

**Refiguring Spanish cultures. An approach to “Spanishnesses” through the  
film *costumbrismo* of the early 1990s in Spain**

Garbine Jaurrieta Barriain  
Student number: 4265513

Master Thesis  
Cultural History  
Thesis supervisor: dr. Hendrik Henrichs  
Second reader: dr. Willemijn Ruberg

Deadline: August 15<sup>th</sup> 2015  
Number of words: 11.429

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## Refiguring Spanish cultures. An approach to “Spanishnesses” through Spanish film *costumbrismo* of the early 1990s

“Yo pensaba que lo más jodido de mi vida había sido la censura de Franco. ¡Pues no! Lo más jodido es la pérdida de la memoria”

[I thought that the worst thing in my life had been Franco’s censorship but I was wrong. The worst thing is memory loss]

Luis García Berlanga, 2000.

### Introduction

In 1985 the acclaimed Spanish film director Luis García Berlanga released *La Vaquilla*, a film on the Spanish Civil War. Set in a small village in Spain, the film narrates the celebration of a popular festivity in which young peasants, old sanctimonious ladies, witless soldiers, a greedy priest and an oblivious landlord, gather together to perform the traditional party. Berlanga didn’t need a single shot of a gun or bomb to disentangle the anxieties that constituted Spanish culture and which lead to the dramatic bloody end in the real realm. In *La Vaquilla* popular customs and the everyday life were the accurate representatives of a culture’s history.

If we look at this cinematic narrative geniality from a wider perspective, Berlanga’s film shows how the representation of intangible cultural traditions in Spanish cinema [*costumbrismo*] stands as a source where questions about Spain’s history can be posed. The particular interest of this study focuses on the reproduction of Spanish immaterial heritage in the film world of the early nineties. By this period, Spain had experienced the settlement of the internal sociopolitical reforms carried out after Francoist regime [*Transición*] and the final reinsertion of the country in the international map after forty years of stagnation and relative isolationism. Hence, by this last decade, Spain took part in the transnational economic and cultural trends promoting a cultural dynamism in line with the international cultural policies. This included the management of intangible heritage and cultural diversity preservation.

In 1985 the law for Spanish Historical Heritage came into force. One of its main points was the preservation of intangible popular and traditional cultural expressions, with special emphasis on the local and regional customs.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, in 1989 the UNESCO approved the Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, which defended the importance of intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development. The recommendation also fostered policies to preserve immaterial heritage.<sup>2</sup> In Spain, after the national law

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<sup>1</sup> Spain. Law 16/1985 (June 25, 1985) on Spanish National Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> “Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore” (Adopted by the General Conference, United Nations, 25<sup>th</sup> session, Paris, 15 November 1989).

of 1985 the Autonomous Communities' Governments [*Estado de las Autonomías*]<sup>3</sup> were soon handed over the accountability for the further elaboration of heritage policies for the preservation of cultural diversity at a local and regional scale. In a way, after the stabilization of the democratic reforms during the *Transición*, the cultural repression and identity homogenizing politics previously imposed by Franco had to be resolved by each Autonomous Community. The result was a blossoming of local and regional identity claims and redefinitions among Spaniards.<sup>4</sup>

Spanish film production was not alien to the complex network of entangled post-national, national and regional identity debates and their articulation within the country's heritage preservation politics. Indeed, the reflection on such problematic in the Spanish *costumbrista* cinema raises this genre as a framework of study. The reproduction of cultures' immaterial heritage in the film world creates a set of picturesque images revelatory of the gaps, tensions and characteristics that define those early nineties. After the viewing of a remarkable amount of films released during the entrance in the XXth century, I found a relevant link between the way some Spanish films represented traditions and the broader historical context of the country. In fact, the portrayal of folkloric codes in fiction films [*costumbrismo*]<sup>5</sup> has been a constant in Spanish national film production that has varied with the sociopolitical changes. This makes film *costumbrismo* a very interesting research source for cultural historians and the blossoming field of Spanish Cultural Studies, which still calls for more interdisciplinary contributions that shed light on Spanish culture and history.

Nonetheless, in the last decades different voices within Spanish cultural and film studies have claimed the relevance that custom films have as illustrators of broader conceptual issues on heritage, culture, and identity as they are remarkable texts embedded in highly complex historical and cultural contexts (Fiddian & Evans, 1988; Kinder, 1997; D'Lugo 1997; Parsons, 2000; Faulkner, 2013). In this regard, this investigation departs from the assumption that the way immaterial heritage is represented in films plays an important role as indicator of communities' cultural changes and their evolution throughout history.

Therefore, it is relevant to wonder how film *costumbrismo* represents Spanish local and regional immaterial culture at a time of transculturalization and of internal refigurations within the country. After all, the transculturalization that characterizes postmodernity's cultures in a globalized world interplays in Spain with the country's renegotiation of cultural identities caused by their necessary self-redefinition after totalitarian years. Hence, there is a problematic interplay between cultural traditions and the broader trends on issues of cultural diversity preservation at a time of greater awareness of

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<sup>3</sup> Spain was organized in a series of autonomies with regional governing bodies envisaged as an institutional framework for accommodating cultural differences.

<sup>4</sup> The first regional heritage legal policy was developed in the region of Navarra in the Then it was followed by the rest of autonomous communities such as Andalucía (1987) and País Vasco (1990).

<sup>5</sup> The concept refers to the representation of a series of everyday life activities and folkloric traditions in artistic productions.

Spain's cultural heterogeneity within the country. For this reason, the guiding question in this dissertation is: *How is the representation of cultural customs in Spanish film costumbrismo during the early nineties interlinked with the anxieties for the preservation of cultural identities?* This raises two secondary questions. In first place, how does the search for local and regional identity ties in Spain manifest itself in its film *costumbrismo* of the early nineties? Secondly, after forty years of cultural homogenization imposed by Franquism, to what extent can the representation of regional and local immaterial culture and customs in the Spanish film production of the early nineties be explained by postmodernist interpretations of cultural identity?

### **Objective and justification**

This research aims at throwing new insights to the still present debate on Spanish identity in relation to Europe and the coverage of this issue within the country's cultural production, a problematic already at stake in the philosophical debates between Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset during the nineteenth century's *fin de siècle* and in the literary spheres of the *novelistas* and *modernistas*, among others. My work as researcher and cultural manager at the Cervantes Institute in Utrecht, a public institution established in 1991 with the aim of promoting and researching on Spanish and Latin American culture, was the starting point to support this investigation. The Spanish contemporary film series organized between April and June of 2015 in this centre<sup>6</sup> and the Institute's promotion of publications that study the traditional and ritualistic folklore of Spanish regions inspired this thesis. In particular the work by cultural anthropologist María Ángeles Sánchez (1998) on popular festivities and the conference she gave in the Cervantes Institute in 2011, which was available at Cervantes' archive, set light to come up with my research question. Throughout the early nineties she documented the wide range of regional and local customs and folkloric festivities that were, and still are, celebrated in Spain every year. She positively explained how,

“Since Spain was reorganized in a State of Autonomous Communities, these communities have made considerable efforts aimed at consolidating their differences and assessing their identifying features. Popular celebrations stand as a great instrument to achieve such goals.” [*Desde la organización de nuestro país en Estado de las Autonomías las comunidades han realizado un considerable esfuerzo orientado a consolidar y valorar lo que de diferente, de personalizador, de identificativo hubiera en ellas y nada mejor, ni más grato que las fiestas populares para lograr este objetivo*].<sup>7</sup>

I then wondered how this trend she documented was influenced by transnational concerns for the preservation of intangible heritage and cultural plurality, and to what extent it was rather an internal

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<sup>6</sup> “Spanish Film Contemporary Classics”, Cervantes Institute Utrecht. See: [www.utrecht.cervantes.es/FichasCultura/Ficha100131\\_39\\_1.htm](http://www.utrecht.cervantes.es/FichasCultura/Ficha100131_39_1.htm).

<sup>7</sup> María Ángeles Sánchez, *Fiestas populares: España día a día* (Madrid: Santillana, 1998), 12.

need for refiguring identities in a post-Transition context. In this regard, this could set new insights on the ever present debate for defining Spanish identity and its relation to Europe.

## Method

Although the main lines of my study are based on the viewing of a prominent number of Spanish films, I have purposely avoided a long list of titles. I have opted to develop my argument through the close analysis of a relatively small body of *costumbrista* films. These are *It's Dawn, and That Should Be Enough* (*Amanece que no es poco*, 1989) by Jose Luis Cuerda, *Cows* (*Vacas*, 1992) by Julio Medem and *Iberian Portraits* (*Retratos Ibéricos*, 1991/1992/1994) by Juan José Bigas Luna. The latter is a trilogy formed by *Ham Ham* (*Jamón, Jamón*, 1991), *Golden Balls* (*Huevos de Oro*, 1992) and *The Tit and The Moon* (*La Teta i la lluna*, 1994). In order to select them I followed three criteria:

- In the film there had to be a focus on the representation of customs and traditions of a Spanish community (presence of *costumbrista* features).

- The selection had to be varied in the sense that each film would rather be contextualized in a different Spanish region. Preferably, the directors also had to come from different Autonomous Communities.

- The films had to have been released within the period of 1989 and 1995 as those were the years when the formal international recognition of Spain as reintegrated in the international map took place with the celebrations of the Expo 92' in Sevilla and the Barcelona Olympics, and Madrid's stint as the European Community's Capital of Culture. At the same time, since 1989 there is a growing global and national interest for the preservation of cultures' intangible heritage and folklore, as the UNESCO recommendation and the articulation of regional heritage management policies in Spain show.

In order to support my reading of Spanish cinema narratives I will look at sources on Spanish Cultural Studies. Here the work of authors such as Joe Labanyi, Helen Graham, Antonio Sánchez, Joan Ramón Resina, John Hooper or Ulrich Winter provide a rich literature on a field that yet, calls for more interdisciplinary contributions.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, I will use material from the field of Spanish Film Studies like the works by Nuria Triana-Toribio, Marsha Kinder or Marvin A. D'Lugo.

Parallel to the close study of the films, I will elaborate a theoretical framework based on cultural theory with a special focus on defining cultural identities in transnational contexts and on grasping the power of fictions as vicarious narrators of history. With that in mind, I will seek to find an insightful outcome that sets new light for the understanding of the present in Spain.

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<sup>8</sup> Helen Graham & Antonio Sánchez, "Introduction" in *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity*, ed. Helen Graham & Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1995), IV.

## Chapter 1. *Costumbrismo*, cultural policies and Spanish identities

### 1.1. Disentangling film *costumbrismo*: A historical approach

The Spanish Royal Language Academy's dictionary defines *costumbrismo* as the “portrayal of regional or national customs in pictorial and literary works”.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, the concept nowadays also extends to the idea of “dealing with customs” or “related to local customs” within the artistic realm, including films.<sup>10</sup> The origin of the term draws back to the depiction of distinctive features of regional life and customs in literature, a narrative resource in Hispanic production that already started with Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in the XVIIIth century.<sup>11</sup> Then, and fostered by the Romantic cult of local color, it kept manifesting in short articles, sketches and short *novellas* during the 1830s to later develop into full-length novels.

In Spain, *costumbrismo* soon took a broader significance as the relationship this narrative genre inevitably had with traditions would be used as a reference in the intellectual and political debates on Spanish modernization throughout the XIXth and XXth century. The features *costumbrismo* depicted in literature became signs of Spanish identity or Spanishness and mingled in the discussions on how the country had to embrace the modernizing currents coming from Europe. A number of essayists, such as Larra, Joaquín Costa, Unamuno or Ortega y Gasset, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries exhorted Spaniards to undertake intense cultural self-scrutiny and encouraged a variety of social reforms and educational programs aimed at national regeneration and cultural parity with Europe. In very broad terms, the prescriptions ranged from implementing a secular culture, creating more democratic institutions or addressing concrete economic problems to a recovery of Spain's imperial glory along with a restoration of counter-reformation Catholicism.<sup>12</sup>

Among others, the members of the *noventayochista* movement, with Miguel de Unamuno (*En torno al casticismo*, 1895; *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, 1912) as one of its main representatives, developed a special interest for the rural and customary projecting there their existentialist anxieties and their ambivalences about Spanish acquisition of European modernity.<sup>13</sup> To a certain extent, *noventayochista* movement's ambivalent attitudes were similar to those exhibited by the European

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<sup>9</sup> “Costumbrismo.” in Real Academia de la lengua española, 2014. Retrieved May 15, 2015 from: <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=costumbrismo>.

<sup>10</sup> Nuria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (2003), 178.

<sup>11</sup> During the symposium “Cervantes and the birth of the modern reader” (April 23, 2015) held at the Cervantes Institute in Utrecht Konstantin Mieriau, professor at the Spanish Cultures and Languages Department of the Utrecht University, argued how *Don Quixote* stands as the initiator of the Hispanic interest for the representation of the everyday life and folklore in fiction, a style also known as *costumbrismo*. According to this researcher, the study of costumbrist representations has ever since become a historical material cultural historians can look at.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Mermall, “Culture and the essay in modern Spain” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*, ed. David T.Gies (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P, 1999), 164.

<sup>13</sup> I refer here to modernization as the process of capital driven social, economic, political and cultural change occurring at differential rates over the past 200 years across Europe and the U.S.A characterized by features such as accelerated industrialization, urbanization, a more complex division of labor and social differentiations and the increased level of popular involvement in political life.

counterparts as their pessimism could find an echo in the works of modern writers such as Paul Verlaine, Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence or T.S. Elliot.<sup>14</sup> However, the dramatic developments in Spain that led to the Civil War twisted and ended the evolution of these intellectual debates.

During Franco's regime the totalitarian social control policies put special focus on the promotion of films that praised Spanish customs based on national-Catholicism. That way, during the 1940s and 1950s Spanish film theatres not only hosted censored Hollywood movies in which plots were modified and American actresses' cleavages were covered up with poor post-edition audiovisual effects,<sup>15</sup> but also home productions that fostered Franco's homogenized idea of Spanishness. National films advocated religious celebrations and the presence of folkloric music, especially Andalusian.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, since the early 1960s national cinema acquired a different goal. In 1959, Franco had decided to adopt the capitalist order he had been loudly denouncing since 1936 so promoting Spanish characteristic folklore in films became a useful measure for safeguarding conservative traditionalism against the influence of progressive ideas that could permeate society with the opening to the international market. Films such as *Las chicas de la cruz roja*, and *Paco Martínez Soria* movies –a series about a Spanish peasant who struggles to keep up with his traditions in a modernized city– or *Manolo Escobar* folkloric musicals are results of such politics. Their portrayals of traditions were supported by the regime since they promoted a certain Spanish specialness in comparison to the rest of Europe. They served Franco's plans of economic modernization without democratic freedom [*apertura*], a policy made famous by the promotional slogan for international tourism "Spain is different."<sup>17</sup>

However, directors such as Luis García Berlanga, Luis Buñuel or Juan Antonio Bardem were able to provide critical satires of the social and cultural affairs under totalitarian rule by precisely using the regime's *costumbrista* narratives. *Plácido* (Berlanga, 1961), *Viridiana* (Buñuel, 1961) or *El extraño viaje* (Fernán-Gómez, 1964) are remarkable touchstones of such strategy. They stood as early signs that the dictatorship's strategy of allowing and even encouraging the modernization of the economy while restraining his socially progressive aspects was doomed to fail.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Antonio Sánchez, *Postmodern Spain: A Cultural Analysis of 1980s-1990s Spanish Culture* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2007), 12.

<sup>15</sup> In cinema compulsory dubbing of foreign films facilitated censorship through mistranslation. For instance, great pains were taken to avoid female adultery. In *Mogambo* (John Ford, 1953) and *The Barefoot Countess* (Mankiewicz, 1954) in order to justify the wife's attraction to another man, husband and wife were made into brother and sister. See: Jo Labanyi, "Censorship for the Fear of Mass Culture" in *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity*, ed. Helen Graham & Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1995), 210.

<sup>16</sup> Nuria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2003), 63.

<sup>17</sup> This was a propaganda slogan and tourism campaign assembled by the new Minister of Tourism and Information Manuel Fraga Iribarne in the early 1960s.

<sup>18</sup> Antonio Sánchez, *Postmodern Spain* (2007), 19.



Soon after Franco's death and the economic liberalization of the 1960s, Spain began an accelerated process towards modernization -a shift from almost thirty years of isolationist totalitarian regime to the full entrance in the European Commission in 1986. These so-called transition years [*Transición*] started around 1975 and ended in 1986 with the re-election of a socialist Government. The *Transición* brought political democratization, the development of civil society and the final acquisition of international capitalism, which meant a belated assimilation of Western modern features such as urbanization, secularization, greater social differentiation and the permeation of European progressive ideas within society, among others. Yet, such changes had already been so unevenly and problematically introduced since the XIXth century's *fin de siècle* that the Civil War broke out in 1936.<sup>19</sup>

During the years of the democratic reconstruction (the Constitution was approved in 1978) film directors developed special interest for productions that depicted sexuality beyond the narrow parameters of Catholic dogma. Sexy and erotic comedies (so-called *Landismo* and *Destape* genres) were the outcome of such sexual taboo-breaking attitudes. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 1980s Spanish cinema witnessed an intermingling of the *costumbrista* comedies of the 1950s and 1960s with modern cultural forms. This artistic current found its main representative in the film director Pedro Almodóvar. Almodóvar's films presented the Spanish *Zeitgeist* of the eighties, in the sense that they aimed at representing simultaneously the Francoist old-fashioned world as sentimental kitsch and the upcoming modern world of information technology. The films constantly juxtapose sophisticated, cosmopolitan, modern forms with highly traditional Spanish ones. They exemplify the apparent contradiction between being genuinely Spanish and, at the same time, modern European celebrating the parallel arrival of late modernity as well as the continuing presence in Spanish society of certain archaic cultural forms.<sup>20</sup>

Directors such as Fernando Trueba or Fernando Colomo also released films that followed this eighties style, creating what some scholars have considered the first postmodernist parodies of customs and traditional values.<sup>21</sup> As Deborah Parssons analyzes, Spanish films of the 1980s are "haunted by sanctioned national images of the past at the same time as they attempt to move beyond them."<sup>22</sup> In this regard, Cristina Rodero's photographs of village festivities in her work "Hidden Spain: Public Celebrations in Spain, 1974-1989" [*España Oculta*], which has aesthetically influenced many later film

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<sup>19</sup> Helen Graham & Jo Labanyi, "Culture and Modernity. The case of Spain" in *Spanish Cultural Studies* (1995), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Helen Graham & Antonio Sánchez, "Modernity and Cultural pluralism. The politics of 1992" in *Spanish Cultural Studies* (1995), 410.

<sup>21</sup> Nuria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (2003), 134.

<sup>22</sup> Deborah Parssons, "Nationalism or continentalism? Representing heritage culture for a new Europe" in *Beyond Boundaries. Textual Representations of European Identity*, ed. Andy Hollis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 13.

productions,<sup>23</sup> similarly show the anachronistic survival in contemporary Spain of cultural relics from the past: rituals cohabiting with the allure of globalization.

After the break with the forty years of totalitarian regime, the political and intellectual debates on national identity lost their ontological and metaphysical dimensions present in movements such as the *noventaoychistas* or Ortega y Gasset's *modernistas*. The debates now acquired a rather functional character.<sup>24</sup> In a way, the modernization of the country and the redefinition of its cultural identity had an urgency that materialized in the quick reforms and transformation of the transition years which brought to the new organization into autonomous communities [*Estado de las Autonomías*]. Then, with the awakening from the totalitarian amnesia,<sup>25</sup> the communities' claims for the recuperation of a lost cultural past started to emerge. Spaniards began manifesting anxieties about how the new reinscription into the international map would shape those regional and local identities previously hampered by the regime and which were now trying to be revitalized. This problematic mirrored in the country's heritage preservation policies carried out during the late eighties and early nineties.<sup>26</sup> The first regional heritage legal policies were developed in the region of Navarra (1986)<sup>27</sup> and Andalucía (1987). Then they were followed by the rest of Autonomous Communities, such as País Vasco (1990) and Cataluña (1993).

## 1.2 *Costumbrismo* and Spanish identities: A theoretical approach

Ulrich Winter, an authority in the field of Spanish Cultural studies, states that “in post-dictatorial Spain, cultural identities- and therefore cultural identifications and rights- are still to be renegotiated due to three constitutive, conflicting and even contradicting factors: a cultural tradition broken by Franquism, the totalitarian centralized repression and the arrival of transculturalization in a globalized era.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, even though there is no doubt about the difficulty of articulating Spanish identities with their heritage politics after a history of repression, it is necessary to approach this issue

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<sup>23</sup> The link between Rodero's work and later Spanish productions such as *Blancanieves* (Pablo Berger, 2013) was studied in the film series “Spanish Film Contemporary Classics” at the Spanish cultural center Cervantes Institute in Utrecht (May 11, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Mermall, “Culture and the essay in modern Spain” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture* (1999), 164.

<sup>25</sup> According to Joan Ramón Resina the first decades of the new democratic regime brought the silencing of past injustices such as the repression of those identities that diverged from the official Francoist narratives. Nonetheless, Spanish scholars such as Santos Juliá and Aguilar Fernández have argued that during the Transition the past was not forgotten but was remembered and then put to one side until such time as the political opportunity structure was able to withstand its re-emergence. See: Joan Ramon Resina, *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 19.

<sup>26</sup> El País, “Escepticismo en algunas comunidades autónomas ante la reestructuración del Ministerio de Cultura,” *El País* April 26, 2015, [http://elpais.com/diario/1985/04/26/cultura/483314406\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1985/04/26/cultura/483314406_850215.html)

<sup>27</sup> Royal Decree 115/1986 of January 24th on the “Transference of services and functions for the management of Culture, Sports, Social Assistance and Heritage Promotion and Preservation”.

<sup>28</sup> Ulrich Winter, “La renegociación de identidades colectivas en la España democrática: entre memoria histórica, cultura popular y cultura política,” in *Iberoamericana* 13 (2004), 81.

and take into consideration as a determinant factor the effects of late modernity's globalization and transnationalization. After all, accelerating after 1978, Spain has experienced a rapid process of belated modernity (though a fast political democratization and the late development of civil society), but at the same time –precisely because this modernization process has necessarily meant the reinscription into a wider European economic and cultural environment- it has also participated in the social and economic cultural fragmentation characteristically assessed by postmodernism theorists.<sup>29</sup> Then, how do we define cultural identities in Spain?

Several theorists have already put to the foreground the tensions and difficulties of defining identity in the borders of Spain within a framework of postnationalism and internal regional rearticulations. Colmeiro, Moreiras-Menor, Hooper, and Puga Moruxa join scholars such as Silvia Bermúdez, Antonio Cortijo Ocaña, Timothy McGovern, Joseba Gabilondo, Joan Ramon Resina or Jessica A. Folkart, who interrogate definitions of national identity within a framework of postnationalism. Though their outcomes vary, they all have argued that there is a special problematic marked by not only the arrival of a new world order but also by the forty years of dictatorship which hampered the heterogeneity of identities existing in the country. Folkart applies the concept of “the liminal” used by Turner in his description of ritualistic in between stages to explain such problematic. As she states, there exists a feeling of a certain liminality in the sense that identities in Spain nowadays are situated at a threshold of “neither one thing nor another, but simultaneously both an neither.”<sup>30</sup> This could be read as the consequence of experimenting globalization or as the consequence of redefining the country's cultural variety after Franco's homogenization. Both readings could link to that special interest for revitalizing and reasserting local and regional specificities through the fostering of popular festivities witnessed in the last decades in Spain.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, Antonio Sánchez has coined the Spanish culture of the nineties as postmodern precisely for its “ability to participate simultaneously in different cultural processes, illustrating hybrid intermingling of vibrant pre-modern traditions with elitist, experimental modern forms and advanced mass culture. In this context, local and regional communities can be tracked in between their own definition in a time of transculturalization.”<sup>32</sup>

As Heritage Studies have recalled at a transnational scale, since the 1990s there has been an increasing multidisciplinary interest in the way diverse communities forge, maintain and negotiate their identities. A range of communities defined either geographically or by cultural, social, ethnic, economic and /or other experiences, have increasingly asserted the legitimacy of their collective identities and

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<sup>29</sup> Helen Graham & Antonio Sanchez, “Accelerated development and social schizophrenia” in *Spanish Cultural Studies* (1995), 408.

<sup>30</sup> Jessica A. Folkart, *Liminal Fiction at the Edge of the Millennium: The Ends of Spanish Identity* (Bucknell: Bucknell U.P, 2014), 131.

<sup>31</sup> María Ángeles Sánchez, *Fiestas populares: España día a día* (1998), 12.

<sup>32</sup> Antonio Sánchez, *Postmodern Spain* (2007), 27.

social, political and cultural experiences. Consensual heritage narratives about the nation and national identity have been challenged by the diversity of community experience and identity claims.<sup>33</sup> Then, how do we define identities in face of the new cultural claims and transnational refigurations that have taken place in the last decades?

In the last 30 years, cultural theory has developed a series of paradigms that unfold new approaches to cultural identities in a time of transnational social interactions. On the one hand, authors such as Berger Luckmann or Anderson have claimed the constructivist or imaginary character of cultural identities. On the other hand, the hibridity and transculturalization individuals experience as a result of globalization (Bhabha 1990; Bronfen/Marius/Steffen 1997) leads to the idea of living in a rather “postnational constellation”(Habermas 2001) in which cultural communities can endure or disappear. In addition, the formation of new political communities enlarges this poliedric character of identities. As a result, cultural policies are currently extremely confused about what sorts of rights are trying to be met as there is an uncertainty about who citizens are and what these individuals are members of (Roche, 2001).

In this context, the capacity of people and institutions to respond and adapt to increasing, complex streams of information and interactions is at stake. In the case of Spain, we can observe this tendency in the evolution of its autonomies’ cultural policies for the preservation of folklore and customs after the post-dictatorial accounts. To a certain extent, the policies became a mirror of the cultural identity anxieties of contemporary global culture assessed by postmodern critical theories, which claim that global culture suffers amnesia and hence the accompanying rhetoric of mourning and obsession with the loss of identity, as seen in the pervasive signs of fragmentation, dismemberment, simulacra, fissures and the cultivation of nostalgia.<sup>34</sup> In face of the difficulties of locating ourselves in and within a rather decentered postmodern culture, authors such as Jameson and Baudrillard defined our current state as that where history is absence and in which knowledge of a real past is unattainable. In this approach, we are condemned to an endless present in which the past is relayed through stereotyped and nostalgic images within an evanescent present.

Nonetheless, Stuart Hall, from a rather postcolonial identity perspective, contends that the crucial point involves more than the actual recovery or discovery of the past, the process undertaken. How narratives are retold is what is of the interest for the present (and future). So it is not the rediscovery but the production of identity that may attract the interest of cultural historians. But not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the retelling of the past.<sup>35</sup> In this view, culture is inevitably seen as a site of power that is negotiated and contested. Therefore, cultural identities come

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<sup>33</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 5.

<sup>34</sup> José Luis Colmeiro, “Nation of Ghosts? Haunting, Historical Memory and Forgetting in Post-Franco Spain,” *Electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature*, 4 (2011), 17-34.

<sup>35</sup> Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996).

from somewhere, have histories but like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subjected to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. With that in mind, Hall suggests that cultural practices and narratives of identity such as literature or cinema go beyond and can provide insights in the current state of collectives' memory and identity.

In this same line, Paul Ricoeur defends that fiction can help us in our understanding of the past and how the dialectical forces in the formation of culture operate.<sup>36</sup> This doesn't mean that any representation is valid: they are all determined by a narrative structure and the specific socio-historical conjecture in which it is written. Therefore, fictions are cultural texts where current and past ideas and values can be exposed, challenged or subverted as well as where alternative approaches are incorporated and different processes of representing and questioning the past are juxtaposed and put to the foreground within a socio-political current framework.

I will use the approaches by Hall and Ricoeur as a theoretical departure for my investigation of Spanish film *costumbrismo* of the early nineties. Hence, I approach cultural identities as being in a continuous process of construction and evolution, and therefore, I consider their cultural production, like literary and film fictions, a source for analyzing such conformation. As I proved in the previous section, *costumbrismo* in Spain reveals important information about not only the country's internal sociopolitical evolution but also the conformation of collectives' cultural identities within processes that are simultaneously operating at an international scale.

## **Chapter 2. Representation of customs in three Spanish film projects of the early 1990s.**

During the early nineties there was a tendency of looking towards Europeanization and how the entrance into Europe intermingled with Spanish cultures. After all, Spaniards were at that time witnessing how their country hosted some of the most remarkable world fairs and international events, which in a way signified the international recognition of the country's fast cultural and political reconfiguration. Among the rapid changes experienced was the new reorganization of the country in Autonomous Communities in less than a five years time lapse (1974-1979). Yet, it was between the late eighties and early nineties that each community acquired legal authority to develop immaterial heritage preservation politics. Concurrently, the debate on plurality and intangible heritage preservation was echoing the debate from a transnational scale. The Spanish film production of that turn of the last XXth decade reflected such social anxieties.

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The reality of the historical past* (Milwaukee: Marquette U.P, 1984).

The following analysis draws on a selection of two films and a trilogy. They all use a rather exaggerated and surrealistic representation of *costumbrismo* and they are giving hints on the state of Spanish society and the broader context it was part of with the arrival of the nineties. Eventually, the films are texts from which we can throw new findings on Spanish cultural history and the current situation of this land.

I argue that there are two important interrelated points at stake in the country's new heritage politics that can be studied by looking at film *costumbrismo*. On the one hand, after forty years of stagnation and homogenization the films portray the rapidly achieved cultural dynamism in line with transnational trends, which would include intangible heritage and cultural diversity preservation. On the other hand, it is in that new promotion of cultural heterogeneity in line with the international anxieties where we can study the specific problematic that exist in Spain when defining the identities of the country.

### **2.1 A new being in the world: Intangible heritage is refigured**

At the dawn of the big world celebrations that Sevilla, Barcelona and Madrid were about to host in 1992 and 1993, director José Luis Cuerda released his comedy “It’s Dawn, and That Should Be Enough” (*Amanece que no es poco*, 1989). Set in an imaginary Castillian village, the film narrates the story of a college professor at the University of Oklahoma visiting his hometown on sabbatical. Yet, the script soon deviates into a plethora of surreal and whimsical events and side-stories whose protagonists range from a group of American researchers seeking for Spanish cultural authenticity, police officers that help the inhabitants to get drunk or an African villager dressed in tribal clothes even he was born and raised in Castilla. The bizarre representation of the everyday life and customs of the village [*costumbrismo*] is the driving theme. Although the film did not make an impact at the box office and rather had little audience rates at that time, nowadays it is considered a cult movie in the history of Spanish cinema.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that its atypical and nonsensical elements might had hid a fine reading of postdictatorial accounts that was not grasped at the time of its production.<sup>38</sup>

To the accusations of bizarreness and absurdity that Cuerda's production received he answered that “*It's Dawn, and That Should Be Enough* portrays a very sane vision of the country's reality”.<sup>39</sup> Following a Berlanguan narrative language,<sup>40</sup> in his parody Cuerda is depicting Spain's interest for showing Europe the rapidly achieved maturity as a nation as well as the economic and

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<sup>37</sup> Alberto Mira Nourelles, *The A to Z of Spanish Cinema* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 97.

<sup>38</sup> Nacho Jarne Esparcia, “Amanece, que no es poco” in *Making Off. Cuadernos de cine y educación* 72 (March 2015), 6-16.

<sup>39</sup> Diego Muñoz, “Amanece, que no es poco, un filme loco, loco, loco” *La Vanguardia* (January 4, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> The term “Berlanguan” refers to those productions that are influenced by the work of Spanish film director Luis García Berlanga who, as we mentioned in the introduction, made social critiques and satires through the use of *costumbrismo*.

cultural dynamism apparently attained by the early nineties.<sup>41</sup> One of the opening scenes is revelatory of such approach. In this passage, the Professor is trying to check how the people in the village are doing after his long time away when out of the sudden, one of the inhabitants who was apparently walking behind fantastically appears far ahead of him while still standing behind. “I have the ability to double myself”, responds the latter. The scene sets light on the following progress of the movie as the director is going to mock the obsession of Spain for becoming a progressive country and surpassing the past.

As the grand old man of Spanish cultural history Joe Labanyi argues, since the transition to democracy Spain has done much to imprint and enhance a sense of Europeanness into its cultural fabric, in an attempt to overcome the feeling of “lagging behind” that accompanied the Francoist period.<sup>42</sup> In the early nineties, showing Europe the new face sometimes meant pushing that attitude without reflecting on how the big slip from past forms to the full integration into Europe (1986) had operated. Indeed, authors in the field of Spanish Cultural Studies have considered that such accelerated change caused a certain state of “schizophrenia” due to the speed and the complexity of the changes that radically altered their society in less than thirty years.<sup>43</sup> The sentiment of a new being in the world while not having thoughtfully gone beyond the past is what Cuerda’s passage represents. The director had already investigated on the accelerated embracement of international modern trends with his film series “Total”, where a Spanish rural village is out of the sudden considered to be London.

In *It’s Dawn and that Should be Enough* Cuerda goes on and poses a surreal but at the same time revelatory satire of the blanks that the race for joining the core modern progressive Europe might leave. At some point in the middle of the plot the inhabitants democratize the right to be another character. That way, they can rearrange the roles each person plays in the rural community, such as the church’s bell ringer or the priest. Eventually, they also vote for the rearrangement of their ritualistic events like the patronal festivity. On top of that, the group of American researchers witnesses these popular votings. This passage implies the common old critique of Spain’s lack of a widespread coherent democratic culture after its transition years, a fact that was not deeply scrutinized in face of the optimism that reined the very early nineties. More importantly, by adding the group of American observers Cuerda is questioning how Spain welcomed Western increasing interest for articulating a set of mechanisms to preserve and promote intangible heritage globally.

In 1989 UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore due to the widespread preoccupation of maintaining intangible culture at a time of

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<sup>41</sup> Sebastian Balfour & Alejandro Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain* (Oxford: Oxford U.P, 2007), 167.

<sup>42</sup> Jo Labanyi, “Introduction” in *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* (1995), 17.

<sup>43</sup> Helen Graham & Antonio Sánchez, “Accelerated development and social schizophrenia,” in *Spanish Cultural Studies* (1995), 408.

intense globalization and fear for cultural homogenization. This measure would be later criticized and modified as it did not meet the aspirations of producers of intangible heritage to control their heritage nor did it offer a process for informed consent and consultation with individuals and groups whose heritage had to be safeguarded.<sup>44</sup> Cuerda's film (released in 1989) recalls how Spain is aware of the new intangible heritage preservation debates of that time. We can find it in a dialogue where the village's major paternalistically tells Ngé Ndome (the only African inhabitant) how he is "very concern with new trends on safeguarding and integrating ethnic minorities and customs nowadays." Nevertheless, the director is satirizing this conversation as he intentionally portrays in Ndome all the superficial and shallow stereotypes that are associated to his ethnic group (good at dancing, promiscuous, dressing with tribal clothes). Spain is portrayed as a new international actor dealing with its traditions but which also is learning how to respect other cultural customs by following international recommendations.

Cuerda then presents Spain's particularities, including the political senselessness of the country's past, but at the same time reflects on how the new broader international interests for preserving cultural specialties are present and affect Spanish customs and consciousness. In this self-referential line, Spanish director Juan José Bigas Luna's film trilogy Iberian portraits [*Retratos ibéricos*] might have been the most recognizable cinematic exploration of the underlying tensions in Spanish society with its new relation to Europe and the world.<sup>45</sup> Though each art of his trilogy –*Ham Ham* (1992), *Golden Balls* (1993) and *The Tit and The Moon* (1994)– operates as an autonomous film, they can also be read as one whole oeuvre. Yet, Bigas Luna took an approach more reachable and accessible to analyze by the foreign public, a reason why his trilogy gained the attention of international film studies and the international critique.<sup>46</sup>

Bigas followed a distinctive enunciative strategy that, through the exaggeration of old clichés about Spanishness, aimed at narrating the evolution towards the Europeanized Spain of the nineties. He sought to portray the idea of a Spanishness resemanticised by transnational forces and, like José Luis Cuerda did, he tried to pose on the audience views on what Spanishness meant.<sup>47</sup> He triggers such approach right from the start in *Ham, Ham*, a story about a young lady called Silvia (played by Penélope Cruz) debating between her love for the wealthy but dependent heir of an underwear factory (Luis) and her love for Raúl, a passionate Spaniard who dreams of being a bullfighter (played by Javier Bardem). In one of the first scenes, José Luis unexpectedly asks Silvia for her hand under the big

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<sup>44</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 107.

<sup>45</sup> Mavin A. D'Lugo, "La teta i la lluna: The Form of Transnational Cinema in Spain" in *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/ Media/ Representation* ed. Marsha Kinder (London: Duke U.P, 1997), 200.

<sup>46</sup> *Ham Ham* won the silver Lion in Venice in 1992, *Golden Balls* won the special jury prize in San Sebastian and *The Tit and The Moon* won the Osella prize for best screenplay in Venice. At the same time, international film theorists such as Marvin D'Lugo or Paul Julian Smith have studied Luna's work in depth.

<sup>47</sup> Mavin A. D'Lugo, "La teta i la lluna: The Form of Transnational Cinema in Spain" in *Refiguring Spain: Cinema* (1997), 200.



billboard of a Spanish Osborne bull (a wine marketing sign put alongside the roads during Franquism which has historically been associated with the totalitarian homogenized idea of Spanishness). The ring ends up being the metal cap of a coca-cola can. This narrative resource is a diegetic point of departure in Luna's production as it represents that articulation of Spanish traditions within an ever globalizing world that the director aims at investigating by destabilizing the construction of a cultural image of Spain based in stereotypes of gypsy life, flamenco dance and bullfighting.<sup>48</sup>

In *Ham Ham* Silvia decides to go for the love of Raúl -who represents the anachronistic idea of Spanishness as a culture of passion, bullfighting and masculinity- over José Luis -a boy up to date with modern international trends but who has no personality-. Nevertheless, she ends up choosing none of them. As film theorist Marvin D'Lugo argues, that pairing of national and transnational narratives helps to establish a special kind of allegory in the film as though it were "a conceptual instrument for enabling [Spaniards] to grasp the implications of their new being-in-the-world".<sup>49</sup> What we could extract from *Ham, Ham's* passage is that Spain is being affected by internal and external factors and by doing so it refigures itself and its cultures emerging as a new global player open to continuous reinventions.<sup>50</sup>

With the second film *Golden Balls* (1993), a story about a Spanish real estate corrupted broker named Benito González (played by Javier Bardem), Bigas Luna goes on with his study of that first symbolic marriage between Coca-Cola and the *Osborne* bull. Set in the southeastern coastal area of Spain, the film is more focused on the assimilation of neocapitalist behaviours and how they impacted the collective consciousness of Spanish people. Here, the problematic that José Luis Cuerda expressed in terms of a society not educated in dealing with a democratic culture shifts to the economic realm. *Golden Balls* is rather an investigation on how real estate businesses manifest themselves in Spanish new democratic culture. The results were on the one hand, an obsession with recklessly building all over the Mediterranean coast vacation resorts inspired in the city of Miami; and on the other hand, the wider manifestations of post-dictatorial economic corruption (the so-called eighties *pelotazo*).<sup>51</sup> The film is a representation of what cultural historian John Hooper called the Spanish "cult of excess"<sup>52</sup> but it also acts as a link for understanding the early nineties' blossoming of local and regional policies for immaterial heritage preservation. Luna is going to unfold that connection through the protagonist's dreamworld.

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<sup>48</sup> Bigas Luna & Cuca Canals, *Crónica Pasional de Jamón Jamón, Huevos de Oro y La Teta y La Luna* (Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores, 1994), 16.

<sup>49</sup> Marvin A. D' Lugo, "Bigas de Luna, Huevos de Oro: Regional Art, Global Commerce" *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Studies* 1 (1997), 71.

<sup>50</sup> Sebastian Balfour & Alejandro Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain* (2007), 204.

<sup>51</sup> The term refers to real estate business of doubtful legality.

<sup>52</sup> John Hooper, *The New Spaniards* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 196.

After the character Benito González fails to amass a fortune in the Spanish coasts, he dreams of buildings falling down while only an obelisk with a Catalanian traditional hat [*barretina*] on its top stands. After this dream, he moves to Miami as he doesn't want to give up on his real estate imperial dreams. Nonetheless, he doesn't succeed and instead he ends up in a state of confusion and disenchantment. This scene is making allusion to the later interest of regions for revitalizing customs in face of the cultural dilemmas that appeared with Spain's new interaction with the market economics and enterprise culture. Benito's confusion and the prevalence of that *barretina* (sign of a regional culture) in his unconscious while he sits in his Miami house hints on the later interest of Spanish regions and localities for working on their specialness. This is going to be more extensively represented in the last film of the trilogy *The Tit and the Moon* (1994) as well as in the film *Cows* (1992), by Julio Medem. As I seek to analyze in the following section, these two films elaborate on local and regional cultural anxieties in Spain.

All in all, there are three interlinked main points that we could outline regarding how *Ham Ham*, *It's Dawn and that Should be Enough* and *Golden Balls* represent the new interactions between internal cultural traditions and their entanglement with the new sociopolitical realities during the nineties. First, it is complex to define signs of Spanishness as this is marked by a close past of repression and promotion of anachronistic and homogenizing folklore. As we saw, in these films the directors lampoon traditions and signs of Spanishness that had been promoted by Francoism such as the Spanish Osborne Bull or the male culture. Secondly, the arrival of globalization and the consequent international elaboration of new policies for the preservation of cultures' immaterial heritage is also a big factor affecting Spanish consciousness. Finally, there is a widespread confusion within Spaniards when defining themselves brought by the country's internal fast transformation and its accelerated reinscription into the international map. That being behind and at the same time pushing to be ahead or the fast race for building skyscrapers and marrying coca-cola are representative of such disorientation.

The three factors aforementioned could explain the upturn for the local and regional revitalization of immaterial traditions that took place in the nineties, which anthropologists such as María Ángeles Sánchez documented.<sup>53</sup> All the same, the blossoming of a bigger interest for regional and local specialness might have been affected by a specific necessity of redefining identities in Spain. These productions revisit and refigure the traditions and visual style of Spain's cultures leading to one more questioning: What can the films tell us about the search for local and regional identity ties in Spain?

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<sup>53</sup> María Ángeles Sánchez, *Fiestas populares: España día a día* (Madrid: Santillana, 1998), 12.

## 2.2 Redefining cultural identities in Spain

The film *The Tit and The Moon* (last part in Bigas Luna's Iberian trilogy) starts with an image of a shaky Catalan *Castell* that the nine year-old protagonist (Tete) aims at climbing. The *Castell* is a Catalonian tradition consisting of a competition in which teams of people form human pyramids in the main squares of towns and cities. This custom was revived after Franco's prohibition of non-official folklore and it was further fostered with the transference of power for the preservation of immaterial culture to the Catalan Autonomous Community in 1993.<sup>54</sup> The policy gave wider independency to this region to promote its cultural identity. Yet, Tete's precarious position dramatizes the unstable space of Catalan community, which was in the throes of reshaping itself around a series of internal and external economic, social and political changes.<sup>55</sup>

Made in 1994, *The Tit and the Moon* narrates the story of the young boy Tete and his obsession for finding the perfect lactating breast. Tete is no longer obtaining the desired milk from his mum so he tries to find it in the breasts of a French woman, who finally doesn't fulfill Tete's desires either. Bigas uses this concept to explore the desire of Catalonians (represented in the figure of Tete) to combine with Europe (French woman) and to distance from Spanishness (Tete's mother). In this context, the director is now investigating and challenging the trends for the promotion of regional cultural identities as non-related to Spain anymore. Yet, with *Ham Ham* the director had also tackled the idea of Spanishness understood as the one represented in icons of intangible heritage such as bullfighting, and masculinity. One of the most representative scenes of such critique might be the moment when actress Penélope Cruz shelters from the rain under the broken cardboard balls of an Osborne bull billboard.

Furthermore, Luna had also criticized with *Golden Balls* the delusive aims of embracing capitalist culture as a main feature of Spanish refigured post-totalitarian identity. The end of this film is revelatory of such approach as we see Benito (Javier Bardem) destroying his apartment in Miami and then crying next to his bidet,<sup>56</sup> the only memory of Spain left after his total embracement of American capitalism. However, there is another passage that supports and paths the way to Bigas' audiovisual study of cultural identities. Before moving to Miami, Benito throws a party in which people end up singing karaoke. Jealous when an American actor starts singing the U.S.A hit *Only You*, the protagonist grabs the microphone and intones a folkloric ballad by Spanish singer Julio Iglesias over the foreign tones. He is wearing a red Catalan *barretina* while he sings.

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<sup>54</sup> The law on Catalan Heritage was promulgated on September 30th 1993 [Ley 9/1993, de 30 de septiembre, del Patrimoni Cultural Catalán].

<sup>55</sup> Mavin A. D'Lugo, "La teta i la lluna: The Form of Transnational Cinema in Spain" in *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/Media/Representation* ed. Marsha Kinder (London: Duke U.P, 1997), 198.

<sup>56</sup> Throughout the film Bigas pays special interest to the sign of the bidet as a bathroom appliance present in all Spanish homes but not that widespread in other countries.

With the *Tit* the director shifts to the realm of regional nationalisms. In other words, that *barretina* that was still standing after Javier Bardem collapses in *Golden Balls* is not the absolute solution to the confusion that communities in Spain face when defining their identities. According to D'Lugo, in *The Tit* the notion of some profound regional subculture linked in little Tete's mind with his position in his own immediate family, is derided as merely a transitory stage of communal allegiance to be superseded in time by other forms of social affiliation. Hence, Bigas is criticizing fixed and stable forms of nationalist narrative by lampooning the obsession with promoting Catalan intangible heritage. For instance, he characterizes Tete's father by absurdly being always dressed up with the Catalan folkloric uniform [*beret*]. Luna proposes a regional/national/global interface that effectively reveals the relativistic nature and shifting centers involved in formulations of cultural communities.<sup>57</sup> As Expósito has defined, in *Iberian Portraits*,

“There is a recycling of old national stereotypes in postmodern and ironic simulacra, which highlight the radical arbitrariness of national identity. Moreover, we find a critique of the ways, both formal and ideological, that sustain national identities as identitarian entelechies (*Golden Balls*) or, in some cases, as self-evident tautologies that can only lead to cultural self-absorption (*The Tit and Moon*).”<sup>58</sup>

Then, the Catalan director proposes a refiguration of cultural identities in Spain away from confrontations and essentialist localisms and regionalisms. I argue that Luna represents this idea in the figure of Tete's new born brother. The brother is born in a context of Europeanization and globalization but keeps linked to the lactating breast of the mum (Spanishness) while wearing the *barretina* (sign of Catalan identity) on top of his head. We could look at this narrative as a postmodern identitarian pastiche but with its symbolic ambiguity the director rather searches for a symbiosis of tradition and the modern, of regional identity and transnational hybridity away from the internal confrontations that persist in Spain.

In this same line, the Basque director Julio Medem released his film *Cows* [*Vacas*, 1992] in order to investigate about the complex question of Basque cultural identity. I use the term complex due to the history of violence that has surrounded this community. The claims for more political independency and cultural identity preservation policies in the Basque Country<sup>59</sup> have been historically obscured due to the use of terrorist violence by some members of the Basque community. In this sense, *Cows* narrates the story of three generations of two rival neighboring families living in a rural valley somewhere in the Basque province of *Guipuzkoa*. The families are clans (Iriguibel and

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<sup>57</sup>Mavin A. D'Lugo, “La teta i la lluna: The Form of Transnational Cinema in Spain” in *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/ Media/ Representation* ed. Marsha Kinder (London: Duke U.P, 1997), 198.

<sup>58</sup> Alfredo Martínez Expósito, “Ambivalencia, performatividad y nación en La teta y la luna de José Juan Bigas Luna” *Garzoa: revista de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Literarios de Cultura Popular* 2 (2002), 170.

<sup>59</sup>Law Basque on Immaterial heritage preservation in 1990, BO País Vasco,157/1990 (August 6, 1990).

Mendiluce) devoted to the traditional Basque sport of *aizkolariak* [woodmen], hence their rivalry. Their lives are marked by the Third Carlist War (1872-1876), the First World War (1914-1918) and the fatidic Civil War (1936-1939). The Irigibel-Mendiluce historical confrontation is an allegory to the historical disagreements within Basque communities on how they relate to the Spanish cultures. As the director explained,

“In the Basque conflict there is something unsolved and a frustration. I didn’t want to set my story in the present because it was harder to approach it for me so I decided to locate it in the past in order to disentangle the current situation. I chose the period between the Third Carlist War and the Civil War since I think that, differences aside, the essence of this problematic remained similar between the Civil War and the present times (early nineties).”<sup>60</sup>

According to Medem, Basque culture has been marked by the stagnation of certain anachronistic ideas of identity locked by the violent historical accounts (from the Third Carlist Wars to the creation of the terrorist group *ETA*). Indeed, he uses the same actors to play the three generations in order to portray a sense of circular trap where identities are seized acquiring a sense of delusive mysticism. In the film, the myth is the magical aura that the characters of the movie give to the tree that grows in the middle of the forest that separates the two family houses. Around the tree, all the confrontations and offences occur. Yet, love relations also take place around it. The director uses the milk cows (characteristic animal in the Basque rural economic system) as the only impassible spectators of all happenings. *Cows* stands as a rejection of teleological nationalist narratives, whether Spanish or Basque and it offers alternative ways of perceiving nationalist symbols and social structures as a rather evolving system. Yet, it doesn’t promote the erasure of cultures’ traditions and identitarian features - in the film the tree never dies- but rather their reconfiguration by accepting their continuous transformation.

By the end of the film, the last two members of the Irigibel-Mendiluce families escape on a horse after the bursting of the Civil War. Some minutes earlier, the horse had bumped eye-to-eye into the milk cow. With this last powerful visual encounter, Medem poses in the cow’s eye a call for the non-oblivion of cultural memory. Sooner or later it will be necessary to critically look into those cows’ eyes to understand and sort out identity confrontations. As the director expressed, he uses this “symbolic methapor as a message against violence and for the promotion of new ways of approaching Basque and Spanish cultural history.”<sup>61</sup>

Hence, Bigas Luna and Medem are portraying the revitalization of regional customs and immaterial traditions that took place since the early nineties. This trend was actually manifested all over Europe, due to the new concerns on preserving cultural heterogeneity and diversity at a time of

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<sup>60</sup> Vacas, entrevista a Julio Medem para un País de Cine 2, DVD, *El País* (2004).

<sup>61</sup> Idem.

globalization and bigger transnational interactions.<sup>62</sup> Yet, the film-makers are also analyzing the country's specific reasons for such revitalization and the internal identity anxieties the trend held. Their audiovisual outcomes point at two necessary changes in the collective consciousness of Spaniards. First, realizing that all cultural identities in Spain (Basque, Catalan, Castilian...) have to go beyond the national context and approach their redefinition accepting that they are influenced by the current transnational context. Secondly, the country needs to recover its historical memory and to face the repression suffered by some cultural communities.<sup>63</sup> In this second point lies the specificity of Spanish communities' identity redefinitions: they were promoted, safeguarded and revitalized without a common study of what they were and how they were homogenized during Franquism. In other words, the fast political and legal articulations made since the *Transición* years in order to recognize the existing heterogeneity lacked a common cultural study of the communities' culture and history. The blossoming of immaterial heritage preservation during the nineties aimed at overcoming a homogenizing globalization but also a traumatic totalitarian homogenization which failed to be mentioned and addressed during the *Transición*.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

Popular festivities, folkloric suits, old traditional sports...since the early nineties regional and local communities in Spain made considerable efforts aimed at consolidating their differences and assessing their identifying features through their immaterial heritage preservation policies. *Costumbrismo* films mirrored such tendency. But, how is the representation of cultural customs in Spanish film *costumbrismo* during the early nineties interlinked with the anxieties for the preservation of cultural identities?

In the early 1990s in Spain there was a complex situation in which the revitalization of traditions and the concerns for immaterial heritage preservation within the country's Autonomous Communities were the result of two constitutive interrelated factors. The first one was the creation of international recommendations on cultural diversity preservation at a time of new political integrations and of economic and cultural globalization. The second one was the regional and sub-national claims for recognition (such as Catalan, Basque or Galician) after a totalitarian past of cultural repression and

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<sup>62</sup> The anthropological study *Revitalizing European Rituals* stands as one of the first field works documenting this 1990s trend for the revitalization of rituals and traditions in Europe. See: Jeremy, Boissevain, ed, *Revitalizing European Rituals* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>63</sup> The draft on the "Law of Historical Memory" [*Ley de la Memoria Histórica*] of 2006 aimed at recovering not only the memory of the civil war victims but also those repressed communities and cultural identities such the Basque or Catalans. Yet, the Congress failed to reach an agreement and no common research on the country's cultural memory was made.

<sup>64</sup> As Joan Ramón Resina has argued the first decades of the new democratic regime brought the silencing of past injustices such as the repression of those identities that diverged from the official Francoist narratives. See: Joan Ramon Resina, *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 19.

a democratic *Transición* based on the silencing of past offences. Therefore, Spain was fully inscribed in the international map participating in wider trends at the same time as the country's communities where for the first time articulating their internal policies and performing local customs for the preservation of their heritage.

Then, how did that search for local and regional identity ties in Spain manifest itself in its film *costumbrismo* of the early nineties? Film *costumbrismo* portrayed the consequences of a fast internal refiguration transmitting a certain sense of schizophrenia inside Spain. They argue that Spaniards experienced a sort of disorientation brought by the fast assimilation of new cultural influences from outside and the disentanglement of the old social, cultural, and political order inside the country. By decontextualizing customary practices, showing characters that struggle to live in a refigured world order and adding surreal events such as the doubling of a person, the films suggest such confusion. Furthermore, the symbolism their directors make use of -with Bigas Luna showing those *Osborne* bulls falling apart or that kid not knowing where to find a lactating breast- represent such schizophrenic state of Spanish collective consciousness. In other words, the *costumbrista* films analyzed in this research expound that not only the arrival of a more homogenizing new world order affected that state of confusion but also the fact that for the first time since totalitarian years, the heterogeneous cultural identities were no longer hampered. Yet, it was relevant to wonder to which extent the collective schizophrenia the films portray is a consequence of the former cause rather than the latter.

So, after forty years of cultural homogenization imposed by Franquism, to what extent can the representation of regional and local immaterial culture and customs in the Spanish film production of the early nineties be explained by postmodernist interpretations of cultural identity? The struggle to articulate customs and traditions in a post-national context that the films depict are not distanced from the wider transnational trends on cultural diversity preservation of the early nineties. In this sense, we could argue that the Spanish audiovisual productions analyzed in this research portray close-ups of the transnational postmodern anxieties on identity definitions. We can observe such approach in the pastiches of the religious and the secular, the traditional and the modern or the indigenous and the foreign the films make.

Yet, with this investigation I have shown how it is rather the way of approaching and dealing with the past history of Spanish multiple identities what is specifically at stake and which has specially affected the state of Spanishnesses. The sense of postmodern schizophrenia in Spain is the result of having disregarded the historical memory of the country's cultural communities during the *Transición* years. This also explains the 1990s boom for the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Spain at an Autonomous-Communities scale.

As a result, the films consider the necessity of jointly recovering the country's historical memory and of facing that shared repression suffered by cultural communities. Among others, if the

origin and history of that *castell* (a Catalan popular tradition) that we saw in Bigas Luna's *The Tit and the Moon* or the reason why violence was the resort taken by some people in that land of *aizkolaris* that Medem represents in *Cons* are not approached together, fragmentation will persist. If only independent regional policies for the promotion of heritage heterogeneity exist without a common project for the recovery of cultural and historical memory, cultural stagnation and internal identity confrontations will prevail in Spain.



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