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Wide-eyed Boys and Star Kids: Children and Violence in *Voces inocentes* (2004) and *La lengua de las mariposas* (1999)

Niamh Thornton, University of Ulster, Coleraine

Dictatorships are central to *Voces inocentes/Innocent Voices* (Luis Mandoki, 2004) and *La lengua de las mariposas/Butterfly Tongues* (José Luis Cuerda, 1999). Not because dictators explicitly appear in either, or are even named as such, but because they cast a long shadow over the lives of the children who grow up often ignorant of their existence, but are victims of their policies and actions. Set respectively in El Salvador and Spain, the coming of age narratives have similar episodes -- the young boys go to school, play with their friends, fall in love -- and the overarching narrative is that of a key dramatic period, both of the nation's and the children's lives. There are particular events relevant to the context in which they are set that result in different outcomes. Children's innocence is compromised in very different ways in each film when they are forced to engage with their country's political turmoil. At the same time it is this very innocence, which is the strength of having a young child protagonist, that must be both underscored and eroded, in ways that is intended to both draw the audience in and cause heartbreak at its loss in order to reach an understanding of the complex political circumstances. This chapter will concern itself with the meaning of childhood as represented in these films under the shadow of dictatorship in El Salvador and Spain.

Central to this to and fro between innocence and experience is what childhood means in the late-Twentieth and early Twenty-First centuries. This is a period which saw "the most rapid change in conceptualization and experience of childhood" (Cunningham 1995, 187). Historians of childhood, such as Hugh Cunningham and Peter N. Stearns, have mapped out how childhood, as a distinct phase in human life, has increased in duration since early agricultural societies. Where before children were needed to tend animals, care for those younger than them, and help in the family trade, children are now expected to attend school, not work until they are well into their adolescence and are highly dependent on their parents, often until they are into their early adulthood. This change in patterns of childhood responsibility, the decrease in family size and the reduction in infant mortality are credited with the idealization of the child in Western society (Stearns 2006, 55-60). Both Spain and El Salvador are countries which could be categorised as agricultural societies in the periods

in which these films are set, in many respects, however, the representation of childhood in the films impose contemporary frameworks on these. Both *Voces inocentes* and *La lengua de las mariposas* are good examples of the idealized child, which the respective protagonists, Chava (Carlos Padilla) and Moncho (Manuel Lozano), embody and perform.

Notwithstanding this development in how childhood is perceived, there is a tension between a "romantic view of childhood as a special time of life" (Cunningham 1995, 190) and "an increasing disjunction" between this view and "lived reality" (Cunningham 1995, 190). This is evident in the contrast between the emphasis on the innocence of the child in both of these films and the terrible toll borne by real children in conflict zones. Estimates suggest that around 150 million children have been killed in war and civil war since the 1970s with a further 150 million more crippled or maimed, and, despite our conceptualizations of war in most fictions about war as being the stuff of male (and very rarely female) enterprise, in the same period, approximately 80% of those killed in conflict are women and children (Stearns 2006, 112 and Gabarino, Kostelmy and Dubrow 1991, 1).[1] Despite this degradation of the experience of childhood for many children in the world, and the anxious debates in the US and elsewhere about the destruction of childhood by consumerism and other modern ills, the idealized child is persistent in film (see, Cunningham 1995 on Neil Postman's *Disappearance of Childhood*, 180). The children perform innocence in both *Voces inocentes* and *La lengua de las mariposas* through the eliciting of particular actions but also through the aesthetic choices of the filmmakers, which I shall explore.

Innocence can be read as a synonym for childhood in *Voces inocentes* and *La lengua de las mariposas*, therefore, its demise casts a long shadow, as do the destroyers of this innocence - civil war and dictatorship. Naturally, how these dictators are manifested is different in each film, because of the particulars of each context. *La lengua de las mariposas* is set in 1936 in the months leading up to the Spanish Civil War (1936-9), during the politically progressive period of the Second Republic (1931-9).[2] Moncho goes to school for the first time and is educated by the liberal, atheist, and elderly Don Gregorio (Fernando Fernán Gómez), whose unconventional lessons include walks in the countryside catching insects and butterflies. Moncho is fascinated by butterflies. His father (Gonzalo Uriate) is an ardent supporter of the Republic, while his mother (Uxía Blanco) is a conservative Catholic cautious of the changes that have been wrought. Set in a small town in rural Galicia, the tensions between the inhabitants are to be read synecdochally for those of Spain as a whole,

with rich farmers attempting to abuse their power, priests monitoring the behaviour of others, and suggestions of close collusion between the Church and the Civil Guard.

Episodic in structure, the narrative follows the gentle pace of Moncho's childhood as we watch him overcome minor obstacles (such as his first day at school and his asthma attacks); dance with a girl and have a first kiss; accompany his brother to band practice and observe him fall in love; watch a neighbour, O'lis's (Guillermo Toledo) amorous adventures with Carmiña (Elena Fernández); and, most importantly, and through several vignettes, his interest in and growing respect for Don Gregorio. This is against the backdrop of the increasing tensions evidenced through overheard conversations and furtive glances between adults about religion, politics and the police, up to the moment when the news breaks of the army uprising in Morocco led by Francisco Franco. News of this event is heard over the radio by men at the bar, whilst Moncho and his friend, Roque (Tamar Novas), follow the latest episode in O'lis's relationship. The impending horror of what is to come and the dramatic shattering of his heretofore idyllic life is foreshadowed by O'lis killing Carmiña's dog, the discovery that she is his half-sister, and witnessing Don Gregorio drunkenly getting sick in the town square.

Events then precipitate and Moncho sees the civil guards battering and rounding up his neighbours, and his mother burning his father's radical papers. This culminates in a scene in the town square with the inhabitants gathered around to witness the dissidents who are to be taken away (it is not clear to where). As they watch the prisoners file out Moncho's mother encourages both him and his father to insult them. His father reluctantly shouts at Don Gregorio, "asesino, anarquista, cabrón, hijo de puta" [murderer, anarchist, bastard, son of a bitch], crying as he says the words. Shortly thereafter, on further encouragement from his mother, Moncho shouts "ateo, rojo, rojo, rojo" [atheist, red, red, red]. With these words Moncho has demonstrated that he has absorbed the messages of his conservative mother and turned against his father's beliefs. He chooses the side of the dictatorship over that of liberal, secular pre-Civil War Spain. This is an interesting twist, where often women and children are seen as victims of war and men its actors, Moncho and his mother become both actors and victims. The patriarchal power normally ascribed to a teacher and father become usurped by a more authoritarian one in the guise of the dictatorship and its local mediators, the church and the police, and Moncho and his mother collude in their downfall. To suggest that this is simply positing an anti-feminist reading by the filmmakers would be simplistic, however, it

does place an uncomfortable stress on actions performed by those normally disempowered by authoritarian regimes.

In the seconds preceding this decision to shout, Moncho stares wide-eyed, with a sad expression, tilting his head slightly in apparent empathy with his teacher. Then, it cuts to his teacher on the truck, and cuts back to a close shot of Moncho who begins to shout with his face contorted by anger. On the last 'rojo' the reverse shot shows the teacher's evident sadness as he sees his student shout at him. This is the moment of innocence corrupted, which a simple, minimalist, lilting score underlines.

Alongside other boys, Moncho then runs after the truck carrying the prisoners and throws stones shouting "ateo, rojo, tilonorrinco, espiritrompa" [atheist, red, satin bowerbird, probiscus]. The latter two are words he learned from the teacher, and he is now shouting them as meaningless utterances. This is the darkest scene in the film and gives a different meaning to the narrative that has come before. José Luis Cuerda described this as "una reflexión sobre cómo se mueren las esperanzas" [a reflection on how hope dies] (Asúa 1999, 73). The child's last few months are altered in the light of the ending. This period was merely a brief reprieve from the historical events that are to overtake his childhood and cast the shadow of the civil war and the dictatorship that was to govern over Spain until 1975.

In this final scene, the movement of Moncho and the boys is slowed down and, as the other boys move out of the frame, it focuses on him as he comes to a stop. He is silent, his face is no longer in a grimace and he blinks slowly. This then changes to a freeze frame image of him in black and white, alone on screen, in a close shot, staring after his teacher who has been taken away. His brow is slightly creased and his mouth is set to one side, both of which suggest concern or worry. Underneath the image, in English subtitles, is the statement: "The Spanish Civil War had just begun". The image remains the same for the duration of the final credits, with the same poignant piece of music. The freeze frame image of the child's face is a reiteration of his innocence. The suggestion of this final moment is that this is the innocence that will be destroyed by civil war. In the preceding sequence we have had a brief glimpse of the ugliness of the conflict that is to come and how Moncho will become embroiled in it. The director clearly established Moncho's childhood up to that point as idyllic in order to create greater drama and shock at the change in his world. The implication of a before and after is deliberate. The camerawork, lighting, and music, as well

as the performance of the actor emphasises his childish innocence and even cuteness, and renders the subsequent events more poignant, in part, because we know what is to come.

The shadow of civil war and dictatorship is ever present. This is an instance of what Karen Lury has described, where "children are 'perfect victims', since they are blameless, they make the wrongs of war seem all the more wrong, and the viewer's righteous and explosive response all the more satisfactory" (2010, 105). Moncho is a victim of the change in his society. As a young child the film has evidenced that he has limited agency, that is, most of what he experiences is as a result of encouragement or having been placed in given situations. Therefore, he (unlike his mother) cannot be blamed for shouting at his teacher and the other prisoners at the end of the film. In fact, given that he starts using words that have no bearing on the moment evidences his lack of awareness of what these words really mean. A 'probiscus' and a 'red' are interchangeable signifiers, for him, they are random words in a situation that is beyond his ken.

Similarly, Chava in *Voces inocentes* is the perfect victim. The narrative is concerned with the period leading up to and just after his twelfth birthday. Turning twelve is significant because that is the age when children could be recruited into the Salvadorean army to fight in the civil war (1980-1992). Again, the film is episodic in nature. Chava experiences raids on his school by the army searching for boys over twelve to recruit; falls in love with a classmate; plays with his friends in the surrounding countryside; there are shoot-outs between the army and rebels in the hamlet in which he lives; he is displaced from home, is separated from his mother, joins the guerrillas, is arrested by soldiers, reunited with his mother, and, finally, leaves El Salvador to go and live with his father in the US. This mix of the ordinary and the dramatic makes the story more poignant as the more mundane experiences of childhood are heightened by the experience of war. For example, Chava has problems walking his girlfriend, Cristina Maria (Xuna Primus), home after a day at play with their friends because of curfew. As a result his mother is distraught, fearing the worst, when he returns home late. What is a very ordinary, chivalrous gesture becomes risky during civil war. The dangers of war are ever-present and, again, his innocence is harmed and his everyday is altered by violence. The contrast between the idealised childhood and the violence of war is where the drama lies.

The reasons for the civil war in El Salvador were as a consequence of both local factors, that is, it was an attempt to overthrow an oligarchic system governed by "decades of

dictatorial rule" (Tulchin and Bland 1992, 1) by a series of military leaders in order to create a just and equal society, and, international interference, specifically the Cold War foreign policy of the US government paranoid about the possibility of the introduction of Soviet-inspired Communist rule, south of the border (See, Tulchin and Bland 1992, 2 and Armstrong and Shenk 1982, v-vi). Alongside the "bloody legacy of repression" (Tulchin and Bland 1992, 1), as a result of dictatorial rule, El Salvador had become a "polarized, impoverished and unstable country" (Landau 1993, 66). This is evident in the film through the brutality, meted out on the ordinary people and the poverty in which Chava and his family live. Rather than being concentrated in a single figure, dictatorship became a cycle of governance in El Salvador. Armstrong and Shenk describe it succinctly, "El Salvador had no single tyrant, just seventeen military governments since 1932" up to the Civil War (1982, 111). Similar to *La lengua de las mariposas,* dictatorship is indicated through tension and fear in the film. Unlike *La lengua de las mariposas*, *Voces inocentes* dwells on the brutality of the regime, given that it is set in the bellicose stage of the civil war.

The scene of Chava's departure in *Voces inocentes* is worthy of comment, as it is an uncomfortable iteration of his exceptionality in the light of the final message of the film. His mother, grandmother, younger sister and brother are there to see him off. He holds his mother's hand and she helps him onto the truck alongside other migrants. This gesture, and the expression of concern on his mother's face underline his vulnerability and youth. She is forced to send her child away to the US, accompanied only by a woman to whom she gives money, and so is presumably a coyote. The farewell is slow paced. Chava tells his mother, "no quería que vendieras tu máquina de coser" [I didn't want you to sell your sewing machine], thus reminding the audience of the family's precarious economic position. She tells him not to worry. As he gets into the truck, his mother steps back. This is the first time in this sequence that they appear in different shots. He then stands up quickly, and in reverse shot we see her rush forward and embrace him for the final time, she struggles to contain a sob, and says, "prométeme que vas a estar fuerte" [promise me you'll be strong]. He promises her, she kisses him, and holds his arm as she steps back, letting it go as she moves out of reach. The camera follows her. She then clenches the hand that had held his into her chest, and is evidently struggling to hold her emotions together. The truck moves away as Chava says goodbye to his brother and sister. In the edit it moves between his and their point of view as he and they are further distanced from each other. We then get a medium shot of

his little brother, Ricardito (Alejandro Felipe), in his grandmother's arms, who says, "ahora yo voy a ser el hombre de la casa" [now, I'll be the man of the house], an echo of a statement that his mother had said to Chava, earlier. His grandmother smiles sadly and nods, followed by a quick cut to a close shot of the mother's face, who appears to begin to cry as if the enormity of this statement has just struck her.

It is at this point that a sweeping orchestral score is introduced as we then cut to a long shot of Chava in the truck driving away through the countryside. In a voiceover Chava says, "yo no me quiero ir a los Estados Unidos, pero si me quedo me van a acabar matando. Pero voy a regresar porque prometí a mamá sacar a Ricardito antes de que se cumple los doce" [I don't want to go to the United States, but if I stay they'll kill me. But, I will come back because I promised mom I would get Ricardito out before he turns twelve]. The music swells as he reaches this concluding statement, thus emphasising the emotional impact of the message. This then cuts to a wide shot of a blue sky with small rain clouds. The camera tilts downwards to a wide shot of the roofs of the houses in the small hamlet where Chava lives. He is on the roof with his arms outspread, imitating the sounds of an airplane carrying out an aerial attack. The camera tracks in on him playing war by himself. In voiceover he says, "esta historia podía haber sido contada por Fito o Chele o Cristina María. Pero me tocó a mí. Es para ellos [This story could have been told by Fito, or Chele, or Cristina Maria. But it was left up to me. It is for them].

Given the temporal shift in the events from those that he is seen to directly experience as a twelve year old, to information that this young self cannot know about the future, it is evident that he is now ventriloquising the adult voice. There is a continuity to using the same voice, which we recognise as Chava's, however the obvious mis-match between the voice and what he should sound like as an adult demands a suspension of disbelief. It also draws attention to the use of prosopopoeia, as described by Karen Lury, which is a technique used in fiction to enable the author to speak as another. Lury places an emphasis on the use of this technique to enable the living to speak through the dead, "[p]rosopopoeia is a form of projection; a form of ventriloquism in which the living speak for or through the dead, just as the adult revisits, reshapes and retells his childhood experiences as if he were (still) a child" (2010, 111). Here, she emphasises the separateness of childhood from adulthood as a time distant in the past and removed from adult experience. For Lury, once we have passed into adulthood our child selves are separate, unknowable and, therefore, dead. Chava, speaking

the words of the adult, is carrying out a layered version of this prosopopoeia. He is the child actor performing and narrating the subsequent years of the child character and biographical subject up to his later adult decision to write, and then goes on to profess the adult's modesty that his story is as worthy of those of others and that this account can represent theirs. In this brief voiceover he is child and adult, whereas, if the voice had been omniscient or if it were that of the adult it would have shifted the emphasis from childhood experience to adult reminiscence. This voiceover is both an expression of individual value and a suggestion of the synecdochal power of the narrative.

There is an added poignancy in the naming and the tense he uses in his statement. The 'podía haber sido' [could have been] is the past conditional, which subtly alludes to the fact that all of the children he names have been killed in the course of the narrative. There is an implied clause missing in this sentence, which we understand having followed the story. If they had survived, these children could also have told this story. Therefore his, 'me tocó a mí' [it was left up to me] carries the heavy burden of responsibility of the survivor. There is a randomness implied by the verb *tocar* in Spanish, which, in this context, quite literally means to be touched (by fate) or for it to be your turn or obligation. He is acknowledging that large element of luck involved in his survival over that of the others in the film.

Once he completes the voiceover, having being brought down in the mix, again, the music builds to a crescendo and, on a sustained note, the shot is frozen on Chava mid-movement. Over this image subtitles appear on screen telling us that Chava successfully made it to the US and was reunited with his family six years later. This time, instead of the child's voice it is the implicitly more factual titles on screen that give us this information. The coda continues as the screen fades to black and new intertitles appear informing the audience that: the war lasted a further twelve years with 75,000 dead and a million in exile; the US government contributed personnel, training and equipment to the value of 1 billion dollars; and that 300,000 children have been recruited as child soldiers in the last forty years. Once the sustained note ends, the folk song "Casas de cartón" [cardboard houses] plays over the intertitles for a few seconds and for much of the credit sequence. The narrative has moved from the particular to the global in a short sequence.

An important element of this information on screen is that it is written and not spoken. Here it is worth comparing it to the "The Spanish Civil War had just begun" of *La lengua de las mariposas*. These words appear only in the form of a subtitle. It is information

for a foreign audience that the Spanish-speaking audience was not expected to need. However, the value of this subtitle is not as a translation of words that are uttered or written on screen, but as a translation of culture for the non-Spanish audience. It acts in the same way as the intertitles at the end of *Voces inocentes*, that is, to inform the viewer of the context and significance of the film. It provides a cue to a reading and frames the film within a particular socio-historical field. We are being told by those who chose to include the final subtitle in *La lengua de las mariposas* (who may not be the original filmmakers), that this is what the film means. It is about Spain on the cusp of the Civil War and the tragedy of a child's implication in its horrors. The absence of this statement in Spanish suggests that the Spanish viewer would understand this reading without a prompt, whereas, in *Voces inocentes* the filmmakers have made a judgement that all viewers must understand what this film is about, in part, because they have chosen to broaden it out beyond the local context in which it is set. Their message is that this is not a film just about child soldiers in El Salvador, it is about all child soldiers.

That this is text in both cases is also significant, particularly with regards to the shift between Chava's voiceover and the final intertitles in *Voces inocentes*. Text and writing are privileged over orality and given a higher truth value. Oral utterances are more transient than written, which has a fixity that suggests duration. As Walter J. Ong states, "[t]he spoken word is always an event, a movement in time, completely lacking the thing-like repose of the written or printed word" (1988, 75) and that, in contrast, "[t]hough words are grounded in oral speech, writing tyrannically locks them into a visual field forever" (1988, 12). Words gain permanence through writing, and the editing and selectivity that it entails. Of course, as Ong is eager to emphasise, once literate an individual loses primary orality, that is being free of employing language with the knowledge of how it is written (1988, 12-13). In addition, film originates in a script, however temporary and transient its oral, aural and visual elements may appear. Therefore, the words we hear are constructed with an awareness of the narrative tropes and techniques of other scripts. In addition, as literate viewers, we similarly ascribe text with greater value. Given the privileging of the written in everyday life, even within a temporally bound medium such as film, text has a force that is beyond the spoken. These facts that we are given at the end of the film are also information that this particular child would not be expected to know both temporally and intellectually. Although he has spoken of things outside of his lived experience as a child who has witnessed terrible violence,

knowing about child soldiers in other countries would appear as an additional violation of his innocence and further compromises his childhood. There is a curious contradiction: he can voice an adult's reflexivity on the process of writing, but, his innocence would be damaged by voicing knowledge about the wider world. It also suggests that the voiceover has the additional function of performing innocence regarding the scriptwriter's authority. The final intertitles, though relevant to the film and our reading of it, exist beyond the plot. They are positioned in the same territory as the credit sequence, part of the film that is extraneous to the narrative, yet, in this case, seeks to determine our understanding of it.

Although based on the true-life experience of the co-author of the screenplay, Óscar Torres, the final intertitles of *Voces inocentes* indicate that this is a message film against the use of child soldiers. The narrative sets up a dialectic between 'normal' childhood behaviour and war as a violation of childhood. For many, childhood should be about play. This is underscored by James Garbarino, Kathleen Kostelny and Nancy Dubrow in their book *No Place to Be a Child: Growing Up in a War Zone*. They state, "Play! Children have a licence to play, and in so doing they explore the world" (1991, 11) because, "war danger can lead to emotional trauma, developmental impairment, and extremist, revenge-oriented ideology" in many children (1991, 27). Although, they do acknowledge that not all children are irrevocably damaged by war, "some children develop a precocious and precious moral sensibility" (Garbarino, Kostelny and Dubrow 1991, 27). Their insistence on the need to save children from conflict is in their capacity as child development professionals who have interviewed survivors of conflict. Childhood historians engage differently with this area, taking a more impassioned view. Peter N. Stearns suggests that "[t]he furor over child soldiers reflects a complex mixture of new (if ineffective) global standards and a real deterioration in many children's lives" (2006, 115). There is this tension between the ideal childhood and the real, lived experience of many children.

Garbarino, Kostelny and Dubrow's injunction to preserve childhood for particular activities fits with the idea, current in the twentieth and twenty-first century, of childhood as a time set apart from adulthood, which deserves special protection. This is despite the fact that more children than ever before are engaged in and killed in conflict. Recent numbers suggest that "an estimated 300,000 minors living on nearly every continent were engaged in combat at the end of the twentieth century" (Marten 2002, 2). This is because

> [a]n unfortunate truth behind the military use of children is that they make good soldiers. They can easily handle lightweight modern weapons; they are easily motivated and natural 'joiners', willing to take risks; and, ironically, they can often infiltrate enemy positions and territory because most adult soldiers are reluctant to fire on children (Marten 2002, 2).

Then, even though many children fight and die in conflict and, "in many societies, becoming a soldier is a sign of manhood, accompanied by prestige and honour" (Marten 2002, 6), it is not read as part of a 'normal' childhood in either *Voces inocentes* or *La lengua de las mariposas*. In an interview, the director of *Voces inocentes,* Luis Mandoki echoes the sentiment put forward by Garbarino, Kostelny and Dubrow with regards to what childhood should be about, "[w]hile it was important to tell what happened to kids in the 1980s, the film is more important because these things are still happening today....Children were not born to fight. They were born to play, and that's what this movie is about" (Moeller 2005, np). Here, he is both demonstrating his own awareness of the reality of what happened to children in the 1980s in El Salvador (and elsewhere in Central America), and broadening it out to acknowledge the experiences of many children in the world in the present day, on the one hand, and giving voice to the 'naturalness' of play to childhood, on the other. Underpinning the aesthetic choices in *Voces inocentes* is this concept of the idealized childhood lost through the experiences of war. Likewise the tragedy at the end of *La lengua de las mariposas* is this same loss of childhood innocence for Moncho.

As is evidenced in Chava's miming of the strafe bombing, and the earlier games we witness him and his friends playing, play cannot always be read in direct opposition to conflict. Garbarino, Kostelny and Dubrow state that "[r]eal war is neither the fantasies we dream of when we hear patriotic speeches nor the pretend games we engaged in as children when we played war" (1991, 8). Thereby, they set up adult fantasies alongside childhood games of war, on the one hand, against reality, on the other. This ignores the differences between subjective experiences and positions the 'we' undifferentially. This 'we' is in opposition to a 'them' who experience war and overlooks the children who play at war while war is taking place. It also ascribes an innocence to play which it does not necessarily possess, as it is assumed to be untainted by experience and, here again, childhood is read to be characterised by innocence, and therefore, so too are children's games. In his introduction to *Children and War: A Historical Anthology* James Marten (2002) discusses how children

assimilate war experiences, and he states that children "seem to understand war more instinctively than they do peace. They can conjure up images of the former much more readily and concretely than the latter; peace remains an abstract idea reflecting an inner state rather then relationships among groups" (2002, 5). This is an uncomfortable thought, but has a lot of bearing on the 'fantasies' and 'patriotic speeches' conjured up by Garbarino, Kostelny and Dubrow. Set side-by-side their statements imply that war appeals to our childishness, whether that means our naivety or fantasy, yet children in war is a disturbing idea given our privileging of these innocent qualities in children.

Like *La lengua de las mariposas, Voces inocentes* is very clear that civil war is detrimental to a child's life and tears them away from the normality of play. This is clearly articulated in a poem written by one of Chava's friends, Chele (Adrian Alonso), which Chele reads out in class. This occurs when there has already been an aggressive roundup of all boys aged 12 or over by the army at the school. At this point Chava is only concerned with his girlfriend Cristina Maria, who has just asked her friend, Yanira (Daniela Varela), to pass him a note on her way to the bathroom. As he opens up her note, the visuals cut between close shots of Chava reading his note and medium shots of Chele reading his poem. Chele's poem is brief and poignant,

> Ningun niño de mi escuela quiere ir a pelear
> No les gusta la guerra porque prefieren jugar
> Los soldados los buscan por' los quieren reclutar
> Pero a mí y a mis amigos nunca nos van a reclutar
> [None of the kids in my school wants to fight.
> They don't like war because they want to play.
> The soldiers look for us 'cause they want to recruit us,
> But they will never catch me nor my friends]

The simplicity of its language and the basic rhyming scheme (AABB) is typical of the naïve writing of children, which is the linguistic and lexical rendering of innocence. It also reiterates the filmmakers' belief in what children want and need: play not war. Yet, because this is a simple, irrefutable sentiment (by Western standards) and is one that runs throughout the film, it is an important decision to deflect from the over-sentimentalisation of this moment. This is done by intercutting the visuals with Chava's own little love story, whilst still allowing the message to go across clearly. This scene is all the more affecting for what

takes place immediately afterwards. Yanina leaves the schoolroom and is taken aback by guerrillas who run across the courtyard and upstairs. She returns to class and stands inside the door unable to speak. The teacher asks what is wrong and the camera cuts to a shot of the class looking perplexed. This is immediately followed by a loud blast as the windows are shattered as a result of an explosive attack by the army on the guerrillas. This is followed by a battle, which takes place between the guerrillas and the army with the children ducking the crossfire; that is, all except Chava who runs to the window to watch the fighting and then decides to leave the building, running to his mother who is on her way back from the market. This is characteristic behaviour by Chava who often runs to witness events up-close, despite the evident dangers. It is an exceptionalism, which is typical of the traditional (male) narrative voice of autobiography (See, de Man, 1979). The film runs a fine line between creating tension and excitement in the action sequences and slowing down for the emotional core of the narrative. In general, such as in this scene, it dwells on the moving consequences of civil war on the children, without revelling in a maudlin telling of it, all the while keeping pace with the action.

The significance of childhood innocence is articulated by the radical priest in the film (Daniel Giménez Cacho) in a speech that he gives on the steps outside the church. He says, "Las caras de nuestros niños han perdido la inocencia de su espíritu. En su lugar solo encontramos el miedo. Porque nuestros niños han perdido la esperanza de sobrevivir" [The faces of our children have lost their innocent spirit. In its place, there is fear. Because our children have lost the hope to survive]. This is part of a broader speech where he riles at the injustices meted out to the people of the town by the soldiers, in clear defiance of the beating he has just received that has left him badly injured. This is the last sighting of the priest in the film. His final words, "Hoy, hermanos, ya no basta con rezar" [Today, brothers and sisters, prayer is no longer enough], show his evident anger and frustration at the actions of the soldiers, suggesting that he is off to join the armed movement. In this address, his appeal is to the soldiers, who stand on the rooftops of buildings and around the town square, and also to the townspeople who stand before him.

Making the children the subject of his appeal is to de-politicize his (and others') engagement in the armed conflict. Up to this point, we have witnessed him challenge authority, negotiate with the soldiers, attempt to appeal to their better natures, and declare his own position in the town, all to no avail. His involvement is presented as his only option.

His fight is not an engagement in specific rights, needs or presented as taking sides in a complex political situation, it is for more 'universal' values of the protection of children and justice. The priest also has a synecdochal function. In El Salvador Liberation Theology, a Marxist influenced Catholic movement, had an important role in creating organized groups in rural areas. As a consequence of their engagement and solidarity with the poor and disenfranchised, priests and nuns were beaten, tortured and murdered by the army in large numbers. The most notorious of these killings was the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, in 1980, which was one of the factors which led to the outbreak of civil war (see, Armstrong and Shenk, 1982). This priest in *Voces inocentes* alludes to a broad sentiment that was within Liberation Theology, however, his words are largely devoid of any specific political engagement, which is troubling. His implicit espousal of the violent struggle is significant in the film and indicates a pessimistic turn in the narrative. Where, heretofore, he is represented as a decent man trying to support and protect his parishioners, he is driven to despair and (implicitly) to violence by the soldiers' actions. The focus on the children in this scene, both rhetorically and visually, in the repeated shots of the various children in the diegetic audience, is used as a way of evading politics and appealing to a generalized idea of justice.

The priest's speech has a direct parallel in *La lengua de las mariposas*, where, on retirement, Don Gregorio gives a speech making reference to freedom and the importance of childhood. In contrast to the priest's speech, Don Gregorio's audience is made up of parents, children and dignitaries from the village. He begins his speech with an allegory about a duck, who continues his journey irrespective of the impediments, and then continues with his own commitment to change, concluding "si conseguimos que una generación, una sola generación crezca libre en España, ya nadie les podrá nunca arrancar la libertad" [if we can allow one generation, just one generation to grow up free in Spain, then no one will be able to take away their freedom]. Don Gregorio begins the speech in a light, even tone, then builds towards the end to a rousing, emotional level. Don Gregorio is obviously aware of the political turmoil that the country is experiencing, and, where up to the conclusion of the speech close shots of Don Gregorio are intercut with close shots of Moncho, the final section cuts to the mayor, who storms out at the end. This indicates that the mayor is unhappy with the speech, but also implies that what Don Gregorio has said is contentious. Again, the words themselves are not explicitly political, nor are they grounded in a specific ideology.

Instead, they speak to more universal values of freedom and hopes for the youth. This next generation to whom Don Gregorio is alluding is Moncho, who is wide-eyed in a look that suggests that he may understand the emotions being conveyed, but not the words. This apparent ignorance of the politics being alluded to in the allegorical tale and in the grand rhetoric of Don Gregorio, serve to underline Moncho's innocence and naivety at the complexities of the adult world, from which he is still at a remove.

Adult and child performances convey sentiment, and so too does music. Non-diegetic music is used very deliberately to elicit emotion in both films, but diegetic music is also meaningfully employed, albeit to different ends. In *La lengua de las mariposas* Moncho's brother, Andrés (Alexis de los Santos), joins a local musical group the *Orquesta Azul*, who play a mixture of different pieces, including: Cuban ("El manisero"), the national anthem of the Republic "Himno de riego", and a Spanish pasodoble ("En er [sic] mundo") at local festivals. This music functions, variously, to demonstrate an opening up of Spanish culture to a wider world, situate them temporarily and politically in the Republic, and reflect the popular taste of the era. While the band participates in a picnic in celebration of the Republic, they are never explicitly marked as political. However, one of the members is later arrested, alongside Don Gregorio and is transported away. For Moncho, the musicians are a source of fascination, being part of Andrés's world to which he is witness; of enjoyment, when he attends the festivals and dances with a girl; and, finally, adventure, as he travels with Andrés to another town where the band plays. The positive associations are part of the local colour, but also ways in which the adult viewer can see beyond the wide-eyed innocence of Moncho. For example, this is evident when we see the brutality and deprivation suffered by the young woman Andrés falls in love with, or when the camera focuses on the worried looks of his mother when the police pass by the picnic site as the band play. *La lengua de las mariposas* has this doubling, where it repeatedly reinforces the innocence of the child and the simplicity of his world, all the while drawing attention to what he cannot understand. This technique, in turn, reinforces our awareness of his innocence and ignorance of the wider political tensions taking place, and of the long shadow cast by dictatorship over the story, thus rendering the later historical events more tragic.

There are several popular pieces of music in *Voces inocentes*, the most significant of these is "Casas de cartón" [cardboard houses]. It functions as a leitmotif of sorts that suggests rebellion, as well as conjuring up the terrible conditions in which Chava and his

companions live. It is important to note that the film was to be entitled "Casas de cartón", and Torres credits it as being the main source of inspiration for the film (Tovar 2005, 11). The song is first played by Chava's uncle, Beto (José María Yazpik), during one of the night time gun battles that take place in the hamlet in which Chava lives between the guerrilla's and the army. The gun battle begins just as Chava, his brother, sister, mother and uncle are eating their dinner. Immediately they rush to push a mattress against the window, as we have seen them do before, and jump under the bed. In previous battles, Chava stayed huddled under the bed with his siblings. This time, emboldened by his uncle's presence and curious at what is happening in the next-door house, he rushes out after Beto, who is carrying a gun. They discover that their young neighbour, Angelita (Paulina Gaitan), has been fatally wounded and is dying in her mother's arms. They attempt to help her, to no avail. Once she dies, they return home. Beto puts away his gun and takes out his guitar to play. He strums the opening chords of the song, and Chava's mother tries to hush him. This is another instance of a mother acting conservatively to protect her children, similar to that of Moncho's mother, mentioned earlier. Nonetheless, Beto continues to play and sing, carefully enunciating the lyrics. The song by Ali Primera is typical of the *nueva canción* [new song] movement, with its politically engaged and poetic lyrics which deliberately portray the ordinary consequences of injustice (See, Richards 2005, 36-39). The following are the opening lines:

> Qué triste se oye la lluvia
> En los techos de cartón
> Qué triste vive mi gente
> En las casas de cartón
> Viene bajando el obrero
> Casi arrastrando los pasos
> Por el peso del sufrir
> Mira que mucho ha sufrido
> Mira que pesa el sufrir
> [How sad can the rain be heard
> On the cardboard roofs
> How sad do my people live
> In the cardboard houses
> Down go the workers
> Nearly dragging their heels
> from the weight of suffering
> Look how they have suffered

Look at what it is to suffer]

Written using simple language reminiscent of the child's poem cited earlier, the song has clear ideological intent. The songwriter, and therefore in its enunciation the singer, is identified with the workers and their struggle in the use of "mi gente" [my people]. At the same time the listener is induced to look "mira", not to passively observe, but to understand the conditions in which the people live and work. Its plaintiff musical accompaniment and simple language have a similar effect to that of the later priest's speech: to induce solidarity and to obviate opposition to the sentiments expressed.

The song is repeated again when Chava listens to it on his radio in a dangerous and naive act of rebellion. He walks down the street in front of the soldiers listening to the song on the transistor radio Beto gave to him. It is clearly audible to them. The priest sees and hears this and goes over to Chava and silences the radio. Chava turns it on again, aware that he is being rebellious, but, as a child he is not aware of the real consequences of his action. To save Chava the priest switches his own radio on inside the church and plays it over the loudspeaker. The soldiers tell him to turn it off, and when he refuses they shoot his speakers. Broadcast by *Radio Venceremos*, the guerrilla radio station banned by the authorities, the song is shown to be potent in both its ability to convey messages and to challenge the authorities (See, Germain Lefevre 2006, 239 and Landau 1993, 114-5). In addition, the fact that the priest could turn the radio on in a matter of seconds, given that it was a station that had to keep switching wavelengths to avoid being blocked, is an early suggestion that he is not only able to challenge authority to protect a child, but that he is also sympathetic to guerrilla activities and ideology.

The final time the song is played is over the end credits. Although the song has been directly linked to the people's struggle in El Salvador and established as a specifically radical song in that context, the final intertitles which have broadened the narrative from the specific to the transnational have a complicated positioning with this song.[3] The song is non-specific in its referents, that is, no place names or particular local cultural or political terms are given. Therefore, this song could as easily refer to the people of El Salvador as any other country whose inhabitants live in similar conditions. However, there are two significant elements that would suggest that the song undermines the universal message of the intertitle. Firstly, the

song in its style and melody is of a particular period 1960s-80s, when the *nueva canción* was popular. Although not all of the audience would be expected to know the historical relationship between political movements and the *nueva canción*, the film's narrative clearly establishes this connection. Secondly, linguistically it is located specifically in the Spanish-speaking world. Therefore, there is a logical connection to this in its associations. As a consequence, whilst the intertitles may suggest a wider framework for the narrative, the music brings the audience back to the particular.

Music in both films functions as a symbol of freedom and as a form of resistance against tyranny. Characters associated with rebellious activities are aligned with particular songs. In *La lengua de las mariposas* the musicians play at a picnic associated with liberal values, perform songs with political subtext and one of them is arrested. Likewise, in *Voces inocentes* diegetic music is directly linked to subversion.

As well as these similarities, there are also differences. The physical worlds in which Moncho and Chava live are very distinct. Moncho's house is comfortable, albeit basic, and solidly built in which he shares a room with his brother. Chava is in a single room dwelling, with a leaky, corrugated roof. The weather in *La lengua de las mariposas* is generally dry and sunny. There are several scenes where Moncho is outdoors in the countryside with his friends or teacher and there is an idyllic air. This is achieved not only through the shots flooded with natural or natural effect lighting but also through the use of gentle birdsong and the sounds of insects. When he ventures into a wooded area, normally associated with fear and danger in fairytales, a genre with close affinity to childhood terrors, just as it is in *El laberinto del fauno / Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006) (see, Lury, 2010, 126). In *La lengua de las mariposas* it is just another extension of this peaceful Arcadian idyll. The bright, sunny weather is another element that associates childhood with an idealised time and serves as a sharper contrast to what is to come. If this is what life was like in the pre-civil war years, *El laberinto del fauno,* with its oneiric, savage world is an imagining of the damages caused by dictatorship.

In contrast to *La lengua de las mariposas*, the weather is more extreme and nature is more treacherous in *Voces inocentes*. The forest is a place of mystery and danger, where guerrillas are hiding out and soldiers lurk waiting to attack the children, leaving behind dead bodies in their wake. Whilst there are brief moments of reprieve, where the children play in open fields or beside the river, there is always danger imminent. For example, their play is

curtailed by the curfew, indicated by the church bells tolling and they have to return home quickly. On another occasion, the boys bathing and throwing stones in the river are interrupted by the arrival of one of their former classmates, who is now a soldier. This encounter ends with him threatening them with his rifle. Therefore, there are no safe spaces, and even home, as mentioned earlier, can be caught in the cross-fire.

Children are associated with the physical environment in very particular ways. This is manifest in how mud is utilised as an element that recurs as a trope in the film. According to Lury, who elaborates on its significance for our reading of children in films, mud "functions literally to impede the young protagonists, to manifest physically their unwillingness to ignore one of the principle behaviours of civilization – cleanliness," on the one hand, whilst it "has a contradictory status for children, since playing with mud and getting dirty are often recognised as one of the particular joys of childhood" (2010, 131). She continues, "mud as both a terrifying and absorbing just-is-ness; demonstrating what is exposed, what is left when the world is turned upside down, when the fragile civilisation that the child has barely understood has broken down" (2010, 133). The opening sequence of *Voces inocentes* has an instance of this mud as manifestation of terror and civilisation in collapse. The camera is at a low level, and is held on slow motion rain falling in muddy puddles. The rain is the first sound we hear and is mixed in with the sound of their feet splashing through the puddles and the non-diegetic music. This shot cuts to close shots of army boots, followed another shot of child-size feet wearing ordinary shoes, ill-equipped for the pounding rain and deep puddles they have to tramp through. This cuts to a medium close shot of legs, showing that the children are walking in the middle of what appears to be a small group of soldiers. This fades to a low angle shot of the brow of a hill on the same muddy path, with a head bearing a helmet appearing over it. The single French horn solo on the soundtrack is accompanied by sustained chords on strings, thus connoting a sombre mood (see Meyer 1956, 266-269). A plaintiff oboe continues the theme, taking over from the French horn. There is low lighting in the scene and only the profile of the figures can be seen, therefore they are identified through the sturdy boots, uniforms, guns and helmets of the soldiers, who look tall compared to the small, bedraggled boys, who walk with their hands held behind their heads, wearing t-shirts, trousers and flimsy shoes.

These figures metonymically represent the many others that will be alluded to at the end of the film. Their movement is slow, in rhythm with the music, and fades are used to

transition between shots. Each shot focuses in more clearly on the boys and the soldiers' guns. After the director's credit and the film title, we are told that the film is based on a true story, thereby rendering the scene all the more poignant. In a voiceover, one of the children says, "tengo mucha sed y me duelen los pies. Tengo piedras en el zapato. Seguro, nos van a matar" [I am very thirsty and my feet hurt. I have rocks in my shoe. They're going to kill us, for sure]. At this point the voice isn't identified with any one child, again reiterating the metonymic function of the story. This scene is repeated later in the film, but this time, we recognise the voice to be Chava's. His voice is closely miked and very quiet, thus emphasising his vulnerability. The music continues to be simple and has a wailing tone, as if in lament at what we are seeing on screen. Without coming to any climax this scene transitions to the next through the use of music and the sound and a short shot of heavy rain. The next scene shows Chava watch his father leave for the US in the rain. This is a very slow opening. The use of music and slow motion, as well as the elemental rain and mud, create drama and suspense. In this scene it is not children who become savage through their association with mud, but the adults who force them to tramp through it. It suggests that society itself has broken down, which therefore renders these innocent, small children all the more vulnerable.

These films are part of a canon that "turn to the child as a figure through which to explore the legacy of war and genocide during the twentieth century" (Lebeau 2008, 141). However, they also differ in many ways. Where *Voces inocentes* matches Vicky Lebeau's assessment that cinema has "forged a diverse, sometimes deeply painful, iconography of the child as victim of war, certainly, but also as active, if radically traumatized, participant in adult hostilities" (2008, 141-2). Chava is constantly curious, and eager to become part of the adult world. He may not want to be in the army, because they are represented as carrying out injustices, but he willingly attempts to join the guerrillas. As a child on the cusp of teenage-hood, that period which is understood as the transition into adulthood, his interest in the adult world is part of 'normal' development. In contrast, Moncho is very clearly a young child. He has just started school (albeit delayed through illness), and his interest in the adult world is almost that of an explorer looking at a strange land. Therefore, his actions at the end of the film are rendered all the more tragic in that a distance has been traduced and his childhood is indelibly damaged.

Both films emphasise the children's vulnerability and innocence through a variety of aesthetic choices, casting decisions, and the direction of their performances. The children's physical appearance, in particular their big eyes are given particular attention in the close ups as indicators of a quite literally reproduced wide-eyed innocence. This attention to their eyes is to elicit empathy and to suggest that we are witnessing an authentic distillation of the story through their soulful expressions.

The terror of dictatorship is distinct in each film. In *Voces inocentes*, the fear and danger caused by the state is what damages this child's life. So too do the injustices and poverty in which he lives diminish his existence. His mother has to work hard, sometimes leaving her children alone at night in a war zone, their house is very rudimentary and in poor condition, and the food they eat is limited. This is all implicitly caused by the dictatorship, yet is never really challenged nor debated in the narrative, thus rendering the film a strangely apolitical representation of a highly charged political period. In *La lengua de las mariposas* dictatorship is ever-present as a ghost of what is to come. Even in the dappled light of the idyllic woodland, Franco's presence is there, interestingly, as the tragic darkness that is a dramatic contrast to what we see on screen. It is as if Moncho's childhood is more perfect because of what comes after, and its loss becomes all the more deeply felt. All that we see in both films is through the perspective of what is to come. The children's stories are "double-voiced" because "the child's limited and often unconventional view of the world and war is framed by the adult's knowingness and retrospective understanding" (Lury 2010, 109). It is the directors' and our adult view that places the dictatorship at the centre of the story that the child merely moves through to survive. In *Voces inocentes* and *La lengua de las mariposas* the argument against war is imputed through an emphasis on the cuteness of the child, which is to be read as innocence. In these films the loss of innocence is the great tragedy of dictatorship.

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[1] Marten (2002) suggests that the percentage is actually 90% and states that 1.5 million children were killed, 4 million injured and 12 million were refugees since the 1990s.
[2] See, Kinder (1997) on the significance of setting a film during the Republic in post-1996 Spain.
[3] See, Meyer (1956), on the connotative significance of music within specific cultural and temporal contexts, 258-66.