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Class, Gender and Ethnic Identity in Mexican Film & Television Melodrama

The two films that I will analyze is Roma and Maria del Barrio as it relates to class. The directors each have a vision for the telling of these stories as it relates to class. Roma is a neo realistic film that uses the long shot. The viewer as the camera moves with Cleo, allows you to almost read her thoughts about how she perceives her world. The films focus is the normalcy of her life. The director's use of mis-en-scenes helps to sharpen the viewers focus on the allusion of inclusion. It allows the audience to make comparisons and draw conclusions about Cleo and her social status within and out of the family. The directors in the neo realistic genre, wanted to divest film making and audiences from elements that were conservative and steeped in unrealistic visions of their countries and the lives of the local people. It was a driving view that these Hollywood type films were a significant factor in alienating citizens from their true conditions and community. Cleo represents indigenous women who are relegated to menial work, have no voice, are essentially invisible but are an integral part of the fabric of the life of Mexican society. Cleo's character radiates a quiet strength, but her type is presented in many films as a caricature of the subservient maid, but it is her like countless others that are the foundation of the greater society. She epitomizes the notion of all responsibility and limited rewards.

In *Maria del Barrio*, the director uses the tele novella to express his views on class. The tele novella is a limited-run television serial drama that until the 2000's was produced primarily in Latin America. It follows in the tradition of the radionovela that promoted traditional family values on radio. *Maria Del Barrio* follows a Pygmalion story line in which from the beginning scene you see her aspirations and fantasy of having this fairy tale like life. It is a melodrama on steroids. While *Roma* was made for cinematic viewing on platforms like Netflix, the tele novella is designed for local evening viewing with a vision and focus on community norms and local colloquialisms. The Tele Novella is in the melorealism genre, this style originating in film production of the 1990's, in which melodrama was joined to social realism. The Tele novella gives a critical exposition on society through its focus on family and relationships. Throughout the episode the viewer is constantly reminded of the distinction between social classes by the commentary of Maria, the main character. This distinction is evidenced by one scene in the church, where the priest pays deference to Don Fernando De la Vega, a member of the social elite. The outrage exhibited by Maria at this slight of being brushed aside for Don Fernando causes her to articulate how people in her social class feel about their status and treatment as compared to those in Don Fernando De la Vega class. This scene shows the ever-simmering friction between the upper elite and those in Maria's class. But there is also, a divide amongst Maria's class generationally. The scene of Maria's godmother's illness and eventual death, highlighted how those in the older generation, internalized and accepted their second-class position and saw their different treatment as the natural order of society. A society where those in their socio-economic strata were unworthy of concern. The youth however, saw their treatment as oppressive and a condition that should be challenged. The episode also displays how religion

influenced all social classes. It influenced the altruism and benign benevolence as displayed by Don Fernando De la Vega and the obedience of the lower classes. Like Cleo in Roma, the women, Maria, her godmother, the maid in Don Fernando's home are all for the most part invisible. The biggest secret is that all the women are invisible even in the upper elite. It is a patriarchal society where men's needs come before the women who are relegated to the home and children and even in that area, they are not the sole authority. The tele novella was a way to codify a country's cultural identity. In this instance, it amplifies the negative themes found in both Roma and Maria Del Barrio that women are in a class unto themselves regardless of socio-economic status. That like Maria, women are ruled by their emotions and not logic and therefore are incapable of rational thought or independence without oversight by men. This reinforced the legitimacy and normalcy of a patriarchal society. The light at the end of the tunnel is that despite these negative themes, this gender class is remarkable in its ability to persevere and thrive in environments designed to minimize and marginalize their impact.