

Group 6 - DP Film HL

Esperanza

Collaborative Film Project Report

Production Title: Esperanza

Chosen Role: Editor

Logline

When crisis strikes Venezuela, a young girl must flee in search of a better life or face the consequences. In doing so, she realizes what home means to her.

Word Count: 29

Esperanza is targeted towards the uninformed international audience to show the situation of Venezuela. This film is told from a personal lens of a Venezuelan girl, inspired by the screenwriter's own experience, thus encouraging the audience to understand the narrative at a personal level why the crisis is distressing. This is powerful, because the crisis is often mentioned only as a social issue of a nation, and never about the individuals who are affected by it; the storytelling from the perspective of an individual is powerful, because it encourages resonance, that is not always captured by the news outlets. Pacing, cutaways and contrasting colors are used to communicate the weight of emotion carried by the characters.

The narrative of *Esperanza* is far from my own personal experience. I have never lived in a country in a political turmoil and had to seek asylum. When I was first presented the script, it was very powerful as it was derived from the screenwriter's personal experience of being a Venezuelan. As I talked with her and another Venezuelan student, I got a glimpse of what it means to lose a homeland. This film is about Esperanza, a perceptive girl recalling her memory as she exits the country, using *quatro* as her device.

I was originally approached by the screenwriter to be the cinematographer, because she thought I had a good visual composition. I felt the responsibility to tell the story right, and sought for a position as an editor, because I have identified my growth in pacing and I wanted to utilize this learning to communicate the hardship of the character. I used iMovie in this production; because of its ease of use, I am able to concentrate on constructing the edit instead of having to deal with the technical aspects of using the software.

The pacing in the film was greatly inspired by *A City of Sadness* (Hou Hsiao Hsien, 1989) that is about brothers who face the political turmoil in Taiwan following the end of World War Two. In this film, the long takes are often utilized to show the emotion carried in the narrative, rather than telling it. Prior to the production, the screenwriter was very clearly communicating to me how she identified the sense of nostalgia as a theme; a girl misses her good time in Venezuela, which only exists in her distant memory. This is when I decided to use the slow pacing to communicate the hopelessness and the powerlessness that characters are experiencing.



Fig 1. Blue and yellow colors establish two distinct atmospheres in *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006)



Fig 2. Blue and yellow contrast between New York and India in the *Darjeeling Limited* (Wes Anderson, 2007)

The use of different colors is a conscious decision we made in the pre-production. Because Esperanza's memory of the past is incited by her encounters in the present, it was important to clearly distinguish the narrative told in two different timelines. We intended to use blue tone to show present, because she is experiencing the hardship today, and use yellow to highlight her memories from the past that she adores. This is influenced by the use of color in *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006) and the *Darjeeling Limited* (Wes Anderson, 2007) (figs 1 and 2). *Pan's Labyrinth* uses blue-cool colour to communicate the harshness of Captain Vidal while the warmth of Ofelia's fantasy is communicated by the yellow color; this lead to our identification of magic realism as a genre for Esperanza's memory. This is appropriate to our narrative, because it distances the audience from the harsh reality, to make them understand it better; the contrast in the way the reality is depicted heightenes the present tension. In *Pan's Labyrinth*, Ophelia's world is explored in two different narratives; the harshness of the post-Spanish Civil War is contrasted with the fantastical journey that Ophelia embarks on. Furthermore, magic

realism evolved in Latin America in the mid 20th century, and this selection of the genre also effectively communicates the setting of our film. In *Esperanza*, we wanted to achieve the same by contrasting the present and the past, to show the hardship that Esperanza goes through as she leaves her homeland, while maintaining the sense of realism in the story told present.

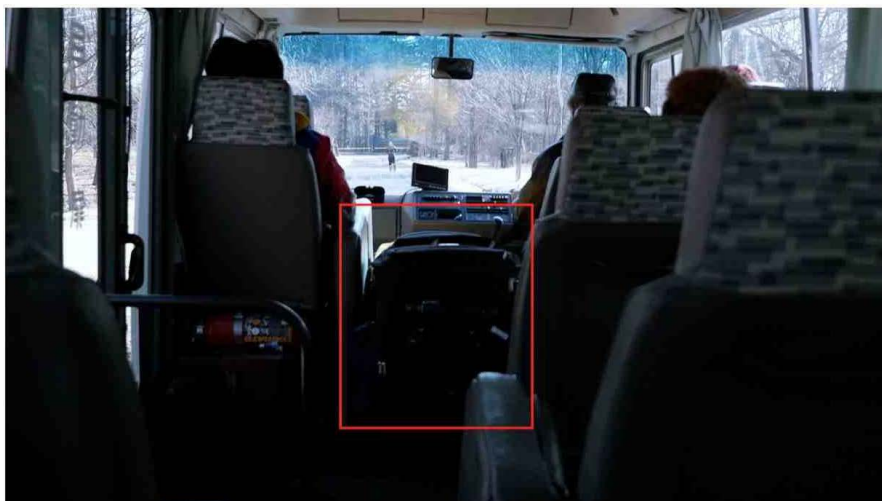


Fig 3. During the production, I made sure that the continuity was present like the placement of suitcase. (highlighted by a red rectangle)

Production took place in the span of two separate days. I was present on set during production, working with the team and went over the footage together. I was also overseeing the script during the production, to make sure we were not missing any shots and continuity existed, for example the placement of suitcases in the bus (fig 3). This also encouraged me to clearly envision how the shots might be assembled in post-production. However, because we casted teachers as our actors, our production was ran under the strict time constraint. While I was proud to complete our production on time, it also limited us from collecting all the cutaways, because we were prioritizing the shots with adult actors; this limitation encouraged me to further pursue the idea of long takes in the opening sequence.

This first scene was the most difficult section of the film to edit, because the soundtrack was redubbed and there were sections that I had to insert cutaways to mask the parts whose visuals and sound were not matching.



Fig 4. The opening sequence I originally intended (upper), and that of the final cut (lower).

My original edit had a different opening sequence; I compiled the long cuts of the shots of the sky with electric cables, the road and the decayed wood to communicate the dull atmosphere (fig 4). I thought this would be effective, because it established the setting before the narrative started. However, when I shared this cut with the director, he was very determined to start with a shot of the characters. I have appreciated this decision, because it instead keeps our focus to the characters. Eleven seconds of the long cut invites the audience to observe the characters and absorb the emotion that they are carrying. Furthermore, had I pursued my original cut, it would also have fixated the setting of the entire narrative to the present, which was not our intention. By starting the sequence with the characters, it establishes the focus of the narrative on the characters who are not only bound to the present setting. This is important, because the narrative is also about her memory in the past.



Fig 5. The portrayal of the quattro and flag were equally significant in my edit.

I chose to insert the close up shot of the quattro as the second cut, because it is Esperanza's device to connect with Venezuela (fig 5); this instrument is integral to the narrative of the whole film and I wanted to communicate its significance at the very beginning of this film; this is shown in the cutaway as Esperanza starts playing the song. I attempt to remind the quattro's significance by inserting the cutaway again forty five seconds later. Another semiotic that I consciously inserted was the shot of the Venezuelan flag. This shot is run for nine seconds, while Esperanza is playing the song, to establish the connection between the instrument and her country. I chose to run this shot at the same length as the shot of the instrument, to imply how the instrument is what reminds her memory. It was important for me to have this cutaway just before Esperanza stops singing to highlight its significance. Had I included it in the middle of Esperanza's singing, it would have been buried by other cutaways blurring its purpose. This establishes the instrument as the motif of the overall narrative.

Both the director and I decided to distinguish the present and the past by contrasting continuity editing and montage. We thought the continuity editing was effective to portray the reality, because of its naturalistic progression, while montage editing sets up the sense of manipulation as Esperanza recollects her memory. By combining shots that are not literal, montage creates meaning; it is uncertain if what the audience is seeing is real or imagined, to depict the magic-realism world.

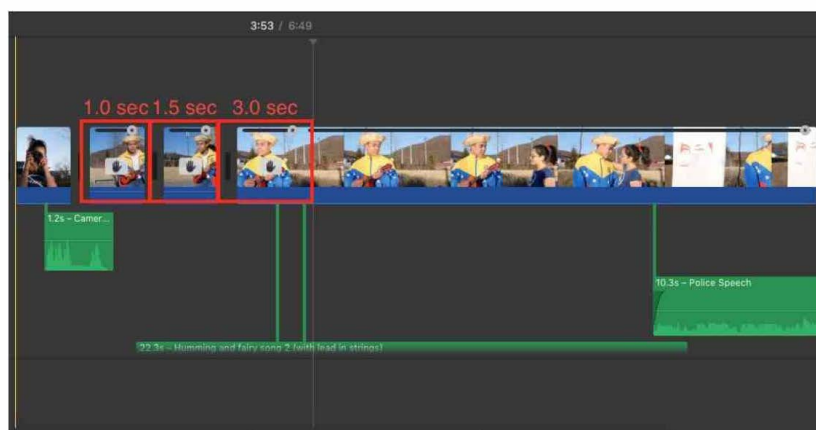


Fig 6. The pacing of each shot is manipulated to communicate the emerging love.

The pacing of memory occurred generically; I used cut on action and match cut for the natural progression of the edit. However, we made one conscious decision in this scene of memory: the pacing of photographs of Simon Jesus, the male cuatro player whom Esperanza gave her first kiss to. I originally had them as equally long cuts, to indicate his significance to her. However, the crew felt it was too long, and we ended up shortening each shot while we gradually increase the length (fig 6). This effectively communicates the rising romance; the increasing speed of the photographs mimic the increasing heartbeat when we are in love. This decision contributes to the success of the montage editing.



Fig 7. The choice to either end with the shot of the characters or with the guard.

Individual creative visions were challenged when we were deciding the edit of the ending (fig 7); whether to show the facial expression of the characters or not. The director had a strong preference to end with the shot of characters while I felt it was more impactful to end with the shot of the border guard confiscating the cuatro. I was reminded of *Shoplifters* (Koreeda, 2018), where the film ends with a shot of a neglected girl looking out at the window. This ending is powerful, because the film only captures the trapped girl seeing outside, but we don't see what she is seeing. Likewise, I thought it was more powerful to end with the shot of the guard leaving the bus, because it gives space for the audience to imagine the ending. I felt very reluctant to suggest a conclusion based on our assumption, because the hardship is beyond my comprehension. Furthermore, by ending with the guard, it shows the powerlessness of the characters and how their life is beyond their control, which is true to today's situation in Venezuela. I sustained the length of the blackslate to give space for the audience to imagine and absorb the emotion of Esperanza. The length of the black slate contrasts with the prior editing that are cut in fast pace, which further amplifies the psychological effect.



Fig 8. The contrast between blue and yellow suggests the different atmosphere of each setting.

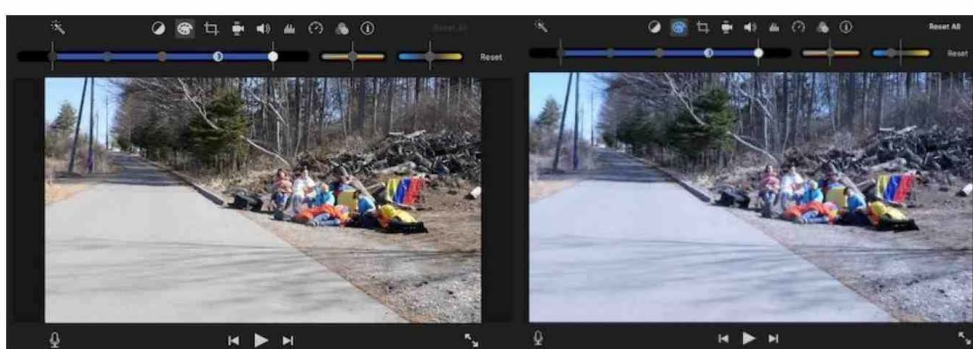


Fig 9. Before and after the color coding

The color in *Esperanza* is used to establish the atmosphere and suggest emotion (fig 8 and 9). I used the blue-yellow parameter on iMovie to establish two different settings; the harshness of the reality is represented by blue, while the warmth of her memory is represented by yellow. The director and I both felt that color should not be exaggerated, because we wanted to communicate that this story was not imagined, but it is based on the real event; the exaggerated color would have disconnected the story from reality. Contrasting color effectively communicates the two different atmospheres of the setting, except for one shot: the shot of demonstration. Though it is still part of Esperanza's memory, I chose to neutralize the colour, for two reasons: to show that the event is in the midst of the past and the present; and the uncertainty of how it might evolve. Because the sky is the predominant feature of the frame, the raw clip was blue so I added yellow effect to neutralize the color. I attempt to show that the Venezuelan Crisis is not what constitutes Esperanza's memory, but an event that is revolving today. This contributes to the overall editing, because the neutral color indicates that it was the turning point for Esperanza; the

emerging oppression became real to her when she lost Simon Jesus, and its natural color indicates the transition from her memory to the hardship in the present.

Because I was able to take on the role I felt the most comfortable, it pushed me to have a clear intent that I can share with my crew as I was making decisions. I always admired the filmic skills each of my teammate possessed, and I believe we successfully weaved our individual asset to craft the powerful story. The mutual respect was always present, and it encouraged us to have discussions as we crafted the film; this allowed us to question and gain deeper understanding of the decisions that we had taken as a premise. I am very grateful to have been part of this creative endeavor.

1982 words

Works Cited

FILMS

Pan's Labyrinth. Del Toro Guillermo, Ivana Baquero, Doug Jones, Telecinco, 2006.

Shoplifters. Hirokazu Koreeda, Kirin Kiki, Sakura Ando, Fuji TV, 2018.

The Darjeeling Limited. Wes Anderson, Jason Schwartzman, Adrien Brody, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2013.