

[Society, Culture and Tradition in the US through Four Filmic Versions]

de

[Manuel Doñas Salinas]

TRABAJO PARA EL TÍTULO DE MÁSTER

Entregado en la Secretaría de Humanidades

de la Universidad de Almería

como requisito parcial conducente

a la obtención del título de

MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: APLICACIONES PROFESIONALES
Y COMUNICACIÓN INTERCULTURAL
2011

ITINERARIO: Investigación y Docencia

Manuel Doñas Salinas

Nombre estudiante y D.N.I.

Firma estudiante

14 de junio de 2011 Almería

Fecha

Ciudad

José R. Ibáñez Ibáñez

Nombre director TFM y D.N.I.

Firma director TFM

14 de junio de 2011 Almería

Fecha

Ciudad

CONTENTS

SUBJECTS ABSTRACTS

Strategies for Communication in English.....	1
British and American Culture and Tradition	3
Oral Communication, Social, Cultural, Linguistic and Psychological Aspects	4
English as an Intercultural Vehicle.....	6
Research Methods in Applied Linguistics	8
Computer Resources for Teaching and English for Translation	9
Methods in Linguistic Research.....	11
Methodology for Teaching English	12
English for Specific Purposes	14
Research in the English Classroom: Theory and Practice.....	15
Linguistic Analysis and Cultural Analysis of Print Advertising in English	17
Art, Literature and the Mass Media in English Studies	18
Landmarks in Contemporary English and American Literatures.....	20
Cultural Studies: Narrative, Identity and Genre	22
Other cultures in English speaking countries.....	23
New Trends in Literature Written in English.....	25

[...]

RESEARCH

1. Introduction.....	Pg. 28
2. American Values and Beliefs: A Brief Introduction	Pg. 32
2.a. Where American Beliefs and Values Come From	Pg. 32
2.b. Society and Values in the US.....	Pg. 36
2.c. Social Structure	Pg. 37
3. The Documentary: Michael Moore.....	Pg. 41
3.a. <i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	Pg. 41
3.b. <i>Fahrenheit 9/11</i>	Pg. 54
3.c. Conclusions.....	Pg. 66
4. Racism.....	Pg. 72
4.a. <i>Crash</i> (2004)	Pg. 72
4.b. <i>Gran Torino</i> (2008).....	Pg. 82
4.c. Conclusions.....	Pg. 91
5. Final Conclusions	Pg. 93
Works Cited	Pg. 97

[...]

Subjects Abstracts

1. Strategies for Communication in English

Lecturers: García Sánchez, María Elena and Bretones Callejas, Carmen María

1.a. Objectives.

The main objectives of this subject were for students to develop and acquire the skills and techniques necessary to communicate themselves in the English language at an upper-intermediate level (according to the Common European Framework of Languages, at a B2/C level). By obtaining these objectives, students will be able to improve their comprehension and expression of the communicative skills in both oral and written levels and they will be able to apply them in practical fields such as academic and professional.

1.b. Methodology.

The methodology followed in this subject was a mixture of theoretical explanations on the different skills involved in the English language, i. e., writing, reading, listening and speaking, powered with the use of visual material used to clarify the comprehension and understanding of those explanations. Several practical activities were done during the sessions by both lecturers.

1.c. Commentaries on the subject.

During the teaching of this subject, the so-called four skills were developed beyond the limits of practice field until reaching the most important and relevant theoretical points nowadays. Apart from the most theoretical explanations, we had the

opportunity to learn some important traces in order to create and perform any type of production in the English language.

One of the most important points of the first part of the subject (the one which was taught by Mrs. García) was the different types of genres involving the writing skill and the importance of Academic Writing for the future investigations and research done by students. The other part of this very first part was about the speaking skill and the most important points were related to the abilities within that skill: the Production Skills. Although they can be applied in both skills (writing and speaking), their importance increases in the oral field, for example with negotiation skills.

On the other part of the subject, the one which was taught by Mrs. Bretones, we saw the different points involving the two remaining skills: reading and listening. Apart from the most theoretical aspects of each skill, the most interesting point in this part of the subject was the one related to cognitive issues in both skills. The most recent tendencies in linguistics applied to communicative strategies marked an important part of the subject.

Regarding to the process of evaluation, students did some short practices about the specific theoretical points which were being acquired at that time. These short activities helped students to set the knowledge previously learnt and they were quite positive for the future tasks we had to do: an essay about writing and speaking and an examination about the theoretical aspects of reading and listening. For the essay I chose to develop an analysis of oral speeches (particularly one given by John F. Kennedy) from the point of view of Academic Writing and the importance of speaking skills in order to obtain a wished purpose.

I personally have found this subject very interesting in terms of how to produce a proper academic piece of paper. Taking into account that I decided to study the part of this master which was attached to investigation and teaching, the theoretical explanations and the traces for producing a piece of paper according to the academic style have been very useful. Apart from that, the sessions dedicated to cognitive linguistics in reading and listening were also of much interest. In summary, the possibility of learning the basic traces for the production of an academic work and the new material involving cognitive linguistics, apart from the extended information

received about reading, writing, speaking and listening are crucial for our future as researchers and/or lecturers.

2. British and American Culture and Society

Lecturers: Fernández Sánchez, José Francisco and Ibáñez Ibáñez, José Ramón.

2.a. Objectives

The main objective of this subject was to develop the students' knowledge about the two most important and influential countries in the English speaking world. The context and background contemplated general and specific aspects of both countries very useful in order to make the students become aware of the most important points of the history, culture and society of these countries in the last 30 years.

2.b. Methodology

In both parts, the methodology included theoretical explanations on each country divided in certain topics involving politics, religion, communications or race and ethnicity (each of the topics belonged to a specific country, not to both). These theoretical explanations were supported with audiovisual content and powerful quotations which reinforced the content of the units.

2.c. Commentaries on the subject

Each country (UK and the US) starred four different units involving the most important facts in the last three decades. Immigration, the Northern Ireland issue and Mass Media belonged to the theoretical content of UK. Religion, Race and Ethnic Groups and the US Foreign Policy belonged to the theoretical content of the US as well. Both countries shared the same topic about Politics, paying special attention to the last Prime Ministers and Presidents in each country. In the beginning of every unit we had quotations which were going to be read during the lessons and turning into an active participation of students as they read them and comment them with the help and assistance of the lecturers. This assistance became more present when the production of the paper had to be done.

The evaluation was the most complete one that students have ever had in the master. It consisted of the production of an essay about a given topic (mine was about the Arizona Immigration Law) and a final exam on the whole subject content.

As an English student, the English and American culture and society has always fascinated me. So the content of this subject has been of great importance to me and it has been one of my favorite subjects in the master, not only because of the origin of the content, but because of the development of it during the lessons and the selected topics (especially interesting was the one towards the American religion and the Northern Ireland issue).

The knowledge I have acquired in this subject has been of great importance because I have done my research work on the social and cultural aspects reflected through a specific way of communication in the US. So this subject has helped me so much during the planning of the research as well as it has provided me with useful bibliography. The elaboration of the required paper to pass this subject also gave me ideas and techniques which I have used in my research work.

3. Oral Communication: Social, Cultural, Linguistic and Psychological Aspects

Lecturer: Bretones Callejas, Carmen María.

3.a. Objectives

The main objective of this subject was for students to know what oral communication is in a deep aspect as well as they should obtain the needed skills required to communicate efficiently in different professional contexts. They will also acquire the needed skills for communication in English within a professional and intercultural context.

3.b. Methodology

The methodology followed in this subject was divided into a theoretical and a practical part. Within the theoretical part students attended to explanations supported with audiovisual content and with some extra material such as articles. In the practical part students did exercises applied to specific contents within the topics of

the subject. These practical exercises were corrected and put in common by all students and the lecturer.

3.c. Commentaries on the subject

In this subject students saw a wide range of topics related to oral communication and some techniques towards how to teach oral communication properly. Among the topics related to oral communication, students distinguished semantics and pragmatics (with special attention to Grice's Principle) as well as psycholinguistics (and the new trends of Cognitive Linguistics related to listening and reading) as the most important regarding the theoretical part of the subject.

Students also made a review on the most important languages in the world (for which a quick oral presentation during a lesson was prepared) and about Aronson's puzzle techniques. Finally some important features about oral communication were also seen. As examples of these important features students had negotiation techniques, cross cultural communication or the dimensions regarding oral communication.

Regarding to the process of evaluation, the participation in class as well as the production of the practical exercises during the lessons were important. However the most important way for the evaluation of this subject was through an exam on the theoretical material (the lecturer made a selection of topics for the exam). This exam consisted of a number of short questions which were to be answered with the use of the material given in class. Needless to say, the questions were a little bit more difficult and specific because of the presence of the material in the exam as a useful tool for the students to accomplish the task.

I have found this subject interesting and helpful as well. On the one hand the theoretical material about Cognitive Linguistics and the topics related to Semantics and Pragmatics were of much interest for me because I had always been attracted to that part of Linguistics during my degree.

On the other hand, the part dedicated to oral communication and how to teach oral communication was very helpful for those students (like me) who are English teachers. We watched some videos in which different teachers from different parts of the world performed activities related to oral communication (listening and speaking,

mainly). We also watched some videos explaining some useful activities in order to improve the students' oral skills. For these reasons I have found this subject interesting and helpful, because it was attractive for my professional and academic interests.

4. English as an Intercultural Vehicle: Literature and Society.

Lecturer: Gómez López, Jesús Isaías

4.a. Objectives

The main objective was related to the connection between literature and society and how those fields could help each other. Depending on the use a society does of literature, the possible influences could be interpreted in a good or bad way as well as the reception of literature by the population. As part of the civilization's growth, literature plays an important role in the evolution not only of that society, but in the evolution of the individuals who are part of that society. These questions will be discussed in this subject.

4.b. Methodology

As a subject about literature, reading was a key aspect to fully understand the contents of each of the units explored in the subject. Each lessons consisted of a theoretical explanation of the most important points and aspects of the unit and then we extended those theoretical points to a specific literary work and its influence over society. Moreover, other types of literature were also contemplated such as film scripts: students watched specific scenes of some movies which were originally literary works.

4.c. Commentaries on the subject

The theoretical explanations of the content units of this subject were very dynamical because students participated making commentaries about some specific aspects of the theory. This explanations were combined with the commentaries of the literary texts we were proposed.

The most important units were those related to the works *A Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, and *The Hero of the Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell.

The importance of the foreseeing included in *A Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has fascinated scholars from the moment of their publications. These two works are considered masterpieces of science fiction in the twentieth century in literature written in English. Their importance also stands in the capacity of both authors to represent societies ruled by the principles of dystopia: contrary to utopian societies, dystopian societies are characterized by the totalitarian practices imposed by governments covered by the messages of a peaceful and happy society. These key points were discussed in the lessons dedicated to both works.

On the other hand, *The Hero of the Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell represented an important guideline to understand the processes of building a hero within a literary (or non-literary) work, as well as other aspects of the hero's evolution in the story.

For the evaluation of the subject students were requested to produce an essay about some questions discussed during the lessons: the social implications of *A Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* within our present days or, on the contrary, how to build a personal hero based on the traces contained in Campbell's *The Hero of the Thousand Faces*.

I personally found this subject very interesting as any other subject centered in literature written in English. The selection of the authors was familiar to me, as I had seen some of them during my degree. However I had not read most of the works selected, so this was another point to take into consideration. The essay was very appropriate to produce because it coincided with some incidents in our society which were present in one of the novels offered (I decided to develop my essay based on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*).

5. Research Methods in Applied Linguistics.

Lecturers: García Sánchez, M^a Elena & Bretones Callejas, Carmen M^a.

5.a. Objectives

The main objectives of this subject are to acquire theoretical knowledge about what research is and which the fundamental mechanisms related to research are. Students will develop several practical skills in order to make successful research activities related to bibliographies as well as research of complementary material. They will also develop their skills on recollecting and analyzing data and on producing conclusions. These skills will be developed by students with the purpose of being able to communicate and/or publish their results in academic or scientific fields. The final goal will be investigating and treating the conclusions as well as updating the knowledge acquire and putting that knowledge in the professional field.

5.b. Methodology

Both lecturers performed theoretical explanations on the content topics and they proposed students to do some practical exercises during the lessons in order to clarify and to understand the knowledge previously presented. In order to be more accurate, both lecturers used audiovisual material, such as power points and videos from different websites.

5.c. Commentaries on the subject

Dr. García was in charge of teaching the most theoretical aspects of research. In her lessons students acquired the necessary knowledge about the different ways of research and the tools students are able to use during an academic research. These tools are, for example, the recollection of data and how to treat that data in order to make suitable conclusions. Moreover, students also distinguished the different types of data and how they are linked with different types of research. Finally students learnt about the better habits for a good researcher.

On the other hand, Dr. Bretones showed how to make a successful research using tools such as the Internet and how to follow the rules of one of the most

influential associations in the academic world: MLA. The evaluation of the subject was divided into two pieces of work:

- In the first piece of work, students were asked to produce a content summary of the part developed by Mrs. Garcia, taking into account the most important points of the content units seen in her part.
- In the second piece of work, students were asked to answer to a short question proposed by Mrs. Bretones through the virtual community of the university.

In my opinion this subject was of much necessity for us because it set the most important guidelines in order to improve our research skills as well as the most important rules for the proper production of a piece of work, with no distinction. The points learnt here have been used in the production and elaboration of the Master thesis. In summary, the content of this subject has been crucial for our learning in this master.

6. Computer Resources for Teaching and English for Translation.

Lecturer: Perdú Honeyman, Nobel Augusto.

6.a. Objectives

The objectives of this subject include the cooperative use of the computer program *Déjàvu*, which involves the use of memories for translation. Another computer program which will be use is Hot Potatoes. This program will be used for producing activities designated for teaching. The third main objective will be the capacity of designing a personal web site and its utility for teaching purposes. Finally, the ability of using a wide range of electronic and online tools will be also required.

6.b. Methodology

The methodology of this subject consisted of the introduction to several electronic resources and online programs which will be useful for students in order to perform and improve their abilities and activities related to the teaching field. There were little

theoretical explanation, which was used as an introduction for the programs, and the time was mainly fulfilled using and improving our abilities with the programs previously mentioned.

6.c. Commentaries on the subject

The first of the programs introduced was *Déjàvu*, a program designed as a useful tool for translating. The program consists of the production of several memories containing words and items translated in the language chosen. These memories were intended to help for future translation of texts. Although it was a little complicated in the beginning, the continuous use of the program permitted almost the entire class to be good at working with *Déjàvu*. Mr. Perdú helped in every doubt presented during this process.

The second program used was Hot Potatoes, a program containing several proposals of exercises for English students: a quiz, a crossword, etc. The complete online nature of the program permitted to develop the activities and to publish them quickly without much knowledge on computers.

Finally students were requested to make a website of our own using Microsoft's Office as a base for the site. This activity was mainly performed between lessons because of the difficulty of *Déjàvu*. With the basic traces, students started constructing a website and performing it with exercises made through Hot Potatoes and including some interesting links to other websites related to English and to English teaching.

The evaluation of this subject was to accomplish three tasks requested by the teacher in the first lesson: to make a memory file using *Déjàvu*, to produce six exercises with Hot Potatoes and finally to finish our website including those exercises from Hot Potatoes and links from other websites explaining the contents of those links.

This subject was curious and entertaining as well: we could develop some translating skills while we were improving our memories using *Déjàvu*, we also used our imagination as teachers making exercises with Hot Potatoes and we finally learnt how to make a website without much effort. This final task was the most interesting for me because I had little idea on how to make a website on my own.

7. Methods of Linguistic Research.

Lecturer: Martínez del Castillo, Jesús Gerardo.

7.a. Objectives:

- Skills to solve problems.
- Critical attitude.
- Reasoning capacity.

7.b. Methodology

The methodology of this subject included the reading and understanding of the most important topics contained in the book *Las Relaciones Lenguaje-Pensamiento o El Problema del Logos* by Jesús Martínez del Castillo. In this book there is a historical overview of the most important linguistic theories and reasoning about this problem. During the reading of these units, the lecturer as well as students made commentaries about the theoretical content of each topic.

7.c. Commentaries on the subject

During the time of this subject, students were able to read and comment the first six units of the book. In the first unit the problem and its implications are presented, in the second unit the most important questions surrounding the problem are also exposed. In the third unit, there is a historical review on how this problem has been treated by the most important and influential linguistics of the past: Coseriu, Bühler or Roman Jakobson.

In the fourth unit, the logos concept is historically introduced, starting with Heráclito and making a deep research on its treatment during the twentieth century by authors such as the Spanish Ortega y Gasset.

In the final two units which students were able to read and comment in class, the logos problem and its possible solution was also presented.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the summary of the first six units of this book which were also read and commented in class. Students also had to build a

critical commentary towards the most important considerations proposed both in the units and also in the theoretical explanations and commentaries in class.

Personally I found this subject interesting according to the content of the units and the authors included in each unit. The commentaries made by the lecturer were of much clarity and they helped us to fully understand the purposes of this linguistics' research towards the logos problem and its implications in the communicative field.

8. Methodology for Teaching English.

Lecturer: Salaberri Ramiro, María Sagrario.

8.a. Objectives

The objectives of this subject include the development of skills for planning and implementing didactic units; how to apply theoretical knowledge and practical formation in order to face situations in the teaching field; and how to access to updated information resources about the improvement and regulation of the curriculum of foreign languages in our context.

8.b. Methodology

This subject consisted of theoretical explanations on different but important units related to methodologies and strategies for teaching foreign languages, especially English. During these theoretical explanations, students were requested to put in practice that knowledge acquired during the lessons by performing some practical activities. The theoretical explanations were accompanied by the use of audiovisual material which reinforced the implementation and learning of the content.

8.c. Commentaries on the subject

There were six important units within the content of this subject. They were the following:

- The study of different learning strategies for the so-called skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking);
- How to design units of work;

- The distinction between assessment and evaluation and how to develop successfully both of them;
- The problems which might arise when the teachers find diversity and how to cope with it in a class;
- And finally we had a brief introduction about multiple intelligences and the advantages of encouraging them.

All these units were introduced theoretically and then students performed different practical exercises with the purpose of reinforcing what we had learnt before.

The evaluation consisted of the production of a piece of paper about one of the units or about a practical task which would be proposed to an English class. This piece of work had to include a planning about how to encourage the reading skill in a school. Both activities had to be explained within an oral presentation during the final lesson of the subject. I prepared a task about multiple meaning words in English through the performance of a reading activity which would serve as an introduction for those words. Those multiple words had to be used in a writing activity afterwards using the guessing and understanding knowledge acquired during the reading activity previously proposed.

This was the first time I had a subject about teaching a foreign language to people and I really have acquired important tools and techniques which I did not know before attending to these lessons. Personally, I found very interesting and very important everything contained in the program of this subject for my future aspirations as a teacher: after having attended to these lessons I have had more ideas about teaching certain aspects of the English language to children, but also to adults. Subject of this nature are very helpful and they should be more present during the academic formation of those who are determined to be part of the teaching system.

9. English for Specific Purposes.

Lecturer: Cruz Martínez, María Soledad.

9.a. Objectives:

- To make the students know the research possibilities which are offered by the field of English for Specific Purposes;
- To describe the basic peculiarities of the Business Genre;
- To describe the basic peculiarities of the Legal Genre;
- To describe the basic peculiarities of the Academic Genre.

9.b. Methodology

The methodology of this subject consisted of the theoretical explanations of the contents of the subject and, especially, the practical exercises and analysis of several texts taking into account the two most important aspects of the subject, the Register Analysis and the Genre Analysis. Audiovisual content was also used. The results of the practical analysis done in class were also commented by other students and the lecturer in an attempt to obtain in general and agreed conclusion.

9.c. Commentaries on the subject

This subject included some important linguistic devices related to the recognition and analysis of text from two important points of view regarding to ESP. These two important points of view are the Register Analysis and the Genre Analysis. During the lessons students approached some theoretical introduction of content related to the latest paradigms in Linguistic Investigation:

- Structuralism.
- Generativism.
- Pragmatics.
- Cognitive Linguistics.

As the Register Analysis belongs to the linguistic paradigm of Structuralism, students saw the important features of the paradigm related to the Register Analysis,

that is, the characteristics regarding this type of analysis: lexical and grammatical characteristics.

On the other hand, students made a deep introduction to Pragmatics which was the basis for the Genre Analysis: types of genres, conventions of those genres, generic structures; and other factors such as communicative politeness. Other theoretical points such as discourse analysis and discourse modes were also seen.

After this theoretical introduction and the explanation of the practical devices which were going to be used in the analysis, students concentrated on the application of these points into the practical analysis of several texts: from the point of view of the Register Analysis and the Genre Analysis.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the production of an analysis taking into account both perspectives, Register Analysis and Genre Analysis, of three texts of different nature: academic and professional. The conclusion as well as the results of the analysis had to be developed in a paper.

After a few years without practicing my skills on linguistic theories and devices, such as Pragmatics and Structuralism, this subject has refreshed those concepts to me: the use of morphology and syntax upon a text as well as the analysis of the different topics included in Pragmatics (such as the Speech Act Theory or the Communicative Politeness). Using these devices has been refreshing and interesting too, because during my degree these applications were not practiced too much.

10. Research in the English Classroom: Theory and Practice.

Lecturer: García Sánchez, María Elena.

10.a. Objectives

The main objective of this subject is that students will understand that they can develop their knowledge and skills in English teaching not only following a planned methodology or recommended by an official research, but mainly adopting an attitude towards inquiring and research which will allow them to act and innovate taking into account the conclusions which could be resulted from their research within the classroom, as well as their research in the class in general.

10.b. Methodology:

The methodology of this subject included the theoretical explanations of the content topics of it as well as the practical development of exercises which were related directly to the theoretical units. There were also some text and additional theoretical background which was read and commented in the classroom by the lecturer as well as by students. These theoretical explanations and the extra information supplied during the lessons were supported by audiovisual material such as power points and transparencies and students also used the Internet for further information.

10.c. Commentaries on the subject:

Action research, Reflective Teaching and Motivation were the main topics included in the content of this subject. These three important topics were introduced and deeply developed by the lecturer in order to propose different ways and tools for their teaching skills improvement to students. All these techniques were proposed to this purpose as a guide for those teachers who in the future do not want to be obsolete in the new techniques in English teaching.

Action Research was the first of these three important topics. Its importance resides on the implications of the methodology applied to the recollection of new data and feedback for teachers' own research.

Reflective Teaching is a wide range of content in which action research is also included. The main purpose of Reflective Teaching is an extension of the short definition given in the previous paragraph of Action Research: it contains more aspects related to different fields and not only concentrated on the development of research.

Finally Motivation is a key factor in this course. It is a basic pillar for the development of your students as well as it settles better conditions for teaching and learning within the class, for both teacher and students.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the production of a paper including a critical summary of the content subject and the practices developed during the lessons. Attendance and participation were also taken into account because of the participative nature of the subject, in which students commented and discussed several important topics related to the content subject.

In order to become a better teacher and to develop my skills in independent research, the topics and units proposed and explained in this subject have been of much importance and interest for me. The techniques and methodologies involving Action Research as well as Reflective Teaching, including some certain practical exercises done during the lessons, are a great material and they have encouraged not only my initiative regarding English teaching but my methodology and routines regarding research in other fields.

11. Linguistic Analysis and Cultural Analysis of Print Advertising in English.

Lecturer: Cortés de los Ríos, María Enriqueta.

11.a. Objectives:

- Presenting the linguistic and pragmatics characteristics of English advertising;
- Analyzing the characteristics of text and image in advertising;
- Introducing the cognitive theory of metaphor and metonymy in advertising;
- Analyzing cultural issues in advertising.

11.b. Methodology

The methodology of this subject consisted of the theoretical explanation of several contents of the subject and the development of practical exercises and analysis in order to maintain and reinforce those theoretical units. The explanations were supported by audiovisual material such as power points and transparencies.

11.c. Commentaries on the subject

The main contents of this subject were related to the linguistics devices and theories applied to the studies of printed advertising in English. The most important topics can be summarized as follows:

- Definition, objectives, functions and strategies of advertising;
- Theoretical background;
- Linguistic and pragmatic characteristics in advertising;

- Verbal message and image in advertising;
- Cognitive semantics in advertising;
- Cultural dimensions in advertising.

These theoretical units included important factors and devices which may be used in the linguistic analysis of printed advertising in English. Concepts such as the values and main ideas included in the ads and linguistic devices such as conceptual metaphors were deeply studied and practiced during the theoretical explanations as well as the realization of the practical exercises and analysis.

On the other hand the lexical used as well as the use and implications of the text and the image use in advertisements were also other important devices explained and used as well.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the production of an analysis of printed advertising in English taking into account one or more of the content units of the subject. I chose several advertisements from the Diesel campaign called “Global Warming Ready” in which there were connections between fashion and the environment. I developed the analysis taking into account the most important values and ideas presented in the advertisements in isolation and as a whole.

Personally I found this subject peculiar and it showed me how to develop linguistic tools towards different fields which are not related to linguistics at first sight. It also refreshed my knowledge on linguistics as well as it introduces to me some other different and new notions which I had not seen before, like those related to Cognitive Linguistics. In summary, it has been an inspiring and interesting subject for me.

12. Art, Literature and the Mass Media in English Studies.

Lecturer: Cantizano Márquez, Blasina Jesús.

12.a. Objectives:

These objectives may be summarized as follows:

- The acquisition and reinforcement of the English language in artistic fields;
- Ability to analyze texts and other artistic productions;

- -recognition of the interrelation and influence of the artistic productions and expressions between each other.

12.b. Methodology

This subject was developed using a lot of audiovisual content as well as different artistic manifestations which supported the theoretical explanations done by the lecturer. These theoretical explanations included basic terms for understanding the following texts and their relation with other artistic expressions, such as painting, architecture, etc.

12.c. Commentaries on the subject:

The subject was agreed to be divided into two main parts. The first part related to literature and its implications and connections to other artistic fields and the second was related to mass media in the English speaking countries. This second part was to be prepared and developed by the students in the final lesson of the subject.

The first part included four main units and an introduction. The introduction was about the concept of art and the differences between classical and contemporary art forms, including different fields such as music, painting, sculpture, etc.

The first unit was centered in the art forms within the English speaking countries. In the second unit we entered in the Romantic period in England. We introduced this period with some useful concepts which were going to be essential for the understanding of the unit. We saw in depth some of the most important poets of this period, William Wordsworth, Samuel T. Coleridge and William Blake and some poems written by them. Finally we also review the life and most important works of Edgar Allan Poe and we made special attention to poems such as *Anabel Lee* and short stories such as *The Oval Portrait*. In the third unit, the connections between literature and film were studied in the figures of Annie Proulx, Alice Walker and R. Dahl. The final unit was about Arthur Bradford and his experimental works mixing literature and other media formats.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the production of a paper about mass media in the English speaking countries. I decided to concentrate on the presence of Politics in the American television. This paper had to be presented during the last lesson of the subject for about fifteen minutes and with audiovisual support.

Although some of the authors seen in this subject were also seen during some subjects of the degree, there has been a new and exciting point of view connecting these authors, as well as many more, with other artistic representations. These connections have been considered in the past art forms and in the present ones. In addition the methodology of the subject has provoked that students had to participate and comment many of the works and this situation has brought a dynamic development of the subject. For these reasons I have found this subject one of the most interesting ones of the whole master.

13. Landmarks in Contemporary English and American Literatures.

Lecturer: Ibañez Ibañez, José Ramón.

13.a. Objectives

The objectives of this subject are for students to understand the complex reality towards the British and American cultures in the last decades of the twentieth century and in the first ones of the twenty-first through the analysis of key literary works from both countries. Moreover, students will be able to make personal commentaries from the literary and critic point of view and to compare the vision present in the written texts and the films based on those written texts. Finally it is expected that students will understand the complexity of the multicultural background of both British and American societies and the great impact of the narrative productions written by foreign writers into the social and literary context of both countries.

13.b. Methodology

The subject was developed through theoretical explanations about the social context in which the novels selected were written as well as some biographical information about their authors which was important for the understanding of certain aspects of the novels. The novels had to be read before the lessons in order to fully understand these explanations about them. As a support for those explanations, there were commentaries on several aspects of the novel made by the teacher but also by students.

13.c. Commentaries on the subject

The topics were divided into those about Britain and those about the US. The lecturer offered two novels for each country weeks before the beginning of the subject. Those novels were written from the second half of the twentieth century until the present days, so the historical and social background of the explanations was crucial for the context of the novels but also for the fully understanding of their most difficult aspects.

The novels selected for Britain were *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess and *Money* written by Martin Amis. Both novels represent an innovative way of playing with the language used in literature: in the case of Burgess' novel, there was even a new language created from the mixture of some other languages, for example. In *Money*, Amis played with the boundaries of language and he offers a huge demonstration of his ability in the use of the English language (especially of the use of informal language, full of phrasal verbs and common expressions). Both novels also treat trendy topics of the time they were written: *A Clockwork Orange* criticizes the advances of science related to the possibility of changing human's behavior, such as the Ludovico's Technique. In *Money* there is a strong critique towards consumerism and the dangers of a society based on it.

On the other hand, the novels offered about the US were *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Namesake*. In these novels we saw two contradictory styles: Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* offers a science fiction story with a new style based on the principles of post-modernism which was emerging by the time the novel was written; but Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a portrait very detailed and realistic. *Slaughterhouse-Five* treated some of the horrors which took place during the WWII, such as the Dresden bombing using science fiction as a device for articulating that horror. *The Namesake* offers the portrait of an Indian family which moves to the US and how their traditions and culture is important for progenitors and how the first generation apparently tends to reject that heritage.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the production of a written exam about the most important aspect of the four novels including the theoretical explanations given by the teacher. The participation in class was also important for the final mark.

Like any other subject about literature, I really enjoyed this one. The selection of the novels was very interesting because they were much different from most of the novels and literary productions I read during my degree. The theoretical explanations were very detailed and they reflected a great work behind them.

14. Cultural Studies: Narrative, Identity and Genre.

Lecturer: Jaime de Pablos, María Elena.

14.a. Objectives

The objectives of this subject can be summarized in a few points. These points are the following:

- Ability to learn and work independently;
- Ethical compromise;
- Critic and auto critic skills;
- Global social competence;
- To understand and to have knowledge;
- Ability to produce personal commentaries;
- Applicability of knowledge.

14.b. Methodology

The units of this subject were explained through theoretical lessons in which the lecturer offered those units in order to apply them to specific texts. These texts were analyzed by students using the knowledge acquired in terms of genre and identity and they were compared with the rest of the class and with the lecturer's point of view.

14.c. Commentaries on the subject

this subject started with an initial practice which consisted of the practical analysis a text taking into account some hints about genre and identity studies. After this preliminary exercise there were several theoretical explanations related to the main figures and their theories in feminism and genre and identity studies. These theoretical units were supported by the performance of more practical analysis and the reading of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in class, with comments made by the lecturer but also made by students. In the final lessons, students watched the film *The Purple Color* by Steven Spielberg based on the homonymous novel written by Alice Walker.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the production of a critic essay about one of the novels selected. These novels were Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Alice Walker's *The Purple Color*. The analysis had to be done from the point of view of genre and identity studies which centered the main topics of this subject. The participation in class was also important.

Personally I found this subject very interesting because we did not have much of these topics during the degree. The content of the subject was familiar yet new for me, so I really enjoyed the discovery of new aspects and research related to literature but also related to social issues nowadays.

15. Other cultures in English speaking countries.

Lecturer: Fernández Sánchez, José Francisco.

15.a. Objectives

The objectives of this subject include the enrichment of the students' analysis on the different cultures from different English speaking countries. Through the content of this subject, the different ideologies, political systems and societies which form those countries will be acquired as the great diversity they represent. The diversity related to culture and identity in these societies will also be treated in this subject in order to create a routine in the students' critical analysis which will allow them to cross linguistic and national boundaries.

15.b. Methodology

This subject was basically divided into two different steps. In the first step, there was a theoretical introduction performed by the lecturer about the social, political and historical context of the countries which were going to be studied. In the second step, students could check those social, political and historical aspects watching different films which represented most of those aspects. Finally there was a discussion about the impression which could be taken from the films and the connection of this impression with the reality of those countries. These units were supported with audiovisual material.

15.c. Commentaries on the subject

The theoretical contents of this subject were divided into three main units corresponding to three different English speaking countries. These countries were Ireland, Australia and South Africa.

In the unit centered in modern Ireland, the lecturer made a deep review on the most important landmarks in past century. These landmarks included political, social and historical aspects which lead the country to become what it is nowadays. The film selected was titled *The Stapper*.

In the second unit, the modern history of Australia as well as its most important landmarks. From its discovery made by Captain Cook in the eighteenth century, until the treatment of the aborigines which centered some of the most important issues in the twentieth century, the lecturer provided with crucial information about the country. The film selected for this country was titled *Australia*.

In the final unit of this subject, South Africa was the country selected. The Apartheid years was the most important part of the theoretical explanation provided by the lecturer, in which students saw the most important facts related to this years in the African country. The years after the Apartheid, with the figure of Nelson Mandela as leader of the change, took an important place within the theoretical content of this unit. The film selected for this was titled *Disgrace*.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the analysis of three different movies (one movie per country), paying special attention to how the society of those countries is represented in every film. The lecturer provided a number of movies per

country and the students had to choose between those selections. Participation in class was also important.

As my master's thesis has a similar process as the practical analysis done in this subject through watching some movies and making a comparison to the society they represent, the knowledge and methodology learnt in this subject has been of much importance for me and the production of my master's thesis. On the other hand, the countries and their periods chosen by the lecturer made the subject very accessible to students.

16. New Trends in Literature Written in English.

Lecturer: Redondo Olmedilla, José Carlos.

16.a. Objectives

The objectives of this subject include the acquisition of knowledge about the main movements, authors and literary tendencies in contemporary literature written in English (twentieth and twenty-first centuries). Moreover students will have to know how to analyze meaningful and relevant parts of texts offered by the lecturer from a critical and contextual perspective. Students will have to acquire the basic practical techniques related to the textual context and they will also have to acquire other techniques which provide them with better skills within the access to the texts, their critical interpretation and a mature expression of the ideology and aesthetic underneath them.

16.b. Methodology

The methodology of this subject consisted of the introduction of several theoretical aspects and the realization of practical exercises. The theoretical explanations were supported with the use of audiovisual content as well as many resources taken from the Internet. The texts (most of the taken from the Internet too) were the cores of the practical exercises: these exercises consisted of the analysis of those texts using the tools and techniques previously given by the lecturer.

Commentaries on the subject: contained in the units of this subject, students saw different topics related the literary context of English speaking countries apart from Britain and the US, and also they saw several concepts which helped them in the understanding of those literary contexts.

In the first unit students faced some of the important concepts which were going to prepare us for the future analysis of literature productions and to understand the characteristics hold in those productions. Terms such as the Refraction Principle, a term which takes its name from the physical phenomenon and it is applied to literature in order to portray the special evolution the literature from the former British colonies has suffered along the years. This evolution has been different from the way literature has evolved in Great Britain and the U.S. The practical exercises of this unit included the analysis of texts written by authors such as Wole Soyinka or Derek Walcott.

In the second unit of this subject students faced a brief history of the constitution of Canada as a country and its historical relations with the U.S., the most important aspects related to literature were those related to the Canadian national symbols, multiculturalism and their search for identity. The text selected for this unit was written by Crummey and Van Toorn.

As we did with Canada, in the third unit students had a short introduction to Australian history, including the question about its discovery by the European civilizations and how could the aborigines had reached the huge island in the ancient times, until the relations the country has maintained with its former colonizers along the years until the constitution of Australia as a independent country. Poems written by Ouyang Yu or Field were taken for the practical analysis of this unit.

Finally in the last unit of this subject the new forms of publishing literature as well as the new techniques used in the creative process were introduced. These new techniques have to do with Collaborative Literature, that is, the process of creating a piece of work not individually.

The evaluation of this subject consisted of the production of a paper including the most important topics and issues treated during the lessons as well as the student's personal opinion. Participation in class was also an important resource for the final evaluation.

Personally this subject has been very interesting and amazing: the use of computers as a tool for literature has always been grateful for me. The countries and works selected represent a new point of view in literature written in English from the ones we studied during our degree. After four years studying the literature of the same countries, England and the U.S., this course has been a blow of fresh air to my literary knowledge. The methodology followed by the lecturer also made this subject easier and more accessible to the students which encouraged their participation during the lessons.

Research

1. Introduction

The purpose of this master thesis is to analyze several filmic productions made in the US in order to evaluate the image of the American society shown in those productions. Moreover, the films selected have been written, recorded and produced in the last decade so the representation of the American society is enriched with the most recent landmarks and events which have been of much importance worldwide. Because of the diversity of events which occurred during those years and the amount of references which are present in these filmic productions, the analysis will be developed after some theoretical points introduced in first place. This research and analysis of the films will be supported taking those theoretical points as one pillar for the research and the important events and the ability to portray the American society as the other.

The reasons for this research have to do with the past and controversial years in the US. The last decade has been very important not only in the US history, but in the rest of the world. The political earthquake which was Bush's victory in the Election 2000 was quickly shadowed by the horrible events occurred in September 11th 2001, when the terrorist group Al-Qaeda attacked within the American boundaries in New York and Washington. These two events conditioned the political scene in the US they were the starting point for the rest of important events which followed: the bombing of Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq without the acceptance of the UN.

However, these events had many and decisive consequences for the American population and were combined with the many peculiarities which have characterized the American society along the years. These peculiarities are the multiculturalism of its society and the situation of the racial and ethnical minorities in the country and the discussion about the possession of fire arms and why that possession is intimately linked with the violence and murders in the US.

The political implications and the social consequences brought after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the possession of guns center the first part of the analysis dedicated to documentaries and, especially, those made by Michael Moore. The use of the documentary has a certain purpose by the author. As Juncosa and Romaguera have stated the documentary “trabaja sobre la realidad o la representa, por lo cual siempre está relacionado con la historia, aunque el acontecimiento mostrado se actual. De este modo, es el reflejo, más fiel, del fragmento de historia del momento que se relata” (1997: 69).

The history of the documental film is very old. We could state that its origins date back to the very first productions in which there were only images in movement without any story of script behind them. However it was thirty-five years after the invention of the cinema when we find the first recognition of the documentary within the cinema. This recognition was made by John Grierson in 1929. In the history of the documentary filming, there have been a large number of directors who have decided to produce a piece of work like this: from the very first movies shot by the Lumières (although they did not recognized themselves as movie makers), moving on to Buñuel and his masterpiece “Las Hurdes” in 1932, until the most recent documentaries made nowadays in which themes such us politics, economic crisis or the climate change are present. Here is a brief history of the documentary filming.

In 1909 Félix Mesguich, an employee of the Lumière Co. decided to travel to other countries with the purpose of sharing both his knowledge and the new technological devices which made real the dream of recording living images and showing them. There were other people like him, such as Jean Nedelec who traveled through the northern countries of Europe and America until the Indian subcontinent.

Dziga Vertov was possibly the first author to reproduce the social injustices through the lenses of a camera. The Russian author also founded a group involved in documentaries in the 1920s. Vertov only recorded the images and without appearing in front of the camera. The American Robert J. Flaherty applied the contrary theory to the production of documentaries in the US: he inaugurated the poetic and human informative channel within the documentary in which he settled a narrow relation between the director of the film and the narrator, between the watcher and the watched. John Grierson, as we commented before, coined the word “documentary” in 1926 in an article published in the New York Sun. He formed a group of film makers and they all together approached the most fashionable problems of the society of the time, i. e., they maintained a democratic dialogue with the citizens.

As the decades passed by, the documentary films were more popular and they were shot in several countries: before the rising of Nazism in Germany and during the years before WWII, there were many documentaries shot and made. When the Nazis came to power, Joseph Goebbels took some ideas from the existed documentaries and put them into his propagandistic works. After the war, there was a burst of documental makers in the US: the productions here have a voice-over which is omniscient and which narrates everything that has to be told to the audience. Their documentaries were more realistic and they portrait the situation of the American society after the WWII.

The political documentary was born in 1968 in France. The political revolution in that year provoked that many film makers decided to take part in the claiming and they made pieces of work representing their political vision of the French society of that time.

In the last decades of the 20th century, the technological advances made possible another explosion in the world of documentaries: new trends of planning and making films were introduced in documentaries as well. New techniques such as the inclusion of the own author in the documentary as a mirror for the reactions of the audiences is represented by directors such as Ross McElwee or Michael Moore, this latter one responsible of one of the latest revolutions in the world of documentaries. The spread of the Internet in the twenty-first century as well as the appearance of tools such as youtube.com have permitted the normal population to have access to

shot and film their own pieces of videos. This has provoked that tons and tons of productions and little documentaries have invaded the Internet and they also have contributed to the expansion of the genre among the population.

Apart from the documentaries, there will be an analysis of some movies involving another important topic presented in the beginning of this introduction: multiculturalism. The American society is a multicultural society in which many racial and ethnical groups coexist: white people, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian or Native Americans are some examples of this diversity. The historical background on the country has provoked that some of these minorities were deeply discriminated by the white people since the very beginning of the nation: Native-Americans were an pitfall for the occupation of the rest of the country after the Independence and the African-Americans were brought to the US in order to become slaves of the white people. During the past two centuries, the great opportunities and possibilities offered in the country mixed with the political agitation, economic crisis and the two World Wars provoked huge migrations to the US. Nowadays the country needs to coexist with all of that ethnical and racial diversity, although its society is still far from being equal and respectful: racism, segregation and tension between the members of the same community, etc.

The history of cinema has many representations of these multicultural society and the implications it has involving the topics previously presented, such as racism and segregation. *The Purple Color*, *Giant*, or *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* are examples of the situation of the African-American people within the American society as well as their relations with other racial groups, especially with the white people. More or less critical, more or less objective the filmic productions involving racist topics have increased in the last decades. The echoes of the Civil Rights Movement and the problems derived from the situation of these racial and ethnical minorities (not only the African-Americans) have become of much importance politically and socially speaking. The films selected for the analysis seem to contain a wide appreciation of the multicultural status of the American society and the relationships between different minorities from different classes which results will be considered. i.e., they represent an wide canvas containing most of the multicultural status within the US society.

2. American Values and Beliefs: A Brief Introduction

2.a. Where American Beliefs and Values Come from

2.a.1. Liberty

Liberty has always been much attached to the genesis of the country. In fact one of the most important reasons for the Independence War against the Britain was to free themselves from the hands of tyranny. If there is an approximation to the present days, studies carried out between the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21st show that there is a strong support towards “general statements of free speech and opinion but much lower support for specific statements” (McKay 2009: 8). In order to clarify the nature of general and specific statements, the first ones should be considered as statements such as people criticizing the way the American Government treat the Asian population; and the second statements as for example opinion articles containing different or inappropriate attitudes towards a specific topic. Taking into account the results of those studies, the American population would agree to the first example but not to the second. However those general statements shown by McKay have now always had a privileged position in the people’s imagery: let us consider the treatment of communism within the borders of the country just after the end of the First and Second World War or how the African-American population was being treated prior to the Civil Rights Movement and the Affirmative Action (although these changes towards race and ethnicity have been happening more slowly as the final decades of the past century went by).

On the other hand, there have been some examples which contribute to the thinking that freedom of speech or expression is an unbreakable wall in the modern American society. McKay brings out three main examples about this matter apart from the issues related to the War on Terror which will be discussed in the following chapters. The three main examples are:

- a) Although there has been an over-protection towards freedom of speech from the 1960s until 2001, dramatic changes have taken place ever since the 9/11 terrorist attacks). In any case “American citizens, newspapers and other media now enjoy much more freedom than they used to” (McKay 2009: 8).

b) The fragmentation of the political system in the US has had dangerous consequences such as the violation of individual liberties inside state or local jurisdictions without any claim from the surrounding population. These violation acts as a response from some right-wing minorities to the expansion of the central Government related to racial issues for example.

c) The limits towards the notion of liberty in the US, i.e., America is a free country if we apply the notion of liberty or freedom to the economic fields of individualism and the right to pass those individual properties to the future generations.

2.a.2. Equality

Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution guarantees that "Los españoles son iguales ante la Ley, sin que pueda prevalecer discriminación alguna por razón de nacimiento, raza, sexo, religión, opinión o cualquier otra condición o circunstancia personal o social." Nevertheless the sort of equality found in American society is lightly different: the notion of equality in the US is more attached to equal opportunities rather than to equal position, status or condition of its citizens. This was the original idea in the very first years of the country after the Independence War, and "as the country developed, so it became accepted that the precondition for equality of opportunity was a certain standard of education" (2009: 10).

Nowadays the notion of equality of opportunities is deeply rooted, especially when that equality is related to dignity or esteem which has recently been the focus for the efforts of the Government and the American legislation, raising an interesting conflict with another important value in American society: individualism. By trying to solve the conflicts around discrimination against women and ethnic minorities, the Government has confronted the interest of a specific group or part of the population and the old notion of individualism wafting across the American landscape and which can be breathed very often in the US.

2.a.3. Individualism

It is not a secret that Americans prefer private institutions rather than public ones. Trade-unions or collectivist political parties have very few supporters. The spirit of

independency and self-efficiency is present in the way Americans see reality. They prefer an individual resolution of problems rather than a Government providing any goods or services they need. On the other hand if the question involves specific issues such as public and universal health coverage, social security or education, it is commonly accepted that it is the Government's responsibility, or at least, the American people tend to prefer those specific issues covered by the central Government.

This individualistic behavior is a consequence of the capitalist economic model ruling the country: people learnt how to be independent and self-reliant in terms of economic matters. If we compare this situation to the economic rivals of the US in Europe or Asia, the population living in those countries tends to be more open to a certain control done by the central government. As it was mentioned in the previous point, the notion of individualism is usually in conflict with the attempt to provide equality of opportunities: "Positive discrimination in favour of ethnic minorities, women or the disabled can mean the application of rules and standards intended to benefit whole social groups. In such instances, the merits of individuals are sometimes subordinated to those of the group". (2009: 12).

The Affirmative Action policy, one of the most remarkable victories of the Civil Rights Movement, allowed job opportunities for minorities –the black population primarily. This policy becomes a fine example of the problems dealing with the conflict between the notion of individualism and equality of opportunities. The positive discrimination programs have been very popular in the recent political campaigns in the US, as an attempt to reduce the inequalities existing in the American society. These attempts to reduce inequalities are more common in the political ideology of less conservative parties, such as the Democratic Party.

2.a.4. Democracy, Populism and Law

There seems to be a clear idea involving the terms democracy, populism and the rule of law and that is the notion of majority. Although we have seen the hints of the individual concept deeply rooted in the minds of the American population, in terms of political thinking and the way the law is stated and ruled in the country, the common American mind tends to move into the fields of majority. In other words, "majority

opinion carries a weight and independent value in the USA that is unusual elsewhere." (2009: 13).

However, here also seems to be a contradiction between that democratic feeling developed through the opinion of the majority and the little disappointment with the way politics have been becoming more blurry with several scandals from the mid 20th century or how politicians have been performing their promises (or how they failed to fulfill them). The supportive feeling towards the political system and the Constitution dated from the 1960s has been changing slowly because of incidents such as the Vietnam War, the Watergate or the Iranian hostage crisis. These events mixed with the economic crisis in the 1970s provoked a significant decline in that supportive feeling, although it increased again during the economic bonanza of the Clinton administration. It is not a secret that when things go in the right way, critical opinions or statements seem to vanish; but when things go in a worse way, those critical opinions seem to fulfill the air. In any case, the contradiction stands still whatever the economic situation may be.

Going deeper in the disappointment feeling towards some institutions, politics in general or politicians, there is an interesting idea which comes from this: the un-American feeling. In the US, the population is supportive (in a general way) to democracy and there are some voices denouncing their disappointment as we have commented in the previous paragraph. These denouncing voices, on the one hand, are critical to some particular institutions, politicians or governments but, on the other hand, they do not support any type of critical opinion or thought towards the whole system of the regime. As David McKay suggests that although violence and crime have always been present in the US, this curious situation on the lack of strength of those who turn to be critical with those specific institutions could turn into some of the most defining characteristics of the American society nowadays:

More convincing perhaps is the claim that, unable to mobilize politically against the prevailing ideology, increasing numbers of Americans have turned to non-political violence and anti-social behavior (...), but it is extraordinarily difficult to make clear causal connections between this sort of pathology and political values and institutions. Violence and crime have always been a part of what was for many generations a frontier society. (2009: 15-16)

To conclude with this, we could summarize that there is an astonishing ability in the American society to resist several divisions (which are usually very deep and attached to important issues) within the umbrella of the supportive feeling towards the constitutional system. This has been baptized as Americanism by many people, such as Samuel Huntington who appoints its importance and how this notion has shaped other values and beliefs in the US:

It is possible to speak of a body of political ideas that constitutes “Americanism” in a sense which one can never speak of “Britishism”, “Frenchism”, “Germanism” or “Japanesism”. Americans in this sense is comparable to other ideologies or religions. “Americanism is to American”, Leon Samson has said, “not a tradition or a territory, not what France is to a Frenchman or England to an Englishman, but a doctrine- what socialism is to a socialist”. To reject the central ideas of that doctrine is to be un-American. ... preoccupation with “un-American” political ideas and behavior has been a recurring theme in American life. (qtd. in McKay 2009: 16).

This is probably the most clarifying reason to understand why Americans have those inner and deep divisions concerning political ideologies while the central Government and the bases of the American state preserve their strength as they receive such a loving feedback from the majority of the citizens.

2.b. Society and Values in the US

2.b.1. Immigration and Demographic Changes

The idea of immigration has always been connected to the US, passing from generation to generation and defining the own land as a land of opportunities, as a land of freedom (especially in the very first years after the born of the country). People from Europe, mainly, and other places in the world have been immigrating to the US during the 19th and 20th centuries looking for new opportunities in a country which defended liberty above everything.

Legally speaking, the country reinforced the laws about immigration especially from the second half of the past century, in an attempt to stop the overwhelming

amount of people who were arriving at Ellis Island. Despite these attempts to control (some of the attempts would look pretty conservative even racist nowadays), there was and there is the general assumption that, "once in America, people of all backgrounds will be provided with an equal opportunity to succeed" (McKay 2009: 21).

This immigration has caused significant changes in the demography of the population in the US, increasing the number of African-American and, more recently, people with European origins and especially Hispanic population has been increasing in the last few years.

2.b.2. Economic Change

The economy in the US has moved from a very doubtful beginning to the huge super economy it is nowadays, with its influential power over the rest of the economies in the world. The capitalistic model has brought great benefits to the American country as well as dangerous and unstoppable crisis which, nowadays, affect the entire planet. This model has the same advantages and disadvantages as in any other place in the world; one of the most problematic disadvantages is the fact that the differences between rich and poor people become more and more defined as years go by. This last comment leads us to the next point.

2.c. *Social Structure*

2.c.1. Income and Wealth

It is believed that the majority of the American population is mainly middle-class. They also have a high education and a high level of *home ownership*. There are many surveys and measure about the nature (or at least, the nature of the majority) of the population. However these studies cannot state anything about the distribution of wealth and income between the population and the levels of poverty existing in the society.

Although it is difficult to measure the amount of people in the US living below the poverty threshold, and taking into account the existence of a specific (also official) poverty measure which sets the limits of poverty for people and families in the country, there seems to be an undeniable fact:

No matter which way it is measured one thing is certain: America does have a large population of poor people; not perhaps poor in the sense of living below subsistence level, but certainly poor in the sense of having little hope of full-time, secure employment and access to good housing and an acceptable living environment. (2009: 29)

Nevertheless, these factors have not influenced the born of a class-based politics in the US. The general feeling that the country has been economically successful along history, together with the assumption that it does not exist a clear ideology towards a working-class which would have initiated social mentality, not in the sense of socialist but in the sense of socialized. If we add the notion of equality and liberty and the general consideration of a country for opportunities and freedom have prevented the country to develop a working-class idea implemented in politics. This fact has caused that, even after experiencing strong economic crisis, the economic model as well as the distribution of the income and wealth has not been questioned extensively.

2.c.2 Race and Ethnicity

As it was seen in the point dedicated to the immigration and demographic change, the population in the US has a great diversity concerning ethnical and racial aspects. African-American people were almost exclusively the most important racial minority in the country, but in recent years an amount of Hispanic (mainly from Mexico and other parts of Central and South America and the Caribbean) and Asian immigrants have been arriving at the US. Asian Americans hold more diversity involving countries such as China, Vietnam, and Japan and also the people coming from the Indian subcontinent are often included in this classification.

With regards to the situation of these ethnical groups in the US, they have represented the less educated portion of the population, if we compare them with the white people. The legal situation African-Americans and Hispanics have been enjoying over the last thirty years with the application of several measures which have provided a more prosperous and better position to those collectives, although poverty is usually represented by people belonging to these ethnical groups. The

situation of African-Americans is still more detailed: some scholars and commentators suggest that the break-down of the black family unit has brought disadvantages to them. The nature of their jobs may be one of the most influential factors which contribute to the weak economic situation of African Americans in the US (speaking in general terms), even after the progress made after the Affirmative Action Policy implementation in the late 1960s:

One particular problem for African Americans is that, as they are greatly over-represented among blue-collar and low-paid jobs, they are more vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy than are other social groups. This has become particularly serious as the labour market has become more flexible and unions weaker. Better –educated and professional African Americans, by way of contrast, have continued to improve their position in society. (2009: 30)

Speaking about their presence in politics and although the current president of the US is an African American, the representation of these ethnical groups in the political field is very poor in comparison to the number of white politicians. Despite this fact, their representation is growing slowly, but growing.

2.c.3 Gender

Not only in America have women improved their status in comparison to the male genre. In almost every country of the Western Civilization has been correcting their situation and women have nowadays a much better status than they had 30 years ago. In the US the situation has been the same. There seems to be many reasons for this improvement: apart from the claims coming from many women along the 20th century, there are other aspects which have contributed to their huge entrance in the professional world. Some scholars state that the decrease of the earnings in several works joined with the need to maintain the economic stability within the familiar core provoked that women started entering the professional world in order to protect the familiar economy.

2.c.4 Religion

There is well known that religion in America is synonymous with diversity. From the genesis of the country, religion has been attached to the behavior and tradition as a tree is rooted to land. The first settlers had many different branches of Christianity (by the time they arrived the consequences of Luther's Reformation was at their peak and there were many different ways of professing religion in the old country). With this background, it would have been strange if Americans were not so religious.

However their religious diversity within the country has not developed a social distinction in the population and it definitely has not become a problem as it was in other countries such as Ireland or Germany. Although there are an amount of religions, sects and denominations in the US, they do not provoke any fragmentation to each other.

2.c.5. Region

From the Maxon-Dixon Line which divided the northern states from the southern states long time ago, passing through the Civil War in the 19th century until the final division of the states, the country has suffered a great diversity of manners, behaviors and local beliefs and values because of the enormous size of the American territory.

The distinction between the southern states and the northern ones is possibly the most attractive: from the very beginning the southern states had different cultural traditions and they also had very different economic resources. For almost hundred years the South did have very explicit differences involving economic and, of course, the slavery topic which was one of the main reasons for the Civil War in the mid 19th century. After their defeat in that war, the southern states recovered in the following decades. However the most important change came after the consequences of the Civil Rights Movement appear in the American society. Since the decade of 1960, the urbanization and the improvement (slowly improvement) of the situation of the African-Americans in the South has been moving forward.

There are other regions in the country which also have remarkable distinctions, although not so important and distinctive as those we have seen of the South:

The Pacific states (...) and Hawaii tend to be more urban, liberal and internationalist than the rest of the country. The mountain states (...) are more rural and conservative, although urbanization and immigration are changing Arizona and Nevada very rapidly. The Midwest generally conservative but also has a populist streak... (2009: 34)

2.c.6. Communications

The US is a huge country and until the radio was invented, the news in the country had the term locally attached to them. After the invention of the radio and with the gradual entering of the television in the majority of the American homes, the diversity and number of television and radio networks increased to a great number. Contrary to what logic could state, this has not created confusion towards the acquiring of everyday news in the US: it is true that there is a great number of television and radio networks, but almost all of them belong to the three major networks (CBS, ABC and NBC)

On the other hand we have to appoint to the increasing effect that the Internet and the new possibilities of communication are provoking not only in the American society. The technological changes we are experiencing today will bring a new way of having access to news.

3. The Documentary Film: Michael Moore

3.a. Bowling for Columbine

3.a.1. The Columbine Massacre Exposed

The documentary film made by Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine*, takes its starting point in the incident occurred in the Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado, in 1999. Two students entered the building with guns and explosive and they shot twelve students and one teacher dead. During the gunshot, twenty-one students were hurt by gunfire, whereas other three were hurt in an attempt to exit the building.

The sorrowful days lived after the tragedy were followed by a national debate raised from the national mass media on how relatively easy people could have

access to firearms in the US and the possible solutions which could be done by the Federal Government, as an reinforcing of gun control laws, and on the other hand the reasons and factors which motivated gun violence (and violence in general) involving youngsters in the country.

Among the measures taken in the following months of the massacre, security in schools increased to levels never seen before and a fear and panic towards specific people grew in the country: people fond of metal or gothic music or social outcasts became the target of that panic reaction from the “normal population”.

Over these pillars, Michael Moore decided to portray everything behind this crucial event in the recent history of the US as well as he tries to denounce the reasons why there is a certain number of people in the US who declares unconditional love to the gun culture and the possible social and anthropological implications that culture might have in their own culture as a country. In his movie, many of the points of view raised toward the gun culture and the Columbine massacre seem to express their opinions on what happened and why crime and violence appear to be firmly installed in the American imagery.

3.a.2. *Bowling for Columbine* by Michael Moore. A Brief Summary.

In *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore portrays the values and ideology which shape the culture guns in the U.S. From the very beginning the most traditional traces of the working class appear in the documentary: a farmer, a milkman, a teacher; and there also appear the two boys who perpetrated the massacre at Columbine High School. After this brief introduction Moore demonstrates how easy is to purchase a fire gun in his homeland, Michigan and some crazy and weird things related to guns and gun culture. The intention is to show the individual values that move gun supporters instead of the protection given by the Government (in fact there are some people who reject that protection and control from the Central Government and prefer to do things on their own). It is a sort of responsibility for some of them, a responsibility of being American.

The film examines the Oklahoma terrorist attack in 1995 and Moore interviews Terry Nichols' brother (Terry Nichols was one of the two terrorists). Through this interview, Moore shows that there are people who know a lot about guns, who have

strong feelings towards bearing a gun and towards knowing how to use it. Moreover, Moore shows how there are people who know about guns but who do not know about Ghandi.

After the Oklahoma story, the film moves on to another city called Oskoda and Moore speaks with one teenager who was the second in a list of people ready to commit a crime. This story is used as an introduction to what is going to be next, the massacre of Columbine.

Lockheed Martin is the largest company to produce guns in the US. Moore goes to the city of Littleton to speak with *Evan McCollum*, Director of Communications at Lockheed Martin. They are sensitive about what tragically happened in Columbine but they cannot stop what they do, i.e., making missiles. The intention is to introduce the following scenes in the film: a brief review of what the US has done historically (and sadly) to have dangerous relatives in the rest of the world with the purpose of attacking or disturbing unpleasant regimes or governments, such as in Nicaragua or in Iran, until some of those dangerous relatives became also an enemy in the figure of Osama Bin Laden and the 9/11 attacks. The international issues involving the US takes us to the incoming news which were brought just a few hours before the massacre in Columbine: US troops attacking a few villages in Kosovo killing several casualties. Back in Lockheed Martin, Mr. McCollum suggests that what happened in Columbine was a microcosm of what happens in the rest of the world.

The following part of the documentary opens with an image of Charlton Heston, the Hollywood actor and president of the NRA (National Rifle Association) and this image is compared with another one involving the victims' relatives and families of Columbine: there is a comparison between those who bear guns and those who suffer from the consequences of the use of those guns.

Matt Stone, co-creator of the cartoon *South Park*, is from Littleton and he went to Columbine High School. In the film, he accounts for the reasons for such a violent act which can be summarized as follows: society and education did not motivate students and, by extension, the two assassins. The guilty society is afterwards portrayed as an over-reacting society, that is, society does not do anything except when things happen and then the citizens tend to over-react about these sorts of issues. This over-reaction only manifests itself for a short period of time and after that

everything goes back to normality without little or no change: people do not plan any change in order to prevent such problems. The over-reaction after the massacre at Columbine pointed to Marilyn Manson, the singer, as main starting point because the two students who committed the crimes were fond of his to his music. However Manson defends himself and criticizes society for not doing anything about problems such as isolation or lack of motivation in education. He also suggests the irony behind the American attacks in Kosovo (which produced civilian casualties) and the massacre. And this part leads us to the following: rage.

There are many reasons which have always been raised from American people towards rage, as a precursor of so many murders in the US. However these reasons are compared in the documentary with other countries (European mainly) and are finally declined by the author of the film. So a possible solution comes from a brief history of the US drawn in cartoon: fear.

Barry Glassner, in *The Culture of Fear* claims that the media is the main responsible for the states of fear which suffers the nation, the media control and promotes fear among the population and they always have the same target: the black population. This situation creates a growing fear in the white community towards the black one. An example of this media strategy is the reality called COPS, a group of policemen catching and arresting people, mostly African-Americans or Hispanic Americans. Violence is exciting on TV; it sells more than other things. That is why Moore goes there to untangle the myths revolving around the fact that in America there are more crimes and murders involving guns than in Canada. In Canada, people have a great number of guns but they do not lock their front doors when they go to sleep. The main reason is that in Canada their politicians have more common sense, they solve their troubles without violence (or at least they try) and the main reason is that the media do not hit the Canadian population with constant doses of fear and violence on TV. As a Canadian man says "If more guns granted more security, the US would be the safest place in the world". Fear is the word, because "Americans don't think twice".

Finally there are some other local conditions which also contributed in a way to another massacre, such as the poor economic situation of Flint, Michigan, and the death of a six-year-old girl who was shot by another six-year-old boy at school.

Moore investigates the reason for this killing revealing that the boy's family was so poor that they could not pay attention to him and he managed to take his uncle's gun. His mother was enrolled in a special Social Program for people who cannot have economic resources and this is the way the Government makes them to pay back what they have received from the State. After 9/11 the social problems were not a priority in the American politics, so people like Tamarla, the boy's mother, were forced to work far away just to live with little (very little indeed) money. On the other hand, fear and the so-called War on Terror were the great priorities for the Bush Administration.

Before the closing interview with Charlton Heston, Moore convinces K-Mart, the discount department store responsible for selling bullets for hunting, but also the bullets which were used in the Columbine massacre, to stop distributing and selling them. Moore goes to K-Mart with two boys who survived the Columbine massacre. The first time they get nothing from the managers of K-Mart. However, when they go with print media and TV correspondents, they finally success to make K-Mart stop selling bullets to people. It is tiny victory, but a victory for two of the surviving students of Columbine.

At the end of the documentary, Moore tried to unsuccessfully interview Charlton Heston and making him uncomfortable in his own house in LA. Moore raises questions about crime rates, fear and the Columbine incident, for examples, which Heston refuses to answer at the end. And this is how it ends, Heston running away from Moore who leaves a picture of the six-year-old girl from Flint who died of a gun shot at school.

3.a.3. Individuality as a way of living

– *The Pilgrims*

In the section dedicated to the values and beliefs which introduces this research, one of the most important and influential values is the notion of individuality. Moreover, there are some scenes in the documentary in which individuality is perceived as more than just a simple notion. It is perceived as a sort of right which every American deserves. Here are some factors which might have provoked that status of individualism as a “right” over the federal control from the Government. To find the

reasons, we should go back to the early British settlers in American territory: the Pilgrims.

The story of the Pilgrims has fascinated the Americans along their history. The Pilgrim Fathers are believed to have been part of a Separatist group, in religious terms, a separatist group from the Church of England. Only a few decades after the constitution of the Church of England after Henry VIII, there was an important amount of emerging beliefs and congregations in England. These congregations had different religious beliefs, ways of professing their faith and, in general words, different points of view concerning the practicing of a religion. Although the Puritans were commonly well accepted by those bishops and members of the Church of England, the Separatist (and future Pilgrims) were constantly denied, mocked and discriminated by the most important religion in England. After a few years suffering this situation the separatist group decided to flee to the Netherlands and from there to go to the New World in an attempt of searching the peace and stability they thought they needed to develop their faith in a proper way.

In 1606 they sailed to the New World with half of the congregators who formerly were to make the journey because of some technical difficulties: there were two vessels at the very beginning but one of them was not ready and only the Mayflower made the journey with the very first pilgrims. After two months in the ocean and surviving strong winds and fierce storms, the Mayflower arrived at Cape Cod on November 10, 1606.

The story of the Pilgrims has always had a deep influence in the way of thinking about the control of the Federal Government and how the citizens prefer to do things on their own way without any help from the institutions, but only in certain aspects of their everyday life. Needless to say there have been many more influences over the past two centuries which have reinforced that idea, such as the Independence War, the Federal system ruling the country and the experience of other countries which have applied a governmental control over the citizenship in critical times. An important example of this latter case was the decades following World War II in Great Britain, when the country needed to be rebuilt and the British citizens did not have the means to undertake reconstruction. The British Government agreed to take control of many companies and institutions, making them public. After three decades

following this system, the British country turned into riots in the well-known Winter of Discontent at the end of the 1970s. The critical situation of Great Britain, economically speaking, was a mirror where the American citizens looked and it served to reinforced the idea of individuality over the control of the Government which has its genesis in the reasons which motivated and forced the Pilgrims to take a two-month journey across the Atlantic Ocean in order to reach their freedom.

– *Distances, Natives and Conflicts*

Another important factor to take into consideration is the enormous distances in America. The whole country is much bigger than Europe and, nowadays, two states, Alaska and Texas, are larger than Spain. Long distances created the atmosphere of isolation and autonomy within the first settlers and their following generations.

Apart from that there was the key aspect of the presence of the Native Americans: after years of conflicts and fighting, the settlers and future American determine to fight and eventually seclude the Native American population into reservations. These conflicts extended their independency when the French and Indian War/Seven Years War with French forces started and they had to organize themselves in militias in order to respond to another threat: the French army in their territories.

– *The American Dream, Solidarity and Motivation at school*

These previous factors have contributed to create a sense of individualism in the American people, generation after generation. In addition to this mixture of individual ideas inherited from their ancestors and kept in the American imagery, we find the social problem of individualist and outcast students in schools. As it is repeatedly shown in the documentary, being a teenager is a hard task. But it is even harder without the help of those who live around you. The lack of solidarity is suggested in the documentary as one of the reasons which contributed to the final and horrible deeds carried out by the two students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, in the Columbine massacre. Nonetheless education does not seem to be the main objective of this critique on the social relationships and the treatment of outcast

behaviors, the message taken does not seem to blame the public (or private) educational system. It seems to go beyond that.

The American Dream promotes the same idea of achievement of your goals through your personal effort: “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (John Truslow Adams qtd. in online.sfsu.edu). It has been contemplated how recurrent this definition and the terms American Dream can be to define a truly American spirit. And it has also been noticed how dangerous that exportable spirit can be to the proper Americans who might be damaged by the dark side of that definition. By promoting a lifestyle based on the autonomy, on the possibilities you can obtain if you have the ability and the talent, there is a potential risk to discriminate those people who are not so talented or those people who do not have the resources (economical or from another origin) to achieve what is considered that American Dream.

These three factors are suggested in the movie as part of the reasons which might have influenced, tragically, the two assassins in the Columbine massacre.

3.a.4. A Right to Have a Gun.

– *The Second Amendment*

The Constitution of the United States of America was adopted in 1787 after the War of Independence between the thirteen colonies and the United Kingdom, and it was ratified only a year after. The elaboration of the Constitution took place in the Philadelphia Convention, being George Washington the President of that Convention and then President of the country. In the first piece of paper, the most important rights concerning the population as well as the hierarchy and constitution of the Federal Government were included.

Only three years later, the United States Bill of Rights was included in the Constitution. The Bill of Rights consists of ten amendments added to the original text, banning cruel and unusual punishments or the requirement of jury trials was written. Nevertheless, one of the most controversial amendments that which involved the possibility to bear fire arms fire arms was also included. Ever since its inclusion, the second amendment was an issue intensely debated over the following decades: “A

well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." (Qtd. in McKay 2009:468)

The Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States guarantees the possibility of the people to keep and make use of arms. The dispute mentioned previously was particularly held during the second half of the twentieth century. Much of the debate was caused by the formulation of the own phrase because it might lead readers to confusion about its purpose. This confusion has been intensified by defenders and detractors of the Second Amendment.

– *Detractors and Defenders of the Amendment*

Crime rates in the US have been rising over and over until reaching top peaks by the end of the twentieth century (especially in the 1980s). This rising levels were often accompanied by the presence of fire arms. As a result, a tumult of people contrary to the possession of fire guns in the US has been growing and whereas drastic reforms to the Second Amendment have been claimed. A great majority of the American population have started reading the text in a different way as people used to do in the early times of the Constitution. Obviously the times have changed and the militia term in the text has a different meaning nowadays.

During the first decades after the War of Independence, in which much of the fighting was done by state militias instead of a regular army, as in the case of the British army, the meaning of the Second Amendment was mainly designated to the supply of fire arms and the improvement of the gun arsenal of those militias. The problem came when the militias naturally evolved into public security forces in charge of the protection of each state, the National Guard. The National Guard members are nowadays soldiers who have been professionally prepared by the Government and they do no longer represent a regular group of people without discipline or any control from Washington.

The detractors of the Second Amendment read in the text that the right to bear fire arms in the US is only for the maintenance and supply of those state militias a fact which was necessary and unquestionable at by the time the Bill of Rights was included in the Constitution, an aspect which should be reassessed nowadays because those militias have been integrated as public security forces prepared,

supplied and commanded by the Federal Government. As a result, the detractors of this right state that if the original meaning of the Amendment has been lost over the decades and nowadays the guns are directly connected to the high crime rates within the US, it seems logical to advocate for the reformation or derogation of the Second Amendment as a right to every American citizen.

On the other side of the discussion, the defenders of this right read the text as if it only guarantees the right to every American citizen to have a gun, without any distinction or clarification on the purpose of keeping and bearing it: "In America we may reasonably hope that the people will never cease to regard the right of keeping and bearing arms as the surest pledge of their liberty." (St. George Tucker qtd. in Halbrook 2006: 7)

One of the arguments widely used by those who defend the right to keep and bear guns is that if there is any prohibition or reformation to the Amendment, it would threaten their liberty and, as we have seen before, liberty is one of the most powerful pillars sustaining the American democracy and the notion of being a "truly American". There do not seem to be other arguments or possible ways of interpreting the Bill of Rights which would be in favor of the defenders of the Second Amendment. However basing their defense on the threaten of their liberties and rights as American citizens provides it with a much more efficient and strong argument against the detractors, because it would be very risky for a Government from any political background to start, or even to suggest, a reformation on the Second Amendment which would establish boundaries in the use of arms in the US. The only attempt to incorporate reforms to the text would be frame into the extents up to which the Government should or should not intervene in the liberty of a certain part of the population and then the individualism would also enter on stage.

This intense debate between both sides of the same coin is portrait in the documentary by the victims' relatives and families who suggest that something has to be done about this matter and the NRA headed by its President, the actor Charlton Heston.

3.a.5. Fiction and Reality: The Culture of Fear (Part I)

– *The Power of Television*

Barry Glassner in his book *The Culture of Fear* suggests some interesting points about the way fear influences audiences. The continuous bombing of crimes, violent stories, sad stories or some poisonous killer bees on TV has been shaping the behavior of the majority of the population in the US. Taking into account that in the country there are more than 300 million people, with a great number of people who have a television at home and who are exposed to those sorts of news, this issue becomes more relevant.

Glassner himself is interviewed by Michael Moore during the documentary *Bowling for Columbine* and he exactly quotes himself using the words from the introduction to his book *The Culture of Fear*:

Why, as crime rates plunged throughout the 1990s, did two-thirds of Americans believe they were soaring? How did it come about that by mid-decade 62 percent of us described ourselves as “truly desperate” about crime—almost twice as many as in the late 1980s, when crime rates were higher? Why, on a survey in 1997, when the crime rate had already fallen for a half dozen consecutive years, did more than half of us disagree with the statement “This country is finally beginning to make some progress in solving the crime problem?” (Glassner 2009: xix)

Moore in a way provides an answer to these questions in a very simple way: television has the answer. Through an interview with the ex-producer of *Cops*, Dick Harland, Moore discovers that the most important thing for producers and TV channels are audiences: the larger audiences you have, the better. It does not matter if what you broadcast is good or bad, from a moral point of view. It does not matter if it creates a fake sense of fear towards a specific community or if it marks harder the distinction between the black and white America. It does not matter if it is successful.

Television has a powerful influence over the American population. As Glassner suggests, although the crime rates had decreased non-stop for almost a decade, the mention to crimes and violence on the news had been increased in a six hundred percent. Is it just a battle for the audience or are there other factors which encourage television channels to pay special attention to crimes and violence on the news while

the statistics indicate that the reality is moving to a different direction? Vicente Verdú commented on his novel "El Planeta Americano" the following lines which are very significant and representative of the situation of the American mass media:

Con el afán de diferenciarse, una emisora radiofónica de Nueva York se anuncia en los murales de la Penn Station con este eslogan: "More news, less crimes" ("Más noticias, menos crímenes")...Porque todas las emisoras de la competencia abarrotan los programas con información criminal, el tema más recurrente en la comunicación audiovisual norteamericana (1996: 77)

This bombing of crime-and-violence-related news has brought an increase of the selling of guns and material linked to protection, such as security doors, house alarms and similar products. There seems to be a clear distinction between what television intends to communicate and what reality does communicate. Although, taking into consideration the reaction of the population and the statistics as well as the portrait presented in the documentary, the proper phrasing would be that there seems to be a clear distinction between what television does communicate and what reality does not.

– *The African-American Community*

The black community is portrayed in the documentary as an ill-treated racial group by both the mass media and the economic system. It (the black community) represents an important percentage of the poor in the US, or at least, they represent an important percentage of people who live close to the limits of poverty. In addition, the mass media treat their community as thieves, assassins and any sort of social danger that uses violence as a general answer. Moore does not try to unmask this myth towards the black community and its representation through the mass media, but he brings to attention in some specific moments that they are not so dangerous as any other ethnical or racial group could be, and he maintains the equality between the black population and white population as wrongdoers presenting two assassinations at schools carried by students: Columbine which was perpetrated by two white students and the six-year-old girl who was accidentally shot by an African-American boy at school in Flint, Michigan. The motifs for both incidents were not the

same and, consequently, the perception of both massacres differs greatly. However both of them represent youngsters and children who have access to guns and who have killed other people (intentionally or non-intentionally).

Finally the reception of the violence made by African-Americans and the white population is uncovered because there is a lack of statistics about it. Also we see that the possible blame for the little boy's family, the boy who accidentally shot a girl of six in Flint, could not pay enough attention to the boy because their working conditions were not the most appropriate to attend to a little boy.

– *Breaking the Myths*

The US is a huge country with only physical borders with two countries: Mexico on the south and Canada on the north (Alaska is not considered in this geographical distribution of the borders). In order to find the reasons for such situation towards guns, Moore set his eyes on Canada, where he has members of his own family live.

Canada is believed to have the same number of guns and fire arms spread among its citizens, Nonetheless, Canadian crime and murder rates in which fire arms are involved are drastically lower than those of the U.S. The situation in a city close to the border, Windsor, is far different from those cities in the US: the murders in this Ontario city are almost non-existent in its recent history. Bearing these data in mind, there is an attempt to discover what the American people would think about this reality in Canada. The most fashionable reasons why Canada is less violent than the US even having the same number of guns are (in order of appearance):

- Violent content on movies and television
- Poverty is greater in the US
- The majority of the Canadian population is white.

Each reason is dismantled by the facts shown in the film, leaving the treatment of violence and crimes on news and how politicians react towards serious problems as the only possible reasons which could explain why Canada has lower rates of murder involving fire arms than the US.

3.b. Fahrenheit 9/11

3.b.1 Introduction

In 2004, Michael Moore aimed to focus President George W. Bush's biggest mistakes and the consequences those decisions brought to the American society in his documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The terrorist attacks on September 11th and the consequences of those attacks over the social and political point of view and how the foreign policy is affected by them in the foreign policy in the future years is also treated. Some important values such as patriotism and important issues to understand the recent American history, such as the War on Terror, are also treated in the documentary.

In the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda against the US on September 11th, almost 3000 people died. The planes which crashed into the World Trade Center left a deep wound the American society. The response of the American society and, most specifically, of the US Government brought a number of controversial decisions not only in the framework of the American population; it also influenced the US foreign policy for the rest of the decade as well as the situation of the countries affected from the American response: Afghanistan and Iraq.

The weapons of mass destruction, the constant state of alert in which the Americans got involuntarily immersed and the most dark aspects of the Bush Administration regarding obscure business and interest directly or indirectly related to the consequences of the attacks on September 11th constitute the pillars of this documentary premiered at American theaters a few months before Bush reelection, in an attempt to change the minds of those Americans who trusted their president and their government after all.

3.b.2 *Fahrenheit 9/11* by Michael Moore. A Brief Summary

Fahrenheit 9/11 is an attempt to show the bleakest side of the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the following reaction by the US against Afghanistan and later Iraq.

The film focuses almost exclusively on in the figure of George W. Bush who was President of the US from 2001 until 2009. Bush had to deal with the years after the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda on September 11th. With this

background the film starts with the US Presidential election of 2000 when originally Al Gore was about to obtain the victory in the key state of Florida, a state which would give him the global victory and the presidency. However a television channel related somehow to George Bush declared he headed the poll in that state so the rest of the networks had to apologize because they instantly thought they were wrong about the previous results. Here there is a suggestion of electoral fraud carried out by the Republican Party by means of controlling the TV Channel Fox News (his cousin was in charged that night); the control of poll recount through his ex-director of campaign and, finally, by way of eliminating most of the African-American population from the electoral lists in Florida before the Election Day. As a result Presidential election in 2000 was solved by the Supreme Court and George W. Bush became the 43rd President of the United States of America, though his coming into office was a quite troublesome experience.

A group of African-American people tried to stop the Supreme Court's designation and to declare that there were some irregularities during the recount process and the production of the electoral lists which had left an amount of African-Americans without their right to vote. However their petition had to be signed by, at least, one Senator and no-one did. Moreover, Bush inauguration Day was full of incidents provoked by a crowd of people who went there just to express their disappointment, disagreement and rejection of the Supreme Court's decision. It was January and there were still eight months until the terrorist attacks on September 11th.

The following eight months of his mandate, Bush spent almost forty-four percent of the time on vacation according to Michael Moore. He lost the control of the Senate in favor of the Democratic Party. In the film, Moore states that he was more like a President in the process of resignation rather than a President recently elected. But then the tragedy occurred.

The terrible attacks in New York and Washington on September 11th are treated in the documentary film with extreme delicacy: the impacts of the planes are not shown though the sound provoked by the collision the sound. By using the sound of this horror, Moore enhanced the astonishment and evokes what happened that day. When the visual images finally come back, there is a sad music which accompanies

the scenes of people from New York crying, praying and their reactions the very first minutes and hours after the attacks. The number of dead people is reminded by Moore just before showing some scenes about what the President was doing that morning. George W. Bush had gone to a school in Florida. He was with a kindergarten class when the attacks were happening: when he was informed of the attacks, he spent almost seven minutes reading a book for children while no one made a move. Then Moore suggests that President Bush was unable to respond and he had not done his job properly because he was supposed to have received some classified documents which contained important information about the suspicion that Osama Bin Laden was about to attack the US.

Nevertheless there is one thing that the Government certainly did: the air space closure. No airplanes were allowed to take off or land except for the one which took Bin Laden's family and some other Saudi people out of the country in the following days after 9/11. An FBI ex-agent is asked about this matter and he answers that the normal thing would have been to interrogate Bin Laden's family, even if there were not real suspicions upon them. Next, the documentary film moves on the links and relations which supposedly existed between Bush's family, Bin Laden's family and some Saudi businessmen.

The supposed connections between these families and the Saudi businessmen start with the introduction of John R. Bath, Bush's companion during his services in the National Guard. Using this character, Moore raises the suspicion that Saudi people invested huge amounts of money in every company, such as the Carlyle Group, managed by George W. Bush in the past, when his father was the President of the US. The Carlyle Group was a conglomerate of other companies, including United Defense and some other related to Bin Laden's family. Moore states that The Carlyle Group earned a lot of money in the first two months after the attacks on September 11th thanks to the huge military spending incurred by the Bush Administration. Here there is an ironic scene in which we see G.H.W. Bush meeting Bin Laden's family abroad while his son, George W. Bush was determined to find Osama in Afghanistan.

One of the consequences of the attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda in New York and Washington was the establishment of a commission, whose purpose was to

investigate everything happened before, during and after the attacks. In a first moment, President Bush tried to stop the Commission of the Congress, but he could not: when the research was finished, the Government censored twenty-eight pages of the final document. On the other hand, there was a request for an independent commission to investigate the same as the commission of the congress did, but in this case Bush succeeded to stop it. Then an African-American woman who lost her husband in the terrorist attacks appears on screen and she asks for the truth while there is a scene in which the President rejects to declare in any commission.

There are more dark and suspicious connections between members of the Government and some companies which earned a lot of money after the attacks, such as Unocall and the total amount of money invested by Saudi families in the US.

The following part of the documentary focuses on the so-called War on Terror developed by the US Government and the mass media to terrorize the population: examples of headlines such as psychosis, high alert or poison stuff are shown. The purpose was to create a climate of constant fear which contributed to the appearance of fear among the population sending contradictory messages to them: fear messages and comforting messages; increasing and decreasing the alert level with quickness. Then the state of fear had as a result the appearance of stuff related to security, such as security cameras (there is an advertisement) or a man showing how to use an emergency parachute in case there is another terrorist attack against a skyscraper. The part of the documentary focused on the terror provoked by the media ends with the stories of people afraid of terrorist attacks in small villages such as Flint, Michigan, (Michael Moore's hometown) or Tappahanok, Virginia. The message is clear: an attack could take place anywhere, anytime. As a result, people from small villages distrust strangers and foreigners and they also feel the fear and panic as if they lived in a big city such as Washington or New York.

The US Patriot Act which was passed and approved after the 9/11 attacks (and it also was a response to the attacks) centers the following part of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. John Ashcroft, USA Attorney General during the Bush Administration was the person who suggested this act. Some controversial points of the Act are shown in the film:

- Medical and financial records: the Government could have access to them if needed;
- Computer and telephone conversations could be recorded and analyzed if needed.
- Library books: the Administration could check the books you consult and take from public libraries.

It is pointed out that these points could be executed by the Government even if the citizen had not committed a crime. As a consequence of this act, there are some curious cases of people who have been investigated by the Government as suspects or possible suspects: a group in California called Peace Fresno and the case of an old man who was denounced by his gym mates after expressing some critics against Bush policy and the reasons for the Iraq War. After these curious cases, other people who were directly or indirectly related to the act appear to express their opinions on the act, such as it contains ambiguous definitions (as the definition of a terrorist). They also suggest that the act has some violations of the human rights or, the most disturbing, that some parts of the act were contemplated by some politicians from the Republican Party years before 9/11. Moreover there is one congress who declares that the act was not totally read before being approved (actually he declares that there are many acts which are not read before passing). After leaving this part of the documentary, Moore shows two more consequences of the USA Patriot Act: security in airports peaked levels of obsession and the cuts undertaken in some places such as the Pacific-coastal border of the State of Oregon, where only one person is in charge of the security of around 160 kilometers of coast.

The War in Iraq remains the key element in the final part of the documentary. In the beginning of this part there are some soldiers speaking about the motivation and what they feel when they are about to combat: they use music and other motivating material. These confessions are shown with some scenes of the Iraqi population suffering from the attacks of the US army. Then we assist to two different realities: the one in Iraq displaying horrid images, and a speech by Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense in Bush Administration, bringing attention to the human touch used in Iraq by the American soldiers. The War in Iraq measured the levels of Bush's

popularity, because there were no weapons of mass destruction, he had the support from not so many countries (they did not have the acceptance of the UN). In this context, the American mass media strongly supported the conflict.

However, and although Bush announced that their mission was finally accomplished, the conflict extended for too many years resulting in thousands of casualties on both sides from Iraqi citizens and American soldiers. In this situation the American Army decided to recruit more people from the US. Moore again chooses his hometown, Flint, to show poverty level which was present in the inner cities of the US and how the American Army focused on the poorest people for the recruitment: Flint is a city with almost fifty percent of the population unemployed (according to the film). The recruiters just observe and choose teenagers and youngsters coming from the poorest families.

The army believes that they carry with the values of liberty and democracy to the Iraqi people, but there are some scenes which show the contrary. Then a woman whose family has served (or is serving by the time of the film) in the army appears. She states that she disagreed with the people who protested against the intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, that they did not know the real truth. Scenes of soldiers poking fun at on Iraqi people and torturing them appear, but Moore decides to address this behavior and he indirectly blames Bush for this because of the non-ethical origins and reasons for the War in Iraq. The message here is clear: the American Army is not guilty, on the contrary, they do what they have been commanded. There is also an African-American soldier who claims that he would not go back to Iraq even under the punishment of prison. This situation created by the Government in which the soldiers are active participants but no guilty, is finally reinforced when the cuts to military benefits and payments are shown in the documentary.

Finally the soldiers' families and relatives appear to give a sentimental message as well as they express their suffering: as the Government and some companies related to some members of the Government (as Halliburton) increase their benefits, there are still soldiers dying in Iraq, fighting for a country which support them but for a Government which is more worried about the benefits and other business than in the security and welfare of its soldiers. The final scene of the documentary film shows

the director Moore trying to convince a number of congressmen to enlist their children in the army to go to Iraq to fight as the poor people have done, but none does. The film ends with this final message: poor people who most of them are social outcast from the system are the ones who are in first place defending the liberty of that population who decides to stay and enjoy that liberty. It is a sort of betrayal to those who fight, because their government has sent them to a dangerous place, they have been put in a risky situation for an unjust cause.

3.b.3. Fiction and Reality: The Culture of Fear (Part II)

– *The War on Terror*

Throughout the opening of this century, Americans have remained inordinately fearful of unlikely dangers. Even so, at least in some regards, there have been changes in our culture of fear. Most notably, foreign terrorist replaced domestic bogeymen, as the principal figures in fear mongering by politicians and in much of the media. However, the very same scare tactics I discuss in the pages that follow-misdirection presenting victims as experts, and treating isolated incidents as trends- have been applied with great success in the newer fear narrative. In the months immediately following 9/11, for example, the attacks elevated to newsworthiness minor airline mishaps and phony bomb threats that previously would not have made headlines, and created an exaggerated sense of individual risk. (Glassner 2009: xii)

One of the most remarkable consequences of the terrorist attacks on September 11th was something derived from the practices carried by the mass media in the previous decade and which appeared in the part concerning to *Bowling for Columbine*: the culture of fear. But this time, this fear was focused on the terrorist and the possible ways they could attack anytime and anyplace in the US. The constant news and messages of increasing and decreasing alerts within very short periods of time as well as the methodologies and ways the terrorist could perpetrate another massive attack in American territory, centered the majority of the topics discussed and showed in the mass media. As we saw with the crime rates and

violence, although these alert levels or terrorists threatens were based on vague information, they were presented as real and imminent attacks to the US population.

This constant state of alert and distraction contributed to the introduction of some measures from the Government which was not so popular or fair in their extent, but necessary in the politicians' words. It is curious how similar was this War on Terror and the concept of doublethink coined by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In his words, doublethink is:

To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy, to forget, whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again, and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself — that was the ultimate subtlety; consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word 'doublethink' involved the use of doublethink (Orwell 1989: 37-38)

Although the situation was far different and even the ways of treating and disturbing the people's mind has not been proved, the War on Terror created a similar effect: the quick changes in the messages given to the audience and the contradictory content of them, provoked that the population had an exaggerated notion of what was really happening at that time. This situation and taking into account the strong influence over the American population determined the reception of the measures proposed by the US Government in an attempt to protect the Americans.

– The USA Patriot Act

From a non-American point of view, one of the most astonishing consequences of the attacks on September 11th was the passing of the Patriot Act in the American

Congress. In this piece of legislation, some rights were passed with great quickness although they were likely to threaten basic human rights. However the most astonishing aspect is that most of the population agreed that this piece of legislation could help them to be protected more efficiently from the terrorist threat.

To understand how this act passed with the approval of the majority of the citizens we have to pay attention to two important factors:

- The first of these factors is the influence cast by the War on Terror commented in the previous point. The constant state of alert created by the mass media and also by the politicians mixed with the contrary messages, who disturbed the population, provoking that the Americans would live under a disturbing atmosphere in which the solutions were demanded. In this context, it is easier to understand how this act obtained the approval of the citizenship.
- The second factor can be seen in the title of the act: the USA Patriot Act, as it appealed one of the most important American values, that of patriotism and being a true American.

As a result there was a step back in the evolution of conditions of people in America, especially concerning security. This situation also contributed to the appearance of cases of people being denounced after claiming political opinions contrary to those of the Government or the investigation of certain groups which were not related to terrorism or with political aspirations.

3.b.4. Patriotism: Reactions after the 9/11 Attacks

– The Catalyst

In the words of Samuel Huntington, we foresaw some traces of the meaning of Americanism as a way of living, as a doctrine closer to an ideology or religion than a simple notion. When the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked on September 11th 2001 and the mourning time started to fade away, a strong sense of patriotism reappeared with impressive ferocity. It is logical to think in these terms

after a disaster of such a magnitude as the 9/11 in which so many people died and in which so many people showed their solidarity between each other.

Although that feeling resided in the American population, the terrorist attacks on September 11th brought the majority of people together against a common threat.

– *The American Army*

Every nation which has an army is proud of the people who are part of it because those people put their lives at risk just to protect the style of life of those who do not belong to the army. That remarkable sacrifice results in a great consideration from the rest of the society. But when we speak about the US and the US Army, this special trade of feelings and sacrifice seems to be of much importance.

The United States Armed Forces date back to the late eighteenth century: its roots started with the Continental army which fought against the British army in the Independence War. This army was not as professionalized as it is today as with the passing of time it became stronger and more efficient.

However, after having fought wars and conflicts, it started to settle the ideals of liberty within the US Army: it is understandable if some attention is paid to the number of “freeing” conflicts this army has fought along its short history, including World War I and World War II in which these values were integrated in the army at their peak. It is possible that these relatively recent conflicts have left strong imprints in the US Army and in the conception the American population has of it nowadays: the sacrifice for liberty.

But it cannot forget the consequences brought after the criticized Vietnam War in which those pure values of liberty and democracy as primary principles of the US Army stumbled.

In any case, the strong influence of the conflicts commented as a vehicle to understand how the US Army is received in the American society: nowadays different opinions can be found about the position, motifs and even existence of the armed forces not only in the US. But this debate is addressed by two main positions as it can be seen in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. These positions are powerfully influenced by the conflicts commented in the previous lines:

- On the one hand, we encounter those people who are contrary to a military intervention as a response to what happened in the 9/11 attacks. This people and, what is more important, how they are seen by other people from the rest of the society is determined by the consequences of the Vietnam War to the US: pacifism and other “isms” in favor of non-military responses are conceived as outsiders who do not understand everything around the US Armed Forces and their sacrifice as American citizens.
- On the other hand, in the voice of the soldiers’ families, we witness the defense of those values and, especially, the defense of the activities performed by the US Army as a sacrifice to the rest of the society: the American soldiers fight for those values of liberty and democracy in other places, but they also protect those values of liberty and democracy for those citizens who decided to stay at home and enjoy that lifestyle supposed to exist thanks to the US Army.

These both aspects are shown in the final part of the documentary and they also meet in the figure of Lyla, whose son died in Iraq. The US Army represents in the film an important example of the patriotic feeling which surrounds and emerges in every American citizen when the circumstances demand.

– Poverty and Americanism

It is ironic how those populations who have been forced to live as outcasts of the economical system, who do not have enough incomes or asserts to live over the poverty levels, these people are the preferred targets for the army recruiters who appear in the documentary. These recruiters are in search of more young people in order to fulfill the vacancies in the army originated in the Iraq War.

The final message given in the film is indirectly addressed to these brave people who choose to fight in a war in the name of a country which has turned its back to them.

3.b.5. Bipartidism and the Polarization of Society

– *Political Parties in the US*

As a heritage from their British origins, two political parties hold the control of the government since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, just as Tories and Whigs have done in Britain for so long. Needless to say that there are other minor parties in the American political scene; however these two parties are the only ones which have the opportunity to seize the power and control the US Government.

The first appearance of one of these two parties came in the first years after the independence, when the first Republican Party was created in 1789. During the first half of the nineteenth century, there was a coalition between the Republicans and Democrats to fight against the Federalist. From 1856, that coalition split and both parties centered the political activities in the country until the present. During that time, one of them had had a significant majority upon the population. However in the last thirty years the Americans have not expressed a clear preference for any of them.

Nowadays the modern US political party system establishes that the major parties have most of the control, but there are other parties which have, from time to time, significant representation in the Congress. These third parties are, for instance, the Constitution Party, the Green Party of the Libertarian Party.

As the control of the major parties over the political scene grew, their influence over the voter and, as an extent, to the population did as well. As time passed by, their control became just undeniable by the other minor parties. In this context, both parties have been creating a division in society towards politics and also towards other important issues.

– *Bipartidism and Polarization*

When there are only two real alternatives for the control of the government, the other choices become more distant and their influences is only perceptible in small communities or reduced groups in comparison to the large number of voters the major parties have been recruiting over the decades. This background has been

creating a polarization of society in some of the most important issues concerning current politics and society: as there were only two important and influential voices producing opinions on matter after matter, the majority of the population have been receiving that heritage and the debates over any important issue have evolved to a discussion determined by only two points of view.

The Iraq War and the bombing of Afghanistan was justified by President Bush in the following words “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (George Bush qtd. on washingtonpost.com 2001). It is logical to consider that those politicians, especially from the Bush Administration, did not give too many choices when it came to terrorism in the first decade of 2000. Perhaps neither of us would contemplate many different choices after the horrible 9/11 attacks. However this message was addressed to the international leaders, a rhetoric message which forced them to take sides and declare what their position was regarding the problem of international terrorism. And although directly addressed to those international leaders, there was an indirect message to those people within the American borders who disagreed with Bush’s foreign policy and his responses to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

During the Afghanistan bombing and the invasion of Iraq undertaken by the American Army, there were massive protests against these decisions carried by American people. They were not as numerous in the beginning as those people who fully supported the resolutions of attacking both countries under the pretext of the terrorist motif and the potential danger which Iraq was supposed to represent to Western Civilization, because they were developing weapons of mass destruction. This opposed situation between the American people has been present in other important issues as the power and influence of both majority parties became so huge that there was little space for other mentalities in the public opinion mainstream.

3.c. Conclusions

3.c.1 Pointing to the Problems

In *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore treats several of the most important problems involving the American society in the last decades and he

tries to find the nature of both problems as well as he suggests possible and plausible solutions.

The problems raised in *Bowling for Columbine* revolve around a common topic: fire arms. Moore seeks the connections between the large number of fire arms in the US and the crime rates and violence levels which are supposed to be increasing day after day in the country. Through a number of selected interviews and a story guided, Moore manages to connect several aspects and traditional values concerning the American population with the common issue of guns. These values or ideals are combined and portrayed in the film and they show the main reasons why there are so many guns and why those guns are usually involved in so many crimes across the country.

In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the problems are more particular and they are deliberately addressed to the then President George W. Bush (the film was previewed in 2004). The title of the documentary film is inspired in the novel *Fahrenheit 451*, written by Ray Bradbury. This film had an intentional purpose as it shall be seen later. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the US is portrayed as a country struck by the terror and the threaten of terrorism and also by the constant pressure forced by the mass media and the Government, which created an atmosphere of over-protection and fast measures whose content were of much debate inside and outside the country. These measures had some points which questioned some basic human rights and they also gained the people’s favor, which seems to be contradictory. This contradiction was a response to some factors explained during the analysis of the film and they will be present again in the following lines.

3.c.2. Through the Looking-Glass

Beyond the problems exposed in the previous point, Moore succeeds in giving the audience a raw description of the most inner aspects of the American society. In *Bowling for Columbine* the audience witnesses the evolution of the notion of individualism deeply rooted in certain people. This notion of individualism creates a constant state of rejecting certain measures and opportunities proposed by the Government. This mentality, which is present in other crucial aspects of the society such as the health care system or the independent power the states have from the

Federal Government (a power which was reflected in the Constitution), provokes that in terms of protection people decides to protect themselves using their own ways, such as acquiring fire arms which is a common practice in the US.

However this practice has not been acquired by the totality of the population. On the other side of the coin the appearance of those families who have lost a relative in a gunshot is crucial, such as the Columbine High School massacre which serves as title for the film. The collision between the position of those families and the defenders of the gun possession without restrictions leads us to the first common point between both of Moore's works: the polarization of the American society. This polarization is seen in *Bowling for Columbine* through the confronting positions between the families of those who have died because of guns and the defenders of the right (because it is a right which is contained in the Constitution as an Amendment). However this same confrontation is seen with more detail in *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Fahrenheit 9/11 was shot and produced with the purpose (among others) of raising the bleakest secrets involving the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 in New York and Washington. Moreover it is a pretext to show what things were done in an inappropriate way (according to the author) by the Bush Administration in the following days and months. Nevertheless, to find the equivalent contradictory positions which appeared in *Bowling of Columbine* we have to wait until the final part of the film. This part is almost entirely dedicated to the troops sent to Afghanistan and, especially, to Iraq; and then it appears this contradictory positions in society through the commentaries and opinions about the USA Patriot Act which was raised and passed in order to secure the country. This act was meant to protect the population but at a huge cost: threatening some basic and fundamental human rights. The reception of this measure as well as the critics towards the presence of the American Armed Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq is seen as a debate between those who support those measures and those people who are not completely comfort with them. With this situation, in both films Moore turns his camera to what he thinks is the reason for this clear division in the society way of thinking and for the support for measures and practices which would seem strange at first sight: his solution stands in the television.

As Barry Glassner suggested in his book *The Culture of Fear* the American mass media put special efforts in showing and spreading systematically news and reports whose common topic was to inspire fear among the population: poisonous bees coming from Central America or crime rates increasing while the statistics, as Glassner maintains, do not support this evidence. Not only the nature of the news was important, but also the number of violent and crime-related news, which highly increased even when the reality was different. But these practices went beyond after the attacks on September 11th in the so-called War on Terror. The state of constant tension proposed by the American television networks and the mass media supported by the contradictory messages given by the Federal Government created an unusual state of disorientation in the population. The consequences in both films are clearly represented by Moore: although in *Bowling for Columbine* the population decides to use guns as protection, in *Fahrenheit 9/11* the American citizens agreed to the passing of the USA Patriot Act which clearly had controversial aspects which had direct and visible consequences within the American borders, such as the cuts on security forces (as we saw in the example of Oregon) or the increase of airport security. These measures are very similar to those implemented in high schools after the Columbine massacre, but with the plus of being a potential threat to some fundamental human rights.

In both documentaries, Moore decides to blame the influence of the television and the Government upon the citizens using the mentioned War on Terror and its introduction in the production of fear before the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

3.c.3. Social problems: Poverty and the Position of African-Americans

It is a constant in both productions: at a certain point in the film, Moore underlines the situation of poverty which many Americans suffer because of the system. His hometown, Flint in the state of Michigan, is a small city with a large number of people unemployed or living close to the limit of poverty.

Being an issue which has always been present throughout his entire life, Michael Moore inevitably moves to his hometown in his production to show the poverty and bad conditions of a specific part of the population who suffers from the

economic system. However the representation of these groups of people has different purposes in each film.

In *Bowling for Columbine* unemployment and poverty are used to raise the conditions in which many youngsters are grown in America: places with little or no motivation for them to try hard, with large number of people who do not have enough to maintain themselves and people who needs to work very hard and who receives very little in return. In this documentary film, this segment of the population is mainly represented by the African-American people. What is more, in *Bowling for Columbine*, the African-American community is represented by the mass media as the main reason for crime and violence in the country: television realities such as *Cops* or the huge number of news about crimes and disturbs caused by the black population have created a disturbing image of this community within society

In *Fahrenheit 9/11* this part of the population is the target of army recruiters who need more people to enlist as soldiers, ready to be sent off to Iraq: the same people who rendered outcast by the economic system in the US and who could hardly benefit from economic measures to solve their problems, are the ones requested by the US Army to fight in a war with controversial origins.

3.c.4. Michael Moore: Position and Reception of the Message

The author of *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* does not maintain and objective positions in his productions. In both works he always takes a stand for one or another side of the two perspectives he usually portrays: thus, in *Bowling for Columbine* he is always on the side of those who want to make a change in the legislation to control the number of fire arms. He tries to maintain a little distance with both positions in an attempt to stick to objectiveness in his interviews. However the inclusion of video and cartoon footage foreshadow his intention and own thinking about the problems arisen in the film.

Finally it is seen how he approaches the NRA by interviewing its president, Charlton Hesston and how he tries to convince him about the danger and consequences the wrong use of guns have brought. Here Moore interprets the character of a detractor of fire guns who only wants to seek the reasons why people prefer guns and the motivations that move them to act that way despite the incidents

and gunshots in high schools which have shocked the American consciousness over the last decades.

In *Fahrenheit 9/11* he literally attempts to uncover the secrets of the then President, George W. Bush. As the documentary was released in 2004, coinciding with the Presidential Election later that year, Moore's intention seems to shake people's conscience, allowing them to think about these issues and the consequences of having George Bush for four more years in office. However Bush was reelected and the results he expected were not accomplished. As Sergio Rizzo commented:

On the practical level, the message of the movie, which the Democratic Party at least tacitly adopted, was unable to win. The truism proved correct. You have to give voters something to vote for, not just against. Of course, the Democratic Party tried to give the voters something to vote for. They attempted to incorporate Moore and his message into the conventional campaign strategy. (...) However the spectacular success of Moore's negative message (and images) dwarfed Kerry's "positive message". (2006: 36)

John Kerry, who was the Democratic candidate for that election, was eclipsed by the figure of Michael Moore in the campaign. And, as the main message of Moore was about the negative things the Bush Administration had done, there were no other choices implicitly or explicitly presented in the movie. So finally Moore's intention of influencing the consciousness of the voters failed in the end because of the lack of presence of a real alternative given by the author. In any case, the intention as well as the position of Moore in *Fahrenheit 9/11* is close to the liberals.

But he also represents some of the main traditional values of the American people: in the overwhelming epilogue of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore states a defense of the soldiers in front of the bad treatment they have received, not only for having been sent to a war which was originated in a lie (as we all knew afterwards) but in the cuts and poor support they have received from the economical point of view.

4. Racism

4.a. *Crash* (2004)

4.a.1. Introduction

In a society deeply influenced by the War on Terror and the continuous bombing of alerts and dangers provoked by the mass media and the American politicians, *Crash* (2004), a film directed by Paul Haggis establishes how the relations between human beings of different racial background are developed in this context.

After New York and Washington terrorist attacks, the situation towards the ethnical groups and race in the US became more difficult. The suspicion underneath any person, whose color of skin was different, was present in the everyday routines of some citizens. In a huge city such as Los Angeles, these tensions between people of different races become more obvious and dangerous because of various reasons such as gun possession, crime fear and crime rates in the city, the position of African-Americans in society, the situation of immigrants coming from the Middle East during those years, and the prejudices which involved every step taken by both sides of the coin, especially white and black people.

It is also important to bear in mind the riots occurred in LA in the year 1992. These disturbs had a racial component and ended with almost sixty people dead after conflicts among African-American, Hispanic Americans and people from other races against the Police Department at Los Angeles.

But the incidents in LA in the year 1992 are not the only past events which are represented in the film: there are also references to the Affirmative Action policy signed by President John F. Kennedy in March 1961, one of the consequences of the Civil Rights Movement.

4.a.2. *Crash*. A Brief Summary.

The film *Crash* is an American film directed by Paul Haggis in 2004. The story is about a group of people who lives in Los Angeles. These people live certain situations which lead to connect each other as the story moves forward. The nature of those situations involves racial issues, religion and the importance of human relations in current society.

The story is narrated in media res, that is, the first scene is placed in the middle of the story. There are a number of people who experience different episodes and who finally get related each other. The Inspectors of LA Police Department Graham Waters (Don Cheadle) and Ría (Jennifer Esposito) are African-American and from Central America, respectively. They are involved in a murder a crime between two policemen at LA Police Department. One of the policemen involved in the incident is an African-American whereas the other one other one is white: the black policeman is killed in the gunshot by the white policeman whose police dossier reports several racial issues. This case leads both of the inspectors to the District Attorney in LA, Rick Cabot (Brendan Fraser), who is running the re-election campaign.

Rick Cabot (Fraser) and his wife, Jean Cabot (Sandra Bullock) are a white and rich couple living in LA. One night, as they are going back home, they are assaulted by two young African-American teenagers who steal their car. Worried about the consequences of this matter in his electoral campaign, Rick tries to minimize the dangers and implications that this trouble would have in his potential African-American voters while his wife starts to suffer an increasing fear towards people from other races based on stereotypes, Jean Cabot becomes much aware of protection in her house, especially when the locks have been changing by a South American man.

A South American man, Daniel (Michael Peña), who works repairing and changing locks in houses used to live in a conflicting neighborhood in LA. Now he along with his wife and little daughter live in a better place within the city far from the riots and gun violence, a common issue where they lived before. He is the target of some racial commentaries from people such as the District Attorney's wife while he and his family also suffers the encounter of a Persian man who is angry at him because of an incident related to a lock he had repaired. The Persian man and his family, who came from Persia in search of a better life in America, own a shop in L.A. Although the father, Farhad (Shaun Taub) has some problems with the language, he is able to communicate himself with other people. Seeking to protect themselves and their premises, they buy a gun from a shop owned by a white man who utters some racial commentaries related to the terrorist attacks on September 11th in New York and Washington, in a discussion. Once his shop is destroyed, he blames the South American man who had fixed the back door lock. Although the problem was not in

the lock but in the door, the Persian man blames him and he manages to go to his house with the gun in order to get his money back.

The policemen Matt Ryan (Matt Dillon) and Tom Hansen (Ryan Phillippe) are working the night shift when the Cabots' car is stolen. They see a similar car and, although Hansen recognizes that they are chasing the wrong car his mate, Ryan, continues with the persecution. In the car there is a couple of African-Americans, the Thayers. The Officer Ryan decides to stop them and to make the correspondent verifications. However Officer Ryan exceeds his authority and molests Mrs. Thayer while he threatens Mr. Thayer with greater punishment if he tries to defend himself or his wife, or to denounce anything happened during the verifications made by them. In the meanwhile, the Officer Hansen observes everything. A few days later Hansen formulates a petition about changing his mate because of his racist behavior. This petition is denied because of its reasons by the chief inspector, who is an Afro-American policeman: as he does not want any racial problem within the police department, he suggests changing the reasons for some physical and embarrassing problem which only affected Hansen and not others. Ryan also makes some disgusting and discriminating comments to an employee of a health insurance company who is African-America. These comments also bring bad consequences to Ryan and, especially, to his father who suffers from an illness.

The encounter of the Thayers with the policemen leaves their marriage deeply wounded. Some racial issues arise after the "over-verifications" done by policeman Ryan and the couple enters in a period of doubts and they also suffered some episodes with racial discrimination behind. For instance, Cameron (Terrence Howard) is a film director and he has to obey his superiors' commands regarding the acting of an African -American actor who "doesn't sound like a black man". Then Cameron goes through a strange journey in which he finally encounters his self himself again, but taking too many risks because of the deep wounds done after the encounter with the police.

One of the most dangerous risks taken by Cameron Thayer is when he decides to face some policemen of LA after two African -American boys had tried to steal his car. These two boys are the ones who stole the Cabots' car. One of the boys, Anthony (Chris "Ludacris" Bridges), is always claiming against everything which

seems to be oppressing the black population: not only does he claim against archetypical stereotypes, but also against strange things such as the origins of rap music which, according to him, is the music of the oppressor. His mate is Inspector Graham's brother, Peter (Laurance Tate), and they steal and also run over an Asian man during one of the robberies. At the end of the film both of them encounter some other characters representing two of the most powerful messages of the film, which will be discussed later.

4.a.3. Historical Events Dealing with Race

– *The Affirmative Action policy*

The Affirmative Action policy refers to a series of policies aiming to fight against discrimination in terms of race, color, religion, gender or national origin. It first was introduced in 1961 when John F. Kennedy was President of the US. The purpose of this measure was and is spread in a wide range, but basically focused on employment and education. The message is quite simple: the Affirmative Action policy purports to promote and maintain equal opportunities for any citizen. This scheme aims to favor members of hyphenated American communities who had been historically discriminated, offering them new job opportunities or many other different possibilities (medical, education, etc.). By doing this, the minority groups which were demanding more opportunities in the 1950s and 1960s in the US, had more presence within society.

This measure also brought different opinions about the prevalence of those people with ethnic or racial background over other citizens who might be more prepared for certain jobs.

– *The 1992 Los Angeles Riots*

Also known as the 1992 Los Angeles Civil Unrest and Rodney King Uprising, these riots shook the city of LA in the year 1992 and they had racial discrimination as a background.

Rodney King was an African-American boy who was fleeing from the police of LA when finally got caught. The police, after catching Rodney, hit him for more than a minute while he was doing nothing on the ground. This violent episode was recorded

by a security camera. This incident went to court and, surprisingly, a white jury absolved the four policemen. After the decision of the jury, many people (especially African-Americans and Hispanic) rioted in the streets of Los Angeles showing their discomfort with the final result of the judge.

While the judgment was still open, the video of King being beaten up by the police was on the television networks. These images created a tense state between the ethnical groups of LA who saw the racial segregation and discrimination that the Los Angeles Police Department was believed to have developed towards them over the years. Because of the impact made by the mass media, the case turned into a national debate over the reaction of the officers and their use of violence (or excessive force, depending on the resources) which was applied.

After the deliberations of the jury and their sentence, there was a huge controversy around the proofs presented, such as the video tape which was believed to have been edited by some biased media. In any case, the riots burst just after the verdicts of the jury later that evening.

The riots cost almost between 800 million and 1 billion of dollars —there were about 3,600 fires set which destroyed 1.100 buildings and targeted those stores run by white owners-. After three days of violence and crimes, over four thousand National Guard members were called on for help and they patrolled the city center and the most dangerous parts in order to maintain the peace and law in LA. The riots took over six days and almost sixty people died during that week.

Although the consequences of the riots were mainly the verdicts of the jury in the Rodney King case, there were other factors which contributed to the state of rage and violence originated after the jury. The economic recession suffered in the late 1980s affected primarily the poorest part poorest part of the city of LA (and also of the country). In Los Angeles the poverty-stricken neighborhoods are occupied by African-American people, so the strongest beat of this economic recession was suffered by them. There were also other factors such as the belief that the LAPD put in practice racial and discriminating measures and procedures: in *Crash* this fact is mentioned as well as how easily the policemen make use of their weapons.

The 9/11 Terrorist Attacks

As it was commented in the part dedicated to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* the consequences brought after the terrorist attacks on September 11th were deeply rooted in the American society.

One of the most dangerous consequence for the ethnical groups and racial minorities in the US, was the increasing fear and distrust manifested by the white population towards colored people or if their origins were set (or supposed to be set) near Afghanistan or Iraq. This lack of knowledge as well as the influence of the mass media and the measures taken by the American politicians after the terrorist attacks on September 11th provoked the situation of tension between races within the American society: this tension was mainly developed by the white part of the population towards the other races and ethnical groups.

4.a.4. The Ethnic America

– *Stereotypes and Prejudices*

Crash proposes an extraordinary clever exercise of recognizing the reasons and nature of the stereotypes and the prejudices which are intimately connected to them. These stereotypes are represented by many characters in the film, leading us to conclude that there are many issues and troubles whose origins remain in the ill-labeled stereotypes within society:

And black women don't think in stereotypes? When's the last time you met one who didn't think she knew everything about your lazy ass before you even opened your mouth? That waitress sized us up in two seconds. We're black, and "black people don't tip" so she wasn't gonna waste her time; someone like that, nothing you can do to change their mind. (Anthony to Peter *Crash* 2004: 8)

The nature of these stereotypes remains in the following factors:

- Color of skin,
- Economic status,
- Place of living within the city,
- Dressing clothes and/or any other complement (even tattoos),

- Country of origin,
- Accent and speech.

These sociological factors are represented in the story and they are better or worse addressed by the characters who use them as a shield or as a weapon to use against other characters in the film: “And you could mention that we’d appreciate it if next time they didn’t send a gang member. Shaved head, pants down around his ass, prison tattoos? (...) Right, and he isn’t going to sell our key to one of his gang-banger friends the moment he’s out the door.” (Jane Cabot to Rick. *Crash* 2004: 31)

There are other factors which contribute to the prejudices established in the story. These factors regarding to prejudices are mainly the historic events which were developed in the previous chapter: the 1992 Los Angeles Riots: “Fact, if anybody should be scared, it’s us: the only two black faces surrounded by sea of over-caffeinated white people, patrolled by the trigger-happy LAPD.” (Anthony to Peter. *Crash* 2004: 10). Another historic event with strong influence over the characters’ reactions is the 9/11 attacks: “Yo, Osama, plan the Jihad on your own time; what do you want?” (Shop assistant to Fhrad. *Crash* 2004: 6)

There is also another important factor which was developed in the part dedicated to Michael Moore’s documentaries and which is the power of mass media over the situation of some race minorities in the US. This influence portrayed by the television networks over the American population is represented through the characters’ fears and prejudices and they determine certain reactions and commentaries which are of much importance within the story. These reactions are also very descriptive and loyal to the real situation which is present in the everyday society in the US.

– *Racism*

However all those stereotypes and prejudices go around the same topic in the story: racism. There are several manifestations of racism in the film. These manifestations may be seen in different social and political levels:

- The suburbs. There is an important representation of the situation of racism in the suburbs very explicit in the story: Anthony and Peter. These two young boys suffer from the consequences of a poor economic situation and they, among other opportunities, decide to steal and to be part of the criminal atmosphere in the US. They are the voices who claim for and against the situation which stereotypes and prejudices have created towards the people of their own race as it was seen in the previous point (although ironically they confirm what they seem to argue against during the film).
- The police. The Officers Ryan and Hansen represent the power and the prejudices which are installed within some forces such as the Los Angeles Police Department. As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the most important factors at the onset of the 1992 riots was the oppressing and discriminating behavior of some members of the police before the incident with Rodney King. This fear is represented by some characters who do not want to face any situation with the policemen because of their fame. Moreover both Officers Ryan and Hansen are protagonists of some major issues related to racism: Officer Ryan has a racist behavior while he is serving such as the incident involving the Thayers. But he also behaves in that way when he is trying to obtain more help for his father’s physical problems. On the other hand Officer Hansen, who seems to be morally distant with these racist issues, is captured by the influence of prejudices at the end of the story committing a crime just because of those prejudices, such as in his conversation with Peter:

Officer Hansen: So, what’s that?

Peter: Just people, man

Officer Hansen: People like me?

Peter: No, man, I’m not laughing at you

Officer Hansen: Yeah, I can see that. How about laugh outside? (Officer Hansen and Peter in the car. Crash 2004: 109)

- The politicians. In the political level, there are also some decisions involving racial issues. When Inspector Graham discovers that the incident between two policemen of LA (a white inspector shooting black dead) was not a matter of racism, the politicians and advisers of the District Attorney recommend him not to uncover the truth and to leave the incident with its racial nature:

Inspector Graham: So, to make this disappear, all I have to do is frame an innocent man.

Flanagan: What are you, the fucking Defender of All Things White?! We're talking about a white man who shot three black men and you're arguing that maybe we're not being "fair" to him?! (Graham/Flanagan discussion. Crash 2004: 78)

This decision comes from the District Attorney's need to obtain the favor of the African-American voters after having his car stolen by two black youngsters. In this case, racism is used as a tool for obtaining advantage in political aspirations in detriment of the truth.

– *Beyond the Stereotypes*

There is an interesting portrait of African-American people who have succeeded in life in the story. They are people who have escaped from the ghettos and they have achieved success in life through their careers. However they have to face the same racist problems even in their new positions in society.

The message of these portraits stands in the belief that racism and segregation only remains in the context of bad education or lack of it. Some characters have to face racist commentaries, suggestions and propositions which are outrageous and insulting for them. But above those consequences, the racist issues are surprising for them: surprising because they did not expect to suffer those behaviors and conditions in the high social status they live in now, then the racist field expands itself to other limits, spreading into the most select levels in society, levels up to which a few people can reach:

Fred (producer of the film, white man): I think we need another take, buddy.

Cameron Thayer: I don't know, Fred, that last one was pretty terrific.

Fred: This is gonna sound strange but...is Jamal seeing a speech coach or something? (Jamal is the black actor)

Cameron: What do you mean?

Fred: Have you noticed—this is weird for a white guy to say—but have you noticed that he's talking a lot less black lately?

(...)

Cameron: And you think, because of that, people won't recognize him to be a black man?

(...)

Fred: Because all I'm saying is it's not his character. I mean. Eddie is supposed to be the smart one. Not Jamal, right? I mean, you're the expert here, but to me it rings false. (Eddie is the white actor)

(Fred and Cameron discussing. *Crash* 2004: 54-55)

In addition to this situation in the higher levels of society, economically speaking, we are witnesses of how these individuals' success is received by other people with their same racial background. Through Inspector Graham's family, this significant and curious consideration by the people from the same racial background: "I asked you to find your brother. But you were busy. We weren't much good to you anymore, were we? You got things to do. You go ahead, I'll sign the papers." (Louise -Graham's mother- to Graham. *Crash* 2004: 105) As these certain people have succeed in society they are seen no longer as members of the same racial group, although they share their same color of skin.

In this case, the different factors which promoted the stereotypes and the prejudices have also provoked a feeling of exclusion and isolation in terms of racial group and ethnicity. In this context the word stereotype becomes of much importance, because it is not just being considered the implications of the stereotypes created towards a specific community or race and how they are considered by other communities. Now the situation of the stereotypes is deeply rooted within the specific community and the individuals who are part of that racial group put in practice discriminating behaviors towards the members of the same racial group who have go further in society. By succeeding in society, these people

are no longer considered members of the same community as they were in the past. This is another type of discrimination within the same discriminated race.

– *Fire Arms*

As it was seen in the part dedicated to Michael Moore's documentaries, especially in the chapter of *Bowling for Columbine* the reasons why Americans strongly agree with the idea of bearing fire arms and its connections with the crime rates and violence in the US were examined, both in the film and in this research. However we also encounter different factors which contributed to that state of fear and tension which lead to the need of protection: the contribution made by the mass media, increasing the notion of fear within the population and also contributing to the development of stereotypes and prejudices towards other racial and/or ethnical groups.

– *Making Business: Immigrants.*

This poor consideration within the same race it is also reproduced in the relations between other races or ethnical groups: the business around immigration.

This practice has been very popular in recent decades and has given too much money to those people who put in practice. Certain groups help other immigrants to enter a country in exchange of money. These immigrants barely know the language and they are cheated in order to obtain money from them. When they are in the country of destination they realize that they have been used and now they have to do different occupations from the ones they were promised. The human consequences are devastating from an ethical point of view.

Through exploitation of immigrants, there have appeared many groups who which have take advantage of the poor situations in the immigrants' countries of origin in order to make money of it.

4.b. Gran Torino (2008)

4.b.1. Introduction

In the verge of the economic crisis, the immigrants in the US have a difficult role in society: on the one hand they have to adapt to the new conditions, new language

and the new place they have come to live in; on the other, they also have to survive the poor economic conditions they usually have to suffer when they arrive in a new country. These conditions and the connections between those immigrants with the rest of the American society are one of the main motifs in the film *Gran Torino* directed by Clint Eastwood in 2008.

The situation of the poorest neighborhoods in the main capitals of the US is a reflection of the situation of the population who lives in them. There are entire areas occupied by immigrants because the white people moved out long time ago. The poor situation of the places coupled with the increasing number of immigrants with low incomes, who settled in those places, made the white population who lived there to move out to another (and better) place within the city. Gradually these neighborhoods become less stable because of the rising of crimes and violence related to fire arms and teenager bands.

However this situation also raises another important component of the American society: multiculturalism. The American society is a multicultural society nowadays; because of the increasing number of those immigrants from different origins arrived and mixed with early settlers in the country. Finally there is a slight portrait of the differences between the second generation of immigrants and their parents, and their reactions toward their ancestors' culture and tradition. As an old ethnic group, the Hmong appear in the *Gran Torino* as a traditional yet modern group of people, depending on the generation presented.

4.b.2. Gran Torino. A Brief Summary.

Gran Torino tells the story of a veteran of the Korea War, Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood), who has recently lost his wife. He is an angry old man who lives in a poor neighborhood in Highland Park, a city within the limits Detroit, Michigan.

Walt Kowalski has always been a rightful American: he fought in a war defending his country, he worked in an American car company for most of his life, etc; but now he realizes that his world is changing. Nowadays the place where he lives is full of immigrants who have come to the country seeking a better life. These immigrants are from different origins, but in the film they are mainly from an Asian background.

Among Kowalski's neighbors, the people who live next to him start to make some contact very slowly although there is strong reticence from Walt. They are Hmongs, an ethnic group who belongs to the mountains regions of China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. These people are bullied and oppressed by band of teenagers who gradually force them to do what they want. As a result Walt decides to defend them, but originally he has different reasons for it.

As an American who has fought for his country and who has worked in the same American company for many years, Walt Kowalski has a strong feeling towards America and what means to be an American. However there is also a dangerous side of this feeling and it is that Walt tends to reject everything which is not American, including people. For these reasons and because of his own bad temper, Walt spends most of his time hating the strange and foreign people who live around him.

But Walt's bad temper does not end here. As he fought in a war, he is familiar with the use of guns, and he does not hesitate using them whenever he considers he has to. One of those tense situations between his Hmong neighbors and the band of teenagers who bullies them everyday leads him to act in favor of his neighbors, although he is only protecting his private property and just "inviting" the youngsters from the band to leave.

As a result his Hmong neighbors and the rest of the people of the neighborhood start giving him presents and thanking for what he has (indirectly) done. After this, Walt starts a closer relation with some members of his neighbor's family at the same time that he tries to protect them using all the violence he is able to use. This violence will be increasing as the story moves on.

Through the film the culture and tradition of the Hmong people is also portrayed. The family who lives next to Walt usually carries celebrations for birth or with traditional and or religious background. These cultural and traditional representations are also carried by the older members of the ethnical group, i.e., the immigrants who arrived in the country many years ago. The first generation of, in this case, Hmong people is less attached to those cultural and traditional representations than their parents. These first generations are portrayed in the story as teenagers, and they are the first Hmong people with whom Walt Kowalski starts to establish a contact. Among

the people with whom Walt states a closer relation, we distinguish two important characters: Sue (Ahney Her) and Thao (Bee Vang).

Sue is a young girl who is already studying at high school. His brother, Thao, is always at home doing some housework while his cousin, one of the members of the band commented before, tries to recruit him tempting his weakness. One of the tests Thao is asked to do is to steal his neighbor's car, a Ford Gran Torino, Kowalski's Gran Torino. But he is almost captured by Walt, so he has to repay his debt because it is a family tradition (his mother and sister obliges him to work for Walt until the debt is paid). While Thao is working for Walt, Sue often visits his brother and Walt and they three start a friendship relationship. For this reason, Walt decides to defend his neighbors from the oppression of the band; because he starts to be closer to them than to his own family.

4.b.3. Multicultural America

During all of the history of the US, immigration has been a major issue from the very beginning. Although it started as colonization, many different people from many different places started to occupy the American territory during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century.

The great migrations happened during the nineteenth century, when almost thirty million people (from Europe) migrated to the country. In these years, the most important migration group was the Irish people who fled from starvation. In the twentieth century this tendency increased, and people from many parts of Europe, Central and South America and Asia decided to move to the US as well. In this context, it is not surprising that most of the population have a foreign background. Only the Native Americans are not included in this category, although they are a less percentage in comparison with the rest of the population.

There have been many reasons for immigration to the US, including political, religious or because of starvation or poverty. As shown in the previous paragraph, the reasons for the massive migration of Irish people during the nineteenth century was the Great Famine between 1845 and 1852, also known as the Irish Potato Famine.

Other massive migrations were caused by wars: during the twentieth century many people from Europe escaped from their home countries because of the dangerous conditions caused by wars or ethnic persecutions and moved to the US looking for the so-promised liberty. Political and religious persecutions have always been a classic in these sorts of issues, mainly in the old times of immigration in the US.

Nowadays the immigration reasons are centered in the economic troubles (although there are other reasons such as academic purposes, etc) which affect a large number of the population worldwide. Actually in the US there are people with German, Dutch, English, Italian, Asian, Mexican and many other different backgrounds living together. This situation has contributed to the multicultural enrichment of the American society and it is portrayed in the film *Gran Torino* through different characters, such as Walt (Polish ancestors), the barber (Italian), the builder (Irish), etc.

4.b.4. Ethnic Minorities in the US.

– *Two sides*

The contradictory values which are usually attached with the American people seem to provoke a wrong influence towards the new immigrants arriving in the US. On the one hand we encounter the peaceful immigrants who try to establish a new home in an unknown land. These people usually work in very poor conditions initially and some of them manage to succeed economically, retaining certain status with the passing of years. As the story shows, we are not taking into account those foreign people who arrive in the US in search of Academic activities because they have a different background and they are placed in a different context from the very beginning of their arrival. These groups of people are portrayed in the *Gran Torino* through Sue and Thao's family.

On the other hand, there seems to be an increasing state of violence and crime towards this part of the population, although their initial goals were much different. This topic was slightly treated in the part dedicated to Michael Moore, especially in the documentary *Bowling for Columbine* in which the crime rates and violence broadcast on TV was often related to and developed by people from these emigrant

communities. Violence and crime are represented in the film through the Latino and Hmong gangs.

– *Gangs and Violence*

Carrying the appearance of a group of people sharing the same identity, the same cultural and traditional background, the gangs constitute a very dangerous side of the immigration issue.

For years, these gangs have been formed by American people in the poorest neighborhoods in the cities. These bands were usually formed by poor people who needed protection or who wanted to be part of something as an answer to the difficulties and wonderings of living in a big and divided country.

Nevertheless, the formation of these gangs among the immigrant population have increased: as there are people who acquire certain values and traditions from the country of destination, many teenagers whose parents immigrated to the US long time ago have acquired these practices (in the film we discover two different gangs formed by Hmong people and Latinos). As a result, nowadays we can find gangs of teenagers and young men representing almost every race or ethnic group within the American society. And as their behavior is not peaceful at all, there are many fights and conflicts between band from a specific ethnic group and bands from another.

Moreover, there seems to be more reasons portrayed in the story for the enrollment of some of their members:

- Isolation, usually provoked by the difficulties in learning the new language or in acquiring the traditions and cultural heritage of the new country;
- Weakness some of the members are weak alone, so they were easily inducted to be part of the band by other stronger members who forced them;
- The notion of protecting themselves, this is very common not only in gangs like this, but in ethnic communities which are less open to the rest of the populations.

These three characteristics can be summarized in the following quote from the film: "It's true, man. Shit, I used to be kind of a quiet little punk like you, everybody fucking with me. But finally I said 'no more.' You, you're lucky, Tao, we got your back. Me? I didn't have nobody. Had to mold my own tribe" (Spider, Thao's cousin and member of a Hmong gang in *Gran Torino* 2008:18). Thao's cousin is trying to convince him to enjoy his gang because he is been treated badly by other people. The isolation of the immigrants mixed up with their weakness in front of another gangs creates the perfect situation for, in this case, Hmong gangs to offer their protection.

As a result, their activities are carried and performed by themselves as well as their problems are solved by themselves. In this context, the gangs try to recruit new members using the same motif of common protection between members of the same race or ethnic group. It is a response to the racial and segregating atmosphere which some of them have to suffer in a foreign country.

– *Poverty and the Life in Group*

Poverty is a common characteristic of all the immigrants who initially arrive in the US (and to any country). They usually have access to jobs which are usually rejected by the white Americans in normal economic conditions, they do not have many chances to choose between jobs unless they are prepared to do so (those immigrants who have moved to the US in search of Academic development are not being treated). If the economic situation is weak, as seen in many scenes of *Gran Torino*, then the economic situation of the immigrants becomes worse, because they are not allowed to choose, being forced to survive in a new country with all the problems which that status carries with.

Those jobs which are usually rejected by other more qualified people do not leave greater wages to the workers, so the economic progression is slower than in other population.

As a result, the poorest places in the city are occupied by the immigrants looking for a cheaper place to build their future:

Walt: I don't know why these goddamned slopes had to move to my block. This used to be a nice neighborhood.

Phong(in Hmong): Why doesn't that stupid, hairy white man move? He must be too dumb to realize he's not welcome here. All the Mee-Khah left in the neighborhood should just move away. Look at him strut like a rooster. (Phong, Sue and Thao's grandmother, and Walt discussing in *Gran Torino* 2008: 13).

However, as it is seen in the previous point, these neighbors are usually accompanied with violence and higher crime rates than in other places in the city. This bad conditions oblige the rest of the population who are able to move into another place, to leave their houses in these neighbors, so the cycle provokes that the situation will go worse unless the own neighbors stop them.

In these conditions, the immigrants tend to protect themselves from outer dangers, even when those dangers are provoked by people from the same ethnic origin as theirs. In the film, the Hmongs react together appreciating what Walt Kowalski has indirectly done for them: he has faced those people who threaten and terrify them. But not only fear and danger make them to protect themselves and to be together. In the celebration of a ritual similar to baptism, there are many people within the house enjoying the party held for the newly born baby boy.

– *Differences between Generations*

There are also remarkable differences in how the immigrants who arrived in the US observe traditions and try to respect their culture and how the first generation of people born in the US decides to incorporate new elements from the American background.

This issue constitutes the portrait of Jhumpa Lahiri —an Indian American writer born in London though raised in the US since she was three years old— in her written production. Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake* sets up a similar comparison between two generations of people: one who has immigrated to the country and the other who has been born in that country, with the entire cultural and traditional heritage in the middle. In Lahiri there is an opposing position of those people have been born in the new country (the US in this case) and who embrace the new traditions and culture of the country in which they are raised. On the other hand, their

ancestors, the immigrants who arrived in the country, try to maintain their tradition such as cooking or dressing, and they also try to hand these traditions down to their children.

In a similar level these contradictory points of view are shown in *Gran Torino* but with some differences. Sue and Thao have been born and grown up in the US, and their lifestyle is closer to the other teenagers of their age. Their parents and grandparents maintain their original traditions and they celebrate their cultural and typical festivities. In these sorts of festivities the children are present, but they occupy a more distant and less active position than their ancestors: they prefer to be in the basement with other people of their age having a party which would be “more western” although their parents and grandparents stay in the house keep on celebrating and performing their culture, as it can be seen in the film.

However there are other aspects in which the two youngsters do embrace their own culture without problems: they wear traditional clothes for specific festivities (such as in a funeral during the film) when required and they, especially Sue, know a lot about their original background as a ethnical minority in the US: the meaning of some festivities as well as some cultural and sociological characteristics of the Hmong (such as the eye contact or when they smile when someone is shouting at them as a reflection of discomfort). The following quotation is an example about this knowledge and Walt’s reaction towards the Hmong tradition and culture:

Sue: A lot of the people in this house are very traditional. Number one, never touch a Hmong person on the head, not even a child. Hmong people believe that the soul resides in the head, so don't do that.

Walt: That's dumb, but fine.

Sue: Hmong people also consider looking someone in the eye to be rude. That's why everyone looks away when you look at them.

Walt: Swell. Anything else?

Sue: Yeah, some Hmong smile or grin when they're yelled at or get into a confrontation. It's a cultural thing. It expresses embarrassment or insecurity, not that they're laughing at you.

Walt: Good God, you people are all nuts. (Walt and Sue in *Gran Torino* 2008:49)

So there is a special connection between the first generation of Hmong people in the story and their traditional customs and cultural heritage although they are more attached to the culture and tradition of the country they are growing up. Although Walt mocks on these characteristics in the beginning, finally he accepts the Hmong people and their peculiar tradition and culture near his life. This is a positive portrait of two different cultures living and joined together.

– *A Historical Debt*

This particular aspect is applied to ethnical minorities in the same situation as the Hmong in the film directed by Eastwood. As it is described in this film, the Hmong helped the US in the past but this help was afterwards forgotten and they were left alone in their original countries: in the War in Vietnam, the Hmong joined the US Army, but they were abandoned when the war was over; so the only chance they had was to emigrate to the land of liberty in search for a new future which has been denied in their original countries because of their alliance with the US:

Walt: Then why are you in my neighborhood, instead of back there?

Sue: It's a Vietnam thing. We fought on your side and when America quit, the Communists starting killing the Hmong, so we came over here. (Sue to Walt in *Gran Torino* 2008: 41)

4.c. Conclusions

In both films the representation of the racial and ethnical reality is truly important. The situation and main topics involving the historical situation, the economic status and the consequences and implications of that economic status are joined with the relations between those communities and the rest of the population.

In *Crash* these relations between communities and the inner problems of some of them conveys the main message of the film. The division occurred in the inside of, for example, the African-American community is very significant about their inner situation and, most important, how they treat themselves. Although society has oppressed them for decades, after the Civil Rights Movement there has been a development of this population, socially speaking. However this development of part

of the population has brought about other problems, which are related to the society outside the minority but also they are related to the society within the minority.

Discrimination and oppression are still present in the US society, especially after the terrorist attacks in September 11th. The Al-Qaeda attacks not only put immigrants from a Middle East background in a difficult position, but also the African-American population suffered from the prejudices and fear which were constantly broadcast by the television networks in the form of news and reports, and from the politicians who were amending new laws to encourage and power the security in the country. This tension is also fed by the other sectors of society, for example the white people's prejudices towards the African-American population.

In a film with a story placed after the 9/11 attacks, the appearance of people resembling Middle-Easterners is almost obliged. In the very beginning of the story they represent that fear and anger promoted by the external factors which have been already commented. But something curious happens in *Crash* and it is that, although they appear in the beginning of the film as victims of discrimination by the Americans, in the end of the story they are compared to those who perpetrated the attacks: the Persian father almost kills a little girl and in his final scene he appears with an American flag behind him, as in an attempt to enhance the feeling of patriotism against that threat. It is curious because what is important for the situation of such a minority as the African-American and, in the beginning of the film for the Persians, in the end it is completely changed for a more typical and expected image of them.

On the other hand, other racial groups appear in both films: the Asian people. In *Crash* their role is attached to victims and crime as well. Firstly the Chinese man who is run over is left in the hospital in a very critical state. However this image is completely changed in the end of the film when he is discovered as a man who makes business with the emigrants who arrive at the country. This anecdotic presence is supplied in the second film, *Gran Torino* and the strong presence and influence over the plot and screenplay of the Hmong people.

As representatives of an Eastern culture and tradition, the Hmongs have different yet familiar routines which are no longer strange to us because of the repetition of this portrait in films and literature over the years, although the protagonists of this portrait in previous productions were from other places. This

repetition does not influence the final result of the comparison between two different cultures, an Eastern culture and a Western one. In this aspect the representation is gentler with the Hmongs in *Gran Torino* than with the Chinese couple in *Crash*. But this positive vision is blackened by the presence of violent gangs.

The gangs play a special and important role in the film directed by Clint Eastwood. On the one hand they serve as a representation of the violence and tension between radical and criminal bands with different ethnical or racial background and the important issues exposed in the part dedicated to Moore's documentaries and the use and reasons of violence with fire arms. These gangs are also a reflecting mirror of the consequences of poverty and the bad adaptation into the new social environment they have entered. As a result, the constitution of these gangs offers protection and also personal claim for those teenagers who usually stand alone or those who have little or none recognition by other people.

On the other hand, the existence of these bands creates a joining force towards those people who are threatened by them. If this representation is extrapolated to the general American society and their reactions and treatment towards the outer menace, an equivalent is found: the international terrorism. Nevertheless this extrapolation is slightly changed in the final message of the film: after realizing that violence cannot be fought with violence, the main protagonist decides to combat this oppression in a more peaceful way. The existence of a subtle critique towards the political solutions and the society's behavior might be inherent as one of the important and subjective messages of this film.

In conclusion, there are different representations of the situation of racial and ethnical minorities in the US. From the tensions and prejudices in *Crash* to the collision of cultures and the problems of integration proposed by *Gran Torino*, these two stories of racism show an interesting portrait of the background and context in which these groups live and how the American society treat (or do not treat) them.

5. Final Conclusions

Although the analysis contained in this research was originally divided into two main parts, one dedicated to documentaries and their representation of the last political

events as well as the relation between the possession of guns and violence, and the other centered in the multicultural status of the US society; some interconnecting factors have risen during this research.

The first factor to create a tangible connection within the movies is fear and its use as a controlling weapon by politicians and as a lure exhibited by the mass media. The problem of fire arms possession has been feeding itself with the increasing state of fear and an apparent weakness of society against some specific sectors of the population. These sectors of the population have been appointed by the mass media, indirectly, needless to say, as the perpetrators of that fear and they have been appointed as the ones to be afraid of. This fear has derived into a tense state within the population and fire arms have been the protagonists, as a protecting device but also as an agent of some terrible massacres.

However this fear has also been connected to the political scene. After the attacks in September 11th fear was used for political purposes in the US: the passing of the USA Patriot Act with all its consequences for the population's rights as well as the unilateral decision of invading Iraq were examples of how the use of this fear could permit disturbing decisions such as these. The mass media also contributed to this state increasing the presence of news related to fear, alert and possible attacks during those years.

Going back to those sectors of the population which were the main target of the fear promoted by the mass media, there is an accurate presentation of how this fear can affect the relationships between different racial or ethnical groups. Prejudices and stereotypes are present in the second part of the analysis dedicated to films and multiculturalism. These prejudices and stereotypes play a relevant role in *Crash* serving as motif of anger and crime at some specific parts of the story, portraying how fear can create a state of tension and restlessness which contributes to make the wrong choices.

The second factor which creates a significant link between all the filmic productions analyzed is poverty and how poverty is focused in some specific racial and ethnical groups and the consequences of that poverty over their status within society, their relations with other races and even the relations between members of the same racial or ethnical group.

In Moore's filmic production, poverty is intimately connected to his hometown, Flint, Michigan, and with the economic status of the African-American population as a reason for their current conception within society and as a way of blaming the Government's neglect. The representation of this poverty along the documentaries raises several conclusions:

- The racial and ethnical groups are the ones who suffer most these consequences;
- That the poor economic status of these racial and ethnical groups derived into a downward spiral of crime and violence in parts of their population;
- Because of this downward spiral, the use of fire arms is directly connected to these people;
- Those who have not yet fallen into the crime and violence webs are ironically tempted to help the rest of the people by enlisting in the army.

But crime and violence as a result of poverty is deeply dealt with in the filmic productions selected in the second part of the analysis. In *Gran Torino* that poverty has evolved into the formation of gangs of teenagers. These gangs usually threaten those people with their same racial background to join them as a way of protection, but also as a way of intimidating and controlling them.

Apart from these linking factors, there are other important considerations about the American society to take into account which are presented in the films and documentaries analyzed. Cultural diversity and traditions are one of the identity signs of *Gran Torino*: the representation of the Hmong culture and several traditional festivities is part of the multicultural portrait the film offers to the audience. This is combined with the different cultural and ethnical backgrounds present in the films: the appearance of people from Italy, Poland, Ireland, Mexico, etc. This diversity enriches the notion of multiculturalism and serves as an accurate description of the status and origins of the American population nowadays.

Another important consideration to take into account is the problems and tensions growing in great minorities such as the African-Americans. These problems and tensions have to do with the distinction made by them between those who follow social stereotypes and those people who have followed the path not commonly taken

and have had success in different fields. *Crash* exposes this situation from two different angles: those who suffer a discriminating attitude coming their family and relatives and those people who start to question their own identity because of the distant created between them and the stereotypes.

As a result, the image of the American society portrayed in the films and documentaries analyzed can be summarized in the following terms: distance, influence and richness.

Distance because of the obvious large distances involving territories but also, metaphorically speaking, because of the significant distance between opinions and points of view regarding the most important topics, most of them which have happened in the past years. The radicalization of opinions and the polarization of society related to many and basic topics suggest and increasing feeling of disunity which is quickly confronted against the asking for unity resulting after the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Both of them are compatible but, as they have been seen, if there is an attempt to have a different opinion on issues which have been wide accepted or towards which the majority of the population has built a strong feeling of unity, there is also a tendency to radicalize and to polarize that opinion. Needless to say that there are strong reasons for this situation but it is also obvious that there have been several measures and techniques used by certain parts of society which have encouraged and exaggerated this difficult situation. But this distance is also applicable when it comes to dealing with the different racial and ethnical groups living in the country: this distance makes them become more exclusive and they tend to be more separated.

Influence developed by the mass media and also by politicians have been a routine in the past years: not only the biased image given of some parts of the population and the connections with violence which resulted in an increasing need for protection, as it was commented before, but also using that influence with political purposes creating an existing but exaggerated fear status within the majority of the population which made easier some tough decisions.

Finally we have the term richness which makes reference to the economic status of some racial and ethnical minorities but it also makes reference to the rich multicultural ingredients and their contribution to diversity as a main characteristic of

the American society. The poor situation of some parts of the population has been commented before as well as the rich traditions and cultural resources which are becoming part of the American daily life.

These three terms allow understanding the great complexities presented in the films and which are also present in a diverse and large society such as the American.

Works Cited

- Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés D.L., 1973
- Breu, Ramon. *El documental como estrategia educativa. De Flaherty a Michael Moore, diez propuestas de actividades*. Barcelona: Editorial Graó, 2010.
- Constitución Española, 1978
- Eastwood, Clint, dir. *Gran Torino*. Warner Bros., 2008
- Glassner, Barry. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. Basic Books: New York, 2009.
- Haggis, Paul, dir. *Crash*. Lions Gate Films. 2004
 ——— *Crash, the script*. 2004
- Halbrook, Stephen P., "St. George Tucker's Second Amendment: Deconstructing 'The True Palladium of Liberty'". *Bepress Legal Series* (October 11, 2006). *Working Paper* 1824: 7.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. New York: Mariner Books, 2003.
- McKay, David. *American Politics and Society*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009
- Moore, Michael, dir. *Bowling for Columbine*. Manga Films, 2002.
 ——— *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Cameo Media S.L., 2004.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Penguin: 1989
- Rizzo, Sergio. "Why Less Is Still Moore: Celebrity and the Reactive Politics of Fahrenheit 9/11". *Film Quarterly*, 59 (Winter 2005/2006): 32-39
- Schenk, Nick. *Gran Torino. The Script*. 2008
- The Library of Congress. American Memory Fellows Program*. "What Is the American Dream" <<http://online.sfsu.edu/~kferenz/syllabus/dreams/thedream.html>> Accessed 9 May 2010

The Washington Post. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html> (September 21, 2001)
Accessed 18 May 2010.

Verdu, Vicente. *El planeta americano*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1996