expansion of villas. As will be discussed in chapter one, the international economic crisis that gripped the world in the 1930s led to the growth of unofficial neighbourhoods in Argentina. This happened again after the catastrophic failure of Argentina's neoliberal restructuring project, which was initiated by President Carlos Menem in the 1990s and imploded in 2001 (Chronopoulos 2006: 171, 174). Scholars that have examined the social turmoil caused by the collapse frequently observe that the inequalities marked by villas and bordering affluent districts occupied by multinationals and wealthy citizens mark the impact of neoliberalism (González 2014: 84-85; Tasín 2008: 91, 113). The fact that villas are largely populated by migrants from rural Argentina and some of the most impoverished parts of Latin America also lends itself to Marxist analyses of contemporary films, since their exodus has been driven by global inequality and the concentration of wealth in certain urban regions. Other factors also justify the employment of Marxist theory. It is important to mention, for example, that villas have always been strongly associated with left-wing militancy and activism, and Marxist liberation theology. This is not surprising, given that they have been violently targeted by the Right since their initial formation. Hence, some of the most influential Argentine filmmakers (such as the leaders of the Third Cinema movement Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, for example) have been explicitly Marxist in their approach to representing villas. Even those artists who do not consciously establish Marxist

subtexts are often scathing in their critiques of neoliberalism and the exploitation of Latin America by the so-called developed world. Indeed, these directors have also been heavily influenced by Getino and Solanas, and the other more explicit Marxists that preceeded them. In other words, presenting villas as a symbol of the inequality created by capitalism has become a standard mode of representation. Often, this means that directors continue to engage with the images of crime, violence and drugs (symbols of economic crisis and poverty) that were standardized before the transition to democracy.

Co-productions between Argentina and other countries are studied in chapter four. One of the most often-cited critics in the field of transnational film studies, Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, highlights the significance of such a study. She states, 'in the prevailing context of increased globalization and transnationalism there has been a concurrent amount of cinematic coproduction between European and developing nations, which merits attention for political, cultural, and aesthetic reasons' (Hoefert de Turégano 2004: 15). Hence, transnational theory is applied to understand how the globalisation of the film industry impacts portrayals of Argentine poverty and, by implication, real impoverished communities. Argentine film is increasingly financed, produced and consumed by complex global networks of public organizations, private companies and individuals. Thus, as many Latin American studies scholars point out, it is important to consider the impact of this on local issues. For example, Paul Julian Smith argues that regional cultures can be compromised by the commercial goal of reaching global audiences through transnational production processes (Smith 2009: 124). In the edited volume *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating the Transnational in Spanish and Latin American Film*, Tamara Falicov examines films financed by the European-Latin American funding pool Ibermedia and demonstrates that the co-produced nature of a film may obstruct the accurate portrayal of Latin American cultures (Falicov 2013: 72). Falicov also states that Ibermedia 'does not transcend problems of paternalism and the inherent power dynamics that surface when there are inequalities of power and resources' (Falicov 2013: 87). Similarly, Sarah Barrow's essay in the same volume argues that co-productions can reinforce unequal power relationships between Latin American nations and their former colonizers. Barrow also notes that the radical Marxist filmmakers of the 1960s were concerned about this, leading them to avoid the production processes that defined U.S. and European films and 'decolonize' Latin American cinema (Barrow 2013: 138).

Despite the legitimate nature of such concerns, however, transnational networks remain an important source of opportunity for contemporary Latin American filmmakers. As Deborah Shaw points out, an ongoing 'internationalization process' has transformed Latin American film industries, helping them to achieve the recognition and foreign investment that are vital to their survival (Shaw 2007: 1). Catherine Leen also observes that the development of a Paraguayan

film industry has been impeded by the lack of opportunities to participate in Ibermedia and collaborate with international financiers (Leen 2013: 157, 172). In another essay, Barrow highlights the need for foreign investment to increase production and visibility in Peruvian cinema (Barrow 2007: 185-186).

With this research in mind, chapter four considers the tensions inherent in transnational production networks, which are advantageous from a commercial perspective, yet may subjugate Latin American cultures and people. More specifically, this chapter examines the degree to which Argentine co-productions capture the intricacies of villa communities or, alternatively, the degree to which their need to attract global audiences leads to oversimplified representations of informal settlements. Therefore, in the broader context of this thesis, this chapter continues to question the degree to which filmmakers have established an adequately diverse understanding of villas in Argentina.

Chapter five focuses on gender as it continues to explore the extent to which the diversity of villas, and particularly the gendered experience of villera/o poverty, has been screened. It deals with portrayals of cisgender women and trans women, allocating specific sections to each distinct identity to avoid their conflation. This simultaneous consideration is justified since both groups are marginalized because of their socioeconomic position and gender identity. The choice to consider cisgender and trans issues is also mitigated by the telling fact that there is only one film that centralizes trans villera/os and very few that centralize female villeras.

Hence, chapter five is primarily concerned with how the masculinization of the villa-centred narrative, demonstrated in previous chapters, is challenged by a minority of filmmakers that contribute to ongoing discourses about gender-based oppression. These discourses are largely based on the growing problem of gender-motivated violence in Argentina. This national crisis has been well documented. In *Porque te quiero te aporreo: "Violencia en los vínculos"* [*I Beat You because I Love You: "Bonds of Violence"*], Alicia Antonia Crosa states that one in four Argentine women experience gender violence at some point in their lives (Crosa 2012: 12). In *Violencia de género: La maté porque la amaba, la maté porque era mía* [*Gender Violence: I Killed Her because I Loved Her, I Killed Her because She was Mine*] María del Carmen Cayupán de Garfinkel explores the reasons for this. She traces the roots of male dominance to Neolithic Europe, implicitly echoing Engels's theory that the gendered experience of poverty first occurred with the emergence of capitalism (Engels in Brewer 2008: 7-25). At this time, apparently, the invention of harvesting tools meant that physical strength was considered the most important human quality and women were subordinated in what were previously matriarchal societies (Cayupán de Garfinkel 2013: 38-43). The psychotherapist and maternity specialist Laura Gutman reiterates this historical view of gender-based systems of power in *Amor o dominación: Los estragos del patriarcado* [*Love or Domination: The Ruins of Patriarchy*] (Gutman 2012: 20-21).

Of course, those who identify as transgender have also suffered from gender-motivated violence and are even more marginalized than women in societies around the world. This is discussed in *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response* (Castillo et al. 2012: 15-34). In 2016, the Argentine government also acknowledged this fact by including trans individuals in the National Registry of Femicides, which provides official statistics about the extent of gender-motivated killings (Gaffoglio 2017: n.p.).

With the crisis of gender-motivated violence in mind, chapter five develops an understanding of how the doubly marginalized position of women and trans individuals residing in villas is reinforced or challenged in film. Such an objective is legitimized by the fact that oppressive representations of gender identity have contributed to a culture of violence against women and trans women in Latin America. This culture of violence has escalated dramatically in recent years. Evidence for this argument is found in what has become known as the Cotton Field case (González et al. vs Mexico). When this case concluded in 2009, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which oversees treaties ratified by Latin American countries, held the Mexican state jointly responsible for the rapes and murders of Claudia Ivette González, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal and Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez. These horrific events occurred in 2001 in Ciudad Juárez, a city that has witnessed the killings of hundreds of primarily young, economically marginalized females since the early 1990s (Simmons 2006: 492-493). The court set an important precedent within its jurisdiction, which includes Argentina, by ruling that the Mexican government failed in its duty to prevent these crimes and obliging it to improve its protection of females (Cook 2010: 566). This ground-breaking decision was based on the understanding that violence against women is a manifestation of a general culture of gender discrimination that permeates Mexican society in many ways. Such discrimination is evident, for example, in the harmful working conditions that women often endure. In fact, many of the Mexican victims worked in the exploitative manufacturing and assembly plants of the *maquiladora* industry, which expanded after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 (Acosta López 2012: 21-22). The workers' departure from the domestic sphere – their subversion of conventional roles – may have been a significant motivating factor in their murders (Eisenhammer 2014: 103). This kind of oppressive mentality is reinforced by mass media. While denouncing the negligent and gender discriminative way the Mexican police responded to the murders in its *ratio decidendi*, the court linked the fate of the Cotton Field victims to stereotyping. In doing so, it echoed cultivation theory:

> El estereotipo de género se refiere a una preconcepción de atributos o características poseídas o papeles que son o deberían ser ejecutados por hombres y mujeres respectivamente. Así las cosas, es posible asociar la subordinación de la mujer a prácticas basadas en estereotipos de género socialmente dominantes y socialmente persistentes, condiciones que se agravan cuando los estereotipos se reflejan, implícita o explícitamente, en políticas y prácticas, particularmente en el razonamiento y el lenguaje de las autoridades de policía judicial, como ocurrió en el presente caso. La creación y uso de estereotipos se convierte en una de las causas y consecuencias de la violencia de género en contra de la mujer.
>
> [Gender stereotypes refer to a preconception regarding attributes or characteristics possessed, or roles that should be played by men and women, respectively. Thus, it is possible to associate the subordination of women with practices based on socially dominant and persistent gender stereotypes. Subordination is aggravated when these stereotypes are reflected implicitly or explicitly in politics and practices, particularly in the reasoning and language of the heads of the judicial police, as happened in this case. The creation and employment of stereotypes is one of the causes and consequences of violence against women]. (in Bustamante Arango 2010: 305)

The court also declared that states should study the connection between stereotyping in media and violence against women (ELLA Network 2013: 4). Scholars and NGOs including Amnesty International have welcomed this outcome (Simmons 2006: 494). Nonetheless, Rebecca Cook and Simone Cusack criticize the Women's Committee, which is responsible for monitoring compliance with the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, for not encouraging the court to demand more strongly that Mexico identify and eliminate harmful stereotypes (Cook and Cusack 2010: 165-172).

Academic research that is not specifically focused on Latin America has also suggested the importance of understanding representations of marginalized genders, demonstrating how the films studied in chapter five are relevant beyond the villa and Argentine borders. The under- and misrepresentation of females has long been a cause for concern for scholars of global media. Gerbner famously coined the term 'symbolic annihilation' to describe these issues (Gerbner 1972: 44). Tuchman draws on Gerbner's work in 'The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media' to argue that media often limit the lives of females by failing to mirror their advancements in modern society. She argues that girls and women are liable to base their

behaviour on stereotypes that teach them to 'direct their hearts towards hearth and home' (Tuchman 1978: 7, 8, 37). Tuchman also identified three processes of symbolic annihilation: omission (the absence of women), trivialization (the treatment of women as passive 'adornments' in need of protection or domestic confinement) and condemnation (the demonization of supposedly unconfined women such as those who work) (Tuchman 1978: 9). The almost exclusive focus on the marginal male in films about villas, which is demonstrated by the analyses carried out before chapter five, shows that female and trans villa inhabitants are particularly vulnerable to such forms of symbolic annihilation. In *Images that Injure*, Paul Martin Lester and Susan Dente Ross demonstrate the persistence of these issues in the 21st century and state that stereotyping can lead to sexual violence and cause physical and psychological illnesses among girls and women (Martin Lester and Dente Ross 2003: 8, 146-148). Cynthia Carter argues that, 'the marginalization and stereotyping of women in the media […] leads to a trivialization of women and their importance in society' (Carter 2011: 366). Cook and Cusack acknowledge that stereotyping is a result of the human need to understand the world through processes of categorization. However, they also argue that stereotypes that threaten the quality of women's lives should be identified and eradicated, as these ideas regularly inform legislation (Cook and Cusack 2010: 1-2). This very idea surfaces in some of the portrayals of gendered poverty studied in chapter five.

In 2007, the Geena Davis Institute for Gender in Media was established in the United States with the aim of researching and educating audiences about gender inequality in media and influencing content creators. A study conducted by the institute and the University of Southern California examined 600 contemporary U.S. films and discovered that over 70 percent of speaking characters were male (Smith et al. 2014b: 1). A lack of roles allocated to middle-aged and older women, the hypersexualization of females and a general lack of diversity in feminine roles were also identified as problems. Furthermore, it was found that the overwhelming majority of film production workers were men (Smith et al. 2014b: 2). Eliana Dockterman and Daniel D'Addario also call attention to the dominance of men behind the camera and the negative impact that this can have on images of females (Dockterman and D'Addario 2015: n.p.). The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which has been conducted every five years since 1995, is also concerned with the effects of the scarcity of women producing global news and consistently finds that 'the world depicted in the news is predominantly male' (Gallagher 2010: vii). In 2010 and 2015, the GMMP reported that women are more likely than men to be photographed, have their age referenced, be identified by their family status, or appear as ordinary people rather than experts. In addition, these studies find that female content producers are most likely to challenge gender stereotypes (Gallagher 2010: vii-viii, ix; 2015: 1-2). Another of the Geena Davis Institute's reports shows that such issues are not confined to

Hollywood. It states, rather, that females are underrepresented, excluded from certain genres such as action and adventure, objectified, confined to nurturing roles and denied fictional positions of power in cinema around the world (Smith et al. 2014a: 7-9, 16). Hence, the paper concludes that, 'gender inequality is rampant in global films' (Smith et al. 2014a: 6).

There have been some signs of progress in recent times. Stars such as Jennifer Lawrence have challenged inequality and demanded equal pay for women in Hollywood (Dockterman and D'Addario 2015: 44-47). The *Hunger Games* series (dirs. Gary Ross, 2012; Francis Lawrence, 2013, 2014, 2015), in which Lawrence's character Katniss Everdeen fights to free a dystopian society from a dictator underscores an apparent increase in the number of female protagonists in U.S. blockbusters. This development is further notable in the production of female-centred remakes of popular films. *Ghostbusters* (dir. Paul Feig, 2016) is one such remake, although it was not well-received (Kermode 2016: n.p.). Another female-centred remake is *Ocean's Eight* (dir. Gary Ross, 2018), which substitutes the preceding trilogy's eleven central men with a star-studded cast of women. The most recent *Star Wars* features have also (dir. Jeffrey Jacob Abrams, 2015; dir. Gareth Edwards, 2016; dir. Rian Johnson, 2017) exhibited what some have labelled Hollywood's changing attitude by placing women who fight to save the universe from the autocratic Galactic Empire at the centre of their plots. With ownership of the *Star Wars* franchise having been acquired by Disney in 2012, these productions suggest that the corporation is working to shift its long-standing association with oppressive gender values. Recently, however, the sense of progression inherent in these U.S. films has been negated by allegations of sexual harassment and rape against well-known professionals in Hollywood, most notably the producer Harvey Weinstein (Davies 2017: n.p.). This widely-reported scandal has revealed and reignited global discussions about the endemic nature of sexism in film industries.

The portrayal of trans individuals has also been problematic in global cinema, underlining social anxieties towards those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Julia Serano observes that, through the frequent use of the 'deceptive' and 'pathetic' trans archetypes, filmmakers fail to 'challenge our assumptions about gender' (Serano 2007: 35-36). 'Deceptive' trans characters are those who are portrayed as false because they trick others into thinking that they were born male or female. It is important to note that this stereotype is often harnessed in the real world, where physical attacks on trans people are frequently accompanied by false accusations that they have been misleading about their identity and bodies (Castillo et al. 2012: 20-22). 'Pathetic' trans characters are those who fail miserably at gender performance and are ridiculed as a result. Again, this form of ridicule is commonly played out in real life (Castillo et al. 2012: 24). Both Serano and Johannes Sjöberg criticize the appropriation of the trans voice by calling attention to the casting of non-trans actors in trans roles across cinematic genres in features like *Boys Don't Cry* (dir. Kimberly Peirce, 1999) and *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*

(dir. Tom Shadyac, 1994) (Serano 2007: 35-36; Sjöberg 2011: 359). According to Rachel McKinnon, these standardized modes of representation expose trans people to a powerful form of 'stereotype threat', which manifests in evasive behaviours such as 'underperformance' and 'situational avoidance' and is caused by the victims' awareness of stereotypes that may be applied to them (McKinnon 2014: 860-861). Indeed, as is the case with non-trans women, prejudices against trans people are partially attributable to negative stereotyping, which has been addressed by scholars around the world. In his ground-breaking ethnographic study *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, Don Kulick observes that the public is 'weaned on derogatory stereotypes about travestis' (Kulick 1998: 8). Kulick denounces the mass media's tendency to portray trans people as dangerous, sexually deviant, psychologically unstable and criminal, while recontextualizing trans prostitution as an outcome of marginalization as opposed to innate immorality (Kulick 1998: 8, 14). Gordene MacKenzie argues that films that portray trans people as crazed murderers who ultimately receive the punishment they deserve are charged by a cultural fear of disruption to the binary system (MacKenzie 1994: 106). How, then, do Argentine films about villas deal with trans characters? This is a significant question, since trans individuals are relegated to informal settlements in Argentina in disproportionately high numbers. In grappling with this question, chapter five constructs a comprehensive understanding of how the specifically gendered nature of the villera/o experience is screened and what possible implications this has for those who are marginalized because of both their socioeconomic position and their trans identity.

Chapter six opens a dialogue on self-representation, again centring on the idea of diversity in representations of villas. It employs a postcolonial framework rooted in the idea that villas, largely populated by individuals of indigenous American origin, are a legacy of colonialism. As Ratier points out, the demography of villas exposes the misconception that the Argentine identity is shaped solely by its European heritage and reflects the perceived superiority of European cultures (Ratier 1985: 20, 22). The classist notion that villera/os represent a non-European, uncivilized social sector that should be suppressed is one that remains prominent in Argentina. As Scorer points out, 'the perceived "Latin American" nature of *villas* […] constructs them as "other" to Buenos Aires' (Scorer 2016: 184). Postcolonial theory thus facilitates the exploration of the way villa inhabitants respond to stigmatization through Villera/o Cinema.

The filmmakers that produce Villera/o Cinema aim to recover the voices of their communities. Thus, they invoke subaltern theories used by postcolonialists. It was Antonio Gramsci who, in addressing the othering of subordinate groups in Italy, first used the term subaltern (Gramsci 1971: 52). Gramsci identified subaltern groups by their lack of political formation and historical narrative and noted that subalternity was brought about by a combination of factors such as class, race, religion and culture (Gramsci 1971: 54, 196; Green

2002: 11; Green 2011: 395). Villa inhabitants may satisfy these criteria since many are Latin American immigrants of indigenous descent. In line with Gramsci's understanding of various levels of subalternity, social hierarchies also exist within villas (Gramsci 1971: 196-197; Green 2002: 11). The living standards of inhabitants vary considerably and new settlers may be discriminated against (Crovara 2004: 37, 41). Those residing in the most underdeveloped or socially problematic sectors of villas are frequently marginalized by those from other parts of the same neighbourhoods. An interviewee in the documentary *Villera soy* [*I am a Villera*] (dir. Víctor Ramos, 2007) reveals this when she states, 'yo vivo en el ultimo pasillo de la villa sobre el Riachuelo y nosotros no existimos para nadie' [I live in the back alley of the villa by the Riachuelo river and no one cares if we live or die]. Similarly, some entire villas such as Villa 1-11-14 are stigmatized by the media even more so than other informal *barrios* because they are deemed especially dangerous (Crovara 2004: 33). This further aligns the marginal demographic in question with Gramsci's subaltern.

The notion of the subaltern was also famously explored by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, in the seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), examined the practice of *sati* in order to define the term. In 1829, the Indian ritual of self-sacrifice, in which a widow throws herself onto her husband's funeral pyre in an apparent act of devotion, was banned by British colonizers, who considered the custom to be a barbaric infliction of suffering upon the unwilling. On the other hand, indigenous men believed self-immolation to be an important tradition that women wished to experience. Spivak argues that both the native and foreign men ignored the widows' opinions about *sati*, thus essentializing and silencing them (Spivak 1988: 93). Therefore, her essay presents a definition that is similar to Gramsci's in that it considers the subaltern to be those who are oppressed and denied access to systems of communication. For this reason, Spivak comes to mind when those living in villas are referred to as 'los que no tienen voz' [those who "do not have a voice"] (Camara in Bellardi and De Paula 1986: 70).

Villera/os have sought to recover their voices and forge a positive villera/o identity by establishing their own systems of communication and forums for self-expression (Satta 2015: 5, 30, 36). Villa-based newspapers, television channels, radio stations and film schools have afforded locals the opportunity to be heard. Self-representation via these media is very much driven by the feeling that 'outside' interpretations of villera/os are, like those of Gramsci's and Spivak's subaltern groups, misinformed and subordinating (Green 2002: 14-15). Hence, Villera/o Cinema is examined through a postcolonial lens, as a system of communication that aims to undermine and rectify the damaging stereotypes fostered on the 'outside'.

With this being one of the primary goals of the films studied in chapter six, theories regarding cultural mimicry must be employed. The postcolonial theorists Frantz Fanon and Bhabha have criticised the imposed need for colonized groups to mimic the cultural practices of

their colonizers (Fanon 1986; Bhabha 1994). This idea is transposed to Villera/o Cinema, a movement in which directors generally reject the blueprint of mainstream cinema, which they feel is a colonizing force. Since this rejection very often involves the reappropriation of stereotypes such as the villera/o criminal, the movement can be understood as a contact zone. Marie Louise Pratt and Bhabha theorize that there are literal and figurative contact zones in which the colonized and colonizer come into contact. In these zones, the oppressed can become empowered by ironically mimicking the cultural practices of the oppressor (Pratt 1991: 34; Bhabha 1994: 54-55). Since Villera/o Cinema's attempt to disarm stereotypes about villas is one such form of mimicry, postcolonial theory facilitates an understanding of the self-representation in this movement.

Robert Stam's film studies also bridge the theory of mimicry to the critique of Villera/o Cinema. In 'The Transmogrification of the Negative', Stam observes the ways in which militant filmmakers such as Getino and Solanas aimed to revolutionize Latin American film industries and societies from the 1960s onwards by turning the disadvantages they faced into important artistic components of their work (Stam 2015: 146-147). As Villera/o Cinema overturns negative stereotypes to destigmatize villas, it aligns itself with radical movements like Third Cinema and others examined by Stam. Chapter six questions how effective such an approach to production might be. It argues that the continuous engagement with negative stereotypes means than Villera/o Cinema remains highly reactive, and that a reactive villera/o culture might be, in some respects, a counterproductive one. As Stam states in 'Alternative Aesthetics':

> These schemas, while suggestive and influential, could also be seen as simply reversing the old dyads rather than moving beyond them. In a purely reactive gesture, the avant-garde obsessively rejects the mainstream, rather like the lapsed Catholic who cannot stop denouncing the Church. (Stam 2000: 261)

As is shown in chapter six, the reactive approach that portrays crime in villas to undermine stereotypes has become the default position of villera/o filmmakers. Perhaps, then, they are restrained by their refusal to stray from some of the values that film movements such as Third Cinema have instilled in contemporary Argentine cinema. Demetrios Matheou suggests that this may be the case when he states, 'there is a critical concern that the shadows of [the radical directors of the 1960s] perhaps loom too heavily over those following behind, that the "homage'' is too strong' (Matheou 2010: 245-246).

This argument is further reinforced by an examination of the few villera/o filmmakers that have embraced mainstream narrative cinema to promote integration. These artists venture into genres that they have traditionally been symbolically annihilated in, such as science-fiction

and superhero films, creating new spaces for marginalized voices. They are perhaps not radical at first glance, as their narrative structures and aesthetics strive towards the typically conventional in many ways. However, it is argued that their very 'conformity' constitutes a new form of rebellion, one that re-imagines the frontiers of marginal cinema. Therefore, through a close analysis of films produced in villas, chapter six questions and redefines the nature of revolutionary film and proposes new solutions for marginal artists seeking to counter social exclusion. Through its critique of subversive mimicry in Villera/o Cinema, it identifies under-utilized production processes that might facilitate the integration of villas into mainstream society.

Finally, this thesis concludes by reflecting on the extent to which the diversity of villa communities has been captured in an increasingly globalised film industry. It calls for a greater departure from the standard villa-centred drama about crime, violence, gangs and addiction. To do so, it returns to Scorer's discussion of how art can be used to create sites of commonality wherein social harmony and the integration of marginalized people can be fostered. This conclusion also draws on Diana George's essay 'Changing the Face of Poverty' (2001) and other research that demonstrates the need and positive social implications for a more complex understanding of poverty in media.

Chapter One

Populating, Governing and Eradicating Villas

1.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the history of villas, mapping their development and social policy towards them from their inception in the 1930s to the present day. It describes how a period of immigration to Argentina from Europe and, later, from rural Argentina and neighbouring Latin American countries, led to the escalation of a housing crisis that no government has been able to alleviate to date. This chapter also outlines the changing attitudes of Argentina's many polarized political administrations towards villas. While some have used villas as a base from which to gain support, others have targeted them and tried to remove them from the urban landscape by whatever means possible. By focusing on official attitudes and policies towards villas since the foundation of the Argentine state, a sociopolitical backdrop for an analysis of films dealing with villas is established.

1.2 Origins of the Villas

In contemporary Argentina, the stereotypical image of the villera/o takes the form of either an indigenous Amerindian or a *mestiza/o* [of mixed indigenous and European parentage]. The racist slur 'negro' [black] is often used as a way of insulting these figures. While victims of such abuse are often Bolivians, Paraguayans and Peruvians, the term is not clearly defined and can be directed at any individual experiencing poverty. As Mónica Inés Cejas explains, a person labelled a black villera/o may be white-skinned (Cejas 2006: 227). The term originated in the 1940s when immigrants from neighbouring countries were labelled 'cabecitas negras' [little blackheads] (Bastia 2007b: 83). What the black villera/o stereotype does not capture, however, is the fact that the origins of the housing crisis can be traced to the late 19th century, when immigration from conflict and poverty-ridden European countries to Argentina was on the increase (Vitale 2015: 2). The previous sparse population of Argentina was seen by leaders as threatening to the country's sovereignty. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (who served as president between 1868 and 1874) and Juan Bautista Alberdi (a writer and Europe-based diplomat) were proponents of relaxed immigration laws, with the latter coining the famous phrase, 'gobernar es poblar' [to govern is to populate] (Lewald 1963: 525).

This belief was reflected in the Argentine constitution of 1853, which opened national borders to immigrants. Somewhere between 3 million and 4 million Europeans flocked to Argentina between 1880 and 1910, increasing the population twofold. Italian and Spanish settlers were in the majority, although there were considerable numbers from other countries

including France, Poland, Russia, Germany and Ireland. Some chose to settle in alternative urban districts such as Córdoba and Santa Fe but the majority remained in Buenos Aires (Solberg 1969: 215; Murray 2012: 7-11). Upon arriving in the capital, settlers generally rented living spaces in tenements called *conventillos*, which are described by Ratier as precursors to the villas (1985: 11). Construction of these tenements began in 1867 when Italian entrepreneurs identified a business opportunity created by a severe lack of housing (De la Torre 2008: 42). The buildings consisted of numerous rooms rented by individuals, groups of workers and families, who shared basic cooking and washing facilities. There were no running water or sewage systems, and diseases were easily spread between inhabitants. Furthermore, high rates of unemployment and inflation posed a serious threat. Rent prices tripled in 1907 and tenants of approximately 2,000 *conventillos* refused to pay their landlords in a conflict that gripped Buenos Aires for three months (Wood and Baer 2006: 862-863). The protests were often violent but were ultimately unsuccessful (De la Torre 2008: 69-70). Even the establishment of the *Comisión Nacional de Casas Baratas* [National Low-Cost Housing Commission], which battled the crisis by constructing collective and individual homes, was not enough to contain the situation. In the years that followed, rents remained a problem for many as immigrants continued to arrive from Europe.

Subsequently, as a response to the international economic collapse of 1929, the Argentine government turned to import substitution policies that would lead to the development of new places of employment in urban areas. This meant that the agricultural sector was deprived of much-needed investment and many rural dwellers, known as *paisanos* or *campesinos*, found it impossible to make ends meet (Gutiérrez 1999: 75). At the same time, the resulting industrialization transformed urban centres into beacons of hope for those seeking employment (Rodríguez, M.H. 2010: 20). Consequently, as migrants continued to arrive from Europe, they were accompanied by waves of immigrants from rural Argentina and neighbouring Latin American countries, where the Great Depression had also taken hold. The exodus was further sustained by various natural disasters (earthquakes, floods and wildfires) that occurred in the North and West of Argentina in the 1930s (Gutiérrez 1999: 76). At this stage, cities were experiencing a serious accommodation crisis and, despite industrial advancement, unemployment remained rampant. This situation eventually led to the mass construction of illegal housing (Cravino et al. 2006: 2).

The Great Depression marked the beginning of Argentina's so-called Infamous Decade. This period was characterised by rampant political corruption and was initiated when the 'father of the poor', President Hipólito Yrigoyen, was ousted by the country's first *de facto* leader, the right-wing lieutenant general José Félix Uriburu. In 1931, a squatter site appeared in the capital's north-central district of Retiro, when the government provided shacks to a group of immigrants seeking refuge from the economic and political unrest caused by the global crisis in Poland. This

became the first incarnation of what remains Argentina's largest villa, Villa 31. The settlement expanded rapidly and became home to around 3,000 people, the majority of whom were men from Poland (Blaustein 2006: 21; De la Torre 2008: 107). Most of these settlers were unable to find work, which explains why the area was initially dubbed Villa Desocupación [The Villa of Unemployment]. This name was soon replaced with the more optimistic alternative of Villa Esperanza [The Villa of Hope], showing how stigmatization and stereotyping were understood as problematic issues from the inception of villas. The same process of relabelling continues in the present day. Some residents of Villa 15 have asked for the area not to be referred to as Ciudad Oculta [The Hidden City], while others in Villa 21 have rejected the tag of Villa de los Paraguayos [The Paraguyan Villa]. Villa 31 inhabitants have also spoken out against those who refer to their community as *El Playón* [the big parking lot] (Cravino 2002: 31). Instead, they prefer the name Villa Mugica, which honours their parish founder Father Carlos Mugica (a figure whose representation in film will be discussed in detail later). Ironically, however, in 1935, not long after the naming of Villa Esperanza, the first state-sponsored demolition of a villa occurred under the president General Agustín Pedro Justo (Blaustein 2006: 22). The evictions were driven by the belief that the villa was causing increased levels of crime (Scorer 2016: 182). For a time, the settlement was eradicated, though Justo's solution would prove to be short-lived.

The outbreak of the Second World War revived the influx of Europeans, particularly from Spain and Italy, and reignited an unauthorised process of construction in Retiro. The settlement was re-baptized Barrio Inmigrantes [The Immigrants' Neighbourhood], a name that is still used today to refer to a section of Villa 31. Around the same time, towards the nearby Belgrano district, Villa Saldias was built by the railway trade union La Fraternidad to house its workers. Concurrently, the government accommodated northern Argentines and Bolivians by allowing the construction of more precarious housing in Bañado de Flores (now called Parque Almirante Brown) in south-central Buenos Aires. All of these areas continued to expand uncontrollably as illegal dwellings were erected alongside those authorised by the state (Blaustein 2006: 22; Alarcón 2015: 58).

When the populist lieutenant general Juan Domingo Perón was elected as president in 1946, three years after he participated in the coup d'état that brought an end to the Infamous Decade, the housing crisis had reached a critical point: 'la ciudad pareció alcanzar sus límites de contención' [the city seemed to have reached its limits of containment] (Gutiérrez and Romero 1989: 33). Ironically, nonetheless, the poor immigrants and rural migrants that occupied villas and other forms of precarious accommodation provided Peronism, the political ideology of Perón, with the massive support base that made its rise possible. In an effort to dilute the excessive concentration of citizens in the capital, the government proposed the construction of individual houses in new suburban *barrios obreros* [working-class neighbourhoods]. This plan

was implemented in order to satisfy citizens' rights to a home and well-being, which were regular focal points of Peronist discourse (Aboy 2004: 290). The social housing strategy was put forward in Plan Eva Perón [Eva Perón's Plan], strengthening the first lady's image as a champion of the poor and 'representation of the state's graciousness' (Szuchman 2007: 779). Although the plan led to the provision of some houses, the accommodation shortage continued, as did unauthorised construction in and around existing villas and other working-class *barrios*. A notable example of this is the annexation of Villa 15 (Ciudad Oculta) to the formal zone of Los Perales. There was initially a sense of harmony between the respective residents, who conducted business together, shared schools and interacted through local sporting competitions (Aboy 2005: 22). However, this solidarity was eroded in 1955 after a Catholic Church-backed coup d'état known as the *Revolución Libertadora* [Liberating Revolution] forced Perón into exile. The new vice-president Admiral Isaac Rojas demonstrated the *junta*'s attitude towards society's most underprivileged when he labelled the area 'un nido de ratas peronistas' [a nest of Peronist rats]. Los Perales was then renamed Barrio Manuel Dorrego after the federalist ex-president (Gigli 2005: n.p.). García attributes a disintegration of solidarity between the official and unofficial neighbourhoods to the new regime and explains that, in the wake of Perón's exile, the links between Los Pereales and Ciudad Oculta were dismantled (García, M. 2008: 2). Suffice it to say, then, that the 1955 coup d'état marked a turning point in the history of the villas, which suddenly became targets as they were known as hotbeds of support for the ousted leader. This attitude would intensify during future dictatorships, culminating in a reign of terror unleashed by the state on society's most underprivileged between 1976 and 1983.

1.3 To Dictate is to Eradicate

A year after the *Revolución Libertadora*, the new military *junta* led by General Pedro Aramburu established the *Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda* (CNV) [National Housing Commission] with a view to managing the housing crisis (Spinelli 2004: 609-610). The commission concluded that there were 21 villas with a combined population of almost 34,000 in the federal capital. It also indicated that this number would rise to over 78,000 with the settlements of Buenos Aires's provincial districts considered. This census was driven by the increasingly popular idea that villera/os should be expelled from the city (Blaustein 2006: 23). At this time, the first in a succession of large-scale attempts to do away with the villas was coordinated by the CNV. The aim was to construct new neighbourhoods with commercial centres, schools and public transport. In addition, families were to receive financial assistance to cover the costs involved in relocating to these new suburban zones. Despite its somewhat positive intentions, however, the project was a failure. The CNV only managed to construct around 200 dwellings, accommodating

only a small fraction of the targeted demographic (Blaustein 2006: 23-24). Subsequent eradication plans would be considerably less sympathetic.[1]

Another coup d'état in 1966, led by General Juan Carlos Onganía and dubbed the *Revolución Argentina* [Argentine Revolution], signalled the beginning of a socially repressive, neoliberal era known as the *Onganiato* (Godio 2003: 27). This regime aimed to be less transitory than previous ones in order to impose its conservative moral values and stop the spread of communism (Encarnación 2016: 86; Manzano 2014: 124). Its *Plan de Erradicación de Villas de Emergencia* (PEVE) [Villa Eradication Plan] had already been announced by the previous president Arturo Illia and was being managed by the CNV. Onganía continued the effort more aggressively than before. PEVE involved moving villa inhabitants to *Núcleos Habitacionales Transitorios* (NHT) [Transitory Housing Centres]. The idea was to employ a system of rotation by relocating 8,000 inhabitants of these transitory sites to new housing outside the city on an annual basis, thus vacating the halfway houses for the next group. However, not a single permanent home had been constructed five years after Onganía's rise to power (Zapata 2003: 9). Meanwhile, six villas had been destroyed and nearly 4,000 people had been moved to the temporary dwellings which, it transpired, measured only a fraction of the proposed size and were highly susceptible to flooding.

The aim of PEVE to 'civilize' and 'educate' suggested that villa inhabitants were uncultured and ill-bred. The feeling within the government, then, was reminiscent of that put forward by Sarmiento in one of the most influential texts in the history of Argentine literature, *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* [*Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*] (first published in 1845). In this book, the author and eventual president labelled rural Argentines as unintelligent and violent brutes who were inferior to the enlightened and educated city folk (Sarmiento 2003: 31-39, 48). Sarmiento's view was transposed to Buenos Aires and used to target people living in precarious dwellings, scapegoating them as a problem for the city as a whole and as a threat to modernity and civic order. Natalia Jauri further highlights the state's prejudiced view under Onganía: 'el problema de las villas era visto no solo como un problema habitacional, sino como patología social generadora de otros problemas de orden moral, social y urbano' [the villa problem was seen not only as a housing problem, but also as a social disease that generated other moral, social and urban problems] (Jauri 2011b: 2). Motivated by these values, PEVE was divided into three phases: *congelar* [freezing], *desalentar* [demotivating] and *erradicar* [eradicating]. The first of these alienating steps meant ensuring that no new construction work was carried out in villas, while the second focused on dissolving residential organizations and pressuring individuals to leave their homes. Once these tasks were accomplished, the final

[1] Alicia Ziccardi also discusses villa eradication plans (Ziccardi 1983: 45-56).

demolition of the settlements would be possible. During the *Onganiato*, approximately 12 villas were completely eradicated and another was partially demolished, dislocating over 37,000 residents (Jauri 2011b: 3). While many were forced to return to worse poverty in their countries or provinces of origin, others ended up in new suburban villas, which were even more underdeveloped and overcrowded than those that had been razed to the ground. Despite overseeing so many evictions, however, Onganía failed to contain the overall growth of the capital's villas, the combined populations of which were around 80,000 by the time he came to power. This figure increased steadily, reaching 217,000 by the time of the next military coup d'état in 1976 (Zapata 2003: 9; Jauri 2011b: 4).

1.4 The City and the Undeserving

Perón returned from exile and was re-elected in 1973, the eighteen-year proscription on Peronism having been lifted by the 'relatively conciliatory' president General Alejandro Agustín Lanusse in 1971 (Graham-Jones 2000: 14). His homecoming was tainted by at least 13 deaths and over 300 injuries. These resulted from the Ezeiza massacre, a bloody ambush by right-wing Peronists on left-wing Peronists in an attempt to become the dominant presence at the historic event. With Perón having masterfully retained the support of polarized conservatives and liberals, conflict upon his arrival was perhaps inevitable. Many villa inhabitants represented the Left during the clash, having been transported to Ezeiza International Airport by public *colectivos* [buses] that had been hijacked by the Marxist-Peronist, Cuban Revolution-inspired paramilitary group the *Montonero*s (Konfino 2015: 97). Despite this violent episode, the beginning of Perón's third term was welcomed by the economically marginalized as he announced plans to construct thousands of new homes for those in need (Ziccardi 1984: 152). The president was warmly received when he visited Villa 31 shortly after his return (Kofino 2015: 70). However, it soon became clear that he was not completely averse to the idea of eradications. *Plan Alborada* [The Dawn Plan] marked his drift to the right by proposing to do away with settlements that were deemed hazardous including, ironically, a section of Villa 31 known as Zona Eva Perón [The Eva Perón Zone]. As a result, in March of 1974, around 2,000 villera/os gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in front of the Casa Rosada, the primary office and residence of the President of Argentina. Police sealed off the nearby intersection of the streets Alem and Mitre to prevent another group from joining the protest. In the confusion that followed, the *Movimiento Villero Peronista* (MVP) [Peronist Villera/o Movement] activist Alberto Chejolán was shot dead (Tasín 2008: 24). Today, his headstone states that he was murdered by repressive state forces (Cabrera de Rice 2009: n.p.). Taking note of this tragedy, Alicia Ziccardi's statement becomes rather poignant: 'la erradicación es siempre el momento en el cual las relaciones entre villeros e instituciones del Estado se tensan en mayor grado' [eradication is always the time when tensions between

villera/os and state institutions are at their highest] (Ziccardi 1984: 167). This event seriously damaged any chance of reconciliation between left-wing villera/o groups such as the MVP and Perón, who suffered a fatal heart attack four months later at the age of 78.

At this time, the economy was wracked by hyperinflation, which the president's widow and successor Isabel 'Isabelita' Perón was incapable of dealing with. José López Rega, a far-right Minister of Social Welfare and advisor to Juan Perón, became increasingly powerful during her presidency. López Rega had founded the state's neo-fascist death squad the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (Triple A) in 1973 and had also orchestrated the Ezeiza massacre. It was his influence on Juan Perón that was seen by villera/os as having caused their conflict with the president (Konfino 2015: 70, 77). His ability to exercise control over Perón, coupled with his interest in esotericism and black magic gained him the unaffectionate nickname *El Brujo* [the Sorcerer]. As the supposed advisor elected cabinet members and made other important governmental decisions, Isabel Perón became a mere puppet leader. Her inevitable deposition on March 24, 1976 made way for the most brutal military dictatorship in Argentine history (Lewis 2002: 3). The coup d'état led to the traumatic escalation of the so-called dirty war, in which an estimated 30,000 people were labelled subversives, kidnapped, tortured and disappeared by the state (Crenzel 2011: 1068; 2013: 174). An extreme disregard for human rights was also endured by those living in villas.

The *junta* leaders General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera and Brigadier Orlando Ramón Agosti sought complete control over both the Argentine people and landscape. It is not surprising, then, that their aggressive and unyielding National Reorganization Process involved taking hold of the valuable land on which villas were built. A new scheme to obliterate unofficial communities was detailed in the state's *Libro Azul* [Blue Book], written by the CMV and authorised by the mayor of Buenos Aires Brigadier Osvaldo Cacciatore in 1980 (Salvatori et al. 2013: 7). Clearly, Cacciatore's aspiration to clean up the city by reducing pollution, improving waste disposal facilities and providing more green spaces were more sinister than the measures described in his book *Buenos Aires: Hacia una ciudad mejor* [*Buenos Aires: Toward a Better City*] (1978). He wanted to create a 'ciudad blanca' [white city] without garbage and an undesired indigenous presence (Oszlak 1982 in Scorer 2016: 49). PEVE was primarily concerned with the informal settlements located in central Buenos Aires and, under this dictatorship, was carried out with a more hard-line impetus than it was during Onganía's regime. Maria Rovi, a villa-based school teacher and social worker responsible for carrying out censuses and arranging evictions, describes her disappointment with the mistreatment of the villa inhabitants in her rarely-cited book *Villa Miseria también es Buenos Aires* [*Villa Miseria is Also Buenos Aires*] (1976). Rovi understood that by casting villera/os out of the city, the dictatorship was simply transferring Argentina's problems from one area to another and

reinforcing the fragmentation between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country (Rovi 1976: 81). Certainly, the attempts of the military leaders to contain poverty outside of the city seemed to be driven by a sense of hostility that was inherent in Sarmiento's ideas. The uncompromising, classist mindset of the regime is reflected in a comment made in 1980 by the housing commission director Guillermo del Cioppo, who envisaged a capital reserved exclusively for those he considered to be the best and most deserving citizens: its wealthiest white inhabitants. Del Cioppo announced:

> No puede vivir cualquiera en [la ciudad]. Hay que hacer un esfuerzo efectivo para mejorar el hábitat, las condiciones de salubridad e higiene. Concretamente: Vivir en Buenos Aires no es para cualquiera sino para el que la merezca, para el que acepte las pautas de una vida comunitaria agradable y eficiente. Debemos tener una ciudad mejor para la mejor gente.
> [The city does not belong to everyone. We must try to improve the environment, standards of health and hygiene. The fact is that life in Buenos Aires is not for just anyone, but rather, for those who deserve it; those who accept the standards of a harmonious, efficient, community. We must create a better city for the best people]. (Del Cioppo in Oszlak 1991: 78)

The very existence of villas was, according to the regime, detrimental to the beauty of the city and the health – both physical and psychological – of its population. Villera/os were described as morally corrupt and threatening to the quality of the population of the city (Bellardi and De Paula 1986: 24; Oszlak 1991: 158, 189). By explicitly categorizing those dwelling in unauthorised housing as 'the undeserving poor', the state invoked a centuries-old, pejorative sociological concept that '[classifies] poor people by merit' in order to justify punitive policies towards certain groups (Katz 2013: 1-7). In 1755, for example, the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau stated that the economically marginalized were 'driven to their destitution by […] immoral conduct' (Rousseau in Halper and Muzzio 2013: 3). More recently, a controversial Culture of Poverty thesis was popularized by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis in *Five Families* (1959), *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (1961) and *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty* (1966a). Lewis's theory suggests that the poorest members of societies, regardless of where they are situated, employ a transnational 'design for living' that perpetuates their situation (Lewis 1966b: 19).[2] Critics have argued that this explanation for the persistence of extreme poverty ignores institutional obstacles to upward social mobility and

[2] For more information on the development, application and criticism of the culture of poverty theory, see Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt's article on the subject (Rosemblatt, 2009).

places the blame on victims in order to ease feelings of responsibility among wealthier individuals.

Like its predecessor, the renewed multi-phase eradication plan began with the prohibition of the construction and repair of homes and businesses. At the same time, a renewed process of *desaliento* [demotivation] mirrored Onganía's attempts to quash villera/o solidarity and activism (Salvatori et al. 2013: 7). One intimidation tactic involved leaving bodies of the so-called disappeared in villas in order to warn passers-by about the results of noncompliance. Such threats were by no means empty, moreover. The torture and murder of villa-based priests known as *curas villeros*, their parishioners, MVP activists and villera/o *montoneros* became commonplace (Blaustein 2006: 87-97; Konfino 2015: 106-109). The intensified nature of the new effort was also marked by the establishment of offices of the housing commission in villas. Removal trucks and military officers were made fixtures of the villa landscape to maintain a steady degree of pressure on residents (Blaustein 2006: 60). The third step, 'erradicación sin alojamiento alternativo' [eradication without alternative accommodation], again marked a change to the approach that was deemed necessary in order to achieve social and urban order (Jauri 2011b: 4). In other words, the dictatorship aimed to depopulate the settlements without offering alternative accommodation. Evictions regularly took place without notification in the early hours of the morning. The use of Cacciatore's new waste disposal trucks to transport people and their belongings meant that villera/os were, quite literally, treated like garbage (Snitcofsky 2012: 52). The violent treatment of families and the rape of female victims by state officials were also common after the escalation of PEVE (Snitcofsky 2012: 8, 14)

The evacuation of those labelled 'undeserving' was further facilitated by the prohibition of the construction of working-class housing in the capital's city centre. Roads, car parks and affluent gated communities were approved at the expense of such housing. The thawing of previously frozen rents left vulnerable tenants at the mercy of a deregulated housing market, forcing them to the margins of society. Businesses with considerable numbers of low-income employees were relocated beyond General Paz Avenue, a boundary separating the autonomous centre from the provincial districts of Buenos Aires (Salvatori et al. 2013: 6). It is clear, then, that in addition to eradicating villas, the government wanted to rid the capital of all people living in poverty (Russo 2001: n.p.). Generally, villera/o evictees were violently removed and forced into isolated regions where infrastructure and public services were non-existent. Considerable numbers of Latin American immigrants were also deported back to conditions of abject poverty in their homelands. Overall, around 200,000 people were dislocated from the villas of central Buenos Aires between 1976 and 1981 (Bellardi and De Paula 1986: 50; Oszlak 1991: 185;

Blaustein 2006: 16). Eradications were also carried out in other districts and provinces, bringing the total number of evictions to an estimated 250,000 (Salvatori et al. 2013: 8; Jauri 2011b: 4).

1.5 Recovering Democracy and Repopulating Villas

The Argentine economy was declining rapidly by the 1980s, and citizens expressed their disapproval of the dictatorship in increasing numbers. In a bid to garner public support, the military launched an ill-fated attempt to seize control of the Islas Malvinas [Falkland Islands], a British colony situated around 300 kilometres off the Patagonian coast. Argentina has maintained a claim to sovereignty over the territory since 1833. Diplomatic negotiations regarding the fate of the archipelago took place on several occasions between 1966 and 1982. Although various solutions were proposed, no agreement was reached (Reisman 1983: 300-309). Argentine forces invaded the sparsely populated islands on April 2, 1982, initially taking control of the region. However, they were not prepared for the subsequent counterattack authorised by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Most of the Argentine conscripts were young and inexperienced and they suffered a catastrophic loss after three months of conflict (Anderson 2011: 191; Blitzer 2013: 31). This defeat had a devastating impact on the dictatorship. The following year, its discredited leaders were forced to abolish proscriptions on political parties and restore democracy (Pang 2002: 41-42).

The transition resulted in a supposed turnabout with regard to the state's handling of the housing situation. Taking heed of the previous failed demolition plans, a new government led by President Raúl Alfonsín facilitated the repopulation of the villas. The first in a series of development projects was introduced in 1984. The *Programa de Radicación y Solución Integral de Villas y Núcleos Habitacionales Transitorios* [The Programme for the Establishment and Integration of Villas and Transitory Housing Centres] repealed eradication laws and initiated efforts to develop and integrate settlements. This programme and its numerous successors have focused on opening roads, improving buildings and transferring legal ownership of sites to villa residents. Nonetheless, the housing problem remains serious. Pablo Vitale criticizes recent cuts to the funding provided by the government of the federal capital and highlights the disorganized distribution of finances to the state bodies responsible for the development of villas. Such policies, he argues, have prevented the implementation of the capital's local constitution, which recognises villera/os' rights to an urban home and resolves to improve infrastructure and services in precarious residential zones (Vitale 2009: 11-15). The challenges faced in satisfying these rights, and indeed the sheer magnitude of the current problem, are put into perspective by the growth of pre-existing villas and the appearance of new unofficial *barrios* since Argentina's catastrophic financial collapse in 2001 (Rodríguez, M.H. 2010: 1-2). While Buenos

Aires experienced a 4.1% increase in its population during the first decade of the 21st century, the number of people living in villas doubled in the same period (Jauri 2011b: 12). Furthermore, despite the succession of failed development plans, eradication has not entirely become a thing of the past since 1983. In 1996, the corrupt neoliberal president Carlos Menem and Argentina's last directly appointed mayor Jorge Domínguez, who was given the unaffectionate and telling nickname *Topadora* [The Bulldozer], approved the construction of the Arturo Illia highway at the expense of a large section of Villa 31. When the residents rejected the terms of their relocation, tensions rose once again and bulldozers, both real and figurative, were met head-on by a group of *curas villeros* whose hunger strike was supported by the Catholic archbishop and future pope Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis). Although a considerable number of people were expelled violently from their homes, the clergymen ultimately forced the politicians to recognise the human rights of the victims (Konfino 2015: 169). When peaceful negotiations resumed, some locals accepted the state's offer of financial assistance and left their homes, while others stayed put. Bergoglio has since seen Villa Papa Francisco adopt his papal name. This informal settlement was far less successful than Villa 31 in its struggle, however, and was demolished a few months after its construction in 2014 after a girl named Melina López was robbed and murdered by two men who took refuge there. A judicial order to dismantle the settlement pre-existed López's death, and those who had protested alleged criminal activity coming from the villa blamed the state for failing to prevent the murder by not deconstructing the villa sooner. Some of the 300 residents of Villa Papa Francisco resisted their evictions and were arrested (*Clarín*, 2014).

In 2015, Kirchnerism, a populist Peronist doctrine that dominated Argentine politics between 2003 and 2015 during the presidencies of its late founder Néstor Kirchner and his widow Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, gave way to the non-Peronist, centre-right Propuesta Republicana (PRO) [Republican Proposal] party headed by the Kirchners' presidential successor Mauricio Macri. The Kirchners had risen to power during a period of severe social and economic upheaval caused by the failure of Argentina's neoliberal project, which is discussed in greater detail in chapter three. Although both Kirchners have been the subjects of political scandals, there was a relative degree of stability in villas while they were in office. Eradication was not legitimized by official large-scale plans and was avoided for the most part. Some development projects were funded in villas. Educational and cultural centres were constructed, and their various programmes were subsidised. A good example of this is the construction of La Casa de la Cultura, which was officially inaugurated by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in 2013. This modern culture centre was built on the site of an abandoned warehouse in Villa 21 and serves as an exhibition centre and base for local artists and cultural groups. The actor, casting director, playwright and filmmaker Julio Arrieta, whose work is discussed at length in chapter six, has had a cinema theatre named after him in La Casa de la Cultura. Such acts demonstrate why

Kirchnerism continues to enjoy great deal of support in villas, despite accusations of the misappropriation of funds and incompetence within organizations responsible for development during the Kirchners' presidencies (Vitale 2009: 15-18). Recently, nonetheless, left-wing Peronism has lost some ground in villa communities. It is particularly notable that Macri outperformed his Kirchnerist opponent Daniel Scioli in Villa 31 during the presidential election in 2015. This surprising result has been attributed to the negative impact of high inflation that has taken a particularly heavy toll on the economically marginalized.

With the return towards a more corporatist, neoliberal Argentina, the future of the villas, particularly those situated in central urban locations, remains uncertain. The PRO party has been accused of purposely concealing Villa 31 with walls and overhead meshing, measures that it argues were taken to prevent dangerous illegal construction and to ensure public safety. In August 2016, Macri's government inaugurated an ambitious project to improve buildings, roads and public services in Villa 31 by 2019. As part of the plan, residents have been promised the opportunity to legally own and finance their homes through a soft-credit programme. It is also proposed that two kilometres of the Arturo Illia motorway, which bisects Villa 31, be replaced with a recreational green space. The city's ministry of education is also to be relocated to Villa 31, and will include schools for children and adults (*La Nación* 2016a: n.p.). Another two buildings previously occupied by criminal gangs will be converted into an employment centre and municipal office. At a reported cost of 6 billion pesos, however, even if Villa 31 achieves the levels of integration planned, developing other informal neighbourhoods to the same degree will prove challenging.[3] That said, re-housing is also underway in areas such as Villa 21. Villa 20 is also set to be replaced with a new *barrio* named after Pope Francis. It will be interesting to see how these projects develop (Musse 2018: n.p.).

Fernández de Kirchner's visit to Villa 31 in August 2016, during which she inaugurated the 'Néstor Kirchner Studio' of the community channel Urbana TV and gave a rare interview, strengthened her position as a candidate for re-election in 2019. The ex-president criticised literal and structural violence supposedly created by her opponents, and celebrated the resilience of villa inhabitants in the face of such oppression:

> Esta villa la equiparó al peronismo porque a esta villa siempre la quisieron hacer desaparecer. El que fuera capaz de desmoronar la villa 31 iba a ser coronado como el nuevo civilizador contra la barbarie. La 31 es el emblema de la resistencia, y de avanzar. (*La Nación*, 2016b: n.p)

[3] At the time of the cited report in August 2016, six billion Argentine pesos equalled roughly 375 million euro.

> [This villa emblematized Peronism because others have always tried to make it disappear. Whoever demolished Villa 31 would be crowned the civilizer that defeated barbarism. Villa 31 is an emblem of resistence and progress].

This much-discussed appearance in Villa 31 shows that informal settlements will remain a major platform from where Argentina's opposing political forces will battle it out in the future.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed historical account of Argentina's villas, spanning from the early 20th century to contemporary times. It has examined the changing social and political settings within which villas appeared, expanded, were eradicated and repopulated. In doing so, it has established a detailed sociopolitical backdrop for the films studied in forthcoming chapters. It has been made clear that the housing crisis pre-dates the establishment of informal settlements in Argentina. While villas are often thought of as of the cause of the crisis and the social problems linked to it, such issues can be traced back to the original phase of immigration from Europe in the late nineteenth century, which was encouraged to legitimize the sovereignty of the Argentine republic.

Nonetheless, villas are commonly understood as a phenomenon of Peronism. This remains the case despite their first appearance over a decade before Perón took office, as is reflected in chapter two's discussion of *Puerto Nuevo* [*New Port*] (dirs. Luis César Amadori and Mario Soffici, 1936). While the expansion of villas in the 1940s is attributable to Perón's failure to transform them into *barrios obreros*, their existence is also connected to global matters such as the Great Depression, which uprooted those who settled in urban villas in the 1930s. Perón's claim that he had resolved the housing crisis are echoed in films produced during his first two terms. As will be shown in chapter two, censors ensured that *Suburbio* [*Slum*] (dir. León Klimovsky, 1951), *Del otro lado del puente* [*From the Other Side of the Bridge*] (dir. Carlos Rinaldi, 1953) and *Barrio Gris* [*Grey Neighbourhood*] (dir. Mario Soffici 1954) portrayed corrupt and disease-ridden villas through flashbacks to legitimize Perón's regime. Anti-Peronist films produced after the *Revolución Libertadora* such as *Detrás de un largo muro* [*Behind a Long Wall*] (dir. Lucas Demare, 1958) would revise this argument, portraying chaotic villas as effects of Peronism.

Subsequent presidents were no more successful than Perón in containing the housing crisis. This is an important, yet pessimistic, observation that is manifest in films produced during the transition between Peronism and right-wing authoritarianism. A sense of disillusionment is played out in *El candidato* [*The Candidate*] (dir. Fernando Ayala, 1959) and *Alias Gardelito* [*Alias*

Big Shot] (dir. Lautaro Murúa, 1961), as well as some other productions examined in chapter two. The feeling inherent in these films, that no government has been able to control the growth of villas or satisfy the basic human rights of villera/os, continues to ring true in contemporary times.

It is not only import substitution policies and restrictions on international trade, which defined the eras of Peronism and developmentalism, that have proven ineffective. Right-wing authoritarianism has also fallen short, to say the least. The aggressive policies towards the villas implemented by military regimes during the 1960s and 1970s represented an attempt not only to purge the nation of its Peronist path, but to abolish communities that did not bolster Argentina's 'white' image. Moreover, they demonstrate a postcolonial mentality that privileges European aspects of Argentine culture at the expense of their indigenous counterparts. Thus, this chapter concludes that villas have come to represent a threat to the elitist vision of Argentina, and Buenos Aires in particular, as the so-called Paris of South America. Inherent in this discriminatory attitude is the misconception that villero/as are marginalized by their own choices, cultures and moral values, and that they are therefore undeserving. Films produced during the last dictatorship (examined in chapter two) mirrored its eradication plan by omitting villas and implying that poverty was self-inflicted.

The neoliberal project of the 1990s also failed those living in villas. The process of economic restructuring initiated by Menem was directly responsible for the social and economic crises that saw the population of villas double in size in less than a decade. Again, this is addressed in productions examined. *Fuga de cerebros* [*Brain Drain*] (dir. Fernando Musa, 1998). *Cama adentro* [*Live-in Maid*] (dir. Jorge Gaggero, 2004), *Paco* [*Paco*] (dir. Diego Rafecas, 2009), and *Las viudas de los jueves* [*Thursday's Widows*] (dir. Marcelo Piñeyro, 2009) are some of the films presently analysed that attribute delinquency, unemployment, drugs, privation and other problems experienced by villa inhabitants to the collapse of 2001.

Thus, the comprehensive history of the villas presented in this chapter contextualizes the forthcoming study of representations of villas in film. These representations are of considerable importance, since villas have, since their inception, been highly politicised sites through which power is sought, won and exercised. Hence, they are spaces that provide a greater understanding of Argentina's polarized political forces. Official attitudes towards villas are symbolic of broader ideologies that have major implications for Argentine society. This underscores the critical nature of decoding their portrayals, something that thesis will now set about doing in the most comprehensive of fashions.

Chapter Two

Villas and the Evolution of Argentine Cinema

2.1 Introduction

Through examination of previous research on villas, this chapter introduces the links between the marginalization of those experiencing poverty and representations of these people. It maps the history of the portrayal of villas in Argentine cinema and explores the origins of common modes of representation. In doing this, this chapter demonstrates that, since the beginnings of Argentine cinema, villa residents are often represented as being morally corrupt or inclined to commit crime. This idea is related to the theory that there exists a culture of poverty, which constitutes one of the main elements of the theoretical framework of this thesis. This chapter analyses narratives that centre on crime and violence, beginning in the silent era and extending through to the period in which Argentina's studio system emerged. Subsequently, it examines portrayals that emerged during periods of Peronist rule and during times of military rule. The transition to democracy in 1983, which defines the limits between classic and contemporary Argentine film, provides a natural finishing point for this chapter.

It is shown that many filmmakers portray the crimes carried out by villa inhabitants to celebrate or challenge Peronism, or to question dominant, Eurocentric notions of development that are linked to Argentina's image as the most 'European' of Latin American nations. In these films, the villa is often a chaotic, corrupt space that must be left behind. Such representations of the villa are linked to the highly politicised nature of Argentina cinema. This introduces the idea that runs throughout this thesis, that negative stereotypes about villa communities are frequently appropriated to harness political power and provoke social change. The idea that the repetition of negative images might have an impact on audiences' opinions about villas and influence social policy towards them, especially regarding eradication or development, is rooted in Gerbner's media cultivation theory, which was detailed earlier in this thesis.

Documentary, it will be shown, has been more inclined to represent villera/os as non-threatening figures. This is particularly the case for those non-fictional films made during the 1950s and 1960s by radical filmmakers who aimed to challenge the neocolonial attitudes rooted in Argentina's European heritage. Ultimately, this chapter maps the portrayal of villas in film and defines the dominant mode of representation of these communities. Close filmic analyses are conducted with a view to establishing and exploring one of the primary arguments of this thesis, that portrayals of villas have been limited in Argentine cinema. This chapter explores the reasons

for these limitations by framing the villa as a powerful weapon that can be appropriated and used to promote radical change in a volatile national setting.

2.2 Accessing and Stereotyping Villas

A notable contrast can be drawn between Argentina's villas and the favelas of Brazil. The latter are 'extremely visible' due to their elevated position on the steep mountains that overlook major cities (Williams 2008: 484). This imposing physical presence is mirrored in international media. *Cidade de Deus* [*City of God*] (dir. Fernando Meirelles, 2002) and its sequel *Cidade de Homens* [*City of Men*] (dir. Paulo Morelli, 2007), which also inspired a spin-off television series, were hugely successful and gained an international audience. These and other works such as the *Tropa de Elite* [*Elite Squad*] films (dir. José Padilha, 2007; 2010) have played a major role in transforming favelas into popular tourist attractions where 'tours and hostels seem to indicate a voyeuristic interest in poverty and danger' (Williams 2008: 483). Donatella Privitera confirms that media productions have helped to transform '"slum tourism" [into] one of the fastest-growing niche tourism segments in the world' and driven 'the global circulation of the favela as a trademark' (Privitera 2015: 270, 273). Brazil's hosting of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics resulted in an even greater number of favelas appearing on international television screens. News reports highlighted the fact that some have been destroyed by the Brazilian government to make way for new Olympic venues (*RTÉ Six One News*, 2016). Television documentaries such as the BBC's *Welcome to Rio* (2014) and *Secrets of South America: Cinderellas of the Slums* (2014) explored the positive and negative elements of favela society and detailed the lives of residents. An episode of Sky's *Ross Kemp: Extreme World* (2014) honed in on drug dealing and consumption in these areas. *Looking for Rio* (dirs. Emmanuel Besnard and Gilles Perez 2014), featuring the French football icon Eric Cantona, also reflects a strong interest in these spaces. Another of the sport's most famous figures, David Beckham, sought out a favela experience during his pre-World Cup road trip through Brazil, as was documented in *Into the Unknown* (dir. Anthony Mandler, 2014). Reports that Beckham subsequently purchased a house in Favela do Vidigal drew attention to the surging property prices in zones that have been 'pacified' (Armstrong 2014: n.p.). Further demonstrating the fashionable status of favelas is the Pepsi Cola advertisement *Now is What You Make It* (*PepsiCo*, 2014), in which the Icelandic musician Stony and various high-profile international footballers celebrate with the public against a backdrop of humble shacks. Such coverage goes some way towards explaining why many of the tourists who visited Brazil during the World Cup opted to stay in favela accommodation, which could even be booked online (Privitera 2015: 274). It is not only in Brazil that marginalized spaces have become fashionable. As Thomas Halper and Douglas Muzzio

observe, tours of socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Los Angeles became popular in the 1990s after the release of a series of African-American gang films including *Boys n the Hood* (dir. John Singleton, 1991), *Juice* (dir. Ernest R. Dickerson, 1992), *South Central* (dir. Stephen Milburn Anderson, 1992) and *Menace II Society* (dirs. The Hughes Brothers, 1993) (Halper and Muzzio 2013: 13). More recently, *Slumdog Millionaire* (dir. Danny Boyle, 2008) has boosted ghetto tourism in India (Bly 2009: n.p; Privitera 2015: 270).

Argentina's villas have not been commodified to the same degree as some of their international counterparts, however. This has been acknowledged by the villa-based media initiative *Mundo Villa*, which publishes print and online versions of its newspaper and operates an online television channel. *Mundo Villa* was founded by the journalist Adams Ledezma in 2008. Two years later, Ledezma's life came to a premature and tragic end when was murdered by one of the gangs that he spoke out against in his reports (Ramos 2010: n.p; *Página 12* 2012: n.p.). *Mundo Villa* has described Villa 31 as surviving literally and metaphorically in the shadows of the modern skyscrapers of the affluent neighbourhood of Puerto Madero (*Mundo Villa* 2010c: n.p.). As will be shown, many renowned filmmakers including Bernardo Kohon, Lucas Demare, Leonardo Favio and Pablo Trapero have compared villas to large buildings in similar ways, thereby questioning the concept of national development. Although villas are more overshadowed than favelas, however, there have been some indications that a so-called slum tourism industry is in the early stages of development in Argentina. The *Argentina Independent* has reported on the construction of a hotel in Villa 31 called Sheratoncita [Little Sheraton] (Walters 2011: n.p.). The tongue-in-cheek name compares the establishment to the luxury Sheraton hotel, which overlooks its more modest namesake from the opposite side of the Plaza San Martín in Retiro. Further irony is found in the fact that the square is named after the great liberator, General José de San Martín, the leader of South America's successful struggle against Spanish rule. While this demonstrates that much attention has been paid to the paradoxical geographical closeness between the severely fragmented classes of Buenos Aires, such developments also indicate that tourism in villas may become more commonplace in the future. Cejas draws attention to the Villas Tour, an 'experience born after the 2001-2 crisis […] which is modelled on favela tour[s]' (Cejas 2006: 227). Undoubtedly, however, such Argentine enterprises account for a much smaller percentage of the national tourist industry than their Brazilian counterparts, which collectively attract around 40,000 customers each year (Rolfes et al. 2009: 11). In reality, the villas are spaces that, at least for now, are almost exclusively accessed by non-residents through media. Ratier's observation that villas have always remained highly stigmatized places that tourists and Argentines have tended to avoid, continues to ring true in the 21st century (Ratier 1985: 9). This lack of other means to grant visibility to the villas

strengthens the impact of film, television, radio, print, music and other media on public perceptions of the areas.

Film scholar Gonzalo Aguilar notes that villas are 'excluded from tourist postcards [and] denied or downplayed by politicians and by the population at large'. Aguilar also states that villas are a 'source of frequent shame' in Argentina and that their inhabitants are thought of as being 'inevitably inclined to crime' (Aguilar 2014: 48). These ideas have been steadily ingrained in society since the first appearances of informal settlements (Ratier 1985: 15, 30, 74, 82). Vitale demonstrates how newspapers attempting to justify evictions in Villa Desocupación in the 1930s associate its inhabitants with deviancy, exemplifying some of the earliest instances of politically-charged stigmatization (Vitale 2015: 430). Lidia de la Torre, an academic in the fields of sociology and communications, observes how the earliest theatrical and filmic representations of villas portray villera/os as being predisposed to criminal behaviour. The same narratives, however, often defend villera/os by attributing their actions to the difficulties they experience in adapting to life as immigrants in the city (De la Torre 2008: 174). María Eugenia Crovara also points to these common oppositional modes of villa represention:

> Algunos (los menos) las refieren […] como modelo perfecto de organización vecinal, como emblema de la visión rousseauniana de la buena vecindad. Otros (los más) las asocian con males de todo tipo. En esta perspectiva, las villas son esos lugares que hay que eludir, donde los delincuentes encuentran guarida, donde tienen montones de hijos que luego deambulan por ahí, si es que no se mueren antes, donde no tienen para la leche pero sí para el vino, donde los que no tienen techo seguro tienen televisor y equipo de música, lugares donde ni la policía entra, lugares peligrosos, donde la promiscuidad reina por doquier, con las tasas más altas de analfabetismo, mortalidad infantil, desempleo y delincuencia.
>
> [Some (the minority) refer to them (…) as places where solidarity reigns, as a perfect model of community organization, as an emblem of Rousseau's vision of social harmony. Others (the majority) associate them with all sorts of evil. From this perspective, the villas are places that should be avoided, where criminals hide, where people have many children who will grow up to do nothing but loiter around there if they are not killed first, where people can afford wine but not milk, where those who don't have a proper roof have televisions and sound systems, where danger exists and the police won't go, and where promiscuity, illiteracy, infant mortality, unemployment and crime reign]. (Crovara 2004: 37)

Cravino notes that these dichotomous identities were maintained throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Like Crovara, she argues that the negative stereotype is the most common one and that mainstream media often gives the impression that all criminals hail from villas (Cravino 2002: 35-36; Crovara 2004: 35-36). Also particularly notable here is the accusation, the prominence of which has been further observed by Ratier, that villera/os prefer to spend money on alcohol and luxury items rather than basic essentials (Ratier 1985: 77). This allegation of marginalization by choice, which is implicit in the theories of the undeserving poor and culture of poverty, was at the heart of a media campaign (discussed in detail later in this chapter) launched by the last dictatorship in order to justify the eradication of the villas (Oszlak 1991: 159; Vitale 2015: 442). Articles in national newspapers suggested that villera/os posed a threat to the economy because they demonstrated a poor work ethic. It was postulated that they could access other forms of housing if they desired, since many had purchased cars and consumer products. Another idea communicated through news media was that those living in informal settlements were criminals who wanted to remain shut off from society so that they could avoid complying with the law (Oszlak 1991: 159). Although some publications attempted to counteract stigmatization by exposing the harsh reality of oppression and eradication, they were seriously inhibited by censorship (Oszlak 1991: 195; Blaustein 2006: 42).

Contemporary media have sustained this focus on a limited range of themes involving antisocial and criminal behaviour. Vitale calls this 'visibilización homogeneizada y estigmatizada' [homogenized and stigmatized visibility] (Vitale 2015: 446). Jauri highlights a dichotomous conceptualization of the city that segregates villas from other areas, and a prevailing public mindset in which villera/os cannot be imagined independently from certain social issues. She states:

> Las miradas externas y dominantes suelen definir a las villas como espacios anómicos y peligrosos que, por ende, deben ser evitados por quienes allí no residen. Sus habitantes, "los villeros", continúan siendo definidos con atributos peyorativos y son representados como sujetos sin cultura y sin aspiraciones de progreso, narcotraficantes, promiscuos, intrusos.
>
> [Dominant external representations define villas as dangerous, lawless spaces that should be avoided by those who do not live there. Their inhabitants, "villeros", continue to be defined pejoratively and they are represented as cultureless subjects who have no desire to progress, drug dealers, promiscuous individuals, intruders]. (Jauri 2011a: 103)

Jauri concludes that these dominant stereotypes stigmatize villera/os and strengthen the symbolic and physical barriers between these people and the more privileged zones of the city (Jauri 2011a: 106). Of course, this also implies the fortification of the barriers between the European and indigenous sectors of Argentine society.

Indeed, this kind of stigmatization does have serious effects. Villa residents have reported severe difficulties in finding work. For example, Erika Arrieta commented that she was only able to secure employment as a school caretaker because her father – the late actor and casting director Julio Arrieta – was well-known outside of their community Villa 21 (Smyth, 2015). In a speech at a public screening of one of his films, the villa-based director and poet César González, who is discussed at length in chapter six, also highlighted this issue (González, 2015). At the same event, González touched on the well-documented fact that those living in villas are regularly denied access to emergency and everyday services (González, 2015; *Mundo Villa* 2015: n.p.). Thus, despite often being located in the most bustling parts of the capital, villas continue to experience exclusion and isolation (Jauri 2011a: 106).

These studies, reports and comments highlight the importance of questioning whether representations of villas and Argentine poverty compound marginalization. With this in mind, this chapter will proceed by discussing some of the earliest screenings of villas, villera/os and poverty. Many of these works set the tone for future directors (discussed later in this thesis) and demonstrate how certain, often stereotypical modes of representation have been appropriated since the earliest days of cinema to construct a diverse range of social and political discourses. The remaining sections of this chapter also foreshadow many of the problematic elements of the more contemporary portrayals studied later and introduce theoretical ideas that will be further elaborated as this thesis progresses.

2.3 From the *arrabal* to the Villa: Poverty and Precarious Housing in Early Argentine Films (1922 – 1950)

The term villa miseria was coined by Bernardo Verbitsky in *Villa Miseria también es América* [*Villa Miseria is also America*] (1957) (Buttes 2012: 268). The author was inspired to write the novel while spending time in Villa Maldonado, fictionalized as Villa Miseria. In the story, the lives of (mostly Paraguayan) immigrants are described in great detail in order to counter the conceptual clustering of them into the poor masses. This rehumanization is also driven by the characters' dignity in the face of degradation. They go to great lengths to maintain clean homes (a difficult task when floods occur regularly) and an orderly neighbourhood. Villa Miseria comes under siege by the authorities, who displace the inhabitants by setting fire to their homes. Blaustein credits the book with unveiling the injustices suffered by villera/os, while Stephen

Buttes describes it as 'foundational fiction' (Blaustein 2006: 20; Buttes 2012: 268). Despite the unquestionable importance of the novel, however, it was not the first portrayal of its kind. In fact, it was national cinema that originally allowed the public to witness life in villas.

As was the case all over Latin America, cinema was originally a cheap form of entertainment in Argentina and catered to the masses by incorporating elements of popular working-class culture such as tango and football, and addressing themes such as unemployment, exploitation and poverty (Calvagno 2010: 41). Although Argentine releases were few and the studio system had yet to be properly established in the silent era, the independent artist José Agustín 'El Negro' Ferreyra offered 'touching and poetic glimpses of [the capital's] poor quarters' in unscripted *costumbrismo* [folk cinema] films (Di Núbila 1962: 4). Ferreyra often took a stereotypical approach by basing his narratives on the experiences of marginal male criminals and fallen women. His lost semi-autobiographical film *La muchacha del arrabal* [*The Girl from the Suburban Slum*] (dir. José A. Ferreyra, 1922) was about a painter who rescues a poor young prostitute from a pimp and falls in love with her (Finkielman 1970: 48). This film was co-produced by the influential director Leopoldo Torres Ríos, whose work would later inspire his son Leopoldo Torre Nilsson to portray a villa in *El secuestrador* [*The Kidnapper*] (dir. Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1958). While working on *La muchacha del arrabal*, Ferreyra and Torres Ríos penned the lyrics of the titular song and enlisted the iconic tango singer Carlos Gardel to sing them. The track describes the plot's female protagonist, who, 'borracha de pena, de alcohol y dolor' [drunk on misery, alcohol and pain], sells 'falsas caricias' [false caresses]. The lyrics also lament the loss of the character's more virtuous past: 'muchacha que ayer fuiste buena, deja que tu pena la llore con vos' [girl, yesterday you were good, let me lament your pain with you]. As will be shown, subsequent representations of women from villas would seldom move far beyond such modes of portrayal. The comedy *La vuelta al bulín* [*Return to the Bachelor's Lodge*] (José A. Ferreyra, 1926), one of two surviving silent films by Ferreyra, revolves around a young hoodlum who suffers various misfortunes after being left by his wife. Similar themes of crime and morality are re-employed in Ferreyra's second surviving silent film, *Perdón, viejita* [*Sorry, Old Girl*] (1927), which portrays a romantic relationship between an ex-thief and a prostitute. Before becoming reunited with the young man's working-class family, the couple is drawn into a fight with the girl's pimp, and she is shot and injured. Andrea Cuarterolo argues that Ferreyra failed to challenge stereotypes in these films because he, as a painter, was primarily concerned with revealing the bleak landscapes of the city (Cuarterolo 2014: 14). Rather than representing an attempt to stigmatize, however, his clichéd modes of representation elicited empathy and demonstrated a 'romantic attachment to the city's south side and its inhabitants' (Cosuelo in Barnard 1996: 10).

Portrayals of poverty remained commonplace during the so-called golden era of the 1930s. At this time, Argentina's film industry was consolidated by import substitution; improvements in audiovisual synchronization; the establishment of the studios S.I.D.E., Lumiton and Argentina Sono Film; and the language barriers created by the introduction of sound film. This reinforced the concept of a national cinema (Di Núbila 1959: 40). The continued prominence of themes of marginalization at this time is explained by the fact that cinemagoers were still mostly working-class and studios were primarily concerned about commercial success (Falicov 1998: 65). Ferreyra continued to employ urban realism in *Calles de Buenos Aires* [*Streets of Buenos Aires*] (1934), which centres on two young women from an *arrabal* [suburban slum]. This film upheld stereotypes about poverty and gender by portraying a fallen woman who, 'seduced by the temptations of downtown', loses her man to a neighbour who is more accepting of life in the ghetto (Karush 2012: 107).

Ferreyra's musical melodrama *Puente Alsina* [*Alsina Bridge*] (1935), which was filmed at S.I.D.E. studios, again demonstrates an 'overt sympathy for the working class' and upholds traditional gender roles (Karush 2012: 108). The plot revolves around the daughter of a wealthy engineer who falls in love with a construction worker and rejects a socioeconomically homogenous marriage arranged by her father. Ultimately, the patriarch's approval of his daughter's decision and acceptance of the honest labourer are required for a resolution to occur. The theme of gender will become more significant in chapter five, which shows that the conservative values of early cinema remain present in contemporary films about villas, and have only been challenged by a few directors. Ferreyra's films, and other 'social folkloric' features that were produced by studios and highlighted the suffering of rural peasants, helped to establish a 'mass critical consciousness' about social inequalities (Falcoff and Dolkart 1975: 155, 157). The class tensions evident in these films represented a national sentiment that paved the way for the rise of Peronism in the mid-1940s.

Given the attention paid to these types of films about poverty, it is somewhat surprising that the next feature to be analysed has been overlooked by academics. Scholars have tended to state that villas debuted on cinema screens in *Suburbio* [*Slum*] (dir. León Klimovsky, 1951), two decades after the construction of the first informal settlements (Aguilar 2014: 48). In fact, in Argentina Sono Film's musical melodrama *Puerto Nuevo* [*New Port*] (1936), the directors Mario Soffici and Luis César Amadori represented a villa (referred to as Barrio Inmigrantes) shortly after the eradication of the original villa in Retiro and just three years after the introduction of sound film in Argentina.

Puerto Nuevo depicts a budding relationship between two performers, one a wealthy woman named Raquel (Alicia Vignoli) and the other a villero named Carlos (Carlos José 'Charlo' Pérez de la Riestra). The opening montage, which combines images of a social club, cigarette

stall, barber's salon and butcher's shop, portrays Barrio Inmigrantes as a respectable and organized, yet underprivileged, community. The images are accompanied by Carlos's accordion playing and singing. As locals join in with his trademark performance of the titular song, the marginalized space is defined as one of talent, culture and solidarity, thus setting up the subsequent indictment of its eradication. Misspelled shop signs and Carlos's inability to access formal musical training suggest a criticism of the lack of educational opportunities offered to those living in poverty. Although the protagonist's friend and neighbour Dandy (played by popular theatrical comedian Pepe Arias) does steal from a mobile *parrilla* [grill], he is exonerated by his impoverished circumstances. His witty charm, the slapstick way he outwits the vendor, and the fact that he feeds his lovable dog Chocolate with some of the ill-gotten food, neutralizes any sense of wrongdoing. This representation marks the emergence of the dualistic criminal-victim villero character, one that continues to feature heavily in modern films about villas and poverty and is discussed in chapter six. The idea that *desocupados* [unemployed people] are pure and more connected to nature is also encapsulated in Dandy's relationship with his pet, when he insists that he would rather live on the street with his canine companion, than in a comfortable house without the animal. The real villains in this film include the police, who evict villera/os for nothing other than singing; Raquel's chauffer, who calls villera/os dangerous people; and her classist suitor Luis (José Gola), who jealously frames Carlos for the theft of Raquel's brooch in an attempt to ruin his career. Chocolate is aggressive towards Luis and exposes him as the thief, thus highlighting the dog's innate ability to sense good and bad, and reinforcing the vision of both social classes projected in the film. Dandy's detective skills again subvert the idea that villera/os are inevitably unintelligent and buffoonish. Clearly, then, *Puerto Nuevo* adheres to a mode of representation that was common at the time of its release and continues to be seen in contemporary productions, wherein the honourable poor are contrasted with the immoral rich.

At first glance, Raquel's presence seems to invalidate this analysis. Although part of the elite, she is a sympathetic and charitable figure who buys Carlos and Dandy new suits so that they can attend her party. She shelters Carlos and nurtures his talent by teaching him to read music and funding his debut performance without his knowledge. However, it must be acknowledged that Raquel is an unorthodox character who rejects the traditional, discriminatory values of her rich family. She refutes Luis's prejudiced insults and asserts, 'atorrantes, no; desocupados. Les aseguro que el que canta es un gran artista' [they're not louts; they're unemployed. I assure you that the singer is a great artist]. As she tells her disapproving patriarchs, 'su opinión no me interesa' [I'm not interested in your opinion], Raquel becomes a modern woman, a figure whose regular appearance in features of the 1930s is noted by Matthew Karush: 'only by rebelling against her father's authority is she able to escape the

morally depraved world of the rich and cross the class line' (Karush 2007: 324). Similarly, Raquel calls her uncle old-fashioned when he objects to her attending a cabaret with her newfound villero friends. Once in the social club, she refuses the usher's offer to close the curtains of their private box, instead preferring to observe a rendition of 'De contramano' [Against the Grain] by Alma (Sofía Bozán). Not incidentally, this tango composition by Amadori celebrates female independence and sexual emancipation. The rebelliousness of both Raquel and Alma, who appears liberal in her attitudes towards love, represents an attempt to appease the audience of the time, which Claudio España notes was largely female (España 2000: 50). The directors stop short of totally liberating Raquel, however. Luis sabotages the planned show by informing Carlos that she paid for its staging. Ashamed to have been backed by a woman, the would-be star abandons the theatre on opening night. Significantly, his refusal of monetary support from a female is presented as a noble act. Alma is eventually vilified, appearing promiscuous as she abandons Dandy and takes up with Luis. Hence, the message delivered through her tango is replaced with a conservative, patriarchal one. Ultimately, although it challenges the establishment's view of those living in poverty and appears to promote female independence, the film also upholds traditional gender roles. This approach to gender again marks the beginning of a long-standing trend in villa-centred films, which is examined in chapter five. *Puerto Nuevo* therefore demonstrates the 'tension between the subversive and conformist messages' that was common during the golden age of Argentine cinema (Karush 2007: 297).

This tension can be attributed to the industry's efforts to hold on to mass audiences by engaging with popular forms of entertainment and catering to their thematic tastes, while simultaneously mimicking Hollywood and 'improving' national cinema by moving away from the socially destabilizing topics of associated with the working-class. The *risqué* tangos sung by Alma were likely embraced by working-class female spectators, yet the character reveals that she has been fired from the cabaret after one of her performances upset the audience. Also, Dandy's fruitless efforts to turn her into a more universally palatable ballad singer (as opposed to a singer of low-brow local tangos) are accompanied by his disparaging remark, 'lo que es no conocer el arte' [this is what happens when people don't know about art], which in turn challenges the idea that the villera/o is uncultured. Confining oneself only to popular working-class culture appears to prevent upward mobility and signify cultural ignorance. At the same time, nonetheless, the upstanding villero Carlos performs the tango 'Yo también soñé' [I, Too, Dreamed]. However, its lyrics yearn for true love and are the moral opposite of those sung previously by Alma. Furthermore, unlike Alma, Carlos can transition comfortably to universal genres, as is seen in the opening sequence when, during a display of solidarity, he leads his neighbours in their impromptu performance of the marching song 'Puerto Nuevo' [New Port]. In the end, Raquel performs a Broadway-style version of the same number with an ensemble of dancers and is met

with thunderous applause from a large audience. The transformation of this song symbolizes Carlos's ultimate distancing from the villa. This represents the manner in which Amadori and Soffici negotiate the boundary between 'good' (European) art, which Timothy Barnard and España agree was increasingly being demanded by critics and studios, and profit, which required winning over the masses (Barnard 1996: 17, España 2000: 27). This sense of ambivalence is reinforced by the film's bittersweet ending, which refuses to offer a clear-cut resolution to class conflict. While Carlos and Raquel are reunited and exit the informal settlement in her extravagant automobile, bound for a life of theatrical success, Luis entices Alma away from Dandy, leaving the 'desocupado' [unemployed man] with only his faithful dog for company. In the closing scene, he walks away from the soon-to-be-destroyed villa with no place to go. With this dualistic finale, which is simultaneously hopeful and cynical towards the prospect of class conciliation, *Puerto Nuevo* demonstrates how Argentine mass culture 'reflected an increasingly integrated society [yet] also contained the raw materials for the deep polarization of the Perón years' (Karush 2007: 295). The film has clear similarities to those examined by Karush, who observes a conflict between notions of marginalization by choice and socioeconomic ascension:

> Many [1930s Argentine films] explored conservative themes such as upward mobility, the virtue of hard work, and the possibility of interclass marriage, yet they continually reproduced populist versions of Argentine national identity that reinscribed class divisions and suggested the futility of overcoming them. (Karush 2007: 326)

The present analysis of *Puerto Nuevo* and its representation of the villa lends support to the argument that the Argentine cinema of the golden age contributed strongly to the construction of a discourse that would later be appropriated by Peronism (Falicov 1998: 61; Karush 2007: 326). This discourse was sympathetic towards those living in underprivileged communities, representing them as pure and united. At the same time, however, it encouraged aspirations of upward mobility and integration, and paradoxically demonized most upper-class characters. Within this ambiguous discourse, villa inhabitants are entirely sympathetic characters. The focus on acts of wrongdoing carried out by them because of their deprivation is minimal. This would not remain the case in many future narrative films. In this sense, *Puerto Nuevo* is an unusual starting point for the representation of villas in cinema.

As the studio system expanded up until 1942, the number of films made each year increased steadily. However, the growing commercialization of Argentine cinema resulted in crisis. Trade unions began to place the industry under increased financial pressure and actors who had become stars during the golden era were now demanding more money in their

contracts with studios. These companies were also able to charge more to exhibitors who, in turn, raised admission fees. As a result, filmmakers were pressured into catering for spectators who could afford the increased ticket prices. Productions became less daring and mediocre screenplays became the norm as the focus remained on the casting of big names. Falicov notes that, 'as the Argentine film industry grew more mechanical, modern and efficient, it stifled the creativity' of directors (Falicov 1998: 61). Filmmakers began avoiding the gritty realism that defined their work in the 1920s and 1930s and national cinema lost its 'human touch' (Di Núbila 1960: 143, 155). 'White telephone' films, so-called because of their luxuriously furnished sets, were heavily marketed to those that had sufficient disposable income to attend the cinema after the economic landscape of the industry changed. As the Argentine film industry catered to elitists who favoured European culture, it was financially ruined by a series of poorly accomplished costume dramas and adaptations of foreign literary texts (Barnard 1996: 17). The attempt to universalize the medium destroyed its essence and paved the way for Mexico's domination of the Latin American film market. To make matters worse, a trade boycott was implemented by the United States because of Argentina's initial refusal to support the Allies in the Second World War. This boycott continued during Perón's first term, making filming materials (especially raw celluloid) scarce and expensive, and leading to a progressive decline in production between 1942 and 1945 (Jakubowicz and Radetich 2006: 54).

The quantity of releases began to increase once again from 1946 with the help of Perón's protectionist policies. However, villas did not appear as the primary focus of any film in the 1940s despite their increasing presence across urban landscapes, which was also driven by protectionism. There were short propaganda documentaries that hailed state housing plans and fictional films that communicated official discourse by portraying workers rebelling and members of the oligarchy redistributing their wealth. It was also implied that crime was rooted in financial difficulties and that criminals should be given the chance of redemption (Kriger 1999: 136-146). This subversive engagement with negative stereotypes continues today and is critiqued in chapter six. Despite these films being made, however, the crisis continued into the 1950s and was evident in the low calibre of Argentine cinema around this time. The poor quality of films was due to attempts to minimise the costs inflamed by the embargo, churn out material and forego reinvestment in production in order to maximise profit. Many studios were forced to close in the decade immediately following the war, a notable exception being Argentina Sono Film, which had links to Perón's government (Kriger 1999: 137). These observations shed light on the decade-long absence of villas from cinema, which ensued after the release of *Puerto Nuevo*.

2.4 Retrospective Representations?: Poverty under 'Paternal' Control (1950 – 1954)

Despite its initial poor commercial performance, Luis Buñuel's production *Los olvidados* [*The Young and the Damned*] (1950) went on to influence many subsequent films about poverty in Latin America. Buñuel embraced realism to construct a tragic narrative about a group of destitute children in Mexico City, employing untrained actors who were experiencing life in the grim urban environments represented on the screen. A pessimistic social critique is established through the portrayal of El Jaibo (Roberto Cobo). This character leads his gang in an assault on a blind street musician, kills a boy accused of sending him to prison, steals from his peer Pedro (Alfonso Mejía) and, in the end, kills Pedro. The director did not find it easy to make such a controversial film and was pressured by the Mexican government into producing an alternate ending. This second ending reflected a more optimistic vision of the country by showing Pedro killing and retrieving his money from El Jaibo, instead of El Jaibo murdering Pedro. In the end, however, Buñuel escaped censorship and this hopeful finale was omitted and forgotten until it was unearthed in 2002 (Gubern 2003: 1). The radical, downbeat closing sequence he opted for, nonetheless, displeased audiences and critics, who were accustomed to pleasant interpretations of *mexicanidad* [Mexican identity] and thought that the Spanish-born director had betrayed the country that provided him with refuge from Franco's regime (Leen 2010: 16-17). *Los olvidados* was removed from theatres prematurely as a result of this outcry. Many Argentine films experienced similar problems when trying to represent poverty during Perón's first two terms. One of these was Klimovsky's *Suburbio*, which was screened just three months after Buñuel's film and, for the first time since *Puerto Nuevo*, made an informal settlement the main focus of an Argentine feature.

Suburbio depicts a love triangle between a villera named Laura (Fanny Navarro), a powerful factory owner named Fabián Moreno (Pedro López Lagar) and a wealthy doctor named Amalia (Zoe Ducós). Amalia's reasons for coming to the villa are a symbolic interpretation of the harm caused by those at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy to those at the bottom. Having run over and killed a child, the guilt-ridden physician dedicates her life to helping his impoverished community. With her practice established in the villa, she tells Moreno that she wishes to help those surrounded by, 'los muros leprosos, los charcos malsanos, el oscuro relente de la basura, los cuartos hacinados, la escuela brutal de la calle' [the leprous walls, the dirty puddles, the dark dew on the garbage, the piled-up shacks, the brutal school of the street]. This statement is accompanied by a montage picturing a landscape polluted with waste, overcrowded rooms and a gang of children savagely cheering on a fight. Here, for the first time since *Puerto Nuevo*, the middle and upper classes both on and off screen witnessed these

unofficial communities. This is acknowledged when Amalia admits that she had previously been blind to the suffering that she sees. She adds, 'hay muchos ojos así' [there are many other blind eyes], drawing attention to the general invisibility of informal settlements in Argentina at the time.

Unlike Soffici and Amadori, then, Klimovsky portrays his villa as a hostile place where crime and immorality are as rampant as the rats that have infested the streets in a literal and symbolic fashion. No sense of belonging is felt by locals, some of whom are portrayed as lazy delinquents. Amalia tells two young men, 'los dos son flojos porque no tienen el coraje de luchar para salir del barro, trabajando y siendo decentes' [you're both deadbeats because you don't have the guts to escape the villa by working and behaving decently]. This idea that those living in poverty can choose to change their lives (a culture of poverty) is later undermined, however. The frequently referenced 'barro' [mud] that the villa is built on becomes a motif that is constantly contrasted with the cleaner 'asfalto' [pavement] of wealthier areas. Laura literally dreams of escaping the 'barro' and living like the women in the city who possess expensive homes, cars, clothing, and jewellery. Nonetheless, she is acutely aware of the unbridgeable gap between their worlds, resigning herself to the fact that, 'ellos están lejos del suburbio' [they are far away from the neighbourhood]. The impossibility of her dream is fully confirmed when Moreno promises her a job as a teacher at a city dance school that, in reality, is a front for a prostitution ring. This seedy, dangerous dimension of the capital is the only one accessible to Laura, who becomes increasingly disillusioned. When insult is added to injury through her discovery of Moreno's relationship with Amalia, she furiously attacks him with a knife, jealously crying, 'yo no estudié, yo no viví en el asfalto, yo soy del barro, lo que se pisotea' [I never studied, I never lived on the asphalt, I am from the mud that is trodden on]. She is eventually forced to return to the villa, where she contracts the dreaded 'peste' [plague]. Even local cultural festivals, which are often used to demonstrate cultural richness and solidarity in villera/o news media, are portrayed as menacing as the infected fallen woman staggers through a parade. She is tended to by Amalia, who also becomes afflicted (in her case, fatally) by the rodent-caused epidemic. Ultimately, then, the frontier separating the classes is impenetrable to all who enter the villa. This idea is encapsulated by the tragedy of the boy accidently killed by Amalia, 'nació en el barro y terminara en el barro' [he was born in the mud and would die in the mud].

Moreno's newspaper, which reports on Hitler's invasion of Poland, informs the audience that the film's action occurs in 1939, more than a decade prior to its release. This temporal setting can be understood by examining censorship during Perón's first two terms. New laws had encouraged production by making credit available for filmmakers (Torre Nilsson 1985: 45). However, the state 'would make suggestions' regarding scenes that were considered potentially critical of its government (Halperin 2011: 130). Before being released, Argentine and foreign

films were scrutinized at regional and national levels, only to be edited or banned if they were deemed to reflect badly on Peronism. Raúl Apold, Perón's infamous undersecretary for media, blacklisted many professionals in the film industry. Even the most vocal of Peronists could be subjected to his wrath if they stepped out of line, as became evident when the Peronist propaganda film *Los aguas bajan turbias* [*Dark River*] (dir. Hugo de Carril, 1952) was removed from theatres because the director criticized Apold (Thompson 2014: 5-9). Hence, filmmakers often exercised self-censorship and refrained from denouncing the government. Of course, a criticism of the ongoing housing crisis, which Perón was claiming to have resolved, would have been unwelcome in films such as *Suburbio* (García 2008: 2). An interesting example of official Peronist discourse about the housing situation is found in a propaganda magazine that caricatured Perón as a superhero, 'proudly holding a house over his head before delivering it to a family' (Milanesio 2014: 91). In the same vein, a pessimistic view of the housing situation of the past was highly compatible with Peronist rhetoric (Kriger 2009: 1). Alberto Ciria explains, 'el estilo peronista más típico asumió el "todo tiempo pasado fue peor" […] Las referencias al ayer debían contrastar con el presente perfecto y triunfal' [typical Peronist discourse assumed that the past was always worse […] references to yesterday had to highlight the perfect and triumphant present] (Ciria 1983: 3). However, the fleeting references to the Second World War were not enough to convince the authorities that the film was truly set in the past. The director was advised to include extra scenes so that the entire story would become a flashback (Aguilar 2014: 48). For this reason, the finale that was originally included reveals that Moreno (who in both versions becomes more sympathetic after Amalia's heroic death) and Laura have been remembering the deceased heroine's story from their home in the titular settlement, which has been converted from an ugly villa into an attractive *barrio obrero* under Perón. Klimovsky's flashback was destroyed after the coup d'état of 1955 put an end to Peronist rule (Fontana, 2013). Like Buñuel, therefore, he was reluctant to comply with the state, suggesting that the negative images of the villa were intended as a reflection of contemporary society. This theory is reinforced by the fact that the screenplay was written by the anti-Peronist journalist and poet Ulyses Petit de Murat, who was exiled in Mexico between 1951 and 1958 and who despised the way in which national cinema pandered to working-class people in the golden age (España 2000: 27).

While highlighting how certain images of marginalization can be adapted to suit opposing discourses, this metatextual history also shows how *Suburbio*'s sociopolitical message is distorted by an attempt to appease censors and, therefore, by its pursuit of funding and commercial success. While the narrative's examination of poverty can be described as anti-Peronist, some of its production values seem to promote Peronism. For example, the selfless doctor Amalia, whose final words express an undying concern for villera/os, reflects Eva Perón's

persona as a champion of the poor, itself a vital element of state propaganda. The young, blonde character even bears a striking physical resemblance to the first lady. Her divinity is mirrored in a statue of her, which is made by Moreno's factory workers. The sculpture doubles as a harbinger of the doctor's death when she refuses to abandon the infected villera/os with Moreno and he smashes the piece in a fit of rage. As the antithesis of the fallen woman Laura, the angelic martyr also symbolizes the whitewashing of the notorious 'mito negro' [black myth], which is propagated by Eva's detractors and claims that she sexually manipulated others in order to escape poverty and establish her first career as a small-time actor (Rabadán Vega 2015: 147). The screen icon Fanny Navarro, a close friend of Eva and the president of the Eva Perón Cultural Association (the actors' society founded by Eva), strengthens Eva's presence on set by wearing her jewellery. Navarro was also romantically involved with Eva's brother and colleague Juan Duarte, as is portrayed in *Ay, Juancito* [*Oh, Little John*] (dir. Héctor Olivera, 2004). It is also significant that Juan Duarte was a major shareholder in Argentina Sono Film and Emelco, the latter of which produced *Suburbio*. Zoe Ducós moved to Venezuela in 1952, the year that Eva Perón's real martyrdom was brought about when she lost her battle with cancer. Ducós maintained a close friendship with Juan Perón when he was later exiled there. As Soffici stated, the Argentine scripts of this era 'were always created for the stars', with casting done before writing (Soffici in Halperin 2011: 131). Thus, these well-known actors were employed to satisfy both the state and the public. The director's attempt to satisfy censors and reach a mass audience jeopardizes a discourse that seems to criticize the government's management of the housing crisis, but is ultimately muddled by its links to the state. This reading of *Suburbio* is congruent with Andrew Willis's analysis of Klimovsky's later period in Spain. Willis states that, after Perón's downfall, the director left Argentina for commercial reasons, as he could no longer secure work with Argentine Sono Film. In Europe, he again adapted to the political environment within which he operated in order to achieve financial success. Willis also calls for research on Klimovsky's early work in Argentina in the belief that it will reinforce his own theories (Willis 2009: 132-134). The present analysis of *Suburbio* initiates this process and introduces a theory that will become important in the later chapters of this thesis. As was the case with Klimovsky, the commercial ambitions and casting of big stars continues to present problems for films dealing with villas. This is most notable in *Elefante blanco* [*White Elephant*] (dir. Pablo Trapero, 2012), as will be discussed in chapter four. The overwhelmingly bleak view of the villa established in this film, which is perhaps more critical of Peronism than it might initially seem, would be re-employed by many subsequent filmmakers of a variety of political predispositions.

Poverty and the housing crisis continued to be portrayed through flashbacks after *Suburbio*. In the opening scene of *Del otro lado del puente* [*From the Other Side of the Bridge*] (dir. Carlos Rinaldi, 1953), a voice in off establishes an awareness that the wrongdoing portrayed

took place in 1929, 'hace ya muchos años' [a long time ago]. Roberto (Carlos Cores) is desperate to escape his downtrodden shack in the district of Avellaneda and cross the bridge that leads from the poverty of the south of Buenos Aires to the wealth of the capital's centre. He is made redundant from his job in a shipyard, which is hit by the Great Depression. The protagonist's deep-rooted frustration and insecurities are further exacerbated when he is rejected because of his low social status by Elsa (Golde Flami), a wealthy city-dweller who uses her sexuality to exploit rich men. Seemingly destined to become a criminal, Roberto joins an illegal bookmaking racket that symbolizes the corrupt governments of the Infamous Decade. He kills and replaces his boss before leading the gang to more serious and lucrative crimes. However, upon discovering that his old girlfriend Luisa (Nelly Meden), another compassionate and loyal blonde mother figure who mirrors Eva Perón's pure image, has given birth to his son Roberto junior in Avellaneda, Roberto decides to return to his simple ways and form the family that he never had in his own childhood. Again, it is fatherhood, a metaphor for Peronism, that puts an end to the marginal male's misconduct and redeems him. This idea is reinforced by sympathetic working-class father figures including the old dock labourer Viejo (Carlos Barbetti), who speaks of his contentment with family life and warns Roberto of the dangers that exist across the bridge (where family is non-existent). The wise, kindhearted drunk Don Berto (Ricardo Galache) keeps a watchful eye over Luisa and Roberto junior, whose name highlights the importance of his relationship with his father, in Roberto's absence. He also teaches Roberto that even the most modest of family homes is more valuable than a lonely bachelor's mansion. Don Berto convinces Roberto to return home, unite his kin and spare his son from the life of crime that he is destined for in the absence of a father. Leaving a life of crime is easier said than done, however, and Roberto's henchmen refuse to cut ties with him. A final showdown on a rooftop ends fatally when the protagonist and one of his gang members fall to their deaths. The closing dialogue, spoken by a police officer who stands over their bodies, communicates Perón's message in the post-Infamous Decade era, 'así terminan siempre los que toman la vida por asalto […] la tormenta ha pasado, mañana tendremos un hermoso día' [those that chose a life of crime always end up that way (…) the storm has passed, tomorrow will be a beautiful day]. Through its protagonist, *Del otro lado del puente* clearly reappropriates the common criminal-victim villera/o figure to deliver its pro-Peronist message.

Soffici again represented a villa in this way in *Barrio gris* [*Grey Neighbourhood*] (1954), confirming the working-class director's place as one of Argentine cinema's most important social commentators (Falicov 1998: 1). The film was based on a novel of the same name by Joaquín Gómes Bas, who also wrote the screenplay. Its narrative, like those of Klimovsky and Rinaldi, unfolds during the 1930s so as to reflect positively on Peronism. As the title Grey Neighbourhood suggests, the villa inhabited by Federico (Carlos Rivas) is polluted by the dark smoke that billows

relentlessly from the chimneys of a local factory. The settlement is portrayed grimly, 'hecho de chaperíos y miseria, de vicios y engaños, de borrachos y politiqueros' [made of scrap metal and misery, of vices and deceit, of drunks and demagogues] (Mateos 2005: 9). Despite his efforts to live an honourable life, Federico finds it impossible to remain uncorrupted in his villa, where he works long hours for low pay in an establishment that serves as a bar, grocery store and brothel, and where girls including his sister Laura (Fernanda Mistral) are prostituted.

There is a notable yearning for patriarchs in the film, suggesting that the villera/o family is inevitably fragmented in a manner that has negative implications for both the individual and society. Federico's father is absent and the waitress and prostitute Rosita (Elida Gay Palmer) is the daughter of an irresponsible drunk. The detrimental disappearance of father figures again heralds the rise of Perón. Lacking a paternal role model, Federico is easily misled by his peer Claudio (Alberto de Mendoza), whom he initially admires. He does find hope of a better life when the old artist Don Gervasio (Mario Soffici) hires him as a trainee and becomes a nurturing masculine role model in the process. A characterization of Argentina's national patriarch Perón, Don Gervasio helps the underprivileged to achieve what they have always desired by painting portraits of them wearing unattainably luxurious clothes and jewellery. As well as facilitating upward social mobility in what seems to be the only morally acceptable manner possible in pre-Perón times, the artist projects Peronism's vision of a purged society. When an inferno engulfs the villa's shady tavern, this father figure exclaims, 'el fuego arrasa todo el maldito, solo se salvará lo que es puro […] un lugar de vicio menos' [the fire will wipe out all that is evil, only what is pure will be saved (…) now there is one less place of sin]. Despite being encouraged by the old man, Federico remains both physically and morally weakened in his polluted villa. Taking advantage of his vulnerability, Claudio convinces him to commit a series of robberies, including one in the house of his mentor. Don Gervasio protects his apprentice from the police, however, in an act of forgiveness that reinforces the godlike image of the good father.

Ironically, the only way that Federico can escape his life of crime is by killing Claudio. In scenes that are reminiscent of *Suburbio*, a cultural parade in the villa becomes a backdrop for death when Federico, whose rage is mirrored by images and sounds of frightening masks and violent drums used during the procession, shoots his accomplice dead. His newfound lover Zulema (Mirtha Torres) becomes another driving force behind his rehabilitation when she convinces him to choose a virtuous path and turn himself in. Significantly, she lives on the outskirts of the villa, where greenery and singing birds represent spatial and moral purity. Much like Amalia in *Suburbio* and Luisa in *Del otro lado del puente*, the sympathetic blonde woman can be understood as a reflection of Eva Perón. In one scene, Federico even compares her to the Virgin Mother, renewing the first lady's saintly and maternal image. Recalling the contrast between Amalia and Laura in *Suburbio*, and Luisa and Elsa in *Del otro lado del puente*, Zulema is

the antithesis of the brunette prostitute Rosita. She comes from a unified family led by a strong and honest father. In the end, Federico's narration informs the audience that he is now reformed and that the villa was reconstructed during his time in prison. He reflects, 'es otro barrio, es otra gente, es otra infancia' [it is a different neighbourhood, a different people, a different childhood]. Images of the new neighbourhood show a clean and peaceful space where children play. The transformation of both the criminal and the squalid titular settlement symbolizes social progress under Perón. Peronism, it appears, facilitates the physical and moral purification of the nation. Like the films directed by Klimovsky and Rinaldi, Soffici's production demonstrates that negative stereotypes regarding villas communicated Peron's message that all previous times were worse than the present. In the wake of the *Revolución Libertadora*, villera/os were seen by many as symbols of the failure of Peronism (Ratier 1985: 32). Thus, stereotypes were redeployed to criticize present-day social problems that were, apparently, caused by the exiled ex-president Perón.

2.5 Back to the Present: From Anti-Peronism to Political Disenchantment (1958 – 1962)

An anti-villa sentiment that prevailed during the *Revolución Libertadora* facilitated the implementation of the new government's eradication plan (Massidda 2012: 42). *Detrás de un largo muro* [*Behind a Long Wall*] (dir. Lucas Demare, 1958) demonstrates this attitude. The film is the first to incorporate the term villa, which had been coined in Verbitsky's then recently-published novel. Demare frames the informal settlement as a grim and violent manifestation of the flaws of the defeated political movement. Although he was known for changing his stance over the years, his work demonstrated 'vehement anti-Peronsim' around the time of the release of *Detrás de un largo muro* (Podalsky 2004: 76; Getino 2005: 44). This is confirmed by Eduardo Jakubowicz and Laura Radetich, who note the anti-Peronist tone of the film (Jakubowicz and Radetich 2006: 96). *Detrás de un largo muro* looks behind a wall built around Villa Jardín during Perón's presidency. The structure was erected to make poverty invisible, particularly to tourists and foreign statespersons travelling to and from Ezeiza International Airport (Ferrari Etcheberry 2009: 1).

Having lost their farm after a period of reduced investment in the agricultural sector, Rosita (Susana Campos) and her father Don Dionisio (Ricardo Argemí) move to Buenos Aires, where the former secures work in a factory (Podalsky 2004: 78). Arriving in the city, Rosita is enthused by the misleading sight of modern towers, which falsely suggest that wealth is within her grasp. However, the naïve young woman is promptly informed by her friends, who have already experienced life in the capital, 'no todo es así en Buenos Aires […] también hay cosas

muy desagradables que uno ni sospecha' [not everything is this way in Buenos Aires (…) there are also unpleasant things here that one doesn't even suspect]. These warnings prove to be well-founded when Rosita arrives at her new home in a stereotypically chaotic, polluted villa. By contrasting urban wealth and poverty in this manner, the director proposes that, 'the existence of villas creates disharmony with the image of modernity Buenos Aires has always projected as the "most European" of Latin American cities' (Aguilar 2014: 48). Violence appears commonplace when neighbours come to blows during a dispute at their communal water pump. The villa is also a space where drunkenness and infidelity appear to be the norm. Pedro (Lautaro Murúa), a regular at a local dance hall, personifies the rottenness of the *barrio*. He wins Rosita's trust at first but rapes her soon after. It transpires that Pedro is a wanted criminal who makes money by stealing and dismantling cars. Unconcerned for the wellbeing of Rosita and her father, he gets them to transport the automobile parts, which the protagonists presumed were obtained legally. Pedro eventually murders Don Dionisio when the old man learns of his crimes and tries to report them.

This narrative and its overwhelmingly grim view of the villa clearly capture the disillusionment experienced by those who travelled to the capital in search of prosperity during Perón's first two terms, only to have their hopes dashed (De la Torre 2008: 173-174). The director emphasizes the victimhood of rural migrants by contrasting the supposed purity of the countryside with an impure city emblematized by Villa Jardín. Parallels are drawn between the peasants destined for the villa and the cattle transported from farms to an urban slaughterhouse by Rosita's true love Andrés (Mario Passano), who never moves to the city and is all too aware of the social problems there. Once she experiences the villa, Rosita becomes distressed and cries, 'yo soñaba con Buenos Aires, ahora lo odio […] es muy lindo por afuera, muchas luces, mucho lujo y detrás esos barrios malditos. Es como una mujer hermosa que tuviera un cáncer' [I dreamed of Buenos Aires, now I hate it (…) it is beautiful from the outside, many lights, many luxuries, and behind it all, these damn settlements. It is like a beautiful woman who has cancer]. With this description, Demare evokes a clear image of Eva Perón (whose life was cut short by cervical cancer) and suggests that, although the promises of Peronism appealed to many people, they ultimately proved to be empty and corrupt. This idea also comes into play when Rosita's friend Teresa (Inés Moreno) reveals pictures of the type of modern chalet and high-rise 'monoblock' that the government has agreed to build for those living in Villa Jardín. Her belief that the villa is a temporary living space clearly amounts to naivety, however. She eventually realizes that the only way to access comfortable accommodation is by moving in with her older admirer Bautista (Warly Ceriani), a wealthy and politically-connected man. As the reaction of her distraught family suggests, she has been robbed of her innocence. Hence, by conducting what seems to be an immoral relationship, Teresa becomes another fallen villera. Culpability for

her fate is levied upon the Peronist state as she warns Rosita about the national development plan, 'esas casas no las tendrán nunca' [you will never have those houses]. This critique is further implied by the constant presence of politicians who pose for newspaper photos with villera/o children yet fail to resolve the housing crisis. In the end, Rosita can only save herself by fleeing the villa and returning to her farm and the kind-hearted *campesino* [country peasant] Andrés. *Detrás de un largo muro* thus signalled the reappropriation of the symbol of the corrupt villa. This irredeemably seedy and dangerous marginal space now pointed towards the failures, rather than the successes, of Peronism.

As with several of his films, Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's *El secuestrador* was based on the work of the anti-Peronist author Beatriz Guido, whom he married in 1959 (Trajtenberg 1961: 35; Polit Dueñas 2005: 74). As well as writing the original short story of the same name, Guido co-wrote the screenplay of *El secuestrador*, which has been compared to *Los olvidados* due to its controversial and surreal treatment of marginalized youth (Roud 1958: 22; Peña 1993: 13). Although it is generally considered inferior to its Mexican counterpart, the Argentine feature was universally lauded for its modern production values and won national awards for its cinematography and soundtrack upon its release. The young cast, who were all acting debutants and included the future screen icons María Vaner and Leonardo Favio, were also highly praised (Peña 1993: 14). The narrative divided opinion, however. While some commentators considered *El secuestrador* to be unnecessarily morbid, others praised what they thought was an authentic and uncompromising portrayal of poverty (Guevara 2011: 1). The principal characters are various youths living in a villa in Avellaneda. The pre-adolescents Gustavo (Carlos López Monet) and Pelusa (Oscar Orlegui) occupy a space somewhere between childhood innocence and teenage delinquency as they roam the city playing and thieving. Their shack is inhabited by their mother, alcoholic father and the latter's drunken, gambling friends. The boys' adolescent aunt Flavia (María Vaner) also resides with them, having been abandoned by her father. This domestic situation is complex and, as observed by Eugenia Guevara, critics have struggled to understand the precise relationship between the characters occupying the informal dwelling (Guevara 2011: 16). Such a lack of clarity underlines the constantly fragmented nature of the fictional villa family. Gustavo and Pelusa are the primary carers of their infant brother Bolita (A. López Méndez). Although genuinely concerned for his wellbeing, the boys are too young to take on such responsibility and they leave the baby unattended as they frolic in a murky villa river. At this moment, in what is one of the most disturbing scenes in Argentine cinema, Bolita is fatally mauled by a pig. His brothers call for help and the corpse is taken away. The infant's death is concealed from Gustavo and Pelusa by various adults, leading the boys to question the local undertaker's young son Diego (Luis Osvaldo Vicente). Diego informs them that their sibling didn't survive the attack. Confused and angered, the villeros push the informant to the ground,

causing him a fatal head injury. As they spit on Diego's body and later mock another passing funeral procession, the children do not seem to comprehend the significance of their actions. In the villa, it appears, death is a banal occurrence that is viewed with indifference by those who witness or cause it. The boys' earlier game of hide and seek, in which Diego climbs into a coffin and foreshadows his murder, as well as the *barrio*'s location beside a cemetery, reinforces this point and underlines the characters' constant proximity to death.

In this film, there are further violent and tragic scenes that again suggest the limitations of villa-centred portrayals. Flavia and her boyfriend Berto (Leonardo Favio) enter a vacant tomb to make love but are set upon by two men and the girl is raped. After the attack, she is only narrowly prevented from throwing herself in front of a train by her partner, who comes to inform her of Bolita's death. In addition, Patrick (Lautaro Murúa), the defrocked pastor whose bizarre rants underscore the surreal nature of the dialogue, has killed his three-year-old son in an effort to spare him from the pain of burns suffered in a fire. The synonymy between poverty and violent death that is maintained throughout the film gives way to Richard Roud's criticism of the ending, which he interprets as a form of misplaced optimism designed to appease the audience as an otherwise miserable story concludes (Roud 1958: 22). Mario Trajtenberg is similarly disparaging towards what he argues is 'a contrived happy end [that] gainsays [the director's] pessism' (Trajtenberg 1961: 36). However, the strange finale, in which the young boys and adolescent couple ride away on a candyfloss cart (a gift given by the local vendor upon her departure from Buenos Aires) is not, in fact, as positive as many have suggested. Sinister, jangling music contrasts strikingly with the smiles and laughter of the characters, whose joy seems out of place given that they have recently lost Bolito and carried out a killing of their own. This disquieting combination of sound and image reinforces the notion that violence, premature death and, as a result, psychological impairment, are the absolute norm for villa inhabitants.

The anti-Peronist sentiment behind this overwhelmingly bleak representation of the villa has generally been overlooked. Perhaps this is because an explicit commentary on state institutions is absent. Jorge Abel Martin observes this absence and argues that the director simply displays the consequences of poverty in a macabre fashion and does not imply a critique of Argentine society and politics specifically (Martín 1980: 32). Guevara supports this argument and suggests that by being faithful to Guido's metaphysical literary style, Torre Nilsson provides a general, apolitical commentary on human nature that is not limited by national frontiers (Guevara 2011: 20). Similarly, Fernando Peña commends *El secuestrador* for capturing the original story's bleak tone but also states that the film should not be considered an example of social realism (Peña 1993: 14). Although Mario Trajtenberg recognises the director's attempt to comment on Argentine society through realism, he also draws attention to some of the more unrealistic elements of the production. He observes the absence of real shacks on the main set

and notes that the prop shacks used 'symbolise inner corruption and bleakness' (Trajtenberg 1961: 36). Nonetheless, an anti-Peronist sentiment remains in *El secuestrador*. Given that the film is not retrospective, the on-screen poverty is that which exists in the aftermath of Peronism. Although Torre Nilsson himself claimed that *El secuestrador* was not intended to be explicitly didactic, he also emphasized his artistic impartiality (Torre Nilsson 1985: 153). The nature of this bias becomes clear upon consideration of the director's strong disapproval of Perón, however. Addressing those present at an independent artists' conference, the filmmaker argued that Peronist propaganda had destroyed national cinema. He talked passionately about the need to expose the reality of life in neighbourhoods, 'construidos con bolsas y zinc, donde diez mil familias viven en diez centímetros de agua' [made from bags and zinc, where ten thousand families live in ten centimetres of water]. Elsewhere, he also stated that cinema should point 'un dedo acusador' [a finger of blame] (Torre Nilsson 1985: 44-47, 154). These comments suggest that the grim representation of villera/os in *El secuestrador* was charged with an anti-Peronist sentiment. Indeed, the corruption that defines the characters appears to be a result of life in the villa, which the government had failed to change despite promising otherwise. Even if this argument is rejected and *El secuestrador* is only understood as a comment on human nature, the production nonetheless demonstrates how particular negative images of poverty have been deployed throughout Argentine history for a range of different purposes, ultimately limiting understandings of informal settlements. These images would also have some bearing on the nature of future representations of villas in narrative cinema, since Torre Nilsson was such an influential figure in Argentine cinema (King 1998: 486).

In the same year that *El secuestrador* was released, David José Kohon, another director who would inspire future filmmaking generations, juxtaposed the conditions of a villa with urban modernity. *Buenos Aires* (dir. David José Kohon, 1958) signals the birth of the Argentine social documentary, an art form later adopted by revolutionary filmmakers who called for a restructuring of Latin American societies by restructuring conventional aesthetics. Notably, in comparison to previous films about villas, Kohon's approach was radical. The director circumvented the usual tragic plot by venturing beyond the realm of fictional entertainment. *Buenos Aires* begins by taking the audience on a tour of the city centre, where high-rise buildings, businesses and automobiles suggest prosperity. These shots are then contrasted with those of ramshackle stick huts crammed together on a muddy and flooded terrain. While the rest of the public are framed in groups, Kohon uses the close-up to individualize villera/os, who are seen working with tools, fixing their homes and collecting water. One woman smiles at the camera. Another laughs while she reads the newspaper and watches children play on the marshy land. Clearly, Kohon sympathizes with these people and challenges stereotypes of the illiterate, lazy and violent villera/o. This view was not congruent with the official anti-Peronist tone of the time.

Observing this fact, Natalia Suniga and Paloma Zeiguer contrast Kohon's portrayal of villera/os with Demare's to note a shift in the mode of representation:

> Mientras que para Demare el habitante de la villa es un delincuente o propenso a serlo, Kohon reivindica la figura del villero en su identidad cultural y en el lugar que ocupa en la estructura social.
> [While for Demare the villa inhabitant is a criminal or likely to become one, Kohon redeems the villero by noting his cultural identity and role in society]. (Suniga and Zeiguer 2012: 220)

Locals are shown waking up early to make their way to the city, where they labour in factories and deliver post. Here, their contribution is acknowledged as vital to processes of modernization. Society depends on them, making their exclusion and poor standard of living especially unjust. Through these sequences, Kohon indicates the problematic nature of prevalent ideas of development in his implication that the growth of Buenos Aires relies on the exploitation of the economically marginalized, whose subordination is necessary for the advancement of dominant groups.

When they return to the villa at the end of their working day, each character faces the camera to confirm, 'si señor, yo vivo aquí' [yes sir, I live here]. While representing pride in themselves, these words also suggest underdevelopment and complicate the capital's image as the Paris of South America. The final scenes show a villa inhabitant painting over graffiti that denounces Arturo Frondizi and hails the opposing presidential candidate Ricardo Balbín. As the wall is whitewashed, the existing political framework is rejected and a process of restructuring is called for. This point lends credence to and elaborates on Podalsky's statement that *Buenos Aires* moves beyond a criticism of local politics (Podalsky 2004: 92). It also reinforces Aguilar's argument that the documentary 'criticizes the processes of modernization in general, rather than simply Peronism' (Aguilar 2014: 48). Podalsky also correctly states that Kohon 'subverts the mythic association of the city with civilization and progress by forcing the spectator to look at Buenos Aires from a different perspective [and associating] the modernizing promise of the buildings with impersonalization and dehumanization' (Podalsky 2004: 94). Therefore, *Buenos Aires* marks a shift in the way villas were screened. This mode of representation was simultaneously carried forward by Fernando Birri and, later, a new generation of Argentine filmmakers who framed poverty with a view to challenging globally dominant concepts of development. Importantly, however, Birri would place the spotlight on the provinces beyond Buenos Aires. These interior regions, as the title *Buenos Aires* inadvertently indicates, were often excluded from national discourses in favour of the capital. These political documentaries shaped

Latin American narrative film and contributed strongly to the development of a 'socially engaged film culture' (Traverso and Wilson 2013: 275).

Kohon's rejection of all political figures recalls the work of various members of the *Generación del '50* [Generation of '50] literary movement, including Guido, Verbitsky and the Marxist author and critic David Viñas. These intellectuals expressed a strong feeling of disillusionment that was prominent among young Argentines during the late 1950s and early 1960s (Rodríguez Monegal 2003: 286; Carrasai 2010: 243). This feeling is evident in *Villa Miseria también es América*, which challenged the notion that immigrants in informal settlements were the cause of urban decay by individualizing hard-working, exploited villera/o characters. Verbitsky's narrative 'was critical of both Peronist and post-Peronist policies and portrayed the villa as the only site of communal solidarity in an otherwise dehumanizing urban environment' (Podalsky 2004: 78). In *Los dueños de la tierra* [*The Owners of the Land*] (David Viñas, 1959), Viñas scrutinizes property law and the inequalities between landowners and the dispossessed (Roca 2007: 88). The novel decries the genocide and enslavement of thousands of indigenous Patagonians and the appropriation of their land during General Julio Argentino Roca's Conquest of the Desert, a key event in the foundation of the Argentine republic. The war, which took place during the 1870s and 1880s, was extremely 'one-sided' and resulted in the transfer of millions of hectares of Patagonian land to a small number of landowners, many of whom were soldiers (Hedges 2011: 22-23). For Viñas, this annexation of the south is a fundamental cause of contemporary social injustice. The narrative continues into the 1920s, showing how the landowners responsible for the Amerindian deaths exploit their workers, who are eventually murdered by the intervening military when they strike for better conditions. As Emir Rodríguez Monegal summarizes, 'el Ejército, después de haber despojado a los indios, contribuye a despojar a los obreros' [the military, having dispossessed the Indians, contributes to the dispossession of the workers'] (Rodríguez Monegal 2003: 284). In his essay 'Indios, ejército y fronteras' [Indians, Army and Borders] (David Viñas, 1982), Viñas compared the Conquest of the Desert to the state terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s, a period during which his own children, the *Montonero* militants María Adelaida and Lorenzo Ismael, were disappeared. This enduring stance against a range of polarized national political movements is further evident in *Contorno*, the literary journal that Viñas co-founded in 1953. The publication spoke out against both Perón and Frondizi, the latter of whom was criticized because of his contracts with multinational oil companies, partial privatisation of education and other developmentalist policies (Carassai 2010: 243).

A similar sociopolitical critique underlies *El jefe* [*The Boss*] (dir. Fernando Ayala, 1958), the first production by Fernando Ayala and Héctor Olivera's successful company Aries Cinematográfica Argentina. The film was based on a story by Viñas, who also worked on the

screenplay with Ayala and whose fiction began to heavily influence the director from this point on (Trelles Plazaola 1989: 14). The violent boss of the title, Berger (Alberto de Mendoza), leads a gang of delinquent men by both intimidating and financially rewarding them. A corrupt father figure, he is generally interpreted as a negative reflection of Perón (Rist 2014: 60). Thus, this re-characterization of the patriarch gives rise to the subversion of the discourse used to idealize Perón before 1955. This reading is supported by the images of the former president evoked by the antagonist's double-breasted white suits, slicked-back hair and animated gesticulations when impersonating an auctioneer to swindle the public. When one gang member, Carlos (Duilio Marzio), learns that his wife is pregnant, he decides to change his criminal ways but is reminded by his manipulative boss that he will not be able to support his family by working only as a novelist. Here, corruption and fatherhood, a symbol of national leadership, appear inseparable. Marcelo (Leonardo Favio), who is at odds with his own father, expresses a feeling of exasperation with such figures, 'estoy harto de padres' [I'm tired of fathers], before stealing a painting of a war of independence leader (another father of Argentina) from his family home to appease his boss. In the end Berger murders a young girl and pins it on Marcelo in order to escape prison. However, the boss's guilt is revealed by the elder of the two Ruiz brothers (Ignacio Quirós), who has his own designs on the role of gang leader. Marcelo realizes this and revolts, 'hiciste eso para cobrarmelo. Basta de mugre. Se acabaron los mandones' [you only did this so that I would owe you something in return. Stop this nonsense. I'm sick of taking orders]. With this allusion to sinister ulterior motives behind the populist pandering of Argentina's heads of state, he leaves the gang along with Carlos, who hopefully declares, 'ya está aclarando' [its becoming brighter], in the film's final scene. Ambiguously, nonetheless, as Ruiz leads the remaining delinquents away, it appears that Berger has already been succeeded by an equally dangerous patriarch.

This sense of disillusionment towards national politics continued in *El candidato* [*The Candidate*] (dir. Fernando Ayala, 1959), another product of Ayala's screenwriting partnership with Viñas and one that is particularly relevant to this thesis given its portrayal of a villa. Set in 1950, the film captures the greed and corruption of careerist politicians who again encapsulate a belief that 'todo jefe está mintiendo' [every boss is lying] (Mahieu in Getino 2005: 45). As is the case in *El jefe*, deceptive fathers, sons and associates embody a sense of betrayal that emerged during the *Revolución Libertadora*'s era of developmentalism. While the doctor and veteran politician Mariano Torres Ahumada (Alberto Candeau) is somewhat well-meaning (having resigned in protest against corruption during the Infamous Decade), he is enticed to return from retirement and run for the presidency by self-serving members of the fictional Republican Party. One of these well-off conservatives is his eldest son Ernesto (Duilio Marzio), who uses his father's respectable reputation to gain power, steal party funds and purchase a

luxurious house. Argentina's most deprived citizens, who are represented by the villera/o constituents of Bajo Belgrano, will never be able to secure a property and are the ultimate victims of such actions. Viñas's view of property law as a base for social inequality can be connected to the appearance of villas here, while the destitution of the settlement is yet another legacy left by Argentina's founding fathers. The villa inhabitants' votes are exchanged for basic household items such as shaving tools and their subaltern position is sustained in order to be repeatedly capitalized upon by way of empty promises of improved living standards. Thus, their subordination is fundamental to the functioning of an unjust system within which power and wealth are distributed in the most unequal of manners. While the villera/os are forced to remain in dire poverty, the politicians live a high life of large homes, cars, tailored suits and imported food and drink. The hospital promised to the impoverished electorate will never be built, regardless of how much it is demanded by Torres Ahumada's second son Horacio (Alfredo Alcón), a socially responsible medical student who delivers babies and cares for the sick in the villa. It is significant that this charitable character is scathing towards the games that must be played in order to compete in the election. He denounces his father's image as the voice of the people, which is contrived by the meticulous management of language (that is, the avoidance of the peninsular Spanish associated with the wealthy), clothes and media. The young doctor also condemns the common practice of obtaining votes by whatever means possible and the opportunism of party members including his older brother Ernesto, who admits that he benefits from the existence of the villa. Horacio even encourages his father to return to a clinical role in a bid to promote the sort of real, effective action never taken within the political arena. Thus, he is a filmic incarnation of Viñas's many young literary heroes who demonstrate, 'alienación con respecto al mundo concreto de la política argentina' [alienation from the world of Argentine politics] (Rodríguez Monegal 2003: 286).

Although the message in *El candidato* is clearly an antioligarchist one, it does not recant the anti-Peronist sentiment of *El jefe*. Rather, both works can be understood as a duology that doubts the possibility of separating power from corruption. Horacio calls passionately for a form of politics that is 'algo más que un negocio' [something more than a business], but as things stand, it seems impossible to govern without becoming, as Torres Ahumada repeats, 'envilecido' [tarnished]. Despite the presidential candidate's protests, he is blackmailed by Ernesto and the party leader Don Pancho (Guillermo Battaglia) into authorising their shady business deals. The general lack of faith in politics communicated here is further revealed in the absence of an honest alternative to the republicans. Torres Ahumada's unseen rival Bazan is a leftist demagogue who eventually wins the election by exchanging villera/o votes for mattresses. It transpires that Miñaca (Héctor Rivera), the conniving political broker responsible for buying support for the Republican Party in the villa, was also working for Bazan and helped him to

achieve the victory. This double-crosser, who does not come from the villa but boasts about having its people in the palm of his hand, personifies the greed, selfishness and immorality fostered by the system, the lack of real difference between opposing parties, and the overall sense of manipulation and betrayal underlying Ayala and Viñas's collaborations. Hence, Miñaca demonstrates an all-encompassing feeling of disillusionment with national politics that, as Angela Romero-Astvaldsson notes, defines Viñas's writing (Romero-Astvaldsson 2007: 63-64). It seems that even positive social advancements are undermined and perhaps nullified by fundamental problems. Miñaca explains that things have changed since the 1930s and that it is no longer only the men of the villa who must be won over with gifts. Therefore, female suffrage equates only to the assimilation of women into a system that is already deeply corrupt. One of Horacio's villera patients praises and vows to vote for Torres Ahumada, but a Bazan flyer hidden under her pillow suggests otherwise. Thus, the villera/os play both sides in order to receive as many benefits as possible. Given the severity of their poverty, however, their actions are not condemned. When Horacio sees the leaflet, the woman becomes embarrassed and apologises for her hypocrisy. However, the doctor understands that she only pledges her support to both parties to gain some of the power and wealth that she is deprived of. Ultimately, since neither party sees politics as a means of achieving social justice, the best that those living in the informal settlement can hope for is some small form of remuneration for a vote that is otherwise meaningless. This idea echoes *Contorno*, the writers of which agreed that 'social change is possible only if there is, on the one hand, a true commitment to it and, on the other hand, a true communion with the masses' (Carassai 2010: 244). However, some of the journal's contributors criticized the economically marginalized, calling upon them to take greater responsibility in stamping out injustice instead of naively waiting for Frondizi to satisfy their every request as a matter of course (Carassai 2010: 242). *El candidato* appears to reject this belief that villera/os should (or could) become less passive. In fact, they appear helpless in the film and their mobilization is never demanded. It is the 'outsider' doctor Horacio, if anyone, who can offer some degree of hope and unite society's most privileged with the disenfranchised. This becomes evident in the final scene when he leaves Buenos Aires to treat the suffering, impoverished population of Formosa. Thus, while *El candidato* did not vilify villa inhabitants, it represented them as peripheral characters and did little to empower them. This problem remains in some contemporary films, as will be discussed in forthcoming chapters.

Ayala and Viñas's arguments, themes and motifs would also reoccur in villa-centred films in the future. Violence and *machismo* are thematized in many of the works discussed later, particularly those studied in chapter five. Viñas's parallels between the Conquest of the Desert, property law and contemporary marginalization would be re-drawn in *La ciudad oculta* [The Hidden City] (dir. Osvaldo Andéchaga, 1988), which is examined in chapter three. *Elefante*

blanco, discussed in chapters three and four, revisits *El candidato*'s idea of an unbuilt hospital, which again symbolizes violations of the human rights of villera/os. In Trapero's film, the wealthy saviour also reappears in the form of priests and a social worker operating in Ciudad Oculta. These privileged heroes reflect the portrayal of Horacio in *El candidato* and Amalia in *Suburbio*. The scientific, medical and religious knowledge of such characters is a source of hope that supports the idea of villa development as opposed to villa eradication. At the same time, however, the presence of such figures marginalizes villera/o characters. Thus, *El candidato* and its passive representation of villa residents set the tone of future films.

2.6 The Wrong Track: Examining Development and Foreshadowing Authoritarianism in Documentaries and Docudramas of the New Argentine Cinema (1960 – 1965)

After studying at the Experimental Centre of Cinematography in Rome, Fernando Birri established the Santa Fe Documentary School, which was integrated into the National University of the Littoral in the founder's home province of Santa Fe. This school was modelled on the Italian institute in which Birri had discovered neorealism, an artistic movement pioneered after the Second World War during the golden age of Italian cinema. Primarily concerned with accurately reflecting social realities, neorealism 'grew out of Western literary styles, such as naturalism, realism, and, most importantly, Italian verismo, which strove to illustrate the stark realities of the peasant and working class' (Ruberto and Wilson 2007: 3). A cost-effective approach characterised by the employment of untrained actors, natural light and sound, and improvised dialogues and settings, neorealism lent itself to representations of Argentine poverty and came to characterise the first New Argentine Cinema (NAC) initiated by Birri (and also Kohon).[1] The NAC was envisaged as a more meaningful alternative to the 'white telephone' films, which opted for traditional narrative structures and aesthetics and ignored important local issues concerning social injustice. Birri's movement formed part of, and influenced, the wider New Latin American Cinema movement, which was defined by 'alternative aesthetics' (Stam 2000: 260). These alternative aesthetics simultaneously subverted dominant forms of filmmaking and dominant political ideologies. Birri confirmed this as his objective in 'Cine y subdesarrollo' (1963), published in English as 'Cinema and Underdevelopment' (1983). In this manifesto, the director argued that the production of social documentaries was the best way to construct an alternative cinema that would free the audience from a conventional method of production that was oppressive, dependent, imperialist and subordinating (Birri 1963: 42-44).

[1] A second movement also referred to as New Argentine Cinema was formed in the late 1990s and will be discussed in chapter three.

Given this rationale, it is unsurprising that poverty was placed centre stage with a view to strengthening the Argentine social conscience and overcoming neocolonial processes of domination and subordination.

The filmmaking process was a collective one, with the majority of roles being interchangeable (Birri 1986: 6). Production values were notably imperfect. This was largely attributable to a lack of resources at Birri's disposal. Nonetheless, he also believed that Argentina was not yet ready – that it had not yet developed enough of an independent economy or culture – to move beyond the social documentary (Birri 1963: 43). Thus, a lack of resources led to the adoption of an alternative aesthetic that, while born out of necessity, also displayed artistic merit in that restructured the conventional approach to production to call for the restructuring of society. Stam observes that this kind of aesthetic was one of the defining characteristics of Latin American militant cinema in the 1960s, referring to the process by which filmmakers transform their disadvantages into subversive and empowering forces as the 'transmogrification of the negative' (Stam 2015: 147). With the immanency of a renewed period of military rule, this alternative approach and the leftist, Peronist views it served would eventually force Birri to flee to Brazil and Cuba, before settling in Italy (Birri 1986: 8). Nonetheless, the director's radical mindset would later inspire other Latin American filmmakers of the 1960s, whose desire to transform societal conditions was also reflected in their re-evaluation of traditional production practices. Among the most notable of these radical figures is Glauber Rocha, who developed raw and imperfect 'aesthetics of hunger' to reflect the misery of poverty in Brazilian New Cinema, and the Argentines Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, whose Third Cinema movement is discussed in detail later. The first two productions by Birri and his students, *Tire dié* [*Throw Me a Dime*] (1960) and *Los inundados* [*The Flooded*] (1961), had a strong impact on radical Latin American filmmakers. With their alternative approach to production, these films foregrounded informal settlements to capture the reality of 'subdesarrollo' [underdevelopment] and expose the tragic truth behind the official Frondizian discourse of 'desarrollo' [development] (Getino 2005: 50). Thus, they 'would profoundly influence the course of film in Latin America by firmly establishing the legitimacy of a revolutionary cinema dedicated to social realities' (Ruby Rich 1989: 3).

Tire dié, declared 'una encuesta social filmada' [a filmed social survey] in its opening scenes, was the school's debut project and is often regarded as the first Latin American social documentary, having been filmed before *Buenos Aires*. Between 1956 and 1958, the director and his students lugged their heavy, substandard recording equipment to Barrio del Puente, an informal settlement in Santa Fe, on an almost daily basis to conduct interviews and observe the lives of residents. They documented their subjects' struggle to survive and raise their children, who risk their lives by running alongside a passing train in the hope that passengers will throw

coins to them. The first of the three sections of *Tire dié* opens with a prologue narrated over aerial views of Santa Fe city. The narrator, a well-known actor named Guillermo Cervantes Luro, cites statistics regarding production and consumption in the provincial capital. As he tells the audience how many factories, warehouses, schools, hospitals, governmental buildings and new houses there are, a sense of development and prosperity is established. However, as the bird's-eye shot pans across the landscape, modern buildings gradually give way to a cluster of shacks on the marshy ground of the urban periphery. This contrast between the city and the informal settlement, along with the information provided by Luro, marks the first step in unveiling the misleading nature of official policies regarding development. In addition to highlighting marginalization, the provision of numerical data parodies the statistical method of knowledge production that the documentary challenges via the graphic character study carried out in its final two segments (Sadek 2013: 296; Foster 2013: 3). Thus, Birri underscores the importance of the social documentary and reminds the audience that statistics cannot accurately describe the intricacies of villa communities. Birri realized, then, the significant role of film in the construction of a more complex understanding of poverty. This is one of the key points made in the present thesis, which criticises the limited manner in which villas are often represented and highlights the need for a more pluralistic view of informal settlements in order to facilitate their integration into the wider Argentine society.

The middle section of *Tire dié* is made up of interviews with adults as they struggle in vain towards capitalist integration by selling vegetables and livestock, scavenging, and fabricating basic tools from waste materials. Thereafter, the final sequence centres on the pre-adolescents and their begging on the railway lines. By examining the marginal characters' attempts to turn a profit in these sections, *Tire dié* subverts the dominant developmentalist discourse promoted by the United States in order to prevent the emergence of communism in the post-war period. The economic strategy of developmentalism was adopted by Frondizi and became known as *frondizismo* [Frondizism] (Zuvekas Jr. 1994: 710). Developmentalism was not a new concept, however. When Latin American countries first achieved independence, 'Europe was the model to imitate and the developmentalist goal was to "catch up"' (Grosfoguel 2000: 350). Critics argue that this mentality is tantamount to neocolonialism, implicitly subordinating non-European forms of knowledge production and social, economic and political organization. Also, they claim that the concept is ethnocentrically biased and that the advancement of Latin America is obstructed by a global capitalist system wherein U.S. and European prosperity depends on the existence of underdeveloped nations that are highly susceptible to resource exploitation.[2] Such theories had been assimilated by Frondizi's predecessor Perón, who had resisted aligning

[2] This argument is famously put forward in Eduardo Galeano's influential book *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* [*Open Veins of Latin America*], first published in 1971 (Galeano, 2009).

Argentina with the United States politically, economically and ideologically (Amicci 2012: 138). This being Birri's stance, *Tiré die* 'reappropriates the trope of development, [which was] overdetermined by the modernizationist recognition of industrial and Western-style growth' (Baugh 2004: 58). Peronist rhetoric underlies this process of reappropriation, as it had often incorporated images of children to demonstrate that it was cultivating 'the seeds of Argentina's future' (Foster 2013: 2). Birri's contrast between the middle-class commuters who occupy a symbolically elevated position on the train and the children below them, shows that Perón's objectives have been undermined by the current government. By overturning official discourses regarding progress in this manner, Birri refutes the developmentalist notion that integration into capitalist society must be pursued in order to achieve demarginalization. The director furthers this argument by mediating villa residents' longing for greater state intervention in bringing about social integration. This, they recall, occurred in the recent past (under Perón, clearly) when they had construction jobs in the city and a more integrated and comprehensive schooling system.

Furthermore, in its critique of developmentalism, *Tire dié* opposes the belief that marginalization is attributable to a culture of poverty, lack of personal development or work ethic. The adults and children appear entrepreneurial, capable and mobile, using their skills to obtain money and work towards social inclusion. Despite their abilities, however, they continue to suffer in their supposedly developed society. This becomes clear as the children scurry perilously along a high railway bridge in the hope of receiving small amounts of cash. The train itself, which Matt Losada notes is a common emblem of capitalist modernity and development in Latin American film, appears to have left one child with brain damage after an accident (Losada 2011: 22). In Stam's edited volume *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, Ana López also shows how Argentine trains were used to align the country with Europe from the point of view of modernity and prosperity (López 2015: 104). Birri, however, overturns this trope, using the train to show the devastating consequences of his interviewees' attempts to integrate themselves into mainstream society. The theme of the train also underscores a Peronist voice, in that Perón's purchase of the railroads from the British – a decolonizing event, as far as Peronists were concerned – appears to have been undermined by the inequality that the locomotive now represents.

As he presented this critique of an exclusionary definition of progression in a post-Peronist society, Birri also realized the importance of not compromising his arguments by marginalizing the people on screen. Acknowledging his own position as an outsider in Barrio del Puente, Birri made efforts to empower the oppressed. The presence of the production team is removed from interviews. The disappearance of Luro's voice-of-God narration after the opening aerial pan means that the interviewees become the authoritative voice as they describe their lives. This

represents a departure from the traditional 'expository mode' of documentary filmmaking to a more experimental, 'observational' and 'reflexive' mode (Burton 1990: 50). In addition, a preliminary hour-long cut of *Tire dié* was shown to the residents of Barrio del Puente, who then helped to edit the final 33-minute version (Birri 1986: 6). The director also set up a mobile screening facility and took *Tire dié* to remote communities around Argentina (King 1998: 486). Hence, while mediating the other voice, Birri also allowed audiences normally excluded from the exhibition process to engage with film. Such forms of collaboration allow filmmakers' to avoid the exploitation of their subjects who are living in poverty (Stam 2015: 156). Ultimately, Birri's move away from traditional villa-centred narrative about gangs, crime and immorality, complements his attempt to 'democratize' and revolutionize cinema through the repositioning of the filmmaker. This radical approach profoundly influenced the course of New Latin American Cinema, representing an effort to remove the perpetuation of marginalization and exploitation from the production process, and reflect the desired social reorganization in aesthetics (Burton 1990: 52, 80). Birri's pioneering approach to production and distribution would inspire the revolutionary filmmakers of the 1960s, whose representations of poverty were even more politicised than his own.

Along with *Buenos Aires*, *Tire dié* marked the beginning of a period in which filmmakers documented life in villas to rebel against neocolonialism and dominant ideas of modernization. The second film to emerge from the Santa Fe school, *Los inundados*, continues along this trajectory. The narrative is fictional but has strong elements of documentary. Its distinct use of neorealism is strongly evident when one of the various nonprofessional actors looks directly at the camera to address the audience. Also, its characters were based on the people Birri encountered while making *Tire dié*. In fact, some of the documentary's interviewees also appear in *Los inundados* and make references to their children earning money by begging from the passengers of trains (Getino 2005: 51). The film chronicles the struggles of the Gaitán family, who are forced to live in a train carriage after their rural settlement is flooded. Constantly let down by politicians, the family is transported from one location to the next until they eventually arrive back at their home. In an act of solidarity, the neighbours set about repairing the destroyed area. However, their efforts appear to be futile as Dolorcito Gaitán (Pirucho Gómez) turns to the camera and explains that it won't be long before another flood occurs. The film represents 'a key moment in the shift in the way the interior of the country was represented' (Losada 2011: 30). Certainly, Birri paid attention to the countryside in a manner that was unique. Rather than cutting between each of the family's stops, the rural landscape is observed as the carriage passes through it. The Gaitáns gaze at and comment on the beauty and fertility of the land, mentioning its usefulness for grazing cattle and turning a profit. Therefore, through the eyes of the dislocated inhabitants of the informal settlement, rural Argentina is reconstructed.

Again, the employment of the train undermines the state's development programme and underscores Birri's Peronist stance.

Having acted in some of the films discussed previously, Lautaro Murúa continued to thematize marginality and development in his directorial career. This is evident in *Alias Gardelito* [*Alias Big Shot*] (dir. Lautaro Murúa, 1961), which won Argentina's prestigious Silver Condor award for best film in 1962. The production is based on the homonymous short story by Bernardo Kordon, another member of the Generation of '50. Its script was written primarily by the Paraguayan novelist Augusto Roa Bastos. David William Foster describes Murúa's film as a valuable account of the transition period between the fall of Perón and the rise of the subsequent series of military dictatorships (Foster 2010: 45). This account is constructed via an interrogation of the dangerous underworld of Buenos Aires, which exemplifies Argentine cinema's historical engagement with noir. *Alias Gardelito* is certainly not an example of Peronist propaganda. It does, nonetheless, concern itself with the instability of the upheaved society of the *Revolución Libertadora* (Foster 2010: 45-46). Therefore, it retains the sense of hopelessness and disillusionment with national politics that had earlier been communicated in collaborations between Ayala and Viñas.

Although he is not a villa inhabitant, the titular anti-hero Toribio 'Gardelito' Torres (Alberto Argibay) is a comparable figure who struggles to pay his rent in one of the capital's cheap *pensiones* [boarding houses]. He is 'an example of the impoverished provincials who are drawn by the bright lights of Buenos Aires to the capital city in the hope of finding a better life' (Foster 2010: 46). Nicknamed after the iconic tango singer Carlos Gardel, in whose footsteps he wishes to follow, Gardelito will go to any lengths to satisfy his literal hunger as well as his hunger for fame and fortune. His failure to realize his dreams and ultimate violent death reflect the failed ambitions of Peronism and successive regimes. Gardelito works for the local gang leader Feasini (Raúl Parini), stealing from disembarking train passengers and scamming bidders at auctions. He is drafted into his boss's smuggling operation, which involves selling illegally imported car parts. Overestimating his own cunning, Gardelito tries to hold back some of the gang's profits for himself. However, he is betrayed by his friend Picayo (Walter Vidarte), shot by Feasini and left to die at a landfill site. Like the rotting urban waste that he is surrounded by in his final moments, Gardelito has been consumed and discarded by the city.

Murúa diverges from the common mode of portrayal in that he is not particularly sympathetic to his marginal characters. The delinquency, promiscuity and disloyalty of the arrogant, yet incapable, Gardelito and his shady associates renders them personifications of the director's dislike for life in the capital (Murúa in García 2003: 1). This was a capital that, having been industrialized by Perón and subsequently Frondizi, attracted provincial Argentines seeking to realize their dreams of prosperity. Through images of moral corruption in the urban jungle,

Murúa challenged Frondizism, which was being endorsed by the exiled ex-president Perón in return for Frondizi's promise to lift the ban on Peronism (Alvarez Ripalta 2001: 2). However, rather than being a united force, as is suggested by the president's populist approach and support from Peronists, the economically marginalized classes appear severely fractured as the characters constantly deceive each other. As part of the same critique, Gardelito fails to benefit from the systems of modernization that were central to developmentalism. Like a fictional and unethical version of the interviewees in *Tire dié*, he can only aspire to a perverse and dangerous form of assimilation into capitalist society. This is demonstrated as he steals from provincial migrants who arrive on trains that once symbolized national progress. Furthermore, Gardelito illegally trades mechanical components made by the Ford Motor Company. The significance of this becomes clear when one considers how, despite permitting free-market trade, Frondizi also continued the process of import substitution that had been implemented by Perón. As part of this plan, automobile parts were among the many goods that were subjected to heavy customs duties (Programa de Estabilización Económica en Argentina 1959: 29). Murúa demonstrates how such policies encourage the formation of the black market within which Gardelito operates and facilitate criminal practices that destroy both the individual and society. This dejected and despairing assessment Frondizism, and the post-Peronist transition to right-wing military authoritarianism, is also reinforced in the opening and closing moments of *Alias Gardelito*, both of which show the titular character's gruesome demise. In the initial sequence, Gardelito's last breath is immediately followed by a close-up of a train. Here, his violent death is contrasted with a locomotive that Birri had previously transformed into a symbol of the failures of developmentalism. When the narrative comes full circle, the camera tilts upward from his body to reveal a backdrop of factories. These businesses, which also represent the industrialization fostered by the current president and Perón, are symbolically distanced from the abandoned corpse. As Daniel Amicci observes, Frondizi put in place policies to achieve, 'tanto una inserción más conveniente en el sistema de intercambios global como la puesta en marcha de un modelo de desarrollo industrial de base' [both a more convenient inclusion in systems of global trade and the establishment of grassroots industrial development] (Amicci 2012: 151). Evidently, however, Murúa's anti-hero cannot benefit from either of these mechanisms.

Frondizi was ousted from office in 1962. He had angered military leaders by lifting the proscription on Peronism, a move that facilitated Perón's proxies' victories in legislative elections. Military authorities allowed the civilian José María Guido to act as their puppet president between March 1962 and October 1963 (Ford 2010: 101). Guido's elected successor Illia was the fifth head of state since Perón's fall. In 1966 he, too, would be overthrown by a military coup d'état (this one led by Onganía), the fourth in just over a decade. This enduring political instability forced Birri (and, later, other filmmakers) into exile. It also influenced one of

the most famous portrayals of poverty ever seen in Argentine cinema. *Crónica de un niño solo* [*Chronicle of a Boy Alone*] (1965) was directed by Leonardo Favio, whose first appearance in Torre Nilsson's film *El secuestrador* seemingly inspired him to continue addressing the theme of marginalization in his directorial career. *Crónica de un niño solo* is dedicated to Torre Nilsson, demonstrating the continued influence of his social conscience on national film. The feature is often regarded as the best in the history of Argentine cinema and received the prestigious Silver Condor award at the Mar del Plata film festival in 1966.

Favio's own troubled childhood, which was spent living in an orphanage and on the streets of Buenos Aires, is reflected in the story of Polín (Diego Puente) (De los Ángeles Carbonetti 2000: 40). The eleven-year-old boy, played by the untrained actor Diego Puente, is held in a correctional facility for unknown reasons. He grows tired of the physical and verbal abuse that he endures at the hands of those running the reformatory and strikes Fiori (Victoriano Moreira), the head warden. This lands him in jail but, seemingly accustomed to such situations, he cleverly manipulates the cell's lock and escapes. Polín then returns to his villa and previous life of pickpocketing and skinny-dipping. A scene in which he peers through shop windows that separate him literally and symbolically from model skyscrapers shows how Favio remained conscious of the debate on developmentalism that dominated many narratives of poverty in the 1960s. Furthering this critique, a young adult villero named Fabián (Leonardo Favio) tells Polín about his plan to replace his horse and cart with a Ford car. If he is to achieve this goal, however, it will only be as a result of having worked as a pimp. Here, as in some of the previously discussed films, the distorted relationship between the marginalized and capitalism is highlighted. They can never achieve legitimate integration into the system and engage in criminal activities as a result. As the film's title suggests, Polín's parents are largely absent from the plot and, by implication, their son's life. They fail to visit him in the reformatory (the parents of others do arrive) and are only briefly heard when the child returns home. An adult male, who is perhaps Polín's father, sounds particularly unwelcoming when the boy appears. The camera remains outside of the shack during their conversation and, tellingly, the parents are never seen. Instead, the audience witness a drunken man stumbling through the informal neighbourhood. The villa thus becomes a transgressive and dangerous space inhabited by alcoholics and prostitutes. There is no real sign of solidarity within the villa. A recurring topic of discussion among neighbours is the recent death of a local named Jacinto. It is unclear if the man's fatal fall was the result of an accident caused by intoxication or if he was killed in a dispute. The authorities seem eager, nonetheless, to repudiate suspicions of murder in order to avoid an investigation. The nearby river, although scenic, is also a treacherous place where childhood playfulness and the burgeoning brutality of marginal male adulthood co-exist. Here, the film's most controversial scene unfolds when a group of boys rapes Polín's friend. In the villa, Fabián accommodates men

who eagerly wait outside his prostitute's cabin. Polín looks on curiously from a distance and counts his money, seemingly considering paying for sex. Here, attention is once again drawn to the transitional phase between childhood and adolescence from which the central character experiences marginalization. As he spies on the prostitute at work, his youthful innocence dominates his developing sexual urges and he is quickly distracted by the presence of the horse that Fabián had promised to sell to him. Empathizing with the restrained animal, Polín unleashes it, removes its saddle and takes it to graze. A police officer accuses the boy of stealing and the closing scene shows him being led back to prison, thus completing the cycle of his marginal existence.

In many ways, *Crónica de un niño solo* typifies the NAC by employing realism to expose the precarious lives of disadvantaged children in Argentina. For example, the director provides a subjective insight into Polín's world through the extensive use of point-of-view shots. This is particularly notable in the reformatory when, as punishment for feigning illness in an effort to leave the building, the protagonist is forced to run laps of the gymnasium with arms held aloft and a heavy sign labelling him a fugitive around his neck. Polín is clearly undernourished, having previously informed the doctor that he had not received any visits and, therefore, had not eaten. The unstable, hand-held camera circles the room, evoking feelings of dizziness and nausea. Similarly, when Polín fights with another prisoner, close-ups of his opponent's face dominate the screen. The camera remains in the midst of the fray and the audience is only privy to what the boys see. As the violence unfolds, the lens suddenly tilts upward to reveal the presence of Fiori, mimicking the boys' shock. Low angles such as the one used here amplify the intimidating presence of the wardens, bringing the audience deeper into the world of the young, marginal other. In the villa and by the river, the audience is united with Polín in his position as an observer. In the former location, both the spectator and character are removed from the action as they watch an apathetic police officer and lawyer deliver the verdict on Jacinto's death. Polín and the audience witness the riverside rape from afar, while both parties also spy on Fabián's prostitute together. These techniques create a sense of isolation and mark the use of realism, which is also notable in the casting of untrained child actors, scarce employment of props and music, long silences and naturalistic, controversial scenes of nudity. Furthermore, as he is led back to prison, Polín looks directly at the camera as if to mobilize or implicate the spectator. This ending calls to mind some of the realist films discussed previously, particularly *Los inundados* and *Los olvidados*, both of which break the fourth wall. Also underlining Favio's employment of realism is the fact that he worked with very little state funding and filmed in a real informal settlement in Olivos, Buenos Aires. Ultimately, by mediating the apparent reality of marginal life in a hard-hitting way (quite literally, given that Puente was really struck when filming scenes of physical abuse), *Crónica de un niño solo* demonstrates the transformation of the traditional production

process via the employment of realism in NAC (Khatchadourian 2012: 1; De los Ángeles Carbonetti 2000: 41).

However, as María de los Ángeles Carbonetti argues, viewing *Crónica de un niño solo* purely as an example of realism results in an incomplete understanding of the film. In fact, Favio often uses expressionism to critique the particular national political climate within which he was operating (De los Ángeles Carbonetti 2000: 51). Viewing language itself as limiting, expressionism communicates emotion via aesthetics. In contrast with realism, it avoids simply recording facts and pointing to tangible truths, instead attempting to mediate the metaphysical meanings of words, images and sounds. Eisner explains that 'the Expressionist […] commits himself to his impulses' and believes that 'the world is there for all of us to see [, so] it would be absurd to reproduce it purely and simply as it is' (Eisner 2008: 10-11, 17-18). Cinematic expressionism was pioneered in Germany during the silent era. As explained by the influential film theorist Siegfried Kracauer in *From Caligari to Hitler* (2004), the movement foresaw the rise of Nazism. *Crónica de un niño solo* functions in a similar manner. Often, there is a sense of being monitored as cameras hover overhead in the reformatory. In these cases, the subjective lens is substituted for a panoptic view of vacant, enclosed spaces. These production values, combined with the presence of sinister watchmen, represent the director's preoccupation with the threat of authoritarianism hanging over Argentina (De los Ángeles Carbonetti 2000: 50-52). Lending credence to this point is the fact that Fiori and the other state-employed wardens behave in what can be described as a militaristic fashion. They arrange the boys in line for inspection, count as the children pace the gym, punish them violently for disobedience and give orders with a whistle that shatters a silence symbolic of the suppression of free speech. They constantly converse in undecipherable murmurs and force the boys to face the wall, thereby restricting oral, aural and visual communication. Here, social realism and expressionism work in tandem as the audience are transported back to the subjective world of the children in order to evoke feelings of apprehension, suspicion and fear. Mariana Baranchuk and Paula Rodríguez Marino agree that the guards personify state control and mass surveillance and observe the 'sensación de encierro' [a sense of confinement] established in both the reformatory and villa by images of railings, gates and doors (Baranchuk and Marino 2005: 85).

Further evidence of the influence of expressionism is also found in the use of lighting. The elongated silhouettes cast by the guards as they navigate the building's staircases are resonant of a famous scene in the German expressionist silent horror film *Nosferatu* (dir. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922), in which the spindly shadow of a bloodthirsty vampire ascends a stairway as he stalks his victim. Polín is trapped between similar shadows as he is made face to the wall on the landing, conjuring the feelings of abandonment and seclusion suggested by the film's title. The child's solitude and the stereotypically fragmented villa family,

symbolized by the absence of a caring and ethical authoritative figure, is representative of the Argentine experience during a turbulent and disconcerting period in the country's history. Polín's freedom is thus, like that of real Argentines around the time of production, precarious, if at all existent. It is precisely this point that is communicated by his experience in the unstable home environment that the villa seems to be. Although he has escaped prison, just as Argentina has escaped its previous dictatorship, he inhabits the settlement under the constant threat of being recaptured. He cannot locate any adult carer outside of the correctional facility. Thus, parenthood once again becomes a metaphor for responsible political leadership, or lack thereof, in Argentine film. Polín cannot escape violence either. By mediating these preoccupations concerning seclusion and suffering, and using aesthetics to arouse feelings of uncertainty and incarceration, Favio foreshadows the oppression of the *Onganiato* and other future dictatorships (De los Ángeles Carbonetti 2000: 39). Indeed, as discussed earlier, those residing in informal settlements would suffer greatly after the coup d'état of 1966. Like Polín, actual villera/os would be considered by the state as, in Fiori's words, society's 'manzana podrida' [rotten apple]. Furthermore, it is true that the feelings of solitude and alienation expressed by the director were increasingly becoming an issue in real life. This becomes clear upon considering that PEVE, which was introduced before the release of *Crónica de un niño solo* and implemented ruthlessly by dictatorships from 1966 onwards, specifically aimed to destroy social cohesion in villas. In the plan's process of *desaliento* [demotivation], villera/os would be isolated via the prohibition of public gatherings and local activism. Onganía's rise to power also heralded a time of intensified censorship, again calling to mind the preoccupations about communication expressed in Favio's ominous narrative. Thus, the political concerns conveyed by the director proved to be well-founded. In fact, it was precisely because of the suppression of free speech foreboded in the film that *Crónica de un niño solo* marked the end of the first NAC.

2.7 Evolving Images of Poverty and Informal Settlements in Third Cinema: *La hora de los hornos* (dirs. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968)

The first NAC did not end without leaving a legacy. The Third Cinema movement pioneered by Fernando 'Pino' Solanas and Octavio Getino was heavily influenced by its predecessor and was particularly inspired by Birri. Ana Del Sarto distinguishes between the two eras as follows:

> New Cinema is related to the early transformations within Argentine national cinema traditions activated by Fernando Birri, but also, at a more massive level, by Lautaro Murúa and Leonardo Favio, while Third Cinema is directly connected to the clandestine practice of Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino and the Cinema of Liberation Group. (Del Sarto 2005: 78)

In their manifesto 'Toward a Third Cinema' (1970), first published in Spanish as 'Hacia un Tercer Cine' (1969), Getino and Solanas promoted the idea of a Third Cinema that was in opposition to Hollywood cinema (First Cinema) and what they viewed as its dependant alternative, auteur (or independent) cinema (Second Cinema). Third Cinema was designed to operate outside of the dominant, imperialist system wherein film was a consumer good used 'to satisfy only the ideological and economic interests of the owners of the film industry […,] the great majority of whom were from the United States' (Getino and Solanas 1970: 2). Ultimately, the objective of the movement was to form a revolutionary militant cinema that was 'capable of contributing to the downfall of capitalist society' and decolonizing so-called Third World countries (Getino and Solanas 1970: 1). Third Cinema aimed to achieve this by, even more so than Birri had done earlier, avoiding normative filmmaking techniques. As was the case when *Tire dié* was filmed, members of production teams were expected to be competent in all areas, making the process a collective one and eliminating dependency on individual technicians. Distribution was decentralized and screenings were held in unconventional locations by groups sympathetic to the cause. Narratives and aesthetics were seen as tools that should be used to mobilize the audience. The camera itself was imagined as a weapon of war in that, rather than simply pointing out social injustices to passive spectators, it intended to draft them into a violent conflict against neocolonialism (Getino and Solanas 1970: 8-9).

In their manifesto, Getino and Solanas adopted the theories of the Marxist postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon argued that violence was a justifiable part of the decolonization process and was necessary for the psychological wellbeing of the colonized. This mentality meant that Third Cinema was not concerned with entertainment, unlike the earlier films that sought to make social and political issues palatable by placing them alongside traditional love stories. These previous methods were understood as legitimizing the Hollywood model. Indeed, Argentine cinema had previously imitated U.S. productions in its attempt to compete with them (España 1993: 14; Karush 2007: 296). Getino and Solanas believed that their practices defined a movement that was unbound by the dominant system and, therefore, served as a true alternative to First Cinema. Although Second Cinema positioned itself as such an alternative, it was said to have been allocated the role of rebel within a dominant system that needed forms of authorised protest to appear to promote equality (Chanan 1997: 3). Before publishing their manifesto, Getino and Solanas had already put their ideas into practice by forming *Grupo Cine Liberación* [Cinema of Liberation Group] and creating their masterpiece *La hora de los hornos* [*The Hour of the Furnaces*] (1968). Villas were to feature in this documentary.

Perhaps the most famous and influential Latin American documentary ever made, *La hora de los hornos* presented a new aesthetic that drew on and advanced Birri's radical methods, as is suggested by the inclusion of scenes from *Tire dié*. In a global context, *La hora de los hornos* is also comparable to the work of the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov. Vertov despised the traditional 'played out' plots of theatre and literature. He wanted to abolish non-documentary film, which he saw as bourgeois art that did not serve the interests of Stalin's Russian empire (Feldman 2014: 21-25). Vertov thought of the camera as a weapon that, by destroying the old approaches to aesthetics and narrative, could establish an authentic form of observational cinema that revealed the labour of the worker-artist (which traditional forms of film tended to conceal) and promoted communism (Bittencourt 2013: 20). His experimental masterpiece *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) – an observational and self-reflexive silent montage celebrating the power of the camera – developed new techniques including double exposures, stop motion, slow motion and freeze frames (to name but a few), to capture daily life in Soviet cities. Vertov's aim was to 'educate, impel, and occasionally scold the [audience into becoming] good post-Lenin Communists' (Kizirian 2017: n.p.). A famous shot in this avant-garde production uses special effects to stage the physical collapse of the Bolshoi theatre, a symbol of the dominant narrative-driven form of artistic expression. This image underscores Vertov's revolutionary attitude, which was reflected in both the aesthetics and ideological subtext of *Man with a Movie Camera*. The recurring themes of birth, rebirth, waking from sleep and workers' rights serve the same purpose.

In *La hora de los hornos*, a similarly experimental and subversive approach to production facilitated the objective of uniting Latin America and liberating its nations from dominant ideas about development that seemingly legitimized the economic and cultural superiority of the United States and Europe (Stam 1990: 252). The three-part, four-hour essay film, as the directors labelled it, incorporated an alternative approach to aesthetics. It combined voice-overs and intertitles that called the audience to arms with still images including a striking close-up of the corpse of the Marxist revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, news reels and reconstructed scenes of the literal violence (military brutality against citizens) and symbolic violence (cultural imposition, poverty, exploitation) of neocolonialism. Its pro-Peronist voice meant that *La hora de los hornos* had to be produced and distributed in secret, with Solanas smuggling the film stock to Italy to complete post-production. In line with the ideas put forward in their manifesto, individual authorship went uncredited in favour of the name *Grupo Cine Liberación* (Vertov had done something similar by using a nationwide network of citizens to film for him). Students, militants and low-income workers gathered at clandestine events referred to as 'meetings', since audiences were perceived as participants rather than passive consumers of the ideas represented on the screen. After all, as the filmmakers saw it, why should their 'comrades' be

treated only as viewers when their attendance 'was infringing the System's laws' and demonstrated their willingness to rebel (Getino and Solanas 1970: 7). Meetings did not follow a set pattern, as organizers elected the segments most relevant to their audiences while omitting others (Getino 2005: 58-59). To spur the audience into political action against the exploitative, neocolonial forces of capitalism, *La hora de los hornos* also incorporated interactive intervals. During these breaks, attendees were encouraged by intertitles to become active protagonists in the film by discussing the topics addressed on screen. Highlighting the importance placed on such participation, one of the documentary's most significant textual slogans (also inscribed on a banner during meetings) cited Fanon's phrase, 'todo espectador es un cobarde o un traidor' [all spectators are cowards or traitors]. The dynamic, participatory and radical exhibition process was intended to create liberated, decolonized spaces (Stam 1990: 254).

La hora de los hornos commences by stating that Latin America has never truly achieved independence. When Spanish rule came to an end, it is argued, Argentina was dominated by the British who, by issuing loans and exporting goods produced from what were Argentine raw materials to begin with, drained the new state of its financial and natural resources and imposed its bourgeois consumerist culture. In this way, Latin America (referred to as a nation) was said to have been established as an 'apéndice agrario de la industria europea' [appendage to European industry]. The film purports that the British Empire was eventually replaced by the United States, which colonized contemporary Latin America with the free-market economics of developmentalism.

Therefore, 'Latin America is viewed as a continental unit, where local and national differences cede importance to a shared history of exploitation at, successively, the hands of the Spanish, the British and the United States' (Foster 2013: 129). Moreover, 'one of the fundamental propositions of the film is that such a system is held in place by a combination of symbolic and real violence' (Foster 2013: 133). Informal settlements all over Latin America appear to be symptomatic of this violence. For example, scenes of the settlement from *Tire dié* are contrasted with images of seemingly infinite rows of skyscraper windows that are reminiscent of *Buenos Aires*. Emblematising Latin American poverty, villas play a key role in the establishment of an anti-neocolonial, Marxist-Peronist discourse. Shacks and malnourished inhabitants are shown as the narrator comments that, 'en Buenos Aires y suburbios ochocientas mil personas habitan viviendas inhabitables. Cuarenta y cinco millones de latinoamericanos sobrellevan su miseria en conventillos, villas miseria, callampas, favelas, ranchadas, cantegriles' [in Buenos Aires and the suburbs, eight hundred thousand people live in inhabitable housing. Forty-five million Latin Americans endure misery in *conventillos*, villas, *callampas*, favelas, *ranchadas*, *cantegriles*]. Here, images of villas undermine the idea that Argentina's economic and cultural ties with the so-called First World are empowering and progressive. They stand in

stark contrast to, and unveil the miserable truth behind other shots suggesting Argentine sovereignty and prosperity. These include images of the most eloquent avenues, buildings and monuments of Buenos Aires, the apparent epicentre of neocolonialism. That is, the headquarters of the Argentine elites who only value the European cultures that they relentlessly mimic. The decrepitude of the villa, therefore, is emphasized to expose the highly unequal power relations that benefit wealthy Argentines with 'European allegiances' (Stam 1990: 258). Informal settlements are included to raise consciousness about the systemic violence of neocolonialism and the subservience of Latin America, which is inevitably fostered by existing political, economic and cultural ties to the colonizing nations. The reference to these neighbourhoods communicates the overarching message that the repression of Latin America is grounded in severe and widespread 'illiteracy, poverty, social marginalization and institutionalized exclusion' (Foster 2013: 141). This message is reinforced by the aesthetic imperfections provided by grainy, still photos of huts and starving children within. As was the case in *Tire dié*, the poverty of the materials used marks the lack of resources under which radical and militant filmmakers tend to operate, but they also become fundamental artistic components of the production. This process of loading technical imperfections with artistic meaning again reflects the 'transmogrification of the negative', which helps to turn the camera into a weapon of war by challenging traditional modes of representation (Stam 2015: 147).

One of the most significant points to be made about the representation of the villas in *La hora de los hornos* is that the promotion of Latin-American unity means that the national context within which they exist is not emphasized. Instead, as the previous citation in which they are mentioned suggests, they become indistinguishable from informal settlements in other countries. Thus, the image of the villa demonstrates precisely how *La hora de los hornos* employs 'the practice of metonymy' to establish 'a correlation between Argentine sociohistorical reality and overall questions of dependence for Latin America as a whole' (Foster 2013: 141). The synonymity between the Argentine villa, Brazilian favela*,* Chilean *callampa,* and so on, accomodates the Bolivarian and Marxist view of Latin American unity at the core of *La hora de los hornos*. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this discourse also underlies many contemporary representations of villas.

Thus, villas are once again eminent at a critical turning point in Argentine cinema. In Third Cinema, rather than remaining images presented for mere observation, the settlements were screened to instigate aggressive action against the enemy. While villas and poverty are portrayed as one of the results of neocolonialism rather than of Peronism, as anti-Peronist directors had asserted previously, society's wealthiest are represented as the cause of the problem. Via this comparison, then, Getino and Solanas intend to overcome the problems of Second Cinema, which was perceived to have 'only dealt with effect, never with cause' (Getino

and Solanas 1970: 2). Those living in informal settlements are portrayed as the antithesis of the industrial bourgeoisie, agricultural oligarchies and intellectuals who implement neocolonialism at ground level by acting as political, economic and cultural intermediaries between Latin America and the dominant countries. Suffice it to say, then, that Third Cinema's representations of villas once again reflect a shift in the social and political objectives of Argentine cinema.

2.8 Disappearing Poverty (1974 – 1980)

La hora de los hornos was officially screened for the first time in Argentina after Perón's return to office in 1973. This commercial release symbolizes how the new Peronist period 'was characterised by a resurgence of cinematic activity' (Ruby Rich 1989: 3). The number of Argentine films screened annually increased somewhat during his third and final term. Perón's return also marked a major reduction in the number of Hollywood films released in Argentina (Gociol and Invernizzi 2006: 19, 24). Meanwhile, national cinema continued to comment on poverty as previous movements had done.

Portrayals of poverty continue to centre on villas in *Yo tengo fe* [*I Have Faith*] (dir. Enrique Carrera, 1974). The film is based on the life of the lead actor Ramón 'Palito' Ortega who, ironically, went on to make numerous pro-dictatorship films before serving as a Peronist governer of the Tucumán province in the 1990s. *Yo tengo fe* tells the story of Martín (Palito Ortega), a young man who leaves Tucumán to seek employment in Buenos Aires. After transitioning between various poorly paid jobs, he finds fame and fortune as a singer. Along the way, he falls in love with Delia (Claudia Cárpena), a native of the northern province of Santiago del Estero. Her reluctance to invite Martín to her home forces him to follow her to a villa in the neighbourhood of Bajo Flores. Those living in the settlement are represented positively. They include playing children and friendly adults who offer Martín directions to his lover's home. There is no sign of immoral behaviour within the community and its appearance primarily serves to support the religious ideals at the core of the narrative. This becomes evident when the villa is used as a space from wherein the protagonist articulates his Christian values. It is here that he tells Delia, 'sos la mujer más tonta del mundo […] porque te da vergüenza ser pobre, como si la pobreza fuera un pecado' [you are the silliest woman in the world (…) because you are ashamed to be poor, as if poverty were a sin]. It is this manner of thinking that leads Martín to success. He repeatedly denounces his delinquent peers and refuses to steal, despite struggling to pay for food. In the closing scene, he is told by his less honourable friend Ezequiel (Ricardo Morán), who has fallen into a life of petty crime and alcoholism, 'para cambiar se necesita algo que yo no tengo y que a vos te sobra: Fe' [to change one needs something that I don't have and that you have in abundance: Faith]. While it is not a haven for criminals, the villa does become infected

by an unspecified epidemic that kills Delia, recalling the plot of *Suburbio*. This constitutes a shallow form of social commentary that would disappear from Ortega's later films. However, he would continue to take a staunch Catholic stance in his productions, thereby developing a cinematic language that pleased the censors of the impending dictatorship.

Less than a year before Isabel Perón was ousted, *La Raulito* [*Little Raoul*] (dir. Lautaro Murúa, 1975) was released. This film, which is based on the true story of an economically marginalized young woman, was the last of its kind in the 1970s. The dictatorship's censorship policies subsequently prevented directors from representing poverty as sympathetically as Murúa. *La Raulito*'s ambiguous title – a feminine article combined with a masculine name – refers to the doubly marginalized (female and poor) protagonist, who disguises her gender in a futile attempt to avoid victimhood. Despite her efforts, as she seeks love, security, and friendship, Raulito is targeted by various men who attempt to take advantage of her. She eventually constructs a family of sorts by taking a young homeless child named Medio Pollo (Juanita Lara) under her wing. Together they flee the oppressive capital and head to the coastal city of Mar del Plata. As they run on the beach, the child collapses and dies, leaving the protagonist alone once again. The central characters' departure from Buenos Aires coincides with the disappearance of similar critiques of social injustice from Argentine cinema. It is made even more unsettling, moreover, by a retrospective awareness of the mass dislocations that occurred shortly after *La Raulito*'s release. When Raulito and Medio Pollo are driven from the city of Buenos Aires, Murúa foreshadows the expulsion of over 200,000 of the protagonists' real-life counterparts to society's margins.

As villera/os were expelled from the capital, they also vanished from screens. This reflected the dictatorship's belief that concealing villas was almost as desirable an option as abolishing them completely (Tasín 2008: 91). Gerbner, who founded cultivation theory in communication studies, called this 'symbolic annihilation' (Gerbner 1972: 44). Hundreds of films were banned. These included Argentine films such as *Piedra libre* [*Rolling Stone*] (dir. Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1976) and *Señora de nadie* [*Nobody's Wife*] (dir. María Luisa Bemberg, 1982), and foreign films such as *Las largas vacaciones del '36* [*Long Vacations of '36*] (dir. Jaime Camino, 1976), *Coming Home* (dir. Hal Ashby, 1978) and *Last Tango in Paris* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972). Many directors and actors including Getino and Solanas went into exile (Falicov 2007: 43; Shaw 2003: 139; Varea 2008: 28). Those who remained practiced self-censorship for fear of being disappeared, as had happened to Raymundo Gleyzer, the leader of the leftist movement *Cine de la Base* [Base Cinema] (Peña 2002: 105-116). Argentine film production fell somewhat between 1976 and 1983, averaging 25 releases per year. The regime favoured imported works that would ensure the removal of undesired social and political themes from cinemas. Major U.S. studios including Fox, Columbia and United Artists dominated the Argentine market (Gociol

and Invernizzi 2006: 25, 29). National releases that were authorised were mostly light-hearted comedies and musicals that 'were ideologically in line with the dictatorship' (Falicov 2007: 42-44). Despite heavily censoring cinema, however, the state still invested considerably in the medium to deliver a message of its own.

In 1976, the head of the *Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales* (INCAA) [National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts] Captain Jorge Enrique Bitleston vowed to finance films that upheld the dictatorship's values (Varea 2008: 33). Hence, features such as *Los hombres solo piensan en eso* [*Men Only Think About One Thing*] (dir. Enrique Cahen Salaberry, 1976) and *El gordo de América* [*American Fatty*] (dir. Enrique Cahen Salaberry, 1976) envisioned a middle-class utopia where white characters were employed, lived comfortable lifestyles and enjoyed a high degree of mobility. During this time, Ortega became 'one of the dictatorship's greatest propagandists' (Finchelstein 2014: 152). Films that he directed, starred in and produced through his company Chango Producciones celebrated the regime and its ideals. For example, as Peter Rist observes, 'in Chango's films the family, the Catholic Church, and the police were always represented positively, whereas university students would be shown negatively along with smugglers and other common criminals' (Rist 2014: 47).

Ortega's comedy *Dos locos en el aire* [*Two Airborne Crazy Guys*] (1976) tells the story of an air force flight instructor who falls in love with the daughter of his superior officer. Upon receiving a promotion, he is relocated to the south of Argentina. His lover understands his motives and announces that his heroic sacrifice will create a better future for them and all citizens. As in most of Ortega's films, the infantile humour of the popular comic actor Carlos Balá marks an attempt to soften the delivery of the political message. Recurring wide shots of the military base, combined with scenes of parades and powerful aircraft, display the might and grandiosity of the *junta*, which is credited for supporting the production. Such scenes are prominent in various films made by Chango and recall the Nazi formations in Leni Riefenstahl's revolutionary propaganda film *Triumph des Willens* [*Triumph of the Will*] (1935). Ortega's subsequent film *Brigada en acción* [*Brigade in Action*] (1977) represented the undercover unit of the Buenos Aires police force in the same manner. Scenes of elaborate ceremonies show countless numbers of officers performing acrobatic motorcycle routines in formation. As in *Dos locos en el aire*, state officials endanger themselves to protect the public. Given Ortega's firm Christian stance, this recurring theme of sacrifice marks the subtle formation of parallels between national authorities and the figure of Christ. In the same vein, those who were most inclined to speak out against the *junta* are aligned with criminality. In *Brigada en acción*, a young leftist masquerading as a law student is found to be involved in fraud and other unspecified 'juegos clandestinos' [clandestine activities]. The same film constructs a rather questionable portrait of poverty. An orphan named Cepillo (Marcelo Chimento) is not abused by state officials,

as was very often the reality for such individuals at the time. Instead, the boy is cared for by them and even aspires to join their ranks when he is older. Therefore, images of poverty were not used to denounce authorities and social injustice, but rather, to reinforce a positive image of state institutions and prop up a dictatorship-friendly mode of representation that is typical of Ortega.

Given the actual treatment of the economically marginalized by the state, this form of portrayal is, as Fernando Varea labels Ortega's propaganda, 'escandalosamente idílica' [scandalously idyllic] (Varea 2008: 68). Furthermore, the idea that the detectives are Cepillo's carers suggests that the state can and should adopt minors who are at risk of becoming so-called subversives. This treatment of the orphan is particularly disconcerting given that military officers often illegally adopted the children of those murdered by the dictatorship (Villalta 2009: 147-148). Confirming this reading of Ortega's work, the Argentine film critic Santiago García notes the same themes in *¡Qué linda es mi familia!* [*My Family is Beautiful*!] (1980), which tells the story of a man who rejects his adopted son's biological father when the latter arrives in search of his child (García in Finchelstein 2014: 150). Similarly, the state's nationalist message is delivered in the *Superagentes* [*Super Agents*] film series produced by Cinematografía Sudamericana. Sergio Wolf observes that the titular agents' objectives generally involve the appropriation of money, objects and knowledge (Wolf 1992: 275). Children are treated in the same way in Carlos Galettini's instalment *Los superagentes…y la gran aventura del oro* [*The Super Agents and the Great Gold Adventure*] (1980), in which a homeless child accompanies the virtuous heroes on a mission to recover Inca treasure and a young girl from a notorious villain. As Varea details the many ways in which cinema was used to promote the *junta*'s moral and religious values, he observes, 'jamás se mencionaba problema alguno relacionado con problemas sociales o con las violaciones de la Constitución y a los derechos humanos' [social problems or violations of the constitution and human rights were never mentioned] (Varea 2008: 75). He highlights this negligence by drawing attention to *El tío disparate* [*The Silly Uncle*] (dir. Palito Ortega, 1978), in which Argentina's economic woes are disregarded when Carlitos (Carlos Balá) exclaims, 'aquí en este país el que quiere trabajar encuentra trabajo' [here in this country, whoever wants to work finds a job] (Varea 2008: 75). This implication that people are living in poverty because of their reluctance to work reproduces the marginalization by choice and culture of poverty stigmas that informed the villa eradication schemes of the time. Ultimately, although the dictatorship managed to symbolically annihilate villas from cinema screens, they also managed to reinforce negative stereotypes about poverty. These portrayals became an important part of a broader official discourse that demonized villera/os with a view to legitimizing their literal annihilation.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter marks the first step in comprehensively mapping the representation of villas in film. It has introduced recurring ideas of this thesis, particularly regarding the limited nature of portrayals of villas, by discussing productions from the silent era, Peronist, and democratic and authoritarian post-Peronist periods before Argentina's transition to democracy in 1983. Through these close readings, this chapter has established an understanding of the way film contributes to, and counteracts, the stigmatization of the villa in Argentine society. It has shown how and why stereotypes about poverty, which were established as cinematic norms as far back as the 1920s, have been appropriated and mobilized time and again to articulate or reconcile class tensions; comment on the eradication of villas; and promote or condemn Peronism, developmentalism and authoritarianism. The screening and censorship of villas and poverty thus reflects the evolution of Argentine film within a dramatically changing sociopolitical environment.

In 1931, *Puerto Nuevo* made villa inhabitants the protagonists for the first time on screen. This film stands out in the context of this thesis since it portrays talented, charismatic characters living in a unified unofficial community that is not threatened from within. Furthermore, *Puerto Nuevo* avoided the overtly distressing images of destitution that would eventually become the norm and took place mostly outside of the marginal space of Barrio Inmigrantes in flamboyant houses and theatres. Notably, it was far less focused on the criminality and violence fostered by poverty than later fictional films about villas. To understand why this is the case, it is important to point out that the villas were not seen as a significant national problem when *Puerto Nuevo* was made in 1936. Villa Desocupación, the original incarnation of Villa 31, did not yet pose a threat to Argentina's European image (as it was populated by European immigrants) and was the only major unofficial *barrio* that existed in Buenos Aires around the time of production. This, along with the fact that the newly emerged studios were primarily catering to working-class audiences, explains why *Puerto Nuevo* remains somewhat of an anomaly when compared to subsequent narrative films about villas, which did not emerge until almost two decades later. As cinema became a more exclusive form of entertainment in the late 1930s and 1940s, villa residents disappeared from screens. This is partially attributable to the increasingly profit-driven nature of an industry that was becoming less accessible to low-income audiences and controlled by elitists who made pretentious efforts to improve national cinema by removing elements of working-class culture from it.

When villas re-appeared on cinema screens in the early 1950s, the camera began to remain within the unofficial *barrio*, which was now represented as a dangerous, corrupt space to satisfy the opposing political agendas that arose after Perón's rise to power. It was during this period that some of the most common modes of representation were developed. These

portrayals often focus on the criminal-victim: a figure who is driven by destitution, itself caused by the failures of the 'wrong' ideology, to violate dominant moral values. The criminal-victim is generally a potentially violent, economically marginalized male drawn by a need for social mobility and integration, which can only be provided by the 'right' ideology, into a life of crime. This character, or indeed outright criminal characters, dominate the plots of Peronist films such as *Barrio gris*, *Del otro lado del Puente*, anti-Peronist films such as *Detrás de un largo muro*, and films that are politically ambiguous (or at least not explicitly Peronist or anti-Peronist) such as *El secuestrador* and *Alias Gardelito*. When they were not involved in acts of wrongdoing on screen, villera/os tended to be symbolically annihilated, to use Gerbner's term. In other words, they were peripheral, passive and dependent on 'outsider' saviours, as is evident in *Suburbio* and *El candidato*, *Yo tengo fe*, and the otherwise anomalous film *Puerto Nuevo*. Often, moreover, these films reinforced traditional gender values while representing villera/os. This resulted in portrayals that occasionally cast high-status women in central roles but rarely did so with those native to villas.

The trends developed in narrative cinema in the 1950s and 1960s were dismantled to some degree by the radical documentary filmmakers of the same era. Kohon redeemed villera/os by portraying them as hardworking and omitting overused references to criminality in *Buenos Aires*. Birri did the same in *Tiré die*. In these non-fictional productions, male and female villa inhabitants work in vain towards inclusion in a developmentalist economy in which there is seemingly no room for their assimilation. By departing from the trends of narrative cinema, these radical filmmakers underscored the significance of film in facilitating the social integration of those experience severe poverty. By foregrounding the voices of villera/os, these directors realized the significant role of the social documentary in the construction of a more complex understanding of poverty. As this thesis later concludes, a complex understanding of villas can and should be facilitated by filmmakers. Getino and Solanas, the leaders of the militant movement Third Cinema, were also unyielding in their promotion of a new type of cinema that was liberated from the colonizing influence of European and U.S. culture. This being their mindset, they disregarded previous efforts to entertain audiences while representing the dispossessed, and further eschewed the traditional take on poverty through an alternative aesthetic that echoed a call for an alternative, Marxist approach to structuring Latin American societies. Nonetheless, in its promotion of Latin American unity, their documentary *La hora de los hornos* obstructs a nuanced appreciation of the local circumstances within which villas developed. Thus, while radical in its production values and ideological message, *La hora de los hornos* is perhaps less effective than documentaries such as *Buenos Aires* and *Tire dié* in establishing an understanding of the impoverished, marginalized circumstances that are specific to villas.

A comprehensive cinematic view of villas was not established during the 1970s. During this time, in fact, villera/os were again symbolically annihilated. They were forced off the screen by a dictatorship that simultaneously implemented a violent plan to remove them from cities. As these disappearances occurred, cinema tended to reinforce negative interpretations of the culture of poverty theory. In other words, there was a recurring implication that privation is self-inflicted and attributable to a reluctance to comply with the law and dominant moral codes. This stigmatizing act of victim-blaming also informed the anti-villera/o sentiment and eradication schemes of the time.

All these films established the boundaries of villa-centred representation, which remain intact today. As will be discussed later, many contemporary filmmakers still tend to engage with a limited range of themes (crime, gangs, violence, victimhood) and genres (drama, melodrama) when screening villas. This point paves the way for subsequent chapters of this thesis, which concludes that there is a need for a more complex understanding of villa communities in order to facilitate their integration into the wider society. Chapter four frames this argument in a transnational context, considering the degree to which local aspects of the villa are overlooked in international co-productions aimed at a global audience. This chapter asks whether contemporary films that mark the increasingly transnational nature of cinema compromise understandings of villa communities as they reach beyond Argentine frontiers. Chapter five discusses the limits of villa-centred portrayals by revisiting the idea introduced here, of the over-representation of criminal marginal males. This section considers the under-representation (again, the symbolic annihilation) of other genders and examines the few villa-centred productions that defiantly centralize females and transgender people that reside in informal communities. Chapter six shows that filmmakers who come from villas and aim to counteract the limited representations of their communities in fact reconstruct many of the narratives discussed in this chapter, thereby foregoing the opportunity to show alternative aspects of villas. The concept of radical cinema is also reconsidered and redefined in this chapter as it explores the different manners in which villera/o filmmakers challenge or accept traditional aesthetics to destigmatize their communities. Finally, the critique of capitalism, developmentalism and neoliberalism that is, almost without exception, implicit in the films analysed in this chapter, sets the scene for chapter three. Chapter three demonstrates how narratives about villas and poverty readopted a leftist critique, while also reappropriating images of violence, gangs and criminality, to comment on the Argentine government, society and economy after the return to democracy in 1983.

Chapter Three

Capitalism, Crisis and Villas in Post-Dictatorship Productions

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Marginalizing Villas in Early Post-Dictatorship Films (1984 – 1989)

After the return to democracy in 1983, free from many of the previous constraints of authoritarian censorship, artists began to recount the story of the so-called dirty war. As they set about coming to terms with the atrocities of the recent past, the crimes committed by the *junta* became a prominent theme in what is often referred to as *cine testimonial* [testimonial cinema]. *La historia oficial* [*The Official Story*] (dir. Luis Puenzo, 1985) is the most famous of these works. Puenzo's film won the Best Foreign Language Film Academy Award in 1986 by showing how military officers kidnapped and gave away children born to their prisoners, the so-called disappeared. Villas appeared in some of the films that reflected on the dictatorship, with directors reinforcing the settlements' traditional association with the Left by focusing on militancy and social activism in the areas.

It has been established that the leftist guerrilla group the *Montoneros* formed links in villas. For example, the influential writer Rodolfo Walsh, who held journalism workshops in Villa 31, was a member of the paramilitary group. The *cura villero* Father Carlos Mugica was a sympathizer of the *Montoneros* before he turned against violent means of rebellion. There were also prominent villera/o members of the organization such as Teófilo Tapia, whose life story is told in *Patria Villera: Villa 31 y Teófilo Tapia: Historia de una lucha* [*Villera/o Homeland: Villa 31 and Teófilo Tapia: Story of a Struggle*] (Konfino 2015: 89-103). Less organized forms of rebellion also took place against PEVE from 1976, some instances of which are documented by the journalist Cristian Alarcón in his nonfictional literary narrative *Si me querés, quereme transa* [*If You Love Me, Love Me as a Drug Dealer*]: 'todavía late entre los pobladores más antiguos de Villa del Señor la imagen de las mujeres de polleras y chinelas, con los chicos en brazos, frenando el paso de las máquinas' [the memory of women in skirts and sandals blocking the paths of bulldozers as they cradled babies, is forever etched in the memories of the oldest residents of Villa del Señor] (Alarcón 2015: 58). Despite such direct participation in acts of resistance, however, filmmakers initially represented villera/os as passive by nature. Therefore, even though villa inhabitants were not represented negatively in early post-dictatorship films, as to do so might have disrupted the denunciation of state terrorism, they were relegated to the periphery. This tendency is evident in *Todo es ausencia* [*Only Emptiness Remains*] (dir. Rodolfo Kuhn, 1984), a documentary in which relatives of disappeared citizens tell their traumatic

stories. Images of a villa appear as Marta Francese de Bettini recalls the volunteer work of her 21-year-old son Marcelo Bettini, the first of four members of her middle-class Evangelist family to be killed. In one of Kuhn's interviews, the mother suggests that the murderers could not comprehend the Christian values of their victims and so treated them as subversives. She states, 'sentíamos profunda admiración por ese compromiso que ellos habían tomado. Claro, pagaron con su vida' [we deeply admired the sacrifice they made. But they paid with their lives.] Marcelo's sister Marta Bettini de Devoto also commends his charitable spirit, 'toda la vida se preocupaba por los demás' [all his life he worried about others]. As they praise the victim's religious faith and sacrifices made by him in life and death, a Christ-like image is conjured up. With this romanticization of middle-class activists and militants, villera/os become, in the words of Marcelo's family, 'los pobres' [the poor] and 'los demás' [the others]: a mass of helpless victims served by the heroism and virtue of non-villera/os.

This attitude is also notable in the fact-based feature *La noche de los lápices* [*Night of the Pencils*] (dir. Héctor Olivera, 1986), in which the secondary-school students Pablo Díaz (Alejo García Pintos) and Claudia Falcone (Vita Escardó) teach and donate food in a villa before being captured and tortured (very similar scenes later reappeared in *Garage Olimpo* [*Olympic Garage*] [dir. Marco Bechis, 1999]). Other activists are shown tending to children in a makeshift medical centre, again exemplifying how the villa was used to bolster a sympathetic portrayal of socially conscious, nonconformist (albeit naïve) 'outsiders' (Crowder-Taraborrelli 2016: 16). Pablo distributes Marxist propaganda flyers picturing Che Guevara to a kindly woman whose humble dwelling, its doorway adorned by a picture of Eva Perón, again demonstrates the strong left-wing politicisation of the villa and the minor, sympathetic roles given to villera/o characters at this time.

Jeanine Meerapfel reconstructs a similar marginal space to Olivera's in *La amiga* [*The Friend*] (1989). The film follows a woman named María (Liv Ullman) as she searches for her son Carlos (Gonzalo Arguimbau), who was captured from a *Motoneros* base in the unofficial barrio Villa Itati, also known as La Cava [The Cave]. When the camera moves inside the thrashed hideout, broken lamps and withered flowers point towards the deaths of the absent guerrillas and symbolize the destructive impact of the dictatorship. A portrait of Eva Perón is again a significant part of the marginal mise-en-scène, as is an image of General San Martín. Thus, the film reinforces left-wing Peronists' appropriation of the image of the great liberator who, as a hero to all Argentines, already occupied the national consciousness as a symbol of freedom (Rein 2015: 73-75). As in *La noche de los lápices*, villa inhabitants are represented by fleeting images of playful children, while the ever-present violent threat within the marginal space is not posed by those who reside there, but by the plainclothes officers who monitor it. María's inability to locate, or even identify, the locals who witnessed her son's kidnapping also underlines the

invisibility of villera/os in early post-dictatorship films. Another brief image of the villa appears towards the end of *La amiga* when Raquel returns to democratic Argentina after having spent years exiled in Germany. She is told that Buenos Aires has been modernized as she travels along a new motorway towards the city centre. However, the continued existence of the informal settlement, which is glimpsed below a towering skyline, serves as a subtle reminder that Argentina's social, political and economic problems, and the disappeared that once occupied Villa Itati, will not simply vanish from history.

3.1.2 The Conquest of the Villa: Recentralizing Villera/os (1988 – 1989)

Crónicas villeras [*Villera/o Chronicles*] (dir. Marcelo Céspedes and Carmen Guarini, 1988) screens villas in a very different way to the films discussed so far in this chapter. By examining the effects of PEVE, the documentary empowers and mediates the voices of those dislodged from their homes. Céspedes and Guarini, who later produced the much-discussed testimonial documentary about the children of the disappeared *Los rubios* [*The Blondes*] (dir. Albertina Carri, 2003), individualise villera/os. These villera/os tell their life stories and recount their personal experiences of expulsion from an unofficial *barrio* that was located in Bajo Belgrano, unsettlingly close, as far as the authorities were concerned, to the upmarket areas in the north of the capital. One of the interviewees, the aforementioned villero activist Tapia, discusses his involvement with the *Comisión de Demandantes* [Plaintiffs' Commission]. This group was formed by Tapia and another defiant Villa 31 local, Efraín Medina Arispe, and led to the establishment of the *Coordinadora de Sobrevivientes de Villas de Emergencia de Capital Federal* [Organization of Survivors from Villas of the Federal Capital]. This organization comprised commissions from several villas. Assisted by lawyers from the Argentine Communist Party and provided with chapel meeting spaces by *curas villeros* who were generally members of the Christian-Marxist *Movimiento de Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo* [Movement of Priests for the Third World], the collective waged a legal battle against the Municipality of Buenos Aires and saved some families from eviction (Snitcofsky 2009: 18; 2012: 55). Céspedes and Guarini show how, despite an extreme scarcity of resources, construction cooperatives founded by resilient victims re-established villa communities by building new homes, hosting social events (a street party is held for national children's day) and making provisions for local infrastructure and services (a nursery and cultural centre are planned). As villera/o resistance to state terrorism is highlighted in this way, they become the heroes of their own story. One evictee gazes at shipping containers stacked high upon the land that he once called home, mourning the fact that his *barrio* was levelled to make way for the storage of multinational imports. Here, a connection between the state's cold-blooded treatment of the economically marginalized and its neoliberal policies is

clearly established. Villera/os are shown to have been, quite literally, alienated by economic as well as social policy. Thus, *Crónicas villeras* centralizes the villera/o in a manner that is unique up to this point in the post-dictatorship era, while retaining a critique of capitalist development that is evident in many of the films analysed thus far in this thesis.

Like *Crónicas villeras*, *La ciudad oculta* [*The Hidden City*] (dir. Osvaldo Andéchaga, 1989) foregrounds the villa as it recalls PEVE. Osvaldo Andéchaga reveals the horrors of the eradication of Ciudad Oculta through a critique of private property law that, with its Marxist overtones and commentary on the formation of the Argentine Republic, evokes Viñas's work. In the one of film's most thought-provoking scenes, the blonde, white-skinned teacher of a group of *mestizo* villera/o children including Roberto (uncredited) commends the Conquest of the Desert and General Roca's 'defensa de la libertad y de la propiedad privada, que era violada por el indio en sus permanentes incursiones' [defence of freedom and private property rights, which were violated by Indians in their constant raids]. The teacher also echoes Sarmiento by claiming that, for the sake of civilization and progress, 'fue necesario someter el indio por la fuerza en pos de su culturización y de su educación' [it was necessary to violently suppress the Indians in order to enlighten and educate them]. As the students are indoctrinated into a system intent on marginalizing them, clear comparisons are established between the natives dispossessed by Roca and those who have been criminalized by contemporary housing legislation. Villera/os are the new colonized group, then, and property laws have never been more explicitly set at the heart of the Argentine class conflict. Further confirming the symbolism of the teacher's comments, a classroom portrait of one of Roca's soldiers dissolves into a close-up of an aggressive reformatory warden shouting orders at the adult Roberto (Leandro Regúnaga), who has been locked up since childhood for seriously harming (and perhaps killing) two boys who stole the money he earned by selling confectionary on trains. Upon his release, Roberto forms a relationship with his neighbour, a politically informed Bolivian woman named Teresa (Isabel Quinteros). The interrogation of Roca's social legacy continues as she explains:

> La ciudad no solo es grande, también es blanca […] los negros somos nosotros […] es como si por una ley divina algunos acá nacieron para mandar y otros para ser mandados […] para alguna gente las cosas están bien así como están y esa es la gente que tiene la fuerza.
> [The city is not just big, it's white (…) we are the blacks (…) it's as if, because of a divine law, some were born to give orders to others (…) for some people things are good the way they are and those are the people with the power.]

From the outset, then, *La ciudad oculta* picks up where the NAC and Third Cinema left off, framing property law and capitalism in general as neocolonial forces and the root cause of contemporary inequality in Latin America. Significantly, moreover, Andéchaga diverged from the common representation of the villera/o as a gang member or criminal-victim figure.

3.1.3 Escape to New York: Pre-Crisis Poverty (1989 – 1997)

Argentina's return to democracy was accompanied by 'the eruption of severe economic and financial crises associated with the [dictatorship's] collapse' (Smith 1991: 46). Throughout the 1980s, tens of billions of dollars flooded outward by means of capital flight and payments of interest on mounting external debts. When the Peronist Carlos Menem assumed the presidency in 1989, his government responded to the crises, which had caused rampant hyperinflation, by restructuring the economy with neoliberal policies, as dictated by the IMF and World Bank-promoted Washington Consensus (Smith 1991: 45; Arestis 2004: 254). This led to economic deregulation, trade liberalization, the privatisation of state enterprises, the pegging of the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar (the Convertibility Plan) and the dismantling of public welfare and pension systems. While wealthier members of society benefited from these reforms, the economically marginalized, who had been won over by Menem's populist rhetoric, continued to suffer. Menem's project privileged the interests of big business and transnational firms, exacerbating inequality and widening the gap between the rich and poor (Filc 2011: 227).

As the free market reigned, state funding for production was cancelled and the number of national films screened hit an all-time low (Rocha 2009: 841). The corrupt president's favouring of the private sector and lack of concern for cultural production almost bankrupted the Argentine film industry. Only 17 films were released in 1991 and just ten were released in 1992 (Matheou 2010: 236; Pinazza 2014: 10). A mere five films were released in 1994, the least productive year since the introduction of sound film (Andermann 2012: 1). The neoliberal environment, reflected in the prioritization of profit over art, resulted in a tendency to imitate U.S. production styles, narrative structures and product placement values in the early to mid-1990s. This sheds some light on why cinematic images of informal settlements were virtually non-existent around this time. Nonetheless, as a national debate ensued between those who supported the business-minded approach to financing and those who wanted the state to reduce the influence of the market on culture, the INCAA began to finance more independent projects and introduced specific funding for short films and first-time directors (Pinazza 2014: 10). What became known as the New Cinema Law, passed in 1994, rescued the national industry by imposing cinema ticket and video rental taxes that were partially reallocated to filmmakers.

Quotas were introduced to ensure that Argentine features appeared in cinemas, while private television companies were encouraged to make films. With these new regulations in place, the number of national productions increased again. In 1997, 28 films were released and Argentine cinema outperformed Hollywood in the internal market (Falicov 2003: 53). These changes opened doors for filmmakers such as Adrián Caetano, Bruno Stagnaro, Lucrecia Martel and Pablo Trapero, who would lead the second NAC movement with unapologetic, visceral images of poverty.[3]

Fernando Musa, who first entered the industry as the second assistant director on *La ciudad oculta* and studied at the INCAA film school, became one of the benefactors of these changes. After winning the private broadcasters' 'telefilms' screenplay prize and receiving funding from the INCAA, he was able to make his directorial debut in *Fuga de cerebros* [*Brain Drain*] (1998). The film straddles either side of a turning point in national filmmaking, demonstrating the mainstream production values that were prominent during the early to mid-1990s and a storyline about poverty that is typical of the eminent second NAC movement, with which Musa is not generally associated. *Fuga de cerebros* becomes a mainstream-NAC crossover production by focusing on delinquents who occupy marginal spaces including Villa 21 and commit crimes yet remain non-violent. Musa, in fact, acknowledged the benevolent nature of his characters and sentimentality of his plot, 'es una historia de ladrones con un corazón así de grande' [a story about thieves with hearts of gold] (*La Nación* 1997: n.p.). Imagining a less threatening informal *barrio* than those seen in post-2001 cinema, the feature demonstrates how, before the crisis took hold, concerns about poverty and the marginal other had yet to reach a critical point among Argentines. The director's glossy portrayal of the villa gave rise to disparaging reviews. Unfavourable comparisons were made between *Fuga de cerebros* and the apparently more authentic realist films of the first NAC, particularly those made by Musa's family relative Favio, who *Fuga de cerebros* is dedicated to (Castagna 1998: 14; *La Nación* 1997: n.p.). The very appearance of the villa, nonetheless, shows how Musa pinpointed anxieties that would later come to define the second NAC. Joanna Page argues that the resurgence of realism after the crisis represents a fear of poverty that was seen by many as a very palpable and imminent threat, while the more fantastical nature of pre-crisis films underlines a reduced sense of urgency in relation to the same issue (Page 2009: 95-97). *Fuga de cerebros* lends credence to this point, given that it does not rely heavily on realism and includes many fantastical scenes. In fact, in line with early to mid-1990s trends, it demonstrates conventional tropes that are most notable in an upbeat ending that is at odds with the otherwise tragic plot. The protagonist Fideo (Nicolás Cabré) and his homeless friend Panta (Luis Quiroz) are killed as they attempt to realize

[3] For a detailed discussion about the emergence and characteristics of the second NAC movement, see *Other Worlds: New Argentine Film* (Gonzalo Aguilar, 2008).

their dream of driving to the United States via the Pan-American Highway in a stolen car. They are pursued and shot dead by the corrupt police officer Gordo Sosa (Enrique Liporace), who also previously murdered their disabled peer Rengo (Brian Forciniti). Rather than conclude the film with his bird's-eye view of the police standing over the marginalized adolescents' bodies, as would be done a short time later in the second NAC's breakthrough film *Pizza, birra, faso* [*Pizza, Beer and Cigarettes*] (dirs. Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro, 1998), Musa chooses to include additional scenes of New York City to counteract the pessimism of the bloodbath. As the camera circles the Statue of Liberty, the boys are heard celebrating their posthumous arrival to the Big Apple. Evidently, then, Musa's film merges elements of the mainstream works of the first half of the decade and the numerous gritty films about poverty that began to appear soon after its release.

Somewhat ironically, despite its mainstream and commercial elements, *Fuga de cerebros* can be read as a challenge to the extreme brand of capitalism that dominated Argentine politics in the 1990s. The director exposes a side of Buenos Aires that challenged the official line that Menemism was synonymous with development (Chamorro 2005: 57-58, 61). Only the most destitute of zones in the south of the city appear, while wealthier *barrios* are nowhere to be seen. The locations include the cramped apartment where Fideo resides with his abusive brother Oveja (Diego Topa) and their mostly absent mother, and the villa where their boss Coco (Alberto Busaid) and stilt-walker friend Carlitos (Lautaro Perotti) live. Clearly, these spaces and the citizens who inhabit them have not experienced any of the apparent progress of the 1990s. The boys are left with the crumbs from the table of capitalism as they struggle for integration by stealing consumer items, which they sell to Coco. This way of surviving leaves them at the mercy of the black market. When Fideo asks the old man for a fair price, he is met with the response, 'en el mercado hay muchos y cada día valen cada vez menos. La primera vez te di demás porque sos un amigo, pero eso hoy en día sería hacer beneficencia' [there are many people in the market and the items are worth less each day. The first time I overpaid you because you are a friend but today that would be like giving to charity]. The protagonists' financial instability, then, is obviously the cause of their social exclusion and ignites the conflicts that they experience.

This becomes evident when they get into a fight with a wealthier boy who refuses to pay for their entry to a nightclub. They are arrested, but the rich boy is released when he reveals that his father is a high-ranking military officer. While this constitutes a criticism of Menem's pardoning of the human rights crimes committed by the dictatorship, it also implies that class inequalities manifest in the legal system and a privileged socioeconomic status can place citizens above the law. Meanwhile, upward mobility remains impossible for the young protagonists. Even the savings that Fideo and Panta manage to scrape together for their escape are stolen by Oveja. Fideo confronts Oveja in the strip club where he finds his brother spending the money on

prostitutes and alcohol. However, the protagonist is thrown out of the establishment by security guards. The Oriental theme of the club, which is located in Chinatown and called China, again underlines the central characters' lack of mobility and the state's covering up of Argentina's impoverished reality. In the end, Fideo and Panta's final car chase comes to a tragic end when they realize that they don't have sufficient fuel – an obvious symbol of the global capitalist market – to escape Sosa.

3.1.4 New Argentine Fears: Screening Capitalism in Crisis (1998 – 2011)

Menem's neoliberal reforms initially yielded positive results, improving national productivity and increasing profits for businesses (Salvia 2015: 331). However, as recounted in documentaries such as *Memoria del saqueo* [*Social Genocide*] (dir. Fernando Solanas, 2004) and *La Toma* [*The Take*] (dir. Avi Lewis, 2004), the worst social and economic crises ever experienced in Argentina were to come. Signs of decline appeared in 1997 when unemployment and poverty increased as workforces in privatised enterprises were downsized (Carranza 2005: 67). The large amounts borrowed from the IMF and World Bank during the 1990s to sustain convertibility ensured that money continued to leak from the economy through debt servicing (Nataraj and Sahoo 2003: 1641-1643; Salvia 2015: 327). With the dollar peg and trade liberalization in place, imports became more accessible to Argentines, increasing the financial flow outward. Correspondingly, exports became uncompetitive and production costs could not be lowered by reducing wages because employee protection laws prohibited such action. The Brazilian *real*, devalued threefold in 1999, offered better value to foreign investors than the peso, inflaming Argentina's financial problems. The Brazilian devaluation also meant that Argentina lost a great deal of its primary export market, since the prices of Argentine produce tripled there. The worsening current account deficit caused by the import-export imbalance meant that the dollar peg became increasingly unsustainable (Nataraj and Sahoo 2003: 1642). Moreover, Argentina was not exporting enough to pay the interest accumulating on its foreign debts (Bonnet 2006: 170).

Realizing that a major devaluation of the peso was required to rectify this situation, citizens rushed to banks to withdraw their savings. The looming abolition of convertibility would prove catastrophic for them, as deposits held in foreign (mainly U.S.) currency would revert to the weakened peso and destroy their value. On 3 December 2001, Domingo Cavallo, the Minister of Economy responsible for introducing convertibility, restricted cash withdrawals in a desperate measure to curtail the run on banks. This freeze became known as the *corralito* (Carranza 2005: 71). The *corralito* ignited nationwide protests referred to as *cacerolazos* because protestors would take to the streets and strike pots and pans. There was also looting and

conflicts between protestors and police (Morello 2002: 26). At least 26 people were killed in these riots (Arie and Cave 2001: n.p.). Then, as the year of 2001 came to a chaotic end, Cavallo and President Fernando De la Rua (who had been elected Menem's successor in 1999) resigned. In what have since become infamous scenes, De la Rua fled the Casa Rosada by helicopter in order to escape the furious crowds that had gathered in the Plaza de Mayo. His exit led to a fortnight of unrest in which five different presidents assumed office (Arie 2011: n.p.). Argentina's neoliberal project had failed disastrously. The nation could no longer pay its debts and as 'the world witnessed the largest sovereign default in history', the catastrophic potential of extreme capitalism became abundantly clear (Helleiner 2005: 951).

Despite a dramatic decrease in the taxes redistributed to Argentine filmmakers due to falling box office takings, production did not wane as considerably as one may have expected after the meltdown. Whereas 45 films were released in 2001, 37 were released in 2002. A boom then followed, with 46 screened in 2003. This number increased to 54 and 65 in 2004 and 2005, respectively, before dropping only slightly to 58 in 2006. These figures represent the results of a decrease in production costs following the devaluation of the peso (Rocha 2009: 842, 848-849). After this seminal moment, particularly grim images of poverty began to reflect the impact of the crisis on the national consciousness and on cultural production. In these features of the second NAC, neorealism was revived to 'expose the harsh realities that lie beneath the image of Buenos Aires as a modern, sophisticated city' (Leen 2008: 466). Returning to the style that Birri brought to Argentina four decades earlier proved to be the most cost-effective solution for directors operating within a climate of national bankruptcy, since it involved using untrained and inexperienced actors who belonged to the social demographics represented, amateur equipment, and natural sound and lighting. Improvised dialogue and settings also allowed directors to reduce costs and take advantage of the minimal resources at their disposal at any given moment. As well as offering a pragmatic solution to funding difficulties, neorealism served as an effective means of representing the growing sense of immanent socioeconomic descent. As they deal with capitalism in crisis, the sense of anxiety inherent in these works stems not from the thought of becoming a member of the working poor, but of falling to the lowest depths of the social hierarchy during a process of pauperization, which is described by Marxists as an inherent element of capitalism in crisis (Bottomore 1991: 411-412).

These changing narratives of poverty were often characterised by images of crime that were more distressing that those seen in *Fuga de cerebros* and earlier 1990s films. Page notes a general shift in the way crime was represented in Argentina at this time by comparing its fantastical and even glamorous nature in pre-crisis films to its brutal and bloody reality in post-crisis features (Page 2009: 94-96). She also states that images of crime in the immediate post-crisis era deliver the Marxist message 'that capitalism produces its own criminals' (Page 2009:

88). Marx and his fellow father of Marxism Frederic Engels thought that deviance was an expression of a 'sense of hopelessness' caused by the exploitation of labour, while criminologists have drawn on Marxism to argue that capitalism promotes the criminalization of marginalized groups for the benefit of the rich (Ugwudike 2015: 78-79). In addition, the global rise of neoliberalism has been linked to increased rates of both white and blue-collar crime. This is commonly attributed to the system's promotion of competition, individualism and consumerism (Whitehead and Crawshaw 2012: 38-40). These criticisms are often heavily reinforced in the films about poverty released after the failure of Argentina's neoliberal project, initially surfacing at the dawn of the second NAC in *Pizza, birra*, *faso*. The film is highly comparable to *Fuga de cerebros* in that it focuses on a group of young delinquents who cannot achieve upward mobility by legitimate or illegitimate means. Stagnaro and Caetano's story is much more harrowing than Musa's, however. This is perhaps best demonstrated in a scene that clearly references *Los olvidados* as it shows the central characters Pablo (Jorge Sesán) and Cordobés (Héctor Anglada) stealing from a beggar with a physical disability. *Pizza, birra, faso* also foregoes an appeasing, Musa-esque finale and the credits roll over an aerial shot of the body of Córdobes, who has been murdered by police while trying to flee to Uruguay (much like his counterparts in *Fuga de cerebros*) after holding up a nightclub with his peers. Other films from this time construct equally unnerving representations of poverty. *Bolivia* (dir. Adrián Caetano, 2001), a tragic black and white drama, centres on Freddy (Freddy Flores). The Bolivian immigrant is exploited in his job at a restaurant in Buenos Aires and targeted by a xenophobic customer named Oso (Oscar Bertea), who is an unemployed victim of the recession. Recurring shots of clocks mark a countdown to the pair's final confrontation in which Oso shoots and kills the protagonist. Caetano's subsequent film *Un oso rojo* [*A Red Bear*] (2002) is set in dusty, dilapidated post-crisis suburbs that recall the wild, lawless towns of the Western genre. Its gun-toting central character, again called Oso (Julio Chávez), is released after spending years in prison for killing a police officer. His efforts to earn a living as a cab driver are fruitless and, needing money to save his daughter and ex-wife from eviction, he gets involved in a heist in which he kills another policeman with casual ease. After being double-crossed, Oso brutally ends the lives of his accomplices, confirming the hard-hitting nature of the second NAC.

Villa 21 forms part of the brutal Argentine underbelly where *El polaquito* [*The Little Polish Boy*] (dir. Juan Carlos Desanzo, 2004) unfolds. Although Desanzo is not usually associated with the second NAC and began developing his script in 1994, it was not until the era of the crisis that his film was completed. Indeed, the timing of *El polaquito*'s release may be explained by the compatibility between its narrative and the gritty trends of the second NAC. Desanzo employs neorealism to create an 'appalling [and] chastening […] critique of a system that creates child-exploiting mafias' (Holland 2003: 41). The use of realism is congruent with the second NAC

and is notable in the concerned and fearful facial expressions of members of the public who thought that they were witnessing real events when they saw his reconstruction of gangsters striking minors in public. The true story represents the staged suicide of Polaquito, a villa-born but now homeless adolescent, by his exploiters in 1994. Polaquito is played by Abel Ayala who, like his character, actually lived in the chaotic Constitución train station where much of the narrative is set. Fernando Roa, another previously homeless actor (who has a minor role as a street child in *Fuga de cerebros*) plays Vieja, the slightly older friend of Polaquito who commits armed robberies to survive. The experiences of Polaquito, his sister Chela (Laura Espínola), love interest Pelu (Marina Glezer) and Vieja reflect the injustices inherent in Argentina's neoliberal project. While the boy imitates the legendary tango singer Roberto 'El Polaco' Goyeneche in the hope of receiving cash from train passengers, the girls are forced to sell their bodies. The theme of the train aligns *El polaquito* with films discussed in chapter one such as *Tire dié*, which also developed leftist critiques of development and capitalism. The teenagers' boss Rengo (Roly Serrano), who is also Pelu's stepfather and whose status as a more violent version of Coco in *Fuga de cerebros* again demonstrates the hard-hitting nature of portrayals of poverty after 1997, takes their earnings. In order to protect his business, Rengo bribes police and allows them to take advantage of the teenagers under his control. One officer rapes Pelu and Polaquito. Thus, sexual assault becomes a manifestation of the exploitation that the homeless are subjected to in an underground business that is a microcosm of a wider, flawed socioeconomic model. When Polaquito tries to leave Rengo's operation and is jailed, his holding officer sums up the nature of this system:

> Decime pibe, ¿cómo vas a sacar los pies del plato? Es como si yo mañana le diría al comisario '[…] hago la mía, no laburo más para usted'. No señor, no se puede. Hay que respetar los códigos, mientras el sistema esté vivo y no se arme quilombo, ganamos guita todos.
> [Tell me kid, how can you be so disloyal? I would never say to the police chief '(…) I'm doing my own thing now, I no longer work for you'. No Sir, you can't do that. You have to respect the rules. As long as the system works and nobody causes any problems, we all profit.]

As is suggested by this comment, the oppressors control and exploit the young characters for their own benefit. In an effort to retain his grip on Polaquito, Rengo insidiously insists, 'acá tenés un laburo, tenés donde morfar […] tenés un futuro bárbaro por aquí' [you have a job here, you have somewhere to eat (…) you have a great future here]. Polaquito sees through these lies, however, and he and Pelu continue vying for control of their own labour. Their aim is to busk on

trains with an independent song and dance routine and earn enough money to escape to Brazil. To accomplish this, Polaquito tries to keep some of his earnings, but he is caught and beaten by Rengo. Later, he ventures to the affluent neighbourhood of Nuñez to beg without supervision but is threatened for encroaching on the territory of another gangster. Things seem to take a turn for the better when he manages to steal a high-tech camera and a car radio. However, recalling Fideo's experience in *Fuga de cerebros*, he is cheated by a shop owner who pays far below even black-market value for the items. When Pelu becomes pregnant, she and Polaquito try to abscond to launch their travelling show. Their plan is quickly thwarted by Rengo's goons, however. Polaquito is assaulted, framed for the possession of hard drugs and thrown from a hurtling train. After escaping from hospital, he holds Rengo, who has ruined his dreams of having a family by forcing Pelu to get an abortion, at gunpoint. However, Polaquito is ambushed by his boss's gang, who stage his suicide by hanging him in the train station. Clearly, the protagonists are prohibited from withdrawing from the system because their subjugation is fundamental to its functioning. Thus, given the post-neoliberal context of *El polaquito*, it reaffirms the idea that 'inequality and poverty are functional components of capitalism' (Peet 1975: 564).

Although a collective label is not commonly used to refer to Argentine films produced from the late 2000s onwards, it appears that the spontaneity of the second NAC has been replaced with a more conventional, scripted format. Martín Piroyansky, who appeared in the acclaimed film *XXY* (dir. Lucía Puenzo, 2007) and directed *Abril en Nueva York* [*April in New York*] (2013) and *Voley* [*Volleyball*] (2015), has spoken about using improvisation only sparingly to re-energize rehearsed performances on set (Kuschevatzky 2016: n.p.). Aguilar identifies a post-epic era that coincided with Argentina's bicentennial celebrations in 2010, noting the rejection of minimalism in biopics about historical figures such as San Martín and Juan and Eva Perón. It is also notable that, although post-second NAC directors have tended not to explicitly take sides in the pro-Kirchner versus anti-Kirchner debates that have been at the forefront of national politics since 2003, they have continued to comment on inequality and class fragmentation as they scrutinize a society that has not recovered from crisis (D'Espósito 2005: 42; Fernández Irusta 2015: n.p.). Villas have been used as spaces from which this discourse has been delivered.

In *El resultado del amor* [*The Effect of Love*] (dir. Eliseo Subiela, 2007), Martín (Guillermo Pfening) is a lawyer who has been forced into the profession by his parents. He is completely disillusioned with his career and what amounts to an arranged marriage to the daughter of his father's business partner. After witnessing an older colleague drop dead from a heart attack, Martín decides to resign from his well-paid job and reject the norms of his social class. He files for divorce and relinquishes his house and car without engaging in a property battle with his ex-wife. Leaving his previous life behind, he takes up residence in a camper van and begins to flee what he calls the fatal effects of middle-class boredom. This new lifestyle allows him to avoid

the pressures that resulted in his ex-colleague's death and embrace his passion of playing jazz and blues on his cherished saxophone. These events appear to form part of a socialist or anti-neoliberal subtext. As Martín renounces traditional ideals and begins busking, he redistributes his wealth by handing over his savings to his audience. His mother explains this by stating that he was always affected by witnessing poverty. These choices result in Martín meeting and falling in love with a villa resident named Mabel (Sofía Gala Castiglione). The couple take up residence on Martín's mobile home, where they dismantle class barriers by remaining unconfined to specific *barrios* and exchanging values and ideas linked to their socioeconomic backgrounds. While Martín introduces Mabel to Billie Holiday, whose jazz suggests 'middle-class' cultural tastes in Argentina, Mabel teaches Martín how to dance to Rodrigo, an iconic *cuarteto* singer associated with working-class audiences. Thus, it appears that love, happiness and health are most likely achieved by rejecting materialistic, consumerist values and replacing relationships that are akin to financial agreements with those that are not based on profit. Mabel's situation suggests that these things are also achieved by leaving the villa, the development of which, significantly, is never called for. Her brother Hugo (Matías Marmorato), a psychiatric patient who is awaiting the arrival of aliens to take him away, advises her, 'rajá de la villa cuanto antes. Yo creí que mi plan de fuga era perfecto […] salvate' [leave the villa as soon as you can. I thought my escape plan was perfect (…) save yourself]. As the film's title implies, it is the strength that Mabel finds in her intimate connection with Martín that allows her to survive her brushes with death, which are caused by a HIV infection that she contracted either after being raped in the villa or by working as a prostitute. Thus, rejecting the system, which creates the class divisions symbolized by villas and well-to-do *barrios* of the capital's north side, is a life-affirming move.

It is precisely this point that has led the melodrama to be labelled by critics as naïve and saccharine (Fouz 2007: 28). In an interview with *Clarín*, the director disregards such negative comments and states:

> A los dos los salva el amor que supera límites, fronteras sociales y culturales. Algo que me parece absolutamente cierto, a riesgo de parecer cursi […] El amor es lo único que nos puede salvar.
> [Both characters are saved by a love that overcomes restrictions, and social and cultural boundaries. At the risk of sounding corny, I believe that this is absolutely true (…) Love is the only thing that can save us]. (Commisso 2008: n.p.)

This comment further reinforces a call for social reconstruction driven by the rejection of the individualistic, profit-oriented values that are central to neoliberalism and result in social inequality and crisis at both a personal and economic level.

In *Paco* (dir. Diego Rafecas, 2009), the protagonist Francisco 'Paco' Blank (Tomás Fonzi) is a nuclear physics graduate and the son of Senator Ingrid Blank (Esther Goris).[4] He falls in love with Nora (Charo Bogarín), a cleaner in the Palace of the Argentine National Congress. After serenading Francisco with her indigenous Toba song, she takes him to her home in a villa and introduces him to paco. This drug is a cheap and highly-addictive combination of cocaine paste, kerosene and any number of variables that may include baking soda, amphetamines, crushed glass and other substances. The narrative's non-linear timeline then leaps forward to the moment when Francisco finds himself strung out in a police holding cell. His mother bribes Nina (Norma Aleandro) and Juanjo (Luis Luque) with state funds to secure a much sought-after space in their private rehabilitation clinic and ensure that Francisco can leave jail. As he recovers in the clinic, flashbacks show Nora being forced to have sex with various members of a villa-based drug gang in exchange for a dose of paco. Afterwards, the young woman hangs herself in her home. In an act of revenge, Francisco travels to South Africa to obtain explosives, which he plants in the dealers' factory. Seconds before his bomb detonates, he notices the gang leader's young son entering the building. Although he attempts to raise the alarm, the child is killed along with the criminals. After his rehabilitation, Francisco confesses and is imprisoned, despite having had the opportunity to get away with the crime due to a lack of evidence against him.

Paco received an overwhelmingly negative reception upon its release. Critics pointed out its contrived acting, pseudointellectual philosophical references and inauthentic soap opera-like aesthetic (Rodríguez, M. 2010: 31; D'Espósito 2011: 50). Nonetheless, the film is worthy of discussion as it uses villas and poverty as symbols of the catastrophic impact of neoliberalism, which continues to be felt almost a decade after the crisis. Nora is an oppressed labourer. Her low-paying job in the congressional building clearly implies state culpability for her impoverished, oppressed existence in the villa and resulting addiction. This critique of post-crisis society is augmented by a damning portrayal of Argentina's healthcare systems based on Rafecas's experience as a recovering addict (Ruchansky 2010: n.p.). Ultimately, tragic death is the only alternative for those who cannot afford private medical care, namely villa inhabitants such as Nora. This idea that a nation cannot rely solely on the private sector, which denies essential services to the economically marginalized, underscores the flaws of neoliberalism. This discourse is not black and white, however. State institutions also fail to treat citizens with dignity and respect, to say the least. A public rehabilitation facility ironically misnamed Vuelta a la Vida

[4] A play on words is notable in that Paco is both a hypocorism of the name Francisco and the name of an illegal drug.

[Back to life] holds patients against their will in order to secure government funding. Flor (Valeria Medina) and Dany (Roberto Vallejos) are tortured when they try to leave and must take up arms in order to escape. Similarly, Belén (Sofía Castiglione) is held captive in a public psychiatric hospital where she is raped by its head doctor before being rescued by her parent Susu (Willy Lemos) and sent to Nina and Juanjo's centre. A negative representation of police is also evident when officers cooperate with the gang and escort the leader to his factory. Such an indictment of law enforcement agencies sits ambivalently alongside the tragic consequences of taking the law into one's own hands. In this sense, the complex discourse on government institutions also highlights a tension pertaining to notions of individualism. As suggested in the accidental killing of the gang leader's son, the state's failure to maintain properly functioning institutions does not mean that personal action is more effective than government intervention when it comes to establishing a just society. This message is further clarified when Francisco's ultimate confession and cooperation with the law are moralized as the correct decision.

The importance placed on collective action is also reflected in the idea that the failure of the family (a symbol of nation) may have a devastating impact on the individual. Most of those receiving treatment in the private centre are middle class and blame their dysfunctional families for their addictions. The patients' parents include the crooked senator who uses her son's problems to gain positive publicity, a pair of promiscuous drug users, an alcoholic and a prostitute, the last two of whom openly admit to having neglected their children. Indio (Juan Palomino), a working-class staff member and previous patient, also relapses when his ex-wife denies him access to his son. Thus, the unity of the family is clearly imperative to individual well-being. This is not to say, however, that individual responsibility is rejected. Two of the addicts strongly deny any connection between their parents and their personal struggles. Furthermore, Nina counsels her patients and advises them that, while one's family is important, individual action is the key to recovery. Once cured, Francisco comes to terms with this and gladly accepts that, 'al final siempre estamos solos' [in the end we are always alone].

However, this statement about individual responsibility cannot be fairly applied in Nora's case. The poverty and social exclusion that she experiences in the villa prohibit triumph through personal action alone. The villera is not represented as being capable of defending herself. Her well-being cannot be achieved without effective government action, such as the allocation of funds to worthwhile social programmes. Through this image of the passive villa inhabitant, while not rejecting individualism or capitalism, Rafecas appreciates the need for state intervention. As far as the director is concerned, the system is not fundamentally flawed and existing laws suffice. Problems lie, rather, in the absence of responsible implementation of legislation. This is suggested when the popular journalist Nelson Castro appears on the senator's television set and announces, 'al narcotráfico hay que prevenirlo y combatirlo con la ley' [drug

trafficking should be prevented and fought with the law]. What is required for social justice to exist is not revolution, but the cleaning up of state structures and stronger community values, all of which are impeded by political corruption and personal greed. Instead of calling villera/os to arms, *Paco* suggests that more powerful social actors must instigate social change. Hence, the film returns to disempowering modes of representation (evident in *El candidato*, for example) wherein the stereotypical poor appear unable to protect themselves. The crisis of capitalism, and resulting drugs epidemic and lack of access to rehabilitation facilities, make those living in the villa utterly dependent on more powerful, wealthier individuals.

Javier Van de Couter's melodrama *Mía* (2011) is based on the true story of Villa Aldea Rosa, an informal settlement founded by members of the LGBTQ community in 1995 and destroyed by the Argentine state three years later. The inhabitants, who can only earn a living as *cartoneras* [informal waste collectors] moonlighting as prostitutes, are faced with the constant threat of the demolition of their homes. The figure of the *cartonera/o* represents the enduring effects of the failure of neoliberalism. The damage to labour market conditions caused by the collapse, and the increase in the price of recyclables brought about by the devaluation of the peso, led to a drastic rise in the number of informal waste collectors operating in Argentina (Escliar et al. 2005: 7; Chronopoulos 2006: 168; Scorer 2016: 162-165). Rubbish picking was legally considered a form of theft before the crisis, but political pressure caused by the thousands of newly unemployed people forced to recycle for a living led to its decriminalization by Kirchner's left-wing government in 2003 (Chronopoulos 2006: 171). Hence, these characters are strongly associated with the crisis, the words *cartonera*/*o* and villera/o often being used synonymously after 2001 (Aguilar 2015: 195). One of the *cartoneras*, Ale (Camila Sosa Villada), was declared male at birth but identifies as female and dreams of becoming a mother. While collecting waste in a middle-class district, she finds a diary in which a psychologically ill woman named Mía documented her life in the lead up to her suicide. Ale is touched by the story and attempts to return the book to the author's widower Manuel (Rodrio de la Serna) and their ten-year-old daughter Julia (Maite Lanata). The father, an office employee whose grief has driven him to alcoholism, rejects the gesture and becomes aggressive, attacking Ale and expressing contempt for her gender identity. Nevertheless, Ale continues to visit Julia and becomes increasingly maternal towards her. Manuel eventually realizes that they have bonded and hires Ale as a temporary nanny ahead of his and Julia's move to the south of Argentina. The film concludes as police demolish Aldea Rosa and attack the locals. As a distressed resident named Piba (Tatiana Giménez) flees the scene, Ale emerges from the rubble of the villa cradling the young woman's newborn baby. Though left homeless, it appears that she has accomplished her dream of forming a family, becoming a mother and, therefore, as she puts it, becoming complete as a human being.

The villa constructed in *Mía* is notably different to the one seen in *Paco*. The settlement is not a stereotypically disordered space. One critic even described its toy-like appearance as part of a laboured attempt to create empathy with the protagonists (Lima 2011: 32). A haven from the chaotic city, Aldea Rosa is awash with sunlight and surrounded by fruit-bearing trees on the scenic banks of the River Plate. This utopian element of the marginal space is also reflected in the success of the alternative economic and social systems that have been established within. Aldea Rosa resembles a socialist commune that has not been contaminated by systems of monetary exchange. Residents survive by pooling their talents and resources for the overall benefit of the community. Ale makes clothing, which she gifts or exchanges for items and services that she needs. Her detachment from traditional monetary values is also demonstrated when she reassures Manuel that she is not looking for payment in exchange for Mía's diary. Later, when asked how much she charges for her nanny service, she apathetically asks Manuel to pay whatever sum he thinks appropriate. *Mía* will later be discussed as a transnational portrayal of the villa and as a representation of the gendered nature of poverty. In the present dicusssion, however, it is important to underscore the socialist critique evident in the unalienated nature of the Aldea Rosa. Liberated from the depersonalizing effects of the market, this settlement offers lessons to a materialistic middle-class sector in which personal relationships have been broken down by dominant values.

Elefante blanco [*White Elephant*] (dir. Pablo Trapero, 2012) is the most commercially successful villa-centred film made to date and demonstrates the social conscience that has defined Trapero's work since his first feature *Mundo grua* [*Crane World*] (1999), which dealt with exploitation in the construction industry. The titular white elephant refers to an enormous derelict building in Ciudad Oculta, where the film is mostly set. Character dialogue informs the audience that the project was the brainchild of the socialist politician Alfredo Palacios, who set out to build Latin America's largest hospital in 1937. Construction was halted after initial funding problems and later resumed by Perón after his rise to power. However, as a result of the coup d'état of 1955, this effort also failed almost as soon as it had begun (Hermann 2012: n.p.). For over 90 years, the building remained abandoned by successive governments unwilling or unable to accept the financial burden that came with completing the project. In 2018, Macri's government, which has initiated an ambitious plan to develop some villas, began demolishing the structure to make way for offices of the Ministry for Habitat and Human Development. By showing how the hazardous site of the 'white elephant' is home to around 300 families and serves as a shelter to many drug addicts, Trapero turns the hospital that never was into a concrete symbol of the problems experienced in the villas.

The main plot follows the terminally-ill *cura villero* Julián (Ricardo Darín), social worker Luciana (Martina Gusmán) and Belgian missionary Nicolás (Jérémie Renier). When a paramilitary

squad wipe out the Native American tribe in Nicolás's Amazonian parish in the opening scenes, he is taken to Ciudad Oculta by Julián, the parish priest. Here, he begins to deal with his survivor's guilt by helping his new colleagues to oversee a major construction project, which includes a new chapel, dining hall, crèche, medical clinic and houses. When political and religious leaders fail to deliver the money promised for the project, *Elefante blanco* echoes recent criticism about the state's past relationship with the Church and, in particular, accusations that senior members of the clergy including Jorge Bergoglio, who is now Pope Francis, collaborated in acts of state terrorism during the dictatorship. The obstruction of the funds also gives way to a subplot dealing with worker exploitation, one that has characterised Trapero's work since his directorial debut (Brooke 2013: 109). This theme suggests the marginalizing and poisonous nature of capitalism, which is reaffirmed at various moments throughout *Elefante blanco*. The opening scene, in which Julián has a brain scan in a clean, modern hospital, highlights the general lack of access to medical services in the villa and problematizes the strong reliance on the private sector to provide health cover to the public. This point, which recalls elements of Rafecas's critique, is also reflected in the towering presence of the vacant hospital in the villa. Moreover, through a cyclical trajectory of poverty alluded to in spoken references to the era of the dictatorship, Trapero shows how social mobility has always been denied to villera/os. Mugica's strong presence in the script (his fictional successor Julián visits his tomb, recites his prayer and mentions him in a memorial mass) means that the villa is again politicised as a radical, leftist space (Aguilar 2015: 202). When Julián visits a cancer survivor who claims to have been cured after praying at Mugica's tomb in Villa 31, he rows an old canoe along the Riachuelo. The river, which is contaminated by large amounts of industrial waste, is polluted by discarded Coca-Cola bottles and plastic supermarket bags. These images imply that big businesses create and exacerbate poverty. Here and in other scenes, the villa is framed in a symbolic manner that was discussed in chapter two and has become typical in fictional and journalistic media. Reflecting the unequal distribution of wealth, it appears to be squashed beneath the soaring skyscrapers of Buenos Aires's lavish commercial district and alienated from the outside world.

3.2 Between Marx and Menem: Alienating the Hidden Cities

The theory of alienation is one of the most influential aspects of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in which Marx argues that the condition (also known as estrangement) is a consequence of a society based on a system of private ownership and, as a result, divided into classes (Marx 2007b: 36). As the proletariat do not own the fruits of their labour, they begin to view them as hostile objects and become estranged from their work. These people produce within a capitalist society, not because of their supposed instinctive need to create, but because

they are coerced into generating a wage. Everything made is viewed in monetary terms only and human relationships suffer, demonstrating the dehumanizing and depersonalizing capacity of the system. Ultimately, according to Marx, the private ownership laws on which capitalism are founded conflict with human nature (called the species-being or species-essence) and detach people from the natural process of self-expression through production (Marx 2007b: 69; O'Malley 1977: xi). The concept of alienation has been applied across a range of disciplines. Sociologists understand 'loneliness as a kind of alienation […] found in the absence of intimacy with others' (Saleem 2014: 71). In psychology, alienation was famously perceived by Karen Horney as an 'escape into fantasy' from an 'unbearable reality situation' that results in the formation of idealized versions of the self (Horney 1946: 13; 2013: 23). These forms of alienation are experienced by many of the characters discussed in this chapter as a direct result of their poverty and marginalization.

The peripheral location of villas and villera/os in early films suggests the breakdown of human relations in Argentine society and the resulting physical and psychological alienation of the economically marginalized. When villera/os are re-centralized in *Crónicas villeras*, they are shown to have been, quite literally, cast aside by PEVE to make way for international trade. *El resultado del amor*'s message about the need to nurture human relationships again implies the depersonalizing nature of a severely fragmented and superficial contemporary society. In order to secure her emotional wellbeing, Mabel ceases her attempts to become wealthier through prostitution and begins volunteering as a clown called Clavelina at a children's hospital, while Martín stops practising law, thereby ceasing to support a fundamental pillar of an inherently unjust society. His musical performances allow him to take control of his labour and signify a reconnection with his creative capacities. Martín's saxophone is a fitting symbol of his journey of rediscovery, as this instrument often symbolizes the raw emotions that Subiela encourages the audience to reconnect with in order to re-establish human relationships. Since it is often played using improvisation and instinctive thought, the saxophone (and jazz music in general) is also, significantly, a cultural icon associated with romance and rebellion against social norms and the establishment (Cottrell 2012: 307-308, 321-326; Stam 2015: 148).

In *La ciudad oculta*, the suffering in the society constructed after Roca's Conquest of the Desert (which imposed the concept of private property on indigenous groups) is characterised by the alienation of Ciudad Oculta residents from their labour. Real archival images of the takeover of the Lisandro de la Torre factory are cut into the film. The state enterprise was founded by Perón in order to reverse the long-existing dominance of British and U.S. capital in the meat market, but was later privatised by Frondizi. The workers' heroic efforts to take control of the building and their labour were dealt with violently by state forces and failed to prevent the loss of over five thousand jobs (Salas 1990a: 21-22; Salas 1990b: 198). The conflict, which is

emblematic of Argentina's class struggle during a time when workers were suffering because of the IMF-promoted austerity measures that bolstered developmentalism, is incorporated into the script via Roberto's godfather Uña (Edgardo Suárez), who was one of the operatives made redundant. This event calls to mind Marxism's critique of the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist, who is driven by a desire to maximise surplus value, rather than by morals or empathy. These ideals lead to the downsizing and repression of the workforce (Smith 2012: 18-22). Indeed, the failed occupation of Lisandro de la Torre symbolizes the appropriation of the workers' productive capacities and their subsequent social alienation in the villa.

Villa inhabitants also experience physical alienation as a result of their marginalization. Exploitation, isolation and a sense of despondency are shown to be sustained by the prohibition of villera/o unions and activist groups. This forms part of a process of demotivation which, as highlighted in chapter one, was fundamental to PEVE and aimed to dismantle relationships between villera/os. Physical alienation is also evident in Roberto's repeated imprisonment and kidnapping in the final scene. This bodily separation from society has various negative consequences. When he returns to the villa after being released from the correctional facility on the first occasion, he finds himself estranged from his family, who have disappeared from Ciudad Oculta after years of hardship. As he puts it, his lack of professional training and education makes him a 'recién nacido' [new born]. 'Hay cosas que yo no sé' [there are things I don't know], he says, when he acknowledges that prison has destroyed his prospects for social integration and upward mobility. Villera/o alienation again becomes physical when evictees are displaced to empty fields at the city's margins. Roberto's elderly neighbour Don Ruiz (Vito Catalano), who becomes a homeless widower after military officers prohibit a taxi from entering the villa to take his wife to hospital, appears completely estranged. The ex-railroad mechanic's life has lost all sense of meaning since he was fired under circumstances similar to Uña's. As he reminisces passionately about his previous job and home at the beginning of the film, the economic and social policies of the dictatorship seem to have forced him into a state of severe psychological distress. The elderly man's anguish becomes worse when his dwelling is demolished. At this point, he sets up a solitary hut near a railway line and refuses to eat. He becomes so withdrawn and disturbed that he takes his own life by crawling in front of a one of the locomotives that previously represented his livelihood but have been transformed into something much more dangerous by the dictatorship's restructuring of the economy and society. As in Marxist discourse, then, the dismantling of human relationships, psychological breakdown and suicide are possible endpoints of a flawed method of governance (Brown 2012: 45). The exploitation of villera/os also forces them to retreat from the material world into their imaginations. As is the case with Don Ruiz, and in line with the psychoanalytical perspective, alienation again becomes 'the loss of significant relations with others' when Roberto describes sexual fantasizing as part

of his daily prison routine (Saleem 2014: 72). A similar sense of disillusionment and separation from his peers forces Uña to dwell on the past, which is portrayed through footage and still images of real trade union gatherings. His monologue reflects on the factory takeover attempt and laments the supposed solitude of the modern-day worker, 'no fuimos cagones, ahora estamos guacho. Tus amigos se fueron y uno no tiene con quien juntarse a pelear. ¡La gente tiene miedo, mierda! [We weren't cowards before, but we are now. Your friends left and there is nobody to fight alongside us. People are scared, damn it!]. A notably similar process of differentiation between 'today' and 'yesterday' occurs frequently in anthropological and sociological studies, in which villera/o interviewees remember the villa of yesteryear through a rose-tinted lens and compare the historical marginal person's honour and loyalty with the selfishness and recklessness of their contemporary counterparts (Tasín 2008: 62, 64, 73, 76; Tasín et al. 2012: 58; Alarcón 2012: 111-112, 126). Comments such as, 'se perdió el respeto' [they have lost all respect] are commonplace (Tasín 2008: 135). Even the criminals of days gone by are recalled as decent, having employed 'los codigos de lealtad y comportamiento ya extintos' [codes of loyalty and behaviour that are now extinct] (Alcarón 2012: 148). While drugs and gang violence certainly pose a bigger threat now than in previous decades, a certain romanticising of the past is evident in these studies. Here, as is the case with Uña's comment, the historical villa resident becomes an idealized self.

Uña eventually comes to terms with the idea that psychological impairment is not merely a state of mind and must be combatted in the physical world through social reconstruction. This reflects Marx's belief that alienation is not, as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach understood, 'rooted in the mind' (Cox 1998: 41). Such a materialist approach implies that 'human beings [are] shaped by the society they [live] in, but [can also] act to change that society' (Cox 1998: 41). Uña realizes this possibility:

> La gente es como el agua. A veces deja la costa seca, otras se viene toda junta y te humedece hasta el cogote. Solo hace falta un poquito de viento como cuando sopló en el Lisandro.
> [People are like the sea. Sometimes the tide goes out and the coast remains dry, other times it comes in up to your neck. All that is needed is some wind, like the one that blew at the Lisandro de la Torre factory.]

This 'wind' comes in the form of his attack on a neighbour, who secretly assists state officials to carry out evictions and destroy the houses and belongings of villa community members. The traitor is assaulted, stripped and hung from a tree by his feet, much to the satisfaction of other Ciudad Oculta residents. As the director cuts from Uña's monologue to a shot of the beaten man,

it becomes clear that Uña is responsible for the attack. This attack triggers the unification of the Ciudad Oculta residents, who decide to march towards a government building to demand justice. Hence, villera/os are unified through affirmative, concrete action. This idea is foreshadowed early in the film when Roberto's naïve expectation for change to happen naturally – 'algún día la cosa va a cambiar' [someday things will change] – is challenged by Teresa. She assures him, 'las cosas no cambian solas' [things don't change by themselves].

Poverty again leads to alienation in *Fuga de cerebros*. As well as giving rise to the misplaced optimism of the finale, the fantastical nature of the screenplay also allows for an effective representation of estrangement. The protagonists' lack of money forces them into a fantasy world. This is exemplified in Panta's experience of what appears to be maladaptive daydreaming, a psychological condition that 'usually occurs as a coping mechanism in response to trauma, abuse or loneliness' and forces sufferers to create a world to which they can escape to in times of distress (Tapu 2016: 891). It is telling that the homeless character flees reality during moments of mental anguish and that his fantasies stem from financial hardship. He imagines being with a beautiful model who adorns billboard advertisements for luxury consumer goods that he will never be able to afford. After his arrest he worries, 'casi me mata el cana, no? Si yo tuviera plata y una moto' [the cop nearly killed me, didn't he? If only I had money and a motorbike], before picturing the model flirting with him. Another of these fanciful utterances comes when Panta promises his imaginary sweetheart, 'mi amor, si yo tuviera guita, no tendrías que laburar' [if only I had money, I would take care of you, my love]. In a different scene, the homeless teen curses the exploitative practices of Coco before drifting into one of his dissociating daydreams about the beauty. Later, he takes his would-be girlfriend on an imaginary motorcycle jaunt through Buenos Aires which, with its superimposed image of the Statue of Liberty overlooking the River Plate, is transformed from its impoverished state into a fantastical version of Manhattan. Finally, he is mentally transported from an ominously stormy night that foreshadows his and Fideo's deaths to a beautiful summer meadow, where he shares a passionate kiss with the woman of his dreams.

Just as Panta envisions a loving physical relationship and prosperous future in New York, Carlitos claims that he will leave the villa to perform in a Patagonian circus. Coco casts doubt onto this assertion with good reason, suggesting that the stilts the boy constantly walks on will never truly elevate him above the poverty in which he exists. Fideo is also disconnected from reality and attempts to conceal and deny his misery in a variety of ways. Even the modern exterior of his apartment building is misleading, hiding the decrepit truth of its interior. Both he and Panta carry tennis rackets in order to appear wealthy. To reinforce this image, Fideo claims to have been born in the United States, where his estranged father, who is sentimentalized by the protagonist as a poetic intellectual, is waiting for him. However, it is obvious that the father

died or abandoned his family during his son's infancy. In addition, Fideo upholds his facade by exaggerating his level of fluency in English and musical talent. The song that he claims to be composing, much to the excitement of his peers and a group of men that he encounters in Villa 21, only contains two poorly written lines, which he recites in a voice devoid of melody: 'when I am looking into your eyes baby, I can see your eyes baby'. In one scene, Fideo kisses his villera love interest Diana (Jimena Anganuzzi) in front of a deliberately phony-looking backdrop. With its bluish night sky, oversized crescent moon and shooting stars, this backdrop would not be out of place in a Disney movie. Elsewhere, as he steals a vehicle, Fideo romanticises his actions by claiming that he is guided by an inner voice when he commits crime. In truth, however, he is influenced by Coco and his mother, who taught him to steal. Fideo lies to Diana, claiming to have bought her a bicycle that he, in fact, robbed. He also tries to impress the girl by picking her up in a stolen car that he purports to own. Thus, the marginal youth denies the nature of his impoverished reality and constructs an idealized self-image. This mirrors the delusions of Menemism, which created a false vision of its own. Ultimately, the protagonists cannot reach New York. In the same vein, neoliberal Argentina cannot be transformed into a country of the so-called First World, despite its efforts to imitate U.S. economic policy, align its currency with the dollar and market itself as a developed nation.

Desanzo's impoverished young characters experience a similar type of psychological alienation as a result of their exploitation. Like Fideo in *Fuga de cerebros,* Pelu invents stories about a loving father who is awaiting her arrival on foreign soil (in Brazil), even going so far as to falsify adoring letters from the absent parent. Similarly, Polaquito convinces himself that he is the father of Pelu's unborn child. Even though he is reminded by Vieja of how many men she has been forced to have sex with, 'he fastens onto Pelu as an escape, transforming her in his imagination into someone she's not prepared to be' or someone that her exploiters prevent her from becoming (Holland 2003: 42). As its title suggests, Polaquito's trademark tango 'Naranjo en Flor' [Flowering Orange Tree] employs natural imagery that is far removed from the ugly cityscape that he inhabits. It speaks of lost love and yearns for an ideal past, a fantasy that provides solace from a bleak present:

> ¿Qué importa el después?
> Toda mi vida es el ayer
> Que me detiene en el pasado
> [What does the future matter?
> My whole life is in the days gone by
> That hold me in the past].

Evidently, the control Rengo has over the boy results in his mental breakdown. This is evident during a critical moment of transition in which, after failing to escape the pimp and take control of his own labour, he carefully cradles a large insect before suddenly deciding to squash it. Here, the director captures Polaquito's decline and suggests that an inherently exploitative system isolates, dehumanizes and brutalizes the economically marginalized boy, turning him into a violent criminal and destroying his ability to form empathetic social relationships.

Marx argued that alienation results in commodity fetishism, a term that intentionally compares capitalism's instilling of illusionary monetary value upon goods, to 'religions that endow inanimate objects with supernatural powers' (Elster 1986: 56). During this process, objects are imbued with characteristics they do not materially possess and perceived as abstract, powerful things that are unrelated to the human effort required to create them (D'Amato 2006: 50). Thus, fetishism transforms people into 'anonymous quantities' (Milios and Dimoulis 2004: 8). The young homeless characters are objectified, devalued and dehumanized in this way. Parallels are drawn between Polaquito and valueless mongrel dogs. He is told by a woman selling thoroughbred Golden Retrievers for 300 dollars each that stray puppies can be obtained for free. Of course, there is no real difference between the two types of canine and the cachet placed upon the pedigrees is imagined. The vendor actually reveals this to Polaquito: 'no quiero decir que estos son mejores porque son caros […] la gente busca marcas y vos para jugar con un perro no necesitás marca' [I'm not saying that these dogs are better because they are expensive (…) people want brands but a dog doesn't have to be a thoroughbred in order for you to play with it]. As is the case in Marxism, then, individuals seek fetishized products in order to create identities that have been eroded by their very alienation in the first instance. Ultimately, human beings become dominated by things and their desire to possess prestigious things can lead to criminal behaviour. The young protagonists are not only treated and sold as valuable or worthless items, they are also governed and led to crime by the consumer goods that they worship. After all, the imbued worth of such goods grants them access to otherwise prohibited areas and offers them a feeling of upward mobility. Rather than accepting a street dog for free, Polaquito is misled by the illusion of the market and is driven to steal in his futile pursuit of one of the expensive puppies. Similarly, by dressing in their stolen apparel, Vieja and Polaquito can enter the high-class restaurant where they carry out their final botched robbery. The boys also ogle the Fila and Nike footwear displayed in a shop window before holding a salesman at gunpoint in order to obtain the globally recognisable brands. Polaquito considers each label's ability to make a person run faster, naively suggesting that the objects take on a life of their own. Even though Vieja laughs this off as a childish comment, he too remains mesmerized by the shoes, which have attained value by the imaginary attributes and prestige of fetishism.

Therefore, capitalism fosters crime by fashioning the false mystical powers that create an object's monetary worth.

The media also contributes to processes of alienation and criminal creation by falsely suggesting the possibility of upward social mobility through deviance. Vieja is obsessed with a gangster whose rags-to-riches story is romanticised in a glossy fashion magazine, itself a symbol of the extreme consumerist culture associated with capitalism. The publication encourages the idealization of the marginal self, and Vieja's aspiration to become kingpin of the underworld provides false relief from the pain of his reality. As in the films analysed by Page, however, 'the reality of crime is distinctly different from its imagined version' (Page 2009: 95). This underlines the more gruesome nature of portrayals of poverty after the culmination of the crisis. Vieja tries to follow in his idol's footsteps by taking hostages in a fancy diner and demanding the presence of news cameras, which he believes will bring him fame. He does end up on television, but only as another of the many unidentified and, therefore, depersonalized criminals who have been shot by police. As Vieja lies dead on the ground, his entire body is covered by a cardboard box that removes his dignity and denies his humanity.

Other films have also attributed the breakdown of human relationships to the economy, unequal distribution of wealth, and crisis. In *El resultado del amor*, Hugo's internment in a psychological clinic is connected to his poverty and again shows how characters are forced to create false realities. His belief that aliens will take him away is clearly a rather hopeless means of escape from the villa. In *Paco*, the lack of empathy shown by the dealers towards addicts, particularly Nora, clearly demonstrates the dehumanizing capacity of the market. Of course, they view their product only as an item of exchange. In this sense, Rafecas's narrative is congruent with the idea that estrangement stems from the viewing of 'other people through the lens of profit and loss' (Cox 1998: 40). On the other hand, the communal, unalienated nature of the villa in *Mía* means that its inhabitants are more connected to each other and their environment. This is suggested when Ale's describes the beautiful flora in Aldea Rosa and soothes Julia's minor injuries with leaves from a garden plant. Aldea Rosa inhabitants are empathetic to each other's plights and protect each other when the police invade. Ale shelters Pedro, who lost his home during a previous eviction, while the neighbours collectively care for Piba after finding her pregnant and malnourished outside a Buenos Aires airport. The residents also refer to the unborn child as the grandchild of the villa's founder Antigua (Naty Menstrual). In the 'outside' world where monetary values dominate, these personal connections seem more difficult to achieve. Manuel's neighbours are never seen, for example. The psychological problems experienced by 'outsiders' also mark the results of life beyond the villa commune. Mía's diary is a self-portrait of a recluse whose suicide is caused by severe postnatal depression and a lack of confidence in her parenting skills. Upon hearing Mía's story, some of the trans

women of Aldea Rosa label her 'una depresiva del barrio de Nuñez' [a posh depressive]. They again reinforce the link between wealth and familial estrangement by asserting, 'es porque no vivía en la calle y tenía mucho tiempo para maltratarle a la criatura' [it's because she never lived on the street and she had lots of time to mistreat her kid]. Ale, on the other hand, does not fear parenthood and actively seeks to construct a family. She is primarily concerned about relationships, particularly her bond with the child. It is only when she imparts these values onto Manuel and Julia that their previously unstable relationship is mended. Thus, the villa inhabitant leads others towards a less alienated society.

In *Elefante blanco*, the social implications are again much more positive when money is not a primary concern. Julián informs Nicolás that residents play an integral role in building their homes and facilities. As older individuals teach the next generation to lay bricks, the construction project in the unofficial *barrio* doubles as a scheme to keep youths away from gangs and create a more connected and empathetic community. When funding ceases and the project threatens to become yet another white elephant within the cycle of poverty, the residents take control of the site and their labour amidst shouts of 'vamos a construir las casas nosotros mismos […] la tierra es nuestra' [we'll build the houses by ourselves (…) this is our land]. Here, they fight against a police invasion in order to take ownership of their project and, reiterating a point also made in *Mía*, this has a unifying impact upon the community. After they take over the site in the film's final act, there are numerous scenes of solidarity in which neighbours gather, protest and mourn their martyred leader in great numbers. Trapero's closing shot frames a reinvigorated Nicolás, who has become deeply attached to his community, keeping watch over Ciudad Oculta from the heights of the titular edifice. As the Belgian assumes the leadership of the parish, the audience understand that although the vicious cycle of despair continues, so too does the Marxist-Christian fight for social justice.

3.3 Concrete Realities: God and Christianity in the Villa

The theme of religion is a significant one in villa-centred films. Notably, for example, Palito Ortega heavily promoted conservative Christian values from within an unofficial *barrio* in *Yo tengo fe*. This is not surprising, given that Ortega was responsible for producing right-wing propaganda for the dictatorship. After the transition to democracy, the theme of religion remained a central aspect of the social and economic critiques of villa-centred films. Given the leftist nature of these works and the strong Marxist tradition of Argentine cinema, Marxism, which sees religion as reinforcing socioeconomic oppression, offers a useful framework for analysis. Marx famously called religion 'the opium of the people', describing it as an illusionary form of happiness and a 'fantastic realization of the human being' that represents the demand

for a true form of contentment only achieved by real action (Marx 1977: 131). Marxism views religion as offering false solace from alienation, which the so-called 'great unwashed […] working people' were most capable of challenging (Marx and Engels 2008: 294). In Marxism, dependence on a supernatural entity amounts to a form of wishful thinking that obstructs the realization of one's actual capabilities and prevents social justice. By stating that God is a projection of man's internal nature, Marx and Engels attacked Christianity's alienating 'focus on an abstract mind that aims to get rid of the body' (Leeb 2007: 847). Other influential Marxists including Gramsci argue that the Catholic Church has established a hegemonic culture based on the interests of the wealthy (Patnaik 1988: 7-8; Boothman 2011: 55-67).

However, not every film about villas produced after the fall of the dictatorship is critical of religion. As previously discussed, young Evangelists who volunteer in an informal settlement are represented as heroes in *Todo es ausencia*. In *Fuga de cerebros*, Musa uses religious imagery to create a symbolic aesthetic that foreshadows the deaths of Fideo and Panta. Leonardo da Vinci's mural *The Last Supper* is clearly reconstructed in the villa during a scene in which 13 characters face the camera and dine on one side of a long table. It is during this gathering that the Judas-like figure Coco betrays Fideo, who sits in Christ's central position, by falsely promising to find him a reliable car for his escape to New York. As Carlitos and his mother dance the tango, a 'death' of the nation is also foreshadowed.

Many films of the post-dictatorship era, nonetheless, view religion (Catholicism in particular) as a force that oppresses those occupying informal settlements. In *Mía*, Antigua disregards the Christian beliefs of one of her neighbours, '¡Dios no existe, pelotuda!' [God doesn't exist, you fool!]. Her contempt is justified when she reveals that it was a Catholic archbishop who was responsible for the formation and marginalization of her community after publicly announcing that the LGBTQ community should be banished to an island, 'para no molestar a la gente' [so as not to bother people]. In the postcolonial subtext of *La ciudad oculta*, religion is framed as one of the pillars upon which an unjust modern society is founded. Roberto's teacher reveals that Christianity inspired Roca's acts of genocide during the Conquest of the Desert. She notes that the military leader was driven by 'la Fe Cristiana' [Christian Faith] and that:

> Esta verdadera cruzada evangelizadora no solo se orientó al sur del territorio […] En el norte, otros patriotas extendieron la gesta, hito fundamental en la construcción de esta prospera y pujante nación que hoy es motivo de nuestro orgullo.

> [This genuine Evangelist crusade was not restricted to the south (…) In the north, other patriots reinforced the feat, marking a fundamental milestone in the construction of this prosperous and thriving nation that we are now so proud of.]

Here, it appears that Christianity is imposed to subdue the colonized, who find false comfort in faith and may refrain from rebellion as a result. As it decries the state's eradication plan, *La ciudad oculta* views the projection of villera/os' needs onto a supernatural deity as hopeless and repressive. No God, religion or miracle can advance the class struggle. When looking for a resolution after being made homeless, some evictees resign themselves to their situation, suggesting that that their fate is in God's hands and stating, 'Dios sabrá' [God only knows]. However, Uña protests angrily against the ineffectiveness of such comments, 'sí, Dios sabrá pero yo ni mierda […] voy a ver que se puede hacer' [yes, God knows but I don't know shit (…) I'm going to find out what can be done]. Here, it is implied that God is an abstract projection of the natural characteristics and desires of the human being. The oppressed ultimately refuse to wait in vain for a miraculous change of events. As Teresa asserts in her aforementioned conversation with Roberto, things will never change without rebellion from below. Of course, as she implies with her indignant tone, the apparent 'ley divina' [divine law] that empowers some and exploits others is actually man-made and can be changed. As they begin their protest in the final scenes, there is a realization that only proactive assembly will permit them to return from society's margins. Such a denunciation of religion's capacity to render villera/os docile and subservient echoes Marxism's strikingly similar materialist discourse.

The location of Mabel's rape in *El resultado del amor* is, significantly, the villa chapel in which the devout protagonist seems to experience religious apparitions as she prays for an escape from poverty. Her hope that God might save her is comparable to Hugo's hope that aliens might save him. Hugo implies this and warns Mabel that the Church uses the idea of God to exploit people financially. Mabel also experiences Catholic guilt. She tells a statue of the Virgin that she accepts HIV as a punishment for selling her body. In the end, Mabel and Martín realize that they are each other's miracle. It is not prayer, but medicine and love, that cures Mabel. Nonetheless, Mabel chooses to get married in the chapel where she was raped. Martín's parents enter the villa to attend the ceremony, having finally accepted their son's decisions. Thus, religion has a useful social function in that it unites communities and social classes. During the mass, the priest asks God to protect the bride and groom. However, a close-up of a gun carried by one of the guests from the villa suggests a more dependable, human means of ensuring one's well-being in the informal settlement and elsewhere. In the end, while Subiela appears to

respect Catholicism's ability to offer hope, he prioritizes the importance of establishing relationships between people from all social backgrounds.

Trapero establishes a discourse that is similar to Subiela's in that it recognises the clergy's ability to contribute to society in a tangible way while criticising other elements of the religion. Of the films analysed in this thesis, *Elefante blanco* constructs the most complex dialogue regarding religion, re-establishing a dichotomous catholic identity. The Church appears to have split in two since the era of the dictatorship. On one hand, the representation of senior clergymen as bystanders of suffering and accomplices of corrupt politicians echoes the recent accusations that Catholic leaders collaborated in acts of state terrorism during the so-called dirty war. On the other hand, *curas villeros* are portrayed as selfless heroes who rebel against the evil elements of their institution. This division facilitates a leftist discourse. In the real world, the abandonment of the hospital in Ciudad Oculta coincided with the formation of various radicalized Marxist-Christian groups that stood against social inequalities that were growing amidst the new implementation of U.S.-promoted economic policies in Argentina. These religious groups 'joined a dialogue with Marxism, denounced social injustices, provided leadership to politically marginal groups and struggled to change the very nature of the Latin American Catholic Church' (Dodson 1974: 203).

The most well-known of these movements, the Movement of Priests of the Third World, reinterpreted Christianity so as to encourage political activism amongst priests and prioritize 'social reality' over ethereality (Dodson 1974: 60). Father Mugica was one of the movement's founders and his image remains an iconic symbol for social justice in Argentina. Murals of him can be found in many economically disadvantaged areas, most notably Villa 31 (Villa Mugica) where he founded the Cristo Obrero parish and is now entombed. Known for his affiliation with left-wing Peronists, the priest was assassinated after conducting mass in his villa chapel. Nobody has ever been convicted of the killing. However, it is commonly accepted that López Rega's Argentine Anticommunist Alliance were responsible (Premat 2012: 31, 38-42; Larraquy 2014: n.p.). One of Mugica's closest associates recalls seeing the death squad's infamous assassin Rodolfo Eduardo Almirón firing the fatal bullets during the ambush (Konfino 2015: 83-84). Julián's failed attempt to have Mugica beatified indicts the Vatican-based decision makers and encourages the audience to side with those who work at community level and are in touch with the tangible problems that mark an intersection between Marxist and Christian values, a juncture that may seem elusive given the conflictive nature of Marxism and religion. The one-time commander of the *Montoneros* Roberto Cirilo Perdía explains, however, that priests and Marxists were united by their shared belief that, 'había que ponerle cuerpo a la palabra' [you had to back the word up with the body] (Konfino 2015: 92).

The priest characters' practicality and focus on urgent matters emphasizes a similar pro-Marxist-Christian dialogue. Although they say mass, pray and confess their sins, Julián's tendency to act affirmatively is represented as the most admirable aspect of his character (Urraca 2014: 364). His work is generally more akin to Luciana's than to that of his superiors. As Mugica did, Julián takes a hands-on approach, the issues he deals with being as concrete as the dilapidated structure that gives *Elefante blanco* its title. Despite his terminal brain tumour, he cleans flooded shacks, removes the teenager Monito (Federico Barga) from a drug den on top of the abandoned hospital and spends time with the sick. Furthermore, he takes a direct approach to wealth redistribution by selling the properties that he inherited from his rich family to fund the construction project of Ciudad Oculta.

While Julián works on the front line in the fight for social justice, the archbishop is confined to an ornate cathedral and a lavish office where he holds fruitless meetings with religious and political leaders. When Julián is present in the office, his confrontational attitude emphasizes the divisions within the Church. It is here that he attacks his idle, bureaucratic superiors, stating, 'en una situación como ésta, no podemos ser solamente sacerdotes' [we can't just be priests in a situation like this]. Similarly, Nicolás maintains strong ties with the physical, sensual world and the individuals around him. He develops a sexual relationship with Luciana, attends a street party in the villa and dresses in casual sports clothing to resemble those he serves. Nicolás also intervenes directly in local issues by assisting Luciana and a third priest named Lisandro (Walter Jakob) with their rehabilitation programme. In addition, he bravely enters the gang leader Carmelita's (Susana Varela) hideout in order to retrieve the corpse of her rival Sandoval's (Pablo Gatti) godson and calm a brutal turf war between the two. In the end, Nicolás's relinquishment of his relationship with Luciana, which occurs after Julián appoints him as his successor and advises him to consider the needs of their parishioners, represents not a prioritization of the vow of celibacy, but a commitment to the villa community. At this point, the priest's rebuttal of individualism is represented as heroic. In the end, Trapero's film strongly promotes the idea that the Church must learn from Marxist-Christians to become more physically engaged with disadvantaged communities.

3.4 Marketing Addiction: Drugs and Villas

Marxist's theorize that one of the manifestations of alienation and exploitation is addiction. While Engels blamed alcohol dependency on the exploitation of labour, Marx argued that the growing 'cheapness of beer promotes […] drunkenness' in his discussion of supply and demand (Engels 2009: 93; Marx 2007a: 477). In contemporary times, this theory has been applied in the context of illegal drugs (Byron 2013: 434). Some contemporary films such as *Cama adentro* [*Live-in Maid*] (dir. Jorge Gaggero, 2004) (examined in detail in chapter four) and *Mía* frame alcoholism as a middle-class problem resolved by economically marginalized characters. This mode of representation tends to be the exception to the rule, however, and poverty has been synonymous with addiction in Argentine cinema since its earliest days. For example, in the villas featured in *Barrio gris* and *Détras de un largo muro*, taverns are places of alcoholism and vice that symbolize the rotten state of pre- and post-Peronist Argentina. Don Berto is also heavily reliant on liquor in *Del otro lado del puente*. In *La ciudad oculta*, the bartender that constantly serves Uña compares himself to the figure of Death because everyone meets him at some point. In *Fuga de cerebros*, Fideo and Panta smoke marijuana to escape reality. In Desanzo's film, Polaquito returns to Villa 21 to find his alcoholic father beating his mother and sister Chela. At this point, his reasons for leaving home become clear and he tries to convince his sibling, a victim of their father's sexual abuse, to flee as he has done, '¿para qué mierda estás con ese borracho hijo de puta […] en cualquier parte vas a estar mejor' [why the hell are you staying with that drunk son of a bitch? […] you would be better off anywhere else]. However, it seems that poverty is leading Polaquito down the same path as his father. When his efforts to make money fail and Rengo destroys his dreams of starting a family, the teenager seeks refuge in toxic inhalants. In these films, drugs represent another way in which those living in poverty are forced into a fantasy world.

In *Elefante blanco*, the turf war between Sandoval and Carmelita further demonstrates the destructive power of the drugs market as the gangsters compete with each other for a piece of the pie. Young people are dragged into this violent conflict with devastating results. The paco addict Monito is ordered by Sandoval to kill Cruz (Mauricio Minetti), an undercover detective posing as a social worker in order to obtain information about the drug dealers. Monito is then shot and injured by Cruz's vengeful colleagues when the priests attempt to smuggle him out of the villa to a hospital, an act that would not be necessary should Palacios's socialist project have been completed. It is in this final showdown that Julián is killed by state forces in a way that mirrors Father Mugica's martyrdom and underlines the plot's circular trajectory. An officer opens fire on Monito as he flees and Nicolás bravely intercepts the bullet, receiving a non-fatal wound. At the same time, Julián draws a pistol on the policeman in order to protect his young

parishioner and both discharge their weapons, killing one another. Monito is subsequently captured and, seemingly, doomed. His failure to receive medical attention reflects the socialist critique implicit in the trope of the hospital. Thus, the violence that stems from the drugs business is all-encompassing and draws in even the least violent of individuals.

Rafecas also implies a strong relationship between extreme forms of capitalism and addiction. In his film, paco is a symbol of the failure of neoliberalism. The narrative reveals that Argentina's financial collapse created a market that was dependent on a cheap drug, thereby recalling the many studies that attribute a dramatic increase in paco consumption after 2001, as well the substance's high toxicity, to the crisis (Taylor 2008: 6; Castilla et al. 2012: 211; Epele 2011: 1468, 1470). Senator Blank stresses these links between the economy and drugs by noting that Argentina has been in 'caída libre' [free fall] since 2001. She cleverly (albeit hypocritically, given her own corrupt nature) compares the cooking pots that served as drums during the *cacerolazos* to those now used in the production of narcotics:

> Hay más de cien cocinas de cocaína solamente en Buenos Aires. Esto empezó en 2001 con el disparo del dólar. Dejamos de ser un país de tránsito para ser un país productor. Por eso ahora existe el paco, porque es lo que queda de la cocción, lo que raspan de las ollas. Vamos directos a la favelización del conurbano. Es una droga de exterminio diseñada claramente para terminar con una clase social con la que no saben qué hacer.
> [There are more than 100 cocaine kitchens in Buenos Aires alone. This began in 2001 after the peso crashed. We ceased being a transit country and became a drug-producing country. That's why paco exists. It's what's left over from production, what they scrape from the pots. The suburbs are turning into shantytowns. It's an exterminating drug designed to finish off a social class that they can't deal with].

These words also rearticulate the controversial rhetoric of the *Asociación Madres en Lucha contra el Paco* [Association of Mothers in the Fight against Paco], an activist group credited as supporting Rafecas's production. In the documentary *Paco: The Poor Man's Drug in Buenos Aires* (dir. Pérez Arellano, 2014), the association's representatives claim that paco is used by the state to wipe out those living in poverty. One of the group's mothers reiterates this belief in Rafecas's film when Senator Blank searches for an online video about information about her son's addiction. In this video, the woman claims that dealers are in cahoots with police and manipulate the market by removing certain drugs from it, forcing desperate addicts to consume the most destructive substances. By no means is this the 'invisible hand' of Adam Smith's self-regulating

market (Bishop 1995: 165). Rather, the mother echoes Marxism's rejection of the idea that the market is an autonomous force (Sayers 2007: 93). Rafecas's interpretation of the paco epidemic's relationship to the market calls to mind criticisms of capitalism's perpetual need to 'seduce [the consumer] into a new mode of gratification' (Marx 2007b: 115). The villa-based dealers mirror the capitalist, who:

> Places himself at the disposal of his neighbor's most depraved fancies, panders to his needs, excites unhealthy appetites in him, and pounces on every weakness, so that he can then demand the money for his labor of love. (Marx in Rees 2005: 87)

Herbert Marcuse famously elaborates on this idea in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) when he denounces capitalism's inevitable creation of false, repressive needs. With striking relevance to the theme of the drugs market, he states:

> We may distinguish both true and false needs. "False" are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognise the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. (Marcuse 2002: 7)

While Nora's true need is for rehabilitation and a better standard of living (both of which are accessed by wealthier addicts), her false need, the satisfaction of which only perpetuates her subjugation, is the chemically-induced high that provides a spurious escape from destitution. Ultimately, then, while employing stereotypes of villera/os as criminals and victims, the director suggests that the market's breaking down of human relations has a detrimental impact on the marginal individual. However, although paco production appears to have replaced the less covert villa eradication plans of the past, the wealthier addicts (including Francisco) show how its destructive effects reach beyond the informal settlement. Stereotypes are challenged in the private clinic, where addicts are from more privileged backgrounds than Nora. Nonetheless, Francisco must form a relationship with a villera in order to discover narcotics. The idea of the villa as a drug-infested cesspool occupied only by criminals and victims of drugs, corruption and exploitation, is never challenged. The opening scene, in which approaching sirens wail as Francisco lies unconscious in an alley and has his clothes stolen by an unidentified assailant,

establishes this chaotic and one-dimensional view of the informal settlement. As the plot unfolds, the villa remains little other than the central point from where drugs flow to all sectors of society. It is characterised by the omnipresence of dealers who operate from their laboratory at its epicentre. The villa is the site where Francisco becomes hooked, a place he compares to 'agua estancada [y] podrida' [stagnant, rotten water]. It is a space filled with underdeveloped characters including dark-skinned, heavily tattooed, toothless drug merchants and an unnamed gang leader whose suit and briefcase would befit any capitalist entrepreneur. Although Nora's mother (Norma Argentina) is the only character in the villa not consuming or distributing paco, she becomes its victim. As she cries over her daughter's body, she is defined by her relationship to the drugs trade and becomes, like Nora, a casualty of a system that has exploited the economically marginalized and offered them a false escape route from their misery by saturating the market with a lethal substance. A more empowering portrayal of the villera/o might have seen Nora's mother joining a mothers' anti-drugs group such as the one involved with the production. However, heroism is reserved for 'outsiders' such as Francisco.

3.5 International, Interracial and Interclass Relationships

As has been shown, villas are often represented as alienated from the world, the oppressed characters within struggling to forge links with 'outsiders'. Internally, however, villas are often represented as unified spaces where solidarity between Latin Americans provides a model for wealthier, but more fragmented, sectors of society. Since villas first appeared in film and literature, they have been used to promote a vision originally perceived by the independence leader and 'first Pan American' Simón Bolívar, who 'wanted all the Hispanic-American countries to form a great federation in order to establish international political balance in the New World' (García-Prada 1931: 96). Verbitsky pioneered this mode of representation in *Villa Miseria también es América*. The author's socialist narrative attributes the poverty in villas to problems that 'transcend national borders [and are] the result of capitalist exploitation' (Podalsky 2004: 80). In the same vein, the images of villas and other Latin American informal settlements in *La hora de los hornos* underpin the directors' Marxist argument that Latin American unity is needed to challenge neocolonial oppression.

Contemporary filmmakers often highlight Latin American diversity in the villa, framing the spaces as manifestations of the unequal distribution of wealth at a global level. Teresa's nationality is significant in *La ciudad oculta*. Unlike the stereotypical passive villa female, she is involved with a Bolivian society that assists people to establish new lives in Buenos Aires, regardless of their origins. For example, this society helps Roberto, an Argentine. Uña's initial dismissal of Teresa's project, xenophobic hostility towards her and mistaken belief that his Argentine identity will save him from eviction (referring to the military he says, 'somos de la

misma sangre' [we're of the same blood]) are represented as foolish and counterproductive, and call for the deconstruction of social hierarchies based on nationality within villa communities. This leads Andéchaga's critique beyond the orthodox rich-poor dichotomy. Teresa recognises the need to eliminate the marginalization of non-Argentines within the villa and plays an integral role in bringing her neighbours together. Hence, the perceived differences between people born in Argentina and undocumented Latin American immigrants are shown to be obstructive to the common welfare of the oppressed. Class, seemingly, should trump both race and nationality in the minds of those experiencing poverty, as is implied by Teresa's comment to Roberto that all working class individuals are 'negros' [blacks] irrespective of the colour of their skin. Thus, Andéchaga's representation of the villa promotes the formation of a single, unified, class-conscious proletariat that transcends notions of statehood, the dissolution of which is another idea strongly associated with Marxism (Marx 1967: 129; Draper 1970: 281-282). This is also the case in *Mía*, in which the marginal space is occupied by people from rural Argentina, Paraguay and Peru. A place of social harmony, Aldea Rosa provides a model for mainstream society. The migrants living there are capable of bringing about interregional and interclass solidarity, as is seen in the relationship that Ale instigates with Julia and Manuel.

In *El resultado del amor*, the love that flourishes between Martín and Mabel on the neutral socioeconomic ground of Martín's mobile home symbolizes the dissolution of the classes. Villa life is not romanticised by allowing the wealthy hero to become integrated into the downtrodden area, nor is there an idealized perception of upward social mobility. The fact that both Mabel's father and Martín's colleague both suffer heart attacks suggests that life at either extreme point of socioeconomic spectrum may lead to the same end. For the director, the promise of upward mobility is a false one: capitalism's carrot on a stick. Even if it were possible for Mabel to ascend, it is clear from Martín's decision to abandon his career that material wealth does not equate to inner contentment.

On the other hand, interclass and miscegenous romances are not considered in *Elefante blanco*. Luciana's affair with Nicolás comes at the expense of the possible plot device of her falling in love with a Ciudad Oculta native like, for example, the Belgian priest's villa-born counterpart Danilo (Julio Zarza). *Paco* operates similarly in this regard. Rafecas's disempowerment of villa inhabitants is also reflected in his inadvertent maintenance of class tensions at the end of the film. Hence, despite the director's criticism of the inequalities created by neoliberalism, the socioeconomic divide is reinforced in *Paco.* Francisco and Nora's relationship is killed off with the death of the villera, paving the way for a more normative pairing that is represented optimistically. Before the end credits roll, a closing title card reassures the audience that, after spending nine years in prison, Francisco was reunited with Belén, a white woman who does not come from a villa. This resolution undermines Nora's suicide, pushing it

to the narrative's periphery and naturalizing socioeconomically, regionally and racially homogenous relationships. Although Francisco acknowledges the common nature of tragic deaths such as Nora's as he dines in an opulent restaurant in the closing scenes, the closing title card referring to his future with Belén concludes the film in a problematic fashion. Once the wealthy hero is cured and has served his time, balance is restored and Nora's death becomes a distant memory. *Paco*, then, diverges from the standard modes of representation that use the villa to demonstrate the virtues of international, interregional, interclass and miscegenous relationships.

3.6 Conclusion

The interrogation of capitalism through images of villas in post-dictatorship films is not surprising, given the strong links between the system and the existence of informal neighbourhoods (Davis 2006: 22-26). The very criminalization of villas is brought about by the private property laws upon which capitalism is founded, while the value of the land on which many of the settlements are built has made them frequent targets of eradication schemes. Their original expansion was also, as discussed in chapter one, a direct result of the Great Depression that spread across economies and societies in the 1930s, while recent growth has been caused by the neoliberal crisis of 2001. Certainly, the villas' large concentration of migrants from some of the most impoverished parts of Latin America is a result of global capitalism's unequal distribution of wealth and power. Generally, moreover, those living in unofficial *barrios* are the low-income workers and unemployed reserve labour force that must suffer exploitation so that profits can be maximized and concentrated in the upper echelons of society. The historical association of the villas with leftist activism, radicalism and violent and non-violent Marxist movements has further transformed them into spaces from which a critique of capitalism is articulated in contemporary films.

As seen in *La ciudad oculta* and *Mía*, villas are frequently portrayed as spaces wherein national frontiers are undermined and oppressed Latin Americans are unified in the class struggle. These two films, the former produced two decades before the latter, show how the cruelty of eradication continues to pose a threat in contemporary times. Thus, the property laws that remain a focal point of Marx's attack on capitalism are explicitly problematized by Adéchaga and Van de Couter. The directors portray such legislation as a tool used by right-wing authoritarian forces to construct a white, middle-class, heterosexual and poverty-free urban space. Trapero also shows the violent terror inflicted by the state on those who have no option but to engage in what the law determines, as Julián puts it indignantly, 'occupación ilegal' [illegal occupation].

For Andéchaga, Van de Couter, Trapero and (to a somewhat lesser degree) Subiela, religion threatens to sustain alienation and marginalization by imposing its traditional teachings and abstract values. It is only when villera/os or radicalized villa-based, Marxist-Christian priests focus on the corporeal, that they advance in the fight for social justice.

Desanzo, Rafecas and Van de Couter use villas and poverty to criticize the appropriation and exploitation of labour, as well as processes of universal commodification that defines capitalism. An unfavourable representation of the market also reoccurs in the productions examined. Desanzo links the illusion of monetary value to the marginalization, criminalization and death of the marginal other. Rafecas and Trapero's unveiling of the devastating impact of the narcotics industry on poverty-ridden communities also problematizes the inner workings of markets. Andéchaga's characters are victims of the market in that they are unemployed and relegated to the villa due to state privatisation policies. Musa's marginal teens are in a comparable position, failing to benefit from monetary systems of exchange. The end result of all of this is physical and psychological alienation, which in turn leads to the demise of characters via murder, addiction and suicide. *Mía* and *Elefante blanco* reinforce this viewpoint, using the villa to show how the absence of alienating monetary systems allows for better human relationships. Similarly, in Subiela's film, healthy relationships and the unification of the social classes are formed by rejecting the idea that success and happiness are determined by wealth.

Musa's film, produced during a period when Menemism prioritized commercial performance to the detriment of culture, itself becomes a victim of the market as its Hollywood-esque ending disrupts its social critique. This exemplifies how, although they all communicate similar ideas related to capitalist systems, the varying representations of villas examined in this chapter also reflect the general evolution of post-dictatorship cinema within its changing political and economic contexts. Andéchaga's work shows how national cinema remained fixated on the recent past as the nation emerged from its most violent and oppressive period. Later, the second NAC's general reluctance to propose solutions to social injustices – its mere capturing of the grim reality of a national financial and social implosion – underscores a sense of hopelessness and anxiety that was prevalent in the immediate aftermath of the crisis of 2001. More recent films such as those made by Subiela, Rafecas and Van de Couter return to didactics, offering lessons and suggesting ways to resolve the social and political problems that they address.

While the employment of violent stereotypes was less common in early post-dictatorship films, which invariably represented a unified villa as they reflected on the nation's experiences with authoritarianism, the failure of neoliberalism sparked a resurgence of portrayals of impoverished people as criminals and addicts. Even though the directors in question do not aim to vilify the marginalized, this shift in modes of representation lends support

to an argument made by Alicia Entel in her book *La ciudad y los miedos* (2007). Entel states that in Argentina, the fear of becoming a victim of an authoritarian regime has, since the turn of the century, been replaced by the fear of becoming a victim of delinquency caused by post-crisis poverty. The author specifically highlights a growing fear of the male villa inhabitant (villero) which recent films can be understood as reacting to since they generally attempt to comprehend the unlawful behaviour of the marginal figure in question (Entel 1997: 53).

Ultimately, this chapter has continued to map the representation of villas by examining how and why contemporary films reinforce or counteract the normative, stereotypical ideas about villas established in previous years.

Chapter Four

Overcoming the Exhibition Crisis: Villas and Marginalization in Transnational Co-Productions

4.1 Introduction

Since the inception of sound film, Argentine filmmakers have been faced with major challenges when producing and screening their work. Before the transition to democracy in 1983, censorship, trade restrictions, and political and economic instability deterred foreign investors and inhibited the establishment of local independent production and distribution companies (Shaw 2007: 1-2). This resulted in a strong reliance on public funding, which was difficult to secure for those who did not intend to propagate government messages. Moreover, the dominance of authoritarian regimes in Spain and other Latin American countries further limited the distribution of films that were made (Rodríguez-Vivaldi 2007: 273). Cultural exchange became much less restricted in the 1990s, but Menem's neoliberal model brought film production to an all-time low, prompting Getino to famously announce, 'Argentine cinema has lost the interest of the public' (Getino in Rocha 2009: 841). Despite the subsequent success of the second NAC and increased academic and public interest in Latin American film in general, the potential for success remains limited, and many films are not made or widely distributed because they are not believed to be commercially viable (Shaw 2007: 3).

A booming worldwide piracy industry has also eroded profits. Its threat is particularly visible in urban areas, where DVD vendors who operate with little hindrance sell the latest releases for a small sum of money. The black market and internet file sharing have all but destroyed the possibility of generating revenue through DVD sales, meaning that filmmakers are almost entirely reliant on their box office earnings (Villazana 2013: 40-41). The average Argentine film must attract around 200,000 cinemagoers to break even, but this remains an immensely challenging task in complexes that are dominated by U.S. blockbusters. Indeed, since the introduction of motion pictures in Argentina and other Latin American countries, the cinema consumed has mostly come from the United States or Europe (López 2003: 103). When interviewed at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012, Vanessa Ragone, a renowned Argentine producer who worked on the Oscar-winning production *El secreto de sus ojos* [*The Secret in their Eyes*] (dir. Juan José Campanella, 2009), echoed Getino when she expressed a concern that the national audience had 'once again lost interest in local films'. She noted that Sebastián Borensztein's comedy-drama *Un cuento chino* [*Chinese Take-Away*] (2011) had performed

disappointingly and that national films rarely sell more than 100,000 cinema tickets (Mango 2012: n.p.). César Albarracín further underlines the gravity of the situation. The Argentine director was outraged by an article in *La Nación* that criticized the provision of a state subsidy of 600,000 pesos for the making of *Miserias* [*Miseries*] (dir. César Albarracín, 2009), which only 13 cinemagoers paid to see. Albarracín responded indignantly to these comments in a video that he uploaded to YouTube, arguing that he was unable to fund a publicity campaign and could only afford to access one commercial theatre (Albarracín, 2014).

To overcome this 'exhibition crisis', today's Argentine filmmakers frequently look towards generating funds through international financing programmes and overseas screenings (Rocha 2009: 841). This means that their work is becoming progressively more 'glocal'. Of course, Latin American films have always merged local and global elements in the sense that they have imitated U.S. and European narrative styles and modes of production while establishing a strong sense of 'nation-ness' (López 2003: 104, 105, 117). However, given the increasing significance of the transnational co-production, which extends access beyond local markets, Argentine filmmakers must now consider the demands of international viewers more than ever before (Hoefert de Turégano 2004: 17).[1] These viewers tend to be accustomed to the high production values of Hollywood and may not be knowledgeable about, or especially interested in, the local issues dealt with in national cinema. To this end, directors often strive to appeal to audiences both within and beyond national borders by employing production values that are reminiscent of U.S. cinema without relinquishing the social conscience that has traditionally characterised local, low-budget works. Hence, 'the strength of some of the most successful films from Latin America, in contrast to many (but not all) of its Hollywood counterparts, is that high-quality entertainment is produced without the loss of a socially committed agenda' (Shaw 2007: 5). Teresa Hoefert de Turégano explains, 'these films function through a mise-en-scène of particular national, regional, or local identities associated with the director, juxtaposed by ubiquitous or "universal" themes, made stylistically palatable and narratively accessible' (Hoefert de Turégano 2004: 23).

In 1989, the Ibermedia programme was established to assist projects aimed at the Ibero-American market. This funding pool is sponsored by Spain (the primary contributor), Portugal and 18 Latin American countries including Argentina (Falicov 2013: 67). Since its inauguration, non-U.S. films have substantially increased their share of European and Latin American markets, with between 40 and 60 percent of Latin American and Spanish projects now being collaborative, depending on the country (Rodríguez-Vivaldi 2007: 273). Nonetheless, the scheme has come under scrutiny. In the documentary *Latin America in Co-production* (dir. Libia

[1] For further information on the history on co-productions between Spain, Latin America and other countries, see Alejandro Pardo's article on the subject (Pardo, 2007).

Villazana, 2010), Villazana holds Ibermedia to account for the unfair distribution of profits between participating countries and argues that it reinforces Spain's dominance over its former colonies. Similarly, Sarah Barrow states that the global financial networks relied upon by Latin American directors 'set up new relationships […] that hark back to the concerns about imperialism that preoccupied their predecessors of the 1960s' (Barrow 2013: 138). Criticizing Ibermedia's requirement for the inclusion of Spanish actors and other Spanish elements in films set in Latin America, Falicov demonstrates that the co-produced nature of a film, itself brought about by the need for profit, may impinge on its narrative (Falicov 2013: 72). Such research demonstrates that economics and commerciality can dilute and misrepresent cultures that may be marginalized in the first instance.

The present chapter explores this relationship and the tension between commercialism and social commentary in co-productions between Argentina and other countries. It examines how mainstream films attempt to profit by developing universally appealing stories without foregoing their regional tone. Through close analyses of four films, this chapter discerns the implications for marginalized communities as they become the subjects of transnational projects that demonstrate important changes in the nature of Argentine film and inevitably 'walk on a tightrope between local complexity, needs and desires, and international market needs for an accessible, and therefore exportable, product' (Rodríguez-Vivaldi 2007: 275). Some of the possible problematic elements of the features analysed are foreshadowed by Deniz Göktürk who, in her study of migrants in transnational cinema, argues that funding bodies are more willing to invest in certain types of portrayals of marginal groups. She concludes that, 'filmmakers have been almost driven to represent the "other" culture in terms of common assumptions and popular misconceptions' (Göktürk 1999: 6). How might this statement apply to the works examined in this chapter? Are certain modes of representation favoured by transnational financiers when it comes to portraying poverty? When Argentine directors attempt to compete with Hollywood by reaching out to foreign markets with investment from abroad, what are the consequences for the marginal subjects screened?

To answer these questions, four co-productions dealing with villas and economic hardship are considered: *Elefante blanco*, *Mía*, *Las viudas de los jueves* [*Thursday's Widows*] (dir. Marcelo Piñeyro, 2009) and *Cama adentro*. These films demonstrate a variety of approaches to representing poverty, demonstrating that international co-productions are not homogenous by nature (Hoefert de Turégano 2004: 15). Although it is the most technically accomplished feature examined here, *Elefante blanco* is problematic in its representation of poverty. This film calls to mind both older and contemporary features such as *Suburbio*, *El candidato* and *Paco* in its paternalistic implication that members of the Europeanized middle class are needed to rescue, civilize and bring order to villas. The centralization of popular actors who play 'outsiders' and

the simultaneous marginalization of villera/o characters lends support to this point. On the other hand, the marginalized characters in *Mía* and *Cama adentro* are foregrounded and prove capable of unifying society by challenging gender and class-based discrimination. *Las viudas de los jueves* mutes the voices of those living in poverty and the villa becomes an invisible source of anxiety for the morally corrupt, economically privileged individuals at the centre of the plot. Damaging stereotypes about villera/os are deconstructed as they are mediated through these elitist characters, who avoid and know little about villera/os yet remain prejudiced towards them. Ultimately and paradoxically, the silencing of the villera/o in *Las viudas de los jueves* marks a subversive attempt to denounce the corrupt benefactors of Argentina's neoliberal project.

4.2 The Glocal in Argentine Co-productions about Poverty

4.2.1 Funding and Production

Elefante blanco was by far the most popular Argentine film of 2012. The global critical acclaim and commercial success achieved by Trapero's film demonstrate the potential for Argentine co-productions to access foreign markets (Urruca 2014: 354-355). The transnational nature of *Elefante blanco* is reflected in the extensive network of European and Latin American organizations behind it. Three companies from different countries were primarily responsible for making the film: Trapero's Matanza Cine, Spain's Morena Films and Argentina's Patagonik Film Group. Although the latter organization was founded by the Argentine producer Pablo Bossi, its major shareholders have included the global media giant Clarín Group, Disney's subsidiary Buena Vista International and the Spanish telecommunications provider Telefónica (Falicov 2013: 85; Newbery 2007: n.p.). The French companies Soficinema 8 and Full House are also credited for assisting the production, while funding was received from the INCAA and its Spanish counterpart the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales (ICAA) [Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts]. In addition, the film was made with the participation of various television channels from Spain, France and Argentina.

Mía was also well received upon its release. It won numerous awards in Latin America including Best Film at the Puerto Rico Queer Film Festival, Best Foreign Language Feature at Brazil's Mix Film Festival, Best Script at Havana's Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano and the Maguey Prize at the Guadalajara Film Festival. It also won awards in the United States, Canada, France and Korea. The melodrama was financed by the INCAA, Ibermedia and Spain's state-owned broadcaster TVE. It was produced by the Argentine company Maiz and Ángel Durández, who is recognised as a Spanish native in the opening credits. The screenplay was developed with the assistance of the Oaxaca Screenwriters Lab, a collaborative workshop run by the U.S.-based Sundance Institute and Mexico's Carmen Toscano Foundation,

which provides filmmakers with access to high-profile Anglo American and Latin American creative advisors (Paxman 1999: n.p.).

Marcelo Piñeyro has considerable experience working on European-Latin American co-productions, having directed the Ibermedia projects *Caballos salvajes* [*Wild Horses*] (1995), *Kamchatka* (2002) and *Plata quemada* [*Burnt Money*] (2002). His international credentials are also reflected in a producer credit on the previously discussed Oscar-winning feature *La historia oficial*. Piñeyro's Argentine-Spanish production *Las viudas de los jueves* is funded by Ibermedia, the INCAA and the ICAA. Its other financiers are Spain's public *Instituto de Credito Oficial* (ICO) [Official Credit Institution] and television channels from both participating nations. The film is based on the homonymous best-selling novel, which was written by the Argentine author Claudia Piñeiro and published in 2005. Scoring and production were carried out by the Spanish natives Roque Baños López and Gerardo Herrero, respectively. The former has seen his international profile grow considerably over the past decade, having won prestigious Goya awards for his work on the Spanish film *Las 13 rosas* [*13 Roses*] (dir. Emilio Martinez-Lazaro, 2007) and the British-Spanish co-production *The Oxford Murders* (dir. Álex de la Iglesia, 2008). Baños López has also composed in Hollywood for high-profile features including *The Machinist* (dir. Brad Anderson, 2004), *In the Heart of the Sea* (dir. Ron Howard, 2015) and *Don't Breathe* (dir. Fede Álvarez, 2016). Herrero was reunited with his co-producer of *El secreto de sus ojos*, the Argentine Vanessa Ragone, when working on *Las viudas de los jueves*. The lead actors, all of whom are Argentines, are globally active and have worked on various Ibero-Latin American projects. Especially notable is the casting of Pablo Echarri, whose popularity in Latin America and Europe marks the increasingly transnational nature of contemporary Argentine film (Falicov 2013: 82).

Cama adentro (released as *Señora Beba* in Spain), another Ibermedia project, received glowing reviews from international critics. At the Sundance Film Festival, it won the World Cinema Special Jury Prize and was nominated for the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize. Gaggero's film had further success at other festivals in Argentina and Europe (D'Espósito 2005: 42; Goodridge 2005: 24). It was produced by the now dissolved Netflix-owned company Red Envelope Entertainment, Spain's Filmanova and the Argentine companies Libidofilms and Aquafilms, and received funding from both provincial and national organizations in Argentina and Spain (Goldstein 2008: n.p.). Developmental support was again provided by the Sundance Institute and Carmen Toscano Foundation. Gaggero's formative years also saw him crossing frontiers, studying filmmaking in Argentina and, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles.

4.2.2 Glocal Themes

While on one level *Elefante blanco* is a universally recognisable melodrama characterised by Luciana and Nicolás's romantic relationship and Julián's terminal diagnosis, its study of social exclusion also marks an incorporation of local themes that recall the second NAC movement spearheaded by Trapero. Indeed, *Elefante blanco* aims to face social injustice in Argentina head on and confront those responsible for it (Rubio 2013: 52). This sociopolitical commitment parallels the frequent contributions made by Trapero and Darín to charitable causes in their country (Urraca 2014: 357-358). One of the most important regional issues that the film deals with is the figurative disappearance of villera/os. This message is conveyed as Julián informs his protégé Nicolás that the villas are not shown on official maps or accounted for in the national census. As she helps undocumented residents to obtain official identification cards, Luciana's actions also mirror the director's desire to make the inhabitants of villas visible to the international community and generate worldwide awareness of the issues that they are faced with. When he addresses a large crowd on the streets of the villa, Julián draws comparisons between the injustices experienced by those living in the settlement today and those living there during the last dictatorship. Therefore, Trapero echoes the common notion that those living in poverty are socially excluded to such an extent that they have been disappeared, like many victims of the so-called dirty war (Entel 2007: 53). As Julián commends Father Mugica in the same speech, he calls attention to real issues that are further emphasized when Trapero dedicates *Elefante blanco* to the murdered priest in the end credits.

This emphasis on regional matters marks a blurring of the lines between fiction and reality, a neorealist approach that also defines both NAC movements. Julián's mission to have Father Mugica beatified also forges an intersection between these local and other global elements of the story, as it reveals a tension between Ciudad Oculta's parochial clergymen and their overseas superiors, who refuse to recognise the status of the iconic martyr. Trapero's criticism of the Vatican-based decision-makers bisects what Villazana notes is one of the world's most dominant transnational organizations (Villazana 2013: 27). At a local, villa level, the Church is characterised by its commitment to achieving social justice. As he attempts to secure Father Mugica's beatification, Julián asks for official recognition of the supposed miraculous curing of a woman who prayed at his tomb, which is located in Villa 31. His discussion with the cancer survivor also allows him to reflect on his own illness, showing how the director cleverly links his celebration of a real local hero to the film's universal themes of illness and death. Meanwhile, in a current worldwide context wherein the Church's reputation has been irrevocably damaged after many scandals, Trapero's attack on the transnational hierarchy that refuses to make Father Mugica a saint and complete the villa construction project, falls in line with global filmic trends.

These trends are reflected in the internationally acclaimed U.S. documentaries *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God* (dir. Alex Gibney, 2012) and *Deliver Us from Evil* (dir. Amy J. Berg, 2006), and fact-based features including the Oscar-winning U.S. production *Spotlight* (dir. Tom McCarthy, 2015). Such films demonstrate how the Catholic Church's systematic abuse of children has concerned audiences all over the world in recent years. The British-Irish production *The Magdalene Sisters* (dirs. Peter Mullan, 2002) and the more recent British film *Philomena* (dir. Stephen Frears, 2013) also unveil the abuse of unmarried mothers and babies by the clergy in Ireland. This degradation has been further highlighted in 2017 by extensive media coverage of the discovery of hundreds of infants' remains in a septic tank on the grounds of a Catholic maternity home in Ireland (*Irish Times* 2017: n.p; O'Keefe and MacDonald 2017: n.p.). Thus, *Elefante blanco* tackles any potential lack of global interest regarding regional matters by contextualizing the work of villa-based priests in a transnational fashion.

Mía is also glocal from a thematic perspective, its production coinciding with the proposition and enactment of Argentina's Gender Identity Law, which was finalized in 2012. This law allows individuals to change their gender on official documents without the need for psychiatric evaluation or court rulings. Furthermore, it provides access to health services including hormone treatments and surgeries, and legalizes adoption for trans individuals (Socías, Zalazar et al. 2014: 3). As well as commenting on the actual eradication of Aldea Rosa, Ale's desire to become a parent mirrors that of Mariela Muñoz, an Argentine trans woman whose precedent-setting court case ignited a national debate and led to the passing of the landmark legislation. Muñoz adopted and raised 17 orphaned children before undergoing sex reassignment surgery in Chile in 1981, when the procedure was still illegal in Argentina. In 1993, she was reported to police by the biological mother of another of her children, who had unsuccessfully attempted to extort money and property from her. In the resulting legal battle, Muñoz was ruled an unfit mother due to her transsexuality and occasionally informal adoption methods. The defendant had three children removed from her care and was imprisoned for one year. She was denied the opportunity of motherhood until she had her female gender identity legally recognised in 1997 after psychological evaluation (Vaid and Hormel 1995: 28-31). Muñoz, who passed away in 2017, won the support of the public during her ordeal and became a symbol of love and Argentine motherhood (*Clarín* 2017: n.p.). Like *Mía*, her story also transcended frontiers. It inspired the play *What's Wrong with Daniela Duñoz?* (1998), which was commissioned by the Junges Theater in Zurich, written by the Dutch playwright Suzanne van Lohuizen and directed by the Argentine director Marcelo Díaz (*Clarín* 1998: n.p; 2017: n.p.). By reflecting Muñoz's experience, Van de Couter supports the introduction of an Argentine law that facilitates self-declared gender and trans parenthood. Thus, *Mía* joins a critical global discussion

spearheaded by Argentine artists, human rights campaigners, politicians, religious leaders and scholars.

This debate is summarized in *Sexualidades migrantes: Género y transgénero* [*Migrant Sexualities: Gender and Transgender*], which is edited by the Argentine philosopher and politician Diana Maffía. The text contrasts the sociological and medical models that attribute transgenderism to either social or biological factors and inform debates on the ethics of gender confirmation surgery. One of the volume's contributors, Eva Giberti, explains that while some view the operation as a legitimate course of action, others consider it a form of mutilation and advocate an entirely psychoanalytical approach that may enable individuals to accept their bodies without medical intervention (Giberti 2009: 62). The latter argument echoes the influential theory popularized by the feminist scholar Judith Butler, who states that gender is socially rather than biologically constructed (Butler 1999: 179). Proponents of the same argument thus believe that trans people should not be treated as though they have a problem, but that cultural values should be altered to facilitate the acceptance of those who do not fit neatly into the binary system. However, with the obvious immensity of such a task, some agree that surgery may be acceptable in that it alleviates the suffering of individuals who feel a damaging sense of incompatibility with the world around them.

Of course, Maffía was not the first Argentine to address the complex issue of gender identity. *El beso de la mujer araña* [*Kiss of the Spider Woman*] (Manuel Puig, 2006), which was first published in 1976, has become one of the most widely acclaimed Argentine novels. Puig's global success is attributable to his construction of an innovative, dialogue- and stream-of-consciousness-driven narrative that brings the reader deep into the subjective world of two characters who ultimately challenge conventional notions of gender. The author uses a mens' prison run by a right-wing Argentine dictatorship as a literally restrictive and torturous setting within which to undermine restrictive and torturous gender and sexuality norms. In the story, a homosexual and stereotypically effeminate window dresser named Luis Molina gradually teaches his cellmate, the leftist militant Valentín Arregui, to reject *machismo* and question his conservative understanding of manliness. At the same time, Valentín imparts assertive qualities normally seen as masculine upon Molina. This allows Molina to challenge his clichéd interpretation of femininity and emerge from the romanticised fantasy world where he hides from a society that labels him a deviant. When the relationship between the two prisoners becomes sexual, they overcome binary concepts of gender (Puig 2006: 221-222). Here, the fragmented human identity that they embody merges into one that is unbound by oppressive cultural values. It is not unreasonable to state, then, that Puig was one of the original instigators of the Argentine debate on gender identity.

In recent times, Puig's discourse has been echoed by organizations such as the *Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgéneros de Argentina* (ATTA) [Argentine Association of Transvestite, Transsexual and Transgender People] and *Federación Argentina Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales y Trans* (FALGBT) [Argentine LGBTQ Federation]. These groups have become some of the primary advocators of Argentina's new gender identity and same-sex marriage laws, and continue to pressure the government into bringing about equality for Argentina's LGBTQ community. They have also clashed with religious leaders including the archbishop Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis), who have taken a discriminatory stance against the trans community (Encarnación 2016: 137-140). This denunciation is echoed in *Mía*, when the protagonists criticize a Catholic archbishop who condoned the segregation of Aldea Rosa. Other religious leaders who share these attitudes include the Argentine Evangelist pastor José Luis Cinalli, who distorts the biological-determinist understanding of gender and sexuality to establish a transphobic and homophobic discourse. In *Cuestión de género* [*A Question of Gender*], Cinalli and his wife Silvia Cinalli claim that LGBTQ individuals can restore their 'natural' heterosexual and cisgender states by worshipping Christ (Cinalli and Cinalli 2012: 144, 151, 156).

Filmmakers have tended to reject such oppressive views, as is evident in the screen adaptation of Puig's novel. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (dir. Héctor Babenco, 1985) epitomizes transnational cinema. It is directed by the Argentine-born, Brazilian citizen Babenco, filmed and set in Brazil and performed in English. The high-profile, U.S.-born actor William Hurt takes on the role of Molina and the Puerto Rican actor Raul Julia plays Valentín in the film. Hurt's performance won him the Academy Award for Best Actor. The global impact of Puig's story is further highlighted by Oscar nominations for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay. *XXY* (dir. Lucía Puenzo, 2007) further underscores Argentine cinema's deliberations about gender. Puenzo has been praised for her realistic and nuanced depiction of intersex adolescence that argues in favour of the individual's right to define their identity. In the film, the teenage protagonist Alex (Inés Efron) arrives at a point in her life when she:

> Wants no more pills, no more doctors, no more changing schools, no more secrets. Her parents begin to see that it is time to let her make these choices for herself. And we see what it is that her parents have been able to protect: she can choose, because they have not taken her choices away. (Tamar-Mattis 2009: 73)

Thus, much like Puig and Van de Couter's narratives, *XXY* rejects cultural and legal restrictions on the expression of gender identity. This point will be examined in greater detail in chapter five.

As well as being particularly reflective of liberal social trends in Argentina, the legislative amendments for which Van de Couter's film called also had global implications as they signalled a new era for transgender rights around the world. In 2014, for example, Denmark followed Argentina's lead and eliminated the requirement for psychiatric evaluations, sterilization and judicial orders when redetermining gender on official documents (*Guardian* 2014: n.p.). In 2015, Colombia, Malta and Ireland passed gender recognition bills influenced by the Argentine system of self-declaration (Linshi 2015: n.p; Palomino 2015: n.p.). This happened in Bolivia and Ecuador in 2016, while the Chilean chamber of deputies began to finalize a similar act in 2017 (Jara 2017: n.p; Rojas Medrano 2016: n.p.). *Mía*'s glocal nature thus demonstrates and contributes to a process identified by María Eugenia Socías et al:

> Argentina has been leading significant regional and worldwide efforts to improve equality for LGBT persons, and to address the unique needs of these vulnerable populations, such as through the legitimization of same sex marriage (including full adoption rights) in 2010. (Socías, Zalazar et al. 2014: 2)

Ultimately, while the story of Aldea Rosa is especially relevant in a local context in that it comments on the ever-present topics of villa eradication, poverty and social exclusion in Argentina, Van de Couter also contributes to a far-reaching discussion on gender. By recontextualizing the state's destruction of villas as a manifestation of the cultural fear of nonconformity to dominant gender ideals, as well as framing the eradications traditionally as an outcome of class-based discrimination, *Mía* strikes new chords with audiences regardless of where they are situated.

Las viudas de los jueves also incorporates a glocal narrative. The plot is distinctly national in that it follows four married couples – Tano (Pablo Echarri) and Teresa (Ana Celentano), Gustavo (Juan Diego Botto) and Carla (Juana Viale), Martín (Ernesto Alterio) and Lala (Gloria Carrá), and Ronnie (Leonardo Sbaraglia) and Mavy (Gabriela Toscano) – as their lives unravel within the confines of the luxurious gated community Altos de la Cascada in the lead-up to the 2001 crisis. As Piñeyro examines the false neoliberal promise of the 1990s, he employs metaphors of concealment that recall *Fuga de cerebros*. Certainly, all is not as it seems in Altos de la Cascada. A sinister sense of secrecy is established by the characters' self-imposed isolation from society as well as their tendency to deceive one another and veil their immoral behaviour. Behind closed doors, Gustavo suffers from a psychological disorder that drives him to strike,

choke and almost kill Carla. Martín hides his impending bankruptcy from Lala, who continues to make extravagant purchases that the couple cannot afford. The unscrupulous alpha male Tano exploits terminally ill people by buying their life insurance policies at a discounted rate and cashing them in after their deaths. Even the son of the most sympathetic couple, the on-site estate agent Mavy and her unemployed husband Ronnie, poses as a woman online for sexual gratification. The masking of unsettling realities is also alluded to in the film's promotional posters, which show the titular widows wearing large black sunglasses. Mavy's statement, 'las apariencias engañan' [appearances can be deceiving], points to the ugly truth hidden by the characters and, by implication, Menemism. When the banking collapse reaches a critical point, Tano proposes a suicide pact. He, Gustavo and Martín then electrocute themselves in his swimming pool to avoid the shame of bankruptcy and leave their wives with sizeable insurance payouts. Although the plot is confined to the local setting of Altos de la Cascada and comments specifically on the social divisions constructed by Argentina's elite, as Jonathan Holland observes, *Las viudas de los jueves* 'has much to say about current global troubles' (Holland 2010: n.p.). Indeed, the crisis does not exist in a national vacuum and is contextualized through allusions to global capitalism and the inequalities fostered by world powers. The characters that embody devastating neoliberal values are, significantly, members of Argentina's Europeanized elite. Their constant code-switching (they sing 'Happy Birthday' in English and use words like 'whatever') marks an effort to reinforce their social status by association with Anglo cultures that have gained prestige in Argentina at the expense of their indigenous counterparts. They are also linked to the globalised financial industry through their dealings with Spanish banks. Hence, the Argentine crisis is framed in the broadest terms.

It is also significant that, in the same year that Piñeyro's film was released and the global recession was in full swing, the U.S. production *The Joneses* (dir. Derrick Borte, 2009) was also screened for the first time. In Borte's film, a group of undercover salespeople pose as a quintessential nuclear family in order to market products in a wealthy suburban neighbourhood in the United States. One unassuming victim is so influenced by the product placement scam that he becomes heavily indebted and takes his own life by tying himself to a lawnmower and riding into his swimming pool. The familiar nature of this plot highlights the relevance of *Las viudas de los jueves* beyond Argentina. The same can be said of *La zona* [*The Zone*] (dir. Rodrigo Plá, 2007). Like Piñeyro's film, *La zona* exposes the tragic impact of urban fragmentation, as well as the social inequality and culture of fear towards the marginal other that drive it. This Mexican-Spanish production is set in a gated community in Mexico, which is infiltrated by three youths from the surrounding slums. After breaching the community's walls to steal from the homes within, the youths are hunted down and killed by a local mob, whose exaggerated and brutal brand of vigilante 'justice' (one that is encouraged by corrupt police) is driven by their paranoid

hostility towards 'the other'. Thus, as it does in *Las viudas de los jueves*, the representation of the gated neighbourhood in *La zona* 'calls into question dialectical understandings of urban violence that claim that aggression emanates almost exclusively from the lower classes' (Lehnen 2012: 171).

Cama adentro also capitalizes on the globally accessible theme offered by the economic meltdown. The film frames the crisis in a nuanced and personal manner, showing how broad social inequalities are maintained on an individual level (Ros 2011: 102). It follows Beba (Norma Aleandro), a divorcée and member of Argentina's Europeanized upper class who desperately clings to her privileged lifestyle and the services of her live-in maid Dora (Norma Argentina) after becoming financially ruined in 2001. Dora, nonetheless, is forced to resign after 30 years of cohabiting with Beba, who can no longer keep up appearances once her inheritance disappears and her ex-husband's shop ceases to provide her with an income. Beba's initial attempts to hide her financial problems – she continues to take taxis, claims that she is visiting a pawn shop on someone else's behalf, and hides cheap whiskey in expensive bottles – again reflect the façade of Menemism. Her husband's shop specializes in golf equipment, recalling the critique of neocolonization via global capitalism in *La hora de los hornos*. In fact, Getino and Solanas use images of golfers to critique the Argentine oligarchy's mimicking of European culture. Gaggero's subtle re-employment of the sporting trope represents the glocal nature of the film by revealing how global hierarchies are re-created at a local, Argentine level.

The director proceeds by undermining these hierarchies, using the crisis as a means of restoring a sense of equality between Dora and Beba. As Dora competes for jobs with a seemingly endless line of maids less than half her age, the mass unemployment caused by the economic collapse is emphasized (Kramer 2014: 114). With no skills or work experience, Beba also struggles to earn money. She begins trading luxury cosmetics, but this ill-advised investment has no chance of success within a drastically flailing economy. Beba is eventually forced to move out of her upscale apartment in the affluent district of Belgrano. As society transforms under the weight of the collapsed economic system, the tables turn and she seeks refuge in her friendship with Dora, who lives in a precarious settlement on the neglected outskirts of the capital. Thus, Gaggero calls for a new, less alienated form of social cohabitation in which relationships, status, and the manner in which people treat one another are not determined by money (Ros 2011: 108-109). Other phenomena related to globalisation are also addressed in the film, contributing to its universal appeal. As Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Bridget Anderson discuss in their respective books *Servants of Globalization* and *The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, the feminization and racialization of paid household labour are strongly linked to the inequalities resulting from global capitalism and, therefore, are relevant to societies the world over (Salazar Parreñas 2001: 25; Anderson 2000: 150-153). Dora's roots in the Chaco (one of

Argentina's poorest provinces and one with a large indigenous population), native ethnicity, gender and the fact that she serves a white family with European origins, reflect these points.

This situates *Cama adentro* within an international subgenre of maid films, which examines the commodification of female migrants from the world's poorest regions by the wealthy. This subgenre, which also includes the Brazilian film *Domésticas* [*Maids*] (dirs. Fernando Meirelles and Nando Olival, 2001) and the Chilean production *La nana* [*The Maid*] (dir. Sebastián Silva, 2009), reflects the wide-scale relevance of domestic servant stories. The Argentine film *El niño pez* [*The Fish Child*] (dir. Lucía Puenzo, 2009), in which a Guaraní-speaking maid flees from Buenos Aires to her Paraguayan village after being falsely accused of killing her sexually abusive employer, also underscores the border-crossing potential of the subgenre. Puenzo uses the oppression experienced by the maid to construct a postcolonial discourse in which intertwined class, racial and gender hierarchies are viewed as legacies of Latin America's European conquerors (Escaja 2011: 274).

One of the reasons why films about maids remain relevant across borders is that, in many countries, domestic employees must relinquish the opportunity of motherhood in order to care for the children of their employers (Salazar Parreñas 2001: 93). The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has highlighted the same issue across Latin America, while Elisa Cragnolino confirms its prevalence in Argentina (Cerrutti and Maguid 2010: 13; Cragnolino 2008: 330). Cinema can contribute to such problems. Margarita Saona shows that films aimed at global audiences often domesticate Latin American women, making them desirable and 'acceptable in a global market that depends more and more on the services rendered by women who migrate from the poorest countries to the so-called First World' (Saona 2008: 126). In these films, Latin American women have been represented as the most suitable people to look after the children of the rich, who lack the desire and maternal instinct to do so. Other films challenge these representations. As Saona observes, a segment of Emmanuel Benbihy's anthology film *Paris, Je t'aime* [*Paris, I Love You*] (2006) directed by the globally successful Brazilian filmmaker Walter Salles reveals the suffering of a Latin American immigrant who must leave her own child to take care of the child of a wealthy Parisian family (Saona 2008: 126, 130). This trend is also visible in the Brazilian film *Que Horas Ela Volta?* [*The Second Mother*] (dir. Anna Muylaert, 2015), which tells the story of a maid who bonds with her employers' son while her biological daughter remains in the care of her grandparents.

Cama adentro incorporates a similar critique of these values, entering a global discourse by demonstrating a trend that has taken root in Argentina and beyond. One of Dora's superficial wealthy friends, Memé (Susana Lanteri), advises another, Sara (Elsa Berenguer), to prevent her maid from becoming pregnant. Sara also reveals that Beba has paid for Dora to have abortions on two occasions in order to retain her services. In these scenes, Gaggero demonstrates how

the unfair distribution of wealth results in the colonization of the body of the economically marginalized female. Thus, while constructing a local and personal story about two individuals who embody Argentina's social hierarchies, *Cama adentro* also contributes to a global discussion through its unsympathetic portrayal of affluent characters who believe that their children should be cared for by economically disadvantaged females who are, in turn, deprived of parenthood so that they can fulfil their assigned role.

4.2.3 The Mise-en-Scène as the Message: Technical Aspects

The glocal nature of Trapero's film is further evident in its production values. *Elefante blanco*'s visual experience is often an epic one, demonstrating its objective to reach beyond home borders. The camera sweeps majestically along rivers as Julián takes Nicolás from his Amazonian village to Ciudad Oculta in one of the opening sequences. This aesthetic recalls the Oscar-winning cinematography in *The Mission* (dir. Roland Joffé, 1986), a British production about Jesuit missionaries who travel to the scenic Iguazu Falls region straddling Argentina and Paraguay to convert a Guaraní community to Christianity. The breath-taking shots of the rainforest glorify the work of the priests in both films. Trapero's river also introduces a postcolonial discourse by acting as a literal and symbolic link between the murdered Native Americans who were served by Nicolás and the villera/os. When Julián rows along the Riachuelo in a later scene in Ciudad Oculta, the villa mirrors the tribal village. Therefore, the villa is again framed as a colonial legacy. Later, grandiose aerial views of a landscape overrun with humble shacks indicate the enormity of the neighbourhood as well as the director's ambitions. Conversely, ground-level tracking shots take the audience on a virtual journey through a labyrinth of dusty alleyways. At one point, this employment of the dolly evokes the feeling of being caught up in the standoff between Ciudad Oculta locals and police. Here, Darín's comment rings true, 'nos enfrentamos a esa dura realidad con ellos' [we face the tough reality with them] (Darín in Rubio 2013: 62). Though not quite as unsettling as the manic, hand-held camera used in independent films such as *Villa* [*Slum*] (dir. Ezio Massa, 2008) and noted by the Argentine scholar Jens Andermann in the second NAC, these long takes are reminiscent of neorealist national movements (Andermann 2012: 31). Similarly, dialogues such as those that occur at the addiction support meetings appear improvised, a trait very much associated with low-budget Argentine productions. At the same time, however, Darín notes that their intention was to retain a choreographed feel:

> La idea era que la cámara y la puesta en escena no conspiraran contra la verdad de cada secuencia, pero que al mismo tiempo no cayéramos en la estética de un noticiario o un documental.
> [The idea was that the camera and the mise-en-scène didn't work against the truth of each sequence, but at the same time, we didn't fall into the aesthetic of a documentary or news report]. (Darín in Rubio 2013: 62)

The actor's discussion of the camera work lends credence to the idea that the film strives to balance world-class production values with practices that are generally associated with Trapero's early years as a director of the second NAC. *Las viudas de los jueves* is similar in the sense that it retains a universal appeal through its high production values. The film's intense stylization compliments its critique of neoliberal excess. This is most evident in a visually striking opening scene, in which the excessive use of white at a garden party (clothes, furniture and flowers are all uniform in colour) suggests decadence and, ironically, the moral impurity and corruption that underlie the characters' refined and elegant image. Here, Piñeyro reaches towards the aesthetic heights of cinematic adaptations of the literary classic *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1925), which is set in the 1920s against a backdrop of U.S. prosperity and centres on a flamboyant millionaire named Jay Gatsby. Baz Luhrmann uses elaborate production values to reconstruct Fitzgerald's critique of the materialism and greed stemming from capitalism in his film *The Great Gatsby* (2013).

Mía is far more modest from a cinematographic point of view, as is *Cama adentro*. Both films have a minimalist, chamber-drama feel that recalls some of the low-budget projects of the first and second NAC movements. Thus, when compared to *Elefante blanco* and *Las viudas de los jueves*, these films call attention to the heterogeneity of transnational co-productions focusing on Argentine poverty. This is evident in the exclusion of the aforementioned bird's eye shots, which are often used when screening shantytowns to depict an unplanned, uncontrollable, sprawling mess. Unlike in *Elefante blanco*, very few extras are employed in *Mía* and *Cama adentro*, which is quite uncommon for films of any nationality dealing with so-called slums. In *Mía*, Ale tows her heavy recycling cart through empty, spot-lit city streets that look like the stage of a local theatrical production as opposed to the set of a transnational feature film. These images, as well as symbolizing isolation and imprisonment (Ale is framed behind steel railings as she moves through the city, as Polín was in *Crónica de un niño solo*), allow the director to individualize his protagonist, thereby avoiding the homogenization of the villa and the marginal other that occurs in Trapero's co-production and will be discussed in more detail later.

Whether a film uses an original score, pre-recorded music or any music at all, might be determined by its budget and artistic or commercial objectives. Nonetheless, music in film is a 'primary instrument of emotional direction [that] tells us what to feel' (Wright 2003: 10). In *Cama adentro* music is heard in only one short scene at a party in Dora's neighbourhood. The upbeat 'Blancanieves' [Snow White], which is written and performed by the independent Buenos Aires-based duo Sonia Policino and Rubén Policino, gets the locals onto the dance floor, helping to establish a positive image of the marginalized Argentine. Such sparse, diegetic use of the soundtrack reflects Gaggero's employment of realism and underscores the film's stripped-down technical features and general minimalism, again recalling the NAC films. The lack of music also intensifies the focus on dialogue and silences, creating a sense of intimacy between the audience and characters (and between Dora and Beba) that lends itself to the personal manner in which social inequalities are examined and dismantled. Conversely, in *Las viudas de los jueves*, Baños López's dramatic score, the sinister feel to which reflects the characters' deviousness, is located beyond the narrative sphere and is heard throughout the film. Since the exclusive use of natural sound and omittance of diegetic sound are generally associated with independent and arthouse films, Piñeyro's soundtrack complies with the traditional mainstream standards established by big-budget films marketed to mass audiences.

Trapero's alternation of an original score and pre-recorded music underlines *Elefante blanco*'s glocal nature. Music is used somewhat sparsely in his film, strengthening its association with the NAC movements. When compositions are heard, however, they are mostly by Michael Nyman, the high-profile British composer of the award-winning soundtrack of the international co-production *The Piano* (dir. Jane Campion, 1993). Much more than a popular accompaniment to the visual aspects of Campion's film, Nyman's soundtrack (which has sold over 3 million copies) plays a primary role in defining characters' emotions and the meaning of the narrative itself (Ap Siôn 2007: 181). Similarly, his epic orchestral pieces provide both commercial appeal and meaning in *Elefante blanco*. They aptly accompany the scenic river sequences, thereby contributing to the glorification of the priests in the way that Ennio Morricone's music does in *The Mission* and revealing Trapero's intentions to carry local issues across borders. At the same time, however, Nyman's instrumentals are situated alongside 'Las cosas que no se tocan' [The Things You Cannot Touch] by the Argentine group Intoxicados in what becomes a hybrid soundscape. As Nicolás is awoken by gunshots on his first morning in the villa, the unmistakable working-class slang of the singer Cristián 'Pity' Álvarez is suddenly audible and a band rarely heard outside of Argentina is loudly launched onto an international stage. This use of distinctly local music is complicated by the fact that Intoxicados's track draws inspiration from British and American popular music and is situated in Argentina's *rolinga* genre, which unashamedly mimics groups such as the Rolling Stones and Ramones. This simultaneous homogenization and

individualization of Argentine identity clearly emerges from both a desire to create a sense of local cultural authenticity and a realization that a film's commercial success depends on the audience's ability to relate to its music. Indeed, the glocal feel of 'Las cosas que no se tocan' overcomes a problem identified by Robb Wright, who states, 'a song that serves as an unofficial anthem for a group or generation in [one country] might, although intelligible, have no similar resonance for an equivalent group in [another country]' (Wright 2003: 11-12). In the same vein, it is also significant that the less universal song 'Pucho loco' [Crazy Drug] by the *cumbia villera* pioneers Damas Gratis plays only faintly in the background of a villa street party.[2] The fact that this local recording is barely audible highlights the pushing the national but universally relatable rock of Intoxicados to the fore. It is also noteworthy that, while Nyman's uplifting instrumentals are used in the few scenes 'outside' the villa, the lyrics of the songs by Intoxicados and Damas Gratis are only heard when the audience see the villa. These lyrics, unmistakably Argentine from a linguistic perspective and heavy in their use of local slang, reinforce the stereotypes addressed earlier in this thesis. 'Pucho loco' emphasizes drug consumption and incarceration as outcomes of poverty. Pity, who is as famous for his addictions as he is for his talent, introduces the audience to Ciudad Oculta with the attention-grabbing words, 'me gustan las chicas, me gustan las drogas' [I like girls, I like drugs]. Furthermore, the distorted, driving guitars that accompany his raspy voice are commonly used to evoke a sense of exhilaration in cinema (Wright 2003: 13). 'Las cosas que no se tocan', then, encourages the audience to become excited by the conflicts that are about to unfold in the villa. In this sense, *Elefante blanco* seems to abide by the idea put forward by many scholars, that violence and crime in ghetto-centred films enthral U.S. and European audiences (Williams 2009: 485; O'Neil Tusia 2012: 124-126; Dürr 2012: 708). The characters in *Mía* host their own party in a scene that further suggests the heterogeneity of transnational representations of poverty. The Aldea Rosa inhabitants dance to the fast rhythm of 'Niña de la villa' [Girl from the Villa] by the iconic Argentine *cuarteto* singer Carlitos 'La Mona' [The Monkey] Jiménez, which blasts through the settlement at full volume. In notable contrast to Trapero's choice, this traditional Cordoban track has positive overtones. Its lyrics reassure a girl who is compared to 'una bella flor' [a beautiful flower] and symbolizes innocence and purity, that true love will one day be hers despite having been betrayed by a lover from outside of her informal *barrio*. Evidently, then, the technical and productive diversity in transnational co-productions dealing with villas suggests that such films do not conform to any particular standard and representations of marginalized groups are not necessarily homogenized by the globalisation of cinema.

[2] While acknowledging stylistic differences between the genre, Timothy Wilson and Mara Favoretto state that the Argentine rock, or *rock nacional*, produced during the dictatorship and modern *cumbia villera* function similarly, as communal forms of social protest (Wilson and Favoretto 2011: 164-165).

4.3 Building the Transnational Villa

Representations of villas are not uniform in transnational cinema. Although, as Debora Shaw observes, multinational locations and universally identifiable spaces are often important in international co-productions, the plot of *Elefante blanco* is confined to the narrowest of regional landscapes (Shaw 2013: 52). While Trapero reaches audiences far beyond the borders of Argentina, his characters are restricted to the confines of the violent concrete jungle wherein the plot unfolds. The only people that seem to be able to leave Ciudad Oculta are the three middle-class protagonists. Meanwhile, villa natives are immobile, as is evident in Monito's failure to escape and make it to a hospital on the 'outside'. Although he does spend time at a rehabilitation facility, this location can be understood as an extension of the marginalized space, which the teenager can only leave when in police custody.

The neighbourhood is, in many ways, a terrifying place. Its establishing images, which show Nicolás waking up to the sound of gunfire, suggest that the literal storm from the night before will be replaced by one of violence. The conflict between Sandoval and Carmelita's gangs impacts on everyone. Nicolás and Luciana get caught in the crossfire and must run for their lives. Monito gets dragged into the feud and is forced to murder Cruz. Even Julián, who adamantly believes that priests should steer clear of the turf war, is compelled to open fire to protect his parishioners. Trapero's confined setting therefore becomes the destination of a virtual tour that permits proximity to gangland violence in the ghetto.

However, this bleak portrayal of the villa is complicated by Trapero's refusal to idealize the 'outside' world. Spectators are permitted only a brief glimpse of the city beyond the villa when Luciana collects Julián and Nicolás from a ferry port on their return from the rainforest. They drive along a dull grey highway that runs below a tempestuous urban sky. A storm beats violently against the windows while the camera remains claustrophobically confined inside the automobile, thereby introducing a tension that is heightened by an almost complete lack of dialogue. Hence, while the villas are shut off from the wider community, the director does not construct an affluent utopia as a contrast to them. This feeling is verbalized by Lisandro as he and Luciana host their addiction support meeting. He announces, 'la villa es nuestro lugar y eso no lo vamos a negar' [the villa is our home and we are not going to deny that]. The sense of belonging and pride is again made clear when the attendee Tatiana (Tatiana Giménez) exclaims that she tells 'chetitas' [little snobs], 'estoy bien acá, me siento bien […] ¡Aguante Oculta' [I tell them I'm fine here, I feel good (…) go Ciudad Oculta!]. In addition, she defends her neighbourhood by recognising the drug problem as a symptom of social inequalities, 'la villa no tiene la culpa' [it is not the villa's fault]. While Lisandro advises the group to leave the confines of their surroundings from time to time, he is merely (although naively) recommending that they mix with the rest of society without abandoning their roots. Echoing this sentiment, Julián tells

Nicolás that their housing project appeals to residents because it allows them to remain close to their families and friends. The sense of community implied here is again emphasized when groups of local people construct buildings and clean the flooded chapel and streets, even though their efforts may be wiped out by the next storm. This ineffectual struggle against nature's elements mirrors the one against social inequality. The villera/os also come together to celebrate Danilo's ordination and commemorate the life of Father Mugica. The final protest and takeover of the building site is the ultimate declaration of solidarity and marks the culmination of the film's decidedly local objective to inform the audience that, 'las villas están plagadas de gente trabajadora que rema contra la corriente para alimentar a sus hijos' [the villas are full of hard-working people who row against the tide to raise their children] (Darín in Rubio: 2013, 68-69). In this way, in the ever-present debate that pits policies of infrastructural development against those of eradication, Trapero aligns himself with the former.

It is also significant that, in line with the argument that transnational films strive to establish universal spaces, Trapero often homogenizes the marginal space so as not to overload foreign audiences with an abundance of local details that may be difficult for them to grasp. Rather than making a clear distinction between the primary locations of Ciudad Oculta and Villa 31, the director condenses both into a single shantytown. This calls to mind Paul Julian Smith's observation that in transnational film, 'nationally distinctive elements are muted in order to facilitate the flow across national boundaries, with […] scripts stripped of specific references to regional geographies or cultures' (Smith 2009: 124). This 'process of neutralisation' becomes even more notable when one considers that independent films such as *La 21, Barracas* [*The 21, Barracas*] (dir. Víctor Ramos, 2008) explore the conflictive relationship between the residents of two different informal settlements (Smith 2013: 12). The dilution of local identities in Trapero's feature is recognised as one of the key issues concerning the globalisation of cinema (Hoefert de Turégano 2004: 16). Thus, some 'co-productions are in danger of promoting the homogenization of Latin American cultural representations by an accommodation to European perspectives that may be reductive in nature' (Rodríguez-Vivaldi 2007: 275).

The capacity for diversity in transnational co-productions is suggested by Van de Couter's villa, which might be described as more 'local' than Trapero's. *Mía*'s Aldea Rosa is far removed the villa in *Elefante blanco*. Drug trafficking and violence are not present in Aldea Rosa. The calm and unified nature of this community is emphasized by the threats posed by classist and transphobic 'outsiders'. These individuals include abusive police who strike fear into the hearts of the villa residents, the religious figures who condemn the trans community and members of the public who insult Ale and her neighbours. Moreover, Van de Couter remains somewhat more neutral than Trapero towards the prospect of evacuating the villa, successfully mediating each side of the argument that has dominated villa-related politics since the first eradication efforts.

A sense of belonging contrasts with a simultaneous desire for upward mobility and the improved standards of living. When they are offered alternative, state-financed accommodation, the neighbours discuss their fate. Antigua contends, 'yo acá tengo mi casa, tengo mi marido y no me interesa que vayamos amontonadas a un hotel' [my husband and my home are here, and I do not want us to end up crammed into a hotel]. Conversely, others express a desire to leave, pointing out the lack of gas, electricity and running water in their homes. While Antigua says that they have chosen to be there, some of her neighbours disagree, arguing that they have no other place to go. Through such debates, the director appreciates the complexity of the relationships between villera/os and their communities and reflects the sense of belonging and desire for upward mobility that co-exist in villas.

The marginal neighbourhood in *Cama adentro* shows no sign of being ruined by drugs or violence. Like Van de Couter's villa, it is a natural, bright, and safe environment. Dora takes pride in her home. Her biggest concern is not the risk of being assaulted, but rather, improving her living space by laying new floor tiles. Hence, Gaggero brings a sense of normality to life in precarious settlements that, as Claire Williams points out, is often lacking (Williams 2008: 487). Despite their thirty-year relationship, Beba's visit to Dora's home is her first. She is taken aback at how attractive the house is and compliments it, 'está muy lindo, todo lo que hizo acá' [what you have done here is really nice]. Her words perhaps mirror the surprise experienced by a public that is accustomed to less aesthetically attractive marginal abodes. In contrast, Beba's apartment, although valuable, is claustrophobic and gloomy, lacking natural light and, when she cannot pay her electricity bill, any light at all. Although Dora's partner Miguel (Raul Panguinao) flirts with a woman in their locality, this is countered by many images of a strong community spirit. For example, locals gather to play football and Dora takes care of her neighbour's baby when the woman goes to work. The mother then returns the favour by helping the protagonist to find a new job after she leaves Beba. The party scene also contributes to the representation of the neighbourhood as unthreatening. Furthermore, the marginal space benefits from a cool breeze that provides relief from the oppressive heat of Belgrano, which signifies the rotten state of upper-class society. As Beba enjoys the serenity and fresh air in Dora's garden in the final scenes, she declares, 'Buenos Aires es un infierno, aquí corre una brisa tan linda' [the city is like hell, there's a lovely breeze here]. It is here that the whiskey that Beba habitually consumed before the crisis is substituted for iced tea. Hence, her visit to the marginal *barrio* signifies purification and liberation from the toxic, materialistic values of neoliberalism. Gaggero, then, challenges the common perception of Argentina's disadvantaged areas as, 'infected place[s] that must not be entered but left behind' and represents a radical departure from films that depict those who manage to escape poorer regions as heroes and those who remain as criminals 'destined to live there' (Grinberg 2010: 667). Rather than documenting a struggle to move away

from a disadvantaged neighbourhood, Gaggero narrates an enlightening, transformative journey towards this welcoming space. This journey provides positive lessons about community and calls for the deconstruction of hierarchies based on wealth in post-crisis society.

The diversity of the co-production is once again evident in *Las viudas de los jueves* which, although sympathetic to those living in informal settlements, never actually shows a villa. The disappearance of the villa is subversive. Its invisibility exists despite an ironic proximity to Altos de la Cascada, thus highlighting the social exclusion it experiences at the hands of the oligarchy and the significant social inequalities fostered by Argentina's neoliberal project. The fetishization of gang-related violence in villas, which arguably occurs in *Elefante blanco*, is also prohibited and criticized by Piñeyro when the rebellious and unpleasant teenager Trina (Vera Spinetta) fabricates jaunts to the often-mentioned but never-seen villa to frighten her father Martín and impress her peers. Trina's apparent belief that entering villas might make a person appear trendy and streetwise constitutes a criticism of the shallow, self-serving way poverty is perceived and portrayed by wealthier members of society. Also, Martín's shock at his daughter's claims that she goes to the villa to engage in 'turismo de aventura' [adventure tourism] shows that, as far as the residents of the gated community are concerned, the villera/o is a bogeyman who represents the worst kind of fall from grace. This critique of the characters' misinformed and stigmatizing view of the villa allows the audience to re-evaluate their perception of informal settlements and realize that the most threatening spaces are not necessarily those where poverty looms large. Ultimately, the different approaches to representing marginalized spaces in *Elefante blanco*, *Mía* and *Cama adentro* again confirm the diverse nature of transnational co-productions.

4.4 Aligning the Stars and Casting Aside the Marginal Other

Transnational films often employ well-known stars in order to compete with Hollywood and win over international audiences (Shaw 2013: 54). *Elefante blanco* demonstrates this with a high-profile cast led by Darín, who boasts a significant commercial appeal and ability to attract international audiences (Urraca 2014: 357; Garavelli 2016: 20). The actor is renowned for his performance in *Nueve reinas* [*Nine Queens*] (dir. Fabián Bielinsky, 2000), a film about con-artists that has been compared to *The Sting* (dir. George Roy Hill, 1973) and inspired the inferior Hollywood remake *Criminal* (dir. Gregory Jacobs, 2004). He also starred in the Oscar-nominated film *El hijo de la novia* [*Son of the Bride*] (dir. Juan José Campanella, 2001) and the Oscar-winning film *El secreto de sus ojos*, which served as the blueprint for another less-acclaimed U.S. version, *Secret in their Eyes* (dir. Billy Ray, 2015). Ironically, Darín has achieved this global recognition while publicly rejecting roles as stereotyped Latin American characters in Hollywood films (Fantino, 2013). Such disapproval of the U.S. industry makes his identity even more local, despite

his global success. Therefore, although he is an internationally admired and in-demand star, Darín remains firmly attached to Argentina. Martina Gusmán has achieved her own share of global recognition. Two of the films that she starred in, *Leonera* [*Lion's Den*] (dir. Pablo Trapero, 2008) and *Carancho* [*Vulture*] (dir. Pablo Trapero, 2010), the latter of which also featured Darín, were Argentina's official submissions in the Best Foreign Language Film category of the Academy Awards. Like *Elefante blanco*, both of these films comment on regional matters (the rights of female prisoners, and national road safety and economic struggles, respectively) while employing conventional dramatic and thrilling narrative structures. Gusmán's presence on the main judging panel at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011 further confirms her status in Europe. The filmography of the Belgian actor Renier also reveals his worldwide appeal, boasting titles such as the *Palme d'Or*-winning Belgian production *L'Enfant* [*The Child*] (dirs. Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne, 2005) and the star-studded British-French co-production *Atonement* (dir. Joe Wright, 2007). He also appears in *In Bruges* (dir. Martin McDonagh, 2008) alongside the Hollywood headliners Colin Farrell and Ralph Fiennes. The central cast of *Elefante blanco*, therefore, further underlines Trapero's intentions to represent Argentine social injustices on a world stage. On the other hand, the simultaneous casting of villa natives in minor roles such as that of Monito marks an attempt to validate the representation of their demographic. As previously mentioned, the Villa 21-based actor Julio Zarza, who is considered a villa ambassador due to his work with *Mundo Villa* and his appearances in villa-produced films such as *La 21, Barracas* and *Villa*, also makes an appearance as the young priest Danilo. This is another way in which, by combining the neorealism that is typical of the NAC movements with elements mostly associated with Hollywood, *Elefante blanco* attempts to accurately portray the local while also remaining globally appealing.

Despite this dualistic approach to casting, however, *Elefante blanco* presents difficulties with regard to representing the voices of the oppressed. These issues recall Spivak's problematization of the appropriation of marginalized voices. The type of protagonist employed reflects Trapero's consciousness that he and his crew were, '"extranjeros" en este mundo de pobreza' [foreigners in this world of poverty] (Trapero in Rubio 2013: 59). Despite having worked in his parish for 20 years, Julián will always be an 'outsider' because of his wealthy origins. Even his recitation of Father Mugica's prayer distinguishes him from 'them', 'Señor, quiero morir por ellos, ayudame a vivir para ellos' [Lord, I want to die for them, help me to live for them]. Nicolás is identified as a foreigner in every sense when he reveals that his family background is similar to Julián's, while Luciana also appears to be more privileged than the people she assists. She acknowledges this fact when she humorously mocks the priests, 'los dos se dieron el lujo de ser pobres' [you can both afford the luxury of being poor].

By implying that only native villera/os can truly experience their poverty and marginalization, this observation underscores the dissipation of the voices of those who are native to the marginal space. Why, for instance, does Nicolás become the next parish leader instead of Danilo, who is, in Julián's words, 'un hijo de la villa' [a villa child]? Since Danilo's character remains undeveloped, his appearance proves to be little more than an effort to authenticate the mise-en-scène. This idea is supported by the fact that the character never speaks, even remaining mute during his public consecration as Julián holds court with a lengthy speech. The absence of this voice becomes even more conspicuous when one considers Zarza's experience in leading roles. Each time Danilo comes into shot, he is literally marginalized as Nicolás and Julián take centre stage. He is positioned at the side of screen during what is supposed to be his ceremony and during another religious procession that moves through his neighbourhood. There are very few exchanges between villa residents and even fewer non-aggressive interactions between them. When they do engage in a conversation during an addiction support meeting, their dialogue is mediated by Luciana and Lisandro. Likewise, a fight between Monito and another local youth, and the conflict between Sandoval and Carmelita, are intercepted and halted (at least temporarily) by the white, middle-class outsiders who seem to be employed to bestow moral values and peace upon the locals.

Villera/os are not involved in the narrative's most universal subplots and are defined only by their relationship to the themes of social injustice. As mentioned in chapter three, Luciana's affair with Nicolás leads to the exclusion of villera/os from the narrative's romantic storyline. Although Monito says that he has found a girlfriend when Nicolás visits him at the rehabilitation facility, the audience never witness his relationship and the reference appears to be, like Danilo's appearance, a perfunctory expression of equality. This is also the case with the villa-born doctors, teachers and lawyers, who are commended by Julián during Danilo's ordination but, nonetheless, remain unseen. Conversely, Julián and Nicolás are complex individuals rather than one-dimensional men of the cloth. As the latter constantly removes his white collar, ignoring Lisandro's warnings that he may be mistaken for a police officer and shot, he is humanized.

Julián's illness, along with his frustration with the seemingly endless cycle of poverty and anger towards those responsible make his character similarly human. He is a 'man of action', his efforts on the ground and dispute with his superiors distinguishing him from the unsympathetic Catholic hierarchy (Urraca 2014: 365). The contrasting marginal position of native villa inhabitants again recalls *The Mission*, in which the heroic missionaries played by the screen icons Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons monopolize the story, while the colonized are silenced and deemed savages who need to be civilized and governed by Europeans. One native man does become a Jesuit priest, but his experiences are not examined in depth and he remains

a background figure. Such problems have been highlighted by various scholars and critics (Stone 1996: 315; Schickel 1986: 111). James Schofield Saeger describes *The Mission* as 'a white European distortion of Native American reality'. He also criticizes the film's historical inaccuracies and objectification of colonized people, who are prohibited from expressing themselves. The Guarani language is not subtitled, and missionaries never seek the opinions of indigenous people on community matters (Schofield Saeger 1997: 63-64). Ultimately, the audience learn little about the Indians, despite the large numbers of them that appear on screen (Sterrit 1986: 25). This is also the case with the villera/os in Trapero's film. A notable sense of irony lies in the fact that, while the Argentine lens never strays from the precarious locality in question, the focus remains on the middle-class priests and the social worker. Laura Podalsky highlights the importance of portraying the villera/o identity in a multifaceted manner. While praising Kohon and Verbitsky, she argues that by stressing the 'humanity of villa residents' and representing their unique individuality, artists can challenge 'the facile characterization of them as "masses"' (Podalsky 2004: 108). These points make clear the pitfalls of the approach taken by Trapero, who fortifies class barriers by failing to acknowledge the life experiences shared by the audience and villa residents. Ultimately, the peripheral position of those who have been born into poverty and the simultaneous centralization of Darín, Renier and Gusmán, render marginal figures passive objects of a glocal gaze. Furthermore, by refusing to develop villera/o characters, the director fails to fully realize his objective to counteract discourses that frame villas in an abstract fashion (Marín 2012: n.p.).

Mía also takes a dualistic approach to casting by drafting both global stars and lesser-known Argentines who are actual members of Argentina's transgender community. Rodrigo de la Serna has achieved a considerable degree of international exposure to date. His success is best exemplified by his BAFTA-winning interpretation of the figure of Alberto Granado in *Diarios de motocicleta* [*The Motorcycle Diaries*] (dir. Walter Salles, 2004). This biopic about Che Guevara is a particularly notable example of a transnational film since it received funding from various Latin American, European and U.S. sources, employs an international cast and crew, and incorporates many scenes of border crossing. The Brazilian director is also known around the world, having launched Brazilian cinema onto the global stage through his company Videofilmes, which produced the internationally acclaimed features *Central do Brasil* [*Central Station*] (dir. Walter Salles, 1998) and *Cidade de Deus* (Williams 2007: 11-12). Camila Sosa, on the other hand, has a background in stage performance. Like the other trans actors cast in *Mía*, she is virtually unknown outside of Argentina. Despite De la Serna's star status, however, his character Manuel does not overshadow that of Ale and the local social injustices that she and her neighbours are victims of. In fact, he has relatively little screen presence compared to Sosa, whose show-stealing singing talent is capitalized upon in several scenes in which she sings beautiful, wistful

melodies to herself and Julia (Lima 2011: 32). Van de Couter's reluctance to hone in excessively on Manuel and Julia allows for villa characters to be personalized to an extent not achieved by Trapero. As is detailed further in chapter five, by working in this manner, the director undermines many of the most damaging heteronormative stereotypes that exist in relation to the trans community.

Cama adentro is similar to *Mía* in its centralization of the marginal female. The presence of Dora, who is played by the acting novice and long-time domestic employee Norma Argentina, is equal to that of Beba, who is played by Norma Aleandro. This is significant, since the appearance of Aleandro, a veteran of Argentine cinema whose 'participation is considered a near-guarantee of both artistic quality and box office success', emblematizes the commercial aims of Gaggero's transnational co-production (Rohter, 2007: n.p; D'Espósito 2005: 42). Argentina's naturalistic performance was universally praised, moreover. In fact, critics agreed that she was not overshadowed by, and perhaps even took the spotlight away from, Aleandro (D'Espósito 2005: 42; Goodridge 2005: 24; Young 2004: 53; Kramer 2014: 114). This representation of Dora facilitates an explicitly positive and humanizing portrayal of the marginal woman. She is objectified by Beba's pretentious friends, who invade her personal space by touching her face to check the results of Beba's facial creams. One of the women others the maid with the comment, 'es morocha, tiene otro tipo de cutis, no se arrugan como nosotras' [she's dark, she has another type of skin, they don't wrinkle like us]. Such humiliating treatment is directly contrasted with the dignified, sensitive and humane manner in which Dora helps Beba in her hour of need. She lovingly dresses Beba's wounds and helps her protect her social status by putting cheap whiskey into expensive bottles before serving Beba's friends. Dora meticulously cleans Beba's apartment, spends her own money on cleaning products and works for months without pay. Thus, the marginal woman is devoted, diligent and hard-working. Her loyalty is again demonstrated when, even though she no longer works for Beba, she returns to her apartment to bring her a birthday cake. Dora is also independent and, even after losing the job she held for three decades, does not depend financially on her partner as Beba does on her ex-husband. She is resourceful enough to find a new job despite the high levels of unemployment caused by the crisis. She is also kind and understanding enough to take care of her neighbour's child for free. Finally, the way Dora welcomes Beba to her home and stores Beba's furniture without asking questions that might embarrass, are the ultimate testaments to the sensitivity and humanity of the marginal woman.

Las viudas de los jueves does not cast stage actors or nonprofessionals in the way that *Elefante blanco*, *Mía* and *Cama adentro* do. However, although it focuses on well-known actors like Echarri, the antagonistic personalities of the characters allow for a criticism (albeit a less explicit one) of the silencing of marginal voices and the misrepresentation of poverty. Tano's

prejudices and ignorance towards the unequal distribution of opportunities demonstrates how villera/o stereotypes are subverted and undermined. Notions of marginalization by choice and a culture of poverty are evoked when he comments on poverty. When asked by Ronnie, '¿y si te hubiera tocado la vida de cartonero?' [what if you had been born into the life of a waste collector?], Tano responds 'la vida no se toca, la vida la hacés vos' [life doesn't just happen to you, you make it]. Martín is equally unsympathetic. He is deceitful, indecisive, gormless and in awe of Tano. He greedily chooses to leave his money in an Argentine bank to benefit from a high interest rate that is clearly a desperate bid to prevent an inevitable, catastrophic run on deposits. His wife Lala is a demanding, materialistic and gossiping alcoholic. As is the case with Tano, her classist attitude is encompassed within a resolutely negative portrayal of a morally vacuous, corrupt upper class that ultimately prefers death over poverty. She imagines villera/os as bestial and worries, 'con todo lo que está pasando da miedo salir a la calle […] ¿Y si los de la villa salen en estampida?' [with everything that's going on, I'm afraid to go outside (…) What if crowds come stampeding out of the villa?]. Mavy, whose family only lives in Altos de la Cascada because she works there as an on-site letting agent, protests, 'no son animales' [they are not animals]. Hence, barbaric and Eurocentric perceptions of the dispossessed are refuted by those who are not part of the vilified elite, again revealing the subversion and undermining of stereotypes regarding villas and poverty.

This alternate approach to denouncing the mistreatment of the economically disadvantaged is also marked by other sympathetic figures such as Ronnie. The only husband not driven to suicide, he challenges Tano's bigoted, materialistic values and realizes that there are more important things in life than financial wealth. He states, 'matarme sería una manera de negar todo ese otro que también soy' [killing myself would mean denying everything else that I am]. This comment underlines the crisis of masculinity experienced by the other husbands, who would rather die than appear to have failed in their roles as successful breadwinners. The poisonous nature of the rich is inherited by Trina, who regurgitates her mother Lala's prejudices, 'estuve afuera […] donde están los monstruos de verdad' [I was outside (…) where the real monsters are]. Later, she is raped by the gated community's security guard and blames men from the villa, falsely claiming that she was attacked on one of her trips to purchase drugs. As the crisis culminates, the audience witness news programmes showing Argentina's most desperate citizens looting supermarkets for food. These pictures are literally muted on Carla's television, showing the central characters' lack of solidarity with the wider society and confirming the subversive rationale behind the silencing of the oppressed voice. It is exactly this type of shocking image that informs the characters' prejudiced opinions about those living in poverty. Ironically, however, it is also clear that the violence on the television screen is instigated by those in control of Argentina's wealth. This critique allows the audience to scrutinize the

media that serve as the only point of contact between rich and poor. In this way, the director creates a Brechtian 'distancing effect' that allows the audience to identify the classism driven by portrayals of poverty in the media (Silberman et al. 2015: 5). A similar effect is also achieved through the (dis)appearance of maids, who are the only dark-skinned characters on screen and remain almost completely silent as they are ignored by their employers. One is framed from the shoulders down and with her back to the camera as she serves breakfast to Teresa, who occupies the centre of the screen. The absence of the maid's face dehumanizes and alienates her, reflecting the dismissive attitude and general mistreatment that she is subjected to by her bosses. Although it is not specifically stated that the maid or looters are from villas, it is undoubtedly true that these characters are all economically marginalized. Scorer notes that, like the *cartonera/o*, 'in-house maids […] remind those living in other areas of the city of the villa's presence' (Scorer 2016: 184). Ultimately, the respective representations of the maid, looters and those who are explicitly recognised as villera/os, form part of the same critique of upper-class prejudices. Villera/os are encompassed within a general portrayal of poverty, which becomes an invisible symbol of discrimination and elitist ignorance in *Las viudas de los jueves*.

4.5 Conclusion

A recurring argument of this thesis is that the representation of villas is often limited in cinema. As this thesis will later conclude, the frequent repetition of themes relating to gangs, drugs and crime have restricted audience understandings of informal communities and therefore inhibited their assimilation into the wider society. This being the case, it is notable that international co-productions, which have been criticised for foregoing nuanced portrayals of local issues in order to reach global audiences, have demonstrated a diverse approach to representing Argentina's informal settlements. The shifting nature of villas in international co-productions has been made evident in the present analysis of themes, aesthetics and casting.

Regarding casting in an increasingly transnational film industry, it seems, unsurprisingly, that the commercial promise of well-known names on the credit roll is something that attracts interest and investment from national and foreign sources. Most of the stars discussed here have had successive appearances in co-productions, shedding light on the rationale behind the scrutiny that financiers such as Ibermedia have come under for favouring certain professionals (Hoefert de Turégano 2004: 19; Villazana 2013: 39). As they portray villas, however, the films examined in this chapter counterbalance star presence by also casting lesser-known, sometimes untrained actors who are actual members of the marginalized groups represented. The directors negotiate this path with varying degrees of success. Trapero does not explore villera/o figures in depth, instead preferring to focus on three characters who come to the villa as saviours from

the 'outside'. This mode of representation is rooted in films studied in chapter two, such as *Puerto Nuevo*, *Suburbio* and *El candidato*. While some may argue that this has a marginalizing effect on villa residents, others might justify the centralization of the well-known actors who play the heroes by drawing attention to the large audiences that have become aware of social injustice in villas because of their presence. Although their work has not been as widely disseminated as Trapero's, Van de Couter and Gaggero are undoubtedly more efficient at empowering marginalized figures while also acknowledging their need for government support and social inclusion. Piñeyro omits visual references to villera/os, but his production *Las viudas de los jueves* is mostly concerned with challenging extreme capitalism and the classist voices that push villera/os to the peripheries of society. In this exploration of the erosion of the middle-class in Argentina, the absence of villera/os implicitly exposes the negative impact of social fragmentation fostered by the members of a gated community, who ironically monopolize the screen. Writing about the novel on which the film was based, Scorer observes that *Las viudas de los jueves* reveals how attempts to escape a lack of social harmony by establishing gated neighbourhoods, ironically and counterproductively reinforces the fragmentation that establishes 'the other' and drives the fear towards them (Scorer 2016: 110). This critique of oppression is adapted to the screen through the overwhelming presence of residents of Altos de la Cascada. The ironic symbolic annihilation of the villera/o foregoes some of the more practical effects of fully exhibiting actors from underprivileged communities, however. These effects are seen in Norma Argentina's successful career, which took off thanks to her acclaimed performance in *Cama adentro*. After appearing in Gaggero's film, Argentina played Mabel's mother in *El resultado del amor* and was reunited with Norma Aleandro in *The City of Your Final Destination* (dir. James Ivory, 2009), a Uruguay-based U.S. drama starring the iconic actor Anthony Hopkins.

In co-productions about villas, there is no standardization of the themes of criminals, gangs and violence. In fact, features that are wholly Argentine have tended to focus on these matters more so than their transnational counterparts. This is somewhat surprising, given the enormous global acclaim and outstanding box-office performance of violent 'slum' films such as *Cidade de Deus*. *Elefante blanco* is the only film studied in this chapter that capitalizes on the success of such narratives. Some social workers and villa residents who saw their involvement with Trapero's production as an opportunity to promote integration between villas and the 'outside' felt cheated by this fact. These individuals have strongly condemned what they feel is a clichéd plot that focuses excessively on drugs, rioting and murder (Rubio 2013: 59). Other filmmakers have circumvented such issues entirely. Van de Couter does not attempt to reach global audiences through images of gangs or violent crimes committed by villera/os. Rather, while continuing to show that life in unofficial *barrios* is made extremely difficult by

discriminatory attitudes that are deeply-rooted in official discourse, he foregrounds the most non-threatening aspects of villa communities. Moreover, despite the particularly national context of *Mía*, its portrayal of an informal settlement contributes to a global debate that has seen improvements in trans rights in many countries. Thus, Van de Couter's villa is not a symbol of the problems related to gangs that stem from poverty. Rather, it is a manifestation of the marginalization of those whose only 'crime' is defying traditional gender values. *Las viudas de los jueves* also challenges stereotypes. However, it does so subversively, incorporating them into the worldview of unsympathetic wealthy individuals who fear villera/os but, in fact, pose a greater threat to society than those experiencing poverty. This critique is again marked by the overwhelming presence of elitists who distance themselves from villera/os, while recreating the conditions that they seek to escape in their private community, a microcosm of neoliberal society that is inevitably inclined to plunge into a state of crisis. Chapter six demonstrates that this kind of subversive engagement with negative stereotypes frequently occurs in villa-based productions. While not inherently problematic, it's overuse may have negative implications for villa communities. Ultimately, the manner in which *Mía* and *Cama adentro* in particular, retain the local social conscience that has traditionally characterised Argentine cinema, while deviating from overrepresented aspects of poverty, suggests that the transnationalization of the cinema industry does not necessarily mean the homogenization of film.

The aesthetic of the villa also varies considerably in the films discussed in this chapter. *Elefante blanco* is ambitious and epic from an audiovisual perspective, incorporating many extras, lofty aerial shots of Ciudad Oculta, spectacular natural scenery, impressive tracking shots through the alleyways of the villa, and expertly edited riot sequences. It's combination of a grandiose orchestral score with popular Argentine rock music and *cumbia villera* also demonstrates an attempt to appeal to mass audiences while retaining a distinctly Argentine feel. *Las viudas de los jueves,* while taking a very different thematic approach, is also ambitious in its production values, as is evident in its extravagant set design and use of music. Conversely, the understated feel of *Mía* and *Cama adentro*, evident in their aesthetic minimalism, suggests the plurality of the transnational production. Thus, in conclusion, transnational cinema does not invariably favour any particular mode of representation. It has, as Podalsky argues, 'no inherent morphology' (Podalsky in Hoefert de Turégano 2004: 15). This bodes well for the concept of the co-production which, despite being criticized for diluting national cultures, can accurately examine a particularly local space while also transcending frontiers to deliver meaningful social messages.

Chapter Five

Gendering Poverty and Countering the Male-Centred Fashion of Violence in Films about Villas

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the representation of those who are marginalized because of both their gender and socioeconomic position in Argentina. The productions that provide a focal point for this discussion, *Guido Models* (dir. Julieta Sans, 2015) and *Mía*, are two of the very few that explore in depth, the gendered experience of poverty in villas. Although Sans deals with cisgender women and Van de Couter trans characters, both productions are analysed in the present chapter since they challenge the heteronormative norms often considered synonymous with the villa and counter the masculinization of the villa-focused narrative.

As has been made evident in previous chapters, a significant number of portrayals of villas recall the novelist and scholar George P. Elliott's influential analysis of the mass media's frequent representation of men as aggressors who 'operate outside the usual laws of civilized society […] on the principal of violence'. These films naturalize criminal-centred narratives about poverty and reinforce what Elliott calls an 'expectation of violence' or a 'fashion of violence' in portrayals of marginal masculinity (Elliott 1965: 33). Filmmakers mostly work in this way to demonstrate the impact of social exclusion and demonize the political movements seen as responsible for continuing the cycle of poverty. While *Cama adentro* and, to a somewhat lesser degree, *El resultado del amor* stand out as female-centred portrayals of economic marginalization in Argentina, numerous classic and contemporary films including *Suburbio*, *Barrio Gris*, *Del otro lado del puente*, *Crónica de un niño solo*, *Fuga de cerebros*, *El polaquito*, *Paco* and *Elefante blanco*, demonstrate that female- and trans-centred narratives about villas are exceptions to the standard manner in which villas are represented on screen.

This chapter demonstrates that, through the theme of fashion, *Guido Models* counters the 'fashion of violence' and speaks out against the gender-based forms of discrimination that define the female experience of poverty in villas. However, this documentary is also found to be wanting by not doing enough to challenge potentially harmful definitions of feminine beauty promoted by the fashion industry. In this way, while Sans works towards a more pluralistic representation of villas, her production also reconstructs conflicting liberal and conservative attitudes towards gender in Argentine society. While often progressive when it comes to

legislating for gender equality, this society is under serious threat from the growing problem of violence towards girls and women.

The following section of this chapter incorporates a close textual analysis of *Mía*. By allocating a specific section of this chapter to the examination of Van de Couter's film, I aim to avoid conflating his discourse about transgender rights with Sans's feminist subtext. It is argued that, while trans characters appear in minor roles in some films about informal settlements, their gendered experience of poverty has been largely overlooked in villa-centred productions to date. Although, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, trans characters have been marginalized in mainstream cinema in general, it is particularly significant that they have not been included to a greater degree in films about villas since there is a disproportionately high rate of poverty among the trans community in Argentina (Socías, Cahn et al. 2014: 71-72; Socías, Zalazar et al., 2014: 3-5). This issue is addressed in *Mía*, which shows how trans individuals are often relegated to informal settlements because of their exclusion from the formal labour market, itself a result of non-conformity to the traditional male-female binarism. By highlighting this very particular form of gendered social exclusion, *Mía* accomplishes its objective of calling for changes in legislation relating to the rights of trans individuals. In particular, the film portrays trans villa dwellers in order to demand their social integration through the granting of adoption rights and through the official recognition of their gender identities. Hence, the countering of the masculinization of the villa-centred narrative serves to promote the acceptance of trans people in mainstream society.

In constructing these gender-focused discourses and, in the case of *Mía*, in defying traditional concepts of gender, both Sans and Van de Couter circumvent the stereotypical image of the crime-infested villa. Unlike many of the films previously analysed, they do not establish ambiguous criminal-victim characters whose economic circumstances and social exclusion force them to carry out serious criminal acts. Thus, these films go some way towards satisfying the need for a more diverse understanding of villas and poverty in Argentina. As this thesis will later conclude, a more complex understanding of unofficial communities is required to facilitate their social, economic and cultural assimilation into the 'outside' world.

A diverse understanding of poverty can be fostered by recognising the socioeconomic impact of systematic gender inequality. This relationship between gender and poverty has been widely acknowledged, as is evident in the United Nation's report published in *The Challenge of Global Slums* (2012). In this report, the executive director of the Human Settlements Programme Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka states that, 'slum women – and the children they support – are the greatest victims of all' within informal settlements (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2012: vi). While this comment overlooks transgender people, who are often marginalized even more than women, it correctly implies that females are particularly

vulnerable to the social problems that unofficial neighbourhoods present. In the same publication, it is also stated that 'slum' areas are often used as refuges by women who have been forced to leave their homes after marital breakdown and domestic abuse (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2012: xxxi). The report also notes that:

> The necessity to distinguish between different levels of poverty has been recognized with a view to targeting and tailoring resources at those most in need. Women […] have been identified as the most vulnerable amongst the poor, as have female-headed households [...] Where housing conditions are poor, such as in slums and informal urban settlements, it is the vulnerable who suffer most from environmental degradation and inadequate service provision. (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2012: 64)

These findings suggest that gender identity is one of the characteristics that most determines one's experience of poverty. It is reasonable to state, then, that scholars should strive to understand the ways in which the gendered experience of poverty is portrayed and ask whether media producers aggravate the experiences of poverty specific to those who are also oppressed because of their gender.

Sylvia Chant lends further credence to this argument in what is some of the most often-cited research on the gendered experience of poverty. Chant discusses the feminization of poverty, a term that proposes a trend in which females are increasingly experiencing financial difficulties in disproportionately high numbers when compared to males, and has heavily influenced feminist discourses and international development policy since the 1990s. Since Argentina's social and economic crisis in 2001, research has pointed towards the feminization of poverty across the country (Moghadam 2005: 65). Statistics from the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC) support this theory, showing elevated unemployment rates among women, particularly those under the age of 30, and lower salaries received by women in the workforce (INDEC 2014: 234; 2015: 210). Research carried out in the city of Córdoba further highlights discrimination against women trying to secure work and negotiate salaries (Carranza and Peralta 2012: 145). Furthermore, these problems are possibly more serious than the official figures suggest. Claudia Anzorena argues that traditional values confine Argentine females to the domestic sphere, wherein they are labelled economically inactive as opposed to unemployed. Anzorena states that the government is reluctant to reclassify these individuals because this would increase pressure on the labour market (Anzorena 2008: 61). The recent establishment of the U.N.-affiliated NGO *Pro Mujer* [Pro Women] in the northern provinces of Salta, Jujuy and Tucumán, also attests to the vulnerability of women to poverty in Argentina.

Since 2005, the organization has provided business loans, education and health services to women in some of the country's poorest regions. The establishment of such organizations and the figures cited presently highlight the socioeconomic impact of systematic gender inequality in Argentina.

In her analysis of the feminization of poverty, Chant accepts the underlying idea that the female experience of poverty is distinct and argues that women experience poverty in greater numbers than men around the world. However, she also points out flaws in how women's poverty is commonly conceived and calls for a revision of the complex relationship between gender and economic marginalization. For example, she suggests that there is an 'over-emphasis on income' and monetary issues, and a problematic treatment of women as a homogenous mass, when it comes to defining the feminization of poverty (Chant 2006: 204-205; Chant 2016: 1-2). Other scholars have supported Chant, stating that it is not just material means that should be measured in order to broaden understandings of poverty among women (Fukada-Parr 1999: 100; Rodenberg 2004: 13). Such research shows that a deprivation of respect, opportunity, dignity and other factors characterise poverty and should be considered in attempts to satisfy the need for 'a new multidimensional view of privation' (Chant 2016: 3).

This underscores the importance of recognising the diversity of experiences of poverty, something that this thesis points out is generally lacking in films about villas. Produced during a time when women's and transgender rights represented some of the most pressing and important issues in Argentine society, *Guido Models* and *Mía* respond to the exclusion of female and trans protagonists in films about villas, providing an insight into the gendered nature of marginalization in informal settlements and working towards a more diverse understanding of Argentina's villas.

5.2 *Guido Models*: Fashioning Agency, Remodelling Femininity?

Whereas the male villero is pre-disposed to criminality in a significant number of the films analysed in this thesis, the female villa inhabitant (or villera) has frequently been strongly victimized without being developed as a character. Therefore, as Gerbner, who originally theorized that mass media cultivate the public opinion, finds in his analysis of images of gender in film:

> Women are the victims of violence, not its perpetrators. One can see at a glance the plethora of women as victim images – women lying prostrate in the hands of males who range from noble rescuers to rapists – all showing the same power imbalance. (Gerbner 1978: 58)

In line with this analysis, Rosita is raped in *Detrás de un largo muro*, as are Flavia in *El secuestrador*, Teresa in *La ciudad oculta*, Mabel in *El resultado del amor* and Nora in *Paco*.

The prostitution of the villera is also akin to rape. This is seen in silent films such as those made by Ferreyra and early sound films such as *Suburbio*, in which Laura is forced into the sex trade by Pedro. Similarly, in *Barrio gris*, Federico's sister Laura (Fernanda Mistral) and their neighbour Rosita must also sell their bodies to earn money, while Teresa in *Detrás de un largo muro* is effectively allocated the same role when she moves in with a corrupt older politician to escape the misery of Villa Jardín. In *Crónica de un niño solo*, the nameless villera prostituted by Fabián remains silent and faces away from the camera as Polín and the audience watch her through her window. In these films, the villera is generally a powerless, peripheral figure.

Contemporary films have continued along this trajectory. *Paco*, for example, frames prostitution as one of the outcomes of economic crisis. Nora is the victim of a process of universal commodification, which is directly linked to the economic recession when she is forced to exchange sex for a lethal drug created by the crisis. Thus, in times of economic difficulty and when money is in short supply, the market dehumanizes, objectifies and commodifies the marginal body in a ruthless attempt to sustain itself. Nora's victimhood and helplessness demonstrate that in post-crisis Argentina, 'the drainage of cash […] has fostered changes in transactions [and] modified modes of circulation' (Epele 2011: 1473-1474). The parallels between rape and prostitution are reinforced when Nora, who is relegated to the periphery of the narrative, takes her own life after a group of gang members have sex with her in return for drugs. In *El polaquito*, the commodification of women again underscores the exploitation of those experiencing poverty. Desanzo's film suggests that there is no difference between prostitution and rape, since the protagonists are subjected to both of these traumatic experiences while under the gangster Rengo's control. Pelu is looked upon as an item of exchange, endowed with monetary value by the market. Rengo brags, 'está cotizando muy bien, cincuenta pesos' [she is earning very well, fifty pesos]. The association of the verb used here – *cotizar* [to be valued at] – with the trading of currencies and stocks further underlines the alienating and depersonalizing nature of the sex industry.

In *El resultado del amor*, the villera protagonist is again forced to sell her body because Villa 21 is a dangerous place from where she must escape. This is demonstrated in the rape scene, in her brother Hugo's plea for her to leave the informal settlement and in her friend Carla's (Oscar Larrea) comment, 'si no hubieses nacido en esta villa podrida ya estarías en la televisión y hasta en las revistas' [if you had not been born in this rotten villa, you would already be on television and in magazines]. Mabel is introduced to the world of prostitution by Malena (Romina Ricci), who sets up encounters with the boss in the factory where she works. These scenes mark an unusually nuanced exploration of the circumstances of the female villa

inhabitant, highlighting links between their exploitation in the formal workplace and the trading of sex. The cash gained from these meetings allows Mabel and Malena to rent a legally constructed property outside of the villa. The importance of this becomes clear when the narrator explains that their new house, 'era cerca de la villa pero no era la villa' [was near the villa, but wasn't the villa]. To pay the rent and secure their position outside of the villa, the women transform the house into a brothel. Hence, 'prostitution is rooted in private ownership' (Engels in Brown 2012: 54). It is only when Mabel decides to move into Martín's mobile camper van that she can overcome this fact. Such a comprehensive examination of the forces that push the villera into prostitution distinguishes *El resultado del amor* from the many previous films wherein the villera remains an underdeveloped figure.

Further distancing Subiela's production from others are dialogues between Mabel and Malena that contrast the 'sex work' versus 'abolitionist' debate, which is central to discussions about the morality of prostitution (O'Connell Davidson 2002: 84). Contract theorists advocate the right to exchange sexual services and believe in the possibility of 'sound prostitution', which does not involve the selling of individuals on the market but rather the contracting of a willing person to provide a service. Opponents of contract theorists argue that those who seem to choose to become prostitutes are forced to do so by economic factors and that prostitution is an oppressive mechanism of capitalism (Pateman 1999: 53-58). When Malena first reveals that she receives money for sex, she counters Mabel's accusation, 'sos una puta' [you're a whore], by calling herself a 'trabajadora sexual' [sex worker]. The conflicting ideas are again juxtaposed when Mabel agrees to have sex in exchange for money for the first time. She says, 'ahora soy una puta' [now I'm a whore]. Malena contests this statement with the reply, 'no, ahora vas a ganar mucha platita' [no, now you're going to earn a lot of money]. It is Mabel, Subiela's progatonist and the more sympathetic of the two characters, who appears to be correct, however. She links prostitution and rape when she explains to her doctor, 'me violaron y después me convertí en prostituta' [I was raped and then I became a prostitute]. Ultimately, Mabel is certainly a more empowered and complex character than the majority of villeras. She ultimately leaves the sex industry, opts to volunteer as a clown and marries Martín. She must live with a HIV infection, but she is more than simply a one-dimensional victim character.

On the other hand, the contraction of diseases secures the marginal female's position as a more simplified victim figure in other films. Laura is killed by an unspecified epidemic in *Suburbio*, as is Delia in *Yo tengo fe*. Although the death of *Suburbio*'s middle-class doctor Amalia is also caused by the plague, this signifies self-sacrifice and not marginalized victimhood. Hence, heroines are generally from the 'outside'. This is again evident in *Puerto Nuevo* when the aristocratic singer Raquel rescues Carlos from Barrio Inmigrantes. In *Elefante blanco*, Luciana is the strongest and most admirable woman on screen. Her social work offers hope in Ciudad

Oculta, recalling *Suburbio*'s saviour Amalia. Meanwhile, even more so than villa males, marginal women are denied significant roles in Trapero's film. Furthermore, the villa's clerical 'padres' [fathers] call attention to the patriarchal norms that have been reaffirmed since the earliest villa-centred works. For example, Alma is demonized in *Puerto Nuevo* because of her aversion to marital stability.

Such norms were again reinforced during the 1950s, as film heralded the rise of Peronism. The characters' need for fathers reflected Argentina's apparent need for Perón. This reveals the 'strikingly gendered nature of Perón's leadership', which depended on stereotypical notions of virile and physically strong masculinity (Milanesio 2014: 85). It is the lack of a father figure that forces Federico into a life of crime in *Barrio gris*. In this film, moreover, Zulema's solid family background and respectable father, who disapproves of her relationship until Federico changes his ways, provide her with the moral conviction to convince the young man to confess his crimes. This is also the case in *Del otro lado del puente*, in which Roberto admits that his desire to join a gang is a result of his need for a father and family. In the same film, Elsa's single marital status denotes her superficiality, materialism and immorality. Her substitution of traditional patriarchal values for an obsession with jewellery and money is condemned throughout the film and Roberto is apparently justified in hitting her because of this. On the other hand, Luisa, who dutifully waits for Roberto to change his ways while caring for their child in the villa, is portrayed as a decent woman. In this way, although Peronism did promote an unconventional version of masculinity where strong men could, like Juan Perón, be at ease in the domestic sphere and even carry out household tasks so as to appear as self-reliant as Argentina should be, it also 'endorsed traditional gender roles – women as mothers and housewives and men as breadwinners' (Milanesio 2014: 96).

Perón's opponents relied equally on gender stereotypes (Milanesio 2014: 97). This is reflected in anti-Peronist films such as *Detrás de un largo muro*. The rotten state of the villa and the city marks the failures of Peronism and is signified by Rosita's inability to find a virtuous man there. Pedro, the villa inhabitant who initially vies for her affection, turns out to be a thief, rapist and murderer. When her father Don Dionisio is killed by Pedro, he must be replaced. In other words, Rosita's life is incomplete without a dominant male presence. Balance is only restored when she returns to the countryside where Andrés, whose disapproval of her move to the capital implies that he knows best, is waiting to console her. The victimization of villeras in these films, although not designed to reinforce their oppression, is rarely empowering and inevitably subordinating. Thus, it reflects a dualistic, liberal yet conservative, attitude to women in Argentine society. This ambiguity has survived in contemporary Argentine cinema, despite the progress that has been made by women in Argentina in recent decades.

Guido Models also reflects this kind of ambiguous portrayal of women in the villa. In some ways, the documentary deviates from the standard portrayals of villeras by examining their gendered experiences of poverty in depth. On such occasions, it demonstrates that documentary has historically been more successful than fictional cinema in providing women with a platform. For example, Birri's documentary *Tire dié* gives a voice to females, mothers and others who might be considered 'the marginal within the marginal' (Foster 2013: 4). Sans's theme of fashion is employed to deconstruct stereotypes about poverty and challenge the 'fashion of violence' in films about villas. The documentary explores the titular modelling school and agency established in Villa 31 by the late designer Guido Fuentes, who emigrated from Bolivia to Argentina in the early 1990s. Sans reflects positively on her subjects, portraying them as resilient and unrelenting in their quest to succeed in the fashion industry against the odds. The various Villa 31-based female models appearing on screen are dedicated and ambitious, juggling their time between rehearsals, shows, studies and household chores. Their instructor and agent Guido is self-taught and has made many sacrifices in order to found his academy, where he offers free classes to those who would otherwise be unable to afford them. Guido and the parents of his most promising prospects, Delia Cáceres and Sonia León, emphasize the importance of education and encourage the young women to study. These women are never victimized or used to serve the interests of any political movement. Recurring close-ups of stilettos clip-clapping across muddy pathways and shots of apprentice models parading past ramshackle market stalls in elegant evening dresses defy the stereotypical shabby image of the villera/o (something that also occurs in *Mía*, as will be discussed). These shots underscore the dignity that villera/os retain despite the decrepit landscape in which they are forced to live and work. In such scenes, Sans recontextualizes villeras in a respectable and unsensational portrayal of individuals who, despite their humble circumstances, nurture aspirations to be models instead of resorting to crime to achieve social mobility.

The models' experience of poverty is not only determined by their gender, thus establishing a multi-faceted image of the villera whose experience of poverty is dependent on both her femininity and nationality. *Guido Models* uses fashion to promote positive relationships between different regions in Latin America, establishing a complex understanding of the nature of the marginalization experienced by the Sans's subjects. When Guido takes Sonia and Delia to his humble home town in Bolivia to establish business links and host a public fashion show, Sans's reveals a broader Latin American hierarchy, the bottom of which the villa inhabitants are not necessarily consigned to. Throughout this journey, a Bolivarian view of Latin American solidarity is reconstructed. After they arrive at Guido's house on the outskirts of the city of Cochabamba, their stigmatized villera/o identity disappears and they find themselves welcomed as celebrities, appearing on national television and judging an audition in which local girls

compete for a place in their upcoming show. Hence, the Villa 31 agency established by the immigrant designer disarms negative preconceptions about villas, empowers marginalized young women and unifies Latin America. This is again suggested when, during a show in Villa 31, a local teenager named Ruth Gamarra sports a red, yellow and green dress made by Guido in the style of the Bolivian flag. As she takes to the catwalk, Guido announces that she was born in Argentina to Paraguayan parents. Sonia is also recognised as Paraguayan by birth. The function of these references to nationality is revealed by Guido's slogan, 'todo por la integración, "no" a la discriminación, "sí" a la inclusión' ["yes" to integration and inclusion, 'no' to discrimination]. Thus, the integration of Villa 31, an area shown to be occupied by many non-Argentine Latin Americans, is called for in order to accomplish the broader ambition of assimilating all immigrants into Argentine society and for recognising the cultural and economic links between Argentina and neighbouring countries. The choice of the Plaza de las Banderas, where the national flags of the Americas are permanently at mast, as the venue for their grand finale in central Cochabamba further reinforces Guido's call for Latin American unity. The spirit in this public space is also incorporated into the event when Guido gifts the Bolivian-themed gown and other items of clothing to the audience. By returning the fruits of his labour and Argentine experience back to his birthplace, the immigrant uses fashion to promote solidarity between Argentina, Bolivia and their international neighbours.

However, given the extent to which *Guido Models* focuses on fashion, it is surprising that Sans does not examine the paradoxical relationship between it and the villera/os' socioeconomic position. The industry's role in the formation of the very kind of precarious circumstances in which the characters live and work goes unacknowledged. As Tansey Hoskins argues in *Stitched Up: The Anti-Capitalist Book of Fashion*, despite often producing great works of art, the fashion industry creates inequalities which are emblematized by its slum sweatshops, 'cheap labour markets, […] dehumanisation [and] guiltless exploitation of the so-called third world, […] terrible working conditions, […] environmental destruction, racism [and] alienation' (Hoskins 2014: 5-6).

These issues are successfully fictionalized in other films including, for example, *Real Women Have Curves* (dir. Patricia Cardoso, 2002), which is based on a play of the same name (1996) by the film's Chicana co-screenwriter Josefina López. Cardoso and López portray Mexican-American women working in a sewing factory in East Los Angeles. A feminist, class-conscious discourse is voiced by Ana (America Ferrera). This protagonist clashes with her conservative mother Carmen (Lupe Ontiveros), who insists that she reject a college scholarship and work as a seamstress to help her sister Estela (Ingrid Oliu). Estela's company struggles to profit, receiving only a fraction of the retail value of the dresses it produces. When Estela musters up the courage to ask for a much-needed advance from the Glitz company, her most

important contractor, an unsympathetic rejection from a female Mexican-American executive further underscores López and Cardoso's critique of the mainstream fashion industry. Ana, who is initially arrogant and disdainful towards seamstressing, quickly identifies this unequal relationship between Estela's small business and the major retailers that she produces for. She scorns, 'does that seem right to you? […] This is a sweatshop. Don't you get it? You're all cheap labour for Bloomingdales'. However, as she irons dresses destined for wealthier, thinner women, she begins to respect the painstaking efforts of Estela and the other women. In the play, Ana also witnesses the fear of deportation that constantly hangs over undocumented Mexican-Americans, allowing her to comprehend the underlying causes of exploitation and realize that many women have little choice but to become 'cheap labour for Bloomingdales'. In both versions of *Real Women Have Curves*, her newfound understanding facilitates a representation of female garment labourers as important but undervalued figures in society.

The documentary *The True Cost* (dir. Andrew Morgan, 2015) also grapples with some of the issues overlooked by Sans. Morgan contrasts the lives of garment labourers in Indian slums with glitz and glamour in the same manner as the Argentine director. However, he does so in order to unveil the devastating results of the so-called developed world's excessive consumerism and materialism: extreme poverty, widespread pollution and terminal illnesses. Morgan also reveals that the workers who are subjected to inhumane and violent treatment, often with fatal consequences, are usually female.

The approach taken in these films highlights Sans's problematic exclusion of a critique of the fashion industry. This exclusion is particularly significant given that Latin American immigrants (especially females), who are central to the film, are heavily exposed to this sort of degradation in Argentina. Large numbers of women leave Bolivia every year to work in the undesirable conditions of the garment industry in Argentina (Bastia 2007a: 660). Bolivian immigrants also made up the majority of workers in the Brazilian sweatshops that were shut down after investigations into the clothing firm Inditex in 2011 (Hennigan 2011: n.p.). Despite paying compensation to Brazil for these crimes, the multinational fashion company, which is owned by the Spanish business tycoon Amancio Ortega and is the parent company of various global retail chains, continues to be accused of outsourcing Bolivian and Peruvian slave labour in Brazil and Argentina (Irigaray 2013: n.p.). This underlines the irony in the portrayal of fashion, a force which reinforces the postcolonial power structures symbolized by villas, as a route to social mobility and international solidarity in *Guido Models*.

The use of fashion as a tool for empowering women, in particular, also creates tensions within the feminist subtext underlying the documentary. Delia and Sonia seem to challenge gendered oppression through their engagement with fashion. A critique of the media's role in reinforcing oppressive gender norms is evident when Delia watches a soap opera in which a

male character claims that his girlfriend left him because he could not satisfy her material desires. The impact of such messages is then witnessed the night before Guido and the models set off on their road trip to Bolivia. In this scene, men are heard whistling and shouting at Sonia as she endures one of her laborious trips home from rehearsals. In Argentina, it is common for sexually explicit comments misnamed *piropos* [flirtatious remarks] to be aimed at women in public areas. Activist groups have called for the government to introduce laws that punish people who make these remarks, but this has yet to happen (Carbajal, 2015: n.p.). In the next sequence nonetheless, Sonia and Delia depart enthusiastically from the bus station on the outskirts of the villa on their three-day journey, thus rising determinedly above this oppressive culture. As their coach leaves the bus station located on the frontier between the villa and the 'outside', the international cross-border trip is again framed as a defiant, feminist act. 'De viaje no te vas' [You are not Leaving] is heard at this point. This song masquerades as a declaration of a man's love for a woman, but has disconcerting undertones that point towards the subjugation of the female object of desire. It seems as though the singer is trying to prevent Sonia and Delia from leaving:

> Si mis ojos fueran el cielo
> Inundo todos los caminos
> Interrumpiendo con mis lágrimas
> Impidiendo que llegues a tu destino […]
> De viaje no te vas
> De viaje no te vas, my love
> [If my eyes were the sky
> I would flood every road with my tears
> To prevent you from reaching your destination (…)
> You're not leaving
> You're not leaving, my love].

However, Delia and Sonia do leave, apparently taking control of their lives. This idea again comes to the fore during the uplifting grand finale of the show in Bolivia. Here, a woman performing 'Te quedó grande la yegua' [The Mare was Too Big for You] responds to the message implicit in 'De viaje no te vas'. She sings triumphantly:

Quieres que la mujer se someta a su hombre […]
Pero una mujer como yo, pero una mujer como yo
No te mereces
[You think that a woman should bow to her man (…)
But you don't deserve a woman like me
You don't deserve a woman like me].

Through these lyrical exchanges, Sans establishes an image of young women who, although marginalized by gender, nationality and socioeconomic status, are determined to achieve independence in a world where they are constantly told that they should be reliant on and subservient to men.

However, since the catwalk might link Villa 31 to the surrounding city better than any of its unpaved streets, appearances remain a major source of hope. This idea has controversial implications that Sans does not acknowledge in the way that other directors do. For example, the manner in which the industry takes advantage of girls and women financially and sexually is exposed by Sara Ziff in her documentary *Picture Me* (2009). Sans's oversights become even more significant when one considers that females trying to escape poverty are particularly vulnerable to these forms of exploitation. This vulnerability is demonstrated in *Girl Model* (dirs. David Redmon and Ashley Sabin, 2012), which documents the controversial practices of a U.S. agency that contracts destitute Siberian girls for the Japanese market, only to aggravate their poverty by leaving them in thousands of dollars' worth of debt. *Secrets of South America: Extreme Beauty Queens* shows how the physical and psychological health of Miss Venezuela contenders who hope that their looks will take them (as the narrator says) 'from slum to celebrity', are threatened by the unrealistic demands and cutthroat criticisms of the beauty gurú Osmel Sousa. When a malnourished pageant participant collapses, Sousa dismisses her health problems and tells her to stand up. The alarming revelation that another candidate who, intent on overcoming the poverty of her informal settlement, has had a mesh stitched to her tongue to prohibit her from eating solids, is particularly damning and rails against the emergence of a dangerous practice associated with fashion and beauty.

Traditional ideas of beauty are at times reinforced by Guido. His admirable statement that he does not reject students because of their physical attributes and sees fashion as a means of providing young people with the sense of self-worth required to achieve social integration, is undermined by the fact that Sonia and Delia, those with the most conventional model aesthetic, remain Sans's primary subjects. In an interview with *Infobae*, Guido discusses his success in helping two models (possibly Delia and Sonia) to secure contracts with Silkey Mundial, a major cosmetics firm: 'cada vez que son elegidas, veo que lo que hago está bien, que voy por buen

camino. Mi trabajo es para que ellas puedan mostrarse y salir divinas' [each time they are chosen, I see that I am doing a good job and that I am on the right track. My job is to allow them to show themselves off and look beautiful] (Fahsbender 2015: n.p.). Integration is thus pursued by conforming to the standards that idealize young, tall, thin females. This becomes evident again when Guido takes his students to the Plaza San Martín in Retiro to teach them how to negotiate the runway. In front of a statue of the great liberator San Martín, the mentor tries to liberate the girls and young women of the villa by calling, ironically, for 'más cadera' [more hip-swinging]. As dusk arrives and the lesson ends, a wide shot of the Sheraton hotel suggests that acquiring the ideal hip-swinging gait might, as well as paving the way for female agency, lead to a five-star lifestyle. Here, it is also noteworthy that the models rely on, and are instructed by, a man. Another male, who acts as the announcer at Guido's Villa 31 show, encourages the audience to applaud the models' beauty, which he says exalts Argentina. At this point, there are problematic implications that villas are equal to, and should be integrated with, other *barrios* precisely because they contain conventionally beautiful females, and that promoting dominant concepts of female beauty might be the answer to marginalization.[1]

Sans does address the subject of body image in scenes that show Delia frying *milanesas* [breaded chicken] and Sonia indulging in ice-cream and a *dulce de leche* [caramelized milk] cake. Sonia even jokes that good food is more important to her than the prospect of a boyfriend. As the models eat with their agent and families, the dining experience becomes a metaphor for the overarching theme of Latin American solidarity and perhaps even a feminist act of rebellion against unrealistic body images. However, it would be naïve to suggest that these values can survive in the 'oustide' world of fashion, which is infamous for its negative impact on women's self-image as well as its oppression of those living in poverty. It is clear that Delia and Sonia want to enter the mainstream fashion and beauty industries. It is also clear that they have what it takes to achieve their goals. In fact, they have already worked as professional models. After the release of Sans's film, both were contracted by Dolce and Gabbana to perform in Milan, one of the world's fashion capitals. This has been framed as an underdog success story in news media outlets that have praised Sans's film (*Clarín* 2015: n.p.). Nonetheless, the oppression that these young women might experience in the modelling business is inadvertently indicated when Guido is interviewed while they pose silently on a Bolivian television programme. In addition to the fact that the Delia and Sonia do not speak, 'Blurred Lines' plays in the background. Since its release in 2013, this global pop hit has been heavily criticized for its glorification of sex with nonconsenting females and video featuring topless fashion models dancing around the composers Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams (Lynskey 2013: n.p.).

[1] These ideas are also evident in an article and interview with Guido in *Mundo Villa* (Moreno 2011: n.p.).

Thus, *Guido Models* does not deconstruct potentially dangerous body images as effectively as, for example, *Real Women Have Curves*. López and Cardoso's characters feel the burden of the culturally imposed synonymy between slimness and attractiveness, but they also defy this pressure. Ana is tormented by her mother, who tells her to lose weight in order to find a husband. She responds angrily to these demands and expresses a desire to disrupt social norms by retaining her voluptuous figure. At the same time, however, she and her colleagues admit that they want to diet and become skinny (and wealthy) enough to wear the dresses that they make. Nonetheless, they enjoy food, which they share during joyous and rebellious moments in their factory, where an oppressive heat symbolizes the standards they reject by consuming a variety of traditional Mexican dishes. At the end of the play, Estela's original designs become successful and she opens a boutique that specializes in plus-sized clothing (López 1996: 96). At the end of the film, after seizing the opportunity to study at Columbia University, Ana continues to accept her physique as she strides confidently through the streets of New York. Hence, what is normally derogatorily labelled 'fatness' is reinscribed into cultural definitions of beauty, producing 'an active dialogue between the acceptance of dominant ideological values (i.e. the American Dream, beauty, thinness) and resistance to them' (Figueroa 2003: 275). López and Cardoso, therefore, problematize society's unrealistic demands for thinness by grappling with 'a paradoxically persistent desire for and resistant critique of the American Dream' (Figueroa 2003: 271). This dialogue draws on *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (Susie Orbach, 1978), which is referenced by López in the play's foreword (Figueroa 2003: 275). Sans does not establish such a complex dialogue about body image. Despite the brief shots of Delia and Sonia snacking, the women look like typical models. There is no consideration given to how they might deal with the culture of excessive dieting that dominates the world of professional modelling. Moreover, Sans never focuses on students that might be deemed more unattractive than Delia and Sonia by conventional standards. Therefore, the opportunity to redefine beauty and challenge the contradictory relationships between women and body image is not capitalized upon in *Guido Models*.

Ultimately, Sans decries discrimination based on interlinked class, immigrant and gender identities. This multidimensional narrative goes a long way towards recognising the complexity of poverty and marginalization in Argentina's villas. Problematically, however, the director never considers the role of the fashion industry in sustaining these problems. Ironically, *Guido Models* and the titular agency battle social exclusion from the margins of an industry that continues to repress females in Argentina, Latin America and beyond, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Even if Guido helps his students to obtain modelling contracts or better their prospects for integration, it seems that they will not escape gender-based oppression. Delia and Sonia have been presented with opportunities to earn money, travel and leave society's

peripheries. However, they are also being indoctrinated into a business that has played a major role in the formation of a culture that objectifies and exploits, perhaps more than anyone else, economically marginalized females such as themselves. While it is admirable that *Guido Models* portrays the villa in an original and positive manner, the documentary would certainly have benefited from a more thorough examination of the contradictions discussed in this analysis. Thus, the film mirrors the dualistic liberated, yet restrained, position that women occupy in Argentine society.

5.3 *Mía*: Transgendering Poverty

Trans people living in informal settlements experience a gendered experience of economic marginalization that is arguably even more difficult than women's. This is indicated by research that has pointed out the disproportionately high instances of unemployment, exploitation, poverty, serious illness and mortality rates among trans people in Argentina (Socías, Zalazar et al. 2014: 1; Socías, Cahn et al. 2014: 71-72). Some Argentine filmmakers have also broached these problems by focusing on the marginalization of individuals who defy gender norms. As Guillermo Olivera observes, in the 1970s:

> Even though there was no affirmative discourse of LGBT identities, there was indeed an incipient recognition and an indirect inclusion of queers onscreen – in the visible, albeit not yet sayable or namable, forms of gay and trans characters. (Olivera, 2013: 64)

The previously discussed film and novel *El beso de la mujer araña* challenge gender binarisms, although their ambiguous, cross-dressing protagonist Molina is not referred to as a trans character. Another such film is *La Raulito* (Lautaro Murúa, 1975), which was briefly mentioned in chapter two. Although Murúa's production does not specifically refer to a transgender identity, it has been read as a 'queer film' that undermines heteronormative hegemony through the gendered experience of poverty of its titular character (Olivera 2013: 64). This protagonist, Raulito (Marilina Ross), feels compelled to conceal her biological sex with short hair, a Boca Juniors football jersey and ragged trousers as she seeks refuge in a city overrun by predatory males. Unable to assimilate into mainstream society as a result of this performative act of cross-dressing, she is forced to stray between psychiatric hospitals, prisons and the streets surrounding Villa 31. With no space of her own – she does not even find a home in the villa and is restricted to its outskirts – Raulito is 'disappeared'. She recognises this, 'desde que nací estoy escapando. No me hallo en ningún lugar. No es que la gente no me quiera. La gente me quiere y yo también los quiero pero no hay lugar' [I've been escaping ever since I was born. I never stay

in one place. It's not that people don't like me. They do like me and I like them, but there is no space for me anywhere]. The scene in which Raulito sits in a bar full of brutish men shows how the marginal female outwits others and ensures her own safety by becoming invisible. Here, her masculine image also means that she can satisfy her passion as a *bostera* [fan of Boca Juniors] through discussions about sport, thus gaining access to a world that she would normally be prohibited from entering. The mistreatment that Raulito avoids by concealing her sex is again demonstrated by her acquaintances Susi (Virginia Lago) and Celia (María Vaner), who display their bodies and perform their prescribed gender role in the most explicit of ways: as erotic dancers. Susi and Celia are objectified by the audiences of a strip club and viewed as property by their male boss, who humiliates them with patronizing lectures about how to seduce men. Susi is also controlled by an aggressive boyfriend who tries to confine her to the domestic sphere by forcing her to work as a maid. Thus, orthodox gender roles appear fundamental to the maintenance of unequal male-female relationships in *La Raulito*. It is these socially constructed hierarchies that Raulito rejects through her appearance and behaviour. However, oppressive values are shown as being equally deeply rooted in official legal and medical discourse. After being arrested, Raulito is sent to a psychiatric hospital where her appearance upsets staff. Doctors and nurses remove her clothing and force her to accept what they see as an acceptable, feminine dress code. At this point, the film denounces the shaming of those who destabilize traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, and subverts the idea that trans characters are psychologically disturbed, a common stereotype outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Perhaps the most striking line in the film occurs when Raulito explains, 'yo no quiero ser hombre, es que no quiero ser mujer [I don't want to be a man, but I don't want to be a woman]. At this point, Raulito disassociates with all gender indentities. Therefore, while *La Raulito* does not construct a distinct trans identity, it successfully portrays the difficulties that those who reject binaries have in assimilating into official social and economic frameworks. Thus, Murúa works towards a complex understanding of the gendered nature of poverty through the representation of a character who exists on the margins of the villla.

Again symbolizing the gendered nature of social exclusion are Raulito's futile attempts to form a family of her own. She is offered food, shelter and work by an older male newspaper vendor. However, when he finds out about her biological sex, he makes an unwanted, aggressive advance and she leaves his home. Later, she takes Medio Pollo (whose gender is also ambiguous) under her wing, but this homeless child collapses and dies in the final scene shortly after they flee to the coastal city of Mar del Plata. This discourse about the difficulties in forming kin (or becoming part of the national 'family') experienced by those whose gender identity is ambiguous renders *La Raulito* a precursor to *Mía*. Upon its release in 2011, the latter production readdressed the theme of family, examining the legal and social obstacles to family formation

faced by those who defy heteronormative values. However, the director Van de Couter constructs a more distinct trans identity than Murúa, while explicitly recognising the gendered experience of poverty within the villa.

This is a significant point, given that trans characters have been overlooked in films about villas to date. In most of the films analysed so far, clear trans figures only appeared in insignificant roles, if at all. One of the minor characters in *El resultado del amor*, Carla, is a trans woman, but her circumstances are not examined in any depth whatsoever. A marginalized space used to critique Menemism in *Fuga de cerebros* is a park near the villa. This park is occupied by trans prostitutes who have clearly not benefited from the restructuring of the economy under Menem. These characters symbolize Musa's re-evaluation of the neoliberal concept of development by showing how those who undermine the gender binary are excluded in what is considered an advanced society. Indeed, the employment of trans villera/o prostitute characters reflects the reality that trans individuals are often forced into the sex trade because they are discriminated against in the Argentine workforce (Socías, Zalazar et al. 2014: 1; Socías, Cahn et al. 2014: 71-72). Nonetheless, these themes and characters are not developed. Although the marginalization of trans people in Argentina is clearly criticised in *Fuga de cerebros*, this criticism is brief and the figures in question ironically remain on the periphery of the narrative. Ultimately, Musa does not construct a detailed analysis of the gendered nature of poverty.

Mía, on the other hand, centralizes characters that are played by members of Argentina's trans community. Although Ale's biological sex means that she is seen as male in the eyes of the law, she identifies as a female. This is made clear when Julia asks Ale why she speaks like a woman and Ale responds, 'porque así lo siento' [because that's the way I feel]. However, this comment does not mean that Ale always conforms to typical notions of femininity. Rather, she retains qualities that are generally seen as male as well as those that are commonly understood as female. She wears a traditionally masculine baseball cap and jeans, but is equally comfortable in an elegant dress given to her by Manuel. She is a talented fashion designer and make-up artist, yet she is also strong, assertive and even aggressive, as is shown when she confronts and overpowers the transphobes that she encounters beyond the villa. She is an expert homemaker and carer, and also takes on the role of breadwinner in her job as a rubbish picker.

Ale further destabilizes traditional ideas about femininity by becoming a non-conventional mother. She possesses a powerful maternal instinct, making the legal and cultural prohibition of trans motherhood especially traumatic. This is evident in her desire to take on the role of the mother Mía. When interacting with people outside of Aldea Rosa, she refers to herself as Mía and calls Julia her daughter. Furthermore, while Mía's diary shows that she thought of herself as an incompetent carer, the trans woman embraces the role of mother and capably

substitutes for her cisgender counterpart. Knowing that she is only acting as Julia's nanny temporarily, however, Ale constantly laments the impossibility of having her memory live on through her own children. In her rendition of the melancholic folk song 'Zamba para no morir' [Zamba of Survival], she expresses loneliness and 'ganas de amar' [desire to love]. She regretfully sings, 'en el hijo se puede volver, nuevo' [with the child, one is reborn] and puts a final entry into Mía's diary to comfort Julia: 'mi corazón va a seguir latiendo adentro tuyo' [my heart will continue to beat inside you]. These scenes recall Raulito's solitude and inability to form a family, especially through the informal adoption of Medio Pollo. Nonetheless, Ale eventually fulfils her desire to become a mother, further challenging traditional gender values. Her informal adoption of Piba's child after Piba flees during the state's final attack on Aldea Rosa, consoles her after the destruction of her neighbourhood. The film's closing shot shows Ale cradling the baby as she emerges defiantly from the smoking ruins of the villa, thereby signalling the second and now permanent replacement of the conventional mother. Here, there is a sense that although the marginal community has been eradicated, so have archaic, oppressive ideas about gender. Motherhood is not, as far as the inhabitants of Aldea Rosa are concerned, limited to those who are determined female at birth. Rather, it is a means of expressing one's need to love and satisfying a universal right to familial heritage, legacy and remembrance.

The character of Antigua further undermines conventional gender values. Although she was declared male at birth, she refers to herself as a heterosexual woman. When asked if there are only homosexual and trans people in the villa, she complicates notions of both gender and sexuality with the reply, 'no, también estaba mi marido' [no, my husband was also here]. Hence, *Mía* succeeds in avoiding a common problematic mode of representation identified by not hypersexualizing trans characters or conflating their genders and sexualities (MacKenzie 1994: 106). Furthermore, Antigua is not a typically submissive villera despite identifying as female. Having founded Aldea Rosa, she is a trans mother figure who has constructed a community free from oppression based on gender and sexuality. According to Van de Couter, it is this community that Argentina should model itself on in order to progress.

This empowering representation of those who defy gender norms is further evident as Antigua leads her neighbours in their fight against eviction, becoming the orator of the film's social message. Recovering her neighbours' marginal voices, she writes an eloquent letter to the state demanding that their rights to a home be satisfied. She also confronts medics who refuse to enter the villa when Pedro (Rodolfo Prantte), a male character living with HIV, collapses. Thus, Antigua calls attention to the lack of emergency services in villas, while also demanding better healthcare for the LGBTQ community, wherein disproportionate levels of HIV represent the devastating consequences of social exclusion (Socías, Zalazar et al. 2014: 1). Here, it becomes evident that those living in Aldea Rosa are subjected both to the usual forms of discrimination

suffered by villera/os and also to a more gender-specific brand of oppression. At the same time, she rises above her multi-facted victimhood, becoming more empowered than the stereotypical villera. Ultimately, then, her character contributes strongly to the rejection of the masculinization of the villa-centred film and marks a complex portrayal of poverty and its gendered nature.

Mía's representation of prostitution also challenges damaging portrayals of transgenderism. Rather than signalling the deviant nature of trans characters, prostitution highlights how discrimination very often prevents trans individuals from entering the official labour market (Socías, Cahn et al. 2014: 64-66, 71-72). Furthermore, Van de Couter's characters have more agency than prostitutes in many previous films about villas. There is no male pimp who gives them orders or dupes them into joining the sex trade. Neither is there a particularly negative portrayal of those who purchase sex. Ale is at ease and reads Mía's diary to one client. She later chooses to leave the street where she waits for business and returns home even though she is approached by a man soliciting sex. At times, Ale's neighbours even adopt a humorous tone when talking about their night-time work. In these scenes, Van de Couter creates a complex portrayal of the way trans villeras enter the sex industry. It is not the violence of any individual, but deeply ingrained structural violence targeting gender ambiguity (which results in unemployment) that drives the sex industry. It is also important that trans figures are not completely disempowered through a process of total victimization in these scenes. Instead, they demonstrate the degree of resilience that has been maintained in a society that denies them access to formal economic frameworks. Significantly, moreover, Van de Couter does not use the theme of prostitution to disrobe and parade the trans body. Hence, he avoids a prevalent method of assault discussed by Annie Wilkinson and Rachel McKinnon, who note that real trans individuals often suffer attempts to have their genitalia exposed. McKinnon sees this crime re-perpetrated in the revelation of trans genitalia in films such as *The Crying Game* (dir. Neil Jordan, 1992) (Wilkinson 2014: 32; McKinnon 2014: 858). This path is not taken in *Mía*, again showing how its focus on trans villeras recognises their gendered experience of poverty while challenging damaging notions of transgenderism.

As it is in Sans's film, fashion is a prominent metaphor used to deconstruct socially constructed binaries in *Mía*. In a newspaper column that the titular mother and fashion critic Mía wrote shortly before her suicide, she urges readers to break formal dress codes and challenge common preconceptions about proper behaviour and appearances. Ale also explains that a magazine she found during her childhood sparked her interest in women's clothing and informed her decision to swap her *gaucho* [cowboy] trousers for a *paisana* [peasant country girl] skirt. This comment is particularly significant given that the *gaucho* is a hypermasculine cultural figure (Kaminsky 2008: 56-57). Ale's ability to design and make clothing also establishes a sense

of equality between her, the economically marginalized trans mother, and Mía, the middle-class cisgender mother. Ale is quick to point out these shared experiences to Pedro. The trans characters' interest in fashion also allows them to defy the expectations of a group of filmmakers that come to the villa. The production team want the locals to appear unkempt as they document the eradication dispute. However, they are surprised to be met by a group of well-dressed individuals. Attempting to manipulate their appearance in a way that creates a greater sense of otherness, the director of the crew complains, 'la ropa es linda, les queda bien pero no parecen de una villa […] tenemos que mostrarles como son, no todas peinadas y maquilladas, ustedes no son eso' [the clothes are nice, they suit you but you don't look as though you are from a villa (…) we have to show you how you are, not all styled and made-up]. Antigua challenges this comment. In doing so, she establishes Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect by exposing the production process and, therefore, socially constructed concepts of both gender and poverty. As Stam notes:

> [The alienation effect serves] to decondition the spectator and make strange the lived social world, freeing socially conditioned phenomena from the "stamp of familiarity", and revealing them as striking, as calling for explanation, as other than "natural"'. (Stam 2000: 261)

As Antigua reveals the heavily choreographed nature of representations of poverty and trans people, and rejects the patronizing, degrading image projected by the media at the expense of marginalized voices, she emphasizes the importance of mediating the words of Aldea Rosa residents:

> Yo no voy a salir en un documental vestida con calzas y zapatillas rotas […] lo importante, al fin y al cabo, ¿qué es? Lo que tenemos para decir, para denunciar. ¿Qué te importa si tengo las uñas pintadas o no?
> [I am not going to appear in a documentary dressed in old stockings and shoes […] what is most important, at the end of the day? – what we have to say and report. What does it matter if I have my nails painted or not?].

Antigua is supported by her neighbours, who defend the truth that they are, 'pobres, pero limpitas y coquetas' [poor, but clean and stylish]. Thus, the theme of fashion lends itself to the defamiliarization of dominant notions about gender and poverty in *Mía*. As in *Guido Models*, this theme challenges oversimplified representations of villas, which incorporate a wide variety of experiences determined in no small part by gender.

A further understanding of Van de Couter's representation of gendered poverty is derived by examining his frequent references to *Edward Scissorhands* (dir. Tim Burton, 1991), Julia's favourite film. Julia and Ale's screenings and re-enactments of the U.S. production, as well as a poster adorning the child's bedroom wall, underscore the adaptation of its themes of social exclusion and the risks of nonconformity to the Argentine context. Burton's titular character Edward (Johnny Depp) is an 'unusual, exemplary and unique' androgynous male (Clarke 2008: 96). His creative and sensitive persona, which is reflected in the sculptures he makes from his scissor hands, is considered effeminate. Therefore, his presence upsets the cultural rigidity of middle-class suburbia, where men work and play golf while their housewives obsess over their hair, make-up and cooking. Edward thus embodies the idea, popularized by Butler, that gender is a social construct. Edward's fate is tragic, however. He cannot achieve integration and is forced to spend eternity alone in his Gothic castle. This suggests that anyone who challenges uniformity is cast aside, their talent and creativity rejected along with them. Such attitudes, according to *Edward Scissorhands* and by implication *Mía*, prevent communities from advancing. A large rainbow-coloured flag perched above one of its shacks suggests that Aldea Rosa is like Edward's castle: a place where nonconformists are isolated, but also one wherein socially constructed boundaries between masculinity and femininity are proudly undermined. As is the case in the suburban neighbourhood that Edward cannot become assimilated into, gender norms are very much intact beyond the villa. Ale, like Edward, is ridiculed by outsiders despite her artistic talent and ability to improve the lives of those she comes into contact with. Manuel attacks her and conflates her gender and sexual orientation with homophobic insults before eventually realizing the error of his ways. She is again shamed by a middle-class male when invited to an expensive restaurant by Manuel and Julia, although she defends herself robustly from her aggressor. The fact that the police pose a major threat suggests that gendered oppression is so socially ingrained that it manifests in the law itself, a problem highlighted by research on gender-motivated violence in Latin America (Cook and Cusack 2010: 1-2; Castillo et al. 2012: 17). Thus, most people beyond the villa fail to see those who defy the male-female binary as capable of contributing to society in a meaningful way. Again, this facilitates the representation of a trans-specific experience of informal settlements.

Van de Couter counteracts such deep-rooted prejudices. In doing so, the director turns on its head the idea that villa inhabitants, particularly trans individuals, must be saved by 'outsiders'. *Mía* shows the unifying and purifying effect that the trans villera has on the fragmented Argentine family symbolized by Manuel and Julia's troubled relationship. Ale helps Manuel to return from the brink of alcoholism and mends his abode aesthetically and emotionally. In various scenes that are obviously metaphorical, she illuminates the 'broken' home by fixing lampshades, blinds and window shutters, and placing vibrant red flowers in the

living room. She improves Julia's academic performance, teaches her homemaking skills and brings a previously absent sense of joy to the child's life through play. She also accomplishes the difficult task of calming Julia's temper and convincing her to accompany Manuel to her grandmother's house in Patagonia, where the father and child can make a fresh start. Therefore, when the trans woman is welcomed into mainstream society, she unifies it, bringing the Argentine family together by imparting on the middle classes, the values that flourish within the villa. Ultimately in *Mía*, Van de Couter demonstrates that the trans experience of economic marginalization is largely defined by the prohibition of trans parenthood, which is symptomatic of broader processes of social exclusion. It is this social exclusion that the director rallies against through his original and much-needed focus on the gendered nature of poverty experienced by trans villeras.

5.4 Conclusion

A significant number of the films about villas studied in this thesis underrepresent women or place them in peripheral roles in which they appear as helpless victims and entirely dependent on men. These films have naturalized damaging perceptions of marginal femininity, failed to explore the gendered nature of poverty and foregone the opportunity to establish complex understandings of informal communities. This treatment of the economically marginalized female does not, of course, constitute a conscious attempt to reinforce her oppression. In fact, it often represents a condemnation of society's mistreatment of her. Thus, a dualistic process that simultaneously defends and marginalizes women experiencing poverty is evident in film. This process mirrors a broader national setting in which women are, on one hand, empowered and, on the other, oppressed by an extreme culture of *machismo*.

This paradox is defined, firstly, by the growing problem of violence towards females in Argentina. Official discourse has acknowledged that systematic gender-based discrimination has led to extreme human rights violations in the country. In 2009, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights published *Violencias contra las mujeres: estudios en perspectiva* [*Violence Against Women: putting studies into perspective]* to bring about a greater understanding of violence against women in Argentina. This report cites the previously discussed Cotton Field ruling, thereby recognising the media's role in cultivating (to return to Gerbner's term) oppressive attitudes towards women (Degoumois et al. 2015: 194).

The culture of violence against females recognised by the ministry is primarly marked, tragically, by the growing number of femicides – murders of women that are motivated by their gender – occurring across Argentina presently, despite the introduction of laws in 2009 and 2012 to protect women in abusive relationships (Angélico et al. 2014: 283). The National Registry of

Femicides, first published by Argentina's Women's Office in 2015, states that there were 235 femicides in 2015 and 254 femicides in 2016 (OM 2015: 10; 2016: 13). The registry also confirms that most of the murderers were the partners or former partners of their victims (Amaya and Rubio, 2015; OM 2015: 7; 2016: 14). The numbers of femicides cited by *La casa del encuentro* [The Meeting House] are even higher than those cited by the government. This NGO reports that there were 2,384 femicides between the beginning of 2008 and the end of 2016, with an increase in the number of murders each year. According to the organization, there were 208 cases in 2008 and 290 cases in 2016 (La casa del encuentro 2017: n.p.). This indicates that a femicide occurs approximately every 32 hours in Argentina.

This alarming trend has led to the establishment of *Ni una menos* [Not One Less], a movement that takes its name from the work of the feminist poet and activist Susana Chávez, who was brutally murdered in Ciudad Juárez in 2011. Its first rally took place in March, 2015, when hundreds of thousands of people marched to the Palace of the Argentine National Congress and other locations nationwide to demand that the government do more to protect females (Rodríguez 2015: 12). In October 2016, protesters took to the streets in great numbers once again after a gang kidnapped, raped and killed 16-year-old Lucía Pérez in Mar del Plata (Iglesias 2017: n.p.). Similar acts of defiance occurred throughout 2017 and are set to continue in the future (*La Nación* 2017a: n.p.).

Paradoxically, however, despite the pervasiveness of a so-called rape culture, Argentina also has a tradition of leading by example in the global struggle for equality with respect to gender and sexuality. Although national suffrage was not achieved until 1947 under Perón, women received full political rights in 1927 in the province of San Juan, a year before the same progress was made in the U.K., for example (Hammond 2009: 1). The return to democracy in 1983 led to the opening of new political dialogues related to gender and sexual rights. In 1991, Argentina became the first Latin American country to establish gender quotas in legislative elections. Menem's introduction of a requirement for women to make up at least 30 percent of party ballot lists led to a substantial increase in the number of women in congress (Gray 2003: 60). Civil unions for same-sex couples were legalized in 2002. In 2010, Argentina became the second country in the Americas (after Canada) to legalize same-sex marriage (Vaggione and Jones 2015: 106). This watershed moment marked, 'un antes y un después en toda América Latina' [a before and after in all of Latin America] (Sívori 2011: 7). As discussed in chapter four, the landmark Gender Identity Law sanctioned in 2012 also led to improved human rights around the world by allowing individuals to alter their assigned gender identities on official documentation without going through legal or medical procedures (Wilkinson 2014: 31). As this chapter was being finalized, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies narrowly approved a bill to decriminalize abortion during the first fourteen weeks of pregnancy, after a 23-hour debate

(Braslavsky 2018: n.p.). Proponents of this bill, which will now be presented to the Senate, believe that it protects women's health and freedom. The debate on abortion shows that women's rights have come to the forefront of Argentine politics in recent years.

Iconic figures such as Eva Perón, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who signed in the same-sex marriage and gender identity laws, remind us of the power and political influence that women have in Argentina. In national media, Mirtha Legrand and Susana Giménez have become two of the nation's most powerful personalities since beginning their careers in the 1940s and 1960s, respectively. Both have been enormously successful in film, theatre and television, their images becoming firmly embedded in popular culture. Cris Morena has produced some of the country's most successful television programmes, most notably the spin-off-spawning children's soap opera *Chiquititas* [*Tiny Angels*] (1995-2001). Vanessa Ragone is one of Latin America's most respected film producers. Norma Aleandro and Martina Gusmán are among the very few Argentine actors to have approximated Ricardo Darín's level of international popularity on the big screen. Albertina Carri, Lucrecia Martel and Lucía Puenzo are recognised as some of Argentina's most accomplished directors. Martel is a particularly notable figure given that the international critical success of her films *La ciénaga* [*The Swamp*] (2001), *La niña santa* [*The Holy Girl*] (2004) and *La mujer sin cabeza* [*The Headless Woman*] (2008) is largely attributable to a 'multilayered critique of dominant patriarchal values' constructed through the experiences of female protagonists (Schroeder Rodríguez 2016: 34).

Women who are not in the public eye have also played important roles in Argentine society. In the aftermath of the economic and social crisis of 2001, many working-class women organized themselves outside of the domestic sphere to finance their households in innovative ways. These inherently political acts improved employment opportunities for women and helped to unify struggling communities during a time of extreme hardship (Echavarría and Bard Wigdor 2013: 96-100). Women's groups also fought against landowners to prevent their land from being auctioned after the crisis, again demonstrating the ways in which females have become empowered in contemporary Argentina (Coni 2007: 68). The majority of the members of the prominent *piquetera/o* [picketer] movement, a diverse network of activists, are also women (Barker 2007: 1-2). However, the *piquetera/os* have been accused of reinforcing gender inequality by confining women to conventional feminine roles (Barker 2007: 2-3, 5). The contradictions symbolized by these various positions of females in Argentine society call to mind the paradox observed by Cayupán de Garfinkel:

> La violencia de género pareciera haberse intensificado en la medida en que la mujer, pese a las dificultades, se va hacienda cada vez más dueña de sí y de su destino, más sujeto de derecho. Frente a ello se observa una respuesta intensa de la masculinidad, que se siente agraviada, amenazada, desorientada por el cambio. Tienen miedo de perder ese poder y, como tienen miedo, meten miedo.
>
> [Gender violence seems to have intensified insofar as women, in spite of their difficulties, are increasingly taking ownership of themselves and their destinies, and becoming subjects of the law. This has been met by a strong response from men, who feel aggrieved, threatened and disorientated by the change. They fear losing power and, since they are afraid, they provoke fear]. (Cayupán de Garfinkel 2013: 15)

This comment summarizes the simultaneity of advances made by Argentine women and the increasing forms of violence against them. Also highlighting this tension is the audiovisual communications legislation introduced in 2009 to improve gender equality in media, develop media literacy among women and encourage women to become content creators (AFSCA 2009: 3, 6). Despite such a positive move, which appears to have been driven by the official acknowledgement that media influences violence towards women, doubt has been cast on the effectiveness of the laws in question. Research has drawn on Spivak to highlight their lack of implementation and denounce the continued absence of voices of female domestic abuse victims in news reports about them (Angélico et al. 2014: 297, 299). Thus, women remain in an ambiguous position.

Guido Models reflects this ambiguity to some degree. While the documentary is a welcome female-focused production that celebrates the potential of economically marginalized women and calls for opportunities for social mobility to be presented to them, it could go further in re-evaluating the harmful definitions of beauty that its protagonists are subjected to. These definitions of beauty are, significantly, closely linked to the culture of oppression against females currently plaguing Argentina. The absence of a criticism of the role that global enterprises play in sustaining poverty and promoting unrealistic body images is especially notable given that Sans worked as an audiovisual creative assistant for global companies including Gucci during the decade that she was based in London (Sans 2017: n.p.). Journalists and academics from a variety of disciplines have also addressed these matters, pointing out the need to improve regulation and education in order to challenge the fashion and beauty industries' incessant preying on females and their self-image (Record and Austin, 2016; Leutwyler, 2006; Cussins, 2001; O'Neil, 2014). Robin Givhan, the fashion editor of the *Washington Post*, notes that despite promising to

promote wellbeing and refrain from capitalizing on children, 'the fashion industry simply loves a skinny young girl' (Givhan 2012: 7). Sascha Cohen compares the dehumanizing capacities of pornography and fashion, stating, 'if porn reduces women to flesh, fashion whittles them to bones. If porn sees women as toilets, fashion casts them as corpses' (Cohen 2007: 36). These issues are largely overlooked, as opposed to being actively subverted, in *Guido Models*.

This chapter has also pointed out the importance of recognising the distinct gendered experience of trans individuals, who are often omitted from conversations surrounding gender-based discrimination. *Mía* demonstrates how filmmakers have an important role to play in rectifying this. Van de Couter moves away from stereotypes about villas as he explores the relationship between transgenderism and poverty. His trans villera characters redefine femininity and motherhood and call for an end to the exclusion of those who defy gender norms from formal social and economic spheres. This film foresaw and contributed strongly to a national debate that led to the introduction of the Gender Identity Law in 2012, which in turn paved the way for further advancements in trans rights. In 2016, for example, the Registry of Femicides began to include instances of transfemicide. Five cases were recorded that year (Gaffoglio 2017: n.p.). Such awareness appears to have been triggered by widespread media coverage of the brutal murder of the trans rights activist Diana Sacayan in October, 2015 (*BBC News* 2015: n.p.). The inclusion of trans women such as Sacayan in the registry marks an important step in recognising their gender identities and ensuring that they are not excluded from official discourses regarding gender-motivated violence and other social issues.

In conclusion, this chapter welcomes the release of *Guido Models* and *Mía*, two films that, by capturing the gendered nature of social exclusion in Argentina, broaden understandings of villas and the diversity of their inhabitants' experiences of marginalization. As they move beyond the common male- and crime- centred narratives about villas, Sans and Van de Couter seem to respond to the call made by Chant and others for a more comprehensive understanding of poverty, and particularly its gendered aspects. Although chapter six does not focus specifically on the representation of gender, it will be implied that even films made within villa communities often reproduce the male-centred 'fashion of violence' when portraying their communities. With this in mind, the value of Sans and Van de Couter's productions, which go some way towards recognising the complexity of informal settlements, becomes even more apparent.

Chapter Six

Villera/o Cinema: Transforming the Mainstream?

6.1 Introduction

With the aim of understanding self-representation in marginalized communities, this chapter considers the ways in which independent films made by people living in villas reinforce or counteract the stigmatization of informal settlements in Argentina. Villa inhabitants contribute in important roles both on and behind the camera in the films examined presently, working in areas of pre-production (casting and screenwriting), production (directing, acting, camera and sound operations, and soundtrack composition) and post-production (editing and exhibition). The short and feature films analysed are produced with minimal budgets and are usually not screened in mainstream complexes, instead being shown at cultural centres, film festivals and on online video portals. All of them comment on life in villas with the objective of providing new perspectives on poverty, while at the same time offering employment and artistic opportunities to those involved. Filmmakers and critics have labelled these films *Cine villero* [Villera/o Cinema] (Irigoyen 2015: n.p.). This movement remains understudied by scholars, even though contemporary technology has allowed it to reach audiences not only beyond villas but beyond national borders.

Villera/o Cinema very often incorporates narratives about crime, gangs and violence, doing so with the intention of broadening the audience's understanding of the social mechanisms that provoke behaviour generally understood as immoral. Thus, Villera/o Cinema demonstrates an attitude described by Stam as the 'transmogrification of negative images' (Stam 2015: 147). Stam observes that this process of transforming negative symbols defines many marginal film movements that emerged in Latin America and around the world between the 1950s and the 1970s. These include the New Argentine Cinema, Third Cinema and the Brazilian New Cinema. The latter movement was pioneered by Glauber Rocha, whose low-cost production techniques or 'aesthetics of hunger' mirrored the experiences of economically marginalized characters (Stam 2015: 147, 149). Another Brazilian director, Rogerio Sganzerla, employed what he labelled as an 'aesthetics of garbage' to transform the ugly into the beautiful (Stam 2000: 263). The Cuban director Julio García Espinosa proposed the theory of *cine imperfecto* [imperfect cinema] to the same effect in the 1960s (Stam 2000: 263). Similarly, the Chicana/o *rasquache* cinema adopts and reverses negative stereotypes about working-class Mexican-Americans. It 'encompasses a funky, underdog, or outcast attitude toward those who deny Chicana/o existence' and constitutes a 'search for alternative aesthetics by making the most with the least' (Lomelí 2014: 112). By celebrating their scarcity of resources,

unconventional production values and imperfections, and by reappropriating stereotypes about poverty, these movements alter aspects of dominant film cultures, using 'satirical mimicry' to 'turn the trash of the stereotype into ironic artistic gold' (Stam 2015: 176). Thus, they lend credence to Bhabha's later revisited postcolonial theory that oppressed groups can empower themselves through the subversive imitation of dominant cultures. Stam defends these practices by stating:

> Although it might be objected that [such] tactics place one in a perpetually reactive posture of merely deconstructing or reversing the dominant, we would argue that [they are] not merely defensive. By defamiliarizing and re-accentuating pre-existing materials, they re-channel energies in new directions, generating a third conceptual space of negotiation (Bhabha) outside of the binaries of domination, in ways that convey specific cultural and even autobiographical inflections. In a context of marginalization, [transmogrifying the negative] becomes a necessity. Since radical discourse has historically been placed in a defensive position by the hegemonic culture, it is virtually obliged to turn the dominant discourse against itself. (Stam 2015: 181).

With this in mind, this chapter explores the various ways in which Villera/o Cinema reacts to mainstream images of villas in order to establish a new understanding of radical film movements in Argentina. These mainstream images often involve crime and violence and are re-established and critiqued by the directors discussed, such as Victor Ramos. Ramos is a journalist and politician who worked closely with film students from Villa 21 to produce *La 21, Barracas* (2008), a tragic neorealist drama centring on two rival gangs in informal settlements to the south of Buenos Aires city. Ramos's production is similar to those of the marginal Latin American cinema movements of previous decades in that it embraces the concept of imperfect aesthetics. A film directed by Ezio Massa is also analysed in this chapter, since it involves the same Villa 21-based school that worked on Ramos's film and readapts his violent thematic focus. Another of the presently analysed villera/o filmmakers, Cesar González, spent five years in prison before his rehabilitation and transformation from a teenage criminal into a poet and filmmaker. Again, this artist is heavily influenced by marginal movements such as NAC and Third Cinema, as is evident in his rejection of mainstream values and reliance on plots about crime in informal settlements. Finally, this chapter examines the work of Julio Arrieta, who has rejected the approach of Ramos and González and opted for a more conventional form of genre-inspired filmmaking to promote the integration of villera/os in society and conceptualizations of *argentinidad* [Argentine

identity]. These analyses do not suggest that the subversion of negative images in the films of Ramos, González and Massa is inherently counterproductive. However, it is argued that these directors may be hyperreactive to very particular stereotypes linked to violence and crime. Thus, as Arrieta has demonstrated, Villera/o Cinema may benefit from finding new ways to engage with the mainstream. Ultimately, this chapter argues that villera/o filmmakers may, as things presently stand, best serve their communities by turning away from the 'aesthetics of hunger', 'aesthetics of mistakes', and the 'sad, ugly' themes that typify revolutionary Latin American film movements (Stam 2015: 146 - 148). In doing this, it can breathe new life into Villera/o Cinema and redefine the nature of revolutionary filmmaking.

6.2 Early Villera/o Cinema

It is no coincidence that the first villera/o film was produced in the 1980s. After all, it was during this time that the collapse of the dictatorship allowed those living in villas to concentrate less on their immediate survival and more on developing their communities and cultural identities. *Batman en la Villa 31* [*Batman in Villa 31*] (dir. Juan Domingo A. Romero, 1989) is the earliest example of a film produced entirely by villera/os. The short film, which comprises an entertaining mockumentary and fictional narrative, was made by an inexperienced crew for exhibition at a national children's day event in Villa 31. Romero engages with mainstream adaptations including *Batman* (dir. Tim Burton), which was also released in 1989, to make a sociopolitical statement about the manner in which villera/os are excluded from mainstream culture. As many of those living in villas were not (and still are not) in a financial position to visit the cinema to see Burton's film, Romero's humble production can be read as a call for meaningful, empowering integration into mainstream economic and cultural spheres. After employing the iconic animated introduction from the 1960s television series *Batman*, the film moves to an interview with a group of men who are building a Batmobile from a supermarket trolley. The conversation is light-hearted but subversive. Burton's dramatic score sets an ironic tone as the men claim to be former NASA employees who resigned because of unfair working conditions and the agency's policy of conquering space. Their opposition to exploitation and spatial appropriation is significant, especially given that their neighbourhood had recently been subjected to the dictatorship's brutal eradication plan. The supposed engineers' tongue-in-cheek description of wind power and nuclear technology suggests that they are skilled, but it also emphasizes the lack of opportunities available to villera/os and their marginalization in the labour market.

This mockumentary segment underlines Villera/o Cinema's tendency to embrace and display its scarcity of resources in the same manner as marginal movements such as NAC, Third Cinema, Brazilian New Cinema and Chicana/o *rasquache* cinema. However, its light-hearted

nature and a subsequent fictional segment in which children are cast as DC comics' iconic superheroes and supervillains show that Romero prioritized entertainment, distinguishing the first villera/o production from the radical movements that Villera/o Cinema would later begin to emulate as a matter of course. The Penguin (uncredited) is portrayed as a cowardly criminal who uses others to do his dirty work. He recruits Catwoman (uncredited) to beat up the Dynamic Duo, Batman (Juan Romero) and Robin (Ricardo el Santi). While this plot provides children with a basic lesson in morality, a mature sociopolitical critique is also evident in the appropriation of Anglo American culture. The language used by the world-renowned fictional characters is earthy and colloquial, distancing itself from the Batman franchise that was concurrently taking the international box-office by storm and situating this version firmly in the villa. For example, Catwoman tells the Penguin 'calmate loco' [chill out, you whacko] and 'dejate de joder' [stop messing around]. While amusing, this also underlines Romero's objective to integrate villera/os into mainstream society while acknowledging their distinct identities. Moreover, the Penguin's hat is modelled on the flag of the United States, its stars and stripes suggesting that the criminal is an embodiment of a nation that supported right-wing military regimes to prevent the spread of socialism in Latin America.

Ultimately, the most radical aspect of Romero's project is found in the inherent notion that villera/os did not have to rely on others to represent them. *Batman en la Villa 31* affirms their ability to create and star in their own films. Significantly, moreover, unlike most productions by villa inhabitants, it engages comically with the superhero genre. In contrast, contemporary villera/o filmmakers tend to rely heavily on neorealism to establish serious and harrowing plots involving extreme violence, gangs, drugs and death. This chapter proceeds by comparing these plots about criminality to their mainstream counterparts. It then examines the ways in which Villera/o Cinema aims to subvert negative themes and undermine the othering of villera/os. Subsequently, this chapter exposes the limiting nature of such tactics by identifying their long-standing presence and exploring their meaning in mainstream films. The culture of poverty theory is addressed to support this analysis and the central idea that the majority of villera/o productions do not necessarily empower villera/os in the manner that they intend to. It is argued that the supposed subversion of stereotypes about crime, violence and gangs may, in fact, reinforce the links between representations of villas and the themes in question. Finally, the science-fiction (sci-fi) genre is examined to demonstrate the ways in which Villera/o Cinema can avoid the problems inherent in gang-centred dramas and map out a progressive path for marginal film. Thus, it will be shown that the values present in *Batman en la Villa 31*, a production that entertains while communicating its message, provide a useful model for today's villera/o filmmakers.

6.3 Contemporary Villera/o Cinema: Mimicking the Mainstream?

A film made by those on the 'inside', *La 21, Barracas* contests 'outside' images. To date, it is the only fictional feature directed by Ramos, a Kirchnerist politician who promotes cultural production and lobbies for infrastructural improvements in Villa 21. The director is also the editor of the newspaper *Mundo Villa* and president of the international anti-discrimination organization SOS Discriminación. Production of *La 21, Barracas* was carried out by the students of Villa 21's audiovisual arts school Fraternidad del Sur, which is led by the executive producer and Villa 21 resident Nidia Zarza. Zarza's brother Julio Zarza leads a cast of residents from Villa 21, underscoring an attempt to mediate real marginal voices. In an interview prior to the film's release, Ramos stated that *La 21, Barracas* aims to educate audiences and challenge the idea that all villa inhabitants are criminals (*Telefe Noticias*, 2009). After seeing *La 21, Barracas*, Ezio Massa re-cast its main actors and used them as screenplay editors in *Villa.* Massa's film was again co-produced by Nidia Zarza, Ramos and SOS Discriminación and constitutes a somewhat more mainstream, very loose remake of the original film. Hence, this production marks another attempt to create an authentic portrayal of villera/os (*Argentina Independent* 2009: n.p.). Undoubtedly, *La 21, Barracas* and *Villa* are envisioned as first-hand portrayals of poverty that have the potential to counteract discriminatory discourses.

César González also sees his films as more realistic alternatives to mainstream narratives about poverty in Argentina. González was born in 1989 and has lived in Villa Carlos Gardel, the primary setting of his films, ever since. After entering a life of crime at an early age, a passage he describes as 'una consecuencia social' [a social consequence] (this comment is reflected in his work), the 16-year-old boy received a five-year sentence for kidnapping and robbery (Irigoyen 2010: n.p.). While attending a prisoners' rehabilitation programme, he discovered the texts of Rodolfo Walsh, who pioneered nonfictional literary journalism and was murdered by the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance in 1977 (Benavides 2000: 22; Blaustein 2006: 95-96).[1] Inspired by this iconic leftist writer, González published his first book of poetry *La venganza del cordero atado* [*Revenge of the Chained Lamb*] (2011) under the pen-name Camilo Blajaquis. This alias merges the name of the Cuban revolutionary Camilo Cienfuegos with that of Domingo Blajaquis, a leftist insurgent in Walsh's novel *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* [*Who Killed Rosendo?*] (1968) (Friera 2010: n.p.). Thus, it alludes to the idealogical stance and approach to production shared by González and the Marxist-Peronist leaders of movements such as NAC and Third Cinema.

During his time in prison, González also edited the first four editions of his magazine *¿Todo Piola?* [Is Everything Okay?], which features articles written by people experiencing

[1] See Nilda Redondo's article for a more detailed description of the works of Walsh (Redondo, 2007).

marginalization. *¿Todo Piola?* later expanded and became an audiovisual production company. The aim of this project becomes clear when the founder criticizes sensationalized mainstream portrayals of villas, the casting of actors from other socioeconomic backgrounds in villera/o roles and the acting of villera/os who are under the instruction of middle-class directors (Casas 2013: n.p.). All of this, according to González, silences the villera/o voice:

> Ni está presente la mirada que tenemos los villeros sobre nuestro hábitat; siempre están hablando de nosotros. Como si necesitaríamos un traductor al lado o alguien que nos escriba los discursos porque no somos capaces de hacerlo.
> [The villera/o view of our environment is never seen. They always speak about us, as if we were to need some kind of translator to write for us because we are not capable of doing it for ourselves]. (Respighi 2013: n.p.)

The repetitive language employed in his poem 'Zapping a las 11 y media de la noche' [Channel-Hopping at Half Past Eleven at Night] re-communicates a sense of frustration with Hollywood films and the prejudicial representation of villera/os on news channels that fail to explore the real causes of crime:

> Una película yanqui con muchos recursos pero poca realidad
> Una película yanqui con muchos recursos y nada para decir
> Una película yanqui con muchos recursos y la trama similar
> A la del próximo canal […]
> Hoy hay allanamiento en la villa
> Vemos como se rompe una puerta que estaba abierta
> Vemos bebes villeros llorando
> Plano con música de tensión
> Zócalo que dice "esta gente merece ser castigada".

> [A Hollywood film with a big budget but little reality
> A Hollywood film with a big budget but nothing to say
> A Hollywood film with a big budget but the same plot
> As the one on the next channel (…)
> Today there is a raid in the villa
> We see how to break down a door that was unlocked
> We see villera/o babies crying
> A scene with suspenseful music
> A caption that says "these people deserve to be punished"]. (González, 2012: n.p.)

These comments establish parallels between villera/os and Spivak's silenced subaltern, and highlight González's intention to recover their voices.

González seeks to amplify these voices by adopting the values of previous radical, left-wing Latin American film movements. For example, he avoids conventional production techniques and embraces naturalism in order to intensify the sense of veracity granted by his turbulent history and tough personal circumstances. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, an international publication whose reporting on him underlines the growing interest his work, he stated that he is heavily influenced by Italian neorealism (Sinay 2015: n.p.). This aligns González's body of work with those of Birri, Kohon, Solanas and Getino, among other revolutionary Latin American artists. Mirroring the techniques of such directors, he casts himself and others from Villa Carlos Gardel in central roles, uses actors' real names on screen and omits non-diegetic sound. Extended takes (the camera often lingers on the eyes to de-essentialize villera/os), improvised dialogue, natural sound and lighting, enduring silences, and unresolved plot lines are also common in González's productions. This, too, reminds audiences of the work of his predecessors. Implicit in these techniques is a limiting rejection of fantastical genres and modes of representation which, as will be shown, can also be useful in counteracting the fragmentation between the villas and the 'outside' world.

The reliance of filmmakers from villas on these very particular and common modes of representing poverty may mean that they struggle to counteract oppression. This idea can be understood by considering Bhabha's theory that the colonizer imposes a 'narrative demand' on the colonized, who then fortify existing power structures by mimicking a dominant culture in which they are less versed (Bhabha 1994: 140).[2] Bhabha's theory of mimicry was inspired by Frantz Fanon, who noted the destructive psychological effects of the imposition of French

[2] Also, see 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' (Bhabha, 1984).

culture on colonized Afro-Caribbean people In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986). Bhabha argues that, 'to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference'. In other words, the 'ambivalence' of imitation means that the dominated group becomes 'almost the same *but not quite*'. This secures the power of the colonizer, who needs the colonized to copy and normalize the colonial subject, while at the same time remaining a 'recognizable Other' that can be subjugated (Bhabha 1994: 122-123). It is reasonable to suggest that there is a narrative demand imposed on villa inhabitants. Ratier implies this when he compares them to colonized people who are treated as, 'un niño al que hay que "educar primero" antes de permitirle el goce de algo' [a child who must firstly be "educated" before being allowed to enjoy any privileges] (Ratier 1985: 31). As will be shown, Villera/o Cinema almost always incorporates themes such as violence, gangs and drugs, which are prominent in the mainstream and are often considered stereotypical and stigmatizing. This thematic focus might be construed as the employment of the dominant filmic language driven by a desire to appeal to mass audiences and a 'desire to remain authentic' (Bhabha 1994: 129). Thus, one is reminded of Göktürk's argument that, 'filmmakers from an immigrant or minority background have often been reduced to producers of "a cinema of duty" [in that they] have been expected to make films about the problems of their people' (Göktürk 1999: 6). By working in this manner, villa natives may, contrary to their intentions, contribute to the culture of oppression that they aim to call into question.

The presence of preconceptions about villera/o narratives is further indicated by the overwhelmingly positive reception that films about violence and crime in villas have received. *Villa* was selected for screening at more than 20 international festivals, winning awards in Brazil, Canada and the United States, and being acclaimed as the Argentine *Cidade de Deus* (*Argentina Independent* 2009: n.p.). Critics have also shown a keen interest in González's difficult formative years while lauding his work. The focus on his troubled past suggests the establishment of a set of boundaries within which he is encouraged to operate. At the same time, the director's claim that he wants to be known as an artist rather than a filmmaking ex-convict appear to be at odds with his almost exclusive focus on his criminal experiences (Irigoyen 2010: n.p.). The director's online biographies draw attention to the bullet wounds inflicted on him by police, his history of drug abuse and his previous prison sentences (González 2010: n.p.). These facts were also emphasized by González at a screening of *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?* in the León León cultural centre in Buenos Aires in 2015 (González, 2015). Arguably, this attitude represents complicity with the narrative demand and calls into question the degree of agency that villera/os obtain through their media.

However, Bhabha also stated that mimicry could be used subversively, becoming 'mockery' as the colonized alter normative discourses in non-conforming ways to challenge

those above them on the imposed hierarchy (Bhabha 1994: 123). If the filmmakers studied here manage to distort the standard narrative of poverty by subverting stereotypes, marginal cinema might become an effective tool for mediating villera/o voices and challenging harmful discourses. In this case, reoccurring portrayals of violence can be understood as an act of rebellion: a kind of 'aesthetic Fanonianism', since Fanon understood violent rebellion as necessary for the psychological wellbeing of colonized groups (Stam 2015: 149). Should Villera/o Cinema only mimic the violent discourses of the 'outside', however, it will symbolize the subaltern position and silenced voices of those represented and point towards the limitations of a marginal cinema movement that hopes to battle oppression. Taking this into account, the present analysis proceeds by considering the effectiveness with which marginal media is utilized and questioning whether or not independent filmmakers are restricted to communicating in ways that facilitate the subjugation of their communities.

6.4 Securing Insecurity as the Thematic Status Quo

La 21, Barracas portrays a conflict between Julio 'Tochiro' Zarza (Julio Zarza) and Miguel 'Gordo' Zarate (Miguel Zarate), rival gang leaders from the bordering neighbourhoods of Villa Alsina and Villa 21, respectively. At a party in Villa Alsina, the two armed groups clash and a tense stand-off ensues. Meanwhile, Debi (Débora Romano), the younger sister of Julio's girlfriend Gisela (Gisela Ledesma), disappears. The girl's panic-stricken mother Susana (Susana Yanacón) searches the streets for her daughter as rumours that the abduction was carried out by the Villa 21 resident Diego (Mario Aguilar) circulate. After police half-heartedly scan the river for her body, locals hastily reach the consensus that Debi was murdered by Diego. In search of justice, Julio vows to avenge the killing. However, Gordo also considers it his duty to punish the alleged criminal and promptly kills Diego. Angered by this, Julio steals the deceased's coffin and throws it into the water in order to reaffirm his own power. As the story unfolds, Gisela's romantic affair with Gordo is revealed. This further infuriates Julio and the plot climaxes when he kills the couple at a local religious festival. As Gordo falls to the ground, he returns fire and Julio's life also comes to a violent end. A final twist occurs when Debi returns home, seemingly unaware of the events that have occurred, and Diego's innocence is belatedly confirmed.

Ramos's focus on gangs and lawlessness, and an apparent sense of hopelessness in his plot, has been criticized by some. Erika Arrieta, who appears in her father Julio Arrieta's films and is involved with various cultural projects in Villa 21, was particularly alarmed by scenes in which children find and play with firearms. Arrieta describes this as a serious misrepresentation of her community (Smyth, 2015). In the same vein, while *Mundo Villa* often documents festivals to disseminate marginal cultures and construct a more positive and heterogeneous villera/o

identity, *La 21, Barracas* uses one such celebration as a backdrop for a bloody shootout, recalling the tragic carnival scenes in *Suburbio* and *Barrio gris* (*Mundo Villa* 2010b: n.p; 2012: n.p.). In this sense, misgivings about the images of violence in *La 21, Barracas* may be well-founded.

In Massa's film *Villa*, Zarza plays Fredy, a violent and withdrawn alcoholic branded by the 'insecurity' logo emblazoned on his jacket. 'Insecurity' is a literal translation of the Spanish word *inseguridad*, which also means 'danger' and refers to the public's exposure to violence and crime. The main plot follows Fredy, Lupin (Fernando Roa) and their younger friend Cuzco (Jonathan Rodríguez) as they search for a place to watch Argentina's opening World Cup match against Nigeria in 2002. Zarate, again called by his actual nickname Gordo, plays a much-feared gang leader who hoards an arsenal of weapons and the badges of murdered police officers in his home. The violent nature of the film is suggested by its posters and title screen, which show the word villa sprayed on a wall and dripping with blood-red paint. In the narrative, moreover, Fredy becomes involved in various conflicts. He causes a gas explosion that kills Gordo and the gangster's second-in-command Bocha (Diego Sampayo). As his psychological breakdown reaches a critical point, he rapes his girlfriend Pato (Gisela Gorrochategui) and shoots Cuzco's television set, destroying his friends' opportunity to see Argentina play in the World Cup. Fredy then enters a restaurant and orders food and wine, which he cannot pay for. When this becomes clear, he opens fire on two police officers and a waiter who had previously refused him access to the establishment. Fredy kills the waiter but is shot by the officers. After he staggers back to the confines of Villa 21, the film ends and the spectator can only assume the worst for the marginal male.

Diagnóstico esperanza [*Diagnosis Hope*] (dir. César González, 2013) revisits themes of crime and violence, following various individuals who are brought together by a prospective robbery. A middle-class businessman named Andrés (Javier Omezoli) hires two corrupt detectives to steal 200,000 U.S. dollars from his brother-in-law. The officers instruct Naza (Nazarena Moreno), a single mother who forces her children to sell drugs in their villa, to plan the robbery. This woman in turn recruits a group of adolescent male villeros to carry out the theft. At the centre of this gang are César (César González) and Lautaro (Esteban EI As), who has recently been released from prison. In scenes that recall the director's past, these two characters kidnap a man outside of the villa and steal his cash. In another subplot, Mariano (Mariano Alarcón) robs a house and subjects the female occupant to a traumatic assault in the process. In the end, the heist that links the various characters fails when Andrés discovers that his brother-in-law has already spent the targeted cash. Andrés is left at the mercy of the corrupt policemen, while the villera/os appear unable to escape their marginalized lives.

González has also produced several short films that define villa residents by their relationship to crime. In *Guachines* [*Little Orphans*] (dir. César González, 2014), four children

traipse through the city streets on an ominously stormy night. In a manner reminiscent of *Crónica de un niño solo*, their innocence is juxtaposed with delinquency as they use public playground facilities while considering stealing a car from a 'cheto' [snob]. Two of the boys opt out, citing their lack of guns and their fear of the nearby police. The others try to commit the robbery and one of them is killed by the vehicle owner. An aggressive undercurrent underlies *Truco* [*Truc*] (dir. César González, 2014), which gives a brief insight into the lives of a group of boys who carry out robberies in the city. The firearm the teenagers share becomes a source of conflict as they argue about whose turn it is to use it. It seems as though the situation will turn sour until they are distracted by Alan's music and instead of taking to the streets, they remain indoors and edit the rapper's latest video. In this obvious reference to González's actual experiences, *Truco* suggests that fostering an interest in the arts can alter the otherwise criminal destinies of young villera/os. This is one of González's most hopeful films, since it does not end in tragedy and suggests alternatives to criminality. Nonetheless, *Truco* continues to use criminality as a yardstick to measure and define the villa. In *Condicional* (dir. César González, 2012), the recently-paroled character Monito (Monito), in need of money to appease his ex-girlfriend and gain access to his infant son, agrees to act as an accomplice in a robbery and murder planned by Rubén (Marcos Blanco). Their target is César (César González), a local dealer whom Rubén feels disrespected by. The film ends tragically when Rubén is shot dead by César during their confrontation.

González's second feature *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?* reconstructs an 'aesthetics of garbage' as it follows an unnamed *cartonero* (Marcelo Chávez) as he struggles to make ends meet and provide for his child, from whom he is estranged. Long tracking shots follow the *cartonero* through the upmarket districts of Buenos Aires as he looks for recyclable waste. These shots, which last for durations of up to 15 minutes, evoke a tiresome sense of toil and hardship, underscoring the aforementioned claims to authenticity implied by the use of realism and 'mimetic fallacy', the reflection of the themes and messages of art in its aesthetic (Stam 2015: 156). The young man secures a legitimate job as a cleaner in an office, but he is soon fired after a snobbish clerk falsely accuses him of insulting her. He decides to resolve his financial problems by stealing but is prevented from doing so by a neighbour who refuses to endanger the *cartonero* by lending him a gun. Others do become involved in crime. The two shotgun-bearing characters foregrounded the film's promotional poster in favour of the *cartonero* [waste-collector], who is relegated to a less salient black and white background, carry out an armed robbery on a businessman. The robbery goes awry when one of the young men is arrested and the other is killed by police. In the end, the *cartonero* returns resiliently to waste collecting and the film concludes in a cyclical fashion as he resumes his thankless and unrewarding search through the garbage of the wealthy.

Ultimately, then, *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?* is much like the director's previous work in that, regardless of its objectives, it continues to contextualize villas and their inhabitants in terms of wrongdoing. It becomes clear upon analysing the narratives of Ramos, Massa and González, that there are certain modes of representation that have become customary when it comes to representing villas on screen. Violence, gangs and crime have been standardized as themes in Villera/o Cinema, but how should these ideas be interpreted?

6.5 Criminal-Victim Hybrids: Subversive Stereotypes or Ambivalent Prejudices?

On the one hand, the prevalence of the theme of supposed deviancy in villera/o films suggests that, when it comes to representing Argentine poverty, mainstream cinema perhaps 'works to consolidate hegemony by inducing its subjects to imitate the forms and values of the dominant culture' (Moore-Gilbert 2000: 459). On the other, as will be explained, the theory of mockery as a form of resistance may allow one to read the films of Ramos, Massa and González as disruptions of the demonization of the economically marginalized. Arguably, the films function in this manner by representing socially destructive behaviour as a manifestation of villera/o victimhood as opposed to some sort of innate evil.

The varying situations of villera/os in *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?* are best understood by considering the director's keen interest in philosophy, which he developed in the University of Buenos Aires before leaving due to financial pressures and alleged discrimination against him in the institution (Ríos 2014: n.p.). González engages heavily with the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who posed his film's titular question 'What Can a Body Do?' in his rationalistic endeavour to conceive the totality of the universe and dislodge humans from their narrow vantage point of their surroundings. Spinoza states that different individuals can be affected in different ways by the same stimulus, and the same person can be affected by the same stimulus in different ways at different times (Spinoza 2002: 304). The fact that some characters react to oppression by becoming criminals while others strive to work with dignity does not constitute a denunciation of the former, but rather an acknowledgement of the diversity and volatile nature of individuals who have grown up in a villa. Hence, González calls for a Spinozian approach to thinking about marginalization, one that embraces the philosopher's famous statement, 'I have made a ceaseless effort not to ridicule, not to bewail, not to scorn human actions, but to understand them' (Spinoza in Shermer 2002: 61).

The inseparability of one's actions and their environment is implicit in the title *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?*, which questions the accuracy of the human perspective and asks the viewer to consider things as Spinoza did, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Simply put, this means thinking in the broadest terms. Spinoza understood apparent entireties as mechanisms of more complex

structures that are difficult to comprehend (Eslava 2010: 116). Adam Murray confirms this reading and understands that, 'for Spinoza a collection of spatially contiguous, simple bodies – bodies which ''lie upon one another'' in the right sort of way – jointly compose an extended whole [and] each of the whole's parts manages to communicate its degree of motion to each of the others in a determinate way' (Murray 2013: 81). Spinoza's question was revisited by Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari. When their book *What is Philosophy* (1991), in which the body is conceptualized as a construct of underlying social realities, is salvaged from a pile of trash by the *cartonero*, stereotypical images of the ignorant villera/o are undermined and education is signalled as a route out of poverty. Hence, as González adopts the aesthetics of garbage, he shows how villa inhabitants can, in a manner that attests to their resourcefulness and resilience, literally build rich intellectual lives out of rubbish. At the same time, the book's messages are evoked. Atte Oksanen describes these messages as follows:

> Deleuze and Guattari […] help us to understand human beings as fundamentally social and cultural creatures who interact with material realities […]. [They] pose the question *What can a body do?* [and] describe bodies in terms of a flow of affects and transitory moments of transformation arising from encounters with the other […] Their philosophy [is] based on criticizing fixed concepts. (Oksanen 2013: 58-59)

It is noteworthy that Oksanen uses Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy to promote a new understanding of the behaviour of drug addicts. Others have used this theoretical framework in a similar fashion, to challenge essentializing representations of stigmatized groups. For example, Amanda Cachia cites the philosophers in question when she criticizes the common portrayal of physical disabilities as 'pathological aberrations' rather than examples of human diversity (California College of the Arts, 2012). Examining such research reveals how, in González's films, the behaviour of the villa inhabitants cannot be understood without considering the world or 'body without organs', to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, within which they exist (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 9). They are, it appears, products of their surroundings.

In *Guachines*, for example, the juvenile delinquents are transformed into victims when the vehicle owner shows little concern for having taken one of their lives. He casually asks a friend to call security and drives away in his luxurious vehicle, evidently unaffected by the incident. Here, González constructs what he believes to be a new vantage point from which the audience can comprehend young people from villas who inhabit a society that relentlessly promotes consumerism while denying them an acceptable standard of living. Clearly, this is also a world wherein they are viewed as worthless and expendable. In *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?*, an

aspiring rapper named Alan (Alan Garvey) takes up arms so that he can bring his girlfriend to McDonalds. Others discuss their desire to drink Coca-Cola and wear famous fashion brands, again expressing the relationship between crime and the materialistic values reinforced by global enterprises. A scene in which the two young men plan an armed robbery while playing *Grand Theft Auto* recognises the role of modern media in normalizing violence. One of the men declares, 'este juegito esta re piola, boludo. Sabés por qué me gusta? Porque parece la vida real: chorreás autos, te cagás a tiros con la gorra, vas en cana' [this video game is really cool, man. Do you know why I like it? Because it's like real life: you rob cars, you shoot at cops and you go to jail]. In these scenes, González conveys Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a complex network of desiring-machines and interconnected flows of desire that produce social reality. His audience are reminded of *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in which it is stated, 'there are no desiring-machines that exist outside the social machines that they form on a large scale; and no social machines without the desiring-machines that inhabit them on a small scale' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 373).

Villa operates in the same way, as is notable in the sense of imprisonment evoked by the mise-en-scène. As Fredy drinks a carton of cheap wine, he is framed through a wire fence that displays a sign reading 'no pasar' [do not pass]. These common symbols of exclusion and immobility imply that the constraints imposed by the government and society are the cause of Fredy's destructiveness. Massa confirms this analysis when he states that the 'insecurity' logo on the character's clothing denotes a menace that 'is not a cause, but a result of prejudice' (*Argentina Independent* 2009: n.p.). The same idea is also communicated when Cuzco tries to watch television through the window of a restaurant but is sent away by the waiter. Ironically, the public service broadcast that the child wants to see is called *Fútbol para todos* [Football for Everyone]. Ramos confirms that the violent images in *La 21, Barracas* are intended to call attention to the lack of justice in villas (*Mundo Villa* 2010a: n.p.). As is often the case in contemporary films representing Argentine poverty, a negligent police force appears responsible for the suffering and violent behaviour of the marginalized. The deliberate scarcity of officers on screen suggests that the deaths of Diego, Julio, Gordo and Gisela may have been avoided if the authorities had carried out a thorough search for Debi. Also, the religious procession during which they lose their lives is ironized by the hymn 'Que viva Cristo' [Long Live Christ]. This contrast between sound and image suggests the need for state intervention by implying that Christian values alone cannot resolve certain social problems. Such effective use of music is again notable when the soundtrack underlines the need for improved policing in marginal *barrios*. As one gang executes a possible drug dealer at the beginning of the film, a song by the cast member Cristian Rey declares, 'así suena la justicia en la villa' [this is how justice sounds in the villa]. By claiming that there is a lack of policing in the unofficial *barrio*, Ramos

endeavours to explain and perhaps even justify the enforcement of its brutal informal laws. This message is explicitly communicated as Gordo preaches to his gang, 'nosotros no tenemos que permitir que un loco ande bardeando porque tenemos familias, tenemos hijos' [we must not allow some lunatic to go around causing problems because we have families, we have children]. Ramos's social critique is also implicit in recurring wide shots in which the villera/os' powerlessness is suggested by giant derelict factories that dwarf them on the screen. These factories also suggest the lasting impact of economic crises that, although caused by global and national leaders, have led to the existence of villas and the privation suffered within. Arguably, scenes such as these establish Bhabha's process of mockery. As the violent actions of the characters appear to be caused by their lack of access to an official judicial system, the responsibility is placed on the state more so than the marginal individual. Hence, like the characters in the films of González and Massa, they are transformed from mere criminals into criminal-victim hybrids.

When Fredy destroys the television set in *Villa*, he and his two friends must resort to criminality in order to be included in the national celebrations surrounding the World Cup. Lupin breaks into an electrical goods store to access a screen. He makes no attempt to harm anyone, however, and his amusingly upbeat disposition allows the audience to empathize with him when he is arrested as the game concludes, ironically, with an Argentine victory. Elsewhere, Cuzco holds an elderly woman and her granddaughter at knifepoint so that he can witness the sporting event from their apartment. Despite the child's threats, the widow recognises his desperation. Instead of scalding him, a possible outcome suggested by suspenseful close-ups of water boiling on the stove, she prepares him a meal. The apartment therefore becomes a Third Space where those inhabiting the 'outside' world begin to understand crime as a result of oppression. Meanwhile, Fredy attacks a businessman in order to, quite literally, mimic the dominant class and watch the football match. The suit he steals from his victim grants him access to the restaurant where he carries out his final shooting. This scene can be described as Fanonian, in that it connects Fredy's need to imitate more powerful individuals to his alienation and mental breakdown.

It is the process of mockery established by criminal-victim characters in 'contact zones' that, according to the directors studied thus far in this chapter, distinguishes their representations of poverty from the mainstream (Pratt 1991: 34; Bhabha 1994: 54-55). However, it is also important to note that the economically marginalized criminal-victim is by no means unique to Villera/o Cinema or even marginal cinema, calling into question the degree of agency that this type of character represents. Many of the films previously analysed in this thesis have represented villera/os as being driven to criminality by their circumstances. In the global mainstream, moreover, disadvantaged individuals are regularly seen as 'both victims and a

threat', given that 'whatever the cause of their illness […] they are a danger to the public' (Pimpare 2009: 11). In *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance*, Charles Ramírez Berg observes that oppositional attitudes toward marginal groups are frequently played out in Hollywood and argues that the supposed subversion of clichéd images of Latin Americans is, in fact, a way of reconstructing stereotypes (Ramírez Berg 2002: 31, 115-116).

Psychoanalytical research on ambivalent prejudices sheds further light on the representation of criminal-victims. In *Stigma: A Social Psychological Analysis*, Irwin Katz demonstrates how interwoven positive and negative feelings towards stigmatized groups are played out in literature. Drawing on Freudian theory, Katz argues that negative emotions can threaten the self-image when there is a perceived confliction between them and dominant moral values. The person experiencing this conflict may subsequently alter their behaviour to re-establish a state of psychological equilibrium (Katz 1982: 6). A tendency to simultaneously pity and demonize villera/os through the criminal-victim figure can be understood as offsetting threats to the audience's self-image by encouraging empathy (victim), while reaffirming stigmatized roles and reinforcing existing social hierarchies (criminal). In this way, film facilitates the expression and reconciliation of ambivalent attitudes towards villera/os through dualistic portrayals that mark 'a conflict of two sets of beliefs, positive and negative, about a stigmatized group' (Whitely and Kite 2010: 214). While traditional prejudices are retained in that villera/os remain defined by their relationship to crime, a behavioural adjustment can be identified in the application of culpability to national authorities. Furthermore, the peripheral references to admirable aspects of villa communities generate what psychologists influenced by Katz call 'moral credentials [that defend] against charges of prejudice by pointing to […] positive beliefs' (Whitely and Kite 2010: 225). For example, there is a sense of solidarity in the villas despite the feud at the centre of the plot in *La 21, Barracas*. Susana's neighbours assist her in the search for her daughter and the gangsters' attempts to avenge Debi's supposed death are driven by their loyalty to their communities. *Villa* is similar in this respect, with its various passing references to the work ethic of individuals who are either not seen or not central to the narrative, which instead focuses intently on the alcoholic's demise. The hope referred to in the title *Diagnóstico esperanza* is glimpsed in Rasta (Tawaedo Prophet), who refuses César's offer to participate in the robbery. Rasta acts as a voice of reason and tries to convince César to follow his lead, but César declares his love for the gangster lifestyle, exclaiming, 'soy re chorro' [I'm a thief at heart]. Again, positive images remain at the margins and Rasta is only briefly encountered. Alan, who prefers to compose *cumbia villera* and reggaeton rather than sell drugs for his mother, also marks an attempt to represent positive aspects of the villa. This child remains a recurring symbol of innocence, culture and creative potential in González's films. His talent, however, is channelled in the same way as the director's as it reconstructs a violent portrayal of poverty.

Rearticulating González's discourse, the musician's signature song 'Yo aprendí' [I learned], which he recites in *Condicional* and *Diagnóstico esperanza*, portrays the villa as a hellish space, albeit regretfully:

> Yo aprendí a ver pibes muertos
> Yo aprendí a ver pibes presos
> Un tiroteo siempre por acá
> Y eso para los chicos yo no lo quiero más.
> [I'm used to seeing kids die
> I'm used to seeing kids imprisoned
> There is always a shootout happening around here
> And I don't want that for the kids any more].

Although this song calls for a change of mindset among youths who commit violent acts, it re-establishes the criminal parameters within which the marginalized settlement is generally defined. This approach, which is evident in all of the films analysed thus far in this chapter, can be understood as a way of legitimizing the recurring 'spectacle of drugs, violence, threat and ruined lives' in narratives about villas (Grinberg 2010: 670).

6.6 Challenging the Culture of Poverty and Defining the Deserving Poor

As outlined in chapter one, Lewis argued that there exists a transnational culture of poverty that transcends factors such as race, nationality and location. This culture is said to sustain the cycle of poverty and is implicit in the accusation of marginalization-by-choice that is often directed at villa inhabitants. The culture of poverty theory claims 'that members of a slum culture fatalistically accept their displacement from the dominant, capitalist society [and] adopt mechanisms that tend to perpetuate their alienation from mainstream culture' (Baugh 2004: 57). In the years following its popularization, Lewis's work heavily influenced social policy in Latin America and around the world (Hegeman 2012: 64; Perlman 1976: 118). While echoes of the culture of poverty argument are notable in some contemporary political and scholarly discourses, the theory has generally been rejected due to its implication that poverty is caused by a way of life passed between generations of economically marginalized people (Perlman 1976: 114; Small et al. 2010: 7; Small et al. 2010: 6-8). Social scientists have instead looked towards reconciling Lewis's work with the oppositional hypothesis that poverty is perpetuated by the situations imposed by capitalism and not by a set of values specific to 'the poor' (Van Til and Van Til 1973: 10-11; Coward et al. 1973: 633).

Nonetheless, mainstream films continue to suggest that a culture of poverty exists. U.S. cinema, for example, often ignores the institutional obstacles faced by the economically marginalized and purports that people can triumph over adversity by working hard and making the right choices (Bulman 2002: 254; Pimpare 2009: 17; Halper and Muzzio 2013: 11, 17). Robert Bulman asserts that this mode of representation amounts to a manifestation of middle-class anxieties, the bearers of which prefer to understand poverty as sustained by those experiencing it and not by dominant social groups (Bulman 2002: 255, 259, 274). By engaging with the significant idea of marginalization by choice, Villera/o Cinema unveils the unequal distribution of opportunities and undermines the idea that people get what they deserve within a meritocratic capitalist system.

Villera/o Cinema might initially appear to imply that residents of villas can solve their problems by choosing to avoid wrongdoing. In *Truco*, the characters improve their lives when they decide to work on a music video instead of taking to the streets to steal. In *Guachines*, the two children who opt out of larceny remain unharmed. Crime and vengeance have devastating consequences in *Villa, Condicional, ¿Qué puede un cuerpo?* and *La 21, Barracas*. In many respects, these films urge marginal youths (and males in particular) not to join gangs or commit violent acts, suggesting that there are other opportunities available. Nonetheless, although characters do opt into gangs, theft and drugs through their own devices, their choices can only be understood by acknowledging the alternatives presented to them. Their dilemma is crystallized by the character played by González in *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?*, who claims that he would rather work long hours for low pay than end up imprisoned or killed by police like his two friends. Although villera/os have a choice, therefore, their options are unappealing. They can risk their lives as criminals or be exploited in the labour market. Significantly, some characters take both paths, underlining González's objective of dismantling the simplistic, false dichotomy that villera/os are either workers (exploited victims) or thieves (criminals). Regardless of their choices, nonetheless, villera/o characters continue to be marginalized. All that they can determine is the manner in which they experience poverty. Social mobility is not guaranteed by sharing middle-class values and obeying the laws made on the 'outside'. No character succeeds financially by legitimate means. Considering that the talented composer Alan never emerges from poverty and resorts to crime in *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?*, even rapping is not represented in the typical mainstream fashion of leading 'underdogs to [financial] success' (Halper and Muzzio 2013: 14). Through this mode of representation, González complicates the conclusions of global blockbusters such as *8 Mile* (dir. Curtis Hanson, 2002), *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (dir. Jim Sheridan, 2005), *Hustle and Flow* (dir. Craig Brewer, 2005) and *Straight Outta Compton* (dir. F. Gary Gray, 2015), which suggest that music offers a route out of poverty. The decision of González in *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?* to habitually consume cocaine is mitigated by his extremely long working day.

In *Diagnóstico esperanza*, Mariano's attempt to sell socks to train passengers fails before he turns to burglary. In *Condicional*, Monito knows that he is unlikely to find work, especially given that he has spent time behind bars. It is for this reason that he helps Rubén to steal from a drug dealer. Similarly, this dealer only sells illegal substances because he cannot find a legitimate job. He expresses a desire to leave the narcotics business but recognises the lack of employment opportunities available to him. The central trio in *Villa* can only participate in the national celebration of Argentina's participation in the World Cup by choosing to break and enter. By the same token, Ramos's characters must decide between anarchy and their own malfunctioning systems of law and order in *La 21, Barracas*. The absence of police, or overwhelming presence of corrupt police, in these stories sheds light on the reasons for hostility towards state institutions, which is one of the traits of the supposed culture of poverty theory (Perlman 1976: 115). This animosity is concisely symbolized in *Diagnóstico esperanza* by a prolonged close-up of the hands of one of the young criminals. Tattooed between his thumb and index finger is a dotted symbol resembling the number five on standard dice, which is known to represent four gang members surrounding and attacking an officer of the law. However, given the crookedness and incompetence of the police in all of the films analysed thus far in this chapter, animosity towards them is rendered understandable. It is only when the hard-working *cartonero* in *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?* is unfairly dismissed from his cleaning job that he seeks out a gun. He does not consider resorting to crime until the film's final act, when all other options have seemingly been exhausted. His final return to recycling also suggests that he is resilient and underlines the frequent transmogrification of the symbol of garbage in film movements that challenge artistic and social norms. Rather than implying that the economically marginalized are somehow impure or corrupted, the 'aesthetic of garbage' underscores humanity and transforms 'the stolen leavings of dominant cinema' by linking waste to virtue rather than moral corruption (Stam 2015: 150, 152). The closing images of the *cartonero* pushing his cart through the streets undermine the idea that hard work and independent action are enough to improve one's socioeconomic situation. This reaffirms the argument that, while personal choices play a role in the type of marginalization experienced, there are significant outside forces that maintain the oppression endured by the characters regardless of their decisions. In this sense, Villera/o Cinema repudiates the culture of poverty theory. Arguably, this mockery of the notion of marginalization by choice marks its originality and autonomy from the mainstream.

However, Argentine films, even those produced by established studios with well-known stars and high production values, have always shown that the social mobility of marginalized individuals is blocked by obstacles which, no matter how hard they try, they cannot overcome. Agency cannot make central characters upwardly mobile in fictional films such as *Suburbio* (Laura tries to escape the villa but ends up in a prostitution ring), *Barrio gris* (crime doesn't pay

for Claudio and he ends up in jail), *Detrás de un largo muro* (Rosita's factory job leads nowhere) and *Elefante blanco* (the Church and political corruption are blamed for a lack of progress). The same discourse is reiterated by those who spearheaded the NAC and Third Cinema movements, as is seen in documentaries including *Tire dié* and *La hora de los hornos*. In all of these films, poverty can only be escaped by radical social and political reform. Thus, the long-standing hyper-politicization of Argentine film, and indeed the strong influence of leftist and Marxist directors (all of which are detailed at length in chapter two), have led to the standardization of criminal-victim narratives. These narratives, despite being promoted as alternative, have become clichés in Argentine films about villas and poverty.

Furthermore, this tradition is also evident at an international level. While they explain how the agency-based theory has often been promoted by Hollywood, Halper and Muzzio also observe that the economically marginalized have been 'reconceived [in U.S. films] as rebels, […] driven to wrongdoing by forces beyond its control' since the 1990s (Halper and Muzzio 2013: 17). The marginal cinema examined thus far is clearly comparable to these mainstream works, in which characters:

> Are responsible for their conduct in the obvious sense that their choices determined how they behaved; but […] it was an unjust society that placed them in the context where these choices seemed to make sense. (Halper and Muzzio 2013: 18-19)

These features aim to fill the gaps left by quantification-oriented development studies, which can highlight statistics about criminal behaviours but cannot 'capture the nexus of desperation which forces people to consider them as options' (Green 2006: 1124). With this mode of representation has come a re-evaluation of the nature of the deserving and undeserving poor. As the villa eradication plans of the past have demonstrated, this distinction has important social implications in that it determines which groups should be entitled to aid and which groups should be dealt with through punitive policies. Halper tracks the evolution of this process of classification and states that, traditionally, those who accepted dominant moral values, particularly in relation to hard work and private property, were considered deserving. He adds that, in reality, however, the compliance of such marginal groups legitimates the system and serves society's most powerful (Halper 1973: 72, 76). For this reason, the new deserving poor are regularly portrayed as those who reject the values of the old deserving poor. These rebels, nonetheless, remain a 'useful conceptual weapon' for the anti-establishment (Halper 1973: 86). The characters employed by Ramos, Massa and González can be thought of as the new deserving poor since they are not evil or immoral simply because they resort to crime. In this sense, they

become filmic pawns who serve the political opposition within the existing system. Thus, the representation of the criminal-victim remains problematic in Villera/o Cinema. This figure embodies the repetition, rather than the transmogrification, of mainstream tropes. In this context, doubt is cast on Ramos, Massa and González's suggestions that their films diverge from the mainstream in an authentic and original fashion. One filmmaker, Julio Arrieta, recognised that artists representing villas were overdependent on plots about gangs, crime and violence. Frustrated with the apparent standardization of such an approach to representing informal settlements, Arrieta sought new ways to engage with the mainstream and imagine the marginal *barrio*.

6.7 Reaching for Stardom

6.7.1 Julio Arrieta: Cultural Middleman?

A long-time resident of Villa 21, Arrieta was 61 years of age when he passed away in 2011. Having built up a substantial body of work as an actor, filmmaker and casting director, he remains one of the most important cultural figures to have emerged from a villa. Arrieta discovered a love of performing as a young man, while working as a children's clown in his neighbourhood. He trained under the playwright Norman Briski and the renowned actor Norma Aleandro, who was so impressed by his talent that she offered to mentor him (Smyth, 2015). In 1987, Arrieta formed the first villera/o theatre group (Seitz 2008: n.p; *Mundo Villa* 2011: n.p.). This group appeared in various short films including *Pabellón 86* [*Cell Block 86*] (dir. Matías Collini, 2006). This film's plot about a football match between prisoners and guards draws on well-known U.S. and European productions such as *Escape to Victory* (dir. John Huston, 1981), *Sleepers* (dir. Barry Levinson, 1996), *The Longest Yard* (dir. Robert Aldrich, 1974) and its contemporary adaptation *Mean Machine* (dir. Barry Skolnick, 2001). Thus, it demonstrates Arrieta's lifelong endeavour to promote integration by departing from the aesthetic of imperfections and finding a space for villera/os in mainstream narratives from which they have historically been excluded.

The documentary *Estrellas* [*Stars*] (dirs. Federico León and Marcos Martínez, 2007) explores these efforts further by centring on Arrieta's casting agency in Villa 21. The relationships Arrieta formed in his community during his time as a Peronist vote collector allowed him to establish this business, which was subsequently employed to cast actors for *Fuga de cerebros*, *El polaquito* and many more films (Rijman 2014: n.p.). Without romanticising the villa, *Estrellas* distances itself from downbeat films about Argentine poverty through Arrieta's charisma and storytelling skills (Domínguez 2007: 23; Ruffinelli 2012: 210). León and Martínez enter the home of this 'wonderfully boisterous' man, where he keeps a database of locals seeking work (Holland 2007: 47). As he promotes his *barrio* as a filming location that is home to skilled performers, production staff, security guards and catering services, cinema becomes a

means to tap into external, mainstream economies from which villas are generally excluded. *Estrellas* metaphorically demonstrates this in its opening scene, which begins in complete darkness. A voice in off shouts '¡acción!' [action!], the doors of a shack burst open and a crowd of actors rush out into the streets of Villa 21 as the documentary's title appears on screen. At this moment, cinema is established not only as an art form capable of delivering social and political messages, but also as a commercial tool that can improve financial prosperity in villas.

The stars referred to in the title are a clear reference to *El nexo* [*The Nexus*] (dir. Sebastián Antico, 2014), a sci-fi film based on one of Arrieta's unpublished short stories, performed by his theatre group, and followed from behind the scenes in *Estrellas*. The cosmos also symbolizes Arrieta's search for social equality through engagement with the mainstream. In a moving scene, he reinforces the symbolic weight of this meaning by observing that the stars' position above the Earth means that they are shared by all the neighbourhoods, cities and countries of the planet. This symbolic idea gives way to the notion that villera/o actors have the potential to be 'stars' of the screen. In a wryly humorous scene, *Estrellas* shows men who resemble anything but typical models having make-up applied professionally and striking poses during glamorous photo shoots. Arrieta is subsequently shown accepting a Martín Fierro Award for the television series *Tumberos* (2002) on behalf of its writer Adrián Caetano. Even though his speech is ignored by the high-profile media professionals in the audience, who include Mirtha Legrand and Susana Giménez, he is unwavering in placing the spotlight on villera/os by commending their contribution to Argentine culture. In the closing scenes of *Estrellas*, the protagonist and his co-star wife Ester Oviedo drive into the sunset in the manner of Hollywood heroes. Their humble origins remain on display, however, in the form of their old car. While portraying the couple as typical stars of the screen, this scene also defiantly asserts their identity though the unusual act of drinking the local tea *maté* in a road-movie-type sequence. As the camera moves from close-ups of the pair to the sky above, the idea that all people are part of the same universe and should have the same opportunities to be seen and heard is subtly reasserted. Here, Arrieta once again leads villera/os away from the margins of Argentine cinema.

Some critics have questioned the validity of this message, however, suggesting that Arrieta's clever astrological metaphor is compromised by the particular type of 'stardom' offered to villera/os. David Oubiña argues that *Estrellas* stabilizes the marginal position:

> Judging from the way the film shows slum dwellers, it would seem that they have little desire to escape poverty – at the end of the day, if they are no longer what they are, they will cease to be in demand by casting directors. (Oubiña 2013: 37)

This critique represents Arrieta as a sort of 'cultural middleman', an insider who promotes the values of the colonizer in his colonized community (Bhabha 1994: 128). Arrieta declares that his actors are prepared to play ruffians, baddies and goons in large-scale productions. He demands, 'si ellos ven que nosotros somos así, páguennos por eso […] no contraten a otras personas para hacer lo que sabemos hacer nosotros y que estamos capacitados de hacer' [if they see us in that way, they should pay us for it […] don't hire other people to do what we know how to do and are capable of doing]. This attitude is further evident during a sequence in which the villa is marketed to prospective location scouts. Various settings are pictured and described by captions as the most authentic sites to stage scenes of criminality. Filmmakers are offered a 'callejón para peleas' [alleyway for fights], 'casa tipo *dealer*' [drug dealer-type house], 'casa tipo secuestro' [kidnapper-type house], and 'calle con pedregullo para persecución' [street with gravel for chases].

Other critics, however, have implied a process of Bhabhaian mockery by arguing that the villa inhabitants in *Estrellas* consciously draw on stereotypes in order to improve their financial standing and that this practice is a subversive and empowering one (Aguilar 2015: 209; Andermann 2012: 103-104). Arrieta reinforces this idea by exclaiming pragmatically, 'yo no quiero fabricar cadaveres cultos' [I do not want to create cultured corpses]. Although he believes in the capabilities of his actors and asserts, 'podemos hacer Shakespeare' [we can do Shakespeare], the casting director's experiences have led him to believe that the roles available to his neighbours are limited. He markets villera/os as artistic, professional and skilled, but also accepts that they are confined to their existing position in the cultural and economic frameworks of the 'outside'. This idea echoes Gramscian discourse in that villera/os seem only able to enter the mainstream and reap its financial rewards should they embrace the degrading positions allocated to them (Gramsci 1971: 52-53; Green 2002: 10).

Importantly, however, Arrieta's acceptance gives way to an opportunity to influence and profit from the mainstream by infiltrating it through a back door. The relationship between Arrieta, the self-proclaimed 'nexo' [link] between the villas and the 'outside', is not entirely unidirectional. In an interview conducted in 2014, Fernando Musa confirmed that Arrieta was responsible for the inclusion of an upbeat song recited by villa inhabitants in *Fuga de cerebros*. Its lyrics challenge stereotypes and demonstrate pride in being a member of a villa community:

Yo nací en una villa
Que es de chapas y cartón
Soy del barrio de Barracas
De comparsas y de alcohol
Yo le digo a usted señora
Y a usted señor también
Ser villero no es crimen.
[I was born in a villa
Made of tin and cardboard
I am from the neighbourhood of Barracas
Of festivals and alcohol
I tell you ma'am
And I tell you sir
Being a villera/o is not a crime]

Furthermore, Arrieta also seems to have influenced Subiela. In *El resultado del amor* (in which Arrieta plays Mabel's father), Mabel's stage persona Clavelina reflects Arrieta's experience as a performing clown which, as his daughter proudly recalls, endeared him to families in their community and inspired the formation of the Villa 21 theatre group (Smyth, 2015). With these contributions in mind, his role is revealed to be a complex one that involves both the acceptance and repudiation of common stereotypes. Arrieta enters the mainstream by accepting problematic portrayals of villas, but he also exerts some degree of power once there. Most importantly, however, the profits, skills and network of contacts obtained by Arrieta in the mainstream facilitate the production of his own films, in which villera/os achieve their objective of becoming stars. This is evident in *El nexo*. *El nexo* marks a significant moment in the development of Villera/o Cinema, since it challenges the long-standing idea that marginal filmmakers must turn away from their dominant counterparts in order to legitimize their work. By rejecting many of the values inherent in NAC, Third Cinema and other such movements, and by drawing on Arrieta's experiences as a professionally trained actor and writer, *El nexo* merges commercial and villera/o art, thereby establishing a new brand of radical cinema.

6.7.2 Aliens versus Villera/os: A Welcome Attack

In July 2014 and after a decade in the making, the feature-length version of *El nexo* was screened in front of a large audience in Villa 21.[3] The event took place in the 'Julio Arrieta Theatre' in La Casa de la Cultura. The modern centre, which Arrieta spent years campaigning to establish, was finally erected by the state in 2013 and provides a base for cultural activities in the villa. The film itself further complicates the notion that Arrieta facilitated the reinforcement of stereotypes about poverty. As the making of *El nexo* is documented in *Estrellas*, Arrieta points out that sci-fi films are usually made in the United States and that alien invasions are generally set in wealthy, urban areas. Pondering this fact, he poses the question, '¿nosotros no tenemos el derecho a tener marcianos?' [do we not have the right to aliens?]. Perhaps, he jibes in his characteristic humorous tone, the creatures are afraid of being robbed in the villa.

Arrieta's comment highlights the fact that global and Argentine sci-fi has seldom focused on informal settlements. This observation is notable given that ethical issues are often dealt with in the genre (McGrath 2012: 2-3). Sci-fi is very often 'centred on the encounter with the other' (Luckhurst 2005: 15). This has been the case since the publication of *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818) two centuries ago. Underlying Shelley's novel about a scientist who turns against a grotesque creature that he created from human body parts, is an overwhelming sense of rejection and solitude (Britton 2015: 6-8). The same feelings are felt by many of the inhabitants of Argentina's informal settlements, who are often seen as monsters by those who bear much of the responsibility for the conditions in which they exist. Clearly, stories about villas are well suited to sci-fi, which examines contemporary social conditions and 'target[s] capitalism, (neo-) colonialism and inequality' (Korte and Zipp 2014: 7). Nonetheless, villas remain absent (or 'symbolically annihilated', to return to Gerbner) from the genre.

This invisibility is notable in *Che, OVNI* [*Hey Man, U.F.O.*] (dir. Aníbal Uset, 1968), which marks the birth of Argentine sci-fi. Uset's film distances itself from villas in quite a literal fashion. Aliens descend on a tango singer and his girlfriend and beam them across international borders. This plot seems like an advertisement for European tourism as the characters are teleported to the most iconic streets of Madrid, London and Paris. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that *Che, OVNI* was a purely commercial film lacking in any kind of social commentary that might concern villas or poverty. This is suggested by Uset's privileging of European heritage, which is evident in the use of what would have been considered prestigious locations and in a cast of established performers led by the famous tango artist Jorge Sobral. The full extent of the director's efforts to market his film is revealed by Alejandro Agostinelli. In an interview carried out by Agostinelli, Uset claims to have circulated an elaborate story about a couple who suddenly found

[3] A short version of *El nexo* was released in 2008.

themselves in Mexico after being abducted by aliens in Argentina (Agostinelli 2009: 250-255). The understanding was that, if people believed that *Che, OVNI* was based on real events, they would be more likely to watch it. The contemporary U.S. horror film *The Blair Witch Project* (dirs. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) profited from similar tactics, becoming a cultural phenomenon and establishing a market for a plethora of sequels and new 'found footage' films. An urban legend about the titular witch was created and missing person flyers picturing the cast (who were not established actors) were distributed, giving the impression that the plot about three student filmmakers who disappear in a haunted forest was based on real events (Keller 2000: 71; Telotte 2001: 33). Uset's story also spread rapidly, its finer details evolving while being passed from one person to the next. The rate at which the Argentine myth was disseminated is particularly remarkable, since Myrick and Sánchez's fabrication relied heavily on the popularization of the internet to 'go viral'. Nonetheless, despite the successful promulgation of Uset's urban legend, his film was both a critical and commercial flop (Martín 1978: 136).

Villas remained absent from sci-fi in subsequent decades. This is not surprising in the dated comedy *Los extraterrestres* [*The Aliens*] (dir. Enrique Carreras, 1983), which was never likely to include a sincere critique of poverty since it was made in the dictatorship's final year. *Las locuras del extraterrestre* [*The Crazy Alien*] (dir. Carlos Galettini, 1988) also focused on entertainment, as is evident in its striking resemblance to the U.S. sitcom *Alf* (NBC, 1986-1990). When Argentine sci-fi eventually became socially conscious, it began to denounce the forced disappearances of the 1970s and subsequent state-sponsored repression of the memory of the same events. In *Hombre mirando al sudeste* [*Man Facing Southeast*] (dir. Eliseo Subiela, 1987), Subiela urges his audience to confront national patterns of militarism in what is 'an impassioned protest against the amnesty granted to junta leaders, and especially against the Catholic Church's unacknowledged complicity with the dictatorship' (Hamner 2012: 62-63). The plot centres on Dr Denis (Lorenzo Quinteros) and his intriguing patient Ranté (Hugo Soto), who claims to have come from another world after mysteriously arriving at the psychiatrist's clinic. Ranté is said to have delivered babies and taught music in villas. He expresses a desire to take a young musical prodigy from the informal settlement to his home planet, where the boy's abilities will be fully realized. Despite this acknowledgment of talent and culture within the villa, there is an ironic failure, given the director's intentions to denounce the dictatorship's crimes, to actually picture the zones that were eradicated from both cinematic and actual landscapes during the so-called dirty war. Gustavo Mosquera, who was mentored by Subiela, makes some progress in this respect with *Moebius* (1996), which uses a plot about a vanished subway train to denounce Menem's policy of forgetting the state's previous crimes. Although villas are again not seen in the film, the protagonist Abril (Annabella Levy) is from a one of the run-down 'monoblocks' established by the national housing fund (FONAVI) in the 1960s. The young girl symbolizes the

next generation's ability to interrupt the cycle of militarism and repression of memory (Hamner 2012: 72).

A futuristic government induces collective amnesia in *La sonámbula, recuerdos del futuro* [*The Sleepwalker, Memories of the Future*] (dir. Fernando Spiner, 1998). Notably, the villas do not make up part of the federal capital from which Eva Rey (Sofía Viruboff) must flee in order to recuperate her memories. Spiner's bleak and claustrophobic city, seen only in black and white, is characterised by uninviting banks, nightclubs, hotels and abandoned buildings (Dapozo 2012: 48). These stand in sharp contrast with the colourful, open countryside where the luxurious house and expansive garden of Eva's premonitions represent freedom. The fact that informal settlements are not portrayed in this urban dystopia is not necessarily negative as far as stigmatization is concerned. Nonetheless, their disappearance exemplifies their general absence from sci-fi films which, although often charged with political and social ideologies, tend to refrain from portraying Argentina's most marginalized spaces. Another dystopia in which villas are not present appears in *La antena* (dir. Esteban Sapir, 2007), a stylized production influenced by German expressionist film and the silent era in general. The plot, in which the inhabitants of a nameless city are literally muted by the television broadcasts transmitted by Mr TV (Alejandro Urdapilleta), rails against the consumerist values promoted by the modern corporations that exercise control over the public through mind-numbing media (Alfonso 2007: 173).

Elsewhere in Latin American Cinema, the Chicano artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Gustavo Vázquez venture into sci-fi in their mockumentary *The Great Mojado Invasion: The Second U.S.-Mexican War* (2001). By parodying Hollywood's portrayals of Mexicans as dangerous extraterrestrials who infiltrate the United States, they undermine the stigmatization of the Latino illegal 'alien' (Leen 2009: 231). A later film directly influenced by Gómez-Peña, Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* (2008), presents a dystopian future in which the shantytowns around the Mexican border town of Tijuana feature prominently. Another reversal of roles occurs in the non-Latino, transnational film *District 9* (dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2009) when malnourished space beings who are insultingly nicknamed prawns find themselves stranded over Johannesburg, deposited in a township (a South-African villa) and discriminated against by intolerant humans. The South African-Canadian director uses these refugees as representatives of the victims of apartheid.

Should *El nexo* have been completed earlier, critics might have claimed that it inspired *Attack the Block* (dir. Joe Cornish, 2011). Much like Arrieta, Cornish was motivated by the absence of the ghetto in the sci-fi genre (Collis 2011: 60). In the British film, vicious gorilla-like monsters from outer space clash with a gang of youths in Brixton, London. The children initially appear to be unsympathetic characters when they mug a nurse, but their portrayal becomes

more complex when they team up with their victim to save their council estate. During their transformation from trouble-makers into heroes, the revelation of their problematic backgrounds mitigates their antisocial behaviour, allowing Cornish to colour the grey areas ignored by the black-and-white portrayals he challenges. One boy's joke that the invasion is the state's latest method of wiping out the disadvantaged is not actually that far-fetched a thought in *Attack the Block*. Hence, while the English director situates social injustices in the realm of fantasy in much the same way as Arrieta and Antico, Cornish also transmogrifies stereotypes in the manner of Ramos, Massa and González, by connecting the characters' felonies to society's othering, devaluation and scapegoating of them.

El nexo also pays homage to Héctor Germán Oesterheld's comic book series *El eternauta* [*The Eternaut*] (1957-1959), which criticizes authoritarian oppression by means of a post-apocalyptic allegory of an alien invasion. However, whereas Oesterheld's hero Salvo is a trained carpenter and legitimate homeowner, *El nexo*'s characters are unskilled *cartonera/os* who occupy Barracas's illegal settlement. Thus, Antico and Arrieta are most subversive in their drafting of villa inhabitants into a genre from which they have traditionally been excluded.

Despite some critics' observation that *El nexo* is not primarily focused on realism, the film retains some of the naturalistic aspects typically adopted in Villera/o Cinema (Masaedo 2008: 32; Trerotola 2007: 187). Filming was carried out in the real homes, alleyways and supermarkets of Villa 21. Scenes of the banality of daily life in the villa are included, and actors keep their real names on screen. The characters also form part of the Villa 21 theatre group, as is the case in real life. Importantly, however, the sci-fi feature distorts this reality, marking a departure from the standard format of Villera/o Cinema. In the film, Julio's fictional play about an alien invasion in Villa 21 becomes a reality when extraterrestrials descend on his informal *barrio*. Here, his playwriting, which is incorporated into the film, facilitates the production of the most fictional villa story ever screened. Thus, although the film remains somewhat factual, it also breaks new ground by straying determinedly away from the miserable realism and mimetic fallacies that are typical of radical, marginal cinema. This adjustment is further achieved using non-diegetic music, special effects (slow motion shots, smoke machines, and scenes in outer space are abundant), an omnipresent narrator and a tendency to avoid the improvisation that often characterises films dealing with Argentine poverty such as those made by González, Ramos and the filmmakers of other radical movements. With this simultaneously realist and anti-realist approach to production, Arrieta forms a hybrid aesthetic that challenges the dominant traditions of Villera/o Cinema and reveals a universe of new possibilities to the marginal movement.

El nexo appropriates the traditional alien blockbuster narrative, casting those living in Villa 21 as the heroes of a typical genre film for the first time since *Batman en la Villa 31*. It is clear from the outset that it blurs the boundaries between a typical villa-centred film and a

typical sci-fi blockbuster. After an accomplished opening sequence that features images of orbs floating across a starlit sky to the sounds of otherworldly music, the action moves to the villa. The protagonist, who takes Arrieta's real name, wakes at night and begins to write his alien-inspired play. This scene deftly skewers the cliché of the inspired artist, however, as Julio's dire economic circumstances force him to write on a clunky and noisy typewriter, thus waking his wife who is clearly unimpressed by his artistic aspirations. In a scene a short time later, when she objects to Julio holding a meeting about his work at their house on a Sunday, he loftily explains that art never sleeps, to which she replies 'deja de joder' [stop messing around]. Neither does the film replace the character of the suffering mother with that of a harpy in the figure of Ester. Her intolerance towards her husband's actions is explained when she is refused credit at her local supermarket. Moreover, their bickering is endearing and amusing, allowing *El nexo* to diverge from the norms of films about villas by introducing to them a rare comic element. A scene in which Ester berates Julio for using ten pesos from their household budget to buy a stage prop, and another in which she uses his typewriter to tell him how much they need to find the money for their children's school supplies, were met with rapturous laughter during the screening in La Casa de la Cultura. This marks an innovative approach to exposing financial hardship, which is subtly unveiled without compromising the film's entertainment value. Hence, Arrieta shows that the most pressing issues in villa communities can be addressed within conventional genres that are not normally associated with marginal film movements.

In the same vein, an understated political critique is seamlessly infused into the traditional alien story. When the Nogrok spacecraft hover over Villa 21 to diffuse a deadly toxic smoke, a framed picture of Eva and Juan Perón trembles uncontrollably inside a home in the villa. Here, left-wing Peronism is destabilized by the same evil creatures that symbolically kidnap and temporarily 'disappear' Manuel (Manuel Rojas), and use the promise of work and technological advancement through the establishment of flying car factories as a means of colonizing and enslaving humans. Hence, the attack of the bad aliens signals the negative impact that right-wing and neoliberal governments promoting development via foreign capital have had on Argentina's economically marginalized citizens. This postcolonial discourse is underlined by the extraterrestrial colonizer's Spanish accent, which is heard across the intercom in the factory from which Ester's mind is controlled. It is reinforced again when Julio narrates:

> El mundo entero se había revolucionado con la tecnología súper-avanzada que ellos traían, pero era una pantalla, una miserable pantalla. ¿En qué íbamos a desconfiar si ya teníamos todo? Nadie se imaginaba que ahora vendría lo peor.

> [The whole world had been revolutionized with the advanced technology brought by the aliens, but it was all a terrible ploy. Why would we mistrust them when they had given us everything? Nobody could imagine that the worst was yet to come].

This statement complicates the discourse surrounding the theme of employment. While the villera/os' ability to turn technology against their enemies suggests that Argentina will benefit from opening the labour market up to the marginalized, the exploitative nature of the Nogroks constitutes a simultaneous call for fair working conditions and favours national rather than foreign intervention. By infusing such a detailed, left-wing Peronist (Kirchnerist) social commentary into an entertaining genre film, Arrieta and Antico renew the idea of a revolutionary Argentine cinema.

As mainstream tropes are readapted within the villa, Julio becomes the archetypal 'chosen one', a common figure in the realms of fantasy and sci-fi, but one never played by a villa community member. A group of good aliens called Dialaks appoint him as a link through which they telepathically warn Earth about a forthcoming attack by their enslavers, a separate malevolent alien race called Nogroks. The messages that they communicate to Julio's mind manifest themselves in his playwriting, which is financed by his drama society's nightly *cartonera/o* work. Hence, while centralizing the villera/o as the hero, this element of the story doubles as a statement about the power and importance of art projects such as the Villa 21 theatre group that Julio constantly defends from naysayers in the film. By pitting villera/os against the antagonistic space beings in a manner that recalls *Attack the Block*, Arrieta and Antico reinstate the traditional good human-bad alien dichotomy reversed in *District 9* and *The Great Mojado Invasion* in order to underline the humanity of marginalized Argentines and challenge society's physical alienation and metaphorical alienization of them. This becomes explicit when the Nogroks begin to control Ester's mind, signifying the iniquitous, yet commonplace, perception of villera/os as otherworldly monsters. However, Julio protects his wife and, in turn, the viewer from such brainwashing. He tells Ester, 'te tenés que dar cuenta que sos un ser humano. Sos humana, no sos extraterrestre, ¡carajo!' [you must realize that you are a human being. You are a human being, not an extraterrestrial, damn it!]. The use of common sci-fi tropes exemplified by these instances of mind and body control can be considered a transformation of a standard genre from which the subjects are usually omitted.

This appropriation of mainstream standards is again evident when villera/os are resignified during a somewhat clichéd turn of events in which an originally problematic object becomes a tool used to defeat the enemy. When the Villa 21 residents discover that their water, which comes from the polluted Riachuelo, can be used to vaporize the attackers, marginalized

spaces become the answer to, rather than the cause of, Argentina's problems. This transmogrification of the negative becomes clearer when one considers the orthodox use of the river as a symbol of suffering in films about villas. Whereas the Riachuelo has life-saving qualities in *El nexo*, it represents death in *La 21*, *Barracas*, becoming the suspected location of Debi's body and the site of Diego's watery grave. In *El secuestrador* and *Crónica de un niño solo*, respectively, the rape of a young boy and gruesome death of an infant take place on riverbanks near villas. The most empowering moment for villa inhabitants comes when Julio enters the Palace of the Argentine National Congress, which stands abandoned in an apocalyptic, grey capital that has been almost entirely reduced to rubble. Assuming the presidential seat and microphone, the protagonist's voice booms through the smoke-filled streets, urging citizens to unite as the villas have done in order to fight the aliens and save humanity. Thus, the never-say-die attitude that the marginal man has acquired through his hardship becomes a fountain of hope and equips him to unify and lead the nation. To achieve this national alliance between the social classes, Julio asks his countrymen to place trust in those whom they have always tended to mistrust, 'los más pobres' [the poorest people], thus clarifying *El nexo*'s message. When the Argentine flag is superimposed over this impassioned speech, villera/os move away from society's margins and arrive at a figurative and literal Kilometre Zero marked by the parliament building, where they come to embody Argentine identity in a manner never previously witnessed in cinema. As the battle between the humans and aliens ensues, the theatre group member Ramón (Ramón Piedrabuena), who works in one of the flying car factories established by the aliens, is able to repair a spaceship. The spaceship takes Julio, who is seen frantically reading books about piloting, to the front line of battle above Earth, where he saves humanity. This constitutes a claim that society will benefit if, rather than attempting to eradicate villas, the state develops the areas and offers opportunities for work and education to their residents. Afterwards, the protagonist's narration confirms the villera/os' heroic position and underlines their appropriation of the orthodox sci-fi story:

> Nuestra tribu – la tribu de la Villa 21, Barracas – en este momento, se siente orgullosa de lo logrado: la victoria y la paz de este planeta. No había armas para combatir al mal pero nosotros las conseguimos.
> [Our tribe – the tribe of Villa 21, Barracas – feels proud of what it has achieved: victory and peace on our planet. There were no weapons to fight the evil aliens but we found them].

This substitution of the notion that villas cultivate violence with the idea that they are spaces wherein peace is defended, underscores the employment of an outcome seen in big-budget disaster films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (dir. Roland Emmerich, 2004) and *2012* (dir. Roland Emmerich, 2009). In both films, some of the world's most impoverished and stigmatized regions (Latin America and Africa, respectively) offer refuge to those fleeing developed nations that have been destroyed by global warming-related catastrophes. In Arrieta's appropriation of these plot developments, which call for the deconstruction of social hierarchies based on wealth, the marginalized become the heroes. Their centralization in *El nexo* marks an outstanding and revitalizing contribution to Villera/o Cinema.

In conclusion, Arrieta can be described as a bi-cultural figure. He has alternated between propping up the dominant narrative with his casting and mainstream acting work, and challenging it by mediating the villera/o experience through a cinematic language that is not obsessed with crime and gangs. As he accepts minor stereotyped roles in the mainstream and rejects them in his marginal films, Arrieta becomes an 'adaptive drifter', who alternates between dominant and marginal cultures so that he can achieve the best possible outcome for himself and his community. Sally Bould Van Til and Jon Van Til describe this figure:

> The lower-class drifter is not fully bi-cultural because he cannot risk commitment to either mode – not to the mainstream one because he is not likely to be accepted as a full participant, and not to the poverty one because it lacks much of the reward provided by the larger system. (Van Til and Van Til 1973: 13)

Similarly, Arrieta does not completely reject the mainstream and its stereotypes because that would have a negative impact on his finances and a villera/o economy that can benefit from the wider film industry. At the same time, he does not fully accept the limited and often demeaning roles offered to villera/os which, to echo Van Til and Van Til, he must challenge in order to retain a sense of self-worth (Van Til and Van Til 1973: 13). What *El nexo* demonstrates by delivering a meaningful, villa-specific social commentary through the conventional employment of genre, narrative and production, is the importance of reconsidering the relationship between marginal communities and media, and re-evaluating approaches to self-representation with a view to finding new ways to counter oppression.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that access to systems of communication alone is not enough to counter subalternity. Rather, the systems must be utilized effectively. However, this seems difficult for many to achieve in an environment where certain styles and themes have become closely associated with poverty. In self-representing and 'outside' narratives, alike, villera/os are very often naturalized as ambiguous, or hybrid, criminal-victim characters. In cultural studies, the term hybrid was popularized by Néstor García Canclini, who rejected the notion of homogenous or pure cultures by observing regional, national and transnational contact zones within which they influence each other (García Canclini 1995: 2-3, 32-33; Rosaldo 1995: xiii-xv). Mary Louise Pratt developed the idea of the contact zone, again drawing on the idea of transculturation to describe 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths'. Pratt stated that contact zones are established by 'autoethnographic texts […] in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them' (Pratt 1991: 34). Much like Villera/o Cinema, autoethnographic texts transmogrify, to revisit Stam's expression, the discourses of the oppressor and establish new understandings of the oppressed (Pratt 1991: 35). In the films of Ramos, Massa and González, the hybrid nature of the criminal-victim is revealed in contact zones within which villa inhabitants encounter people from the 'outside' world. The construction of spaces wherein villa inhabitants and 'outsiders' interact can therefore be construed as an attempt to re-signify villera/os' wrongdoing and form what Bhabha calls a Third Space, wherein 'signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew' (Bhabha 1994: 54-55). The films made by Ramos and González, in particular, draw heavily on radical movements such as NAC, Third Cinema and Brazilian New Cinema. The celebration of a lack of resources constitutes the artistic essence of *La 21, Barracas*, *Diagnóstico esperanza*, *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?*, and a host of other short films by González. This is evident in long takes, handheld cameras, blurred shots, natural lighting and the transformation of negative images of immoral behaviour. However, although there may be an element of truth in these films since the pressing issues of violence, gangs and drugs are rooted in a lack of investment and social exclusion in marginalized neighbourhoods, these filmmakers have contributed to the abundance of material that foregrounds criminality in villas. While these projects are by no means devoid of creative quality and are admirable as individual works of art, they collectively fail to represent the cultural diversity of villas. This lends credence to the idea that 'it is a source of discomfort and disturbance […] when [villa inhabitants] move out of the two places expected of them, the place of the criminal or the victim' (Grinberg 2010: 676). With their dualistic representation of the criminal-victim, these marginal

directors reproduce the ambivalent portrayals that are typical of the mainstream, wherein film remains a manifestation of 'the inner conflicts that are aroused during social interactions with [marginalized] individuals' (Katz 1982: 11). This calls to mind a study carried out by De la Torre in which villa inhabitants are interviewed about their social interactions. One woman explains, 'primero te discriminan y luego te autodiscriminás […] te lo marcan tanto que te lo creés' [first they discriminate against you and then you discriminate against yourself (…) they label you to the point that you believe it] (De la Torre 2008: 174). The present argument, then, is that marginal cinema could achieve a greater degree of autonomy by diverging from themes of crime and gang-related violence, even though they are intended to challenge discriminatory perceptions of poverty. By sticking to exhausted topics, villera/os have inhibited the development of their film culture and identities, and limited the degree to which their marginal voices can be heard.

Arrieta and Antico's production represents something of an exception to this rule. Their very acceptance of a traditional narrative structure and aesthetics alters the default setting of Villera/o Cinema. *El nexo* has taken Villera/o Cinema off the beaten track and established a new path for marginal filmmakers. Indeed, there is a notable degree of rebelliousness in the very concept of a villera/o sci-fi film, especially given the large budgets usually allocated to mainstream sci-fi features. Antico, Arrieta and their crew found ways to overcome such issues, building their own props and raising funds in Villa 21 to cover editing costs (Smyth, 2015). As it challenges the parallels made between villas and barbarism, and undermines the alienization of villera/os, *El nexo* also marks the realization that comprehensive representation plays an important role in the pursuit of social inclusion. It liberates marginal filmmakers, unveiling worlds of possibilities by recognising that veristic and non-veristic models do not belong to any particular type of artist (Stam 2000: 259). The directors of *Estrellas* León and Martínez confirm this. Citing Arrieta, they state '"necesitamos tener marcianos" implica tener ficciones, tener otras historias para contar en la villa' ["we need Martians" means that there is a requirement for different types of fictional narratives about villas] (in Domínguez 2007: 23). Indeed, as the present analyses of the works of Ramos, González and Massa have shown, villas do need Martians. It is, therefore, significant that Arrieta and Antico have made an entertaining and fun film in a villa. Their production proudly sets itself apart in national and transnational arenas saturated by bleak and tragic portrayals of informal settlements. Their decision not to foreground aesthetics of imperfections, and their return to a more orthodox approach, is what makes their work revolutionary. Arrieta and Antico do show, as Glauber Rocha intended to in Brazilian New Cinema, that waste can be made into art. After all, Julio's drama society is funded by waste collecting and his playwriting allows him to save humanity. However, the writer and director do not deliver this idea through Rocha's 'aesthetics of garbage'. Although *El nexo*'s

production team do celebrate a scarcity of resources, as is seen in *Estrellas* when they proudly 'launch' their spaceship (an effective but humble prop made by the crew) from the train tracks in the villa, this celebration does not result in the reconstruction of the aesthetics of NAC, Third Cinema, or *rasquache* cinema. Rather, *El nexo* reinvigorates Villera/o Cinema and marginal cinema in general by opting for a highly imaginative, rather than 'realistic', form of representation. Thus, it shows that portrayals of poverty need not strive to appear poor or 'hungry', to use to Rocha's expression. This is an idea that is rarely considered by villera/o filmmakers. *El nexo* rejects the understanding that, because villera/os' are marginalized, they should be represented in a manner that has become typical of marginal cinema. Instead, it sees normative production techniques as a route towards inclusion in mainstream culture. This becomes clear when one considers that, as discussed earlier in this thesis, villas are commonly portrayed as spaces wherein a Bolivarian sense of Latin American solidarity is promoted through a focus on Bolivian, Paraguayan and Peruvian characters. While Arrieta and Antico do not reject these nationalities or the postcolonial subtext of many villa-centred narratives, they allow villa inhabitants to bear the blue and white flag and proudly proclaim their *argentinidad* [Argentine identity]. By encouraging those living in villas to reclaim their Argentine identity, they locate a central space for villera/os in national discourse and focus on them as important members of Argentine society who may or may not also have indigenous heritages. This feeling that villera/os are significant figures in the context of *argentinidad* is facilitated by the adoption of mainstream production values. *El nexo* proclaims that villera/os are entitled to take ownership of mainstream genres, thereby taking up from where *Batman en la Villa 31* left off. In other words, *El nexo* is revolutionary because it positions villera/os centre stage in a production that is, in many respects, intentionally conventional. Future works can contribute to the development of Villera/o Cinema by exploring genres other than the hard-hitting, gang-centred dramas that have become the norm for films dealing with Argentine poverty. Success in this manner would lead to the further fulfilment of the subaltern's need to challenge subordinating representations of them.

Thesis Conclusion

The Trouble with Keeping Face: A Call for Diversity and Sites of Commonality in Films about Villas

After providing a detailed description of the history of Argentina's villas, this thesis described filmic representations of the informal neighbourhoods. By tracing the representation of villas from the earliest days of cinema to contemporary times in which film is becoming an increasingly transnational medium, I have identified some of the defining elements of films about villas and poverty. Recurring aspects of these films include; middle-class outsiders who save the marginal other; villas as a symbol of the failures of certain economic systems; medicine, education, industry and employment as symbols of the need for development plans rather than eradication policies; and religion as a symbol of the oppression of those living in poverty. Women and characters from the LGBTQ community are frequently peripheralized and underrepresented in films about villas, while the central focus on marginal males reflects and reinforces society's fear of the villero. Films that represent villa inhabitants, particularly female or transgender villera/os, as protagonists or heroic have proven to be the exception rather than the rule, although *Mía*, in particular, points to how such stories can be told in a nuanced, sensitive manner that complicates clichéd portrayals of the villa. What stands out most of all, however, is the establishment of strong links between villas and violence, drugs, prostitution and criminal gangs. These stereotypes have been appropriated and politicised time and again by a diverse range of filmmakers who are often polarized in their ideologies. Peronists have capitalized on the image of the chaotic villa, as have anti-Peronists, critics of Argentina's neoliberal project, and those whose political stance is ambiguous. This suggests that, as one villa inhabitant contends, 'las villas miserias existen porque son necesarias para el poder político' [villas exist because they are used to achieve political power] (Tasín 2008: 77). Negative stereotypes are also useful commercial tools. Transnational films have centred on criminality in villas to reach a global audience, as is exemplified by *Elefante blanco*, one of the most widely exhibited and profitable productions to have emerged from Argentina. Documentary is more inclined than narrative cinema not to centre on images of criminality. *Estrellas* and *Guido Models* are good examples of how non-fictional films have explored different forms of cultural production, and the diverse (and gendered) nature of experiences of marginalization in villas. The broadening of understandings of villa communities encouraged by these documentaries is an important process that fosters integration and should be more common in villa-centred films, as will be discussed presently.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this thesis is its analysis of the films made by those residing in villas. Notably, many of these films continue to thematize violent criminality in the

villa. The need to acknowledge, critique and learn from these productions is closely linked to the need to build bridges between formal and informal neighbourhoods. Films made by villa inhabitants have been largely overlooked by scholars to date. However, they have reached enormous numbers of viewers online, proving that, as technological advancements alter the way media are produced and consumed, marginalized groups find new opportunities to have their voices heard. Cesar González's YouTube channel currently boasts over thirty-three thousand subscribers. His feature and short films, documentaries and interviews have reached millions through this medium. *¿Qué puede un cuerpo?*, for example, has been viewed almost 1.7 million times on YouTube. Video-sharing websites are therefore 'an ideal setting for digital-self presentation and performances [that allow] amateur individuals to […] establish social relations' and form identities (Chen 2014: 233). In these interactive digital arenas, communities are formed, conflicts are played out and power relations are renegotiated (Hendrick and Lindgren 2011: 165; Valentini 2016: 97). With online platforms transforming film industries and societies, and allowing independent artists to build large and diverse international audiences, their significance cannot be downplayed. This is a particularly important point when dealing with filmmakers that, because of their socioeconomic position, might otherwise find it difficult to self-represent through film.

The creation of spaces for marginal voices – a process inherent in the technological advancements discussed here – is fundamental in the fight against social fragmentation, as it allows groups in need of agency to participate in important discussions and forge connections with others. By establishing dialogues with the voices emerging from these spaces, scholars and critics amplify them. The benefits of improved social cohesion are many, as is implied by the abundance of research that finds that exclusion presents serious physical and mental health risks for those concerned (Fleisch Marcus et al. 2016: 261-262; Umberson and Karas Montez 2010: 55-60). Furthermore, fragmentation does not only impact negatively on marginalized groups, since it can lead to conflicts between them and other members of society (Stewart et al. 2006: 6-9). Social alienation is also generally associated with conditions that foster crime: illiteracy, unemployment and deprivation, for example (Foster 2000: 317-319; Behrman et al. 2003: 8, 13; Calvo 2003: v; Parker et al. 2003: 145-146). Broader inclusion, therefore, has positive implications for the whole of society.

The creation of spaces for villera/o voices, which is evident in the development of Villera/o Cinema, must also be accompanied by the eradication of damaging stereotypes, however. Both of these processes have been recognised as imperative to fostering a more integrated society (Cruz-Saco Oyague 2009: 20). This point highlights the problems that have been revealed in this study of Villera/o Cinema, wherein many directors engage obsessively with the negative modes of representation standardized by mainstream media. By comparing films

produced by villa inhabitants to those produced by other filmmakers, it appears that, at best, the former often represent themselves within the context of crime in order to reveal the root causes of this manifestation of poverty. At worst, the producers of marginal cinema seek to capitalize on the commercial success of so-called poverty porn.

I do not suggest that crime does not create serious problems in villas. However, it is essential to acknowledge the (ironically, obvious) fact that the vast majority of Argentina's 2.5 million villa inhabitants are not criminals. This clear, yet understated, point is informed by the 15-month period between 2014 and 2015 that I spent volunteering in study workshops held in the Villa 31 learning centre Detrás de Todo. During this time, I got to know local primary school children and their families, and witnessed the plurality that exists within villas. The individuals that I came to know do not deny and worry about the threat posed by gangs and drugs in their areas. At the same time, however, they are quick to remind others that in their neighbourhoods, 'hay de todo' [everything is present]. This phrase caught my attention whenever I heard it uttered, as it is one that also crops up repeatedly in studies about villa communities (Tasín 2008: 65, 131).

It is with good reason that villa community members want to have the complexity of their neighbourhoods recognised. As Jorge Tasín observes, 'desde afuera la villa es comúnmente mirada a través de esquemas interpretativos prejuiciosos, simplificadores y clasificatorios. Los villeros son todos iguales' [from the outside, the villa is commonly seen through a prejudiced, simplifying and judgemental lens. All villera/os are seen as being the same] (Tasín 2008: 104). Indeed, by failing to capture the diversity of villas, media producers risk misinforming and oversimplifying debates that can lead to support for social policies that are harmful to those experiencing poverty. Hence, as Diana George argues in her influential essay 'Changing the Face of Poverty', only showing poverty at its most grotesque can counterproductively limit the audience's understanding of its many faces, prohibit identification with victims and negatively affect the manner in which the issues in question are addressed (George 2001: 225-228). Media producers, therefore, must work towards capturing the diversity of experiences within villas in order to appreciate the challenges that Argentina faces in developing and integrating them. In particular, they must focus on shared experiences between villera/os and 'outsiders', rather than relentlessly seeking empathy by rehashing negative images (either subversively or not subversively). This is one of the fundamental points in *City in Common*, in which Scorer states:

> An important step toward creating democratic, inclusive cities is to rethink the ways that the common is imagined and put into practice: the negative traits of the common must be rejected in favour of its more affirmative attributes, ones that can foment and support the real and imagined meeting places that make a city a shared space. (Scorer 2016: 14-15)

Nonetheless, in films produced by villa inhabitants, it would be accurate to state, 'no hay de todo' [everything is not present]. For example, villera/o filmmakers have not made any comedy, horror, or romance films to date. They have only produced one sci-fi feature. These and other genres offer a route towards a plurality of representation. They are potential sites of commonality, to use Scorer's concept, wherein the mutual experiences of those living in villas and those not living in villas are emphasized.

Furthermore, Villera/o Cinema does not, in general, deviate from norms in its representation of gender. As in the mainstream, this might be linked to the gender imbalance behind and in front of the camera. It is particularly important to challenge this problem, given the gravity of Argentina's ongoing culture of gender-motivated violence. Increased efforts to recognise the social hierarchies that exist within villas and educate those who are doubly-marginalized, such as women and trans individuals, in media production may prove effective in broadening the horizons of marginal film.

With Villera/o Cinema benefitting greatly from the reduced production costs and global platforms offered by digital technology, it will continue to grow in the future. Hence, this thesis calls for a continued focus on the progression of Villera/o Cinema. One interesting development is that Julio Arrieta's son Cristián Arrieta has recently written and directed *Alas de chapa* [*Wings of Sheet Metal*] (2017). This short film was inspired by a real incident that took place in January 2016 when police opened fire on a *murga* marching band in Villa 1-11-14, killing one and injuring many. Recalling this reality and the fictionalization of the villa in *El nexo*, the *murga* group in Cristián Arrieta's film are electronically tagged, starved and prohibited from rehearsing by a dystopian police force. Despite this renewed process of *desaliento* [demotivation], which evokes images of the violent eradication plans of the past, villa inhabitants remain peaceful and resilient. The protest song that they secretly practice ahead of a public performance at the end of the film attests to this fact with the declaration, 'aunque disparen tus soldados, este canto va a crecer' [even though your soldiers may fire, our song will grow]. The sci-fi genre is not embraced as clearly as it is in *El nexo* but the sense of a not-so-distant future clearly marks the influence of Julio Arrieta, a shrine to whom is seen in the protagonist's home in the film. *Alas de chapa* thus reinforces my understanding that the Arrieta family represent a strand of villera/o

culture that opposes the unrelenting association between villas, delinquency and violent gangs. Julio Arrieta's influence is made clear by his statement:

> Nosotros, los que integramos este grupo de teatro y cultura de la Villa 21 Barracas, creemos que es hora de que entreguemos a la sociedad un guiño, una señal de que queremos integrar esta sociedad como iguales y no desde la marginalidad a la que a veces nos empujan (Arrieta 2008: n.p.).
>
> [We, the members of the theatre and cultural group of Villa 21, Barracas, believe that it is time for us to give society the nod, to deliver the message to that society that we want to integrate as equals and not from the marginalized position that we are sometimes pushed into].

The conventional genres and production values through which these values have been articulated by Julio Arrieta and those who continue his legacy, echoes scholars such as Scorer and George, who imply the need for an increased focus on shared experiences rather than divisive ones.

Another film that has recently been screened in Argentina is *Exomologesis* (dir. César González, 2017) (*TV Pública Noticias*, 2016). *Exomologesis* is different to González's previous films. It has no obvious plot and is screened in black and white. Moreover, rather than being set in a villa, it takes place within the confines of a small, unremarkable apartment. Inside this claustrophobic social microcosm, four males (whose reasons for being there are not stated) are punished, humiliated, given absurd orders, and set against each other by authoritative figures including a landlord, priest and psychologist. These leaders torture and provoke their prisoners while defying them not to react. They force them to obey and enforce the senseless laws of the apartment, compete against, and even rape each other. They rile and provoke them with speeches about the need to triumph in the world and assault them for failing to conform to the bizarre rules on which the apartment's hierarchy is founded. This critique of the institutionalization of power is clearly Foucauldian. This is confirmed when the film is dedicated to Foucault in the end credits. While it has a clear links to González's experiences in prison and the villa, it is also rather universal in its commentary on religion, capitalism, medicine and other social spheres where dominant values and discourses are normalized and made indisputable to channel power towards the powerful. This, as well as the experimental nature of the film, represents a radical departure from the type of work that González has become known for. *Exomologesis* thus indicates that Villera/o Cinema is progressing beyond the limits of the neorealist crime drama. The casting of Sofía Gala Castiglione, who won the Silver Condor Award for her role as Mabel in *El resultado del amor*, as one of the oppressors is another interesting

development that represents a power-shifting reversal of the long-standing roles wherein a villera/o actor is cast by an 'outsider' director. Although Castiglione's presence does not counterbalance González's usual strong focus on male characters, his upcoming feature *Atenas* [*Athens*] may represent an important progression in that it places a female character at the centre of its plot (González, 2015). Further research should determine if this is the case.

Research is also needed to monitor the effects of the ongoing evolution of the Argentine film industry on representations of poverty. Since the much-publicised firing of the head of the INCAA Alejandro Cacetta, President Mauricio Macri has been accused of planning to dismantle the New Cinema Law and of returning to a market-driven approach that had a catastrophic impact on production in the early 1990s. One of the critics of the decision to replace Cacetta is the renowned U.S.-based actor Viggo Mortensen, who lived in Argentina during his childhood and is vocal about his affection for the country. Mortensen released a video in which he singled out the president and the Minister for Culture Pablo Avelluto in his retaliation: 'Macri, Avelluto y todos los fanfarrones neoliberales, déjense de joder. "No" a la destrucción del cine' [Macri, Avelluto and all the neoliberal braggarts, lay off. Don't destroy cinema] (*La Nación* 2017b: n.p.).

As Menemism proved, cuts to state funding can compromise the social conscience that has traditionally marked Argentine cinema. By implication, the renewed neoliberalization of the film industry may have negative consequences for portrayals of villas and poverty. This would undoubtedly undermine Macri's plan to develop and integrate Villa 31 and other socially disadvantaged *barrios*. The possibility of a reduction in funding also means that the future of representations of poverty might lie in the hands of foreign financiers and the marginalized Argentine filmmakers who have become skilled in making films with few resources. Under these circumstances, given that the transnational co-production is sometimes limited in the amount of detail it can provide about villas, it would become even more important for villera/o filmmakers to reflect the entirety of the villera/o experience.

Finally, although this thesis has focused on film, it also opens the door for investigations into other forms of villera/o culture. The considerable volume of literature, music, theatre, poetry and other forms of art being produced in villas has created a wide research gap. By examining these forms of expression, academics can increase public knowledge about villa communities, give a platform to marginalized voices and ensure that important debates surrounding development and eradication are well-informed. Such studies might begin by asking whether in the cultural production emerging from villas, one can really assert, 'hay de todo' [everything is present]. To return to the work of the inspirational figure of Julio Arrieta, the multifaceted references to stars in the most notable villera/o films in which he appears, recall Oscar Wilde's famous observation that 'we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars' (Wilde 2013: 46). This aphorism could well be a metaphor for the ability of Villera/o Cinema

to stake a claim for space and achieve a cinematic presence that not only pushes the boundaries of representations of villas, but of Argentine identity.

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Garage Olimpo. (1999) [film]. Directed by Marco Bechis. Argentina: Aqua Films.

Get Rich or Die Tryin'. (2005) [film]. Directed by Jim Sheridan. United States of America: Paramount Pictures.

Ghostbusters. (2016) [film]. Directed by Paul Feig. United States of America: Columbia.

Girl Model. (2011) [film]. Directed by David Redmon and Ashley Sabin. United Kingdom: Dogwoof.

Guachines. (2014) [film]. Directed by César González. Argentina: ¿Todo Piola?.

Guido Models. (2015) [film]. Directed by Julieta Sans. Argentina: Stigliani Mouriño Cine.

Hombre mirando al sudeste. (1987) [film]. Directed by Eliseo Subiela. Argentina: Film Dallas.

Hustle and Flow. (2005) [film]. Directed by Craig Brewer. United States of America: Paramount Classics.

In Bruges. (2008) [film]. Directed by Martin McDonagh. United Kingdom: Universal Studios.

Into the Unknown. (2014) [film]. Directed by Anthony Mandler. United Kingdom: BBC.

Kiss of the Spider Woman. (1985) [film]. Directed by Héctor Babenco. Embrafilme.

La 21: Barracas (2009) [film]. Directed by Víctor Ramos. Argentina: Fraternidad del Sur.

La amiga. (1988) [film]. Directed by Jeanine Meerapfel. Argentina: Jupiter.

La antena. (2007) [film]. Directed by Esteban Sapir. Argentina: Pachamama Cine.

La ciudad oculta. (1989) [film]. Directed by Osvaldo Andéchaga. Argentina: Rio Negro.

La historia oficial. (1985) [film]. Directed by Luis Puenzo. Argentina: Almi Pictures.

La hora de los hornos. (1968) [film]. Directed by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas. Argentina: Tricontinental.

La muchacha del arrabal. (1922) [film]. Directed by José A. Ferreyra. Argentina: Independent.

La nana. (2009) [film]. Directed by Sebastián Silva. Chile: Elephant Eye Films.

La noche de los lápices. (1986) [film]. Directed by Héctor Olivera. Argentina: Aries Cinematográfica Argentina.

La Raulito. (1975) [film]. Directed by Lautaro Murúa. Argentina: Cineteca S.A.

La sonámbula, recuerdos del futuro. (1998) [film]. Directed by Fernando Spiner. Argentina: Transeuropa.

La vuelta al bulín. (1926) [film]. Directed by José A. Ferreyra. Argentina: Independent.

La zona. (2007) [film]. Directed by Rodrigo Plá. Mexico: Sacher Film.

Las locuras del extraterrestre. (1988) [film]. Directed by Carlos Galettini. Argentina: Argentina Sono Film.

Las viudas de los jueves. (2009) [film]. Directed by Marcelo Piñeyro. Argentina: A.V.H.

Latin America in Co-Production. (2010) [film]. Directed by Libia Villazana. United Kingdom: Independent.

L'enfant. (2005) [film]. Directed by Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne. Belgium: Sony Pictures Classics.

Leonera. (2008) [film]. Directed by Pablo Trapero. Argentina: Buena Vista International.

Looking for Rio. (2014) [film]. Directed by Emmanuel Besnard and Gilles Perez. France: Upside Distribution.

Los aguas bajan turbias. (1952) [film]. Directed by Hugo del Carril. Argentina: Cinematográfica Cinco.

Los extraterrestres. (1983) [film]. Directed by Enrique Carreras. Argentina: Aries Cinematográfica Argentina.

Los hombres solo piensan en eso. (1976) [film]. Directed by Enrique Cahen Salaberry. Argentina: Aries Cinematográfica Argentina.

Los inundados. (1961) [film]. Directed by Fernando Birri. Argentina: Productora América Nuestra.

Los olvidados. (1950) [film]. Directed by Luis Buñuel. Mexico: Koch-Lorber Films.

Los rubios. (2003) [film]. Directed by Albertina Carri. Argentina: Primer Plano.

Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God. (2012) [film]. Directed by Alex Gibney. United States of America: HBO.

Mean Machine. (2001) [film]. Directed by Barry Skolnick. United Kingdom: Paramount Pictures.

Memoria del saqueo. (2004) [film]. Directed by Fernando Solanas. Argentina: SBP.

Mía. (2011) [film]. Directed by Javier Van de Couter. Argentina: Primer Plano.

Miserias. (2009) [film]. Directed by César Albarracín. Argentina: Independent.

Moebius. (1996) [film]. Directed by Gustavo Mosquera. Argentina: Fama Films.

Nosferatu. (1922) [film]. Directed by Friedrich Wilhelm. Germany: Film Arts Guild.

Nueva reinas. (2000) [film]. Directed by Fabián Bielinsky. Argentina: Sony Picture Classics.

Ocean's Eight. (2018) [film]. Directed by Gary Ross. United States of America: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Pabellón 86. (2006) [film]. Directed by Matías Collini. Argentina: U.B.A.

Paco. (2009) [film]. Directed by Diego Rafecas. Argentina: Transeuropa.

Paco: The Poor Man's Drug in Buenos Aires. (2014) [film]. Directed by Raymundo Pérez Arellano. Canada: Vice News.

Perdón, viejita. (1927) [film]. Directed by José A. Ferreyra. Argentina: Independent.

Philomena. (2013) [film]. Directed by Stephen Frears. United Kingdom: 20th Century Fox.

Picture Me. (2010) [film]. Directed by Sara Ziff. United States of America: Visit Films.

Pizza, birra, faso. (1998) [film]. Directed by Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro Argentina: Transeuropa.

Puente Alsina. (1935) [film]. Directed by Jose A. Ferreyra. Argentina: P.A.C.

Puerto Nuevo. (1936) [film]. Directed by Luis César Amadori and Mario Soffici. Argentina: Argentina Sono Film.

Que horas ela volta?. (2015) [film]. Directed by Anna Muylaert. Brazil: Pandora.

¡Qué linda es mi familia!. (1980) [film]. Directed by Palito Ortega. Argentina: Argentina Sono Film.

¿Qué puede un cuerpo?. (2014) [film]. Directed by César González. Argentina: ¿Todo Piola?

Real Women Have Curves. (2002) [film]. Directed by Patricia Cardoso. United States of America: Newmarket.

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story. (2016) [film]. Directed by Gareth Edwards. United States of America: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

Secret in their Eyes. (2015) [film]. Directed by Billy Ray. United States of America: STX Entertainment.

Sleep Dealer. (2008) [film]. Directed by Alex Rivera. United States of America: Maya Entertainment.

Sleepers. (1996) [film]. Directed by Barry Levinson. United States of America: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Slumdog Millionaire. (2008) [film]. Directed by Danny Boyle. United Kingdom: Fox Searchlight.

Spotlight. (2015) [film]. Directed by Tom McCarthy. United States of America: Open Road Films.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens. (2015) [film]. Directed by Jeffrey Jacob Abrams. United States of America: Walt Disney Studios.

Star Wars: The Last Jedi. (2017) [film]. Directed by Rian Johnson. United States of America: Walt Disney Studios.

Straight Outta Compton. (2015) [film]. Directed by F. Gary Gray. United States of America: Universal Pictures.

Suburbio. (1951) [film]. Directed by León Klimovsky. Argentina: Emelco.

Superagentes…y la aventura del oro. (1980) [film]. Directed by Carlos Galettini. Argentina: Distrifilm S.A.

The Blair Witch Project. (1999) [film]. Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez. United States of America: Artisan Entertainment.

The City of Your Final Destination. (2009) [film]. Directed by James Ivory. United States of America: Screen Media Films.

The Day After Tomorrow. (2004) [film]. Directed by Roland Emmerich. United States of America: 20th Century Fox.

The Great Gatsby. (2013) [film]. Directed by Baz Luhrmann. United States of America: Warner Bros. Pictures.

The Great Mojado Invasion. (2001) [film]. Directed by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Gustavo Vázquez. United States of America: Producciones Hermanos Nalgada.

The Hunger Games. (2012) [film]. Directed by Gary Ross. United States of America: Lionsgate.

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire. (2013) [film]. Directed by Francis Lawrence. United States of America: Lionsgate.

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1. (2014) [film]. Directed by Francis Lawrence. United States of America: Lionsgate.

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2. (2015) [film]. Directed by Francis Lawrence. United States of America: Lionsgate.

The Joneses. (2009) [film]. Directed by Derrick Borte. United States of America: Roadside Attractions.

The Longest Yard. (1974) [film]. Directed by Robert Aldrich. United States of America: Paramount Pictures.

The Magdalene Sisters. (2002) [film]. Directed by Peter Mullan. United Kingdom: Miramax.

The Mission. (1986) [film]. Directed by Roland Joffé. United States of America: Warner Bros. Pictures.

The Piano. (1993) [film]. Directed by Jane Campion. New Zealand: Miramax.

The Sting. (1973) [film]. Directed by George Roy Hill. United States of America: Universal Pictures.

The Take. (2004) [film]. Directed by Avi Lewis. Canada: Fox Searchlight.

The True Cost. (2015) [film]. Directed by Andrew Morgan. United States of America: Life is My Movie Entertainment.

Tire dié. (1960) [film]. Directed by Fernando Birri. Argentina: Instituto de Cinematografía de la UNL.

Todo es ausencia. (1984) [film]. Directed by Rodolfo Kuhn. Argentina: Luis Megino Cinematográficas S.A.

Triumph des Willens. (1935) [film]. Directed by Leni Riefenstahl. Germany: Universum Film AG.

Tropa de Elite. Elite Squad. (2007) [film]. Directed by José Padilha. Brazil: Universal Pictures.

Tropa de Elite: O Inimigo é Outro. (2010) [film]. Directed by José Padilha. Brazil: Zazen.

Truco. (2014) [film]. Directed by César González. Argentina: ¿Todo Piola?

Un cuento chino. (2011) [film]. Directed by Sebastián Borensztein. Argentina: Buena Vista International.

Un oso rojo. (2002) [film]. Directed by Adrián Caetano. Argentina: Transeuropa.

Villa. (2008) [film]. Directed by Ezio Massa. Argentina: Malevo.

Villera soy. (2007) [film]. Directed by Víctor Ramos. Argentina: Fraternidad del Sur.

XXY. (2007) [film]. Directed by Lucía Puenzo. Argentina: Distribution Company S.A.

Yo tengo fe. (1974) [film]. Directed by Enrique Carreras. Argentina: Argentina Sono Film.