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' … vayan a San Miguel de Allende, además lleven su visa y su diccionario los que no sepan hablar inglés pues ya se han apropiado de todo los gringos.' The discursive struggle for interculturality in a gentrified hybrid Mexican city

Christopher Anderson[a] and Ireri Armenta Delgado[b]

[a]Centre of Language & Linguistics, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK; [b]Departamento de Lenguas, Universidad de Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on interculturality in the discursive construction of the Mexican city of San Miguel de Allende that is culturally hybrid due to Americanisation and gentrification caused by North American migration and tourism. Constructing their own community as 'expats', this homogenous group produces and reproduces a dominant discourse that normalises Americanisation and gentrification. There is, however, a resistant discourse from multiple voices, both North American and Mexican, that problematises this hybridity in terms of negative consequences for local Mexicans of rising costs, displacement, and a sense of alienation, particularly felt in how English has become a *lingua franca*.

Este artículo se enfoca en la interculturalidad en la construcción discursiva de la ciudad mexicana de San Miguel de Allende la cual es una ciudad culturalmente híbrida debido a la americanización y gentrificación provocada por la migración y el turismo norteamericano. Construyendo su propia comunidad como 'expatriados', este grupo homogéneo produce y reproduce un discurso dominante que normaliza la americanización y la gentrificación. Sin embargo, se observa un discurso resistente de múltiples voces, tanto norteamericanas como mexicanas, que problematizan esta hibridez en términos de consecuencias negativas para los mexicanos locales como los costos crecientes, desplazamiento y una sensación de alienación particularmente en el uso de inglés como una *lingua franca*.

Introduction

Mexico has had a difficult and complex history with its northerly neighbour, the United States of America (Keller, 2016). Whilst much attention in mass media and populist rhetoric has been given to economic and refugee migration from Mexico to the USA whether actual Mexicans or originating from other Latin American countries, there is the less visible phenomena of North American migration to Mexico (we use North American to signify people from the USA and Canada whilst accepting that the majority of migrants are from the USA). The irony of Donald Trump's

failed presidential promise of building a wall on the US-Mexican border is that many Americans were choosing to cross the border south and for some this was to escape Trump. The number of US migrants in Mexico is quite substantial: in 2019, of the 1,060,707 immigrants in Mexico, 762,290 of them come from the United States making up 77% of the total (Datosmacro.com, n.d.). This far exceeds the number of any other group (e.g. the second most popular migrant nationality is Guatemalan with 44,178 migrants). The social make-up of these southward-bound migrants is quite different from their northward-bound counterparts as understood in mass media and populist rhetoric. Rather than escaping poverty or political persecution, they are on the whole middle-class, educated, and relatively rich searching for a cheaper, attractive location to live in. This paper derives from a wider study looking at the impact of North American migration and tourism on two Mexican cities in the state of Guanajuato from the perspectives of interculturality, discourse, and gentrification, namely, San Miguel de Allende (SMA) and the city of Guanajuato (GTO) focussing here primarily on SMA.[1]

San Miguel de Allende and Guanajuato city, located in the central Mexican state of Guanajuato, provide striking examples of the North American immigrant and tourist presence in Mexico sharing characteristics that have made them attractive destinations. Central to these similarly-sized cities'[2] attractiveness is their architectural beauty seen in civic buildings, churches, squares, parks and houses that derived from the wealth accrued from gold and silver mining from the 1520s during the state's Spanish colonial period (Covert, 2017). This physical heritage was eventually internationally codified when Guanajuato in 1988 and SMA in 2008 became UNESCO World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, n.d.).

Whilst both cities have thriving tourism industries and sizable North American migrant communities, there is a significant difference in the nature of the migration. The size of the North American community in SMA is considerably larger and has a longer history dating back to the arrival of the American artist and writer Stirling Dickinson in 1937. From that point onwards, the city developed as an artists' colony with the establishment of its first art school in 1938 (Covert, 2017; Inés de la Torre, 2018). Over time, the city began to attract both American and Mexican artists and writers developing a bohemian reputation by the 1950s. From the 1970s onwards, there was a slow shift of North American migration from bohemian artists to the mainstream middle classes who had a significant impact on the development of the city through their civic involvement. This history contrasts to Guanajuato city which lacks such a long-established North American migrant community and whose migration is linked to wider non-North American migratory patterns connected to it being a cosmopolitan university city and its historical legacy making it a centre for tourism for Mexicans as well as other nations (Asch, 2009).

The motivation for this study initially derived from Ireri's personal experiences, as a Mexican from GTO returning to SMA in 2019 which resonated with Christopher's research on the discourses of coastal gentrification in the south-east of England (Anderson, 2018, 2019) where 'locals' felt alienated from the gentrification caused by the influx of middle-class, relatively wealthy Londoners. This was the starting point to explore how 'interculturality' manifested itself in both cities in the relationships between 'locals' and 'non-locals', where the social dynamics in the way the people construct communication and interaction is a process that is evaluative with power dynamics (Dervin, 2016). As the study developed in the data collection phase it became clear that the central focus was on SMA with GTO being a point of comparison to SMA. The exploration of interculturality as a guiding question to the investigation was broad enough to approach the investigation from a perspective of discovery. We unravelled the impact of Americanisation and gentrification and how discursively the impact was constructed in a rich set of data. SMA is then a site for the discursive struggle for interculturality.

Gentrification, cultural hybridity, interculturality, and discourse

Gentrification, as a concept, developed by Ruth Glass (1964) is now well-established in urban geography and sociology (e.g. Brown-Saracino, 2010; Lees, 2010; Lees et al., 2007; Smith, 2010).

Initial work on London (and later New York) looked at how bohemians (artists, students, etc.) moved to impoverished neighbourhoods attracted by the central locality and the cheap, but architecturally-attractive accommodation. What followed is a process of the new residents causing a material 'improvement' to the area in terms of renovated properties, new shops, and cultural and leisure facilities. This process makes the area attractive to the more conventional middle-classes who move there leading to rising house prices, the selling of rented properties, and the rise in rents of any rented properties still in existence. This leads to the displacement of the original working-class inhabitants who can no longer afford to live there (Slater, 2006). Gentrification is now identified as a global phenomenon (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005) that includes Latin America and Mexico (e.g. Escobedo, 2019; Janoschka et al., 2014). This research fits into other work looking at consumption gentrification, i.e. the perspective of the gentrifiers and gentrified (e.g. Butler & Robson, 2003), contrasting with production gentrification that concerns how landlords, property developers, and regional government manage the process (Lees et al., 2007, pp. 39–88). Following Butler and Robson (2003), we argue that consumption gentrification can be understood using Bourdieu's notion of capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1992; Robbins, 2000). Gentrifiers succeed not only because of their economic capital, but also through the employment of social, symbolic, and most importantly, cultural capital.

There are, however, certain differences in this study to how gentrification is typically conceived. Gentrification takes place in a neighbourhood in a city and is typically composed of citizens of the same country often already living in the same city. In the case of SMA, the process is in the city as a whole with displacement occurring in certain neighbourhoods due to foreign gentrifiers. The changes then are not just built around regeneration, rising property values, and new class-based consumer consumption, but also changes with new cultural practices, at the centre of which is the imposition of a foreign language. At the same time, the city is Mexican with Mexican residents (and tourists) so the city has cultural hybridity with two communities. Following the critical paradigm in intercultural communication (Holliday & MacDonald, 2020), this study examines this hybrid city in the framework of 'interculturality' where an individual's culture and cultural identity in intercultural interaction are not singular and fixed but multiple, emergent, and dynamic (Hua, 2014, pp. 201–220). Interculturality as a critical dialogue is a process that requires mediation between cultures and thus the negotiation between self and others. Such a notion requires the individual the ability to engage and relate to the new people and their practices (Byram, 2008; Byram & Fleming, 2002; Kramsch, 1998, 1993).

The analysis of such interactions has drawn on discourse studies whether in the tradition of analysing intercultural interactions in terms of interpersonal communication (Monaghan, 2016) or how discourse operates at a broader level in, for example, the representation of the other (cf. Ladegaard, 2020). This study takes a Foucauldian approach to discourse (Foucault, 1998, p. 100; McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 31) which constructs discourse as power/knowledge that normalises the subject, fields of knowledge, social institutions and practices in society (Foucault, 2000, p. 32). These normalising dominant discourses are always counteracted by resistant discourses (Foucault, 1998, pp. 100–101). This means that all the participants in this study, including the researchers, are part of producing and reproducing the discourse of SMA, whether in its dominant or resistant forms (or indeed both).

Methodology

The research methodology employed in the overall study is, rather like the city it examines, a hybrid: what we call a duo-ethnographic discourse study. It is an ethnographic study carried out by two researchers whose own positions create within it two different perspectives: Ireri a Mexican woman who lives and works in GTO; and Christopher a British male who lives and works in the UK. This would give an impression of a simple insider-outsider pairing but consideration of our multiple experiences of working in each other's countries reveals that our insider-outsider status

resembled more a postmodern interpretation that accepts that multiple subjectivities and identities make such differentiation less clear cut (Griffiths, 1998, pp. 137–139). The exchange of perceptions of the data collected including how we were treated in the participant observation period meant that this study could be classified as a form of duo-ethnography; an emerging approach that goes beyond the constraints of individual interpretations of a cultural phenomenon to a version where people with differing experiences and differing social and cultural backgrounds can through critical dialogue based on their personal experience create a richer account of a phenomenon (Sawyer & Norris, 2013).

All of the data collected whether from various forms of ethnographic observation and dialogue, or from a corpus of verbal and visual texts, were conceived as being constituent of the discourses of the cities. Indeed, this very text is also a constituent of it. This includes the material culture (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017) of cities including buildings, shops, signs and other material signifiers. Our conception of the discourses is Foucauldian where meaning is located in discourse itself rather than in the relations between linguistic form and social structure of critical discourse analysis (Pennycook, 1994). Here, discourse is a way of organising and creating meaning realised through various forms of representation including language. Foucault was not a discourse analyst per se but a 'historian of the present' who analysed Western society partly through the exploration of the development and functioning of discourses (Foucault, 1991, pp. 30–31; Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 4). Therefore, a Foucauldian approach with its concern of how discourses produce social realities tends to be a sociological and historical enterprise that is textual in the sense that it analyses texts but not within the traditional linguistic mode d'emploi of discourse analysis.

The data collection process fell into three distinct although overlapping activities: participant observation fieldwork, creation of a corpus of texts, and student researcher accounts. The participant observation was employed as a central research instrument of ethnography (Emerson et al., 2001) taking place in March 2020 in SMA (7th–9th March) and in Guanajuato (2nd–6th & 10th–15th March). In SMA, this involved both researchers spending a long weekend in the role of tourists: staying at a city centre hotel and taking part in tourist-like activities such as sightseeing, taking photographs, shopping as well as eating and drinking out. The observations were codified in field notes written during and after the fieldwork. Christopher wrote a set of fieldnotes on the observations of the city in terms of its interculturality. Ireri wrote a set of impression fieldnotes on the experience in SMA. This was supported by photographs taken by both Christopher and Ireri that documented physical spaces, places, and people in the city centre focussing on the cultural hybridity of the city with the interplay of Mexican and North American cultural signifiers and the role of language therein. Christopher wrote a similar set of field notes on his experiences in GTO with supporting photographs. This was slightly different in the sense that GTO was where the researchers were based. However, Christopher, as a visitor, adopted a similar tourist role. The duo-ethnographic component was in two ways. Firstly, by Ireri annotating and commenting on Christopher's completed field notes and secondly through an informal discussion between them during the data collection and then later via email and video meetings when Christopher had returned to the UK. This commenting and discussion helped to develop a better understanding of the phenomena from their two perspectives that balances insider assumed knowledge with the outsider 'tabula rasa'. This commentary and discussion would go on to include considering the other forms of data. The original set of field notes written by Christopher are coded as 'Field Notes 1' while the field notes with Ireri's annotations are referred to as 'Field Notes 2'.

The collection of a corpus of texts began during the fieldwork and continued well after it. This included both hard copy texts collected in places such as shops, cafes, and tourist information centres and permanent texts (e.g. signs and notices) photographed during the fieldwork and online material found during and after the fieldwork. Another tranche of texts was collected by seven of Ireri's BA TESOL students who volunteered as research assistants. They were briefed to collect texts whether online or hardcopy (although the majority were, in fact, online) that demonstrated how the cities are represented in mass media, social media, and in other modes of written and spoken communication with particular reference to the presence of 'non-locals'. The corpus finally totalled 283

texts in English and Spanish that ranged from discussions of North American migration to texts aimed at English-speaking and Spanish-speaking tourists to texts for potential and current North American migrants.

The final form of data collection was accounts given by the research assistants. These were provided in two different ways. Firstly, a private Facebook page was created where the students were prompted to comment on the following question:

> Our project concerns how 'interculturality' manifests itself in the cities of Guanajuato and San Miguel de Allende in the relationships between 'locals' and 'non-locals'.
>
> We are interested in what you have found in looking at the 'non-local' influences on these cities in terms of the mass media, social media and in what can be seen in these cities (e.g. see the photographs of SMA).
>
> We would like to begin a discussion of this with the following question.
>
> As Mexicans, how do you feel about these 'non-local' influences in these two cities?

The students were free to comment and a dialogue was created between the researchers and the students based on their comments. Secondly, the students were also sent the question and asked to write their own individual accounts. Therefore, the students were given the option of either commenting in a slightly more public forum or privately on the accounts.

With the dialogue between both researchers, and between researchers and students, the data provided a multiple-perspective duo-ethnography. The textual data themselves contain texts written and spoken by non-Mexicans and Mexicans adding further to these perspectives. In this way, the research aims for a thick description (Geertz, 1993) that has qualitative validity (Anderson, 2012). The data analysis process began as typifies field-based qualitative research from the initial analysis in the field by the researchers (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) and the informal interactions that followed. It proceeded with the inductive categorisation of the data and led to a deeper thematic analysis itself looking across the full range of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The discursive struggle for San Miguel de Allende

It is abundantly clear from the data and the literature that SMA has been markedly altered by the presence of North American migrants and tourists (Cisneros et al., 2017; Covert, 2017; Inés de la Torre, 2018; Escobedo, 2017, 2019; Pacheco & Vallejo, 2016). This process of change can be understood as a broader social, cultural, and economic process of gentrification whose cultural manifestation can be called Americanisation. The data reveal the processes of Americanisation and gentrification have created a city that is culturally, socially, and economically hybrid. What emerges from this is a discursive struggle for SMA between those who construct the city as an ideal location to visit or inhabitant, and those who problematise this ideal in terms of its detrimental outcomes for locals and the alienation of ordinary Mexicans, a problematising stance that we share.

The Americanisation and gentrification of San Miguel de Allende: the emergence of a hybrid city

Across the data, the presence and influence of North Americans in the city were acknowledged and discussed by Mexicans (in San Miguel, in Mexico as a whole, and the USA), by migrant North American residents in SMA, and by foreign tourists (from north America, Europe and Latin American). The North Americans were labelled variously as 'non-locals', 'foreigners', 'Americans', or the more pejorative 'gringos'. North Americans more commonly described themselves as 'expats' or 'expatriates', occasionally 'travellers' or 'tourists', and very occasionally as 'gringos'. As 'expats', they place themselves as part of a wider global phenomenon identified in various online publications in the corpus devoted to 'expats' globally (with sections devoted to Mexico). They position

themselves as the economically advantaged from the developed world whose decisions to emigrate are lifestyle choices rather than the political and economic necessity that is commonly associated with 'migrants' (Croucher, 2009). They are seemingly unaware of the racism and classism that underpins the dichotomy of 'expat' and 'migrant' (BBC, 2016; Koutonin, 2015). Their presence, whether as 'expats' or tourists, has caused changes to the city that reflect their tastes, needs, and desires in terms of property, leisure, goods, services, and cultural consumption, which reveal the migrants as liberal, educated, and middle-class. These changes are not simply due to their presence in the city but derive from their power in terms of the economic capital of their wealth which pays for the changes as well as the social and cultural capital which enables and codifies the forms of these changes.

One way in which this presence and its concomitant effects were articulated across the data was by comparing SMA to Guanajuato city as seen in these two North American social media comments:

> you would probably get a dozen different answers in comparing SMA and GTO. They are both incredibly beautiful cities, but are very different. SMA has a much larger American population, as evidenced by the fact that many ATMs dispense pesos AND dollars! (Forum comment on 'Never Ending Voyage' travel blog)

> We live in Guanajuato. The foreign presence and impact is far larger in SMA, more worldly. GTO is almost totally Mexican in culture and language. (Discussion comment on Facebook group 'Expats in Mexico')

As the discussants above indicate this is more than just a physical presence but is a cultural and linguistic presence. Across the data, this population is constructed as a 'community', which is liberal, middle-class, and educated bound together using their social capital. The arguments for this were made in the field notes where various cultural signifiers suggested this:

> … SMA offers a more 'cultural' experience than say the sunbeds, sea and cocktails of say Cancun. The 'cultural' experiences were clear in the data I collected with plays, arts, concerts yoga, etc. on offer to the North Americans as well as what was on offer in the city as a whole – museums, etc.

> Furthermore, I was later to see in the Instituto Allende a poster for Democrats Abroad. Added to this, we came across an American woman giving a historic walking tour to a group of senior Americans between the Museo Histórico Casa de Allende and Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel next to the main square. Finally, all of these 'cultural' experiences resonated with my own experiences in the UK and in Italy where I have a second home. It was the same. (Field Notes 1)

In terms of retail, hospitality, and cultural consumption, the city centre and a neighbourhood stretching south from the city centre along the Calle Ancha de San Antonio road were full of shops, services, galleries, arts and crafts, upmarket 'liquor' stores, cafes, pubs, and restaurants directly aimed at North Americans not just identifiable in terms of the type of products and services on offer but in the predominant use of English (see Figure 1). There was a bilingual primary school; an Anglican church with a bilingual sign and Anglo-named vicar; and the Instituto Allende – an educational institute that was the second art school to open in SMA in the 1950s (Covert, 2017) and has become a broader college with part of its curriculum offer directly aimed at North Americans with courses in Spanish, the arts, and general adult education.

The products, services, and environments of these places of consumer and cultural consumption conform to a hip, liberal, international urban middle-class culture found in the USA and cities around the world (Maly & Varis, 2016; Schiermer, 2014; Scott, 2017). For example, there was a 'boulangerie' offering sourdough bread; a restaurant 'called Silverio and identified as "Silverio Urban Coffee & Mixology Bar" on its Facebook page' (Field Notes 1); a 'Bagel Café'; 'Barber and Booze' a barber and bar; and a restaurant serving a 'limonada' in a jam jar glass (see Figure 2). In the corpus, there were many examples of travel blogs and vlogs where the hip aspects of the city in terms of the consumption they chose to include, typically shopping, eating, and drinking were celebrated.

In contrast to sites of Mexican mass tourism such as Cancun, the products and services on offer were often Mexican but frequently with hybridity. Many of the restaurants in SMA offered Mexican food but were unlike the Mexican restaurants we had experienced elsewhere. An example of this

Figure 1. Evidence of Americanisation on Salida A Celaya – a noticeboard with mostly English-language notices at the Instituto Allende; an English-language restaurant menu; an 'Irish' pub; the Anglican church.

was 'El Pegaso' where the 'menu was also bilingual and contained dishes that were more typically American such as avocado on toast as well as serving cocktails – which I have never noticed in more traditional Mexican restaurants' (Field Notes 1). Another example of this hybridity was the 'La 21unica Cantina' which was for us not like a 'real' Mexican cantina at all (i.e. a male-only, working-class bar) but rather an upmarket bar where both sexes were welcome. It was an 'intercultural artefact': presenting elements of what a cantina is in terms of presentation but in content being quite different; 'a strange cultural hybrid drawing on the cantina style but sanitising it for what one assumed was tourist and overseas residents' use' (Field Notes 1).

The shops aimed at the North American migrant community and tourists also had this hybridity. Their customer base was identified in the use of English in signs, labels by staff, and the products. Many shops were concerned with aspects of interior design, furnishings, household products, arts

Figure 2. Hip signifiers. The drink served in a jam jar; sourdough bread in a 'boulangerie'; Bagel Café & Tea Room.

Figure 3. Examples of free material available from shops (a flyer for an English-language play; a postcard advertising a shop selling Birkenstock shoes; a free SMA lifestyle magazine 'Casa Mia') and a poster display in a hip cafe.

and crafts, fashion (particularly women's), and jewellery. Some sold products that were Mexican artisanal; other products that were more international and hip (e.g. a shoe shop selling Birkenstock sandals). Some of these places seemed very upmarket in their interior design; some had a more rustic bohemian chic. Many of these shops had further indicators of the North American community where English dominated: there were piles of free flyers, maps, postcards, and magazines as well as posters for cultural events, and classes for such things as yoga and meditation on their walls (see Figure 3). The 'Consejo Turístico de San Miguel de Allende' (the tourist information centre) also provided a great deal of this textual evidence with much of the same material on display.

The events advertised by this promotional material such as art exhibitions, arts & crafts classes, yoga classes, plays, and concerts further revealed the liberal educated tastes of the migrants as well as the linguistic influence with most of the advertising being in English or English and Spanish. This liberal-progressive class is constructed across the data in personal vlogs, in news reports on 'expats' escaping Trump (Univision Noticias, 2017) and in advertising for property, e.g. an advertisement in a magazine for a gated community farm stating 'Live in a community of like-minded progressive people … '.

The built environment of the city had undergone radical changes directly linked to the North American presence (Covert, 2017; Inés de la Torre, 2018). This could be seen in infrastructure projects such as a new highway connecting the city to the local airport and most importantly in the residential built environment (see Figure 4). In downtown SMA many of the older, historic residential properties had been bought by North Americans in the 1990s and then restored from near collapse. There were more recent new housing developments in and around the city often in the form of gated communities directly aimed at the North American market. Evidence of this could be seen with estate agents promoting their properties in English for US dollars whether at their offices in SMA or online. During the fieldwork, no estate agents were found in the city centre whose publicity was in Spanish and whose properties were sold in Mexican Pesos.

There exists a whole network of social and mass media in print and online identified in the corpus that serves the North American migrants, potential migrants, and tourists in Mexico as a whole with SMA given as a key destination. These texts whether created by the migrants and tourists or created for them, further reveal the presence of North Americans and their tastes, needs, and desires. The following illustrative examples are all in English unless stated. There is an online Mexican newspaper ('Mexico News Daily'); a weekly English-language news programme provided by the national TV station ADN40; and more locally, there are two regional online newspapers, the 'San Miguel Times' and the 'Atencion San Miguel' (in Spanish and English) as well as two free hard-copy upmarket 'lifestyle' magazines ('Casa Mia – The Art of Living in San Miguel de Allende'; and the bilingual 'THIS – Top Destinos'). There exists a range of websites often linking social media platforms aimed at 'expatriates' and potential 'expatriates' globally with pages dedicated to Mexico (e.g. 'expat.com') and sites dedicated to Mexico only (e.g. 'Expats in Mexico'; 'Mexperience'). With
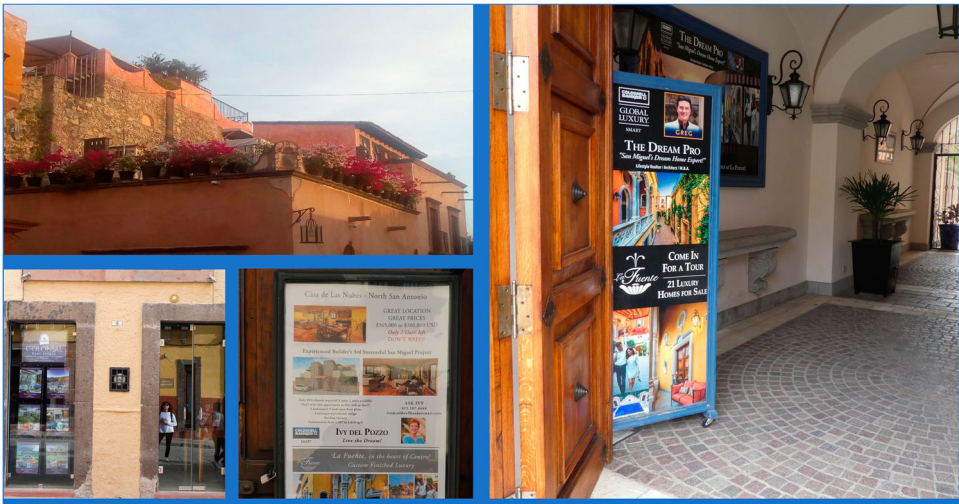
Figure 4. Evidence of residential gentrification: a restored downtown house; the entrance to a newly-developed gated community; the shop front of the 'Colonial Real Estate'; a window display for 'Coldwell Banker' estate agents.

social media, there are local Facebook groups that serve the 'expat' community (e.g. 'Expats & Locals in San Miguel de Allende' and 'San Miguel Newcomers, Expats & Friends'), and a plethora of individual travel blogs and YouTube vlogs that either deal with the 'expatriate' experience or provide travel guides that include SMA. Finally, many of the shops, services, restaurants, and bars that appeared aimed at the North American market had websites and social media, only a few of which were in English and Spanish.

The lack of Spanish in the media for current 'expats' suggests that they are constructed as monoglots unable to communicate in Spanish further suggesting that the community can (a) exist on a daily basis without Spanish, and (b) that friendship groups are within the 'expat' community only. The evidence of the fieldwork supported this: American English was completely embedded in the city in both written and spoken forms. In the city centre, it was more of an exception to see a shop or service sign, information, or publicity in Spanish only with many businesses using only English. Spoken English could be noticed everywhere in the city centre. Christopher never consciously heard an Anglo-North American speak Spanish with the only foreigner he actually heard speaking Spanish being a German (Field Notes 2).

The people, the changes to physical spaces of the city such as housing, shopping, and leisure, the complex network of media support, and the dominance of American English, all confirm the strong presence of North Americans. All of this evidence were signifiers of Americanisation culturally and in economic terms gentrification of the city – all of which has created a hybrid city. It is due to North American migrant economic and cultural capital that this Americanisation and gentrification has taken place.

## '#SueñoMexicano' – the 'Expatriate' & tourist construction of SMA

What can be identified in the range of media texts that serve 'expatriates', potential 'expatriates', and tourists, is a construction of the city that sees the city's hybridity as part of the attraction to move or visit. As an article on North American migrants in SMA in a US Spanish-language online newspaper (Porcayo, 2014), wryly notes in the title '#SueñoMexicano: ¿Por qué hay tantos 'gringos' en San Miguel de Allende?' (#MexicanDream: Why are there so many 'gringos' in San Miguel de Allende?), SMA is constructed as the Mexican 'dream' for 'expats'. This is a 'dream' of a historic and beautiful Mexican city with traditional Mexican food, culture, arts, and crafts that has a vibrant North

Figure 5. Three hard-copy tourist guides to SMA.

American community. Whilst this community imports a North American middle-class liberal culture and language, there is a desire for a 'Mexican-ness'. This construction forms a dominant discourse of SMA that produces and reproduces the desirability of a hybrid city whilst ignoring the negative side effects of Americanisation and gentrification as operationalised there.

The evidence of this construction was found in the range of texts aimed at potential and actual tourists. Whether in the hard copy guides to SMA that were available in shops and the tourist information centre (see Figure 5); in online travel guides (see Figure 6); or in social media travel vlogs
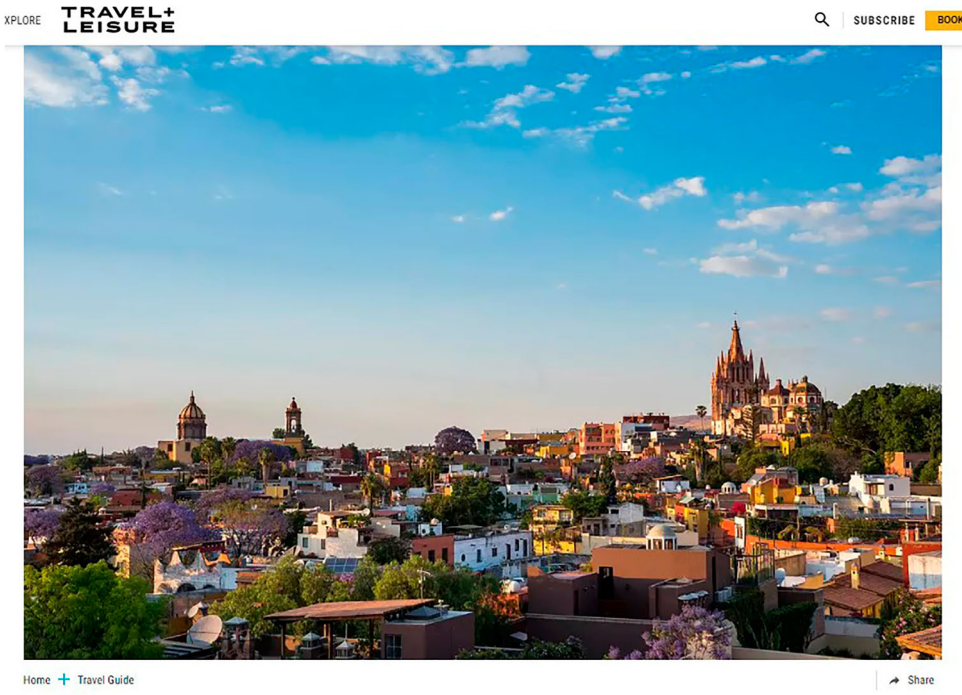
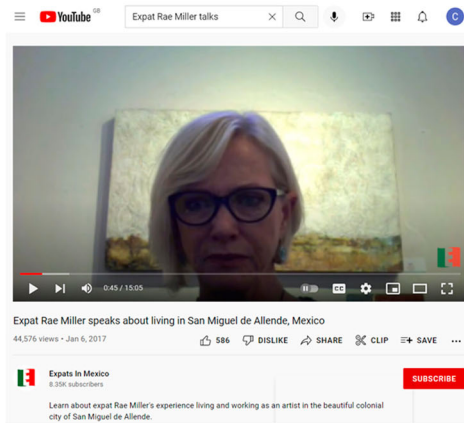**Figure 6.** An example of an online travel guide.

Figure 7. Online media aimed at potential 'expats' to SMA – Video on the 'Expats in Mexico' YouTube channel; and a global 'expat' website 'International Living'.

and blogs, there is a similar presentation of SMA as a place of leisure, consumer and cultural consumption focussing on its architecture, restaurants, bars and shopping, and the North American community. Many of the texts make reference to the consistent success that SMA has had in the Conde Nast Traveller magazine 'Readers' Choice Awards' as the best small city in the world gaining again first place in 2020 (Conde Nast Traveller, 2020).

The construction of SMA in media aimed at current and potential North American migrants, beyond the facts of everyday living and costs, is indistinguishable from the tourist guides, with the same selling points to make the city an attractive and viable place to retire or move and work in (see Figure 7). The estate agents have an important role in this construction using a range of promotional texts from hard copy brochures, websites, and magazine advertisements to their own YouTube channels to sell the 'dream' as a means of selling their property (see Figure 8) to those seeking a more secure environment in gated communities (e.g. 'Dream Homes' in Figure 8) or to those that appear to want to integrate more into the local community, as a copy for one property advertisement reads: 'The neighbourhood is a wonderful mix of gringos and Mexicans' (Colonial Real Estate advertisement in Figure 8).

One video, in particular on an estate agent YouTube channel, summarises well this 'dream' (Home San Miguel, 2016). In the video entitled 'The 4 C's of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico', a senior partner of the company (European-American, middle-aged, and male), speaks to the camera about the reasons to move to SMA drawing on his own experiences of moving and living there. The dream is built around the four 'C's' that make SMA so attractive and viable as a destination to

Figure 8. Promotional material for estate agents – a YouTube channel; a magazine advertisement; a hard copy brochure.

migrate to culture, climate, community, and cost. The 'culture' of SMA is positively positioned in contrast to commercialised Mexican tourist resorts such as Cancun emphasising the city's historic architectural beauty, local festivals, art, music, and food as well as the friendliness and hospitality of the locals. The mild 'climate' is attractive as it avoids the extremes of weather from both the north and south of the USA. 'Community' is seen in terms of a vibrant North American community that has a range of interests (e.g. golf, art, tennis, and birding), and whose values are old-fashioned with a non-profit service focus, thus implying its liberalness. The 'cost' is cheaper than that of the USA in terms of property; property renovation including material and builders; domestic staff; healthcare; food; and transport. This assertion reflects an annual global survey of 'expats' carried out by 'Inter-Nations' a 'global expat network' whose 2021 report shows Mexico ranked 4th out of 59 nations for cheapness (InterNations, 2021). The 'dream' never questions why Mexico is cheaper than North America nor the working conditions of the people that they employ. The 'community' is North American with little mention of the local community beyond the fact that locals are friendly and hospitable, typically in service encounters. There is no mention of how they perceive what is happening in SMA. Most significantly there is no mention of learning Spanish as necessary for living there.

In the '4 Cs' video (Home San Miguel, 2016), the presenter mentions that SMA has Mexican tourists from the big cities. These tourists observed during the fieldwork were identified by Ireri as 'fresa', a term for young wealthy middle-class people from the larger cities in Mexico. They were also served by a range of media in Spanish that was very similar to the English-language texts in content. Some of the free publications available in shops and the tourist information centre were bilingual and presumably aimed at both groups, e.g. two of the hard-copy city guides ('Local – sma guide by locals' and #THESANMIGUELBOOK'). In terms of style and content, they appeared to be pitched at younger travellers in contrast to some of the monolingual English guides (e.g. 'Walking and Shopping Guide') (see Figure 5). Many of the YouTube travel vlogs, like their North American counterparts, were made by, and apparently for, a younger audience (see Figure 9). These vlogs similarly portrayed the city as a place of architectural beauty and of cultural and leisure consumption suggesting that these wealthy middle-class Mexicans find the hybrid city equally attractive. They appear also to have the cultural and economic capital to access and enjoy the gentrified SMA and appear to have no issue with the presence of the English language. Indeed some of the vlogs had titles, video descriptions, and channel descriptions in Spanish and English. In some cases, the titles were in English only while one Mexican vlogger did her video in English. The problem of the English language as the lingua franca of SMA appears not to be a nationality issue, but a class one. Educated cosmopolitan urban Mexicans seem to be comfortable to communicate in English.

The Mexican 'dream' appears to be produced and reproduced uncritically by tourists globally and by North American potential and actual migrants. In this dream, the changes that have happened to the city due to North American migration and tourism have been positive making the city more desirable. Younger urban Mexicans not only enjoy the hybridity of this city as tourists but older ones have also invested in hotels, restaurants, and shops.
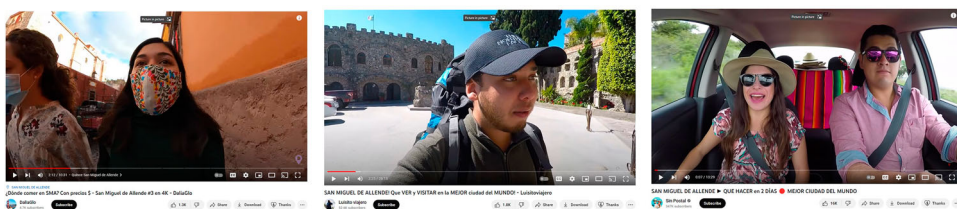

Figure 9. Young 'fresa' Mexican YouTube travel vlogs.

Resisting the '#SueñoMexicano'

The resisting, counter-discourse could be found across the range of data including our own field-work; the research assistant accounts; in a range of texts that included both Mexican and North American voices as well as the academic literature on SMA. Central to this counter-discourse is an argument that the hybridity has created a city that is not authentically Mexican. The researchers, research assistants, and some North American 'expats' living in GTO explained this inauthenticity by comparing SMA to Guanajuato city. Whilst in the fieldwork we recognised that GTO had some foreign tourists and residents, particularly due to the large university there, it had somehow managed to retain its Mexican identity:

> … what I noticed … is far less of a non-Mexican influence on this city. A lot less in the number of non-Mexican people … my impression was far more of a 'Mexican town'. This was also noticeable in the shop signs and notices. In terms of upmarket shops: clothing, art galleries, home & lifestyle, etc. which existed there, there was very little English unlike SMA. (Field Notes 1)

In constructing GTO as 'authentic', Christopher as a 'Mexicophile' visitor to Mexico positions authenticity as a desirable quality for a Mexican city. This is a stance shared by some North Americans who lived in GTO. A comment on an article on GTO in the travel blog typifies this:

> They are both incredibly beautiful cities, but are very different … Guanajuato is more of a Mexican tourist town, as it is important in the history of Mexico … We feel (only our opinion) that Guanajuato has a more "genuine" Mexican culture, while SMA has a more American-influenced Mexican culture. (NeverEndingVoyage, 2021)

For some Mexicans, there is a sense of alienation. When Ireri visited SMA prior to the fieldwork, she felt a sense of not feeling at home; as if she did not belong. Several of the student researchers similarly problematised this phenomenon:

> People are literally transforming SMA into the USA. There are a lot of places like restaurants, business and bars that the whole concept is American. It is not like Guanajuato for example, the city still has its own essence. (Facebook Group Discussion)

There is a perception that SMA has been colonised; as one of the research assistants put it in the Facebook Group Discussion, 'the Americans have conquered it.' This perception was shared equally on social media. For example, the following is a response on an 'expat' Facebook group from a Mexican intervening in English to a response to a question comparing SMA to GTO as places to migrate to:

> SMA is listed that way for the same reason Disneyland is listed as the best place for kids. If you want to live in a colonial tourist trap, SMA is your place. (Expats in Mexico Facebook Group)

The following retweet in Spanish to a 'Visit Mexico' Twitter post advertising SMA further elaborates on this 'colonialisation':

> It's like visiting a gringo city!

> Those who like to see slovenly gringos everywhere, gringo franchises in the historic centre, go to San Miguel de Allende, also bring your visa and your dictionary for those who do not know how to speak English because they have already been appropriated by all the gringos. (Our translation from Spanish)

A key component of this colonialisation construction of SMA is the perception of North Americans unwilling to adapt to the local culture and language. What underpins this, according to the research assistants is a sense of superiority and privilege due to their relative wealth:

> I have had encounters with non-locals saying that they come here because their money here is worth 20 times more and "since México it's a poor country we should be more grateful" and that's not accurate. (Facebook Group Discussion)

> These privileges have been part of the culture for years so we got used to it, this does not mean we are good with that feeling but the government and even the people "in the power" prefer to have foreigners in their stores, hotels, and restaurants because they "give us the money". It is not a good feeling of knowing that there are the "gringo" places, and "locals" places. (Facebook Group Discussion)

This privilege not only means that North Americans do not consider that they have to adapt to the host city but also means that there is informal segregation in the city; something we noted in the fieldwork. As the research suggests, there is a marginalisation of locals (Pacheco & Vallejo, 2016) that at times is discriminatory with locals feeling alienated in a city centre where traditional shops and services have disappeared to be replaced by unaffordable alternatives (Escobedo, 2017, 2019).

There is acknowledgement by many in the data that North Americans have improved the town in terms of housing, shops, and business. As one Mexican wryly noted in a Twitter discussion, 'One of the advantages of the fucking gringos living in San Miguel is that there is a wide variety of products in the supermarkets' (our translation from Spanish). However, the downside of this gentrification is the cost of living; the highest in Guanajuato state (Escobedo, 2017). Many of the research assistants, who all come from the state, pointed out how expensive SMA is and how it leads to inequality and locals leaving the area. This contrasts dramatically with the North American 'dream' of SMA as being cheap, which points out the relative wealth differential between middle-class North Americans and working-class Mexicans. This problem was recognised by some of the 'expats', as one GTO resident noted on her YouTube channel:

> I'm worried about our presence causing prices to rise to the point where locals can't afford their own city anymore. This seems to have already happened in San Miguel … and I'm very concerned about it happening in Guanajuato too.

Following work on gentrification, the direct outcome of these economic inequalities is the displacement of locals. The displacement appears to be encouraged by those in power with the ease with which North Americans are able to buy up property:

> Locals leave … their houses, some of them because they ignore their rights and organisations who could help them; others, because they are cheated by corrupt people; and some because they see a slightly better opportunity to sell their properties. (Facebook Group Discussion)

Research on SMA comes to similar conclusions with displacement due to North Americans buying property; a process that is encouraged by local government policies in favour of North American migrants and tourists whether North American or Mexican (Cisneros et al., 2017; Covert, 2017; Inés de la Torre, 2018; Escobedo, 2019; Pacheco & Vallejo, 2016).

Evaluating the discursive struggle from our resistant position

The dominant discourse constructs SMA as a desirable, cosmopolitan city which at the same time has Mexican authenticity compared to the artificiality of Mexican coastal resorts. The North American presence has eventually led the city to become a place of relocation, retirement, and tourism, the results of which have been normalised and unproblematised in the discourse. The 'locals' in these texts, when actually mentioned, are 'friendly' in service encounters with interesting and attractive local festivals and religious practices. They are constructed as if they were yet another attraction in the city. The 'locals' as people living normal lives as Mexicans speaking Spanish and indigenous languages are not considered. The resistant discourse constructs SMA as an artificial, inauthentic city for tourists appropriated and transformed by North American migrants, which contrasts to GTO which has retained its authenticity. The criticisms of the Americanisation and gentrification of SMA (e.g. cost of living, displacement, and unfair local government treatment of locals) are on the whole not discussed in the majority of the texts aimed at 'fresa', foreign tourists, and potential 'expats' apart from a few outliers that tend to be long-term American GTO 'expats' who, ironically, dislike the Americanisation of SMA. The most visible problematic result of these

processes is the use of English. The way that it has become a lingua franca in the city makes the city more amenable to 'expats' and international tourists, a use which also appears unproblematic for English-speaking 'fresa' tourists. 'Local' working-class people, who have not had the opportunity to learn English to a high standard, are effectively excluded from elements of the city in the same way they are excluded by the relatively prohibitive costs in SMA (Escobedo, 2019). One could reasonably argue this is a form of linguistic imperialism following Phillipson (1992).

In the everyday life of SMA, there is then a form of unconscious segregation. North Americans keep to themselves in their community and there is little interaction with the 'locals' beyond basic service encounters (Inés de la Torre, 2018; Escobedo, 2019). A core principle of intercultural communication has to do with the notion of the mediation of cultures, a 'between cultures', and thus a negotiation of Self and Other (Byram, 2008; Kramsch, 1993, 1998). Interculturality is a dialogic process; otherwise, it is not critical. It is not only about the Others (Mexicans) adapting to the 'non-locals' but a process of negotiation where the non-locals (Self) should make an effort to adapt to the Other, or better said, negotiate the Self. From this viewpoint, we would argue that many North Americans are failing at negotiating their Self. Their segregated behaviour of staying with their own community using their own language is not mediating between cultures. Related to this is the argument put forward by the cosmopolitan scholars (Appiah, 2007; Delanty, 2009) who acknowledge that all cultures and individuals could learn from one another and that both individuals and cultures have the potential for transformation. This questions the extent to which the 'expats' have gone through a process of transformation, or whether they have created a culture in SMA that builds on familiarity. As identified in other work, there is a tendency for migrant communities to retain a sense of their cultural identity and practices even if they wish to 'integrate' (Lawson, 2017). The notion of the 'expatriate' as someone who makes a lifestyle choice to relocate to a particular country would lead to the a priori assumption that they have an attraction to the country and desire to be part of it. In this case, there appears to be a tension in the dominant discourse between the desire for middle-class, liberal North Americans to live the '#SueñoMexicano' but at the same time to live in segregated, and often gated, communities. As pointed out in much of the data including our own fieldwork, the regeneration of the city due to foreign and inward investment has helped to give SMA a new life. This new environment offers opportunities for intercultural exchange, but this does not seem to take place, hence interculturality is suspended. The presence of the 'fresa' adds a layer of complexity to what on the surface could be seen as just neo-colonial Americanisation and gentrification. In enjoying the hybrid city, they appear to have formed their own culture that shares North American privilege.

Conclusion

This research considers Americanisation and gentrification from the perspective of interculturality constructing the data in terms of Foucauldian discourse. This perspective contrasts with other work cited in the paper examining SMA from the standpoint of urban geography. The discourses reveal a gentrification process in SMA as a process of an invasive American culture, or perhaps more accurately, an originally North American but now global invasive 'hipster culture' of liberal, middle-class consumer, and cultural consumption. North American migrants have used their economic capital to buy properties and invest in SMA as well as to support the local economy as consumers of products and services. This economic capital works in tandem with their cultural capital creating a culturally hybrid city in terms of consumption, leisure, lifestyle, and language based on their tastes, needs, and desires. Their cultural capital is not just manifest in these physical changes to the city but in the local and global social and mass media that promote their position. Their social capital can be seen through their various activities that create and maintain their 'community' in the city while their importance to the local economy gives them a symbolic capital of power and influence.

The changes to SMA relate directly to cultural identity in the sense of the 'Mexican-ness' of the city and the loss of 'authenticity'. With the use of English and the rising costs, local working-class Mexicans are unable to access this culture unlike the 'fresa' who have the economic and cultural capital to do so. An area for further research is to examine in more detail how each group constructs and possibly 'otherises' the other in their discourse. There appears to be a contradiction between at times a construction by 'expats' of the locals as 'friendly' and 'hospitable' whilst also fearing criminality (e.g. the secure gated communities). It would also be interesting to explore how the 'locals' construct the 'expats' as implied in preferential and non-preferential treatment in service encounters that we perceived in the fieldwork. The colonial understanding of this phenomenon of foreign 'Western' colonisers taking over a city in the developing world is made more complex by the presence of urban middle-class Mexicans sharing the North American economic and cultural capital relating the issue not just to global north and global south relations but to social and economic class.

Notes

1. The abbreviations of SMA for San Miguel de Allende and GTO for the city of Guanajuato are not just used in this paper for connivence's sake, but, as revealed in the data, they are the commonly used terms by both Mexicans and North Americans for the cities.
2. San Miguel de Allende has a population in 2020 of 174,615 and Guanajuato with 194,500 residents (INEGI, n.d.)

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Notes on contributors

Christopher Anderson is a senior lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the Centre of Language & Linguistics at Canterbury Christ Church University. His major research interest is investigating how cities impacted by (internal & external) migration and gentrification become sites of complex contested cultures, identities, and discourses.

Ireri Armenta Delgado is a lecturer–researcher at the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato, Mexico. Her research interests focus on cultural diversity with particular emphasis on the subjects of intercultural communication and cultural cosmopolitanism. She has conducted several research projects focusing on the dynamics of intercultural encounters in the context of Mexico.

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