

Queer Affects in the Wandering Films of Antonio Hens

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Abstract. This article proposes an analysis of queer affects as they manifest in the films *Clandestinos* (2007) and *La partida* (2013), directed by the Spanish filmmaker Antonio Hens. Our exploration situates these films within a complex transnational framework, a context that not only shapes Hens's authorial poetics, driven by the imperatives of production within his own film company but also exerts a profound influence on the subjectivity of the queer adolescent characters, a distinctive recurring compositional element throughout Hens's oeuvre. Both films abound with thematic elements revolving around nomadic subjective experiences, encompassing themes of displacement, deterritorialization, spatial disjunctions, national estrangement, and an enduring yearning for alternative geographical contexts. Hens's cinematic techniques amplify a pronounced sense of wandering nomadism and queer itinerancy. Within the scope of this article, we embark on an exploration of nuanced representations of queer subjects and their intimate or romantic relationships in various geographic settings. This analysis employs critical paradigms linked to the concepts of homonationalism, queer migration, and emotional intelligibility. The article concludes that Hens's 'wandering films' adroitly utilize male characters who traverse intricate geographic landscapes. These are youthful and sexually fluid figures navigating a complex web of intimate and public urban spaces consistently tethered to notions of national identity. Consequently, these films identify the convergence of corporeal experiences and geographic environments as the locus where ineffable queer affective experiences manifest.

Keywords: Queer cinema; LGBTIQ+ Studies; affect theory; homonationalism; queer migration; Antonio Hens

[es] Afectos queer en las películas errantes de Antonio Hens

Resumen. Este artículo propone un análisis de los afectos queer tal como se manifiestan en las películas *Clandestinos* (2007) y *La partida* (2013), del director español Antonio Hens. Nuestra exploración sitúa estas películas en un complejo panorama transnacional, un contexto que no solo moldea la poética autorial de Hens, impulsada por los imperativos de producción dentro de su propia compañía cinematográfica, sino que también ejerce una profunda influencia en la subjetividad de los personajes adolescentes queer, un distintivo elemento compositivo recurrente en toda la obra de Hens. En ambas películas abundan los elementos temáticos que giran en torno a subjetividades nómadas, tales como las tematizaciones del desplazamiento, la deterritorialización, los alejamientos espaciales, el extrañamiento nacional y un constante anhelo de contextos geográficos alternativos. Las técnicas cinematográficas usadas por Hens amplifican un marcado sentido de nomadismo errante e itinerancia queer. En el ámbito de este artículo, emprendemos una exploración de las representaciones matizadas de sujetos queer y sus relaciones íntimas o románticas en diversos entornos geográficos. Este análisis emplea paradigmas críticos ligados a las ideas de homonacionalismo, migración queer e inteligibilidad emocional. El artículo concluye que las "películas errantes" de Hens utilizan convincentemente personajes masculinos que transitan por intrincados paisajes geográficos. Son figuras jóvenes y sexualmente fluidas que navegan una compleja trama de espacios urbanos, tanto íntimos como públicos, que a su vez remiten a nociones de identidad nacional. En consecuencia, estas películas identifican la convergencia de experiencias corpóreas y entornos geográficos como el lugar donde se manifiestan las inefables experiencias afectivas queer.

Palabras clave: Cine queer; estudios LGBTIQ+; teoría de los afectos; homonacionalismo; migración queer; Antonio Hens

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1. Introduction: Antonio Hens's Queer Filmmaking

Antonio Hens (Córdoba, 1969) is one of Spain's most regular practitioners of the LGBTIQ+ genre in cinema as the practical totality of his oeuvre deals in one way or another with queer subjectivities. Following a period

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between 1996 and 2004 when he produced twelve shorts, in 2003 he decided to establish his own production company, Malas Compañías, which became the vehicle for his later long-feature films: *Clandestinos* (2007), *La partida* (2013), *Oh! Mammy Blue* (2018), and *Mi gran despedida* (2020). Malas Compañías was also instrumental in the production of queer-themed films in Cuba, such as, among others, *Seres extravagantes* (Manuel Zayas, 2004), a documentary about Reinaldo Arenas and gay repression in Cuba; the award-winning *Boleto al paraíso* (Gerardo Chijona, 2010); *Verde, verde* (Enrique Pineda Barnet, 2012); and *Camionero* (Sebastián Miló, 2012), a short on gay bullying. In Venezuela, Hens produced the Goya-awarded *Azul y no tan rosa* (Miguel Ferrari, 2012) and *Cuidado con lo que sueñas* (Geyka Urdaneta, 2013). Together with Fernando Guillén Cuervo, Antonio Hens penned the script for *Los novios búlgaros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 2003), based on Eduardo Mendicutti's homonymous novel. Hens's interest on male homosexuality is paralleled by his interest in the memory of Spain's exile in Cuba, a topic on which he published several monographs.

Shot in Cuba with a predominantly Cuban cast and crew, *La partida* (2013) is a Spain-Cuba co-production that does not attempt to conceal the transnational hybridity of its gaze. Anticipating potentially critical questions about whether he intended to offer a Spanish view of contemporary Cuba, Antonio Hens clearly stated that his film did not aim to present a realistic portrait of the country. Instead, upon its release at the 35th Havana Film Festival in December 2013,² he referred to the film as a “portrait of underprivileged people who can be found in Cuban society and [in] any other [...]. I focus on them because they shed light on the search for personal freedom, which is a universal issue [and on] the contradictory ways in which masculinity is constructed in certain social contexts” (Hens in Hernández, 2013). The film therefore participates in a transnational trend of queer films shot in Cuba which includes relatively recent titles such as Paddy Breadthnach's Spanish-language Irish production *Viva* (2015) and Carlos Lechuga's Cuba-France-Colombia co-production *Santa y Andrés* (2016). *La partida's* Spanish gaze is channeled through a Spanish supporting character (a gay sexual tourist vacationing in Havana) played by Toni Cantó, who had previously featured in transgender roles in films such as *Pon un hombre en tu vida* (Eva Lesmes, 1996) and *Todo sobre mi madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999). Coincidentally or not, Cantó's character in the films by Lesmes and Hens happens to be a football coach and media star.³ The film seeks to capitalize on Cantó's extra-cinematic persona by revealing, at its very end, that the real identity of the seemingly anonymous gay tourist is nothing less than the coach of the Spanish national football team.

Hens's films have often been surrounded by controversy because of their challenging thematic associations among homosexuality, delinquency, and marginality. Such was the notorious case of *Clandestinos* (2007), his first long-feature fiction film with Malas Compañías, which became the center of a manufactured controversy upon its screening at the LesGaiCineMad film festival in 2008, when both the LGBTIQ+ magazine *Zero* and the conservative digital daily *Libertad Digital* misrepresented key aspects of the film. *Zero* published an illustration featuring the film's protagonist as a naked young ETA terrorist forcing a Guardia Civil officer to perform fellatio at gunpoint. The drawing was inspired by the film's themes and characters, yet the forced fellatio and the characteristic Guardia Civil headgear do not correspond to any scene in the film. Furthermore, *Libertad Digital* stated, then retracted, that a sector of the audience had cheered ETA during the film screening at the festival. The media controversy escalated, eventually involving the Spanish association of terrorism victims (Asociación de Víctimas del Terrorismo), Partido Popular, and public agencies from the Autonomous Communities of Andalucía and Castilla La Mancha, which had partially funded the film with taxpayer money. Senior officers considered legal actions against the production company for tarnishing the institutional image of Guardia Civil, but after screening the film they eventually concluded that *Clandestinos* contained no unlawful elements.⁴

Strong emotions attached to both terrorism and homosexuality played up in these hasty and ultimately flawed interpretations of the film. After all, the film was released in 2007, only three years after the 11 March 2004 Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in Madrid—which conservative political pundits initially attributed to ETA—and two years after the landmark passing of Spain's marriage equality law. The film itself is sufficiently daring as to present the topics of gay desire and migration closely linked to issues of wrongdoing, illegality, and terrorism. In her landmark book, *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar analyzes artistic representations of homosexualized terrorist figureheads, such as Poulomi Desai posing in “Osama Bin Laden drag”—images that reveal fractures between engrained homophobia and post-September 11 attempts by the state to coopt LGBTIQ+ agendas for what she refers to as “patriotic” purposes. The image of a Muslim cleric holding a banner with the message “I am a homosexual also” is, in Puar's view, startling “to the queer liberal imaginary at play in contemporary discourses of terrorism and counterterrorism [...] The queer agential subject can only ever be fathomed outside

² The film was presented at the San Francisco Frameline Festival, the Sevilla Film Festival, the Sao Paulo Film Festival, and other festivals in the United States, Germany, Croatia, and Greece.

³ In the 2000s, Cantó featured regularly in Spanish media as a TV star and, in the 2010s, as a politician from the Unión, Progreso y Democracia center-right party. This combination of stardom attributes may have gone unnoticed to Cuban and international audiences, but it is an important element of character construction for the Spanish public.

⁴ Cf. *El Mundo* 28 March 2008, *Libertad Digital* 27 March and 2 April 2008, and Spain's Ministerio del Interior 3 April 2008 <https://web.archive.org/web/20090525221048/http://www.mir.es/DGRIS/Cronologia/2008/04/>.

the norming constrictions of religion, conflating agency and resistance” (Puar, 2007, p. 13). The Spanish case represented by Hens’s films would seem to further complicate Puar’s account of homonationalism in the United States because, as *Clandestinos* so eloquently shows, the ETA terrorist character cannot be as easily and swiftly othered as foreign as Desai’s Bin Laden characterization. If in Puar’s United States there seems to be a basic level of agreement about what constitutes the nation, in Hens’s Spain the controversy around Hens’s film demonstrates that the conflation of male-male-sex and the war on terror is sufficient to excite unbearable emotions.

2. Methods and Theoretical Framework: Queer affects

This paper presents a reading of queer affects in Hens’s major queer-themed films, *Clandestinos* (2007) and *La partida* (2013), in the context of the complex transnational landscape that heightens both Hens’s authorial poetics (a consequence of the production constraints set by his own production company) and the subjectivity of the adolescent queer characters (one of Hens’s signature composition elements). Both films are rich in thematic elements related to nomadic subjective experiences of displacement, deterritorialization, spatial disjunctions, national estrangement and longing to be elsewhere, together with cinematography and mise-en-scène that emphasise a sense of wandering nomadism and queer itineracy.

Hens’s queer ‘wandering films’ provide fitting responses to the upsurge of nationalism and xenophobia since the beginning of the new century in the global scene, in general, and in Spanish-speaking countries, in particular. Populist nationalism and homophobia are elements commonly found in discourses that seek to legitimize anti-migrant and anti-queer ideologies. Homonationalism and pink-washing all too often contribute to shape social attitudes towards queer migrants and sexual exiles, while media narratives in the global North contribute to normalize migrants as heterosexual and cis-gender (Pérez Sánchez, 2017). Such attitudes set LGBTQ+ migrants from the global South apart from other sexually displaced subjects, such as expatriates and long-term tourists from affluent societies who rarely face the same levels of othering and alienation. Affects and emotions attached to the experience of forced displacement for reasons related to gender identity or sexual orientation are often difficult to disentangle from other vulnerabilities. Such emotions are frequently disregarded by mainstream media and other social discourses, as they correspond to experiences that in most cases are framed as unintelligible in host societies. The queer and migrant body plays a central role in the theorization of this kind of emotions, both as the site of affects and the vehicle for their expression. The embodiment of subjective affects is also key for narrative and visual discourses that deploy characters, either real or fictional, to convey notions related to the emotional field.

Reflecting on the affective dimension of intimate relationships in cinema and other visual discourses, Gilad Pavda and Nurit Buchweitz point out that “intimacy is an elusive, obscured and subtle emotion” whose portrayal “challenges the boundaries between the representable and the non-representable, the real and the surreal, the visceral and the ideal, the embodied and the abstracted” (Pavda and Buchweitz, 2017, p. 1). If affect theory is uniquely positioned for the analysis of aesthetic expressions of affects and emotions that transcend representation, fiction film offers indeed a privileged vantage point from which to observe both embodied and abstracted emotions such as those caused by nomadism and displacement, addressed by Hens in his queer-themed films. Hens’s films further enrich Spanish cinema’s longstanding involvement with queer displaced subjectivities, as represented by coeval titles such as *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (Féjerman and París, 2002), *Los novios búlgaros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 2003), *Ander* (Roberto Castón, 2009), *Habitación en Roma* (Medem, 2010), and *A escondidas* (Mikel Rueda, 2014).⁵ The two films discussed in this paper offer nuanced reflections about queer subjects and their intimate or romantic relationships in multiple geographies. *Clandestinos* combines its Madrid setting with visuals and allusions to the Basque Country, Andalucía and Castilla La Mancha. The protagonist trio of teenage prisoners who run away from a juvenile detention center hail from Spain, Morocco and Mexico. *La partida* is set in Havana, Cuba, where the two young protagonists live with their families. Both films place queer subjectivities in multiple transitional thresholds: morphing into adulthood, riding the ebb and flow of homosexual libidinal desires, negotiating fantasies of a border-crossing journey that will take them to a vaguely defined better place. These thresholds illustrate Antonio Hens’s own reflection about teenage characters in his films:

I’ve always been interested in teenage characters, that critical moment in life when we are about to become adults. I am interested in its contradictions, its illusions and the strength of our first loves, which are always the most intense, the most passionate and, in a sense, the most authentic. Later, we become adults and arm ourselves with protective shields. I am also interested in that time during our youth when we don’t concern ourselves with the options we have, when we aren’t interested in going anywhere, relaxed, and haven’t found our path yet. Those are the contradictions I try to explore in my film. (Hens in Hernández, 2013).

⁵ For an analysis of transnational queer affects in *Ander* and *A escondidas* see Martínez-Expósito and Fouz-Hernández (2020).

The two sets of opposing values identified by Pavda and Buchweitz in relation to the portrayal of intimacy are aptly organized by theories of affect that provide epistemological tools to seize the unseizable, non-verbal, bodily, and corporeal aspects of the self. Nomadic, wandering queer affects are embodied; bodies occupy places and spaces. As it often occurs in films of this representational tradition, Hens's films, are inhabited by queer subjects whose bodies fill queered geographies and locations. The unsettling potential of queer affects is further compounded by transnational journeys, physical or imagined. From a Middle Eastern perspective, Hanadi Al-Samman and Tarek El-Ariss observe that queer affects, especially those that are simultaneously or ambiguously "local and global, premodern and modern," possess the unique potential to destabilize a number of ingrained binarisms that are still prevalent in Western thought: "[a]ffect as a productive analytical tool for exploring lust, shame, empathy, terror, madness, and disgust offers innovative approaches that bridge linguistic, temporal, and geographic divides" (Al-Samman and El-Ariss, 2013, p. 208). Brian Massumi's relational version of affect theory, famously condensed in the formulation of affect as "the capacity to affect and be affected" (Massumi, 2015, p. 91), contains an element of interpersonal transitivity that is particularly relevant for the study of wandering and displaced queer subjects. Whether this transitivity is active (to affect), passive (to be affected) or reciprocal (to affect each other), it seems to leave out intransitive and solipsistic feelings and emotions. From this perspective, it becomes abundantly clear that transpersonal, social (therefore, political) affects take epistemological precedence over the realm of individual, intrapersonal feeling.

The affective and bodily perspective provided by Pavda, Buchweitz and Massumi allows for a relevant framing of the transitional queer identities of *Clandestinos* and *La partida*, especially if both films are read against the backdrop of an increasingly normalized and homonationalistic Spanish milieu. *Clandestinos* tells the story of a Seville-born teenager raised in the Basque Country who falls in love with a member of terrorist organization ETA and feels then enticed to join the band and embrace its ideals. In *La partida*, a young Cuban male prostitute gets emotionally entangled with a Spanish client and simultaneously enters a sexual relationship with his buddy who in turn falls in love with him. The young queer characters in both films repress the physical, bodily expression of their true feelings. Both *Clandestinos* and *La partida* explore the limitations of natural language and conceptual maps when trying to give expression to emotions and affective transactions that fall outside recognizable, stereotyped, ready-made, generic feelings. Hens makes a most effective use of transitional male characters whose age, sexual and national in-betweenness is convincingly linked to their inability or unwillingness to give full verbal expression to their emotions. Ineffable emotions present a challenge (and an opportunity also) to the discursive capacity of the cinematic medium. Words become insufficient or inappropriate, which renders non-verbal and *mise-en-scène* devices even more important for the expression of such emotions. Transnational and nomadic queer subjectivities encode ineffable emotions in the physicality of their bodies and in the spatiality of their journeys. Bodies, geographies and affects create therefore an interstitial space wherein ineffability can be aptly interrogated.

3. Results

3.1. Bodies

But I claim that securitization projects' new targets—subjects that are portrayed as victimized by trafficking, prostituted by 'cultures of globalization,' sexually harassed by 'street' forms of predatory masculinity, or 'debauched' by liberal values—cannot be grasped if we recognize them merely as claimants in human-rights campaigns. Instead these subjects should be more accurately analyzed as human-security products emerging in particular gender, racial, and transnational forms in and around military and police operations and parastatal security projects. (Amar, 2013, p. 15).

Paul Amar's lucid take on the sexual politics implicit in state security projects is a powerful reminder that, despite its epistemological limitations, the physicality of the body remains a necessary lynchpin of queer transitional identities. These identities are sometimes reduced to a grid of recognizable, well-defined categories such as those encapsulated in the LGBTIQ+ acronym, but more often they are complex, illegible configurations of the self that defy stable definition. Such wavering between the categorical and the phenomenological is found in all identitarian formulations, but it is particularly relevant in the case of nomadic queer bodies, which, ambiguously and simultaneously located within and outside normative cultural parameters, embody the disruptive potential of their inherent queerness. Mechanisms of social control place great importance on the capacity of the body to signal identity, as the correlation between an appetite for increased control and an accelerated development of body identification technologies demonstrates—from fingerprints to facial recognition to DNA sequencing. State control agencies that seek to regulate and command international movements of persons make extensive use of such technologies for a number of purposes, such as disease control or people smuggling detection. Yet, the bodies of queer migrants who may be seeking refuge from sexual prejudice and homophobia, are virtually invisible to such mechanisms of control. Instead, it is the rhetoric of homonationalism (and its concomitant

everyday practices) that contributes to explain away transitional queer bodies through a variety of time-honored strategies of labelling and othering. These individuals are construed not by body technologies, but rather by facile stereotypes that exploit their perceived exoticism, closetedness, promiscuity, poverty, and a long list of attributes of vulnerability and subalternity. Puar makes the point that homonationalism is often at the root of discourses that seek to naturalize a gap between tolerated and abject queer subjects:

[Homonationalism] is rather a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality [...] Part of the increased recourse to domestication and privatization of neoliberal economies and within queer communities, homonationalism is fundamentally a deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship – cultural and legal – at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations. The narrative of progress for gay rights is thus built on the back of racialized others, for whom such progress was once achieved, but is now backsliding or has yet to arrive. (Puar, 2013, p. 337)

Both *Clandestinos* and *La partida* invest in the physicality of queer bodies and mobilize notions of homonationalism and queer nomadism. In *Clandestinos*, Xabi (played by Spaniard Israel Rodríguez) and his mates Joel (Mexican Hugo Catalán) and Moroccan Driss (Pakistan-born Mehroz Arif) escape a minors' prison. Once in Madrid, Xabi tries to contact his former mentor and lover Iñaki (Luis Hostalot), a member of ETA's notorious Comando Madrid, as hoping to be accepted into ETA. Iñaki is elusive. Meanwhile, Xabi works as a gay prostitute and meets Germán (Juan Luis Galiardo), a retired Guardia Civil officer whom he robs of his gun. In the film's tragic final scene, that gun will be used in a messy (though carefully choreographed) shootout between Iñaki, Germán and Xabi himself, that will end up with the terrorist dead and the policeman seriously injured. In an unexpected twist, the audience finds out quite late in the film that Xabi is not Basque, but an Andalusian who has assimilated ETA's narrative about Spain and adopted a (prosthetic) Basque identity. This complication makes Xabi's geographical itinerary semiotically denser than initially thought: rather than a Basque fugitive, he turns out to be a Sevilla-born, Basque-educated kid with an unknown and unexplained background story, who has no connections to ETA except for having fallen in love at some point with gay *etarra* Iñaki. Delusional Xabi is perhaps no more deluded than his mates, Mexican Joel and Moroccan Driss, but their untold stories of migration and custody, as well as Driss's subtly suggested homo-curiosity, are kept away from the spectator. Whilst Xabi's prosthetic national identity could be symptomatically read as a form of queering, he does not seem to have any particular concerns with his own homosexuality; on the contrary, as Chris Perriam points out in his notes on the film, as a rent boy he is "able to negotiate power relations with older men" (Perriam, 2013, p. 49).

In *La partida*, the film's title introduces a key interpretative clue. Meaning both *game* and *departure*, the title puts the character of football coach Juan (Toni Cantó) right at the center of the plot. It is only at the very end of the film that the spectator finds out that Juan is not just any coach, but the head coach of the Spanish national soccer team—a major revelation after Spain's victory at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Until then, he was just a Spanish tourist in search of gay sex while holidaying in the Caribbean country. This late revelation creates, retrospectively, a zone of suspension in the character's composition: his Cuban sojourn was, now we realize, a getaway from his regular life in which family commitments, work obligations and the attached mediatic strictures of his role (including, assumedly, restrictions on coming out as a gay man) were put on hold for a fortnight. However, what for Juan is a temporal suspension is for prostitute Reinier (Reinier Díaz) and friend-cum-lover Yosbani (Milton García) a moment of radical personal transformation. Such transformation can be fittingly described in terms of a double metaphor embodied by Juan. On the one hand, the football games that become Reinier's central preoccupation as he moves up from playpen games to serious professional training are metaphorically linked to the erotic games that he plays with Juan unbeknownst to his real identity as an international soccer star. On the other hand, Juan's departure at the end of the film, and the subsequent end of the prostitution money he handsomely provided Reinier all along (money that moved the plot forward by allowing Reinier to purchase increasing numbers of clothes and grooming goods), marks the end of their relationship and represents the end of Reinier's short-lived financial prosperity. It is precisely the promise of financial prosperity and an imagined future with Reinier what impels Yosbani to steal money, pushing him to his fatal end. The double metaphor soccer-as-sex and departure-as-death, most clearly embodied by Juan, is at the very basis of the film's plot and sustains much of its affective structure.

In both films, the teenage bodies of Xabi, Reinier and Yosbani become sites of queerness, ineffability and ambiguity. The sexuality of these characters is presented as fluid, to the point that Reinier in *La partida* is a husband in a heterosexual marriage and father to a young baby. In the same film, Yosbani is engaged to a young lady and wedding preparations are under way. Rather than bisexual, Hens's youngster characters can be described as sexually fluid, which in part explains instances of sexual opportunism as is the case of male prostitutes Xabi and Reinier. Both characters have relationships with older sexual clients with whom they

develop ambiguous affective ties. In addition, Reinier and Yosbani in *La partida* enter an ambiguous and asymmetrical relation, one in which Reinier's degree of sentimental commitment is never made sufficiently clear to the viewer while Yosbani seems to have fallen deeply in love with his friend against his own will. Sexual ambivalence and sentimental ambiguity complicate the emotional landscape of all three characters, who are often lost for words when faced with direct questioning by their sexual and emotional partners.

3.2. Places

[I]m/migrants embody otherness but they also represent queer potentialities and configurations, which include among other things, food, religion, dress-code, gender, sexuality, and language [...] These queer forms often go unnoticed because their visibility is not discernible within the more recognizable modes of identity politics through which migrant, national, and colonial issues are publicly staged. Such queer assemblages expose the fiction of European universalism. (Guénif, 2014, p. 74).

Nacira Guénif's eloquent stance on how the complex flux of queer migrancy impacts received notions of European universalism could be easily extended to other heavily regulated protocols of identity. Hens's films add notions of Spanishness, Basqueness and Cubanness to what Guénif brands as the fiction of European universalism. As *Clandestinos* and *La partida* show, geographies and locations can be queered by the physical presence of a queer subject, even in the absence of any visible sexual or affective activity.⁶ This effect can be observed both in spaces that have been socially marked as homosocial (such is the case of the gay pick-up scenes at Havana's Malecón in *La partida* and Madrid's interchange station in *Clandestinos*) as well as in neutral spaces that become appropriated by a queer gaze, such as the enclosed spaces where Xabi and Reinier hold their sexual encounters in each of the films.

Clandestinos combines its queer narrative with a powerful iconicity of notions of Spanishness. In one particularly meaningful scene, Xabi and Driss, after a series of unpromising experiments with homemade explosives, are successful in bringing down the Spanish flag at the center of Plaza de Colón in Madrid. The phallic structure is one of the several erected symbols of Spanishness that punctuate the film, such as the RTVE communications tower. The demolition of the oversized pole is somewhat reminiscent of the coupling of homoeroticism and marginality that came to define the transitional films of Eloy de la Iglesia; it also echoes similar demolitions of symbolic structures in Spanish fiction films post-2001 such as the massive stone cross in the Valley of the Fallen in Boadella's *Buen viaje, excelencia* (2003) and the sculpted spires of Gaudí's Sagrada Família church in Alvarado's *Capa caída* (2013). What makes Xabi and Driss's achievement meaningful for the film's economy of affects is the different emotional burst of each of the characters. For Driss, who has been playing a discrete secondary role for much of the group's adventure, the sight of the detonation and demolition is paramount to total and overwhelming success. It is him, not bossy Xabi, who pulls the trigger in a moment of enthusiastic rapture while shouting an incoherent "gora Euskadi Euskalerrria" – for ETA's signature slogan "gora Euskadi askatuta." Conversely, Xabi gets puzzled and speechless: not only has he failed to make explosives work but, perhaps more importantly for his own self esteem, he has been beaten by unassuming Driss. Xabi's silent, mesmerized gaze as the pole falls down is captured in a face shot that will reappear at key moments in the film, moments of trauma and sentimental revelation that will evoke this moment of demolition.

A similar facial expression of mesmerized disbelief can be seen in *La partida*, when Reinier receives the news that Juan is leaving the country as his holidays are over. The demolition of the financial pillar that Juan represents for him receives a national overlay soon after, when Juan's identification with a Spanish national institution is revealed. There are several spaces that are singled out in *La partida* as subject to a specific queer gaze. These spaces are deliberately inhabited by queer bodies and libidinal behaviors of desire and erotic fulfillment. Havana's Malecón is one of such spaces as it is repeatedly shown in the film as a gathering site and pickup place for gay men. Yet, the most conspicuously queered space in the *La partida* is the rooftop where Yosbani takes Reinier for their most intimate moments. It is indeed on this rooftop that the couple enjoy their happiest times in two different scenes. The first time Yosbani brings Reinier to the rooftop, the camera follows Reinier's astonished gaze as he enters it and discovers an interrupted view of the city's skyline and bayside. The 360-degree pan shot follows closely Reinier's viewpoint keeping him within the frame. His unexpected re-discovery of Havana from an angle all too different to his usual perspective is juxtaposed to his expected exploration of Yosbani's body. The elevated vantage point of the rooftop is sufficiently secluded and protected from unwanted surveillance. Reinier's simultaneous encounter with a hidden Havana and a newly revealed Yosbani, both of whom had always been there for him to explore, is only made possible by the film's careful construction of this queered space. At once a libidinal private space and a secret escape from conventional society in the very heart of the city, the rooftop is the only space in the film in which Reinier and Yosbani are

⁶ The capacity of the queer gaze to appropriate a location by rendering it significant and meaningful, which has long been observed by queer theorists, has been used to explain the emergence of queer villages and queer tourist meccas around the world (see Robbins 2011 and Fouz-Hernández and Gras-Velázquez 2014 on Madrid's Chueca).

fully free to play with their bodies without the fear of being caught. The second rooftop scene glosses over the sexual encounter and focuses instead on a gift Yosbani gives to Reinier: an official t-shirt of the Spanish national soccer team with the prominent World Championship star directly shown to the camera. Significantly for the film's use of ineffability, the two rooftop scenes have nearly no dialogue and direct the viewer's attention to the guys' body language, facial expressions, laughs, short expletives, and quiet sex.

Both films effectively employ transnational geographical concepts. In *Clandestinos*, Moroccan character Driss and in *La partida*, Cuban character Reinier wear shirts representing the Spanish national soccer teams, which serve as emotionally charged symbols of their sports-related aspirations. In *La partida*, the range of emotions and possibilities evoked in the young male couple labeled as underprivileged upon discovering that Juan is the coach of the Spanish soccer team aligns with Cuba's long-standing narrative of poverty and exile. Simultaneously, it aligns with Spain's self-perception as an affluent and progressive society. The film unabashedly incorporates both transnational narratives at various points in its storyline. In a poignant scene, Reinier's mother-in-law (portrayed by Mirta Ibarra) encourages him to elope with Juan and marry him in Spain, viewing it as a means to facilitate a family reunion under more favorable circumstances:

REINIER: Lo que querían era probarme para la cantera de la selección nacional.

SUEGRA: A ver si ahora te eligen y te vas para allá. ¿Qué vamos a hacer nosotras? ¿Te van a dejar salir por la noche o te van a tener preso allí, eh? Reinier, aquí lo que no sirve es estudiar. La cosa está cada vez peor. Muchacho, mira, tú lo que tienes que hacer es empatarte con Juan. Haces que te saquen y te casas con él allá. Sí, no me mires con esa cara, que eso en España se puede. Y después nos sacas a nosotras y a tu hijo.⁷

Her words encapsulate an overwhelmingly positive portrayal of Spain, which is consistently associated with the character of Juan throughout the film. Despite the clear motivation behind her admiration and her apparent acceptance of Reinier's involvement in prostitution, the film does not attempt to deconstruct her pro-Spanish rhetoric, presenting an unequivocal instance of homonationalism. This declaration becomes even more pronounced when it responds to Reinier's extraordinary revelation of potential interest from Cuba's national soccer team. However, this one-dimensional characterization of Spain as LGBTQ+ friendly, juxtaposed with a homophobic portrayal of Cuba, is not shared by another character who yearns for a different place to live. For the idealistic Yosbani, the dream of escaping with Reinier to an abstract and undefined 'somewhere else' becomes an all-consuming obsession that ultimately triggers the tragic conclusion of the film. Consequently, the transnational aspect of *La partida* operates on multiple levels, influencing character development, plot construction, as well as the film's production and reception dynamics.

3.3. Affects

If both Xabi's and Reinier's difficulties to express their own emotions can be framed as ineffable (emphasis on emotions), they can also be seen as underperformed (emphasis on bodies). As Lauren Berlant recalls in relation to Raymond Williams's work on the structure of feeling, the transparency of social performance is a precondition of emotional intelligibility, an idea that resonates well with the social affect theories of Williams and Massumi: "affective atmospheres are shared, not solitary, and [...] bodies are continuously busy judging their environments and responding to the atmospheres in which they find themselves" (Berlant, 2011, p. 15). In both films, queer emotions are not only suppressed by the characters themselves but also concealed beneath the potent (homo)national symbolism embodied in national symbols like flags and soccer teams.

In *Clandestinos*, the coupling of murder and gay love offers some moments of emotional intensity, even if quite formulaic and even basic at times. A key flashback scene showcases Iñaki and Xabi retreating to a remote mountain hut. While Iñaki engages in heterosexual sex in an adjoining room, Xabi takes center stage in the frame, adopting a meditative posture. His nude torso displays a tattooed Chinese character meaning "gradually." Extradiegetic music, suggestive of contemplative intensity, provides sound continuity throughout the sequence. With an air of profound concentration, Xabi executes a remarkably demanding contortion. The shadows of the heterosexual couple disappear in the background. This ritualistic revelation of the inner depths of Xabi's character sets the stage for a subsequent dialogue between Xabi and Iñaki in which the former innocently asks the terrorist to teach him to shoot a gun. Iñaki responds with a passionate diatribe about the Basque people's enduring quest for justice. The *mise-en-scène* contributes significantly to elevating the heightened emotional tone of his impassioned discourse on firearms and epic justice. The frame composition offers a contrast between cold, bluish moonlighting and warm fireplace hues. This dichotomy of blue and orange, complementary colors, accentuates the prominence of the two male figures and the conspicuous absence of a woman in the scene. The gun dances from hand to hand, occupying a prominent place in the

⁷ REINIER: They want me to try out for the junior national training team. MOTHER IN LAW: If you get in and leave, what'll we do? Will they let you out at night or keep you locked up? School is a waste of time. Things are going downhill. Look, boy, you should hook up with Juan. Get him to take you to Spain so you can marry him. Don't look at me like that. It's legal over there. Then you can bring us and your son over later.

frame. The phallic overtones of the scene are further emphasized by Xabi's dangling hand, which almost imperceptibly finds its way under his pants. As Iñaki delivers the line "Esta no es mi mano, es la mano de todo un pueblo que lucha por su libertad" ["This is not my hand, but the hand of an entire people fighting for freedom"] while holding the gun close to Xabi's face, the double metaphor linking the hand, the gun and the genitals becomes unmistakably established. By the scene's conclusion, the viewer has gained insight into the complexity of Xabi's innermost depths, revealing a capacity for ambiguity and duplicity far more intricate than his outward appearance had hitherto suggested.

Clandestinos exemplifies yet another interesting trend in the expression of queer affects. Whereas gay adult characters are consistently built around notions of restraint and self-control, teenager Xabi is often portrayed as fighting his libidinal needs for expression and rapprochement. The film's handling of the theme of adolescent excess versus adult stoicism is further elaborated through a visual treatment of the male body that firmly establishes the generational binary young/adult wherein the former seeks to be shown undressed and the latter is kept out of sight. Interestingly, the conspicuously veiled bodies of mature terrorist Iñaki and older police officer Germán can hardly be interpreted as non-normative, deviant, or abject, which are some of the reasons why mainstream genres keep (some) bodies hidden. A plausible reason why the camera shows no interest in unveiling them could be the oppositional emphasis on the age that sets them apart from Xabi. This way, the character structure of the film creates two distinct groupings, a (mainly gay) set of adult males and a (mainly straight) group of youngsters – with protagonist Xabi protruding as the gay exception in the latter. Xabi's queer body is therefore a site of exceptionalism and difference that, while offering itself to the camera in a range of expressive and haptic variations, resists its normalizing inertia into the socially dominant visual paradigm that would seek to render its queerness either as inappropriate and transgressive or as a celebratory and joyful. Caught in the complex interplay of love and prostitution, and simultaneously grappling with the tension between revealing and concealing his authentic queer identity, the character of Xabi serves as a compelling example of embodied knowledge. This embodiment is particularly evident through the visual integration of his body into the social fabric of the film.

A similar rhetoric of the transitional subject is visible in *La partida*. In the film's libidinal economy of queer affects, the character of Yosbani's father-in-law, Silvano (played by Luis Alberto García), represents a figure of patriarchal authority, empowered with the ability to dominate and symbolically castrate any younger males who attempt to violate his rule. This is clearly underscored by his professional activities in the lucrative black market of sport clothing, which allow him to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. His control over large sums of cash is paralleled by his control over the morality of his family and subordinates. In particular, he subjects his son in law Yosbani to strict surveillance once he starts harboring suspicions about the youth's sexual orientation. In a point-of-view scene shot from outside the house, through a window grille that suggests captivity, Silvano alerts his daughter Gema that Yosbani is "a faggot":

SILVANO: Eso pasa por meter gente extraña en la casa [...] ¡Es maricón!

GEMA: ¿Y qué? ¡Qué, papi, qué, no me importa! Por lo menos yo no traté de hacer de él lo que no era.⁸

Silvano's daughter's withering and, for some viewers, unexpected reply precludes an even more surprising revelation that takes place in the next scene. Silvano tries to persuade Yosbani to return home and, in an attempt to build up some empathy, he makes a personal confession:

SILVANO: Escúchame y no te alteres. Cuando joven, yo también hice... tonterías. Lo que importa ahora es Gema. Así que cuanto antes se casen, mejor.⁹

This is a long-take scene in which the hand-held camera moves between Silvano and Yosbani in closeups. Both Yosbani and the spectator are taken by surprise by this late confession of disavowed homosexuality, not only because Silvano's figure of patriarchal homophobia has been the source of much personal distress to Yosbani but also because his character is presented in the film as emblematic of a homophobic society which, at this juncture, reveals a sexual contradiction at its very core. His confession prompts the spectator to reconsider some of Silvano's attributes as a character; for instance, the absence of a wife figure and the abundance of male subordinates in his entourage seem to point to an element of homosocialization that now acquires new meaning. His predisposition to surveil and control others around him as well as his irrational violence against younger gay men are familiar traits of some homophobic homosexuals.

The homo/hetero hesitancy of Hens's male characters represents a major source of transitionality. In the bus that takes them to Madrid in the early scenes of *Clandestinos*, Xabi, Driss and Joel meet two young ladies who will play sub-plot roles later in the film. In thriller mode, these ladies suspect, unveil, and denounce the

⁸ SILVANO: That's what we get for letting strangers into our home [...] He's a faggot! GEMA: So what? It doesn't bother me. At least I didn't try to turn him into something he's not.

⁹ SILVANO: Listen and don't get mad. I did some crazy things too when I was young. The main thing now is Gema. The sooner you get married, the better.

guys' "terrorist" activities to the police. In romantic mode, they become sexual partners to Driss and Joel. These heterosexual liaisons are instrumental in the erotization of the two male characters as they include disclosures such as the big size of Driss's penis, that contrast with, and might elaborate on the higher-order, epic preoccupations of Xabi. Xabi's queerness is therefore underscored by means of his contrast with his two heterosexual mates who become idly engaged in seemingly recreational, fleeting heterosexual affairs. In truly heroic mode, Xabi's affects are intricate and transcendental, blending elements of sexuality and patriotism. They demand from him both self-discipline and the need for secrecy, setting him apart from the ordinary and superficial erotic indulgences of his friends. The unconstrained exhibition of heterosexual affections stands in stark contrast to Xabi's emotional restraint when it comes to his homosexual sentiments, which he only feels comfortable expressing in the presence of other gay characters.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Both *Clandestinos* and *La partida* adhere to the longstanding narrative tradition of the tragic demise of the gay hero, culminating in the dramatic deaths of key characters. In *La partida*, the emotional pinnacle arrives with Yosbani's assassination at the hands of Silvano. The knife attack takes place on the football field where Reinier is practicing. When Reinier comprehends the situation, he rushes to Yosbani's side, attempting to console him as fellow team members call for medical assistance. This poignant moment, captured in a close-up two-shot reminiscent of their earlier moments of intimate joy, accentuates the dramatic intensity of this classical scene where a lover dies in the arms of their beloved. Yosbani's facial expressions convey the agony of death coupled with the sudden realization that Reinier is with him. In a final effort, Yosbani implores Reinier to escape and live together. The film concludes with a symbolic, extended shot of Yosbani desperately sprinting along a Havana street. The parallel travelling shot frames his body against a backdrop of indistinct urban elements. This cinematic cliché shot is underscored by an eerie Mozart piano sonata in the non-diegetic soundtrack, drowning out any ambient street noise and imbuing the scene with a transcendental undertone. In this concluding shot, Berlant's notion of emotional comprehension through bodily performance resurfaces, where words are rendered superfluous, and Yosbani's fleeing body becomes the locus of pure ineffability.

In contrast, *Clandestinos* opts for a considerably less dramatic and conventionally disheartening resolution to Xabi's narrative. The narrative climax materializes with the violent demise of the terrorist Iñaki during a shootout with the civil guard Germán, unfolding within the confines of an indoor ski attraction in a suburban shopping mall—a parodic echo of the snow-covered mountains from more epic circumstances in the past. Following Iñaki's death, Xabi, now back in detention, receives an intimate visit from Germán. Xabi expresses his dissatisfaction with the abruptness of the visit and urges Germán to act like a normal person. In response, Germán playfully retorts, "¿Normal has dicho? ¿Es que a ti te gusta la gente normal?" [Normal? Maybe you like normal people?], and they begin to undress. However, this conventionally queer ending does not entirely erase Xabi's fluid and impermanent nature, and, more significantly, it does nothing to diminish his emotional ineffability. On the contrary, by raising the notion of normalcy, Xabi reaffirms his capacity to articulate only normalized feelings and emotions while struggling to find the right words for the more complex affects he experiences.

Hens's 'wandering films', which navigate the realm of queer affectivity, effectively employ transitional male characters within intricate geographical settings. Their young, sexually fluid bodies inhabit both intimate and public urban spaces that are consistently associated with national identity, whether factual or aspirational. For Xabi, the real Spain exists in a fundamentally distinct realm from his imagined Basque homeland. In Yosbani's case, happiness with Reinier can only be envisioned elsewhere, perhaps in an idealized, gay-friendly Spain, certainly not in the real-life Havana. Consequently, Hens's wandering films pinpoint the intersection of bodies and geographies as the locus of ineffable queer affects.

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