

# **The Smell of Films and Memories: A Mexican Migrant's Search for Emotional Sustainability.**

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## **Introduction**

I am sitting in the darkness, surrounded by Australians waiting for the film to begin. I am anxious wondering how this film will represent my country. I feel scrutinised as if they knew I am Mexican and they will judge me through the gaze of the film. At the same time I am excited. I want to see my city again and walk in it through its images and sounds, and remember my past in it. I know this will make me feel close to the ones who stayed there.

When people migrate to a culturally different country the act of remembering acquires a vital and distinctive meaning. Having migrated to Australia my memories of places and my past life there have slowly become vague, and I find it difficult to know for sure if my recollections are real, imagined or just products of my desire. In many cases I find it impossible to communicate my memories to people I interact with in the new environment who do not share my cultural referents. It is not so simple for migrants to recount our memories. It is not the same as remembering in other circumstances. In this case the recollection cannot be situated in familiar contexts and common referents or be part of a shared story. Telling our stories of past experiences in another cultural context involves refractions that give stories new meanings. In this dialogue the act of narration transforms what we remember and how it can be interpreted in the different cultural context.

Far from our country of origin, our history, personal life experience and customs provide specific ways of narrating our identity. We construct ourselves for the native others, contrasting more than finding commonalities among our experiences. To share a memory is to communicate our difference. In the new context our identity seems to be disconnected from our past. Our history, or at least part of it, is for our audience somehow strange, not to say folkloric, and in many cases it is even incomprehensible. Implicitly or explicitly we continuously have to translate, not just between languages but between cultural meanings. This act of translation demands more than a standard bilingual competence (Bryan *et al.* 2001). Lacking knowledge of the new cultural environment makes me feel frustrated, inadequately equipped to fully communicate.

Memory is without question an important part of being human and in the context of migration it acquires a central value. Memories sustain people emotionally, reinforcing or not the links with social and affective experiences associated with multiple locations in the two countries (see Fortier [2000] on the role of memory in identity formation of migrants). Memories are an anchor to our past and connect us with those who stayed in the home country and are still part of our emotional life, even if now mediated by phone calls, Skype exchanges, emails or letters, or the trips in which as migrants we feel not locals anymore. We become visitors, known and unknown at the same time.

Having lived most of my life in Mexico City, in my new life in Australia I have found it almost impossible to relate with others without using my Mexican referents. I use my recollections to communicate but because my interlocutors are unfamiliar with the cultural context where my experience happened, difficulties of communication frequently appear. I want to find common referents, but the ones they recognise frequently rely on stereotypes and make me feel depersonalised. In the attempt to belong I retell my memories constructing myself as if I were a cultural actor performing with an ethnic identity (Bell 1999). I am who I am, but adorned by my Mexicanness. I become more Mexican than myself (Coronado 2003). Those memories told as representative of my ethnicity do not necessarily express how I feel I am, and thus they make me feel emotionally dissatisfied. My identity performance is aimed at the others but excludes myself. However, in the story-telling I become in some way who I claim I am.

Immersed into a systematic process of self observation and self reflection on my life in Australia, for almost fifteen years living between two countries (Mexico and Australia), two cities (Mexico City and Sydney), and two social worlds (Mexican and multicultural Australian ‘families-friends’), I have explored my emotional experiences and their relationship with my memories of place. For me ‘place’ is more than the physical location. de Certeau (1984: 118) defines place in the context of his reading of everyday practice as the organised ‘objects of something reducible to the being-there as something dead,’ static. For him place contrasts with space, as ‘a place constituted by a system of signs, a ‘practised place’ (de Certeau 1984: 17). But from the perspective of memory and emotions, places are never emptied of social, cultural and affective meanings, even when they look deserted, still. That is why in this paper I will use the concept ‘place’ to refer to the semiotic complexity of the city (or other locations) in which narratives construct memories. Place is therefore the objective/subjective site where I have reflected on my personal life, my recollections and my way of recounting them, in my country of origin and my country of destination.

In this paper I capture the inherent complexity of the migrant experience by selecting one element I discovered especially significant in my emotional strategies: the memory associations triggered by representations of Mexico in films I have seen in cinemas in Australia. In this case I include films that were produced by Mexicans—*Amores Perros* (2000) and *Babel* (2006) by Alejandro González Iñárritu, and *Y tu mamá también* Alfonso Cuarón (2001)—and on Mexico, these three and *Frida* (2002) by Julie Taymor. All included themes and places that I found meaningful for my emotional wellbeing which includes social and affective connections with others in Australia, and also their distant intermittent continuity in Mexico. I identify this process with the concept of emotional sustainability, defined as the ‘the ability to sustain friendly and nurturing relationships to experience a sense of body-mind and person-planet unity and to maintain physical and emotional health’ (Sattmann-Frese 2005: 218).

I situated my autoethnography in reflecting on my experience as migrant member of an Australian cinema audience. The four films I will refer to include representations of Mexican life from different gazes, which have triggered important recollections about Mexico City, my city of origin, and the country side. In these films I explore how the interaction between different discrete elements shown in the visual and audio

representations, streets, houses, sounds, behaviours, attires, verbal styles and events, set off deeply embodied memories stimulating strong emotional associations. This is one of the intentions of film makers, to emotionally affect audiences through exposure to the screen experience (Keene 2010). Those elements brought me back to personal incidents, some similar and others completely different from those that motivated my recollections and the infinite intimate associations triggered by the films. By reflecting on these incidents I will explore the role different senses play in the process of recollection and its emotional effects, and subsequently the embodiment of such experience: smelling, feeling and reliving through films.

### **A Mexican goes to the movies in Australia. An autoethnography.**

In the search for understanding the link between place, memory and migration I used an autoethnographic approach (Coronado 2009). My aim was to incorporate my own experience as migrant as a core source of data. The autoethnographic reflection and writing, understood as at once introspection and a consideration of the ethnographer's immersion in the processes involved in the study (Adler and Adler 1999), allowed me to identify emotional affects and strategic responses in my everyday practices in the country of destination, linked to my status as a Mexican in Australia.

According to Kuhn (2002: 33) 'Emotion and memory bring into play a category with which film theory—and cultural theory more generally—are ill equipped to deal: experience ... a key category of everyday knowledge, structuring people's lives in important ways.' Such reflections on one's own experience are a significant form of knowledge. In this case I reflect on processes that in many cases are unconscious and difficult to explore, and therefore hard to understand without including researcher reflexivity. Thus I decided to research the impact on migrants of representations of their country of origin in films using an exploration of my own subjectivity as a way to arrive at a deeper comprehension based on my own experience. In this case my autoethnography refers to my condition as a subject under study (Ellis & Boucher 2000). I reflected on myself as migrant, focusing on the strategies I have used to sustain myself emotionally regarding the here (place of destination) and the there (place of origin).

I used autoethnography as a systematic and reflective practice for reconstructing my experiences (acts of memory), the feelings triggered (emotional responses), my

sensations (sensorial memory) and the ways I have incorporated those recollections in my social interactions in both countries. My personal reflections focused on ‘observation’ of my responses to films that included representations of Mexico and I saw in Australia. I also included reflections on what I remembered when viewing the films again for accurate descriptions of the films. At all stages of my reflections the focus was on myself as audience.

These reflections have highlighted the emotional potential that stories and images of the country of origin, shown in films, can have not only for migrants, but also for other viewers who have not directly experienced the represented events.<sup>1</sup>

My experience of cinematographic representations in the films, associated with places that connect with nostalgic events is inherently complex, and went beyond what I expected as the obvious response to images and sounds. They triggered emotions and generated unexpected bodily responses, among them the memory of familiar smells. By smelling the film I was simultaneously transported to important moments of my life or to forgotten events, not necessarily connected with the film image-signs (Pasolini 1976). The embodied emotions experienced sitting in front of the big screen made me feel closer to the place imprinted in my memory, the Mexico that lives through my different senses.

### **Place and Memory: Becoming myself in my two cities**

Mexico City, my place of origin, carries a strong emotional baggage in my recollections. They trigger conflicting feelings: pain, joy, nostalgia, rage, home sickness, oblivion, desire, and relief. It is the city of my childhood, my teenage years and so far most of my adult life. In it my primal affects were born and my roots are buried. That is why I regard this city as the place of my most constitutive memories. I was made and made myself in it as an urban, white, professional middle class woman.

As an anthropologist I had important life experiences in the countryside but those experiences can also be associated with the social relations which are part of the life of

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<sup>1</sup> This kind of emotional response was analysed by Keene (2010) regarding the impact of war films on veterans and their society. Through the use of the concept ‘prosthetic memory’—coined by Alison Landsberg (2004)—he emphasises the role of prosthetic memory as a form of memory in which ‘the new technologies of mass consumption have enabled the creation of affective experiences that can create a “bodily memory,” even though its possessor has not lived through the original event’ (Keene 2010: 10).

the city, the rural-urban dynamic. In Mexico City I encountered many rural migrants. I became their friend and was invited to their home towns. Thus, rural life is also meaningful as part of my Mexican identity.

My destination city, Sydney, is simultaneously my own and alien, familiar and strange, similar and startling. It constitutes me in ways which although profoundly affective I find more difficult to locate in the material space of the city. My recollections in it are intimate and less spatial. I feel I am still a tourist. Nevertheless, the new place also produces sensory perceptions, and day by day they become part of the constitution of my new identity and my memory. Being myself in both cities I discovered they are alike. Both have similar corners and urban ambiances and in both I found kindness and hostility, traffic, dust and smog, people in a hurry and wandering families or young and old couples, dark streets and luminous spaces. But they feel, look, sound, smell, and are lived differently. At least that is how I sense them. The Australian countryside seems very different to me, especially where there are no people, but even more so when it is inhabited and appropriated in culturally different ways. How is it possible that towns do not have centre? I still look for it when travelling along country roads, not knowing where to stop.

After some years living far from my country, my memories of 'my' city have become fuzzy. I have doubts about them being what I have remembered, thinking I have constructed them in my imagination so that I will not lose them. I imagine my city with sounds, colours and textures, temperatures, odours and flavours that feel so real that I cannot be certain if my imagination is playing games or if my memories represent the experiences as they actually were<sup>2</sup>. Against my intellectual position, that acknowledges that memory is always created in acts of communication, as Susan Engel (1999) argues, I insist on remembering my experiences of places as they were, searching in my recollections for an unreachable truth. I need to remember because my memories represent my belonging, the social construction of my beliefs and perceptions. My memories give me my sense of place (McDowell 2008).

My lived places, now memories, feel accurate in the sense that 'memory is true if it resonates with oneself, illuminates one's life and affords a sense of continuity and

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<sup>2</sup> The quality of memory narratives seems to be similar to what Freud (1965) describes as dream-narratives, in which unconscious meanings emerge and become part of how the memory is communicated.

identity to the remembered' (Engel 1999: 13). My places are there and I know they are shared by the ones who stayed. The places I remember, full of social and emotional meanings, are still inhabited by the people who stayed there, but they know how they have been transformed. When I am back (or share past recollections in phone conversations) I find it easy to communicate my memories. I do not have to struggle to make sense, nor to explain the cultural context in which things happened. We share histories and we interpret using cultural codes that provide common meanings and worldviews. These emerge out of the cultural matrix, which in a continuous flux simultaneously articulates common meanings and generates new cultural processes and practices (Bonfil 1987a).<sup>3</sup> Through common cultural referents we recognise each other and contextualise our stories. We trust we can decode meanings. In this way I have evidence of our commonality and this certainty reinforces our links. I continue to be for them as I was, although now differently. To share my memories in such conditions provides me emotional strength (Engel 1999: 33) that sustains me in my new country. It feeds my sense of still belonging, even if dislocated.

In Australia, to narrate those memories implies in the first instance to translate them into another cultural context and into a language that is not mine, English. Telling my memories demands of me a premeditated construction of meaning in which I continuously need to decide what I want to communicate and why, and then plan how to do it successfully. Not always does the outcome satisfy me.

Intentional construction of memory is not unique to my experience or to the migrant condition. It has been recognised as an inherent characteristic in the act of recalling. Furthermore, independently of being deliberate or not, the acts of recollection are 'inevitably selective in that they serve particular interests and political ideologies in the present' (McDowell 2008: 42). It is possible to go further, and recognise that the act of communicating our memories changes the way in which we remember them. In other words, 'in each case the person you are telling it to, and the reasons you are telling it, will have a formative effect on the memory itself' (McDowell 2008: 12). By selecting

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<sup>3</sup> This kind of application of Bonfil's ideas reinforces my interest in his conceptualisation of deep culture (1987b). Against the superficial reading of his work as essentialist, his theorisation, especially in his article 'La teoría del control cultural' (1987a), offers insights into cultural processes that simultaneously have continuity and change.

and replaying the acts that have historically constituted us that we decide are meaningful for our new identities, we perform who we are.<sup>4</sup>

For a migrant like me telling my memories in Australia means to be alert most of the time during the communication process. It seems to me to demand greater awareness than I would have if I was in Mexico, and it makes me feel the communication loses spontaneity. It feels artificial and tiring. Even so, I trust that the metropolitan context as ‘a universal and abstract subject which the city is itself’ (de Certeau 1984: 94) generates convergence, and hopefully while talking about my city and my life in it I will find shared referents, or at least close associations. In the end communication happens, even if occasionally I am frustrated feeling I was not fully understood.

When conversations trigger memories and associations with my city I often feel that common urban referents would have allowed me to establish connections and meanings, and enabled me to relate better with my interlocutors in social and emotional ways. In those cases I have usually chosen selected memories to communicate who I am, in the hope that my audience would be able to find in my represented identity not only who I am as a migrant, a Mexican, but who I am as myself. But through my difficulties to communicate my memories I have discovered that in fact the places are hugely different.

### **The perception of senses: How memories come to life**

The memories of my city emerge also without looking for them. It is not just an intellectual and rational process, a coldly planned act of will, but a response to my personal or social emotional needs. Frequently they surprise me and in my reactions I have perceived at different moments that some senses are strongly associated, and they set in motion intense embodied sensations, which are difficult to discern and which I find impossible to express with certainty and precision. One of them is the smell of memories. Odours have an inherent condition of being imprecise and difficult to verbalise (Classen 1993), but this fact does not stop them from being as powerful as other forms of perception that are easier to capture in words.

There are many works on the relationship between memory and smell from different perspectives, more or less experimental, which try to evaluate and measure the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example Butler (1988) on performativity in the constitution of identity, gender in her case.

psychological, biological and social mechanisms of the relationship between them (Herz and Trygg 1996). They include not only the elements associated, but the interaction between different senses and 'odour memory' (Larsson 1997, Wilson & Stevenson 2003; Gibson 1966). More common, however, is the tendency to focus on the study of responses, in verbal or visual media, produced by smell and in particular the faculty of smell (Dade *et al.* 2001).

In my search for connections between smells and memory I followed a different route. I looked at this link through the whole sensorium, i.e. a system in which the faculties of perception interact in the interpretation of the surrounding world. According to senses theorists—for example, Howes (1991)—the sensorium is mediated by social and cultural processes that define unique ways in which we explain and experience reality, according to hierarchies attributed to the different senses, the 'ratios of sense' (Ong 1991). In this case I posit that the sensorium and its link with memory form an indivisible set, in which any of the perceived elements detonates other sensory perceptions, among them smells. As Classen (1993: 103) says:

Olfactory codes function in association with other sensory codes. In certain cases there is a consonance between the message conveyed through the medium of smell and that communicated through other sensory media. In other cases however, the olfactory message differs from that produced by the other sensory characteristics.

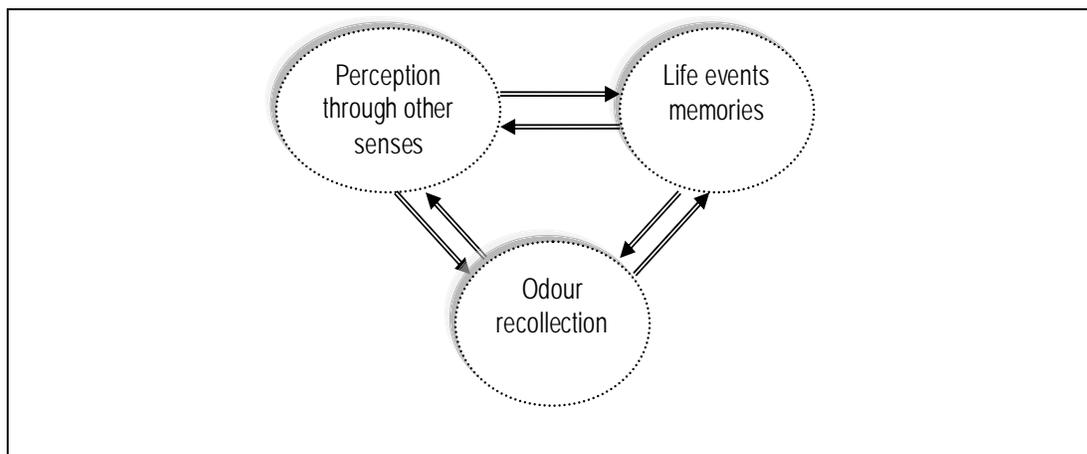
I highlight here the importance of the other senses as mediators between smell → memory, or memory → smell. When incorporating other senses in the process of recalling, it is relevant to take into account the nexus smell-memory not as a direct and unidirectional association but as a system which involves at least three elements. To model this process I use as metaphor the ideas of Henri Poincaré (1943) on the three body system. He studied the interdependence of the sun, the earth and the moon, demonstrating the emergence of complexity when a third body is taken into account, even if, like the moon compared to the sun and the earth it is much smaller and less visible.

Most accounts of the senses emphasise sight and hearing. The inclusion of smell as a minor sense disrupts the simplicity of the dominant binary relation. In practice separating out any one of the senses would be artificial and less productive for the aims of this self reflection. The interdependence between the different senses is crucial,

bearing in mind that beside the impacts of the context of production and communication in which the recollections are told, the already mentioned process of remembering includes a mix of fragments which are perceived by different senses and with multiple connotations: ‘each time we say or imagine something from our past we are putting it together from bits and pieces that may have until now been stored separately’ (Engel 1999: 6).

Out of my reflections on how cinema might contribute to emotional sustainability I propose a systemic view in the form of another 3-Body model, in which the relationship between smell and memory is mediated by the other senses, sight, hearing, and imaginary touch and taste, as in Figure 1.

Instead of situations in which smell triggers memories, as in the famous novel *In search of lost time* (Proust 1994) where from the perception of the smell of madeleines Proust related the memories of his aunt and other associations from his childhood (see also Sutton 2001), the odour can be also evoked by perception through other senses that are linked themselves with recalled stories in which additional emotions are generated. It is not that I remember because I smell, but that I smell because I remember, because I see and hear.



**Figure 1:** Three-body system in the interaction between smell and memory.

The three body relationship is multidirectional. Each site can activate memories displayed in others of the associated senses. In the same way images we observe in films might bring memories from the past into our present, they can also become

embodied, triggering physical reactions associated with the emotions produced. Such recollections turn into imaginaries, that is, constructed representations of lived experiences, including memories of smell, touch and other sensations such as cold, heat, moisture and anguish. For me, when memories produce corporal associations they generate more intensity and consequently more emotional responses are produced.

This tridimensional conceptualisation of the interaction between smell and memory helped me to explore the value of films as an emotional support for migrants. From images and sounds I had olfactory associations, followed by emotions and sensations which themselves produced relations with other memories, not necessarily linked directly with the event that activated the olfactory episode. As Kuhn (2002: 164) states in relation to films, the sense of recognition comes not because the places or events in the film necessarily resemble those of the viewer, but because the film expresses feelings that prompt the audience's memories.

In my analyses of films I focused on the elements which triggered olfactory memories followed by emotional sensations. I recreated these experiences using my sociological imagination, (Mills 2000) and my ethnographic imagination (Willis 2000): I linked my reflections on my 'problem' with broader social patterns that affected that experience. The selection criteria for my corpus (the films I analysed) came from my sensorial and emotional responses to the wider context of translocation between origin and destination.

In my reflections as cinema goer the selection of films was not arbitrary. I used my surprise as an indicator of which films and situations would generate the strongest olfactory memories that create the emotional effect. I will explore the four selected films considering their role on my emotional sustainability as a migrant. Then I explore how the experience connected with my emotional sustainability.

### **In search of emotional sustainability: A Mexican migrant goes to the movies**

In some way the process of writing, trying to describe my reactions in front of the screen and watching the films again and again to corroborate my recollections, reinforced my emotional sustainability. It made me feel close, discovering continuities and ways I can communicate who I am here and there. In figure 2, included below, I capture the process in which I found myself using my sensorium as an audience, first to

see and to hear, then imagining other senses to perceive textures and tastes, and finally embodying the emotions set off by the imaginary or real perceptions of smells.

The most surprising experience for me was the difference between emotions coming from the perceived explicit content of the film (memory in the diagram) and the imaginary triggered in the sensorium as a whole. From the images and sounds represented, which I identified by the senses of sight and hearing, my recollections generated associations sometimes similar but equally often unexpectedly contrary. Emotions that emerge from the films and those created by related memories are not only different, but can be unobvious and opposite.

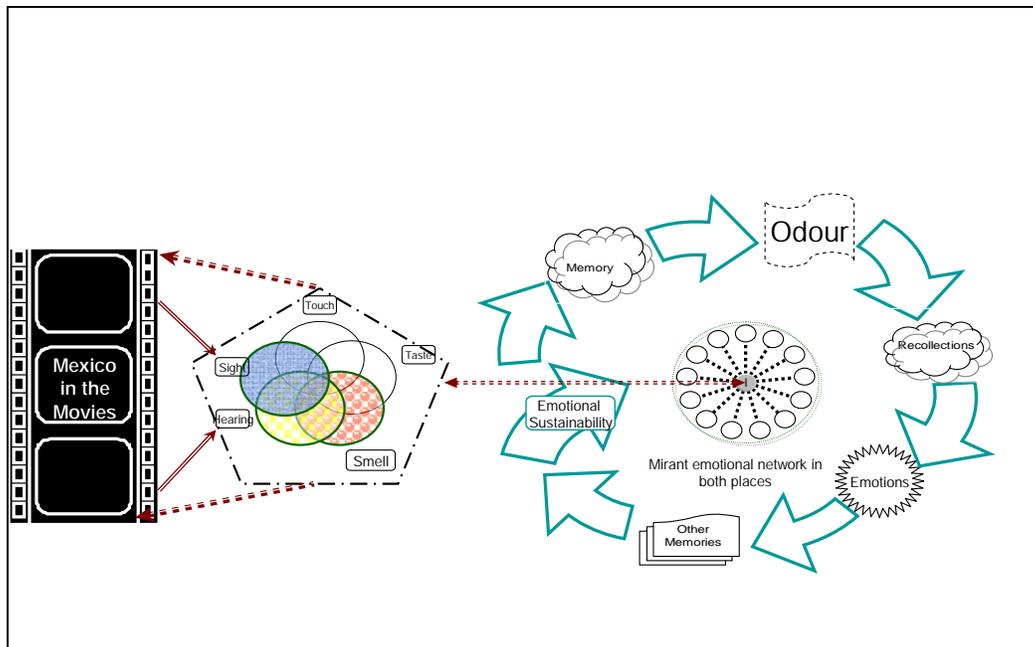


Figure 2: Films, senses and emotional sustainability.

The generation of memory-associations is also infinite. The cycle can continue, finding in each movement the potential of reinforcing my sense of belonging. The connections with my people appear to be stronger even if I am not in face to face communication with them. At the same time the sense of continuity between my past and my present, here and there, reinforces my certainty of relating with the new place, creating my emotional sustainability. Not being divided by an ocean my identity became one, embracing all its diversity, from the now and then, from my countries, my cities, my cultures and my affects.

Films about Mexico, produced by Mexicans or filmmakers from other nationalities, have represented an essential resource for my emotional sustainability in my life as migrant. To achieve emotional sustainability (*supra* Sattmann-Frese 2005) and its associated feelings of belonging can act as an antidote against depressive effects arising from the dislocation involved in the migration process. The feeling of wholeness and wellbeing that emotional sustainability entails is important in situations in which it is common to fall into ‘*anomie*.’ According to Durkheim (1970), in anomic moments, people may experience disassociation or confusion when confronted by the loss of their social and cultural frame of reference. In those situations it is common to find fragmented identities, alienation and marginality in relation to both groups. Such is the risk that we all migrants confront, suddenly de-contextualised, separated from our emotional ties and having to relate to people with other cultures, value systems and social histories.

At the beginning of the relocation process, depending on the reasons for migration and the forms of immersion in the new context, many experience estrangement, isolation and cultural shock. Such feelings make initial interactions with others harder. We may equally experience abandonment and the fantasy of a new and superficial social environment, simultaneously full of anguish and euphoric liberation from past experiences. Some thoughts crossed my mind when I migrated: ‘I do not have a home anymore,’ ‘I will never find true friends again,’ ‘I lost my friends’ or ‘I won’t be part of the life of my loved ones,’ ‘the life of my children escapes as water in my hands.’ I have also encountered similar feelings in conversations with other migrants (see also Read & Wyndham 2003). After some years those fears have lost their intensity and slowly I have discovered strategies for sustaining me emotionally in my two places, with my two peoples. One of those strategies is the emotional associations produced by cinematographic representations of Mexico and the memories they have triggered.

The use of films for my emotional sustainability worked in both directions. They provided cultural referents that allowed me to talk to my new friends in Australia about my past experiences and simultaneously they evoked affective links with my past. For instance, *Babel* offered my Australian friends the possibility of seeing a wedding in a popular/rural Mexican style, which included the decapitation of a hen. Responding to this scene I was able to share over lunch the same shock, and could talk about my

country in a way that was complex, without having to identify personally with such event, even if it is part of the Mexican culture, my culture. Using those images as contrast, I was able to refer to my past and construct for them what I would like my new identity to be, 'Telling stories about the past, our past is a key moment in the making of ourselves ... such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account—whether forgotten or repressed—as by what is actually told' (Kuhn 2002: 2).

The represented culture was familiar but not part of my way of life, although it was closer than I would like to recognise in my new identity. Even though the smell of hen's blood is familiar to me, in the same way as it is for many others who are not Mexican, the event, the images, the noises seemed partially alien to me. In fact I felt relief at being away. Later I will explore this and other relevant scenes in *Babel*.

Films on Mexico provided visual and sound meanings (some as part of dialogues and others as background) for me to find points of commonality to familiarise my Australian friends with situations connected with my memories. They helped me to communicate a deeper comprehension of meanings that are important to me. They provided me with opportunities for self representation that though necessarily Mexican, resonate in such a way that I can talk about my history, a history with continuities and discontinuities with my Australian identity.<sup>5</sup>

Especially important for my memories and associations are the representations of Mexican places in which my personal history was located. Through them I try to capture recollections that are slowly vanishing, leaving only a sense of loss. To see the streets of my childhood and their familiar activities comforts me and helps me to comment on my stories or nostalgias through my associations. Watching the films I remember, but I also discover other ways of perceiving ourselves. The most important experience for me has been the olfactory associations that these images triggered. They generated deep emotions strongly embodied: shivering, sweating, heart beating, itching, flushing. I have never experienced such intense memories through any other means.

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<sup>5</sup> I will not explore here the theme of Australian movies, but it is relevant to mention that I have also used them as a resource to recount my life experiences in Australia when I get back to Mexico. For example the film *Australia* (Luhmann 2008) provided me with referents that helped me to explain how I see my new country, and its social and political history, and how I interpret my relationship with Australia and Australianness. My use of this film, however, feels more didactic and less emotional to me. I have not found in Australian films the kind of imagined embodiment I feel when I see representations of my place of origin.

My first surprise came while seeing the film *Amores Perros*. This film is very sensual in itself. It is also very violent.<sup>6</sup> But in spite of this overt message it triggered a pleasant memory: the soundtrack incorporates sounds from the streets of Mexico, among them the voice of a *tamal*-seller with its familiar cry: '*Tamales!*'<sup>7</sup> The sound triggered a smell of *tamales*, followed by many recollections from my life in Mexico. I will discuss this image at greater length later. For the moment I will just make a connection with a book I had read by Pilcher (2001), who gives *tamales* a central role in the cultural construction of Mexican identity. When I read his book his idea sounded far-fetched, but now, after this intense response to *tamales* I have reconsidered. I asked myself if my personal symbolism attached to *tamales* might be unconsciously linked to some collective meanings linked to the shared culture of Deep Mexico, the core culture which articulates and gives continuity to Mexico's diverse cultural practices (Bonfil 1987b). I do not have an answer, but the experience made me recognise the importance of shared cultural experiences that might carry meanings from the cultural substrata, which can be related with Bonfil's (1987a) cultural matrix (see *supra*).

After my surprise from watching that film I continued smelling films, sometimes inadvertently, at other times on purpose. I paid attention to my reactions each time I watched a Mexican film in Australia, searching, and finding, forms of emotional proximity to my people, my place and my story. This discovery motivated my exploration of smells in movies with a Mexican theme, even when not by Mexican filmmakers. It has also encouraged me to share my strategies. The narrative I include below tries to communicate my memories of how each of the four films triggered olfactory recollections and associated emotions. This practice is now a significant component of my strategy for emotional sustainability, far from my city, my past and my primary affective relationships. In this context my narrative emerged in the language that I regard closer to my affect, which I translated later as an important way to communicate in my new place.

### **Seeing, hearing and smelling my memories on the big screen**

I have chosen to order my account following the chronological order of my life, rather than in the order I experienced the films themselves, as I discovered myself smelling

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of this film as related with the dark side of Mexico, see Coronado and Hodge (2004).

<sup>7</sup> *Tamal* is a popular food made of maize dough stuffed with chilli sauce and meat. It is wrapped with corn or banana leaves and steamed.

and remembering in response to films. I will reflect first on my most distant memories, from my childhood. That does not mean that the process of remembering in the movies was linear. As will be appreciated in the account of my reactions, memories from the four films travelled through different stages of my life and the associations assembled memories that converge and overlap, independently of when they happened in life. I begin with the film *Frida*.

***Frida by Julie Taymor (2002)***

*Frida* is set in two central locations in Mexico City, the suburb of Coyoacán and downtown Mexico City, which coincidentally connect closely with my own history. Even though the film sets those spaces in an earlier time than when I lived there, beginning in 1922 and finishing before I was born, the places as filmed are contemporary, even more so than my remembered place when I lived in Mexico. The fact that it was filmed in 2002 obviously helps it evoke my memories from a later time than the film's chronology. Images of streets, colours and textures are recent, so I find it impossible to know how plausible the film would be for those who were alive in that period. In my memories the images and sounds make sense even if they overlap with more recent memories. For example Frida's house in the film is as it is now, as a museum I have visited recently. The sound of the bells from Saint Augustine's church is in my memories, always the same, from when I was a child till today.

I analyse the film focussing on my reactions as an audience, a Mexican watching a film in Australia. My objective is to narrate the memories triggered by the films as a whole and by specific scenes that evoked olfactory memories that connected with my past, my places and my people. I begin with scenes set in the Zócalo, the main square of Mexico City, and move onto other scenes that connected with different places and events in my life.

*Caminando la película visité el centro de la ciudad como cuando de niña íbamos a comprar con el aguinaldo ropa interior por docena o yendo hacia el zócalo a ver la iluminación navideña. Caminé nuevamente las calles que de niña me llevaban al mercado de Coyoacán agarrada de la mano de mi mamá. Recuerdo los olores del mercado, la mezcla de olor a cilantro, incienso y carne cruda, y yo saltando y tratando de evitar los charcos con su desagradable olor agrio y con miedo a que se me salpicaran mis calcetines blancos.*

Walking the film I visited downtown Mexico City in the same way I did when as a child we went to buy wholesale hosiery or in the direction of the Zócalo, the central plaza of Mexico City, to see the Christmas decoration lights. I walked again the streets that as a girl led me to Coyoacán market, holding my mother's hand. I remembered the market smells, a mix of coriander, incense and raw meat. I see myself jumping the puddles, holding my breath to avoid their disgusting, acid smell, afraid that my white socks might be stained.

*Con las imágenes del panteón huelo a iglesia, particularmente esa mezcla de viejo con olor a cera quemada que seguramente fue lo que en más de una ocasión me hizo que me desmayara. La casa de la familia de Frida me huele a abuela, con el olor de los pajaritos en sus jaulas y el jabón barato en el lavamanos, olor que en mi recuerdo casi no se distingue del jabón para lavar ropa.*

The images of the graveyard remind me of the smell of churches, particularly the stink of oldness mixed with the scent of burned wax, which surely was what made me faint more than once. Frida's family house smells of my granny, with the odour of the birds in their cages and the cheap soap in the hand basin, a smell that in my memory cannot be easily distinguished from laundry soap.

*Las escenas donde hay comida también me desatan olores, pero no me sorprenden. Recordar el olor a mole poblano (el símbolo de la cocina mexicana) que prepara la ex esposa de Diego Rivera al día siguiente de su boda con Frida u oler a chile en nogada me parece obvio y no recuerdo ningún evento en el que de niña me ofrecieran dichos platillos. Mi papá contaba que los chiles en nogada eran especiales para el día de San Agustín en la comida para festejar a mi abuelo, pero yo nunca fui invitada.*

The scenes with food images also triggered aromas but they do not surprise me. Obviously I remembered the smell of *mole poblano* (the icon of Mexican cuisine) which Diego Rivera's ex-wife prepared for the day after his wedding with Frida, or the smell of chillies stuffed with nuts, but I do not recall any event as a child in which someone offered me those dishes. My father liked to say that those chillies were the speciality for Saint Augustine's day, in the banquet offered to my granddad. I was never invited to such an event.

*Lo que sí me sorprende es la mezcla de olor a dulce, canela y grasa ante la imagen de un foco en el puesto de buñuelos en donde Diego y Frida están sentados. En mi recuerdo el foco está mosqueado y me remonta a las innumerables ferias apestosas que visité de niña y de mamá llevando de la mano a mis chiquitas. ¿No sería mejor simplemente oler a buñuelo?*

What surprised me most was the mixing of smells of sweet, cinnamon and fat while watching the image of a light globe on a stand which sells *buñuelos* (pastry bread) where Diego and Frida are seating. In my memory the light globe has fly shit, and this brings me back to the countless stinking fairs I visited as a child, and later as mother, holding the hands of my own little ones. Would it not be better to smell just the *buñuelo* (a special sweet fried bread)?

*Éstos y otros olores me parecen atemporales y me cuesta trabajo ubicarlos en un momento en particular, pero de todos modos me atrapan y me trasladan a lugares en la ciudad de México y a ciertos eventos: Coyoacán el día del Grito, San Ángel en la Feria del Carmen (que también huele a cloroformo de las botellas en donde muestran animales monstruosos), La Alameda en la temporada de Reyes, e incluso el Arco a la Revolución donde recientemente fui con mi nieto pues ahí llegan ahora los Reyes Magos.*

These and other smells seem to me timeless and I find it hard to associate them with a particular moment. Still they trapped me, and made me travel to places in Mexico City and some specific events: Coyoacán on independence day; San Ángel in the Festival for the Virgin of Carmen (which also smells of chloroform, exuding from deformed animals displayed in glass bottles); La Alameda for the festivities of the Three Wise Kings, and the Arch of the Revolution, where I recently took my grandson because the Three Wise Kings made an appearance there.

*Viendo las escenas donde se representa el accidente de Frida también huelo a sangre. El olor me recuerda el accidente que vi de adolescente, en donde la arena ocultaba el color de la sangre pero no su olor. A diferencia del accidente de Frida en mi recuerdo la mujer ahí quedó muerta. Preferiría no acordarme.*

Watching the scenes that represent Frida's accident, I also smell blood. The smell of blood reminds me of an accident I witnessed as a teenager. In my memory the sand concealed the colour of the blood but not its smell. Contrasting the accident in *Frida* with my recollection, the woman I saw was actually dead. I would prefer to forget it.

*En las escenas de fiesta y cantina el humo de puro me remite a la casa de mis papás los sábados, día que su amigo español nos visitaba. Como me desagradaba tener que olerlo cada semana. Siempre pensé ¿por qué no se lo fuma en su casa? El olor a alcohol y cigarro extrañamente me trasladó a la época de la prepa, en La Hiedra. Ahí tomábamos café y cantábamos con una guitarra, pero no recuerdo que oliera a alcohol. Olía a la hiedra que recubría las paredes y a quesadillas.*

In the scenes of parties and bars the smoke of cigars brought me back to my parent's house on Saturdays, the day of my father's Spanish friend's visit. How much I hated its smell. I always thought: why does he not smoke it at his home? The smell of alcohol and cigarettes strangely transported me to my time in high school. In the cafeteria *La Hiedra* (The Ivy) we drank coffee and sang songs accompanied by a guitar, but I do not remember it smelling of alcohol. It smelled of ivy, which gave the place its name and covered the walls. It also smelled of quesadillas.

This memory-association might have come from the setting represented in the film, a tavern with musicians playing in it. Also, I suppose, because both places were associated with the place I lived most of my life, Coyoacán. In this case the connections, as in my three body system, led me first to other senses, but still connected with smell.

*Otros momentos aparecen como asociaciones pero se saltan el orden y me remontan a un recuerdo familiar en mi casa de adulta en el tiempo en que mi hija adolescente pinta. El estudio de Diego y Frida y las múltiples escenas en las que uno o el otro aparecen pintando huelen a las noches en que duermo sabiendo que al despertar el mismo olor aunque más tenue, me anuncia la sorpresa de un nuevo cuadro de mi pequeña artista.*

Other moments appeared as associations but leapt over the chronological order. They brought me back to memories of my own home as adult, when my teenage daughter was painting. Diego's and Frida's studios, and other scenes in which one or the other was painting, smelled of the evenings in which I went to sleep knowing that when I awoke the same smell, although less intense, would announce to me the surprise of a new, striking painting from my little artist.

*La riqueza de las texturas de los muros, los colores y las escenas de las calles llenas de transeúntes pasando entre puestos no me parecen olorosas. Podrían haber olido a melón, pero no. Sin embargo en ellas encuentro dos escenas especialmente evocativas. El puesto de pan me huele a chocolate en el que mi abuelita sopeaba pan de pueblo cuando lo comprábamos en las ferias. La otra escena es la imagen del periódico colgando de un mecate detenido con una pinza para colgar la ropa. Dicho olor me perturba; lo tengo impregnado y lo recuerdo con sólo acercar mis dedos a la nariz. Me parece que el periódico huele a periódico en cualquier lugar del mundo. Quizá por eso prefiero el periódico en Internet.*

The richness of textures on the walls, the colours and the images of streets, full of people passing through the stands, did not prompt specific smells, even though they included images of fruits. I might have smelled the rockmelons but I didn't. However among these images I found two were particularly evocative. The bread stand smelled of the hot chocolate in which my granny soaked the *pan de pueblo*, a kind of bread commonly sold only at festivals and fairs. The other image, of newspapers hanging from ropes with pegs holding them, unsettled me. Its smell is so impregnated in my memory. I recall it just by bringing my fingers towards my nose. It seems newspapers smell the same everywhere. Maybe that is why I prefer news online.

*Es esa clase de olor atemporal y que traspasa espacios. Me recuerda abuelos, padres, hermanos, esposos y amigos, casi siempre hombres, deteniendo con sus manos las páginas abiertas del periódico y pasando las páginas con la fricción de sus dedos manchados. El recuerdo me da escalofríos. Me evoca sensaciones en las que me siento excluida, pero al mismo tiempo puedo establecer conexiones entre mis dos lugares. Es esa clase de recuerdo que me da tranquilidad y certeza. Me permite sentir que mi nueva identidad contiene continuidades y no sólo rupturas.*

It is that kind of timeless odour that invades spaces. It reminds me of grandfathers, fathers, husbands and friends, almost always men, holding the open pages of the newspaper with their arms apart, turning the pages with the friction of their stained fingers. The memory made me shiver. It evoked powerful feelings of being excluded. But at the same time I could find connections between my two

places. It is that kind of memory that creates a sense of calm and certainty. It reminds me that my new identity has continuities and not just ruptures.

***Babel* by Alejandro González (2006) and *Y tu mamá también* by Alfonso Cuarón (2001)**

I have decided to explore these two films at the same time, since I found some similarities in the recollections they triggered. In *Babel* I focus only on the part of the story set in Mexico, when a Mexican nanny travelled from the USA to her home town for her son's wedding, taking her boss's children with her. In the case of *Y tu mamá también*, although there were scenes that smelled of my urban life, as I will mention later, I found the rural images more significant, along roads or by almost deserted beaches. Some of these images converged with those from the wedding in *Babel*, but produced different emotional sensations in me, probably because the locations included different social contexts and emotional ambiances.

*En las imágenes de la ciudad clase mediera de Y tu mamá también las escenas en donde los protagonistas nadan, huelen a alberca y me remonta a la etapa en que cada fin de semana íbamos con mi mamá a nadar al club, jugábamos en los jardines, comíamos tortas y nos asoleábamos. Este recuerdo me huele sobre todo a pasto. Las imágenes que desata no me es claro si las recuerdo o sólo recuerdo las fotos, especialmente aquella en donde estoy en traje de baño jugando futbol, pero sea cual sea el detonador la sensación de ocio representada en la película me resulta muy placentera, y me conecta con mi vida en Australia donde es más común que las casas tengan albercas, aunque el olor que recuerdo es de arena mojada.*

In the images of the aspirational middle class city of *Y tu mamá también* the scenes where the protagonists swim smell of swimming pool and transported me back to the time when we used to go every Saturday to the club with my mother. We swam, played in the gardens, took some sun and ate *tortas* (a Mexican type of baguette). This memory smelled mostly of lawn. The visual images it triggers are not so clear. I am not sure if I remember them or I only recalled photographs, especially one in which I was in a bathing suit playing soccer.<sup>8</sup> Whatever is the case, the leisurely feeling the film prompted in me seems very pleasant, and connects me with my life in Australia, where it is more common for houses to have pools, although the smell I recall is of wet sand .

*El viaje que los protagonistas emprenden hacia la playa se ve, oye y huele muy parecido a mis viajes a trabajo de campo como antropóloga. Es esa mezcla de polvo con hierba y olor a gasolina quemada lo que desata inolvidables recuerdos: huele a cacahuete, pero no tostado, cuando viajo en un camión que me dio*

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<sup>8</sup> This kind of experience regarding the construction of memories from images in pictures has also been reported by Warnock (1994).

*aventón y tuve que ir sentada en una montaña de cacahuates semi verdes, y a sudor y polvo cuando viajé en el techo de un jeep sorteando mezquites y protegiéndome con mi morral.*

The protagonists' trip to the beach looked, sounded and smelled very similar to my fieldwork trips in Mexico as an anthropologist. The mixed smell of dust, grass and burned petrol set off unforgettable memories. I could smell raw peanuts, as on an occasion when a truck gave me a lift and I had to sit on top of a pile of peanuts; or sweat and dust from another occasion when I travelled on the roof of a jeep, needing to ward off the spikes of *mezquites* (a kind of tree common in desert areas) protecting myself with my *morral* (carrying bag).

*Pero las imágenes que más huelen son las de la cantina en el pueblo donde los dos muchachos y la joven se emborrachan y juegan sensualmente en frente de otros parroquianos. Ellas me recuerdan el miedo con olor a adrenalina, ese sudor penetrante que huele hasta cuando te acabas de bañar. Es olor a angustia. No sé si el olor lo imaginé asociado con mis recuerdos o lo olí de verdad sentada en el cine, recordando historias que había escuchado en mi vida, y que me hicieron sentir miedo cuando un transeúnte se acercaba mientras yo caminaba entre pueblos. Mientras veía la película sentía que en cada escena, lo peor iba a pasar, que los jóvenes iban a ser golpeados y la mujer violada. Para mí alivio nada paso ni en las escenas ni en mi vida, aunque aparentemente el recuerdo persiste y desata intensas sensaciones inquietantes que me hacen sentir alivio de estar tan lejos.*

But the images that smelled most powerfully were those from a pub in a rural town where the two young men and the woman got drunk and played sensual games in front of other patrons. I remembered the fear accompanied by the smell of adrenaline, that penetrating smell that is still intense even after having a shower. It is the smell of anguish. I am not sure if the smell was an imaginary association with my memories or I actually smelled it sitting in the cinema, recalling stories that I have heard which made me feel afraid each time someone approached me while I was walking between towns. While watching these scenes I expected that the worst would happen, that the woman was going to be raped and the young men beaten. To my relief nothing happened in the film, nor in my life. But this memory is persistent, and it creates intense, unsettling sensations that make me feel relieved I am so far away.

*En Babel la escena en la que decapitan una gallina que sigue corriendo sin cabeza me produjo desconcierto. No tanto por que no supiera que sucede, sino por mi inusual identificación con los gringuitos. Sus gestos me hicieron sentir chiquita recordando cuando mi tío veterinario mató mi gallina. Yo desde la ventana me asomo queriendo y no queriendo ver. Creo recordar que le torció el cuello y el olor que recuerdo es el del pollo en adobo que no quise comer ese día.*

In *Babel* I was disconcerted by a scene in which a hen was decapitated and continued running around. Not so much because I did not know this kind of thing happened but because of my unusual identification with the reactions of the *gringitos* (diminutive of *gringo*, used in Mexico to refer to Americans). Their gestures made me feel a child again, as on the occasion when my uncle, a vet,

killed my hen. I peeked from the window, wanting and not wanting to see. I seem to remember that he twisted her neck. The associated smell comes from the chicken cooked in *adobo* (chilli sauce), which I did not want to eat that day.

*Las escenas de la boda de pueblo evocan recuerdos más placenteros. No es que haya yo asistido a muchas bodas de ese tipo. Es una en particular la que evoco bailando en la tierra y oliendo a pulque. Mi recuerdo también huele al mole del banquete, pero su olor me transporta al regreso en donde mis dos hijas se hacían las dormidas mientras silenciosamente se comían el pollo del itacate que generosamente nos dieron, como es costumbre en las comidas festivas.*

The images of the simple, rural wedding bring back more pleasant memories. It is not that I went to many weddings of that kind. But there is one in particular that I recall, dancing on the bare earth and smelling *pulque* (a mild alcoholic drink from cactus). My recollection also smelled *mole* from the banquet, but this smell took me back to our car trip home afterwards. During the drive my little daughters pretended to be asleep in the back while quietly eating the chicken from the *itacate* (food gift), which was given to us as is the generous custom in such festivities.

*En la fiesta imágenes y sonidos en particular también me conectaron con mi vida familiar. Huelen a pólvora cuando mi hermano disparaba tiros al aire para que se abriera el cielo y las nubes dejara entrar al año nuevo, y a refresco de naranja cuando celebrábamos algún evento en casa de mis compadres. Este recuerdo también huele a ron con coca cola.*

Particular images and sounds from the fiesta also connected me with different times of my family life. There was a smell of gun powder, as when my brother shot his gun in the air 'to open the sky' to let the New Year come in. I could also smell orange soda, as when we celebrated on many occasion at the house of my *compadres* (ritual siblings). This memory also brings back the smell of rum and coke.

*Esos recuerdos me parecen particularmente importantes como emigrante, renuevan la sensación de amistad y colaboración. En Australia también lo he sentido pero huele diferente. Huele a pan, galletas, chocolates y té. Aunque también a curry, arroz frito, sopa ramen y tinga cuando en comidas organizadas en la oficina yo y otros emigrantes compartimos con otros australianos nuestros recuerdos en nuestro país de origen por medio de sus olores, sabores, texturas y colores. Todo ello también huele a vino, la bebida de rigor en nuestra identidad australiana.*

Those memories are particularly important to me as a migrant. They renew the sense of friendship and collaboration. I have sensed it also in Australia but the aromas are different. They are smells of bread, biscuits, chocolates and tea. There are also smells of curry, fried rice, *noodles* y and *tinga* (a Mexican dish) when I and other migrants organise lunch at the office, sharing with other Australians our nostalgia for our mother lands through odours, tastes, textures and colours. All these memories also smell of wine, the obligatory drink for our Australian identity.

***Amores Perros* by Alejandro González Iñárritu (2000)**

I decided to comment on the film *Amores Perros* last, because it gave me my biggest surprise in the sensorial link I was tracing between films, memory and emotional sustainability. I have already described my initial shock, smelling my city when I heard the sound track from the city streets, and in particular some scenes in which the distant sound from a loudspeaker can be heard offering *tamales* for sale:

♪ *Tamales calientitos, tamales, tamales calientitos, tamales* ♪

The strength of the olfactory memory produced by this street cry might have been reinforced by the symbolic meaning of tamales in Mexican culture,

Parallel to the sound, the images moved between scenes in different neighbourhoods. The repeated cry connected two worlds that are separated by class in many other social contexts. The working class neighbourhood (*vecindario*) where a hit-man and his street dogs live and the wealthy neighbourhood (*colonia*) where he walks along searching for his former life communicate with each other through the sound. In some way the images and sound scapes of the city represented in the film reinforce such memories and prompt the smell and taste of tamales even more.

*El sonido de la venta de tamales en las calles me hace recorrer las calles sin banquetas de mi colonia en México y en donde sigue viviendo una de mis hijas y su familia. Ahí este recuerdo de tamales además de a tamal también huele a salsa, elote asado, esquites, tacos al pastor, todo mezclado con refresco y perro callejero. Y a polvo y sudor de los transeúntes que acaban de jugar basquetbol en 'los juegos.'*

The sound of the tamales-seller made me walk the streets without sidewalks around my former Mexican home, where one of my daughters and her family still lives. Once there, my memories also smelled chilli sauces, toasted corn cobs, *esquites* (corn kernels cooked with herbs) and tacos, all mixed with soft drinks and dirty street dogs. It also smelled of dust and sweat from young men who had just finished playing basketball in the play ground.

*Del mismo modo que en la película, el recuerdo se continúa hacia una zona más acomodada de la ciudad, Polanco, donde me quedo algunos días cuando visito a mi otra hija, aunque ahí el recuerdo de su olor se desvanece, sólo queda en mi memoria el sonido y mi sensación sentada en el cine y descubriendo mi placer olfativo. Aunque no extraño los tamales su olor me trae muchos recuerdos: la boda civil de mi hija, la tamalada los días de la Candelaria, las primeras comuniones y mi mamá batiendo la masa en una cazuela que huele a maíz agrio y*

*a barro. También recuerdo al libro de Pilcher (2001) quien me obliga a reconocer que estoy profundamente conectada con la identidad nacional.*

In the same way as in the film my recollections continued their journey to a wealthier district, Polanco, where nowadays I spend half of my time in Mexico, visiting my other daughter. In my memory the smell became less strong there. All that remained was the sound memory and my sensations of sitting in the cinema rediscovering my olfactory pleasure. Although I do not miss the *tamales* as such, their smell brings back many memories. It reminds me of my daughter's civil wedding, the *tamalada* on the day of Candelaria, of first communions, and my mother kneading the dough in a big *cazuela* (traditional pan) that smells of sour corn and clay. I also remember the book by Pilcher (2001) who made me recognise I am deeply connected with the national identity.

*Pero sobre todo la película huele a miedo. Al igual que mis recuerdos con olor a angustia, las imágenes de los charcos, los perros y la sangre huelen y me remontan a muchos momentos en que de niña, joven y adulta caminé por las largas calles con bardas interminables sintiendo que a cada momento alguien me iba a atacar. Las bardas que pretejen a los que están adentro para que no sientan miedo a mi me huelen a sudor frío, se oyen como taquicardia y encapsulan mi alivio de vivir fuera de mi ciudad y mi preocupación por los que se quedaron en ella.*

But mostly the film smells of fear. In the same way as other memories, the images of puddles, dogs and blood smell, and they brought me back to many moments full of anguish in which as a child, teenager and adult I walked isolated streets with unending walls feeling that at any moment someone would appear and attack me. To me, the walls that protect those inside so that they do not feel fear, smell of cold sweat. They sound like tachycardia and they capture my sense of relief at living away from my city and at the same time my worries for the ones who stayed there.

## **Conclusion**

As a migrant, movies have offered me the experience of reencountering my life, and the ability to communicate emotionally in my new place and identity. They have provided me common referents that are crucial to express myself beyond the stereotypes of Mexicanness, and as time passes, also of my Australianness.

The embodied memories prompted by the mix of sensations from the multiple and complex interactions of the sensorium, in this case imagined from seen images and heard sounds, allowed me to feel that my life and identity, although different in each place, are a continuity. In the process of adapting to a new place and community the experience encoded in my olfactory memory, even if is one of the senses that is most difficult to measure and communicate, has been the most potent trigger of memories and

emotions, which I feel, smell, taste, hear, see and touch, even if only in my imagination. Image, speech and sound tracks smell and produce sensations. They bring back recollections that revive past emotions and help me to recuperate my living fragments, and with them to recreate my new identity, without a feeling of being fractured.

My experience as audience in *Frida*, *Babel*, *Y tu mamá también*, and especially in *Amores Perros* reinforced my conviction that to be able to understand the relevance of memory in the migrant context it is important to expand the range of sensorial experiences that might help to promote emotional sustainability, so fundamental for coping with the migrant's new life experiences in the city of destination. Paradoxically, such sustainability is not achieved only by seeking pleasant memories. To do so might be too artificial. In the relationship with others, the deep links with those who stay in the home country, and with those in the country of destination, and the sense of belonging to one place, or two, or to the planet, necessarily includes memories, sensations and experiences that, like life, produce conflicting memories. Being painful does not make them less important to sustain identity and belonging.

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