Shaping the Tarasplanglish diaspora

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Abstract
The purpose of my paper is to analyze the way in which diasporic experience builds and represents identities in the video project called Tarasplanglish Shorts/Cortos Tarasplanglish. Tarasplanglish Shorts/Cortos Tarasplanglish consists of a series of videos from one to four minutes that address the experience of migration and cultural continuity/discontinuity forged by the Purépecha community of Michoacan in Mexico, migrating to Madera, California in the United States. I propose that the audiovisual work of Indigenous videomakers may be understood as autoethnographic work that makes reference to identify formation derived from the process of migration. The purpose of this article is to analyze the strategies through which Indigenous videomakers represent/construct the identities of migrants using documentaries. Particularly, I explore how the Indigenous videomakers have adapted reflexive and performative modes of documentary to narrate the diaspora and to represent Indigenous communities participating in this experience. At the same time, I examine how these identities shaped by migratory subjectivity are inserted into the national and transnational contexts. The style of these shorts reveals how the videomakers conceive their subjects in the diaspora: mobile, performative and in constant construction. To demonstrate this, I have selected two productions. The first one is What is Tarasplanglish? a short video that explains the purpose of the project and sets the general visual style of the project. The second short selected, Danza de la Identidad, in which a young Purépecha makes a re-interpretation of the traditional identity dance or Danza Celeste.

Keywords: Mexico; Indigenous videomakers; diaspora; accented cinema; documentary
Introduction

The complexity of migration is one of the recurrent themes on the agendas of Indigenous videomakers. This is perhaps partly owing to the adhesion of Indigenous groups to migratory currents for centuries (Torres & Carrasco, 2008, p. 10). Evidence of this can be seen in the journey of the Mexica people, who undertook a long pilgrimage beginning from their homeland, the mythical Aztlán, to the foundation of the great Tenochtitlán; an exodus recorded pictorially in the Mexica codex La tira de la peregrinación (The Strip Depicting the Pilgrimage), also called the Borturino Codex. Just as the Mexicas captured their migratory experience, videomakers, from the nineties to the present day, are telling contemporary stories and experiences about migration. Unlike the “mythical and foundational” migration made by the Mexicas, the displacement of Indigenous communities in Mexico in the last decades are due to harsh socio-economic circumstances caused by the neoliberal economy that marginalizes, among others, the Indigenous communities, forcing them to find their way to survival elsewhere. These migrations take place both on the national level, from the countryside to the cities, and transnationally. It must be pointed out that the movement of Indigenous communities in search of work during the 1980s and 1990s expanded exponentially to the United States, as a result of worsening economic conditions in Mexico. In this paper I will focus on the transnational migration of Indigenous communities to the United States because it is their main destination. The stories, created and re-created according to the transnational migratory practices of the Indigenous subjects, reveal different configurations of what it means for them to be Indigenous, that is, a journey of identity. In the stories, a reconstruction of the traditions of the migrants is evident, through the incorporation/adoption of elements of worlds beyond their places of origin, into their cultural repertoires.

The audiovisual practice of Indigenous videomakers can be placed within the movement of self-determination and decolonization of knowledge. The decolonization of knowledge demands both, to undo the negative effects of the European thought (colonial and imperial) that has denied and excluded, among other things, the histories and knowledges (saberes) of Indigenous peoples and to reverse the ideas and concepts around Indigenous peoples that have marginalized them (Smith, 1999; Mignolo, 2000). For Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), a critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination involves questions relating to the history of Indigenous peoples, as well as a critique of how Indigenous people have been represented or excluded: “Indigenous peoples,” Smith points out, “want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes” (p. 28).

In this sense, the use of media has been instrumental in giving back to Indigenous communities new possibilities of self-representation on their own terms. Around the world Indigenous societies have been appropriating the media for their own cultural and political views. Scholars such as Michelle Raheja (2007) and Freya Schiwy (2009), in their studies of Indigenous media in North America and the Andean region, respectively, argue that the media-makers have been crafting and adapting a new cinematic language by incorporating non-Indigenous audiovisual practices (film, video) to their own Indigenous traditions.
As has previously been argued by scholars such as Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*), Stuart Hall (“New Ethnicities”) and Néstor García Canclini (*Culturas Híbridas*), among others, migration is a phenomenon that lends itself to the construction of “new discourses,” since individuals who migrate are constantly constructing and reconstructing their identities. That is to say, migrants live in an in-between space, to borrow Bhabha’s concept, that is neither their place of origin nor the place where they have established themselves, but rather a place where there is a constant negotiation, constructing different identifying narratives that help them to give direction to their “new” reality. In this sense, the experiences of Indigenous communities immersed in the process of migration may be added to the Indigenous independence and self-representation movements, where a reinvention/renewal of Amerindian cultures is also taking place.

The stories and “new” identities presented by Indigenous videomakers in this study imply an ethnographic translation carried out by the creators, in order to record in the audio-visual medium the experiences of the migrants for more general audiences, with the goal of supporting the activism and decolonization agendas in which they are immersed. When I say “ethnographic work,” I am referring to the practice of deciphering, describing and cataloguing a people or culture, and in this way representing it in a discursive space. Indigenous videomakers interpret their culture and translate it into the audio-visual medium in order to facilitate an understanding of their “realities” and their demands for their target audiences, which are primarily their own communities; secondarily, other global Indigenous audiences; and lastly, if at all, non-Indigenous communities. In this manner, I propose that the audio-visual work of Indigenous videomakers may be understood as autoethnographic work that makes reference to identity formation derived from the process of migration.

In this context, the purpose of this article is to analyze the strategies through which Indigenous videomakers represent and construct the identities of migrants using documentary films. Therefore, I explore the way in which Indigenous videomakers have adopted different conventions (aesthetic and narrative) of the documentary to represent Indigenous communities in migration. In order to achieve this goal, I analyze primarily the videos comprising the Taraspanglish Migrants Video Project by Javier Sámano Chong, and the Purépechas Juana Soto Sosa and Aureliano Soto Rita.

### The depiction of Indianness in Mexican and Hollywood cinemas

The so-called Indigenous film or video acts within a system of codes and conventions that are part of the language of film, which was developed through the history of the hegemonic cinema; those codes and conventions have been used to misrepresent, politically and culturally, Indigenous communities. For instance, in the hegemonic Mexican cinema the figure of Indigenous people represents a space of ongoing struggle, upon which (historically) many

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1 For this project, I use Bill Nichols’ definition of documentary: “Documentary film speaks about situations and
different national actors, mainly non-Indigenous, contribute in imagining and constructing its image. In a general overview, I identify three key moments of cinematic depiction of the “Indian” in Mexico: the Golden Age of the 1940s and 1950s, the New Cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s, and finally the Indigenous video and digital storytelling movement beginning in the 1980s. In the audio-visual field, hegemonic constructions of Indianness in Mexico have their highest moment in the Golden Age. During this period, the representation of Indigenous peoples promoted, through fictional films, an idealized version of a “whitened Indian” through processes of mestizaje and acculturation. The stories were placed in a distant past and were almost never about the contemporary “Indio”. Even after these films became old, several generations of audiences have remained aware of them due to constant presentations by the television networks in Mexico (Televisa, Azteca) and in the USA (Univision, Azteca America, Telemundo). Later, the young filmmakers of the New Cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by a strong political and social emphasis, challenged the way to make cinema by rejecting hegemonic narratives and the visual style of Hollywood, which was the model followed by the Golden Age cinema. In this sense, a more political cinema advocated for the people that were economically, socially, and culturally marginalized, including Indigenous peoples and peasants. These filmmakers opted for the documentary form, instead of fiction, in order to expose the realities of the people. The documentary film showed, through testimony, the voices of the contemporaneous Indigenous subjects; however, in these films the figure and personal agenda of the filmmaker, who speaks on behalf of the Indigenous communities, often looms large.

According to Ramírez Berg (1992), the Indigenous figure in the history of Mexican cinema has been poor and heavily stereotyped in several places. The Indigenous character, generally aimed at supporting roles, is represented as a pre-Columbian Indian, peasant, servant, villain, or as ‘pure Indian’, naïve, glorified, and where the dark color of his skin is a "iconographic brand" that contrasts with the pale skin of the main characters (Ramírez Berg, 1992, p. 77). These images are accompanied by other features that set the stereotype that has prevailed in Indigenous Mexican cinema, such as wearing the blanket dress, walking with short steps and jumping, and speaking with grammatical errors or archaic forms of Spanish (Ramírez Berg, 1992, p. 77).

Besides the national Mexican imagery of Indianness, Indigenous communities that inmigrate to the USA also have to deal with the stereotypes of Mexicans by mainstream Hollywood cinema. The basic stereotypes used by Hollywood to represent Mexicans and Latin

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2 The representation of Indianess in the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema is a theme well studied by the scholars Joanne Hershfield (1999), Dolores Tierney (2007), and Charles Ramirez Berg (1992).

3 The so-called New Latin American Cinema encompasses cinematic movements like the Third Cinema, Cinema Novo, Imperfect Cinema, which appeared as an alternative and a challenge to the international mainstream cinema and particularly to the "Hollywood pleasure machine". The New Latin American Cinema includes cinematographic aesthetic proposals and heterogeneity not only limited to national cinemas, in the same way the "new cinemas" in Europe, such as the Italian Neorealism, French New Wave, or the New German Cinema, did. As Ana Lopez states, the New Latin American Cinema is a political cinema committed to research and sociopolitical transformation of underdevelopment in Latin America. (1997, p. 137)
Americans in general, according to Ramírez Berg (2002), are: *el bandido, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the dark lady, and the Latin lover* (pp. 66-86). These stereotypes can be traced back to the silent era of Hollywood cinema (1910-1920) and its consolidation during the Golden Age of Hollywood (1920-1960), where the Mexican bandit was a recurring character, mostly in western dramas. In more contemporary films, Ramírez Berg also identifies the figure of the immigrant, particularly undocumented ones (pp. 153-182). I would also add to this list the figure of the domestic, such as the maid. The author mentions that, “Mexicans and Mexican Americans may be stereotypically believed to be lazy, dirty, dishonest, unmoral, and with low regard toward life. These traits are then applied to actual Mexicans encountered in lived experience” (Ramírez Berg, 2002, p. 39).

In this context of the mainstream Mexican and Hollywood cinema, the Indigenous video moment that has flourished since 1990 is instrumental in giving back to Indigenous communities new possibilities of self-representation on their own terms. The first initiatives to promote Indigenous video in Mexico were promoted in 1986 by the Mexican state under the initiative of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), currently Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas de México, when they launched a project called *Transferencia de Medios Audiovisuales a Organizaciones y Comunidades Indígenas*. This project intended to promote the fundamentals of video production and management of cameras and editing (Smith, 2006; Wortham, 2004). In 1994 the INI created the first Centro de Video Indígena Nacional (CVI) in Oaxaca and later would open more CVIs in other regions. Following the TMA project and CVI, Indigenous and non-Indigenous NGOs, domestic and foreign, also began the practice of producing an interesting corpus of audiovisual works on Indigenous peoples in Mexico. Moreover, in 1992 Mexico officially embraced its multiculturalism by acknowledging that the Mexican nation has a pluricultural composition sustained by the Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous mediamakers began both a process of appropriation of the cinematic medium and a subversion of its system of conventions (stereotypes, documentary, fiction) in favor of the demands of Indigenous autonomy and self-determination, not only by bringing their own themes and content, but also by subverting the form. Generally speaking, some of the topics on the agendas of the Indigenous activists include recovery and restoration projects (stories, languages, knowledge, traditions), autonomy (political, cultural), representation (political, cultural), and self-representation (artistic, visual). Specifically talking about migration, the themes of their agendas include the right to obtain double citizenship, the reinforcement of their cultural heritage, and the creation of national and international networks that allow them to continue the fight for their demands. Depending on the creators’ interests, these themes or variations of them might be included in their works.

**Triple-ethnography project for migratory practices**

In general, it may be said that the documentary work of Indigenous videomakers is what the academic Mary Louise Pratt (2008) calls an “autoethnography” or “autoethnographic
expression.” This concept refers to the ways in which colonized individuals, in this case within a hegemonic context, represent themselves in an active manner, according to and within the terms and media proposed by the colonizer or the groups in power; in this case, within the conventions of documentary or cinematography. For Pratt, autoethnographic texts are constructed by the Indigenous peoples themselves, whether as a response to or as a dialogue with hegemonic representations of themselves (p. 9). That is to say, they use hegemonic tools for their political and cultural purposes. Another characteristic Pratt notes is that autoethnographic texts are heterogeneous, and the receptors at which they are aimed are usually as much urban audiences as individuals from the Indigenous community. By the same token, the video projects chosen here are aimed at both audiences. I particularly emphasize the projects aimed at a non-Indigenous audience, since they follow the formula, “I (we) speak about us to you”, in which the desire to represent themselves, their history, and their culture is expressed in order to respond to representations made by others, and at the same time, to present their demands for the right of autonomy and self-representation. In this sense, these audio-visual projects are added to the testimonial projects that arose in Latin America, in which marginalized individuals tell their story orally in order to expose the conditions of oppression that marginalize them and in which the individual experience of the narrator serves as an allegory for the life of the group to which they belong. For example, the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1983), makes reference to the conditions of Indigenous populations in Guatemala; or Domitila Barrios, *Let Me Speak! Testimonio of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines* (1970), whose account highlights the conditions of Bolivian workers and miners. By the same token, Indigenous videomakers and cinematographers have inherited the legacy of the first Amerindian writers of the colony, such as Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala in the Viceroyalty of Peru, or that of the Mayan writers who rewrote *Popul Vuh* using western tools (paper, letters, books) in order to both denounce colonial power, in the case of the former, and to regain ancestral knowledge, in the case of the latter. Guaman Poma wrote a chronicle entitled “El primer nueva crónica y buen gobierno” (*The First New Chronicle and Good Government*) in 1615, in which, through the use of Spanish and Quechua as well as drawings, the precarious situation of Indigenous people was described; while Maya writers resurrected stories of *Popul Vuh* (a collection of myths and legends of the k’iche’ people) in k’iche’, using characters from the Latin alphabet, these were later translated into Spanish by an Iberian friar. An important aspect of the work of these Indigenous writers was the translation of their experiences into the language of the other, establishing transcultural communication.

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4 Pratt mentions that, “this term in either form refers to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s term” (p. 9).

5 In using transculturation, I am referring to the transformative process experienced by all societies when they come into contact with other cultures, and as a result of this relationship, they acquire cultural material from the other culture, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, in which elements of the cultures involved find themselves in a dynamic relationship of contradictions and combinations.
The scholar Rolena Adorno (1994) characterized the ability and creativity of the Amerindian writers to interpret and translate their own cultural systems into another cultural system as European (and vice versa) as an act of double ethnography (p. 383). In this way, these double ethnographers interpreted their own culture and translated it into the language and conventions of the other, and so also had to know how to interpret the cultural system of the foreigner. In this sense, I equate the work that the videomakers do to that of the Amerindian writers, given that they interpret their culture and translate it for Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences using the audiovisual medium (video and film) that assumes, of course, a familiarity with, and an understanding of the conventions and grammars of video and film. Indigenous videomakers appropriate from the medium and its conventions in order to use them in their demands for autonomy, self-representation, and cultural activism. We may therefore affirm that the works of Indigenous audiovisual communicators are, in great majority, an autoethnographic expression, in which the role of ‘double ethnographer’ allows the capturing and translation of their experiences in their work. This is how the experience of the appropriation of video technology by the Amerindian communicators positions itself within a long transcultural tradition (and, also, one of resistance) in which Indigenous populations have been immersed since contact with the conquistadors.

Along these lines, Freya Schiwy (2009) has coined the term *indianizing* to refer to the capacity of Indigenous cultures for borrowing and integrating European elements into their own traditions, that is, the Indigenous people immersed in the use of the audio-visual technology are *indianizing* the media. *Indianizing* the media has been a complex process of both collaboration between non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people, and the appropriation of the media by the Indigenous communities. There is ample work of scholars who have focused on the study of Indigenous media from different approaches, regions and aspects. In the particular case of the study of the Indigenous communities embedded in Mexico, some works provide a landscape of the Indigenous and community video and radio in rural and urban areas (Córdova and Zamorano, 2003); others expose the factors that contributed to the development of the video production (Smith, 2006, 2008). Castells-Talens and Ramos Rodríguez (2010) provide insights into the training of the videomakers by the state. In addition to research on the general context of Indigenous media in Mexico, some scholars center their study in specific regions or cases; for example, Gabriela Zamorano and Ingrid Kummels study the region of Michoacan and Laurel Smith and Erica Cusi Wortham focus their research in the area of Oaxaca. Meanwhile,

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6 The author borrows the term *indianizing* from Felipe Quispe, an Aymara revolutionary and politician (Schiwy, 2019, pp. 12-13).

7 Speaking on the global context, some works make reference to the politics and poetics of the Indigenous media (Wilson and Stewart, 2008); others address the issue of global activism (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin, 2002). Some authors study a particular context such as the Aboriginal Media in Australia (Michaels, 1994), Native Media in North America (Leuthold, 1998; Singer, 2001). Amalia Córdova and Francisco Salazar (2008) bring a general view of the poetics of Indigenous video in Latin America. Schiwy (2009) approaches the Andean region from a decolonial perspective and addresses the challenge of adopting the technology.
Alexandra Halkin shares her experience collaborating with videomakers of Chiapas Media Project/Promedios in Chiapas and Guerrero. Even with this important body of study, there are still many unexplored aspects of Indigenous media in Mexico. Most of these studies focus on examining the production process in terms of cultural activism and resistance, as well as the role of the official institutions and NGOs that promote the video production made by the Indigenous communities. However, there is a lack of analysis from the field of Film Studies. I consider that the textual analysis of the films and videos made by indigenous mediamakers is important as a means to review the strategies tailored by the mediamakers in order to craft a different audiovisual language according to their own symbolic order and the way they represent themselves in the audiovisual text.

In particular, in the documentaries, such as those that comprise the Taraspanglish project, in which the migratory experience is highlighted, I find that Indigenous videomakers carry out a ‘triple-ethnography’ project; in addition to interpreting their own culture (the so-called culture of origin), and the national culture in which they are immersed, they also interpret and translate the migratory experience. The triple ethnographic work shows us the cultural complexity from which Indigenous videomakers construct their projects, where ethnic, national, and transnational as well as gender, linguistic, and political discourses intertwine. Given that videomakers are immersed in the migratory experience, their practice can be situated as what Hamid Naficy (2001) has called “accented cinema.” Naficy coined this term to make reference to the cinematic practice by filmmakers/videomakers living in exile, migration, or diaspora, in which the thematic or main concern are related to these conditions. The author argues that “accented films are in dialogue with the home and host societies and their respective national cinemas, as well as with audiences, many of whom are similarly transnational, whose desires, aspirations, and fears they express,” and that most of these films “are bilingual, even multilingual, multivocal, and multiaccented” (p. 24). Naficy classifies the films that constitute the accented cinema as diasporic, exilic, and ethnic. When referring to the diasporic, the author states that, “diaspora, like exile, often begins with trauma, rupture, and coercion, and it involves the scattering of populations to places outside their homeland. Sometimes, however, the scattering is caused by a desire for increased trade, for work, or for colonial and imperial pursuits” (p. 14). The author mentions that people in diaspora are distinguished by ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness that they keep in the long-term that give them a horizontal and multisited consciousness involving both homeland and compatriot communities elsewhere. For these reasons, among diasporic subjects plurality, multiplicity, and hybridity dominated. According to Naficy’s definition, the videomakers involved in the Taraspanglish project can be placed in a diasporic category since their displacement is due to economic reasons and they maintain strong ties with their community of origin. It must be pointed out that although these projects may be similar to the migratory experience of other migrant groups, it must not be forgotten that Indigenous videomakers are additionally immersed in autonomy movements in the Mexican context, which have their own unique attributes. Therefore Indigenous videomakers embody a new shift in the representation of their people due to the possibility of self-representation and the opportunity to
re-write traditional depictions of Indigenous people not only in the Mexican context but also abroad.

**Cortos Tarasplanglish: Accented shorts and pastiche form**

*Cortos Tarasplanglish/Tarasplanglish Shorts* consists of a series of videos between one and five minutes long addressing the experience of migration and the cultural continuity/discontinuity forged by the Purépecha communities that migrate to Madera, California in United States from Michoacan, Mexico. These shorts were produced for the Tarasplanglish Migrant Video Project (2002). Javier Sámano Chong (first director of the CVI of Michoacan) and the Purépechas Juana Soto Sosa y Aureliano Soto Rita were the coordinators and directors of the project meant to train migrants in the production of video as a space for reflection and as a tool to inform their communities (the ones in Madera as well as those from Michoacan) about their rights, obligations, and demands as Mexican citizens and immigrants in the United States. *Tarasplanglish Shorts* addresses themes such as the adoption of a foreign language, the preservation of customs and traditions, political organization, living conditions of the migrants, and ties with members of their communities of origin. Some of the shorts produced by the project are: *Danza de la identidad*, *Así son mis días*, *La salida*, *Pues ya ves lo que pasó con ellos*, *Si la migra te detiene*, *Good bye acuerdo migratorio*, *Mexicanos vs mexicanos*, and *What is Tarasplanglish?*. In the Tarasplanglish project there is an integration of multiple artistic elements and representational techniques that oscillate between fiction and non-fiction; for example, elements such as docudrama, interviews, video recording in studio (*Mexicanos vs mexicanos*), fiction, video-letters, music video style (*Así son mis días*), sketch comedy (*What is Tarasplanglish?*), parody, and performance (*Danza de la identidad*) are used. Thus, unlike the rational and argumentative style used by most of the Indigenous documentaries in Mexico, *Tarasplanglish Shorts* prioritize an emotional and reflective approach. Many examples of this kind of linear and argumentative documentary can be found in most of the video productions made by the Indigenous Video Centres (CVI) sponsored by the Government, as well as in others produced by the NGOs Ojo de Agua Comunicación and those supported by Chiapas Media Project/Promedios.

If we follow the taxonomy of documentary proposed by Bill Nichols (2010), *Tarasplanglish Shorts* can be placed in the reflective and performative modes of documentary. According to Nichols the reflective mode calls attention to our expectations around the form of documentary itself, where the intention of the videomaker is to make the viewer aware that he or she is watching a construction. This is achieved with strategies such as making the process of

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8 The Centro de Video Indígena Nacional (CVI) or Indigenous Video Centres are institutes sponsored by the Mexican government. Among other activities, they train Indigenous persons in video techniques.

9 This project was funded by the Beca del Fideicomiso para la Cultura México – Estados Unidos under the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA), and the Fundación Cultural Bancomer.
editing or recording evident. In this way, the viewer becomes more analytical about what they are watching by being aware that it is a construction (p. 197). Nichols (2010) argues that politically reflective documentaries orient the audience, instead of the film, as social actors who have the responsibility of becoming the bridge between what it is and what can be (p. 199).

Meanwhile, the performative mode seeks to intensify the emotional aspect of the alluded real experiences over the rational ones, to intensify “the rhetorical desire to be compelling and tie it less to a persuasive goal than an affective one” (Nichols, 2001, p. 203). In this type of documentary, the combination of real-contemporary and the imaginary is a recurring element used alongside elements such as acting, reciting, staging, or animation on one hand, and expressive elements of fiction film such as subjective camera, flashbacks, the introduction of a score, freezing of frames, or montages that make reference to mental states by recreating diverse subjectivities on the other (Nichols, 2001, p. 206). However, the combination of the modes (reflective and performative) and the use of a variety of expressive resources, such as the use of music, dance, rituals or dramatizations, cause difficulty in categorizing such documentaries following Nichols’s taxonomy.

Naficy (2009) identifies in some accented films a hybrid form, especially among experimental films, due to the mixing and crossing of formats (use of video and film) and genres (pp. 21-22). However, instead of using the “hybrid form” phrase that implies some kind of mixing, I preferred “pastiche form.” By the term pastiche, I mean the combination of aesthetic elements, a combination that is presented not only in each of the segments of the Taraspanglish project but also in the project as a whole. That is to say that within each video it is possible to find, to a greater or lesser extent, a combination of the aesthetic elements that unify them while the combination of all the different shorts with their stylistic variations makes them a whole. Following the idea of Richard Dyer (2007), it is important to point out that the pastiche, unlike collage, bricolage or cocktail, or other similar concepts, contains the diversity of elements where each one of those elements that forms a composition is perfectly differentiated. Dyer argues that the elements that comprise the pastiche “are held to be different, by virtue of genre, authorship, period, mode or whatever and that they do not normally or perhaps even readily go together” (p. 10). Dyer points out that every element keeps its own flavour by not mixing with the other elements of the text, which makes every element easily identifiable. The author mentions Hip Hop music as an example of pastiche where each one of the parts that make up the musical piece is not only recognizable but it also keeps its independence in relation to the other components or styles. A Hip Hop piece can make use of “rapping”, DJ-ing, scratching, sampling or back-spinning (Dyer, 2007, p. 14). Just like Hip Hop music, which is the music style used in many of the shorts of this project, the elements of Taraspanglish Shorts don’t mix, but rather keep their independence while still contributing to the creation of a larger whole.

Overall, each one of the segments is a series of repertoires about migration compiled by the videomakers through the daily experience of migrants or migrant families. The style of these shorts also gives us an idea of the way the Taraspanglish videomakers conceive their migrant subjects: mobile, performative and in continuous construction. In this paper, I understand the
notion of cultural identity in accordance with the definition Stuart Hall (1994) provides, as a shared culture that functions as a "real" group hiding an other "I" that has been imposed, which is held in common by a people with shared history and ancestors (p. 393). Hall points out that this view is still a "very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples," that seek to undermine the colonial experience making visible and "continuing" what the dominant systems fragmented, discredited, and discontinued (1994, p. 393). In this respect, Hall also distinguishes another way, complementary and different from the first, of understanding cultural identities, which is to recognize that even if the identities come from a place and have a history, it is precisely because they are something historical that they are subject to change. Thus, "far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1994, p. 394). From this perspective, cultural identity is not seen as an essence but a positioning in the historical world. Unlike the essentialist perspectives in which the Indigenous cultures have been pigeonholed, the videographic works discussed in this paper show that identities are constantly in a process of construction that recognizes their position within the different contexts that constitute their reality. In general, Indigenous videomakers struggle to decolonize the concept of ‘the Indigenous’ in the nations in which they are embedded by trying to reduce the hegemonic symbols that have been built around Indigenous communities. However, while their works defend their history and common culture, Indigenous mediamakers also capture the new experiences arising from the contemporary lives of their peoples and the stories forged from the immigrant experience; for example, the struggle for gender equality and autonomy, among other topics.

To explore these themes further, I will focus the analysis on two of the shorts that make up the Taraspanglish Shorts. The first short, called What is Taraspanglish?, explains the purpose of the Taraspanglish project and establishes the visual style used in all the segments. The second short, Danza de la identidad, talks about the reinterpretation of the traditional dance, Kúrpiti, or Celestial Dance. These two examples shape the accented character and underline the “pastiche format” of the Taraspanglish Shorts while mapping out the expressive tools used to translate their migratory experience.

**What is Taraspanglish?: Pastiche and mobility**

The objectives of the Taraspanglish Migrant Video Project are articulated in the short, What is Taraspanglish? The definition of the project is communicated in fragments by intermixing the figure of director Juana Soto with titles and video editing effects. The video begins with a folk music piece from Michoacan playing, and the magnification of a monochromatic TV screen, also called Silk Screen Effect, which produces an ambiguous texturized image upon which the title What is? TARASPANGLISH appears (Image 1).

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10 The silk screen effect (SSE) is a visual phenomenon seen in rear-projection televisions. SSE is described by viewers as seeing the texture of the television screen in front of the image.
The next shot emphasizes the TV screen texture by displaying one of the messages from the electronic devices “VI A/V In” or Audio Video In, which makes reference to the technology used to craft the audio-visual production (Image 2).

Immediately in the same screen, a detail, the lens of the video camera, is shown. Different short cuts show the face of Juana Soto in close ups. She then addresses the viewer and says, “Taraspanglish Media Video Project es…”, her phrase is interrupted by a cut to black screen and the sound of TV static where a title completes her phrase “mediante el video” (Image 3).
Soto continues her explanation through a sequence of fragmented images of herself, some of them fast-forwarded, and with the insertion of written titles that accentuate some key words of her explanation or complete some of the phrases of her discourse. While she talks, the sound is out of synchronization with the image. Soto states in the sequence that, “Taraspanglish Media Video Project es mediante el video informar a la gente acerca de los derechos y responsabilidades como migrantes que uno tiene especialmente en los Estados Unidos en el área de California” (Taraspanglish Media Video Project is, through the use of video, to inform the people about their rights and responsibilities that they have as migrants especially in the area of California in the United States), and the sequence closes with a deliberately out of focus image of a large TV with two people dancing beside it while the soundtrack plays a song by popular Mexican folk singer Cornelio Reyna (Image 4).

Finally the title appears, Taraspanglish Migrants Video Project. The style of this segment is opposed to that of those documentaries that pose themselves as a witness of the actual historic world, presenting the reality, in the way some observational documentaries do it. In this case, the mediamakers make an exploration of the expression of the mediatic world of video recordings, TV, and VHS that highlights that what they show is not reality but their interpretation of their own reality through the audio-visual medium.
The next shot shows an out of focus image with a detail shot of a hand focusing the lens of a camera. The image comes gradually into focus as if the hand in the shot is the one adjusting it. Then in the next shot Soto is looking through the viewfinder while the video camera points to the viewer (Image 5-7).

Images 5-7: Director Juana Soto looking back to the viewer.

After this, two shots show first a Latino girl and then two Latino boys with a white background, while a text appears, “un solo lenguaje de video en tres lenguas” (only one video language in three tongues). The editing reveals to us that Soto is recording these boys and the girl, as well as the rest of the content of the video. This sequence not only exposes the element of film/video
production to the viewer but also the intervention of the videomaker in this process, as we watch her physically manipulate the camera. This sequence is built in a way that shows the videomaker as someone creating his/her discourse but also as someone looking at the viewer.

The video productions made by the people from the Taraspanglish project place emphasis on the migrant condition of the videomakers themselves, which affects the ways in which they choose to interact with the subjects of their documentary and the historic world they show. We see Soto facing the camera, as if looking straight at the viewer, but also in other activities such as designing and arranging the shots with the subjects she is shooting and operating the camera. Unlike her, the other two co-directors, Aureliano Soto and Javier Sámano, are not shown in the shots but act as narrators or an unseen presence that is interviewing some of the subjects. In a wider sense, this treatment points to the creators and their relationship with the tools and the conventions that they are consciously using to represent themselves in the videographic medium. Juana Soto explicitly inserts herself into the narrative of the documentary, making the viewers aware that it is about her own experience and those of the other migrants from Michoacan. By way of these elements, it is possible to appreciate that the technique employed by the creators of Cortos Taraspanglish/ Tarasplanglish Shorts is undoubtedly an autoethnographic expression of their own migratory experience. It is important to point out that by showing herself and by addressing the viewer, Juana Soto is sending a message that she will not only be showing her reality, but establishing a direct communication with the viewer as well. That is to say, the presence of Soto in the frame is not only providing relevant information about the Taraspanglish project, but sharing her experiences through the aspects of her own identity: those of a woman, a migrant, an Indigenous person, an activist, and a videomaker. Also, the act of holding the camera and pointing it at the viewer is her way of affirming that she and those she represents are not only being looked at but are also looking back. In this way, the Taraspanglish videomakers are not only defining themselves and showing their reality in these shorts, but they are also looking back to their audiences to establish a communication with them through the video, according to different objectives. One of the main purposes of Taraspanglish Shorts is to be a bridge of communication with their communities on both sides of the border. In this way, the videomakers communicate with migrants of Madera, California about important topics for that community on the one hand and, on the other, the videos are a medium to make contact with the people in their community in Michoacan and vice versa. In order to achieve its goal, the project has two bases of operation, the one in Madera, California under the charge of Juana Soto, and the other in Angahuán, Michoacan, coordinated by Aureliano Soto Rita.

The videomakers’ emphasis on the artificiality of video highlights its representational purpose and it concurs, as I already demonstrated, with Stuart Hall’s idea about identity as something constructed and in a continuous process of construction that happens within a cultural system (Hall, 1994, p. 392). In this sense, the Taraspanglish cultural identity is a construction of differentiated elements consisting of the interaction between the Purépecha-Mexican and the Californian-US aspects inside a cultural system of migration.
“1 solo lenguaje de video en 3 lenguas”: Linguistic context

Among the topics treated by the videomakers in the Taraspanglish project is the use of language, where the combination of the three languages (Purépecha, Spanish, and English) is highlighted as a result of the migratory context. In *What is Taraspanglish?*, Soto approaches this theme through a humoristic dramatization.

After the introductory sequence to the Taraspanglish project, a new sequence starts showing a detailed shot of the hand of someone who is cooking in a house; the person is pouring too much salt on what he is cooking. The shot zooms out and it reveals an adult man, dark skinned and using a pair of ridiculous glasses. The sequence has an aesthetic that alludes to home videos: hand held, poorly lit - the way people record their own family videos. The reference to home videos is important because scholars such as Naficy (2001) and Schiwy (2009) point out that one of the major ways in which migrants communicate with their communities of origin is by sending videos back and forth (i.e., video letter) to/from home, although many of these are characterized by little cutting or extremely long shots. The man in this video leaves the kitchen and calls his children to dinner in Spanish, “Niños, vengan a comer.” A full shot reveals the living room, where some boys and girls are watching TV and studying. The oldest sibling complains in Tarasco, while subtitles in Spanish reveal that he finds his English homework too difficult and a younger sister agrees in Spanish: “Es que esto está muy dificil.” The youngest brother replies, “You guys are dumb. English is much easier than Tarasco,” and the subtitles translate this into Spanish. A low-angle shot shows the father telling the youngsters in Spanish “Miren muchachos,” and then in Tarasco, “Es muy fácil, solo es cuestión de las terminaciones. Comunicación, *communication*; transportación, *transportation*; información, *information*; flores, *floration.*” He then adds, in Tarasco, “Además, sólo es cosa de quitar palabras, doctor, doc; carro, *car*; pantalón, *pants*; y shorts, *short.*” The youngest brother looks at him disapprovingly and then says, “That is not true. It’s not that easy. There are words like kitchen, center and city.” This upsets the adult who intimidatingly raises his hand while disgruntled, and in Tarasco demands to not be contradicted, “¡Chamaco no contradiga a su padre!” The oldest brother, scared and surprised, exclaims in Tarasco (according to the subtitles) “¡Hay GUEY! ¡Chale!,“ with another non-translated word in Tarasco. The youngest then agrees “Yeah! Highway es carretera.” The “hay güey” expression is a very popular exclamation in Mexico, which sounds similar to the word in English that means highway and possibly to a word in the Tarasco language. The directors try to hook the viewer by using a humorous reflection on the tensions that exist in the use they make of different linguistic codes. The complexity of negotiating between these contexts includes also a tension between past, present, and future. The videomakers show how the migrants reflect on their own culture, while being aware that their cultural identity is a mobile construction in constant tension with its environment.

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11 A different way to translate this expression in Spanish from the one provided by the authors is ¡Ay güey! ¡Chale!, which are expressions of fear or surprise from popular Mexican argot.
Along these lines, the phrase shown in the introduction, “un solo lenguaje de video en tres lenguas,” underlines the ways that video technology serves as a vehicle of negotiation between the different contexts that surround the Taraspanglish migrants. In this segment, the videomakers confront the viewer with some of the existent preconceived cinematic depictions about Indigenous people: monolinguals, traditionalists, very conservative, static, and incapable of adapting. By using humor and irony the videomakers expose and refute these preconceptions.

In addition to the mix of different audio-visual resources, the name of the project also reveals the hybrid environment in which the subjects of the documentary move. Beyond the emphasis on the linguistic context of the directors stated in the title (Tarasco, Spanish, and English), these linguistic categories have a particular historical-cultural weight as well: Indigenous-local, Mexican-national and foreign-transnational. The various symbolic, cultural and historic impetuses combined in these contexts find a space for intersection in the Taraspanglish Shorts, where the Purépecha migrants, or better said the Taraspanglish subjects, negotiate their identity. Lynn Stephen (2007) has conceptualized the migration of Mexican Indigenous peoples to United States as a “transborder” experience. Stephen argues that the Indigenous migrants not only cross a national border but also a great variety of frontiers (ethnic, gender, generational, regional) that shape their experience (pp. 24-25). Thus, the Taraspanglish space allows the participants in these video productions to develop strategies of identity that produce “new identities” and cultures based on the border crossing experience. These identities are created from the fixed categories imposed by Western hegemonic thought, such as ideas about what it is to be Indigenous, Mexican, local, foreign, or the Other. Thus, it is possible to affirm that Taraspanglish is a space for confrontation, dialog, negotiation, and appropriation and transformation of the Purepecha communities in California.

**Danza de la identidad, embodied practices and hip hop**

The Danza de la identidad short gives another glimpse of the diasporic experience, related to the nostalgia for the homeland and local traditions. In a diasporic context, nostalgia is a driving force generated by the sense of loss experienced by the subjects. Thus, themes of sadness and loneliness, as well as sad and lonely characters, are recurrent in accented cinema because, as Naficy (2001) points out, “Loneliness is an inevitable outcome of transnationality” (p. 55). A diasporic nostalgia involves the idealization of the homeland and the past; consequently, accented films/videos evoke the landscape, the music, the family, the monuments, the history, and the traditions as part of the nostalgia.

In a different tone than What is Taraspanglish?, Danza de la identidad is an intimate portrait of the nostalgia of a Purépecha migrant who longs for the traditional dance of his hometown. The title of this segment appears with other titles that read “Kúrpiti: Danza Celeste/ Hip Hop ¡Cielos que danza!” The next shot shows a man sitting on the floor; the man is actually the same one that appears in the segment Mexicanos vs mexicanos, and he is talking directly to the camera which is also in the same low level (Image 8), building a more intimate moment with
the subject while he states, “Extraño mucho la danza. Ya quiero ir a bailar otra vez ahí, para que vean que todavía puedo” (I miss dancing. Now I want to dance again there for them to see that I can still dance). This nostalgic confession is accentuated by black and white aesthetics; meanwhile, the framing seems to imprison the man.

The scene reveals that life in diaspora triggers not only emotions of loss but also a claustrophobic feeling. Then the image switches to color, to a space with a white background and a portable music player on the floor; the man then enters the frame and turns the music on. The young man starts dancing to the music (Image 9), which is the song ¿Me comprendes, Mendes?, performed by the Mexican hip hop band Control Machete.¹²

The soundtrack of the next sequence replaces the Hip Hop song with a piece of traditional Purépecha folk music. This combination is a sample of a negotiation between the traditional and the global. The same man is dancing in the next shot with a little boy dressed in a fashion similar to his, while a title clarifies “Para que me vea danzando otra vez y no se pierda la tradición” (So he can see me dancing and the tradition is not lost) (Image 10).

¹² This song is included in the first album of the group, Mucho barato…(1996).
Through this association of ideas, the directors show how through embodied practices such as dance it is possible to transmit important cultural aspects like traditions and other values, as well as making a connection between the original communities and the new ones. By relating hip hop and the traditional dances, the videomakers suggest that it is impossible to escape the influence of the environments in which they are now living. The choice of hip hop music is meaningful since some of the main qualities of this musical style are its political commitment and its search for justice and empowerment, as well as respect for the cultural differences that coexist in the musical mix. Hip hop is a musical form that sometimes calls for social renewal, and it is associated with some projects of civil resistance. Within the framework of the quest for Indigenous autonomy, hip hop is presented as a creative tool that is added to the expression of cultural and political demands made by the Amerindian peoples. In this case, the Indigenous videomakers have found a vehicle to express their cultural activism by showing a way in which the traditions can be adapted to the everyday life of the migrants, demystifying the idea that the traditions practiced by the Indigenous Peoples are pure, static, and immaculate. The Taraspanglis videomakers express that the culture that they live in is mobile, negotiated and uniquely oriented.

It is also important to highlight that these videomakers vindicate the embodied practices that were discounted a long time ago by Western thought. Diana Taylor (2003), Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo (2004), among others, mention that since the moment of conquest and early colonial encounters the embodied practices (like ritual, dance, song, weaving, storytelling, and cooking) were banned as vehicles of knowledge, while alphanumeric writing was favoured in its place. Even when this kind of knowledge has been systematically diminished and subalternized, it has survived through centuries of resistance. In the case of Indigenous media, Schiwy (2009) argues that when Indigenous media decide to vindicate Indigenous knowledge, they contest a process of colonial subalternization (pp. 8-9). In this way, Indigenous people around the world are fighting back by recovering their embodied practices and restoring their cultural and historical value.

In the sequence, the body becomes the key element and everything else disappears. The importance rests upon the performance of the young Indigenous boy, giving a special meaning to
his dance, the dance from his place of origin and the cultural knowledge he is transmitting with it. Their culture is transmitted to the new generations embodied in the figure of the Indigenous boy that is dancing next to the man. The boy is receiving Indigenous knowledge, the Purépecha knowledge, already influenced by the US life style, Mexican culture, and the urban expression of hip hop. The identity of the Indigenous migrants is now overlapped in a way that is understood by the videomakers as a “mobile culture,” in a manner that acknowledges how their identity is in constant transformation while maintaining a strong connection with their roots.

The pastiche, as a combination of elements and aesthetic “imitation” (Hutcheon, 1985; Dyer 2007) carries an “emancipatory potential” according to Hoesterey (2001, p. 29), that allows resistance and rejection of the rigid identity categories to which Indians, Mexicans, migrants, Indigenous people, citizens, etc. have been historically linked. Richard Dyer and Linda Hutcheon find that in the act of combination and imitation there is a reflection process. Dyer (2007) explains it in this way:

The very fact that it breaks the boundaries of medium and genre, and refuses decorum and harmony, implies that it challenges received wisdom about what goes with what. [...] In contrast, the singular, homogenous and univocal character of other forms of art can be seen as the voice of authority that seeks to make all conform to its will or programme. (p. 21)

Therefore, the individuality of every element of the pastiche avoids a homogeneous narration, while the narration is open and also transformative. In Danza de la identidad, the dance steps are related to a traditional Purépecha dance while the hip hop music that blends for a moment with the dance in the background has a different tone. Hip Hop music and the Celestial dance have different roots, and each one of them has its own history and cultural space. However, this is not an impediment to their juxtaposition in the Tarasanglish experience. The young man dancing knows the place that this Celestial dance occupies in his life: his origins, the traditions of his ancestors, his heritage. As well, he understands the place of hip hop music in his life: his present, the connection with other ways of thinking, the distance from his original community. The juxtaposition of these two elements engenders something different and new, something more adjusted to the current reality experienced by the migrants, revealing at the same time the ongoing construction of identity that is taking place in their lives. The videomakers develop a reflection of how their culture is mobile, while also continuing to emphasize their strong connection with their ethnic roots, “Cultura móvil, pasos de danza inmóvil” (Image 11).
While the use of pastiche allows the videomakers to build a dialogue between discourses, times and identities, by giving a place to the embodied practices they also restore value to these as a valid way of knowledge. The Celestial dance, for example, is shown as the vehicle used to transmit and keep the traditions of their communities of origin for the new generations born in the diaspora. At the same time, through the use of performance captured on video, the Taraspanglish subjects act or dramatize their everyday lives, their history and their present, and they project their future by identifying themselves as Indigenous, migrants, Mexicans, workers, undocumented, documented, women, men, etc. Through the use of media technology and the staging of their embodied practices adapted to their new context, the Taraspanglish identity shown in the shorts is not only a text but also a series of repertoires that are continually being modified and built depending on the time and space in which they move. Even when Diana Taylor (2003) affirms that, “the live performance can never be captured” (p. 20), the fact that the mediamakers are adapting their embodied practices to their new identities through the use of video, shows the way that this technology blurs the distinction made by Taylor between the live performance and the video (representation) by turning the video into an embodied practice that transmits knowledge, at least in the production and motivation of the videos.

Conclusions

The directors of the Taraspanglish project use the documentary form to address the implications arising from the condition of being a migrant through the use of a narrative and visual style that exposes the audio-visual elements and resources used to make a video, with the idea of making the viewer aware that they are manipulating audio-visual technology to communicate their message and to build a representation. Within this concept the directors incorporate in their accented documentaries strategies such as the pastiche form. One of the main reasons for the use of the pastiche is the necessity of acknowledging that the experiences of their subjects are comprised of a diversity of elements that, when amalgamated, create a new and different identity. Among the main elements that make up the identity of the migrants are traces of their
ethnic, national hegemonic or transnational culture. Indigenous Tarasca or Purépecha peoples integrate some aspects of the Mexican hegemonic culture, as well as some from the American and Chicana ones, into their discourse of identity; the vehicle used to highlight this acquisition and negotiation process are various audio-visual resources and repertoires: documentary, fiction, parody, music video, docudrama, video-letters, and others. Additionally, the use of the performative mode of documentary is a way to prioritize a subjective approach over a descriptive and argumentative one, focusing on transmitting the migratory experience from the Taraspanglish subjects in a more emotional tone.

The combination of the expressive resources used in the reflective mode and performative modes implies that the directors are trying to emphasize the emotional aspect of the migratory experience and transmit it to the viewer as effectively as possible. This can be appreciated in another segment of the series, called Así son mis días, which documents a day of working in the Californian countryside, from sunrise to the end of the day. These images use the song of the same name (performed by Mexican hip hop band Control Machete\(^\text{13}\)) as a musical backdrop. Without dialogue or interviews explaining the difficulty of the workday for the migrants, the directors choose to allow music and images to emotionally reach the audience while making them reflect about the harshness of daily work in the countryside.

The Taraspanglish Shorts rescue the new identities formed within the Indigenous groups during their migratory experiences, showing them as something alive, in movement, and in continuous transformation amongst the different spaces of these experiences. As well, these videos show an active positioning of the identity of the Taraspanglish subjects. This is very meaningful since these subjects are the ones who identify themselves as Taraspanglish, which demonstrates that far from being fragmented as a result of the intersection of a variety of identifying discourses, as people typically perceive them, it instead reveals that this act of self-definition is an active process of choice and positioning, based on the experiences of daily life. In this process, the subjects are actively identifying the elements that comprise their identity, which, among others, can be regional, cultural, or linguistic.

Also, by declaring themselves Taraspanglish through the audio-visual medium, the videomakers are performing a triple ethnographic function, where they reveal their interest in reflecting upon their own situation as migrants and the way this is influencing and shaping their identities. The viewer is brought to this reflective space that presents the different categories chosen by the directors to define themselves in a negotiation process of adding and integrating all these identifying discourses. Thus, being Indigenous is not essentialized but instead presented as a construction in constant change, which is affected and influenced by a multiplicity of experiences and relationships (social, cultural, economic, etc.). The documentaries analyzed incorporate a variety of styles and technical, expressive and conceptual resources, which come to be a reflection of the way the new identities are assumed and built by the Indigenous migrants in their current migratory context.

\(^{13}\) Also included in the album *Mucho barato*... (1996)
But above all, the *Taraspanglish Shorts* show us the way that Indigenous identity is assumed (in a transcendental moment for the self-determination movements) as well as the different combinations of elements, discourses and situations that intersect and overlap into being and knowing one’s Indigenous self: woman, man, activist, Mexican, migrant, marginal, Indigenous, intellectual, videomaker, narrator, etc.

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**References**


