

CIVILIZATION ENDS WHERE GRILLED STEAK BEGINS: CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SONORA-ARIZONA BORDER IN FILM

*Luis Coronado Guel**

To my three muses: Seidy, Clío, and Alondra.



Saguaro National Monument in southern Arizona. 1935. Arizona, Southwestern, and Borderlands Photograph Collection. Special Collection, University of Arizona Libraries. (Permission being processed).

Introduction: Cultural Mythologies of Arizona and Sonora in Film

U.S.-Mexico border areas have often been portrayed historically by the mainstream media as peripheral and dangerous, where human interaction is described negatively as violent and conflictive. The border between Arizona and Sonora is no exception, specifically Yuma, Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise Counties, which border with Mexico's municipalities of San Luis Río Colorado, Plutarco Elías Calles, Caborca, Altar, Saric, Nogales, Santa

* Director of SBS Mexico Initiatives, adjunct professor in the University of Arizona Department of History, luisguel@email.arizona.edu

Cruz, Naco, and Agua Prieta. The diversity of these desert lands and their representation in film is almost always the same, and for a very long time, they have been described consistently. For example, José Vasconcelos, the Mexican intellectual considered the designer and promotor of the revolutionary cultural project that formed twentieth-century Mexico, lived part of his childhood in Sasabe, Arizona. In his memoirs, *Ulises Criollo* (Criollo Ulysses), Vasconcelos described the area as very unsafe, primitive, and extremely far from Mexico's cultural center, where, in his view, Spanish "civilization" established the Catholic religion and put down the roots of the "authentic" Mexican identity (Vasconcelos, 2014).

This negative rhetoric about the Sonora-Arizona border region has persisted from colonial times, when the expanding Spanish empire first came to these far-flung, inhospitable lands as warrior-explorers and Catholic missionaries who introduced not only the language and the religion, but the technologies existing at the time, as well as products of the European diet that are today consumed in this geographical area, such as citrus fruits and grapes. One of these missionaries, Eusebio Kino, probably the most legendary of them, set up a distinctive system of missions that line the area that today divides the United States and Mexico (Polzer, 1998). The missionary settlement system actually adapted to the isolated, precarious conditions in the region that made the expansion of Spanish control difficult. In short, these characteristics of the dangerous, isolated, primitive constantly-disputed periphery have distinguished the cultural representations of this border area. This has created mistaken, over-simplified, adverse perceptions about them both nationally and internationally in both countries, perceptions which persist even today. Naturally, this external characterization has been projected by cinema and the media, and has an influence on the imposition of adverse measures that have affected border communities at certain times in history, measures that do not take into account local reality and the fact that the inhabitants have lived harmoniously together for centuries.

On January 25, 2017, for example, Donald Trump's new administration announced the construction of the border wall between Mexico and the United States. Only a few days later, Edward D. Manuel, the president of the Tohono O'odham indigenous nation—erroneously dubbed the Papagos in Mexico—declared that his community would not tolerate the construction of a wall that would divide their ancestral territories, since they consider

the international border to be an unnatural line that divides their indigenous lands (Innes, 2017). The cultural representations of the Sonora-Arizona border feed simplistic conceptions of the region and exclude voices like those of the binational indigenous communities. They reflect ideas of the past that have been taken up by movie production and which, despite having been constructed at different historical moments, project a constant: a dynamic that has been described as negative, marginal, and in permanent conflict. This article explores some examples of the way in which this huge culturally, socially, naturally, geographically, and economically symbiotic desert region has been represented in film. In many ways, this representation corresponds to a national imaginary imposed from outside, from a centralist, negative, distant perspective, very different from local harmonious dynamics.

It should be pointed out that the image we have today of Mexico and the United States is the product of a complex historical construction, in which the stamp of the twentieth century created, changed, and solidified many of the myths, stereotypes, idealizations, and historical traumas that subsist in literature and cinema even today. The method Carlos Ginzburg proposed (1986) for analyzing the morphology of representations and reinterpretations of a particular discourse in a specific context makes it possible to approach these cultural constructs and better understand society.

Beyond superficial conjectures, this work analyzes scenes of film productions that portray or represent the dynamics, landscapes, or characters of the Sonora-Arizona border, taking into consideration their singularities in what has been called "border cinema." These cultural representations constitute literary and cinematographic tropes with profound narrative roots and dynamics that reflect fears, aspirations, world views, imaginaries, phobias, and ideologies that often do not accurately reflect the reality of life on the border, but which film was the main promotor of until they became conventions like those reflected in American Westerns. In principle, Ginzburg's method is very useful for understanding, deciphering, deconstructing, and tracing a cultural representation found in the films that portray the Sonora-Arizona border.

In his work *Historia nocturna* (Nocturnal History) (1992), Ginzburg describes all the elements he finds in descriptions of witches' covens in different eras. He sees them as a committed cultural formation, that is, the hybrid result of a conflict between folk culture and learned culture. Using files from the

Inquisition, Ginzburg argues that both prosecutors and prosecuted find themselves at the center of the investigation. He systematically analyzes the narrative parts of a stereotype created throughout time and due to the exchange, reception, and resignification of those parts of the stereotype by specific individuals at certain moments in history. First of all, his aspiration is to reconstruct the ideological mechanisms that facilitated the persecution of witches in Europe and also the beliefs of the women and men accused of witchcraft. Based on that aim, he opposes all the theses that have pointed to the idea that the image of the witches' coven was developed by prosecutors or inquisitors. He therefore draws a distinction between reality and construction,¹ between a description of a myth and a rite, since for him, the former is a coherent system of beliefs and the latter, an organized group of individuals that practiced these acts (Ginzburg, 1992).

Ginzburg is ideal for examining cinema, since he unravels narrative elements similar in form to what he finds in the documents. He uses the Inquisition trials, treatises on demonology, sermons, iconographic documents, and folk materials as his sources. He identifies their anomalies and then confronts them with other sources that can indicate the origin of these narrative elements. In that, it is very similar to what he does in *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980), with his main character Menocchio, a miller. First, he identifies in Menocchio's statements to the inquisitors elements of his world view and then compares them with the possible cultural, religious, or literary influences the miller had at hand. In this way, Ginzburg establishes the differences that he identifies as anomalies or narrative variants, and thus is able to perform the personal resignification and reinterpretation of the historic subject, and prove the process whereby an image or a myth is created.

Similarly, but much more broadly, he works and interprets the sources in his book *Nocturnal History*. He uses the comparative method, applying it on the different roots of the image of the coven that identifies it in both folk culture and the treatises of "high" culture. This is why its periodization and space

¹ "The judges almost always saw the coven as the log of real physical events. For a very long time, the only dissenting voices were those that, basing themselves on the Canon Episcopi, saw in witches and warlocks the victims of demonic illusions. In the sixteenth century, men of science like Cardano or Dalla Porta formulated a different opinion: the transformation into animal form, flying, apparitions of the Devil were the effect of malnutrition or of the use of hallucinatory substances contained in vegetable potions or salves. . . . Against all biological determinism, we should insist that the key to this codified repetition cannot be anything but cultural" (Ginzburg, 1992: 222).

for study are subject to the cases in which he identifies the elements mentioned, allowing him to go from one side to another, very distant one, and from a place in the distant past to a more recent one. The same happens when films that portray a stereotype or stereotypical cultural representation in cinematic tropes are analyzed, since, even if a long time passed between the first movies of the "Old West" in the 1920s and those produced in the 1960s or 1970s, the same mechanical representations or stereotypes can be found on the screen. Thus, the reconstruction of the history of myths reproduced in cinema is extremely coherent and cohesive (morphologically), and on the other hand, is documented in a fragmented way, implying a renunciation of some of the essential postulates of traditional historical research, which attempts to reconstruct continuous periods of change. In cultural analysis of cinema, it is uncommon to find immediate continuity of the representations of ideas or stereotypes on the screen. Rather, they are noteworthy when they become film conventionalisms. A typical case of this is the representation of the isolated, desert-like, primitive, marginal, dangerous border, which became a convention in U.S. Westerns and has been reaffirmed in the cinema that portrays Mexico's Sonoran North.

In the case of Ginzburg, this technique, which prioritizes the morphology of the cases studied, although asynchronous, allows him to take it as the basis for the diachrony of its periodization. Thus, Ginzburg's method can be applied to the cultural analysis of cinematographic productions, since it makes it possible to take into consideration the isomorphic series that it analyzes belonging to a sphere that moves between the abstract depths of structure and the superficial concretion of the event or ambiance produced in the films (Ginzburg, 1992: 33). In this play of convergences that Ginzburg identifies in the narrative elements and the contrasts, he uses anthropological and at the same time historical concepts and techniques. Using this methodology of historic analysis of myths like the coven or an individual's world view, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the tropes about the Sonora-Arizona border are cultural constructions reproduced on the screen. With regard to audiences' reception of these movie images, using Ginzburg as a reference, we can argue that the representations of ideas or stereotypes on the screen crystallized in a film are transmitted and act in concrete social situations through flesh-and-blood individuals (Ginzburg, 1992: 34). In addition, they act independently of the awareness individuals may have of them. Ginzburg justifies his micro-historical method in the case of the coven myth, arguing,

Local and supra-local circumstances sometimes explain the sharpening of the witch-hunts: certainly, the stereotypical immutable coven, beyond the superficial variants, contributed powerfully to intensifying them (Ginzburg, 1992: 34).

For the case of Sonora-Arizona border cinema, the supralocal circumstances of increased drug and people trafficking in recent decades due to the construction of border walls that left migrants with the sole option of crossing the desert contributed to building a somber legend about the area as a place of death, crime, and insecurity that feeds the political coffers of nationally-known figures who are not even familiar with the border region. So, in the image of the coven that Ginzburg analyzes, two cultural strains that emerge from different visions can be distinguished: in the first place, the theme or narrative developed by the inquisitors and lay judges about a plot hatched by a sect or a hostile social group; and in the second place, elements of shaman origin already rooted in folk culture. Ginzburg considers that the merger of these two cultural strains was very solid and long-lasting because they both had a substantial, subterranean affinity (Ginzburg, 1992: 219). In the case of the border, although local border community dynamics are very harmonious, we can see the stubborn persistence in different films from very different eras of a stereotyped, negative image of the place as somewhere isolated, dangerous, and in permanent dispute because of the crossing of migrants and people alien to the area.

This representation becomes a cinematographic myth that influences the negative perception of the border, even fostering the imposition of policies alien to the locales for reasons of national security. Here, I am referring concretely to the border wall that has become a political banner and Donald Trump's campaign promise that has become very attractive to national U.S. voters in the 2016 election, and was at the same time rejected by the border communities themselves because it had no correlation to their reality. This image of the urgency of the wall has been constructed by the Trump administration in recent years, to the degree of his having sent National Guard troops and attempting to declare a national security crisis several times. However, although reinforced by film and the media, this representation did not correspond completely to the reality of Arizona-Sonora border inhabitants, who had restrictions imposed on their local space from outside based on ignorance of their circumstances, something like the somber legend that levied

legal punishments on witches in the Middle Ages, as Ginzburg narrates. In this sense, the Sonora-Arizona border has been built through negative images and tropes that instill fear in national public opinion, most of whose proponents have never been to the border. That's how powerful an artificial negative perception created by film cultural representations can be, since they impose national policies about a local dynamic.

Beyond the Border: Cultural Representation of a Para-National Region

The border, seen generically by specialists in film analysis, is an example of binational cultural construction present in diverse representations, often defined counterposed to the idea of the national in their archetypal scope. The protagonist of so-called border cinema is a being in a constant identity crisis on the screen. Nothing could be further from the truth. The inhabitants of different border regions, including the one between Sonora and Arizona, have their own identities and have lived together in a specific space and landscape for centuries; they are families whose brotherhood/sisterhood goes beyond the border. People from Nogales, for example, feel that they live in the same city on both side of the border and that they are merely separated by a wall. The most usual representations found in border cinema, speaking generically, stereotype the border as a place of constant transit, often without its own identity, where all its inhabitants seem to be atemporal migrants, constantly coming and going, with no roots. However, until very recently, this cinema and its producers and critics have neglected to create a more faithful construction of border identities. Very often this is because the gaze found in their productions is launched from distant places, which fulfill—or purport to fulfill—the characteristics of the genre more than even stopping to check the verisimilitude of the representation. I will expound on this with examples further down.

It is fair to say that the representation of Sonora-Arizona border residents, often because they have been invisible in film until very recently, has not been negatively standardized to the degree that is set out in the pejorative adjectives Octavio Paz wrote about when dealing with the pachucos of Los Angeles in his memorable *Laberinto de la soledad* (Labyrinth of Solitude). In

another volume of Vasconcelos's memoirs, *La tormenta* (The Storm), the author referred with certain disdain to the culture of the North, when he writes the famous phrase, "Where prepared dishes end and people begin eating grilled steak, that's where barbarism begins" (Vasconcelos, 2000). So, the images created in literature and cinema and implanted in the collective imaginary or the national culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have reflected the ideas, prejudices, fears, aspirations, and realities constructed beyond the Sonoran Desert border.² I have already mentioned José Vasconcelos's *Ulises criollo* and *La tormenta*, where he describes the first years of his childhood in Sasabe, Arizona. These cultural representations include an image that has become a stereotype of the distant Sonora-Arizona border as seen from Central Mexico.

It is important to point out, as Graciela Martínez-Zalce does, that border crossings have been labeled as a kind of limbo on the silver screen and in North American media. She maintains that, since the national space is confined by its borders, it is only logical that borders automatically refer us to multiple symbolic meanings: otherness, hybridization, separation, meeting points (Martínez-Zalce, 2016). I agree wholeheartedly with this reflection, and would add that many so-called border-cinema productions lack depth: the border cannot be reduced to merely the limits of a country. Border representations limited to the level of otherness, meeting, being hybrid, and separation are incomplete, since, even though the border is hybrid, this doesn't mean that it doesn't have its own identity. The opposite would be to assume that pure cultural identities actually exist.

Mexican cinema has been a portrait of the country's society and culture. In over 100 years, it has overcome crises and enjoyed successes, but undoubtedly, its achievements as a visual art have been more sociological than artis-

² I agree with Claudio Lomnitz-Adler when he questions the existence of a national culture or imaginary, since these are the product of a hegemonic discourse that arbitrarily integrates regional cultural practices in a kind of matrix that includes or excludes them according to the hegemonic tendency of those who control and legitimize the representation of the national. When he theorizes the bases of the historiographic current of regional history, the historian Luis González y González also suggests that the events reputed to be national processes, like the Mexican Revolution, were not actually that on a regional level, since in many cases for towns or cities distant from the epicenter of the war or Mexico City, the revolution does not even play a part in local memory. In many senses, the same thing occurs in cinema, since it reproduces imaginaries recognized as national, constructing representations with stereotypes of the nation or of the national that are alien to inhabitants of the different regions (Lomnitz-Adler, 1992; González y González, 1968).

tic, as Carlos Monsiváis said (1993). It has fulfilled critical roles in creating Mexico's modern identity. It has been like an alternative-education school-room, meaning that cinema has produced accessible representations of Mexican society's life found in dress, history, and traditions, which have greatly influenced education and people's mentality. However, film has also been a powerful medium for creating mythologies that act as sorts of meta-narratives about popular culture, class realities, and social and cultural identities, above all on a national level, but also about concrete regions. In that sense, it has also jibed with specific national agendas, both of the state and of specific interest groups.

For the case of northwestern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest,³ both countries' cinema has constructed a few examples of cultural representations that one way or another have fostered and perpetuated generalizing stereotyped visions of their characteristics. However, beyond what has one-sidedly been called border cinema, the reality of the Arizona-Sonora border shows us that the vast dividing line between Mexico and the United States is so complex that it must be understood and represented by dividing it into specific regions and locations. In this sense, it is simple to identify natural and identity-based sections of the binational border. Examples are the Tijuana-San Diego and Ciudad Juárez-El Paso metropolitan areas; the areas adjacent to the banks of the Rio Bravo, where the border line is the river itself; the semiarid and humid areas between Tamaulipas and Coahuila and Texas, far from large human settlements; and, of course, the desert areas between Chihuahua and New Mexico, which are fundamentally different from the landscapes and vegetation found in the Sonora-Arizona region. In terms of biodiversity, the latter two are very different because they belong to two distinct natural systems, the Deserts of Chihuahua and Sonora. The two vast landscapes are dissimilar in their flora and fauna, but in addition, their migratory flows are also culturally and ethnically different. It would be fully justified for there to be specific filmographies of each of these regions, even though until today, they have all been jumbled together under what academics call border cinema.

According to Norma Iglesias Prieto's study *Entre yerba, polvo y plomo* (Amidst Grass, Dust, and Lead) (1991), a border film is one that fits into one of the following categories: one whose plot unfolds in a Mexico-U.S. border

³ Jennifer Jenkins (2016) recently published an innovative study about the construction of the U.S. Southwest that also includes a vision of Mexico's Northwest.

city; whose main character is from the border, without specifying where the story takes place—in this sense, the films starring German “Tin Tan” Valdez and Eulalio “Piporro” González are border films; those that are about the Mexican-origin population living in the United States—here, she is surely referring to a cultural border; and one shot in a border city in which a central part of the plot refers to the U.S.-Mexican border.

On the other hand, even though it's not called border cinema, U.S. film has also produced a series of cultural representations that could fit into this genre since they allude to Mexico, the population of Mexican origin, and the border region the U.S. shares with Mexico—or that corresponds to the territory Mexico lost in the mid-nineteenth century. In general, according to Emilio García Riera's classic study *México visto por el cine extranjero* (Mexico as Seen by Foreign Film), Hollywood has made its representations of “what is Mexican” in different genres more complex, but they have been preponderantly stereotypical—and often unfavorable—images of Mexican identity and people, above all in Westerns (García Riera, 1987). In his exhaustive research, García Riera takes the reader through different eras of movies from Hollywood and other places that portray Mexico from outside. The relationship between Mexico and the United States in film is extremely complex, and his work documents that. He admits that in U.S. films about the Southwest, Mexico or Mexicans received very little attention in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico until well into the twentieth century, which is why the stereotype of the southern border and about its inhabitants is very different from the film construction of “The West.” In U.S. Westerns, the border is presented according to the concept of “The Old Mexico,” while in Mexican cinema, the desert Arizona-Sonora border was a forgotten area, scantily populated, where people could wander freely and come upon mining hamlets with violent cowboys and down-and-out saloons; nothing like a metropolis or an urban area is represented in it. This to-a-certain-point innocuous representation prevailed until the 1970s, that is, before the migratory crisis of the 1980s.

This is why this article puts forward the need to reformulate the cinematic point of view, sketching out an approach to films that portray in some way the complex Arizona-Sonora region. Although they allude to a cultural representation that should be continuous and coherent, their references are lost and dispersed in the generalization of what the border is in the so-called border cinema. In the case of U.S. film, the Western has been the

genre that has most continuously represented the space that is most similar to the real geographical area between Sonora and Arizona. These generic representations of the border in the Desert of Sonora cause a disconnected, artificial, peripheral image of a region where for centuries two modern nations, Mexico and the United States, have converged symbiotically and to a certain extent harmoniously, as have many thousands-of-years-old nations such as the Yaqui and Tohono O'odham indigenous peoples. This relationship of disconnected cultural representations in film blurs the coherence and unity of the region, feeding into the old stereotypical image of the inhospitable, dangerous, isolated land of irreconcilable struggle between the Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon and the Catholic and Protestant, "civilizations" that Vasconcelos described in his memoirs. Attempting to create a filmography that would recover—or at least notice—disperse films about the region of Sonora and Arizona on both sides of the border would make it possible to reconstruct and recover the common history the border communities in the Sonora Desert share. It would also allow us to identify the stereotypes and tropes about the Sonora-Arizona border that have misinformed and deformed the perception of the region from a centralist vision, constructed from the standpoint of places alien to local reality

IMAGE 2
 BETWEEN THE BARBARISM OF GRILLED STEAK
 AND THE U.S. AMERICAN WILD WEST



Poster for the film *Arizona* (1984). Collection of Film Posters, San Luis College Documentation Center (permit pending).

What makes the analysis of cinematic images that have represented the Sonora-Arizona border interesting is the constant of three stereotypes that do not jibe with local reality and are descriptions by outside observers. The border region and the desert surrounding it have been constructed through the cultural representation of the place where Mexican nationality is lost, diluted, and corrupted. The first is the idea that this region is a no-man's land disputed by two "civilizations," one Protestant and Anglo-Saxon and the other, criollo Catholic. This idea always excludes or caricaturizes the inhabitants who belong to indigenous first peoples, seen mostly as Westerns have presented them, always hostile and primitive, but also grouping them all together as Apaches, although the Apache were not the only first people to inhabit this binational area. The second constant stereotypical representation that does not reflect reality is the desert itself. This is because many productions about the region have been filmed in any desert except that of the region itself, which has characteristic endemic flora and fauna, but that an uninitiated audience does not distinguish. And, the third recurring representation is that of the mestizo Sonoran, who is constructed on the screen with a complete absence of references specific to his/her culture, such as the accent and vocabulary of his/her region, which are almost never portrayed faithfully, above all in twentieth-century films. For this last representation, Hollywood films created the concept of "Old Mexico," which, while it idealizes the Spanish and Mexican elites of the area, continues to represent them as peripheral and technologically backward.

This analysis is not exhaustive nor does it examine a considerable number of films about the Sonora-Arizona border, since, in addition, those that do not explicitly represent this region on the screen outnumber the others, even if they were shot in it. Above all, in U.S. film, more than representing Arizona and Sonora, they are merely included generically in the atemporal, placeless cinematographic trope that is the "Wild West." The films I will mention represent this region and contain at least the three stereotypical representations mentioned in the preceding paragraph. This kind of film has contributed to creating an unreal image of the region. It is also important to point out that, to the extent that local communities all over the world, and specifically border communities, have gradually obtained access to producing their own films beyond the metropolises or meccas of world cinema, local spaces have begun to be represented more faithfully.

However, representations of the border prevail that are far-fetched, but nevertheless have been the only reference point for many people from far away who have never been there directly. Some of these superficial representations are remembered by global audiences. One example of this is the award-winning film *Babel* (2006), by Alejandro González Iñárritu, specifically the final sequence dedicated to the nanny played by actress Adriana Barraza. In that sequence, the protagonist has just escaped over the Tijuana-San Diego border and is suddenly seen running from immigration agents through desert scrubland and cacti. Anyone familiar with the landscape around one of the world's most highly travelled border crossings like the one between Tijuana and San Diego knows that it is not desert-like at all, and that it is difficult to even find an unpopulated area like the one portrayed in the film. It looks more like the Arizona desert, but there is a noteworthy disconnect that few perceive in the moment. Let's look, then, at a few other fictitious, biased representations of the Sonora-Arizona border in twentieth-century and contemporary film.

One of the internationally known figures who has represented not only Sonora and Arizona on screen, but also the border crossing between these two states, is Mario Moreno, or Cantinflas. In the 1968 film *Por mis pistolas* (With My Guns), Cantinflas brings us a particular Mexican adaptation of the U.S. American Western, in which he constructs his cinematographic space naming Sonoran locales and roads apparently in the second half of the nineteenth century. While the film does not aspire in any way to realism, it does use a specific space to develop its plot: the desert and the roads on both sides of the Sonora-Arizona border. These historic regional relationships, proper names of towns and places, as well as certain idiosyncrasies of the characters, attempt to make the story plausible, but immediately fall into stereotype. Cantinflas's fame and force in Latin America's art and film mean that the impact of his movies leaves a deep mark on the collective memory in many parts of the world. According to Jeffrey Pilcher (2001), Cantinflas's country bumpkin character is charged with historical, social, and cultural traits that in the last analysis condense into the national identity. This seems to be what he attempts in *Por mis pistolas*: vindicating the Sonoran Mexico, connecting it with its regional past in the lost lands of Arizona.

According to Pilcher, as a universal comic figure, Cantinflas acquired a Mexican face in the colonial period as a member of the urban mestizo sub-

class, who were excluded both from the elites of Spanish society and from Native American communities. In the 1960s, Cantinflas wanted to continue to represent that mixed heritage, and in this film represents the mestizo criollo, heir to that lineage Vasconcelos talked about and that was disdained by the Anglo-Saxon prospectors who dominated the Old West. In this sense, *Por mis pistolas* is the classic, conventional cowboy-and-Indians story, in which Cantinflas attempts to insert the Sonora-born criollo with dignity in that dynamic of the U.S. Southwest. Nevertheless, he also inserts the first nations in a negatively stereotypical way: while they are presented as equal humans by being represented as allies of the main protagonist, they are also portrayed without presenting their cultural specificity, since the region where the plot unfolds was not Apache land, but that of Papagos and Yaquis. The Sonora accent—or at least a northern accent—that at least in some of the actors—but not Cantinflas—attempt to make realistic has no relation to reality. The landscape by no means depicts southern Arizona either, as it lacks the endemic flora, such as the enormous saguaro tree-like cactus, the blue palo verde plants, or the ocotillo or coachwhip. Other characteristics of the landscape are also absent, which is only logical since the movie was filmed in the state of Durango and a location in the Chihuahua desert.

The same circumstance can be found in the film *La cárcel de Cananea* (Cananea Jail), by Gilberto Gazcón (1960), starring Pedro Armendáriz, Andrés Soler, and Carlos López Moctezuma. These actors, shining lights of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, already in decline when this movie was made, don't even bother to try to imitate a Sonoran tone or include the accordions and bajo sextos (or sixth bass) that one of the characters plays. Despite the fact that the corrido alludes to a story connected with the famous Cananea miners' strike considered the direct precursor of the Mexican Revolution, the film's plot has nothing to do with that event, so important in local and regional memory. The location's landscape is also unrealistic, since it was filmed in the Órganos Mountains in the state of Zacatecas, where neither the towns nor the desert nor the hills are anything like what is presented on screen as Cananea, Sonora.

In 1984, the film *Arizona* (Durán Rojas, n.d.), starring Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán, Juan Valentín, and Ana de Sade, came out. The story takes place on the border in the desert, a life-threatening place for anyone who tries to cross over illegally. It is interesting to understand that this film was produced at a time of great economic crisis in Mexico, which began an era of expulsion of

victims of unemployment and hunger, who began to seek better opportunities in *El Norte*, coming up against extreme adversity, discrimination, rejection, and persecution. Here, just like in the two 1960s films mentioned, the Sonora-Arizona region and its inhabitants are not depicted realistically. This is also the case of the last film I'll use as an example: *Desierto* (Desert), starring Gael García Bernal, directed by Jonás Cuarón (2016). Here, we see the same stereotypical representational elements as in the other films cited: the plot unfolds in another desert (Baja California Sur). It includes no spatial or local cultural reference point; and it constructs a feeling of isolation and extreme danger for the audience. Obviously, it was not the producers' intention to portray border life in Sonora and Arizona, since it is understood that what they are trying to denounce is the danger of migrating in the region. Both films, however, although they do denounce the danger of migrating through the desert, fall into the fictitious stereotypical representation that is common on screen when representing Sonora and Arizona.

In sum, the cultural representations of the border I have referred to in these films reflect ideas from previous eras about a region whose dynamic has been described as negative, marginal, isolated, and in constant conflict. On the one hand, the filmography that portrays the Sonora-Arizona border has been generically classified as border cinema, despite the existence of many different regions on the Mexico-U.S. border. On the other hand, this region has mainly been represented in the national imaginary from the outside, from a centralist perspective, distant from its local harmonious dynamics. These films and many others show us a fictitious view of this border region and the desert surrounding it.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Sonora-Arizona border is a region with its own characteristics and identity and is not the result of peripheral relations to national culture. Nevertheless, it has frequently been represented in cinema based on prejudices and erroneous ideas reproduced for centuries. Cinema, understood as a complex, multidimensional social experience projected into different spheres of life in local communities, has not managed to portray or provide a preponderant space to regional visions of those representations.

Attempting a review and identification of those cinematic representations about a specific region of the Mexico-U.S. border could contribute by shedding light not only on daily life, collective imaginaries, popular culture, customs, and habits, but also on ideologies, mentalities, and forms of social organization in specific places, instead of feeding imaginaries that define a negative perception of the region. Thus, a task that remains to be completed is a sketch of a history based on local memories, representations, and experiences, and to reconcile those with what is disseminated by media like cinema.

The reconciliation of representations and histories of the regional communities themselves through cinema would reaffirm their importance in the collective memory, since, when they are not reflected on the screen, these local communities cannot see themselves reflected in the mirror that is cinema.

The border communities of Sonora and Arizona are constantly affected by policies imposed from outside that regulate markets or restrict people's movement. The construction of a wall, arguing that the border is in a non-existent security crisis, is only one sample of this phenomenon. A faithful representation of their daily life could give these people positive visibility in centralist political debates that time and again label the Arizona-Sonora border and the desert around it as the cultural representation of the place where both Mexican and U.S. American nationalities are lost, diluted, and corrupted. This phenomenon does not really occur, and the existence of the myth labels the region negatively and makes audiences in other places fear it.

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