

Wicked Women and Witches

Subversive readings of the female monster in Mexican and Argentinian horror film

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Abstract

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This thesis accrues to the growing field of Latin American horror scholarship in relation to gender and sexuality, discussing the implications of the representation of the feminized, racialized and/or impoverished monster in relation to Mexican and Argentinian national identity discourses. The thesis looks at two distinct iterations of gendered monstrosity in Mexican and Argentinian visual culture: La Llorona and the *bruja* (witch), respectively. Through six case studies, the thesis examines the ways in which these monsters shore up *and* negotiate the roles allotted to their bodies in the larger process of national identity writing. This study ascertains the usefulness of these monstrous entities in perpetual categorical inbetweenness, a position from which they enable critique on the colonial optic that has informed their depiction. These distributions of power, it is argued, are worked through foundational conflicts that embroil La Llorona and the *bruja*, namely: Mexico's reckoning with a colonial past turned colonial present and Argentina's foundational opposition between the redeeming potentialities of "civilization" over "barbarism."

In order to tackle the transmogrification and hierarchization of sexual difference as vital to the writing of national identity discourses, this thesis draws from feminist philosophy and decolonial thought. From the former, it recuperates Luce Irigaray's writing on fluidity and her critique of the constraints of patriarchal languages in the articulation of gender and sexuality and the hierarchization of difference. I envision fluidity as a faculty that allows us to better understand the ways in which patriarchal organizations of knowledge, time and sexuality reveal cracks in their configuration. These organizations, I posit, can be readily ascertained as the foundation of national projects written from colonial, patriarchal predominance. However, this thesis also acknowledges the limitations of psychoanalytical frameworks to account for racial difference and its relation to gender. Therefore, I turn to decolonial thought, reflecting on race and gender as co-constitutive, colonial fictions that inform representations of La Llorona and the *bruja*. In addition, this thesis relies on contextual readings that account for the importance of the political, cultural and historical circumstances in which each case study is embedded.

Chapter One offers an overview of the ways in which Mexico and Argentina have followed similar tracks in terms of horror filmmaking, arguing for the parallel evaluation of their industrial, cultural and historical contexts, to present a novel way of reading the fashioning of their national identities by looking at their genre films. Chapter Two focuses on the figure of La Llorona (The Weeping Woman) as a presence that evinces the painful colonial wound over which *mestizo* nationalism has encroached, voicing the trauma of oppression and exploitation of racialized and feminized bodies in service of colonial patriarchy. The chapter tracks the origins of the myth to *La Llorona* (dir. Ramón Peón, 1933), its subversion to *La Maldición de La Llorona* (dir. Rafael Baledón, 1961) and its updating as a figure of resistance in the era of *feminicidio* and gore capitalism in *Vuelven* (dir. Issa López, 2017). Lastly, Chapter Three explores the possibilities of the Argentinian *bruja* as the embodiment of all that stands outside of "civilization," resisting the violence of its project in the advancement of colonial modernity by denouncing the regulation of the body and its knowledges. The chapter offers the hypersexual witch of *Embrujada* (dir. Armando Bó, 1969) as an affront to the policing of the body, its pleasures and knowledges and as a way to negotiate normative models of femininity and family in accordance to nationalist values. It then approaches the policing and governance of the body, birth and reproduction in two contemporary pieces: *Habitaciones para turistas* (dir. Adrián García Bogliano, 2004) and *Luciferina* (dir. Gonzalo Calzada, 2018). These case studies, I argue, find in the *bruja* a figure that either challenges or enacts the oppressions of extreme coloniality embodied in dictatorial necropolitical projects, always functioning as an enabler of critical thought.

Keywords: feminist philosophy, decolonial thought, monstrosity, Latin America, horror cinema, Mexico, Argentina, La Llorona, witch