

Edited by Dolores Tierney\* and Guest Editor Olivia Cosentino

*Today, after its wins for Best Screenplay and Best Director at the Golden Globes Mediático reups its Special Dossier on Roma, the film topping many [personal](#) and [institutional](#) lists for best film of 2018, with contributions from a roll call of distinguished and rising star academics some of whom are regular contributors to the blog: [Paul Julian Smith](#), [Pedro Ángel Palou](#), [Deborah Shaw](#), [Ignacio Sánchez Prado](#), [Jeff Middents](#), [Olivia Cosentino](#), [Belén Vidal](#) and [Roberto Carlos Ortiz](#). Mediático would like to thank these contributors for their speedy responses and their quick takes on Roma, and Olivia Cosentino's great editing skills which have enabled this dossier to come "hot off the press."*

### **Special Dossier Introduction and a personal experience of watching Roma**

by Dolores Tierney

On a grey Sunday morning, I took my children to Bethesda, Maryland to play in a park whilst I watched a film that, on that day, seemed to be all about childhood, and more importantly who does the actual child rearing: Alfonso Cuarón's breathtaking *Roma*. Two-and-a-bit hours of intense watching later, where I tried to absorb the incredibly detailed and evocative 1970s' décor (by production designer Eugenio Caballero), I emerged blinking to find my girls (with their dad) in a taco restaurant. Having watched a movie where children are often in peril[i] (foreshadowing the film's climax) and Cleo's baby dies, I guiltily sneaked in beside them in the booth to nuzzle their necks (and steal a bite of their tacos).

I've just published a [book](#) in which I argued for Cuarón (and others) as transnational auteurs moving between the Global South and Global North without really changing their aesthetics or perspectives on the processes of transculturation, migration, displacement and loss. But on that Sunday, I watched (and cried at) *Roma* less as a film academic and more as a mother, who, like the film's Sofia (Marina de Tavira), has also counted on other women to help raise her children. Not the kind of live-in domestic help that Cuarón's film details; nor

the emotional or economical exploitation for which *Roma* shows such a stinging awareness, but still I have relied on women to do the kinds of things Cleo (Yalitza Aparicio) does for Cuarón's alter ego, Paco, and his siblings and I recognize that these women (one in particular) have had a massive impact on my own children, and enabled my own moderate career success.

When I came to read reviews of *Roma* however, my primary experience of the film as a grateful mother and the perspective that comes as a result of being a jobbing academic focused on Latin American culture, cinema and Cuarón for twenty-plus years came together in a surge of indignation. One of the primary reasons for writing my book was to tackle the coloniality of Northern-based, generally (but not always) white/Anglo male film critics in their approaches to the work of Latin American film directors like González Iñárritu, Del Toro, Meirelles, Salles, Campanella and Cuarón. A coloniality, one could argue, which has led [Richard Brody](#) in *The New Yorker* to argue that in *Roma*, Cuarón doesn't give Cleo a voice.

Several contributions in this dossier ([Palou](#), [Shaw](#), [Cosentino](#), [Sánchez Prado](#)) eloquently explain how Cleo is not the blank canvass as Brody suggests Cuarón paints her to be, but likely a pretty accurate depiction both of his own nana (Liberia Rodríguez - with whom he conducted interviews in order to reconstruct her life) and a centuries-old structural relationship between Mexico's white elite and a poor mestizo/indigenous underclass socialized to repress their own emotions and reactions in the interests of their employers. In scenes such as the roof sequence (see [Middents'](#) video essay in this dossier) where the shot broadens out to show Cleo as just one indigenous domestic worker washing clothes in a middle-class neighborhood full of Cleos all doing the same, rather than reproduce this relationship, Cuarón is highlighting and indicting it.

As with the rebuke to Brody, the contributions in this dossier seek to offer more local perspectives on Cuarón's *Roma* that can illuminate as well as contribute to ongoing

discussions in the English language press and elsewhere. [Paul Julian Smith](#) recounts his experience watching *Roma* in Mexico City in the context of the debacle over the film's theatrical exhibition and the administration of new president Andrés Manuel López Obrador's planned cuts to support for culture. [Pedro Ángel Palou](#) examines *Roma* in light of Brody's critique of it, arguing how Cuarón's use of long takes and framing assert Cleo's voice and perspective as well as the fragmentary nature of Cuarón's memory of his childhood. [Ignacio Sánchez Prado](#) considers *Roma* as an "archeology of Mexico's class trouble", and how the film reflects on the politics of its early 1970s setting and the 1971 student massacre depicted in the film. [Jeffrey Middents'](#) video essay and accompanying text explore *Roma* as an auteurist text, which playfully references many of Cuarón's earlier films, but in particular evokes his *Y tu mamá también* (2001). Through overlaying the dialogue of the earlier film onto the later film, Middents maps the fictional Tenoch's and Cuarón's own memories, but also offers a new perspective on Cleo's subjectivity. [Olivia Cosentino](#) takes an intersectional feminist position on *Roma* exploring how the intimate/emotional labor Cleo performs in caring for the family opens up a space of critique that has brought about renewed discussions of domestic workers rights in Mexico. [Belén Vidal](#) explores how Netflix new distribution model is both disturbing old models of cinephilia whilst also creating new models of engaging with cinema as art. [Roberto Carlos Ortiz](#) considers *Roma* as part of a Netflix-produced journey of nostalgic Mexican media images and his experience of living through the phenomena it has become in Mexico City.

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writing about Latino Labour and Visibility in Late Silent/Early Sound Hollywood and Mexican actors in Hollywood in the early 1950s, during the “red scare.” Follow her on Twitter @dolorestierney

[i] At one point, Pepe runs ahead with his friend through a busy down town area to get to the cinema. At another point children go on an unsupervised walk through a muddy wood whilst nearby middle-class parents shoot insouciantly into the brush. The scene recalls Lucrecia Martel’s *La Ciénaga* (2001) where one spends the film feeling some catastrophe is about to befall the children.

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