

***Aunque la jaula sea de oro: Representations of the United States
as a Jaula de Oro in Cultural Productions about Immigrants***

**Patricia E. Reagan
Randolph-Macon College**

As a response to a surge in immigration and migrant caravans, President Donald Trump designed his 2018 zero-tolerance immigration policy in an attempt to decrease migration and to increase the criminalization of people whom the government caught entering the United States unlawfully. As part of that policy, between April and June of 2018, the government separated an estimated 3,000 children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border (“Q&A”) and incarcerated them, although the practice of separation anteceded the enactment of the policy and continues to occur today. Trump cited public outrage as a primary factor in signing an executive order to end family separation, at least officially. As Amelia Cheatham reports, in 2019, border officials detained 76,020 unaccompanied minors, and 85% of these young migrants arrived in the United States fleeing the poverty and violence of Central America: specifically, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. When the advent of migrant caravans, the influx of unaccompanied minors, and child separation policies came into the public eye, so did images of migrant children in cages in the media and elsewhere. For example, the 2020 Super Bowl halftime show headlined by Jennifer Lopez and Shakira featured kids in illuminated cage-like structures singing “Let’s Get Loud,” which Lopez confirmed was an intentional statement. Lopez declared: “Other people can try to build walls, keep us out or put us in cages. We are proud to recognize that all of us together are what makes this beautiful country truly great” (qtd. in Herbert).

The notion of a cage, however, is not new to immigrant narratives. Artists, composers, singers, directors, and activists alike have employed the metaphor of *la jaula de oro*, or the golden cage, to describe the situation of undocumented immigrants in the United States from at least the 1980s to the present day. The United States promises riches, prosperity, and the dream of a better life to all that enter the country, but this promise, instead, becomes a trap, particularly for the undocumented immigrant who faces difficulties in every aspect of life, including fear of police detention and deportation, difficulty in obtaining work, cultural and familial disintegration, nostalgia for their country of origin, lack of health insurance, lack of access to public resources and higher education, and even driving privileges. For undocumented immigrants, the so-called “American Dream” becomes an impossible reality, and although opportunity abounds, the immigrant is trapped by the United States.

The notion of a *jaula de oro* became popular in immigrant narratives in the United States when Los Tigres del Norte recorded a *corrido* by that name written by Enrique Franco in 1983. In this study, I examine several works that capture the promises and failures of migration to the United States for Mexican and Central American immigrants through the metaphor of a golden cage that simultaneously attracts and traps. These works include 4 versions of the song including the original from 1983, a recording by Julieta Venegas in 2001, one by Juanes with Los Tigres del Norte in 2011 and a parody called “La jaula de Trump” written by Pedro Palacios and recorded by Los Tres Tristes Tigres in 2016. This study also examines the notion of a *jaula de oro* in 3 films including Sergio Véjar’s 1987 film *La jaula de oro*, Pablo Véliz’s *Cartoneo y nopalitos* (*Carboard Dreams*) from 2010, and Diego Quemada-Díez’s, *La jaula de oro* from 2013.

Historical Origins

The metaphor of a golden cage is neither limited to immigrant narratives nor to one geographic region. Indeed, physical golden cages with metaphorical significance existed historically and continue to exist across many cultures and in multiple mediums. For example, in the early Ottoman empire, rulers often had multiple heirs to the throne, and the descendants practiced fratricide, as Jerrold Post and Robert Robins indicate. When the Ottoman government abolished fratricide in 1596, they instituted the *kafe*: “Prospective rivals for power were imprisoned—some as young as two years of age—in a luxurious pavilion within the palace (‘the golden cage’)” (160). Ottoman rulers even imprisoned some heirs for as many as 50 years. Although this socio-cultural practice was mentally damaging for the imprisoned and affected their leadership potential, it expanded and at one point “became a requirement for succession” (160).

In Spain, a golden cage also appears in the early 1600s in lines 46-51 of “Epístola moral a Fabio” (“Moral Epistle to Fabio”) by Andrés Fernández de Andrada: “Más quiere el ruiseñor su pobre nido... [que] el metal de las doradas rejas” (“The nightingale loves more his poor nest... [than] the metal of golden bars”).¹ In this poem, the poetic voice calls upon Fabio to stop following the riches of courtly life and to return to his native Sevilla (Fernández de Andrada 59). Later, in 19th-century Spain, the neoclassical Spanish poet Juan Meléndez Valdés repeats the image of the “doradas rejas” (“golden bars”) in his Romance XIX, “El colorín de Filis” (1838) (“Phyllis’s goldfinch”), as a parallel between a caged goldfinch and the protagonist, Filis, who marries yet feels “deprived of her freedom” (Corberó 16).

In 1900, Arthur J. Lamb and Harry von Tilzer composed their song “A Bird in a Gilded Cage,” which centers on a woman who married for wealth rather than love. *The Gilded Cage* is also the name of a 1916 silent film from the United States, a 1955 British film, and a 2013 French-Portuguese film, which respectively center on a woman who chooses the wealthy suitor over her beloved, a stolen piece of artwork for which the film is named, and a Portuguese family living in France who come into an inheritance and prepare to return home to Portugal. In art, *The Gilded Cage* is the title of a painting from the Irishman Saint George Hare (1908) that features a shackled woman, and an Evelyn De Morgan painting (1919) featuring a young woman who looks longingly out the window as she is trapped inside with her older husband.

As Sveta Roberman indicates, the golden cage (*zolotaia kletka*) is a metaphor used by Russian immigrants in Germany to describe their lives of “marginalization and exclusion” (64). Roberman explains the concept *zolotaia kletka* was inspired by Hans Christian Andersen’s 1844 story “The Nightingale,” which presents a “life of material comfort but of limited freedom” and is commonplace in post-soviet discourse (196). Although examples of the golden cage abound in various cultures throughout history, the link that bonds this image together in our collective consciousness is the feature of a subject who is imprisoned by their circumstances while being surrounded by wealth, beauty, or opportunity that is inaccessible to them. The metaphor of a *jaula de oro* in the context of undocumented Latinx immigration from the 1980s to the present functions analogously.

“La jaula de oro” (“The Golden Cage”) in Song²

The Norteño group Los Tigres del Norte from Sinaloa, Mexico, are the primary driving force in popularizing the metaphor of a *jaula de oro* in immigrant narrative. Recorded in 1983, the song

was included in an album of the same name that was released in 1984. The Tigres del Norte settled in San José, California, and by 2011 had recorded 44 *corridos* about undocumented migration (Alcántara Ceja 2). Los Tigres produced the largest number of these songs under the writing of composer Enrique Franco (Alcántara Ceja 88). In “La jaula de oro,” an undocumented Mexican immigrant addresses his migration story, his personal fears, and the broken relationship with his children to conclude that the United States is a *jaula de oro*.

As the song begins, the poetic voice shares that he has been an undocumented immigrant in the United States for ten years after bringing his wife and children when they were young:

Aquí estoy establecido
en los Estados Unidos,
diez años pasaron ya
en que crucé de mojado,
papeles no he arreglado,
sigo siendo un ilegal.

I have established myself here
in the United States,
ten years have passed by
since I crossed here as a wetback,
I have not legalized my status,
I am still an illegal alien.

Tengo a mi esposa y mis hijos
que me los traje muy chicos
y se han olvidado ya
de mi México querido,
del que yo nunca me olvido
y no puedo regresar.

I have my wife and my children,
I brought them when they were very young
and they have already forgotten
my beloved Mexico,
the one I never forget
and the one I cannot go back to.

In these lines the poetic voice expresses how much time has passed in which he has been unable to change his documentation status while also voicing a sense of nostalgia about Mexico and the changed relationship that his children have towards Mexico. Enrique Franco confirms in an interview the biographical nature of the song, as he too spent ten years living as an undocumented immigrant after his original documents expired: “Entonces ya no pude venir, llegó el momento en que ya no pude salir. Sí pude salir, lo que no podía era entrar. Y entonces eso empieza a pesar” (“Then I couldn’t come anymore, the moment had arrived when I couldn’t leave. Yes, I could leave, but what I couldn’t do was return. And that starts to weigh on you”) (Ramírez-Pimienta and Pimienta 53).³

In the next stanza the poetic voice asks a rhetorical question that first introduces the idea that he feels like a prisoner. By the end of the stanza the United States has been established as the prison that contains him, although it is a cage made of gold:

¿De qué me sirve el dinero
si estoy como prisionero
dentro de esta gran nación?
Cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro,
que aunque la jaula sea de oro
no deja de ser prisión.

What is money good for
if I am living like a prisoner
inside this great nation?
When I remember my country, I even cry,
When I remember my country, I even cry,
it is nothing but a prison.

While this stanza shows that the poetic voice has garnered some measure of economic success during his time in the United States, it reveals that his financial success is an insufficient exchange for what he has had to give up—in particular, his freedom.

Later in his interview, Franco addresses another facet of the song, the fears of the poetic voice, fears that were and continue to be ubiquitous among other immigrants with whom he had contact: “Entonces te empiezas a poner nervioso, así, con un carro de policías. Evitas al máximo una infracción de tránsito, cualquier cosa de esas te puede poner así” (“Then you start to get nervous around police cars. You avoid getting a ticket as much as possible, anything like that makes you anxious”) (Ramírez-Pimenta and Pimenta 53). Just as Franco experienced these feelings, he uses the poetic voice to express this exact sentiment:

De mi trabajo a mi casa, yo no sé lo que me pasa, que aunque soy hombre de hogar, casi no salgo a la calle, pues tengo miedo que me hallen y me puedan deportar.	From work to home, I do not know what is going on with me, although I am a man that likes to be at home, I rarely go out, because I am fearful that they will find me and can deport me.
---	---

Indeed, he fears leaving his house, being caught by the police, and being deported, which contributes to his feeling that he is a prisoner trapped in the United States. Further, as Rosemary King affirms, here “The architectural space suggested by the US as a metaphorical jailhouse highlights the anxiety of an undocumented worker feeling a panopticon of Anglo surveillance” (224). The economic success the poetic voice experiences juxtaposes with his feeling of imprisonment, thereby leading him to the golden cage metaphor.

Finally, as Alcántara Ceja shows, in the full album *La jaula de oro*, the children of immigrants are a new figure in the Tigres del Norte *corrido*, which reflects the changing immigrant reality: “La configuración de la identidad-alteridad de los hijos aparece como un cambio en la realidad migratoria” (“The configuration of the children’s identity-alterity appears as a shift in the migratory reality”) (101). The song addresses multiple elements regarding the disintegration of the family, including the fact that the children of the poetic voice do not speak Spanish or even talk with him at all; they have forgotten México; they think like Americans; and they deny their Mexican heritage:

Escúchame hijo, ¿te gustaría que regresáramos vivir a México? --Whatcha talking about, dad? I don’t wanna go back to Mexico, no way, dad.)	(Listen, my son, would you like to go back to Mexico? to Mexico? --Whatcha talking about, dad? I don’t wanna go back to Mexico, no way, dad.)
Mis hijos no hablan conmigo, otro idioma han aprendido y olvidado el español. Piensan como americanos, niegan que son mexicanos,	My children do not talk to me, they have learned another language and have forgotten Spanish. They really think like Americans, they deny they are Mexicans,

aunque tengan mi color.

although they have my skin color

Franco confirms the issue of language loss in child immigrants that led him to write the song: “Conocí muchos casos precisamente así de familias que los papás no hablan inglés y los hijos no hablan español” (“I actually met many families just like that in which parents don’t speak English and their children don’t speak Spanish”) (Ramírez-Pimiento and Pimienta 44). In summary, this Tigres del Norte song is a powerful foundation to the repeated imagery of the United States being a Golden Cage in migrant narratives. The poetic voice suggests that even though success can be found in the United States it comes at a tremendous loss: the loss of homeland and family, the loss of heritage, the loss of freedom and of living without fear, and the loss of relationships with one’s own children because of language loss and cultural differences.

American-born Mexican singer Julieta Venegas’s remake of the song in 2001, as well as the collaboration with Colombian pop superstar Juanes in 2011, helped to spread the regional Mexican song to more generations and beyond Mexican-specific ethnicities. In the case of Venegas’s recording, Nancy Flores, an Austin-based journalist who reported on Venegas’s performance at the Pachanga Latino Music Festival in 2014, shares that her mother recognized the song when they were on a road trip together listening to Venegas’s album. Flores writes, “I realized the song was about immigrant parents, like mine, who sacrificed everything so their children could achieve their dreams in a new country.” Venegas’s recording helped connect Flores to her mother as well as to the past. In the case of the feature with Juanes, Fox News proclaimed that “There may be tons of regional Mexican bands, but Los Tigres del Norte are proving that they are ‘Los meros más meros,’ (roughly ‘the real deal’ or ‘the best of the best’) launching the first ever Regional Mexican MTV *Unplugged* concert.” This unplugged series featured collaborations with Juanes, Calle 13’s Residente, Zach de la Rocha from Rage Against the Machine, Andrés Calamaro, and Paulina Rubio. The Tigres song featuring Juanes made it to the Billboard pop music charts, which renewed and spread its popularity. In song, the metaphor established by the Tigres del Norte became a timeless sentiment for immigrant families and their shared experience of loss and imprisonment within a space of wealth (not just monetary) largely inaccessible to many members of their community.

“La jaula de Trump” (“Trump’s Cage”)⁴

Los Tres Tristes Tigres is a comedy group from Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, that creates parodies of popular songs. Such is the case of the 2016 song “La jaula de Trump” (“Trump’s cage”), a parody of the Tigres del Norte song set to the same tune. The popularity of Enrique Franco’s version of the song allows Los Tres Tristes Tigres to have a silent dialogue with “La jaula de oro,” which many listeners know by heart. Mentioning the cage in the title only, Los Tres Tristes Tigres remove the gold and declare the nation to be *Trump’s* cage, a place that has lost its gleaming appeal. Like its predecessor, the song focuses on various elements of undocumented immigration, in this case, following the 2016 election of Donald Trump. The song focuses on the trials undocumented immigrants face, and poses a challenge followed by a feigned apology directed to Trump in an apostrophe at the end of the song.

From the beginning, the song warns the undocumented immigrant that there is little hope for immigrants now that Trump is the president:

Pobre de Estados Unidos.
Yo traigo aquello fruncido
y yo creo que es muy normal,
pues Donald Trump ha ganado,
quien papeles no ha arreglado,
ha valido madre ya.

Poor United States.
My you-know-what is puckered
and I think it's very normal
because Donald Trump has won,
anyone who is still undocumented
is pretty much screwed.

Then the song explores Trump's open rejection of immigrants. According to the poetic voice, life is going to be difficult because Trump doesn't want to hear from immigrants and will be discriminatory against them.

Creo que va estar bien canijo
porque ya ven lo que dijo,
no nos quiere pos ni hablar.
Ahora sí estamos jodidos.
Ahora a ver como me olvido
de Wal-Mart y Disneyland.

I think it's going to be really tough
because you saw what he said,
he doesn't even want to talk to us.
We're seriously screwed now.
I don't know how I'll forget
Wal-Mart and Disneyland.

Aunque vayas con dinero,
creo que va a estar bien culero
con la discriminación.
Cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro
porque allá compraba todo
en las outlet y en la Ross.

Even if you have money,
I think it's going to be pretty shitty
with the discrimination.
When I remember, I even cry
because I used to buy everything there
at the outlets and at Ross.

As a parallel to the idea of gold in the *Tigres del Norte* song, this song also addresses the loss of the financial benefits of living in the United States, although the poetic voice twists the message to highlight frivolous capitalism instead of financial success like the 1983 song did. Namely, the poetic voice imagines leaving the United States and mourning the loss of Walmart, Disneyland, and shopping at outlet malls and Ross.

Regarding Trump's touted border wall, the poetic voice knows it will be tall, although he makes a bet on one of his testicles that his fellow Mexicans will still be able to jump over it:

Ya me imagino ese muro.
Va estar bien alto y seguro
pa' que no puedan cruzar.
Yo conozco bien mi pueblo.
Van a ver. Me mocho un huevo
que se lo van a brincar.

I'm already imagining that wall.
It's going to be really high and guarded
so they can't cross.
I know my people well.
You'll see. I'd bet my balls
that they'll jump over it.

A voice in the song whispers to be careful or they will lose their visas, and the song ends with an apostrophe complimenting Donald Trump, although the video for the song clearly disparages Trump's image:

Eh ya párale!, ¿no crees que esto nos afecte con lo de las visas?	Hey, stop it! Don't you think this will affect us with our visas?
No tienes tan feo el pelo desde siempre lo sabemos que serías el ganador ;) Donald Trump, no seas tan gacho déjanos ir al gabacho te ves de buen corazón	Your hair is not so ugly We always knew That you would be the winner ;) Donald Trump, don't be so crappy Let us go to the U.S. You seem like you have a good heart

As David García indicates, the Mexican *corrido* has often been a vehicle for “resistance to Anglo injustice” and “La jaula de Trump” (“Trump’s cage”) is no exception. García adds that Los Tres Tristes Tigres appropriated Trump’s “stereotypical representations of minorities to justify public policies... [by] playing into a depiction of a determined border-wall jumper, exaggerating his traits in a Trump-like manner. With these stereotypes, humor becomes a method of subversion and political criticism.” The group posted the video with the comment “Aún no lo podemos creer” (“We still can’t believe it”) in reference to the election of Trump.

“La jaula de oro” in Film. *La jaula de oro* directed by Sergio Véjar (1987)

Sergio Véjar’s film *La jaula de oro*, could be described as a prolonged music video that acts out the Tigres del Norte song and portrays the difficult situations described in the song with named characters who face the same challenges as the song’s poetic voice. The film adds a personal and political context to the situation first described by the song. The film builds towards a specific resolution that is not present in the song by having the protagonist return to Mexico when he simply can’t handle the challenges to migrants living in the United States. In the film two immigrant brothers from México, Rodolfo (Fernando Almada) and Reynaldo (Mario Almada), have been living in Los Angeles for 13 years. Rodolfo, the foreman of the factory where both brothers work, has documents while Reynaldo is an undocumented immigrant and a laborer in the factory. Reynaldo rejected the process of trying to obtain a visa or green card because he dreams of returning to México, although his kids and wife do not want to leave the United States. Reynaldo has five children: Hortensia (Isabel Montañez), Agustín (Hernán Hernández), Margarita (Cecilia Camacho), Catalina, and Benito.⁵ After the death of his daughter Margarita, Reynaldo decides to leave for Mexico, and after an inner struggle, his wife, María José (Carmen del Valle), and two youngest children, Benito and Catalina, agree to join him. The film is set after the passing of the Simpson-Rodino Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, the first piece of legislation in the United States attempting to address undocumented immigration. The law included sanctions for employers who hired undocumented workers, increased border security, and amnesty opportunities for some immigrants to gain permanent or temporary legal status (Chishti and Kamasaki 1). For Ana Raquel Minian, it is this IRCA legislation that really solidified the United States as a *jaula de oro*. Prior to the IRCA, migration patterns were circular. With fortified borders, however, migrants “did not return to Mexico out of fear that they would be unable to cross the border north again,” becoming physically trapped in the United States (209). Therefore, even in the few years that transpired between the original publication of the song and

the film, the political landscape for immigrants in the United States had shifted dramatically and the film portrays that change.

Within the first few minutes of the film, Reynaldo establishes his discontent with his situation in the United States by telling his brother: “Según nosotros es que veníamos a darle duro al jale—uno, dos o tres años ahorrar algunos centavos y regresarnos a México” (“According to us we came to work hard—for one, two, or three years, and to save a few dollars and return to Mexico”), although Rodolfo retorts, “Aquí estamos mejor” (“We’re better here”) (0:03:45-0:03:49). The legal status of the two brothers shows how documented and undocumented migrants are treated in differing ways and how they fit into society. Reynaldo tells Rodolfo: “Tú hablas así porque estás inmigrado y tu familia legalizada. Yo no. Yo del trabajo a mi casa y de mi casa al trabajo con miedo de salir a la calle y que me agarre la migra” (“You talk like that because you’re settled and your family is documented. I’m not. I go from my job to my house to my job, fearful of going out and being detained by immigration”) (0:04:49-0:05:15). In this statement, the film “follows the story line established by the corrido” (Curry 50), and as we can see, Reynaldo uses some of the same words as the song in his dialogue.

Véjar’s film presents continuity with the familial difficulties that the poetic voice of Franco’s song faces; just living in the United States negatively affects Reynaldo’s relationship with his children. Consequently, Agustín does not agree with anything his father says or does. For example, when discussing the difference between Mexicans and Chicanos, Agustín tells Reynaldo, “Simplemente, usted y yo, papá, ya no nos entendemos” (“To put it bluntly, dad, you and I just don’t understand each other anymore”) (0:11:55-0:12:00). Then when Reynaldo contemplates his desire to return to México, his daughter Catalina expresses her desire to stay in the United States, and they directly use the words from Franco’s song in their conversation:

REYNALDO. “Hija, ¿te gustaría que regresáramos a vivir en México?”

(“Daughter, would you like to go back to live in Mexico?”)

CATALINA. “What are you talking about dad? I wouldn’t like to go back to Mexico. No way, dad.”

REYNALDO. “No me hables en inglés.”

(“Don’t talk to me in English.”)

CATALINA. “¿Por qué? Yo nací aquí. Yo soy chicana.”

(Why not? I was born here. I’m Chicana.”)

REYNALDO. “Tú eres mexicana. Eres como nosotros. Como yo. Sangre de mi sangre.”

(“You’re Mexican. You’re like us. Like me. Blood of my blood.”)

(0:22:13-0:22:45)

Reynaldo then directs his comments to his youngest son, Benito, who has told his father that he will go with him back to México: “Un día nos vamos a largar de esta inmensa jaula de oro.” (One day we’ll leave this immense golden cage”) (0:23:00-0:23:05). In a scene later in the film, Véjar portrays how the notion of speaking English and rejecting Spanish is supported by people outside of his own family. Reynaldo has an encounter with Catalina’s teacher who exacerbates the conflict between speaking English or Spanish when she tells Reynaldo that “La niña tiene razón al exigirle que le hable usted en su idioma. Es lo que nosotros les pedimos a los padres de la escuela. Porque nosotros no lo podemos hacer todo. Necesitamos que ustedes nos ayuden en sus casas hablando inglés” (“The girl is right to demand that you speak to her in her language. That’s what we ask of

parents from this school. Because we can't do it all. We need you all to help us by speaking English at home") (0:54:02-0:54:15). Her comment noticeably impacts Reynaldo, although he is kind and polite to the teacher. At this point his drive to leave the United States accumulates and the subsequent encounter with his other daughter solidifies this need.

Reynaldo arrives at his oldest daughter Hortensia's house just as her husband hits her. In a heated moment, she blames her father's inaction towards legalization in the United States as the reason she married the man she did—so she could get documents—but suggests that his abuse is the price she must pay to follow the American Dream. In this moment, Reynaldo again feels a tremendous sense of loss. Although he migrated to give his family a better life, her accusation makes him feel that he failed. Finally, Margarita, who outwardly seems to be fond of her father, encourages him to go back to Mexico even though she will stay in the U.S. to finish her university studies. Earlier in the film, she tells her friend Alicia (Amalia González) that she is pregnant but cannot tell her father because she does not know how he will react, underscoring that beneath the surface she too has a broken relationship with her father as a product of her family's migration experience. The viewer never finds out Reynaldo's reaction because, when she tells her Anglo boyfriend that she is pregnant, he indicates that he does not want to have the baby, and Margarita dies upon being struck by a car rushing away from his house in a distraught state. In Reynaldo's case, instead of being a land of opportunity, the United States directly leads to the death of one daughter and the estrangement of three of his other children.

One major indication of the changing landscape in the United States in Véjar's film in the years between the song and the film is the attention paid to "addressing the impact of the newly enacted immigration reform bill" which as David Maciel argues is a central focus in the film (38). This viewer sees that this law impacts Reynaldo directly as his manager lays him off from his job because of his lack of documentation. His boss tells him: "Reynaldo. Es el ultimo día que trabajas aquí. Ni modo. El patrón no quiere más ilegales. La nueva ley se lo prohíbe. No quiere que lo multen" ("Reynaldo. This is the last day you work here. Sorry. The boss doesn't want any more illegals. The new law prohibits it. He doesn't want to be fined") (0:34:01-0:34:14). Ironically, the man who is hired to take his place, Raul, gets the job because he obtained a fraudulent social security card, which was one of the major points of ineffectiveness of the IRCA (Chishti and Kamasaki 2). In a rally attended by many young Chicano activists, Professor Ramírez denounces the IRCA and imparts the film with a social message that has gained importance in the years between the song and film:⁶

El trabajador indocumentado es un invento del gobierno de este país. La nueva ley Simpson-Rodino convierte a los indocumentados en chivos expiatorios y quieren hacer creer al pueblo estadounidense que su gobierno trata de corregir graves problemas como el narcotráfico y el desempleo es una medida de todo punto de vista y mentalidad policiaca y unilateral. Solo están creando mano de obra barata y un nuevo tipo de trabajadores. Los patrones vulnerarán más los derechos humanos porque amparados por la ley podrán denunciar a los trabajadores que pretendan mejores salarios y trato más justo. Serán ahora trabajadores sin derecho para negociar, reclamar, o demandar justicia. Eso simple y llanamente se llama esclavitud.

(The undocumented worker is a fabrication of the government of this country. The new Simpson-Rodino law turns the undocumented into scapegoats, and they want the American people to believe that their government is fixing serious problems like drug trafficking and

unemployment. It's a measure that stems from a unilateral mentality of policing. They're just creating a cheap labor force and a new kind of worker. The bosses will infringe even more on human rights because, protected by the law, they can denounce workers who seek better salaries and more fair working conditions. The workers will have no rights now to negotiate, complain, or demand justice. This is, plain and simple, slavery.) (0:49:49-0:50:43)

As Professor Ramírez adds, the problem will persist for as long as the rich take advantage of the poor. He ends his speech with the message from Franco's song: "Porque aunque la jaula sea de oro, no deja de ser prisión" ("because even though the cage is made of gold, it is nothing but a prison") (0:52:30-0:52:35).

Véjar also connects the social commentary and the film more generally to Los Tigres del Norte, whose band members appear in the film. Hernán Hernández played Agustín, while Jorge Hernández and Raúl Hernández, who left Los Tigres in 1996, also appear in the film. The group plays before Ramírez's speech to unite the group and again at the end of the film, this time displaying a banner that announces their name. For the first time during the film, Agustín shows a level of understanding for his father who has finally left on his return trip to Mexico. He says, "nosotros, su familia, le respetamos su decisión" ("We, his family, respect his decision") (1:30:40-1:30:43), and he dedicates the song to his father. Curry and other critics have claimed that Reynaldo's return to Mexico "suggest[s] to its viewers a nationalistic message that could be read something like, 'Stay in Mexico'" to avoid the inevitable fate of the *jaula de oro* that the immigrant subject will face in the United States (50). The protest of the IRCA and Agustín's message at the end of the film, however, suggest otherwise. The film is directed to all migrants: those who return home and those who stay in the United States and do their best to thrive no matter the adversities and challenges. For Reynaldo, returning to Mexico is the right decision, but for Agustín, his place is to fight for the rights of Chicano workers, which he achieves through music. In the film this is specifically the music of the Tigres del Norte.

Véjar's film is simplistic in its development, plot, and cinematography. The supposed English-speaking characters are Spanish speakers with relatively thick accents in English, and the flatly developed characters "seem more like contrasts or stereotypes than believable persons" (Maciel 41). Despite the film's shortcomings, and its low-budget production, I suggest that it captures a unique moment in the formation of immigrant identity and a changing U.S. landscape and aids in making the notion of *la jaula de oro* part of the collective consciousness in immigrant narrative and thought.

***Cartoneo y nopalitos* by Pablo Véliz (2010)**

Over twenty years later, Pablo Véliz's film shows that the metaphor of the United States as a cage or trap for immigrants is still active and valid. Although Véliz's film does not mention the Tigres del Norte song directly, images of cages and bars and the direct reference to the United States as a *jaula de oro* solidifies Véliz's engagement with the metaphor and connection with the viewer's pre-existing knowledge of its symbolic commentary. Véliz's film adds non-Latino groups that are bound by this metaphorical cage. Like Véjar, Véliz also engages with a current and ongoing political situation, in this case, Arizona's SB1070. As Alisa Reznick describes, this piece of legislation, which became known as the 'show me your papers' law, allowed Arizona law

enforcement personnel to request proof of an individual's legal status at will or the individual would be detained. Ultimately, the law led to racial profiling, mental health repercussions for documented and undocumented Latinos, and family separations.

In Pablo Véliz's 2010 film *Cartoneo y nopalitos (Cardboard Dreams)*, the protagonist, Carla (Mayra Alejandra), is a young undocumented immigrant. At the beginning of the film, Julio (Jorge Rodríguez Jr.) and Ana (Carla Véliz) get a visa to bring their children, Carla, and Lorenzo (Alfredo Lomeli), to visit Julio's father in the United States. The family overstays their visa. The film jumps forward many years and now Carla, who dreamed of being a doctor, has graduated at the top of her class and is hired by a physician's office. Her immigrant status forces Carla to turn down the position because she does not have a social security number. Instead, despite her efforts and determination, she becomes a delivery driver for a Thai restaurant while she comes to grips with her limited opportunities. One day, while she is making a delivery, the police pull Carla over and place her into the system for deportation.

Unlike Vejar's film that focuses on the perspective of the parent Reynaldo, Véliz's film focuses instead on the perspective of the child immigrant, specifically Carla who is also trapped by the United States. Carla realizes that her dream of becoming a doctor is impossible when she fills out paperwork for the position in the doctor's office and must leave some information blank. A staff member tells her to complete that information and then says, "In the meantime, I'll just make a copy of your driver's license and social security card, okay?" (0:39:20-0:39:25). At first, Carla claims to have forgotten her wallet but finally asks "Is there any way that I can work if I don't have what you just asked me for?" (0:39:50-0:39:56). The staff member responds: "But you cannot work without a social. Do you not have one? Is that what you're trying to tell me?" (0:40:05-0:40:15). When Carla assents, he suggests that she go get her "legal status" (0:40:43-0:40:45), demonstrating his ignorance that there is simply no way for her to change status. There is no legal pathway to residency or citizenship for her, which is the way in which she is imprisoned.

When first trying to convince Ana to stay in the United States, Julio tells her that he wants his kids to learn English and get an education, but Ana admits to Julio that she is afraid "a que ya no quieran regresar" ("that they won't want to go back") (0:28:43-0:28:46). Nevertheless, Julio is convinced that the United States will offer them better opportunities. He tells Ana: "Mira. Aquí nos espera un mejor futuro. Y si no lo es para nosotros lo es para nuestros hijos" ("Look. We'll have a better future here. And if it's not for us, it will be for our kids") (0:28:12-0:28:19). After many years have passed and the family is still in the United States, Ana tells her father-in-law, Don Homero (Pedro Castaneda), that the fears she had when they first immigrated were well-founded. She tells him that her children have indeed forgotten Mexico, that they do not remember the grandmother they left behind, and that the entire family lives in constant fear of deportation and racial profiling because of Arizona's SB1070, which is featured in a news segment on the television playing in the background. Ana shares her desire to return to Mexico and visit her mother, but she knows she cannot—because she would not be able to return. Ana spells out her problem with the United States as an immigrant amidst tears: "Lo que Julio me promete es como una jaula de oro... pero sigue siendo una jaula" ("What Julio promises me is like a golden cage... but it's still a cage") (1:03:46-1:04:02) solidifying the implications of the Tigres del Norte song in this film.

After finding out that her legal status will impede her from being a doctor, Carla becomes hostile with her parents and blames them for her situation. When Ana corrects Carla's pronunciation of *arrachera* in the Mexican grocery store, she replies: "Pues, ¿qué quieres mamá?"

Si estamos en Estados Unidos. ¿Qué no hablo inglés?” (“Well, what do you want, mom? We’re in the United States. Don’t I speak English?”) (1:25:24-1:25:28). Carla then proceeds to lay out her frustration to her mom in a powerful scene:

¿Por qué? ¿Por qué nos trajeron aquí si no podemos vivir como los gringos? ¿Te das cuenta que no puedo hacer todo lo que yo más quiero. Y no más me refiero a mi trabajo. Me refiero a todo. No tengo opciones. No tengo ni siquiera licencia de manejar. Es horrible no poder tener la libertad de andar así sin preocuparme... Ustedes nos amarraron a esa vida... Ustedes nos trajeron aquí sin pensar que algún día nos calaría a mí y a Lore... Tu escogiste esta vida para mí. No yo... Es tu culpa que estamos así.

(Why? Why did you bring us here if we can’t live like Americans? Do you realize that I can’t do what I most want to do? And I’m not just talking about my job. I’m talking about everything. I have no options. I don’t even have a driver’s license. It’s horrible to not have the freedom to go about without worrying... You tied us to this life... You brought us here without thinking that one day it would be too much for me and Lore... You chose this life for me. Not me. It’s your fault that we’re like this.) (1:25:28-1:26:13)

In this exchange, Carla brings up her feelings of being trapped, limited, and restricted as an undocumented immigrant. Through Carla’s perspective here, Véliz shows that the children of migrants just like their parents (i.e., the poetic voice in the Tigre’s song and Reynaldo in Véjar’s film), also feel trapped by the *jaula de oro*.

Meanwhile, a second plot line focused on Krupa (Nivi Singh), who has come to the United States from India, highlights other dangers and downfalls of immigration. Krupa appears to be a victim of trafficking, although the film does not clearly define her status. She is waiting for a “guardian” to pick her up who will pay Amit (Ahmed Lucan) for her entry to the United States in exchange for her. When her “guardian” backs out, Amit offers Krupa to be a surrogate mother to Clay (Tom Lagleder) and Eva (Nova Aragon), who are desperate but unable to have a baby. Causing devastation to Clay and Eva, Krupa decides to keep the baby for herself and returns home by turning herself into immigration officials to be deported. Despite Carla and Krupa never officially meeting within the film, their storylines are intimately connected. Julio, Carla’s father, saves Amit’s life during a robbery in the store; Carla delivers Thai food to Clay’s family when they are negotiating Krupa’s surrogacy; Carla passes Krupa, Clay, and Eva on the way to a doctor’s appointment; and when Krupa leaves the couple devastated, Clay is the angry police officer who arrests and deports Carla for a minor traffic violation due to the anger of his own situation. At the end of the film, Carla and Krupa sit together while they await deportation although they do not speak to one another. With the addition of Krupa’s story, Véliz effectively extends the metaphor of the United States as a golden cage to non-Hispanic immigrants.

In four separate scenes, the film’s imagery solidifies this symbolic commentary for Ana, Krupa, Clay, and Eva, and finally for Carla. First, when Ana is talking to her father-in-law she walks towards a white birdcage in the foreground when she calls the United States a golden cage. Then, Krupa is sitting in bed contemplating her brother’s death by drowning, her migration to the United States, and the growing child in her womb when the camera flashes to the white slats of the closet door, which stylistically resemble the bars of a birdcage, in her room in Clay and Eva’s house. When Clay and Eva realize that Krupa has abandoned them and they will remain childless again, Clay, in a fit of anger, destroys yet another barred structure, the white crib that sits in the

corner of the room. Finally, Carla finds herself behind the white bars of a jail cell as she waits for her dream to come to a painful end through her deportation.

Effectively, Véliz employs the motif of white bars as an equalizing force for everyone in the film. Ana's desire to give her children the best life possible is just as great as Carla's desire to be a member of society and a doctor. At the same time, Clay and Eva's desire to have a baby of their own is equivalent to Krupa's struggle and desire to recover from her guilt because she believes she is responsible for the death of her brother. Véliz's dedication of the film to his sister drives this point home further: "For my sister Benny and the thousands of dreamers. This story was inspired by Benita Véliz, who was arrested and placed under deportation proceedings in 2009. Her relentless heart made her the first undocumented person to speak at the Democratic National Convention in 2012. Today she is the landmark leader of DREAMers everywhere" (1:43:47-1:44:11). Like Véliz's sister, Carla embodies the hope of children who came to the United States when they were young but find themselves with an uncertain future because of their residency status when it comes time to go to college, get a driver's license, or find a job. The fact that Carla had no fault in choosing to immigrate is one of the central arguments that lawmakers have used in trying to pass the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) since its inception in 2001. Although the bill has failed in multiple attempts and iterations, in 2012, by executive order, President Barack Obama signed DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), a similar bill, into order after the DREAM Act stalemated in Congress ("DACA and the Dream Act"). Although President Donald Trump rescinded the program in 2017, on January 20th, 2021, the Biden administration reinstated DACA on his first day as president ("Biden Executive Orders"). In March 2021 the House of Representatives passed a new iteration of the DREAM Act, The American Dream and Promise Act of 2021, but the legislation failed to pass in the Senate (H.R. 6). In *Cartoneo y Nopalitos*, Carla's story shows how she is unable to pursue her dream of being a doctor or contribute to society in the way that she would like despite her intellectual capacity and work ethic, effectively rendering the United States a golden cage for her and the countless others in similar situations.

***La jaula de oro* by Diego Quemada-Díez (2013)**

Although Franco's song does not surface in Diego Quemada-Díez's film, as Curry indicates, "the film title activates an intermedial relationship between the musical and filmic texts, which in turn actualizes an entire series of associations with the migration genre" (49). Furthermore, as Curry elaborates, through invoking the genre with the title, the viewer is able to imagine the push and pull factors that are at play for the young protagonists in their decision to migrate, even if these factors are not part of the film (53). Alicia Estrada concurs that the song adds to the film's message although it is absent from it: "The *corrido*'s dystopia foreshadows the film's characters broken 'American dream' and their foreseeable isolation from USA as well as from Mexican and Guatemalan societies" (179). While both Véjar and Véliz's films center on immigrant life in the United States for Mexican families, Quemada-Díez's *La jaula de oro* is a road story with a documentary feel that focuses on the journey of three teenagers from Guatemala (and another teen they meet in Mexico) as they attempt to cross the border to the United States. The journey for these teenagers displays the types of perils that await immigrants from Central America who cross multiple borders. These migrants are also subjected to the dangers of being undocumented in

Mexico, which could include rape, robbery, gang violence, trafficking, and even death during their journey (Lie 140-141).

In the film, Juan (Brando López), Sara (Karen Martínez), and Samuel (Carlos Chajon) leave Guatemala City and meet Chauk (Rodolfo Domínguez), who speaks only Maya-Tzotzil, in Mexico. The depiction of transnational migration in Quemada-Díez's film is far from idealized, as the group faces various trials along their way to the United States. For example, the Mexican police rob them, and they are deported back to Guatemala (even though Chauk is Mexican). Following this demoralizing defeat, Samuel decides not to attempt immigrating again. The remaining trio completes much of their journey aboard the *Bestia*, the immigrant "train of death," and the train functions as the axis of the danger they face. They escape apprehension by immigration authorities and briefly work on a sugar plantation. After they return to the train, heavily armed violent criminals hijack it, rob the passengers, and kidnap the women passengers. The hijackers discover Sara, who has been dressing like a male since leaving Guatemala, abduct her, and assault Juan and Chauk. The viewer never discovers Sara's fate.

As the enduring pair continues their journey northbound, a teenager from Guatemala offers to help them cross the border, but instead, he swindles, robs, and sells them to another man who holds them for ransom in order to collect money from their relatives already in the United States. The leader of the group releases Juan when he realizes that Juan is from Zona 3, the poorest area of Guatemala City, where people live and work in the garbage dump, but Juan returns to plea for Chauk's life with the little bit of money he had sewn into his pants, which he had intended to use to cross the border. Finally, when Juan and Chauk arrive at the border, they get help from traffickers in exchange for smuggling drugs, but the traffickers abandon them in the desert in the United States, where an immigrant hunter shoots Chauk at random. In the end, Juan is the only one who makes it across the border, and he takes a job at a meat factory. The film concludes as he looks to snow falling from the sky, reminding him of Chauk's recurrent dream of arriving to the United States and seeing *taiv* (snow), which in this film serves as a stand in for gold in the *jaula de oro* metaphor.

While the notion of the *jaula de oro* in cultural representations about immigrants has focused primarily on migrant life in the United States after arriving, Quemada-Díez's film adds considerations to the metaphor that extend to the journey to arrive in the United States, particularly for the migrant from Central America through moments of being trapped in the film. The group faces state officials twice, in the form of the corrupt local police who steal their belongings and deport them, as well as the immigration officials who stop the train and attempt to detain them. Then, traffickers hold them against their will three times in their journey: first, when the traffickers take Sara and rob Juan and Chauk; second, when the group detains and holds Juan and Chauk for ransom; and third, when they cross the border with the drug traffickers who take their cargo and abandon them in the desert.

The other consideration that Quemada-Díez's film adds to the *jaula de oro* metaphor is the outcome of the migration journey. How bad must the situation of poverty and violence be in Central America that so many people begin a journey with such poor survival/arrival odds? In the film, only one of the four youths who starts the journey finishes it, which strongly suggests that although the North American public may see the so-called "migration crisis," the average individual does not see or understand *the half of it*. Moreover, in Quemada Díez's film, it is not just that the United States *becomes* a trap for undocumented immigrants living in the nation, but the film suggests that the Central American migration crisis is happening *because* of situations

created by the United States, such as policies that spread gang growth and violence, United States government-backed wars and overthrown democratically elected governments, neocolonial politics, and free trade programs that destroy local economies and benefit only the wealthy.⁷

The imagery of the film emphasizes this critique. For example, the biggest criticism of consumerism, capitalism, and the immigrant's role in that system comes after Juan crosses the border. The first images of Juan in the United States are of him observing a busy highway system and gripping a chain-link fence that will come to represent his entrapment as he looks at a factory with an American flag waving in the breeze. Juan takes the lowliest job at the factory, scraping the bloody meat and fatty meat debris from the floor; once inside the factory, the color white contrasts Chauk's dreams of snow with the deplorable nature of Juan's job. Juan's uniform consists of a white meat apron, white helmet, and white hairnet. Moreover, he faces white machinery and white conveyer belts with white fluorescent lights hanging over him. Despite the uniform whiteness of his environment, this white ubiquity is starkly juxtaposed by the other Latino-looking faces that surround him. The expression on his face is one of defeat and absence. Even the meat scraps that Juan picks up from the floor and piles high in a container are white because they are devoid of blood and lifeless, much like Juan feels now that the fallacy of the American Dream overpowers the damning reality of the *jaula de oro*.

At the end of the film, Juan leaves the factory and looks up at the falling snow. It is not a pure or cleansing force, but rather a painful reminder of all that Juan and his three friends sacrificed and lost to be in the United States. As Neil Archer suggests, "the bleached starkness and abjection of the American Dream is experienced by those who get to the other side – in this film, in the form of a vast and dehumanizing meat-packing factory – ironically underscores the partly illusory nature of the migrant's dreams" (91). Similarly, as Laura Hubner shows, "The American Dream collapses as Juan, who had believed in western materialist or capitalist dreams ends up in a meat-processing factory under dire working conditions" (275). Juan surely never imagined the dire situation that awaited him in the United States, although a conversation at the beginning of the film prefigures this arrival at such a cruel ending when the police detain and deport the group from Mexico. Attempting to avoid deportation, Juan tells the police that they are Mexican and from a little border town called Sueños de Oro (Golden Dreams). To poke fun at Juan an officer says ironically to him: "¿Sueños de oro? ¿Iban a hacerse ricos en Estados Unidos? Pues, ya no llegaron" ("Golden dreams? Were you going to get rich in the United States? Well, you didn't make it then") (0:24:18-0:24:24). As Juan discovers, even though he does arrive to the United States, he was wrong about it having any resemblance to his *sueños de oro* ("golden dreams"). It may have been the allure of prosperity that opened the doors to the cage and then, Juan, the only arriver of his group finds himself trapped within the nightmare as an employee of the meat factory.

Undoubtedly, Juan's life must take a significant turn for him to begin to accept the cruel reality inside of the meat factory. As Archer notes, although Guatemala is "home to economic hardship and disparity," in the end, it appears "almost utopian by comparison" (91). A humorous scene in the middle of the film, where Juan chases a chicken that he steals for his group to eat on their journey, helps to exemplify this utopic vision. In that scene, Juan finds himself unable to kill the chicken with a rock that he picks up from the ground, even though his group desperately needs the food. After petting the chicken, Chauk cradles it as he breaks its neck, showing the stark difference between the consumerism and consumption of the meat-processing factory in the North and the connection of the individual with his product of consumption in this scene. As the furthest removed from capitalism and consumption, Chauk "embodies the presumed ancestral knowledge

and sensibility to kill the chicken” (Estrada 189). This also surfaces when Chauk helps cure Juan’s injuries and there is a subtle suggestion that he has some sort of “supernatural knowledge and powers” to help heal him (Estrada 185). The film seems to suggest this healing power is a result of his heightened connection with nature that is lost in consumerism.

The very presence of Chauk and his death play a part in revealing structures of power that underscore North American neocolonialism in the film. Chauk joins the group simply because they coincide, but then he tries to befriend them despite their inability to communicate with one another. Juan’s initial rejection of Chauk underscores the problem of racism that prevails towards Indigenous people, even by other Latin Americans, and the symbolic pictures with props that the group takes along their journey supports this racism. Sara and Samuel take a picture with an American flag and the Statue of Liberty, although neither arrives to the United States. Chauk dresses up as an Apache Indian in a scene with snow, while Juan dresses up as a cowboy with a waterfall behind him. These two scenes that pit the Cowboy (Juan) against the Indian (Chauk) call attention not only to their personal rivalry but also make a broader commentary on the mistreatment of marginalized groups. The police deport the group, which Juan blames on Chauk. He yells “Ya no quiero ir cargado con este indio” (“I don’t want to be laden with this Indian anymore”) (0:29:53-0:29:56), and he pushes Chauk to ground and violently assaults him. Sara, who has made a point to befriend Chauk from the onset, warns Juan: “Una más y los dejo solos. Conmigo los dos o ninguno” (“Do that one more time and I’ll leave you both behind. Both of you are with me, or neither”) (0:30:29-0:30:34). Juan eventually changes his attitude towards Chauk, and by the end of the film, he shows he would be willing to take a bullet for him when the man who demands a ransom asks him to choose.

Juan and Chauk both survive that threat, although a short time later a minuteman shoots Chauk in the desert in the final moments of their crossing to the United States. As Nadia Lie indicates, the “minimalist rendering” of Chauk’s death scene “suggests that Chauk’s death will be erased from history as a ‘non-event,’ once again illustrative of modernity’s indifference to its victims” (144). Furthermore, “Chauk’s dressing up as a North American Apache in front of the camera foreshadows his death on American territory, as yet another ‘Indian’ killed by an anonymous ‘cowboy’” (146). This symbolic representation reiterates the invisible nature of the migrant who is trapped in the *jaula de oro*. In Franco’s song, the poetic voice makes himself invisible to avoid detention or deportation; in Quemada-Díez’s film, the marginalized group is invisible to the ones in power due to their marginalization. The same invisible quality applies to Sara. Her captor discovers with sick glee, “¡Ésta es hembra!” (“This one’s a girl!”) (0:56:40-0:56:41). He touches Sara’s body and comments: “Qué rico, ésta ha de ser virgencita, chingón” (“Sweet! This one must be a virgin, damn!”) (0:57:08-0:57:12). This, along with the fact that her captors put her directly into the large SUV instead of into the cargo truck with the other women, suggests that her youth and potential virginity will lead to a special and more terrible fate. Just like Juan and Chauk will never see her again, the viewer is forced to speculate about her after she is kidnapped. Regardless, Sara is unmistakably invisible and erasable to her destination—the United States—and this invisibility makes her abduction possible and gives her captors impunity.

Sitting in a drainage tunnel as they arrive in the United States, Juan tells Chauk, “Siento como si tuviera un zoológico en mi estómago, como si un montón de animales estuviera corriendo por todo mi cuerpo de la emoción que vamos a ir al otro lado. Yo siento que todo lo que miremos allá va a estar así bien tuanis”⁸ (“I’m so excited we’re going to the other side that I feel like I have a zoo in my stomach, as if a bunch of animals were running all over my body. I think that

everything we'll see over there is going to be awesome"). Chauk responds in Tzotzil, and Juan's counter response: "Todo va a salir bien y vamos a llegar hasta donde queremos" ("Everything will be fine and we'll get to where we want") (1:31:47-1:32:28) gains an ironic quality when Chauk dies shortly thereafter. In considering the expression on Juan's face when he works in the meat factory, it is apparent that he has not arrived where he desired. Instead, he finds himself entrapped in a *jaula de oro*. While this film takes the most liberty of the three films analyzed in its portrayal of the notion of a *jaula de oro* originally presented by the Tigres del Norte song it becomes evident that the metaphor has expanded not only to the immigrants who arrive but also to those who try to migrate and fail as well as to those who live in the dire poverty perpetuated by capitalism who are unable or unwilling to accept the dangerous odds of migration.

Conclusion

While the Tigres del Norte first established the golden cage metaphor as a component of the Latino immigrant narrative, in recent years, it began to play a much more significant role in the global immigrant narrative. For example, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei recently erected a public and provocative sculptural intervention, *Gilded Cage*, in the Doris C. Freedman Plaza of Central Park in New York City, just a few short blocks from Trump Tower in response to Trump's enhanced border wall. UAP Studios installed the piece, and as Nicholas Baume, Daniel Palmer and Katerina Stathopoulou reveal, Weiwei's project references the metaphorical associations of the golden cage but now as a broader commentary on the global refugee crisis: "Likewise the artist's chosen title for the piece metaphorically suggests superficially attractive situations that might be constraining or confining at the same time, perhaps inviting First World audiences to consider their privilege and what other types of freedoms it may keep them from" (59). In 2018, *Gilded Cage* was moved to Venice. In May 2020 it was blocked from installation at Blenheim Palace, as Mark Westall reports, suggesting continued controversy. After a year of deliberations, however, it was unveiled there in the summer of 2021 for long-term exhibition.

News articles reporting Latino deaths in meat factories because of crowded working conditions, lack of protective gear, and no sick leave or hazard pay during the Covid-19 crisis (Gamboa) reveal that being trapped inside a *jaula de oro* extends beyond cultural production to continue to be a striking and disconcerting reality for immigrants within the United States. The notion of the United States as a *jaula de oro* for the immigrant contradicts the allure of opportunity due to the difficulties and unforeseen consequences faced by many migrants. While the Tigres del Norte introduced the metaphor to discourse in Latino migration, it has taken on a life of its own and now forms part of the collective consciousness reflecting the contemporary reality of migrants in the United States that continues to evolve but remains problematic and marginalizing.

Notes

¹ In his critical edition, Dámaso Alonso discusses the uncertainty of the authorship and the uncertain publication date for "Epístola moral a Fabio." The English translation of this poem can be found in Rivers, pp.251-258.

² The English translation of the song is taken from Chew Sánchez, pp.48-49.

³ Unless otherwise stated, translations are by the author.

⁴ Permission to reprint lyrics of "La jaula de Trump" has been granted by Pedro Palacios – Los Tres Tristes Tigres.

⁵ Information about the child actors playing Catalina and Benito is not available on the physical DVD nor available on websites such as IMDB.com or Filmaffinity.com.

⁶ The name of the actor who played Professor Ramírez is unavailable.

⁷ See for example the collection of essays *Riesgos en la migración de menores mexicanos y centroamericanos a Estados Unidos de América*, edited by Oscar Misael Hernández-Hernández, or Ana Raquel Minian's *Undocumented Lives*.

⁸ Central American slang for “awesome” or “cool.”

Works Cited

- Alcántara Ceja, Cecilia Cristina. *Continuidad y cambio de la representación del migrante indocumentado en los corridos de los tigres del norte, 1971-2011*. 2012. El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Master's Thesis. www.colef.mx/posgrado/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/TESIS-Alcántara-Ceja-Cecilia-Cristina-MEC.pdf.
- Alves, Ruben. *La Cage Dorée (The Gilded Cage)*. Zazi Films, 2013.
- Archer, Neil. *The Road Movie: In Search of Meaning*. Wallflower Press, 2016.
- Baume, Nicholas, Daniel S. Palmer and Katerina Stathopoulou. *Ai Weiwei: Good Fences Make Good Neighbors*. Yale UP, 2019.
- "Biden Executive Orders Preserve DACA, Extend Student Loan Deferrals, More." *ACE: American Council on Education*. 25 January 2021. <https://www.acenet.edu/News-Room/Pages/Biden-Executive-Orders-Preserve-DACA-Extend-Student-Loan-Deferrals-More.aspx>.
- Blenheim Art Foundation. "Ai Weiwei, *Guilded Cage* (2017)." <https://blenheimartfoundation.org.uk/collection/>
- Cheatham, Amelia. "U.S. Detention of Child Migrants." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 10 Feb 2020, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-detention-child-migrants.
- Chishti, Muzaffar and Kamasaki. "IRCA in Retrospect: Guideposts for Today's Immigration Reform." *Migration Policy Institute*, vol. 9, 2014, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/irca-retrospect-immigration-reform>
- Corberó, Bruno Antón. *Influencias del pensamiento estoico y el tópico del Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea en Andrés Fernández de Andrada y Meléndez Valdés*. 2019. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Thesis, dipòsit digital de documents de la UAB, ddd.uab.cat/record/211564.
- Chew Sánchez, Martha I. *Corridos in Migrant Memory*. U of New Mexico P, 2006.
- Curry, Richard. "The Migration Genre in *La jaula de oro*: Voids and Virtues." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 36, 2018, pp. 47-68.
- "DACA and the DREAM Act – A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States." *Howard University Law Library*. <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/immigration/daca>
- De Morgan, Evelyn. *The Gilded Cage*. 1919, Watts Gallery, Surrey.
- Estrada, Alicia. "Decolonizing Maya Border Crossing in *El Norte* and *La Jaula de Oro*." *The Latin American Road Movie*, edited by Verónica Garibotto and Jorge Pérez. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Fernández de Andrada, Andrés. *Epístola Moral a Fabio y Otros Escritos*, edited by Dámaso Alonso, *Real Academia Española*, 2014, www.rae.es/sites/default/files/HOJEAR_Epistola_moral_a_Fabio.pdf.
- Flores, Nancy. "Cultura en Austin: Julieta Venegas headlines Pachanga; festival debuts Latino plays: Cinco de May celebrations." *Statesman*, 24 April 2014, www.statesman.com/article/20140424/NEWS/304249622.
- Franco, Enrique. "Jaula de oro." *Jaula de oro*, performed by Los Tigres del Norte, Fonovisa, 1983.
- . "Jaula de oro." *MTV Unplugged: Los Tigres del Norte and Friends*, performed by Juanes and Los Tigres del Norte, Fonovisa, 2011.

- . "La jaula de oro." *El mas grande homenaje a Los Tigres del Norte*, performed by Julieta Venegas, Fonovisa, 2001.
- Gamboa, Suzanne. "Latinos' Coronavirus deaths at meat processing plant raise alarms about worker safety." *NBC News*, 14 April 2020, www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latinos-coronavirus-deaths-meat-processing-plant-raise-alarms-about-worker-n1183916.
- García, David Xavier. "Singing resistance on the border." *OUPblog*, Oxford UP, 19 September 2017, blog.oup.com/2017/09/singing-resistance-americoparedes-corrido/.
- Gilling, John. *The Gilded Cage*. Tempean Films, 1955.
- Gratereaux, Alexandra J. "Los Tigres del Norte Premier First Ever Regional Mexican MTV Unplugged." *Fox News*, 22 May 2011, www.foxnews.com/entertainment/los-tigres-del-norte-premier-first-ever-regional-mexican-mtv-unplugged.
- Hare, Saint George. *The Gilded Cage*. 1908, Stourhead Estate, Wiltshire.
- Herbert, Geoff. "J. Lo confirms 'kids in cages' in Super Bowl halftime show, issues statement." *Syracuse.com*, 4 February 2020, www.syracuse.com/entertainment/2020/02/j-lo-confirms-kids-in-cages-at-super-bowl-halftime-show-issues-statement.html.
- Hernández-Hernández, Oscar Misael. *Riesgos en la migración de menores mexicanos y centroamericanos a Estados Unidos de América*. El Colegio de Tamaulipas, 2016.
- "H.R. 6 American Dream and Promise Act of 2021." *Congress.gov*, 117th Congress 2021-2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6/all-actions?overview=closed#tabs>
- Hubner, Laura "The Fairy-Tale Film in Latin America." *Fairy-Tale Films Beyond Disney: International Perspectives*, edited by Jack Zipes, et al., Routledge, 2015, pp. 262-77.
- King, Rosemary. *US-Mexico Borderland Narratives: Geopoetic Representations from the Mexican American War to the Present*. 2000. University of Arizona, PhD Dissertation. apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a377203.pdf.
- Knowles, Harley. *The Gilded Cage*. World Film Corporation, 1916.
- Lamb, Arthur J. and Harry Von Tiler. "A Bird in a Gilded Cage," 1900, parlorsongs.com/issues/2001-10/thismonth/featurea.php.
- Lie, Nadia. *The Latin American (Counter-) Road Movie and Ambivalent Modernity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Maciel, David. *El Norte: The U.S.-Mexican Border in Contemporary Cinema*. SCERP and IRSC Publications, 1990.
- Minian, Ana Raquel. *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration*. Harvard UP, 2018.
- Palacios, Pedro. "La jaula de Trump." *Facebook*, performed by Los Tres Tristes Tigres, 10 Nov. 2106, www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154495651071343.
- Post, Jerrold M. and Robert S. Robins. *When Illness Strikes the Leader: The Dilemma of the Captive King*. Yale UP, 1995.
- "Q&A: Trump Administration's 'Zero Tolerance' Immigration Policy." *Human Rights Watch*, 16 August 2018, www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/16/qa-trump-administrations-zero-tolerance-immigration-policy.
- Quemada-Díez, Diego, director. *La jaula de oro*. Machete Productions, 2013.
- Ramírez-Pimenta, Juan Carlos and Jorge Pimenta. "¿Todavía es el corrido la voz de nuestra gente?: Una entrevista con Enrique Franco." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* vol. 23, 2000, pp. 43-54.

- Reznick, Alisa. 'Show me your papers': A decade after SB 1070." *Arizona Public Media*, 30 July 2020, <https://news.azpm.org/p/news-splash/2020/7/30/177558-show-me-your-papers-a-decade-after-sb-1070/>.
- Rivers, Elias L., editor. *Renaissance And Baroque Poetry of Spain: With English Prose Translations*. Waveland Press Inc., 1988.
- Roberman, Sveta. *Sweet Burdens: Welfare and Communalism among Russian Jews in Germany*. SUNY Press, 2015.
- Véjar, Sergio, director. *La jaula de oro*. Tekila Films, 1987.
- Véliz, Pablo, director. *Cartoneo y nopalitos*. Cinevélez Productions, 2010.
- Weiwei, Ai. *Gilded Cage*. 2017, Southeast Entrance, Central Park, New York.
- Westall, Mark. "Ai Weiwei's Gilded Cage blocked from Blenheim Palace by Historic England." *Fad Magazine*, 22 May 2020, fadmagazine.com/2020/05/22/ai-weiweis-gilded-cage-blocked-from-blenheim-palace-by-historic-england/.