The Dynamics of the Mother Archetype in Mexican Cinema Shaped by Women: Analysis of Pioneer Matilde Landeta's Screenwriting and Film Directing in *La Negra Angustias*

by

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In Mexican cinema, the image of the mother has dominated the national discourse through the creation of myths and female archetypes connected with the universal Madonna-Whore dichotomy. These archetypes have proliferated in Mexican culture and are rooted on the Guadalupe[1]-Malinche[2] paradigm, continually reconfigured since the nineteenth century and reshaped during every national project. Various representations of this alternative set of "good mother"-"bad mother" archetypes are found in different expressions through popular culture, especially after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. But even before, romantic literature dealing with the Guadalupe-Malinche binary, such as José Olmedo y Lama´s essay "Malintzin" (1874) as well as the first novel dealing with the Malinche myth: *Doña Marina* (1883), written by Irineo Paz, offer examples of cultural representations that compete for the hearts and minds of a selected group of educated male Catholic Mexican readers, mostly white Creole, and a few privileged "Mestizos."

With the establishment of the young film industry, the national mother dichotomy of Guadalupe-Malinche began to reach a wider audience within the first decades of the twentieth century. Some novels such as Federico Gamboa's *Santa* (1903) and the Venezuelan Ròmulo Gallegos´ *Doña Bárbara* (1929) explore the possibility of a potential reconfiguration of binary oppositions regarding the role of women and mothers by inserting the creation of new female identities, such as the "redeemed-through-death-whore" in *Santa* and the "Devourer mother" in *Doña Bárbara*. These female prototypes got to the big screen and became very popular in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s while galvanizing the original Guadalupe-Malinche opposition.

Another enormous cultural influence during the first part of the twentieth century derives from the long tradition of the "novel of the Mexican Revolution," (1910-1917) usually dominated by male authors. Thus, Matilde Landeta's unpublished screenplay (Landeta1949)[3], and her resulting film adaptation (1949) of Francisco Rojas González´s novel *La negra Angustias* [*Black Angustias*] (Rojas González 1944), are rare exceptions as texts written by women, that deal with the revolution, and which portray an Afro-Mexican "soldadera" (woman soldier) mother. This essay examines the representation of motherhood on the battlefield by comparing the three versions of Angustias's story: Rojas González's novel, Landeta's screenplay adaptation, and also the film directed by Landeta. Although Landeta generally follows the story traced by the original source, the screenplay adaptation and the film proper display significant adaptation differences that beg further analysis. The idea of the Mexican mother as a self-denying, unselfish woman, who always puts her children's and husband's interests before hers, has historically served as an object of consumption in the cinema industry. Julia Tuñón observes that, customarily, the good mother in Mexican film should preferably be a long-suffering woman who endures all kids of torments, pains, and misfortunes, frequently dying in the process (Tuñón 1998: 73). In this respect, Landeta's adapted screenplay is an exception to the preferred melodramatic formula of the self-sacrificing mother, the image that was successfully sold in Mexican popular culture for decades, especially during the golden age of Mexican film.[4]

The concept of motherhood has traditionally functioned as a common cultural tool to keep intact established gender roles within the traditional masculine oriented power structure of Mexican society. In addition to exploring the notion of the combatant mother in film, I also address the concept of "mestizaje," since these two elements have historically been closely related to the idea of national identity. Coined during the colonial period, "mestizaje" stems from the term "mestizo[5]" included in the system of castes. "Mestizaje" comprises the process through which that blood mixing takes place. In his famous essay, *La Raza Cósmica* [*The Cosmic Race*], originally published in 1925, José Vasconcelos asserts in his thesis that Mexicans (who he describes as mestizos) are the new superior race. He suggests that through mestizaje, Mexicans have evolved into a new race to lead the world (Vasconcelos 1997: 97-98). The government of Mexico enthusiastically embraced this doctrine to elicit racial pride, and incorporated it into the education plan. Vasconcelos's essay was consistent with the government's post Mexican Revolution view that all ethnic groups should be combined into a common one that would engender Mexican national identity.[6] The symbolic importance of motherhood and mestizaje in Mexican culture has persisted through every national discourse since the nineteenth century. By analyzing Landeta's adaptation against other film representations, I illustrate how within the history of revolutionary melodrama, the cinematic coexistence of Mexican fixed feminine archetypes such as the "mother" and the "soldadera" is hardly achievable. In addition, I address the notion of race in *La negra Angustias* by focusing on the historically difficult reception of negritude in Mexican culture.

Black Angustias, by Rojas Gonález's, is a quasi-biographical novel that narrates the participation in the Mexican Revolution of a poor, illiterate Afro-Mexican young woman from a small rural little town who, forced to leave her predominantly mestizo community after killing in self-defense, suddenly becomes a commander in charge of a group of revolutionary men. Angustias is the first female leader, and the first Afro-Mexican woman commandant of the 1910 Mexican Revolution to be represented both in literature and cinema. Almost forty years later, both Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) and the film adaptation (1993) portray Gertrudis, another mulatta "soldadera." By analyzing these two Black women combatants, as well as other mothers who are revolutionary soldiers in Mexican film, I discuss how cultural and power dynamics operate in connection to the concept of motherhood. In addition, by considering the Afro-Mexican element, I explore how the notions of race, gender and motherliness are (mis)represented in Rojas González's original source, and how they are interpreted and revised in Landeta's screenplay and film proper. I argue that as a Black woman in Mexico, Angustias is socially ostracized from the outset in the three primary texts analyzed in this essay. Given the history of race and power in Mexico, it is not difficult to understand why Angustias, who in the story is a poor, Black, illiterate, defiant woman, is automatically exiled not only from her mythical, mestizo rural town of "Mesa del Aire" but also from the larger idea of a coherent Mexican "imagined community" (Anderson 1983)[7] of the desired national project based on "mestizaje." My analysis mostly focuses on the progress of Angustias's transformation, as well as the semiotics that take place in the story from the original source (Rojas González 1944) to Landeta's screenplay (1949), and finally, the film proper (1949). I believe that it is fair to consider whether some specific changes during the adaptation process occur because a woman screenwriter and director adapted the original text. Would these specific alterations to Rojas Gonzalez's novel happen in a similar way if the adapter were a male screenwriter and/or director? Therefore, it is important to explore the evolution of the story from Rojas Gonzalez's original source to Landeta's adapted interpretations: both the screenplay and the film.

The novel relates the story of a mulatta woman who served as a colonel under Emiliano Zapata[8] during the Mexican Revolution. The narration centers on the struggle of Angustias, an orphan whose white mother dies in childbirth, while her Black father is a Robin Hood-type bandit who is serving time in jail. Since her birth, Angustias has lived with the town's healer, Doña Crecencia, and from an early age, she develops a phobia towards heterosexual sex, seemingly after witnessing her yellow goat die after giving birth, but this symbolic image does connect with Angustias's condition as orphan. She reunites with her father when he returns to the community and bonds with him while learning, from his oral stories, about the struggle for equality and social justice. Angustias rejects the traditional role of women, and identifies with her father, the legendary bandit Antón Farrera. Harassed at first by the female villagers for rejecting the traditional role for women by refusing to get married, she is eventually forced to flee the community after killing Laureano, a man who was about to rape her.

Upon being rescued by a man called Güitlacoche, and recognized as the daughter of the Black bandit, Farrera, Angustias unexpectedly becomes a commander who fights on Zapata's side. Tougher than most of the men inspired by her revolutionary fervor, Angustias nonetheless faces her downfall when she falls in love, and marries a fair-skinned, middle-class teacher. At the conclusion of Rojas González's novel, the once fierce female leader is conquered, and reduced to nothing by the power of love. She completely surrenders to a husband who disdains her, financially exploits her, and tells others that she is not his wife but his "mistress," because he is ashamed of being married to a Mulatta. Before Angustias decides to kidnap Manuel she confesses her love while Manuel replies: "…Manuel: In other words, my union with you would be considered… not a marriage, but an absurd cross" (Landeta 96). Angustias is, nonetheless, unconscious to her pitiful destiny, and ultimately marries Manuel. In the last image of the novel, the reader finds Angustias obliviously singing while she performs house chores, and tends to her baby.

It is necessary to underscore that Rojas González's narrative reinforces traditional stereotypes concerning Black people, forged since the colonial period, as well as a subtle but sustained misogyny. Several critics such as Janet Hampton (1991), Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas (2000), Robert McKee Irwin (2003), and Laura Kanost (2010), have already discussed at length the problematic aspects present in the novel with respect to race and gender. Indeed, the original source emphasizes on Angustias's ignorance, a propensity for alcoholism, a violent and cruel predisposition, as well as an inclination to take the law into her own hands. One of the most shocking images in the original story is when Angustias resolves to punish the sexually aggressive Efrén "El Picado" by castrating him: "I am going to judge you in the name of the girls…the ones you took advantage of" (my translation, Rojas González 55). Although this scandalous scene does carry into Landeta's screenplay and film, it is only in the novel where Rojas González's Angustias is stripped of nearly any trace of good judgment, by constantly allowing her emotions to rule over her decisions. It is also only in the original source where, in the end, this indomitable, atypical woman is completely transformed into a domesticated submissive housewife after falling in love, and eventually marrying the blond man that she hires to teach her how to read. Her "proto-feminism" is ridiculed by the way she lets herself be fully dominated by her husband during the conclusive part of the novel. In sharp contrast, Landeta rejects this degrading fate for Angustias and offers two different endings for the screenplay, and the film respectively.

Seymour Menton (1954) has pointed out that Rojas González's Angustias has an unparalleled resemblance to Rómulo Gallegos´s *Doña Bárbara* (1947).[9] During the process of civilizing the female character in the novel, Angustias is a combination of Doña Bárbara and Marisela. In the Gallegos story, both Doña Bárbara and Marisela fall in love with the enlightened Santos Luzardo, who is able to control, tame and civilize Marisela while nullifying Doña Bárbara. Similarly, Angustias gets symbolically "whitened" thus becoming docile by her desire to be literate, which leads to her domestication through marriage to the white teacher with whom she falls in love.

Marriage is the institution that finally disarms and puts Angustias in her socially expected place, according to cultural-assigned gender roles. In Gallegos's novel, Marisela gets rescued by the man she marries, while in Rojas González´s text Angustias is taken advantage of by her husband, yet in the end both women become submissive to their white, cultured teacher-husbands, as they are symbolically incorporated into the national project as wives and mothers who contribute to the building of the nation. In fact, what is underscored in Rojas González's novel is that before Angustias could become a mother, her rebellious nature has to be restrained, first by literacy, and then through the institution of marriage. In this respect, Landeta's adaptation of the original source does destabilize and resist the traditional role of the Mexican mother, in both the screenplay and the film.

In contrast with the original source, Landeta's adaptation manipulates the story in such a way that not only renders Angustias more human, dignified, and simply a more credible character seeking a certain degree of female solidarity, but by allowing the combatant to keep her agency, Landeta has Angustias awaken to an incipient feminist consciousness in the two different endings offered both in the screenplay and in the film. However, it is only in the screenplay where Angustias is allowed to reconcile her transgressive female identity with motherhood. It is precisely that ephemeral gap, or transient narrative location, where the screenplay as an outcast genre makes its home, where Angustias is able to reconcile her transgressive female identity with motherhood. Thus, Landeta's screenplay adaptation offers an alternate interpretation to the traditional role of the combatant mother within the national imagery through which the Mexican Revolution functions in most films; only as background for impossible "soldadera" characters, and romantic revolutionary adventures.[10]

On the other hand, the concept of race is problematic in Rojas González's novel and in Landeta´s screenplay and film. Laura Kanost points out that the objectification of Angustias as a Black woman in Rojas Gonzalez's novel fundamentally takes place thorough a male gaze that persistently controls the narrative (Kanost 2010: 558-559). While I agree with her observation, I argue that a comparable analysis cannot apply to the screenplay or the film due to the lack of the extra-diegetic narrator so dominant in the novel. In fact, within the context of Landeta's versions, Angustias's color is almost irrelevant. Therefore it is the overbearing narrator of Rojas Gonzalez's text the single voice that explicitly and relentlessly expresses, in a racist way, how singular and anomalous this female character is. However, the fact that Landeta places trivial importance to Angustias's color is also problematic because the notion of race never gets significantly explored in either the screenplay or the film proper. Landeta's adaptations are indeed free of an explicit racist narrator; yet traditional stereotypes concerning blackness remain unchallenged as Landeta, for instance, resorts to blackface in the film proper[11]. In addition, it is also only in the adapted film where Angustias, after being rejected by the teacher due to her color, carefully observes her face in the mirror, and breaks down in tears, lamenting the fact that she is Black, while her faithful lieutenant, Güitlacoche, unsuccessfully tries to console her.

Consequently, Landeta's adaptation of *Black Angustias* is undeniably concerned with destabilizing the representation of gender while leaving intact conventional social stratification concerning race in Mexican culture.

Nevertheless, the element of race is intimately connected to the notion of the Mexican mother, thus it is essential to understand how the concepts of "mestizaje" and the Mexican mother structure the foundation on which the modern nation was erected after the Mexican Revolution. "Mestizaje" and "motherhood" are closely intertwined in Mexican culture as mother archetypes such as the "Virgin of Guadalupe" and "La Malinche," that emanate from the national discourse. Consequently, while analyzing the differences that exist in the original source and the adaptations, it is necessary to grasp the symbolic importance of the national feminine archetypes that orbit around the image of the "mother" in Mexican culture.

The Mexican institution of motherhood attained a sacred and patriotic prominence right after the independence from Spain when disparate discourses and narratives started to shape the nascent republic's national identity. Within this context, dormant archetypes and myths were revisited in order to advance the idea of a patriarchal Mexican nation. With the establishment of the young film industry, the Guadalupe-Malinche national mother dichotomy Guadalupe-Malinche is now able to reach the masses, with popular movies such as *Santa* (1931) and *Doña Bárbara* (1946) that only affirm the original Guadalupe-Malinche binary opposition. In fact, the national mother paradigm is not effectively challenged in Mexico until the 1980s, with mothers gradually stepping out of the domestic (physical and symbolic) space, transforming and renovating the traditional socio-cultural roles assigned to them, as the diverse aesthetic and cultural production reflects a robust participation of women.

In this respect, Landeta is an exception since the treatment of Angustias character as mother figure in her screenplay is radically opposed to the Angustias of the original source. In the last part of Rojas González's novel, after Angustias marries her teacher she spontaneously turns into an obedient wife. Her husband, Manuel, orders her to abandon the revolution and surrender to the government in exchange of amnesty. The couple moves to Mexico City and have a child. The reader soon realizes that the husband does not care about her; he becomes a philanderer, only interested in squandering Angustias's pension. In sharp contrast, in the last part of Landeta's screenplay adaptation, after realizing that her husband is unworthy of her, Angustias abandons him and the domestic space where he intends to trap her, and goes back to the public sphere, rejoining the revolution as a commander. Unquestionably, this is one of the first cultural representations, envisioned for film, of a woman character radically challenging the status quo of the Mexican mother archetype. The last scene on the screenplay is shocking; Angustias's husband, Manuel, is bragging to his friend guest that this is his "small house".[12] While drinking tequila, he complains that his "mistress" (as he refers to Angustias) is an impediment to his brilliant political career but that he does not have the heart to abandon her and the child. As Angustias inadvertently overhears Manuel:

> …she bursts into tears…crying disconsolately. Suddenly she reacts, stands up and quickly enters the room…[the camera follows her to see her plant herself in front of Manuel, who looks at her in fright] the friend gets up. Regaining her rough mannerisms, Angustias grabs the bottle from the table, and takes a big drink. Wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, says: This poor woman who you can't find a way to leave and who's so expensive to support has decided to go back to being Coronela Angustias Farrera, you hear me? You can tell your boss to call off your job because I'm going back to my people in the hills. So get out of here and go look for support for your brilliant political career…[DOLLY IN FRONT OF Angustias]. Manuel walks toward her, and she pushes him violently away, snatches the baby from the cradle and a carbine from one corner, and heads for the door (Landeta 1949: 114-15).

Unfortunately, this stunning scene never makes it to the silver screen; it remains in the interim location occupied by the adapted screenplay. Although in the film Angustias also returns to command her troops at the end of the story, she never becomes a mother. Thus the idea of a rebellious mother never materializes for the spectator in the film proper. Only the screenplay offers the possibility of a Black Mexican mother as a revolutionary leader.

The female soldier in Angustias's character complements the archetype of the mother. From the context of the Mexican Revolution, the popular "soldadera," archetype originates, in both literature and film, as a collective model that stands for a homogeneous group of usually indigenous women that find themselves under similar circumstances and fixed patterns of behavior. Usually, these "soldaderas" would take up arms, often becoming high-ranking commanders, fighting side-by-side with the revolutionaries. The problem with this archetype is that instead of questioning or transgressing traditional gender assumptions, and unexplored notions of race and class, film representations of the "soldadera" have only affirmed a cultural model that simplistically diminishes the diverse and complex participation of actual women in the Mexican Revolution. Nevertheless, during the twentieth century, Mexican film maintained, and successfully sold, the standard parameters concerning the conventional "soldadera."

But then again, in sharp contrast with Rojas González´s novel, which does not explain why Angustias becomes unexpectedly a passionate warrior committed to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, Landeta's adaptation do challenge the traditional "soldadera" archetype. For example, although Angustias's father appears in her life several years after her birth, the young girl does bond with her father, establishing a loyal, fraternal relationship with him. This is more evident in Landeta's film through the use of prolepsis, which allows the spectator to observe how the girl develops into a woman while sitting at her father's feet, listening to his bandit stories.

In order to understand the significance of Landeta's adaptation process it is necessary to discern Landeta's engagement with the texts through the oscillation that takes place among the original source, the screenplay and the film proper. For example, after Angustias complains to her father during the second time that Laureano sexually harasses her, in both the novel as well as in the screenplay, Farrera hands his daughter his own knife to defend herself if needed. However, it is only in the film that Angustias opts to steal the knife from his father while he is sleeping. This decisive act permits Angustias a higher degree of agency since she is the only one responsible for making this key choice that changes her life. The knife empowers Angustias, allowing her the possibility of an alternate purpose to the traditional docile domesticity that society expects her to follow; thus stabbing Laureano in self-defense initiates her as a female bandit. Yet this phallic symbol (borrowed or stolen) indeed belongs to her father. In fact, what the core story proposes is that it is simply because of her patriarchal heritage that Angustias is able to claim a place in the Revolution. In the screenplay: Moving the burning branch closer to her face, Angustias coldly orders the old man: "ANGUSTIAS: look at me! Look carefully, who do I remind you of? CUT TO: 193. M.S. Of the little old man, who looks at her, surprised, and Angustias continues: ANGUSTIAS: look at me closely, old man, until… The little man interrumps her: LITTLE OLD MAN: *el negro* Antón Farrera! Yes, you have the same eyes, the same expression, the spitting image. "(Landeta 1949: 47). Therefore, it is only after she is recognized as the daughter of Farrera that one of her men spontaneously bestows her the title of "Coronela" (colonel). Thus Angustias draws on her patriarchal (outcast-bandit) popular legacy in order to insert herself as an active rebellious subject in the Mexican Revolution.

Before *Black Angustias,* the most prominent "soldadera" in popular culture and also the first one represented in film was *La Adelita* (1937), which is a hybrid of rural comedy and revolutionary drama. The representation of Adelita in this film is both conservative and symbolic, emphasizing Adelita's purity, innocence, abnegation, and heroism. Adelita's impeccable face, hairdo and attire contrast with the chaos of the battles in the story. Unrevealed are her sexual agency and her rebelliousness connected to her soldierly actions, which are the complementary elements of "Adelita" that could develop her into a more complete character that stands for women's presence on the battlefield. The obvious paradox included within the Adelita-"soldadera" ubiquitous dichotomy in popular culture, is directly influenced by the original archetypal mother oppositional paradigm of Mexican nationalism (Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche) that traditionally has separated good and bad women respectively. Like la Malinche, Adelita has also functioned within Mexican history, imagery and mythology as another palimpsest of eluding signifiers that alternates between the submissive, sacrificial victim and the guerrilla fighter.

In *Black Angustias*, the story presents a more complex character than Adelita because Angustias's virtue resides almost exclusively on her decision to join the revolution to fight for social justice. Defending her virginity, perhaps a highly esteemed "virtue" in a different context, is viewed as abnormal and subversive in this story.

In the original source, the narration, always punctuated with racist allusions, explains how after Angustias rejects a marriage opportunity, the townspeople, specifically the women, become extremely hostile towards her, to the point of physical violence. They consider Angustias a lesbian, and even suspect her of having an incestuous relationship with her father. In an effort to save her, the town's healer (and Angustias's former mother-figure) performs a cleansing on Angustias. This healing act serves to momentarily subdue the female outrage. However, it becomes clear that by openly opting for a nontraditional path for herself, Angustias provokes the collective anger of the people in "Mesa del Aire," as she represents everything that goes against the grain in traditional Mexican culture with respect to notions of gender, sexuality, and race. Therefore, in contrast with Adelita, who is an ideal character who could better be associated with the Guadalupe archetype, Angustias approximates the Malinche archetype, as she makes her own decisions. Particularly in Landeta's adaptation, and before falling in love, Angustias is never a submissive, sacrificial wife or mother. On the contrary, at times she becomes almost sadistic, like the notorious episode, already mentioned, in which she decides to castrate that famous "Don Juan" in the name of the women.

Rojas González's novel definitely is the text that displays a hyper-harsh version of Angustias character. In another disturbing episode in the novel of Angustias's frequent unjustified actions, after stripping a pregnant woman naked, Angustias orders her lieutenant Güitlacoche to beat her as punishment for interceding to save her lover. In agreement with the traditional Guadalupe archetype, the self-sacrificing mother-to-be implores Angustias to execute her instead of her man. Angustias lets her and her boyfriend go after learning that the woman is pregnant but she has to be corporally punished first. Diverging from the original story, Landeta's adaptation omits the beating of the pregnant woman both in the screenplay as well as in the film. She only admonishes her. "Angustias: women make me sick; I swear to God I don't understand it. They are just like the yellow goat"(Landeta 1949: 68). Thus, instead of beating the pregnant woman, Angustias decides to let the couple go after the woman confesses that she is expecting: "Angustias: (yelling) Güitlacoche!...Listen, go and give this woman back her husband, the engineer! Tell Concho I said to give them a horse so they can get out of here before dawn. Understand?" (Landeta 1949: 69). Another interesting aspect of the adaptation concerning this episode is how in Rojas Gonzalez's novel, there is a clear and lengthy explanation about the nature of the relationship between this couple: "I was his girlfriend in Mexico City and one day I followed him…I left my parents, friends, comfort and luxuries…my own virtue was deposited in his hands…because I love him like no other woman would ever be able to love a man" (my translation, Rojas González 1948:109). However, on the screenplay- adapted version Landeta calls the pregnant woman character "the engineer's wife" (Landeta 1949: 68-70). Do these apparently subtle adaptation changes occur because Landeta prefers to convey more respect for the female characters in her adaptation of the story? Perhaps Rojas González view of a woman is that her personality can change radically due to falling in love and becoming a mother, and thus he renders his character as an inconsistent and completely contradictory character. In contrast, Landeta approaches Angustias as human being, with a complex but also a more consistent psychology.

Another more recent example of a Mulatta “soldadera” in film can be seen in *Like Water for Chocolate* (1993) which also attempts to innovate the traditional, romantic, artificial “soldadera” image that was repeated ad nauseam since the 1930s. Yet what lies beneath the surface is the reiteration of the institutions of marriage and motherhood as the only acceptable paths for women in Mexican society, and they cannot coexist with a woman’s life on the battleground. Indeed, whenever, a combatant woman becomes wife and mother, she stops being a warrior, as it is portrayed by Gertrudis, who transgresses the traditional concept of submissiveness and dependency to a certain degree. She abandons her upper class family status and becomes a “soldadera." However, in accordance to the sensual Mulatta stereotype, Gertrudis’s main motivation to leave her home is to satiate her sexual desires. Unlike Angustias, Gertrudis is not concerned with the notion of social justice; it is the desire to fulfill her amatory needs that prompts her to take the opportunity to liberate herself from a claustrophobic bourgeois domestic space. Therefore, just like Angustias, her independent decisions and actions take her close to the traditional Malinche archetype: she betrays her maiden status, she does not care about her mother or family and she is “selfish” for thinking solely about herself and her wishes. Later in the story it is revealed that Gertrudis became a revolutionary general in charge of fifty men. However, the “soldadera” rebellious nature in Gertrudis is overturned in the end, when she is integrated into traditional motherhood. Victoria Martínez emphasizes the element of Gertrudis´s domesticity present in the last part of the novel. Gertrudis arrives at Esperanza and Alex’s wedding reception in a fancy car, as the upper-middle class modern wife and mother to which the new ruling Mexican society aspire after the Revolution. As Martínez underscores: “Rather than the revolutionary, subversive female, Gertrudis has happily integrated herself in to modern bourgeois society. Furthermore… the only information the text offers focuses on Gertrudis's material wealth and the fact that she is a wife and mother” (Martínez 2004: 38). More evident in the film than in the novel, Gertrudis’ manners and demeanor appear more ladylike and softer, her attire more feminine and discrete. She is a woman who has been domesticated according to the social standards that her current economic status demands. Her initial rebellious nature and sexual agency have been tamed and channeled to the nationalized institutions of marriage and motherhood.

While Gertrudis chooses to leave her house and family to follow her erotic fantasies, Angustias is forced to leave her community after killing a man who tried to sexually abuse her, yet both Mulatta characters exhibit sexual behaviors that sharply deviate from traditional, accepted social values. Nevertheless, these two Afro-Mexican rebellious women are restrained at the end of both novels. Just as Gertrudis’s insubordinate behavior is controlled by marriage and motherhood, also Rojas González´s Angustias is eventually brought to her knees, in accordance with acceptable gender roles in traditional Mexican culture. However, in contrast with the original source, Landeta´s Angustias does not resign herself to that pitiful fate. Indeed, in sharp contrast with the Angustias in the original story, Landeta´s screenplay and the film proper render Angustias as a character that subverts her expected social role determined by gender, social class and race, as she defies established cultural assumptions by maintaining her agency.

For instance, in the three versions of the story, after Angustias gets her heart broken when the teacher rejects her on the basis of race and social class, she stops caring about everything, including her commitment to Zapata and the revolution, as she feels defeated and devastated. Now in both the novel and the screenplay her men desert her, even her captain, Güitlacoche, but in the film version, however, Angustias' right-hand man shows camaraderie. Güitlacoche resolves to stay with her and while he is ordering the men to do the same, he gets shot from a second-floor window of an adjacent building. This act of solidarity and noble sacrifice makes Angustias react as she fires back and kills Güitlachoche's assassin. Immediately after this, she orders her men to follow her and rejoins the revolutionary cause. The last scene of the film shows Angustias leading her men and yelling "Viva Emiliano Zapata" and "Viva Mexico" from the hills where the rebels escaped. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, the screenplay takes the end of the story even further from the original source than the film does. Landeta´s script and the novel concur until almost the end, when a disillusioned Angustias regains control of her destiny by taking her son and her carabine, and abandoning her husband to rejoin the Revolution. Not only does Landeta allow Angustias to keep her agency and pride but also, unlike the film proper, the screenplay is the sole location where Angustias can act as a rebellious mother by talking back and challenging society´s traditional assumptions with respect to gender roles and the idea of a "national mother."

Landeta never discussed her unpublished screenplay but when she was asked in the interview with Isabel Arrendondo why she changed the end of *Black Angustias* in the film adaptation, Landeta, who suffered and struggled with discrimination in the Mexican film industry of her time for being a woman director,[13] declared that Rojas González explained to her that what happens in the end of his novel is the logical outcome from an anthropological point of view. According to him, it is only natural that a woman loses her character when she falls in love. But to Landeta, it did not seem natural that a fierce woman like Angustias would stop existing just for falling in love, as she asserts: "I have never believed that a decent woman could lose her courage and ideology by falling in love. There is the one who would leave the family and other things, but her fervor never gets lost…I had lots of courage, and in spite of falling in love, I started a whole revolution by directing films […] it was a time in Mexico when women did not even have the right to suffrage" (my translation, Arredondo: 2002: 201). Therefore, while Rojas González´s novel coincides with the paradoxical submissive-rebellious nature of the "soldadera," and the traditional self-sacrificing "mother" constructs that have been repeatedly represented and successfully sold in Mexican literature and film, Landeta´s adaptation completely deviates from the original source both in the screenplay and in the film proper.

In the history of Mexican film the Guadalupe-Malinche paradigm has prevailed over any other mother representation. Until the 1980s the image of the weak, submissive, self-sacrificial mother is what Mexican spectators used to consume since the inception of fiction in film. This melodramatic formula was successfully sold for a long time in Mexican cinema. The "soldadera" archetype is no exception, especially when the female soldier becomes a mother.

Traditionally, there was no space for a warrior mother in Mexican cinema, particularly for a Black combatant mother since historically only the "Mestizo" or an aesthetic Amerindian could be included in the national cultural discourse. However, Landeta's versions (both screenplay and film) of Rojas González's original novel are rare exceptions to that conventional canon. The progression of Landeta's appropriation of Rojas González's novel, through the development of Angustias, is particularly fascinating as there are both subtle and substantial differences that take place in the adaptation process. Yet, only the Angustias in the screenplay is able to grow into a complete cultural new sign: a Black mother combatant of the Mexican revolution. Unfortunately this image does not materialize on the silver screen because Landeta's film does show a strong female leader at the conclusion of the film adaptation but the character remains childless. Certainty, Landeta's decision to change the end of her bold screenplay when transferring the text into the film proper leaves provocative interrogations to ponder in several fields of study.

Notes

[1] Coined by Evelyn P. Stevens, *marianismo* stands for the ideal submissive, suffering and sacrificial nature of Virgin Mary and that every "good" mother should imitate. These are the main characteristics that make mothers "spiritually" superior to men while paradoxically have placed women in an inferior status among strong patriarchal societies such as that of Mexico. The Virgin of Guadalupe has been the patron saint of Mexico since 1531, just a decade after the final conquest of the Aztecs by Spain. According to the popular tale, Virgin Mary (incarnated in Guadalupe) appeared to the Indian Juan Diego requesting to be adored in her temple; this "miracle" made Catholicism more attractive to Indians and facilitated their conversion. During this initial colonial period the conquest was not just a military but also a religious undertaking.

[2] There is no historical consensus about critical facts on this Indian woman who served as an interpreter. The exact place and date of her birth and death remain unknown. Although very limited, Bernal Díaz del Castillo is the one who provides the most detailed information about her life and deeds in the conquest of Tenochtitlan. He goes as far as to affirm that doña Marina discovered the plans of the ambush that the Tlaxcalans had prepared for the Spaniards, and they were saved because of her in that occasion.

[3] Several unpublished screenplays by Mexican women screenwriters were obtained and compiled for research, including Landeta's *La negra Angustias*. Laura Kanost has translated the screenplays into English. Kanost and I are co-editors in a Bilingual publication entitled: *Las guionistas: A Bilingual Anthology of Mexican Women Screenwriters*. Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe. Arizona State University Press. Forthcoming 2013. The translations into English of all Spanish references, from Landeta's original screenplay, that are cited on this essay belong to Kanost.

[4] The golden age of Mexican cinema is a period between 1936 and 1950 during which both the quality and economic success of Mexican Cinema reached their peak.

[5] In Mexico a "Mestizo" is a person of mix blood, specifically the child of a white-European father, and an American Indian mother or vise versa.

[6] Hundreds of thousands of enslaved African people arrived to Mexico during the slavery period. By 1650, the number of Blacks and mulattos were almost equal to the rest of the population in Veracruz; nevertheless, the cultural post-revolutionary campaign of the twentieth century only recognizes the mix of European and Spaniard (the "Mestizo") as the new national ethnic identity. Therefore, as the director of such cultural initiative, Vasconcelos completely leaves Afro-Mexicans out of the national discourse.

[7] Benedict Anderson's classic study *Imagined Communities* (1983) defines the concept of nation as an imaginative project that aims at defining a specific group of people. According to Anderson, the idea of belonging to a delimited community is articulated and sustained by different cultural practices and symbols meant to creating an ideal homogeneous collective identity. Such cultural practices promote a shared sense of synchronicity and simultaneity within history through collective expressions of patriotism.

[8] Emiliano Zapata Salazar (August 8, 1879 – April 10, 1919) was one of main leaders of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 against the dictator Porfirio Díaz. He formed and commanded an important revolutionary force, the Liberation Army of the South. He is a key figure, both hero and martyr of Mexican Revolution who fought for the indigenous people and poor peasants under the slogan: "land and freedom."

[9] Rómulo Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara* (1929) is considered a masterpiece of Venezuelan and Latin American literature. The novel represents the confrontation between civilization, represented by the hero Santos Luzardo, and the barbaric aspects of the rural environment, represented by the villain, doña Bárbara. In 1943, Mexican director, Fernando de Fuentes, and actors produced a film adaptation. The movie was a box-office success in Mexico.

[10] Paco Ignacio Taibo describes the traditional "soldadera" films as big folkloric parties that fail to represent the revolutionary conflicto by idealizing it: "*La Cucaracha*, *Juana Gallo* o las múltiples películas sobre Pancho Villa… guardan la misma relación con la Revolución Mexicana que las de Tarzán con el África Negra" (364).

[11] Landeta explains, in an interview with Arredondo in 2002, that Mexico has never had a significant presence of Black people and thus there were no Black actors and actresses available to play the role of Angustias and her bandit father. In this interview, Landeta stated that she was attracted to the work of Rojas González because of its historical-anthropological approach, yet she never mentions (because most likely she is not aware of) the prominent research that Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán published in 1946 concerning the Afro-Mexican population.

[12] In Mexico, having a "small house" means supporting a mistress by taking care of all of her financial needs.

[13] In her article, Susan Dever underscores the difficulties that Landeta had to endure as a woman trying to succeed in the society of directors of that period, which essentially was a "Mexican boys club" (Dever 1994:41). While it was not a huge box office success, *Black Angustias* was well received, and Landeta recovered what she spent on this film project, which allowed her to be ready to produce and direct *Trotacalles* (1951), her next film.

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