***Mosquita y Mari* (2012)**

**Film background:** *Mosquita y Mari* is a 2012 coming-of-age drama about two Latina teenage girls in Huntington Park, California (near Los Angeles). The film was written and directed by Aurora Guerrero, a queer-identified Chicana writer and director from San Francisco. The film was primarily funded through an $82,000 Kickstarter fundraiser that Guerrero organized.

**Plot summary:** The film opens with Yolanda (Fenessa Pineda), a Chicana teenager growing up in Huntington Park, who is attending a party with her friends, looking out of place. The next day, as she is completes her homework, she sees her new neighbor, Mari (Venecia Troncoso) riding her bike outside. She runs into Mari at a store, where Yolanda steals something while Mari covers for her. Mari transfers into Yolanda’s school, and the pair become partners in math class, although Mari is resistant to Yolanda’s overtures of assistance. Later, Mari smokes pot in a school bathroom, and when security intervenes, she pushes Yolanda out of the bathroom to protect her. Yolanda thanks her, and offers to help her study. Mari finally relents and accepts her assistance. The girls strike up a friendship and frequently work on homework together as Yolanda attempts to keep Mari engaged in her schoolwork. However, Mari is concerned about her family’s finances, and gets an after-school job that interferes with her ability to study with Yolanda. While the girls continue to spend time together, their differing priorities start to drive them apart. Additionally, a sexually charged moment between them, as well as Yolanda’s attempts to make Mari jealous by flirting with a boy, threaten to cause Mari to distance herself from Yolanda. Furthermore, after losing her job Mari engages in sex work in order to earn money for her family. Despite all the challenges they encounter, at the end of the film, the girls appear to reconcile, as they realize the strength of their connection.

**Content warnings:** The film includes references to off-screen sex work, as well as occasional alcohol and marijuana use.

**Running Time:** 1:26:00.

**Materials for this week:**

* Screening quiz
* Secondary texts
  + Day 2: Whitney Monaghan, “Not Just a Phase: Queer Girlhood and Coming of Age on Screen,” (Prioritized pages, if you choose to excerpt it: p. 98-101, 103-105)
  + Day 3: Juana María Rodríguez, “Introduction” (p. 1-28) in *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (Prioritized pages, if you choose to excerpt it: p. 1-18)

**Lesson 1 – Close Reading Key Scenes:**

1. (7 min) Screening quiz.
2. (10-15 min) Student-led scene close-reading and analysis.
3. (3 min) Teacher-led scene analysis: Yolanda and Mari get ice cream, Yolanda goes to Mari’s house (approximately 12:53-15:57 based on Amazon Prime timecode)
4. (5 min) Discussion prep – Students jot down notes, and share with a partner:
5. What does Guerrero communicate through the ice cream sequence? How does she communicate this?

*This scene provides the first glimpse of genuine intimacy between Yoli and Mari. This is communicated through the tight framing of the shot of Yoli and Mari’s faces, as well as through camera movements that pan over a close-up of the ice cream cone they’re sharing, their smiles, their hand gestures, the schedule Yoli passes to Mari, etc. The only shot in this scene that seems to interrupt the intimacy between the two girls is the shot of the other side of the street, as Mari watches a woman flyering for a store and considers whether she should be pursuing work instead of homework. Intimacy is restored when the shot returns to the close-up of the two girls’ faces.*

1. What does Guerrero communicate through the scenes of Yolanda at her own house and then at Mari’s house?

*The juxtaposed scenes highlight the different experiences the two girls have at home. When Yolanda get to her house, her mother is at home, preparing dinner. The shot shows the kitchen and the dining room, and both look like carefully decorated spaces; the dining table in the back is set for three. Yolanda asks her mother if she can go to Mari’s house, and her mother peers out the window at Mari through the curtains and the house’s gate, a bit suspiciously.*

*In Mari’s house, the walls are bare, and boxes along the wall suggest the family’s recent move. Mari’s mother is irritated at Mari for not unpacking and asks if she has been smoking. Mari seems to carry more responsibilities at home than Yolanda does, such as supervising her younger sister. Questions of class seem to be raised by Mari’s mother asking Mari why she is serving cereal to Yolanda and Mari retorts that it’s not like they have steak. Her mother seems perhaps somewhat embarrassed by the conditions of the home and what they can offer Yolanda.*

1. (25 min) Discussion.
   1. What does Guerrero communicate through the ice cream sequence? How does she communicate this? - Additional questions, if needed:
      1. What emotions are conveyed through this scene?
      2. What cinematic techniques are used to convey those emotions?
      3. Does anything in this scene disrupt the intimacy between the protagonists? Why?
   2. What does Guerrero communicate through the scenes of Yolanda at her own house and then at Mari’s house? - Additional questions, if needed:
      1. What contrasts do you notice between Yolanda and Mari’s homes?
      2. How does the set design highlight contrast?
      3. What class differences do you notice? How does this connect to other events in the film?
   3. **Extension question**: Why do you think Guerrero wanted to highlight the contrast between Yolanda and Mari’s homes? How does that contrast build throughout the rest of the film, and how does it affect their relationship?
   4. **Extension question**: Based on today’s discussion, and notes you took throughout the film, what do you think are some of the major themes of this film? How were those themes communicated through cinematic techniques?

**Lesson 2 – Film Criticism: Whitney Monaghan, “Not Just a Phase: Queer Girlhood and Coming of Age on Screen”**

1. (5 min) Personal reflection – choose 1:
   1. Did you relate to any of the characters in this film? Explain.
   2. Did you enjoy watching this film? Why or why not?
2. (7 min) Discuss.
3. (3 min) Watch final scene, approximately 1:18:30-1:21:00.
4. (7 min) Discussion prep:

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* 1. What is Monaghan’s thesis in “Not Just a Phase: Queer Girlhood and Coming of Age on Screen?

*Monaghan argues that typically, queer girlhood has been represented on screen through two primary tropes: 1) “coming out as coming of age” and 2) queerness as a passing, developmental phase on the way to heterosexual adulthood and maturity. Monaghan examines four recent independent films that represent queer girlhood beyond those two tropes to highlight the shifts in recent filmmaking (99). New elements that Monaghan highlights in her readings of these films include negotiation of belonging, consent, families, and intimacy among peers.*

*Monaghan argues that much of mainstream media suggests that queerness is “just a phase” (101), and that “heteronormative culture casts queer subjects as those without a future” (101). Therefore, “on television, queer girls are introduced as an issue needing resolution, and once this is resolved, are promptly written out” (101). Monaghan also points to film’s depiction of queer girlhood as “nostalgic memories of an adolescence long past” (101), suggesting it as mere experimentation on the path to normativity.*

* 1. What is the specific argument she makes about *Mosquita y Mari* on p. 103-105?

*Monaghan highlights that throughout* Mosquita y Mari*, Guerrero places “an emphasis on the unspoken” (104). She highlights Guerrero’s rejection of the coming out trope altogether as well as dialogue. She argues that in many coming-out narratives, “dialogue occupies a privileged position as the verbal expression of (homo)sexual desire occurs at the climax of the film” (104). She illustrates that Guerrero’s rejection of dialogue and linear development emphasizes desire and sexuality that is often unspoken: “Guerrero shifts the focus to small gestures, emphasizing the intensity of certain moments and the dullness of others…the camera also abandons the narrative and lingers on strands of hair blowing in the wind, awkward fingers fiddling with things, dust particles floating in the sunlight. Through this,* Mosquita y Mari *rejects the typical linear progressive depiction of adolescence on screen, teasing out instead the complexities of intimacy in girlhood in moments of drift” (105).*

* 1. Do you agree with these two claims? Why or why not? Consider how the film’s final scene helps address Monaghan’s claims. Use evidence from the film and the text to support your response.

*The final scene involves an ambiguous but heartfelt moment of connection between the girls as they look at each other from across the street. The camera panning from Mari across the wide street to Yolanda, the extended shots of the smiles on the two protagonists’ faces, and the fade to white followed by a flashback to Mari drawing “M y M” on the car windshield suggests that, while their relationship’s future is hardly clear, this is more than just a phase on the road to maturity, and there is depth to their connection. Rather than using dialogue to clarify a resolution, Guerrero leaves their connection open-ended and unspoken throughout this final moment.*

1. (15 min) Discuss.
   1. What is Monaghan’s thesis in “Not Just a Phase: Queer Girlhood and Coming of Age on Screen? - Additional questions, if needed:
      1. On page 99, what does Monaghan say are the central tropes for queer girlhood in most film and television depictions?
      2. Do you think this is true? Can you think of examples of these two tropes in film and television you’ve seen, or examples that challenge these tropes?
      3. On page 99, what does Monaghan argue are newer developments in films about queer girlhood?
   2. What is the specific argument she makes about *Mosquita y Mari* on p. 103-105? – Additional questions, if needed:
      1. According to Monaghan, how does *Mosquita y Mari* challenge traditional tropes?
      2. On p. 104, what connection does Monaghan draw between dialogue and coming out in cinema? How does *Mosquita y Mari* resist centering coming out?
      3. Review the last paragraph of Monaghan’s analysis of *Mosquita y Mari* on 105. What does she say Guerrero focuses on in her filmmaking, and why?
   3. Do you agree with these two claims? Why or why not? Consider the film’s final scene as you address Monaghan’s claims. Use evidence from the film and the text to support your response.

**Lesson 3 – Theory Analysis: Juana María Rodríguez, Introduction to *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures and Other Latina Longings***

1. (5 min) Compare/contrast reflection – Compare *Mosquita y Mari* to another film we’ve seen so far in this course. What do the two films you’re considering have in common? What makes this one different?
2. (10 min) Discuss.
3. (5 min) Watch the scene in which Yolanda and Mari dance and then cuddle together on the couch before Yolanda’s parents arrive, approximately 57:15-1:02:30.
4. (15 min) Study groups: In small groups, students will review Juana María Rodríguez’s introduction to *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings.* You may want to provide a worksheet where students can capture their responses to the following questions. Students will respond:
   1. What sections of Rodríguez’s introduction stood out to you? Why?

* *Gestures: “’Gesture can signal both those defined movements that we make with our bodies and to which we assign meaning and an action that extends beyond itself, that reaches, suggests, motions; an action that signals its desire to act, perhaps to touch. Gestures emphasize the mobile spaces of interpretation between actions and meaning. Gestures hang and fall; they register the kinetic effort of communication. Even when done in private, gestures are always relational; they form connections between different parts of our bodies; they cite other gestures; they extend the reach of the self into the space between us; they bring into being the possibility of a ‘we’” (2).*
* *Latina and queer intersections: “As Latin@s and as queers, we are often represented, if not identified, by our seemingly over-the-top gestures, our bodies betraying—or gleefully luxuriating in—our intentions to exceed the norms of proper corporeal containment...We swish too much and speak too loudly….We point with our lips, flirt with our eyes and shimmy our shoulders to mark our delight. Our racialized excess is already read as queer, outside norms of what is useful or productive” (2).*
* *Erasure of racialized femme sexual desire in queer theory: “Yet for the most part, these public sexual spaces are available only to men. Neither Halberstam, Bersani, nor Muñoz even attempts to imagine sexual possibilities and pleasures for racialized female subjects, a subject position that seems to be vacated of erotic possibilities” (13).*
* *Why gesture matters: “If we wish to truly investigate the social and sexual gestures of queer racialized female yearnings, as scholars we need to open ourselves to the informal and illegitimate—not only because these gestures might exceed, slow or even jam the institutionalizing mechanisms seeking to make them visible, palatable, or even pleasurable for others, but because otherwise we might miss what might be particular about certain forms of female embodied sexualities” (15)* 
  1. How do these ideas connect? What is Rodríguez’s central claim?

*As a queer Latina femme scholar, Rodríguez is interested in gesture (2) as a way of attending to possibility, sexuality, and desire, especially for racialized female subjects, whose sexual desires are often erased (13). She points out that noticing gestures enables us to notice “informal” or “illegitimate” (15) actions or desires that institutionalizing mechanisms in society would otherwise fail to acknowledge or erase. It is also significant that she points out that gestures are relational—indicating their role in communication with others.*

* 1. How does the scene we just watched, or other scenes in *Mosquita y Mari* exemplify or challenge Rodríguez’s claims?

*This scene illustrates Rodríguez’ claims because Guerrero foregrounds gestures instead of dialogue or overt actions. The close-up shots of Yolanda’s hands tracing Mari’s stomach, or Mari’s face as she turns towards Yolanda while they’re falling asleep, illustrate the importance of attending to gestures that suggest what cannot be spoken, especially, as Rodríguez points out, in terms of illustrating racialized female desire. Rodríguez states: “It is precisely because sex carries the risk of our undoing that the gesture of reaching out to touch another in the service of mutual pleasure, attempting to go beyond the ‘not-yet’ of the present, becomes all the more potent” (12). The “risk of [their] undoing” is apparent in the girls’ immediate jump away from one another as Yolanda’s parents open the door, but so is their attempt to “go beyond the ‘not-yet’ of the present” as they gesture towards each other through this scene. While the events of this scene are never explicitly discussed between the two of them or with anyone else (Mari says later, “you’re making a big deal out of nothing”), it’s apparent how important this moment is that they share.*

* 1. What questions do you have about Rodríguez’ introduction?

1. (25 min) Whole group discussion.
   1. What sections Rodríguez’ claims stood out to you? – Additional questions, if needed:
      1. Review key lines listed on p. 2, 3, 13, 15. Paraphrase these subclaims.
   2. What sections of Rodríguez’ introduction stood out to you? Additional questions, if needed:
      1. How do these subclaims connect?
   3. How does the scene we just watched, or other scenes in *Mosquita y Mari* exemplify or challenge Rodríguez’ claims?
      1. What gestures did you notice in this scene? Why do these gestures matter?
      2. How does this scene illustrate Monaghan’s claim about de-centering dialogue and coming out narratives? How does that relate to gestures?
      3. How does Guerrero’s mise-en-scene and cinematography emphasize the gestures in this scene?
   4. What questions do you have about Rodríguez’ introduction?
   5. Provide brief intro to next week’s film screening.