
Is there a Need for the European Market to Produce a Film Such as *L'auberge espagnole*?

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Abstract – There is an aim for the European market to produce a film such as *L'aubergne espagnoles* for various reasons concerning why it is financed by so many producers. There is a need to “coexist” with the American market and compete with other European films among the so called *films d'auteur* (Copyright) and it was the second most popular French film, after *Amelie*, released in 2001 with a box office success. A film pretending to achieve a broad international market has to represent a heterogeneous group of identities, not just an individual or national identity.

Keywords – European, Identity, l'Auberge, Gender, Spanish.

I. INTRODUCTION

Is there a need for the European market to produce a film such as *L'auberge espagnole*?

It can be considered that there is a need, or at least, a reason for the European market to produce this film. The exploration about the existence of this need and, how and why *L'auberge espagnole* constitutes a target for the European market, will be the basis of this essay. This demand is evidenced, as a matter of fact, by the number of co-producers who participate in the film: France 2 cinema, Studio Canal, Via Digital, Bac Films, Ce Qui me Meut Motion Pictures, Mate Producciones (Productions) S.A and Mate Films.

The film raises a number of important issues concerning why it is financed by so many producers and, why such a project interests them. There are several reasons to take into account. Firstly, not only is there a need to “coexist” with the American market but to compete within the European one and a trial to figure among the European *films d'auteur*. Secondly, *L'auberge espagnole* deals with a current issue which the producers are interested in, because they probably thought that it may bring the wider public to the screen as, in fact, happened. It was the second most popular French film, after *Amelie*, released in 2001 in France, with a box office success. *L'auberge espagnole* was released in 2002, only one year after the success of *Amelie*, in France and between 2002 and 2003 in 36 countries¹.

A number of factors contribute to be such a box office success. *L'auberge espagnole* is not a commercial film but it has a marketing input which can be attributed to several facts:

On the one hand, there are two international settings. The first setting and the most representative is Barcelona, a fashionable and well-known city, which may be considered by Cedric Kaplisch as the perfect place to portray and promote an international vision of Europe and its background. Although, Barcelona is the capital city of Catalonia, it represents a clash of cultures and different identities beyond Catalonia and Spain. Furthermore, Barcelona is portrayed as a sunny and dynamic city; as a result, it is an excellent setting to portray young people and attract the young generation to the screen.

It is remarkable that most well-known places in Barcelona, such as Park *Guell* or *La Sagrada Familia*, the funicular of *Montjuic* and the beach of *Barceloneta* are shown in the film. This choice of setting would almost certainly be different if this film were aimed at a national audience, where other settings representing a more accu-

-rate national identity, would have been possibly chosen.

On the other hand, the second setting is Paris, but only at the very end of the film (last ten minutes). It is remarkable that the setting is Montmartre, 'ou le parisiens vont jamais (where the Parisians never go)' ². It is another common tourist place, chosen for its international recognizability rather than its national specificity, which can be recognizable by a broad public and not only extended to a national public.

The second factor that contributes to the film's box office success is the representation of several Erasmus students of different nationalities and from different backgrounds, who find themselves sharing a flat. The plot constitutes a contemporary subject, focusing on the experience of the Erasmus programme and its intercultural connection; thus, the globalization of Europe taking into account its diversity.

Xabier, the main character, portrays a 25-year-old French Student of Economics, transferred to Spain to finish his degree while learning Spanish, as a condition to obtain a post in the French Ministry. On one side, this fact deals with the experience of an ordinary European student who studies a very popular degree, Economics. Consequently, plenty of young students throughout Europe can identify themselves with the main character. On the other side, Xabier has a formal and stable relationship with his girlfriend Martine, who has known him for four years, and they are both from Paris. It constitutes another very common experience in young people, who can identify themselves with the main character due to his simplicity as a character. Cedric did not choose to represent original or unusual people for his main character, but ordinary people who can be much more familiar and identifiable with most public as he intends to address the wider public, that is to say the majority of people; that is why he chooses a simple character, who has an ordinary life as it is the case for most Europeans.

The other characters of the credit sequence differ from Xabier. His flat mates are not so stereotypical. From the point of view of a search for a European market, this fact implies a need to represent other national identities, which apart from being a fashionable issue has an intended marketing purpose, by means of the representation of stereotypes from several countries. This implies a broad cast of European characters with whom the wider public can identify themselves.

Not only are different nationalities represented but are performed by some of the most representative European actors and actresses of the moment, which contributes to the marketing of the film, since a high percentage of spectators choose to watch a particular movie because of the actors who perform it, among other reasons: starting with France, Romain Duris (Xabier), Audrey Tautou (Martine) and Judith Godrèche (Anne-Sophie) represent France; Cecile de France (Isabelle), Belgium; Kelly Reilly (Wendy), England.

It is relevant to take into account how the need to search for a European market is created by the *auteur*. Starting with the place where all the students are together, *l'auberge*, which is the equivalent of "inn" meaning 'public house or small old hotel where lodgings, drink and meals may be had' ³. *L'auberge* contributes to creating an international atmosphere; the flat is seen as an inn and moreover, as a public space where different people may be admitted. Therefore, it is the key point to reflect a variety of individuals who are mixed together to form a heterogeneous group. There are two scenes which illustrate this idea. The first one, the opening of the fridge, which is departmentalized by sections, everyone has his or her own space in the fridge. It is a metaphor. Every individual has a space in the community; every identity has its own space in Europe, which is, in the end, the common denominator for the *auteur*'s desire to appeal to a Pan-European market. The second example is the

poster with the translation of all the European languages into several brief sentences, which are useful to answer phone calls such as “un moment, s’il vous plait”, (“a moment please”) or “un momento, por favor” (“A moment, por favor”). There is a tendency to create an atmosphere of solidarity among the students who help each other. It is another metaphor, which promotes the spirit of cooperation between nations; the European Union is defined by a plurality of identities, which is reflected within a number of elements in the film.

This raises the question of the extent which the issue of identity is relevant to the need for *L’auberge espagnole* to appeal to a European market.

Firstly, on the one hand, it is significant the fact that the film includes many representations of identity: geographical, gender and sexual: in terms of geographical identity, it focuses on international identity through the main characters and their different nationalities; national identity, through the presence of Spain and France, for example, the representation of typical issues from Spanish culture, such as the “fiesta” in the Spanish bar or the “flamingo” dancer; and lastly, regional identity, through the representation of Catalonia being different from other regions of Spain, for instance, the lecture scene where the Erasmus students ask the teacher to speak in Spanish and he says ‘Si quiere hablar castellano, vaya usted a Madrid o a Latinoamérica’ (‘If you want to speak Spanish, go to Madrid or Latin America’). On the other hand, the film deals with other forms of identity, such as genre. Homosexuals (Isabelle) vs Heterosexuals.

A film pretending to achieve a broad international market has to represent a heterogeneous group of identities, not just an individual or national identity; if it represents a national identity it will achieve only a limited market. A national French film will have a restricted appeal attracting mostly French public whereas an international film may attract a broader public to the screen.

Secondly, it is important to take into account that to achieve success, European films need to find funding and distribution channels 4. This film counts with funding because it is a large co-production and with distribution. *L’auberge espagnole* has a successful formula which has, in fact, some similarities to the American formula: ‘They aim to attract a mass audience by providing dramatic narrative, pace and escapism and they represent a fashionable modern viewpoint to the younger generation’. 5. The formula of *l’auberge espagnole* can be similar but the style is very different. On the one hand, pace and escapism are found in *l’auberge espagnole*. The story itself is plain of escapism, Xabier escapes from France and goes to Spain, he searches freedom. When he is given the work in the Ministry he escaped from that because he found it too oppressive. The ministry is seen as an alienated space, he looks for freedom and he decides to follow his old desire to be a writer. On the other hand, *l’auberge espagnole* represents a fashionable viewpoint to the younger generation, it is a film addressed to youth.

The third question will be why? One of the aims of the film is the question of identity and how is developed throughout the whole film, I find that there is a connection between it and the marketing target of producing the film because the film tries to incorporate the whole of Europe attending to its diversity. The film can be an author's film but it is also a "commercial" film or at least, it has a commercial aim because the film wants to "sale" an image of the Europe of the 21st century.

II. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DIRECTION OF INVESTIGATION

There is a need of the European market in financing this film because the European market need to differentiate from the North American market and produce different films. The Europeans are trying to constitute an identity

in common to seek similarities among them to form a pan European identity instead of multicultural identities in every country of the European Union.

The further direction of investigation may be the aim of European cinema to constitute an idea of European Identity through films.

Filmography 1:

1. Title: *L'auberge espagnole*.
2. Director: Cedric Klapsch.
3. Screenwriter: Cedric Klapsch.
4. Cinematographer: Dominique Colin.
5. Editor: Francine Sandberg.
6. Music: Cyril Moisson, Dominique Dalmasso.
7. Year of release: 2002.
8. Production Company: France 2 cinema, Studio Canal, Via Digital, Bac Films, Ce Qui me Meut Motion Pictures, Mate Producciones (Productions) S.A, Mate Films.
9. DVD reference: pn1997.2A9

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



First Author

Esther Casares Carmona, Lecturer and researcher, translator and writer. She was born in La Coruna (Spain) and she has studied at the Universities of Santiago de Compostela, master in Spanish Letters at the University of Saint Andrews and PhD at the University of Salamanca. She has published several articles regarding cinema criticism.