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## Professional Wrestling and Contemporary Photography: The Case of Dulce Pinzón's The Real Story of the Superheroes

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# *Professional Wrestling and Contemporary Photography: The Case of Dulce Pinzón's The Real Story of the Superheroes*

Heather Jane Bayly

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- <sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes writes in "The World of Wrestling" that professional wrestling is an "open-air spectacle" (2005, p.23). Dulce Pinzón, a young Mexican artist living in New York, took him literally by photographing Mexican immigrant workers in superhero and wrestling garb and placed them on the streets of New York in order to attract the spectator's eye and to focus attention on what Pinzón considered "unnoticed" heroic acts. In her photo series, "The Real Story of Superheroes," El Santo (or The Saint, the legendary Mexican wrestler, actor and popular folk hero) protests in the street among dissatisfied workers; Captain America arrests a lawbreaker; Robin, the Boy Wonder, reveals the gritty side of prostitution on the backstreets of New York; Catwoman takes care of young children...<sup>1</sup>
- <sup>2</sup> While this project would become internationally renowned<sup>2</sup> and win Dulce Pinzón much acclaim, it could be argued that much of the popularity of her photographic series and its universal appeal is contingent upon her use of costume – take away the costumes, and the whole series loses much of its resonance. Christophe Lamoureux explains, "In the ritual of the (professional wrestling) spectacle, the costume bestows the entertainment with its theatrical dimension. What the ring name says of the role, the pro-wrestling clothes make obvious, always through hypersignificants. Robes, leotards, hoods, masks, shoes, gloves, hairstyles and various accessories constitute the excess in the designation of the moral characters interpreted by the wrestlers."<sup>3</sup> (1988 p.188) While pertaining to pro-wrestling, his quote reveals some of the parallels between Pinzón's photographs and professional wrestling – use of costume, narrative, excess, and morality. In fact, all three art forms (contemporary photography, pro-wrestling, and superhero comic books) rely heavily on

costume to help define the notion of “hero” as well as provide an “imaginative blending of fact/fiction, of a subject and its allegorical and psychological significant.” (Cotton 2011, p. 52)

- 3 What definition of hero is illustrated in Dulce Pinzón’s contemporary photographic series and is it consistent with her definition established in the presentation of her project? What is the relation between her “hero” and the wrestling “face”<sup>4</sup>? And can this help the viewer understand not only who the hero is but also who the villain is? Does the discourse of pro-wrestling allow Pinzón to anchor the interpretation of the Mexican workers as heroes more solidly? The first aim of this paper is to identify the objective of Pinzón’s photographic series and how she visually reconceptualized the notion of hero<sup>5</sup>. Then we will question how the pro-wrestling / superhero discourse blurs Pinzón’s photographic message that at first glance appears quite clear and simple.

## Pinzón’s Conceptualization of Hero

- 4 The title of her photographic series claims to reveal “The Real Story of the Superheroes” but this raises the question of how does she define her superhero? Her artistic statement and the visual clues she inserts into her photographs help the viewer to answer this question.
- 5 Dulce Pinzón, a Mexican photographer living in New York since 1995, claims her photographic series emerged in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers. At the time of the traumatic event, she was an activist in a trade union working with fellow Mexican immigrants.<sup>6</sup> Inspired by the everyman heroism of New York firefighters and others, Pinzón felt that, in their own way, the Mexican immigrants were invisible heroes and needed recognition. She explains further in her artistic statement, “After September 11, the notion of the ‘hero’ began to rear its head in the public consciousness more and more frequently. The notion served a necessity in a time of national and global crisis to acknowledge those who showed extraordinary courage or determination in the face of danger, sometimes even sacrificing their lives in an attempt to save others. However, in the whirlwind of journalism surrounding these deservedly front-page disasters and emergencies, it is easy to take for granted the heroes who sacrifice immeasurable life and labor in their day to day lives for the good of others, but do so in a somewhat less spectacular setting.” (2012)<sup>7</sup> Thus, for Pinzón, heroism does not only stem from extraordinary events; it also has its source in the ordinary. Her oxymoronic, ordinary superheroes are simply individuals who make continual sacrifices everyday. Photographed primarily in their work environment, they embody the Puritan work ethic, so prominent in American national mythology.<sup>8</sup> They embrace the values of devotion to country (pay their taxes to the US government) and devotion to family (“help their families” through remittance sent back to Mexico).
- 6 Paradoxically, for Pinzón, it is their very ordinariness that makes them exceptional, “The principal objective of this series is to pay homage to these brave and determined men and women that somehow manage, without the help of any supernatural power, to withstand extreme conditions of labor in order to help their families and communities survive and prosper.” (2012) Their heroism stems from the fact that despite dismal working conditions they manage to pay their taxes and support their family in Mexico through the remittance they send.

- 7 The heroic condition thus comes from their herculean work capacity. “The Mexican immigrant worker in New York is a perfect example of the hero who has gone unnoticed. It is common for a Mexican worker in New York to work extraordinary hours in extreme conditions for very low wages which are saved at great cost and sacrifice and sent to families and communities in Mexico who rely on them to survive.” (Pinzón 2012)
- 8 Thus, by textually emphasizing in her artistic statement the Mexican immigrants’ commitment to country, work and family – sacred values to all Americans – Pinzón alludes to their attempt and/or their capacity of integration into the American society. How does all this translate visually? How did she photographically represent the unsung Mexican heroes? Visually, how is the notion of ‘hero’ communicated to the viewer?

## Visual Codifying of (Super)Hero

- 9 During an interview, she claims that the idea for her project came to her while she was in Mexico and at a time of the superhero revival as she was shopping. She saw a Spiderman costume and the rest is history. (Cattaruzza 2011, p. 51) It all started with the appeal of costumes and their symbolic and esthetic transformative powers.
- 10 The primary choice for the visual translation of the notion of hero resided in the superhero costume and the Mexican garb of the Mexican wrestler (the *luchador*). Thus, Pinzón dressed her fellow Mexican union members and her neighbors in costumes of El Santo, the famous Mexican wrestler, members of the Justice League, the Fantastic Four and other well-known superheroes. Mixing both American and Mexican cultural codes bridges the gap between the two cultures.
- 11 As the superhero genre dictates, the action primarily occurs in New York City, Gotham City or any other fictitious city which creates a possible link to megalopolis. Pinzón accordingly photographed her superheroes in their workplace in which the setting is primarily urban. Those photographed outside provide the viewer’s eye glimpses of skyscrapers, cityscapes, restaurants, construction sites, streets, public transportation such as taxis and the subway. Photographed inside, signs of urban life are still clearly visible – buildings are seen in the background and people are eating out.... thus, imbedding the scenes in New York.
- 12 In order to call attention to the heroic sacrifice that the subjects make, Pinzón has anchored the meaning of each photograph with a caption that specifies each superhero by his/her “real” Mexican identity, his/her hometown and how much remittance is sent back to Mexico each week or month. This notion of sacrifice is understood thanks to the artistic statement that introduces the series yet is reemphasized through repetition in the caption. For example, the caption accompanying Superman reads, “Noe Reyes from the state of Puebla works as a delivery man in Brooklyn, New York. He sends home 500 dollars a week.” (Pinzón 2012) The caption focuses and orients the viewer’s attention to her new interpretation of sacrifice, one that is henceforth linked to race, kinship and labor.
- 13 The photographic genre also contributes to the identification of the Mexican subjects as heroes. In an interview, Pinzón placed her work in what she referred to as fictional documentary. The costume clad Mexicans make the fictional manifest. In contemporary photography, storytelling may “make obvious references to fables, fairy tales, apocryphal events and modern myths that are already part of our collective consciousness.” (Cotton

- p.49) In this case, the superhero costumes reinforce Pinzón's objective to make her art universal and widely recognizable by all classes; meaning is accessible and apparent.
- 14 Yet, at the same time, the workplace setting and the anchorage situate the photographic series in the documentary genre. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Jacob Riis and Lewis Hines used photography to raise consciousness of "How the Other Half Lives," this genre has focused on the isolated and the excluded. In many of the photographs, the subject is the sole individual within the frame: Spiderman scales the outside of a skyscraper; Green Lantern appears to be bored as he guards a vacant worksite; Birdman awaits the subway on a deserted platform; Wonder Woman tends to laundry in an empty Laundromat; Superman cycles through the abandoned streets of Brooklyn. The other photographs which have people as part of the scene appear to isolate or exclude the "superheroes" through non-verbal body language (backs turned from the photographer's lens, gaze engaged in the opposite direction than that of the subject) and plastic elements (blur caused by a shallow depth of field). The Mexican heroes are invisible and ignored by the rest of New York. Although this detachment from the American society does not seem to communicate heroism, it does however link it to the superhero genre. Robert Peaslee in his essay "Superheroes, 'Moral Economy,' and the 'Iron Cage': Morality, Alienation and the Super-Individual" conceives the role of superheroes in contemporary society as "an extreme example of the individual in an alienating and diffuse society." (p.37). He reiterates, "The relationship of the superhero to the social whole has always been one of alienation of one kind or another." (Peaslee p.50). It is in fact the fusion of the two genres, both fictional and documentary, that create the power of Pinzón's photographic series. Without the trope of the costume, much of the impact would be lost. Imagine these same pictures with subjects photographic in their everyday attire. Indeed, functioning as a simple documentary wouldn't have been nearly as effective (nor popular) in meeting Pinzón's objective of "paying homage to unnoticed heroes" and their sacrifices.
- 15 Pinzón's definition of Mexican workers is not stable - it shifts between the notions of hero, superhero and pro-wrestling "face." As it has been demonstrated, Pinzón initially began with notion of hero, but in order to make a clear visual statement that would be easily recognizable, Pinzón relied upon codes from the superhero/ pro-wrestling genre to ensure understanding.
- 16 To be sure, Pinzón's Mexican subjects meet Peter Coogan's criteria for superheroes as defined in his article, "The Definition of Superhero." According to Coogan, a superhero is "a heroic character" with a mission, powers and a specific, recognizable identity (p.21).
- 17 **Mission**, "The superhero's mission is pro-social and selfless, which means that his fight against evil must fit in with the existing, professed mores of society and must not be intended to benefit further himself." (Coogan p.24) The self-abjection of the Mexican immigrants and their social mission is especially clear from the caption. Pinzón's subjects however are working to improve the living conditions of their families which in the end contributes to their sense of self-fulfillment and ultimately aims at improving their social conditions.
- 18 **Superpowers** are one of the most identifiable elements of the superhero. They amplify natural abilities - super-strength, super-speed, super-leaping, invulnerability...(Coogan p.25) However, as the example of Captain America, who is human, points out, powers need not necessarily be super-powers. This lack of superpowers may require extra effort on behalf of the superhero. As we pointed out earlier, Pinzón claims her and Mexican

subjects are heroes because their heroic exploits are achieved “without the help of any supernatural power.”

- 19 **Identity** – costume (iconic representations of identity) and codename (secret identity) externalize their alter ego’s inner character or biography (Coogan p.26). Again, the legend identifies their alter-ego and the costume corresponds to the requirements of their work environment: window washer becomes Spiderman, Aquaman works in a fish market, the Thing jackhammers at a construction site while The Incredible Hulk muscles boxes out of a truck.
- 20 Pinzón’s series also meets the criteria of the wrestling “face” established by Gerald Morton and Goerge O’Brien’s study of the history of pro-wrestling in which they assert that the wrestling hero (“face”), “must embody some significant virtue – patriotism, ethnic loyalty, love of family...” (p.142). Virtues which have been clearly highlighted both textually and visually here. As much as she has drawn upon the fictional superhero characters in order to invest her subjects with visually recognizable traits of heroism, the Mexican workers are not two-dimensional comic book characters. Many parallels with pro-wrestling codes are also present and contribute to the meaning of the series.

## Contributions to Pinzón’s Photographic Series from Professional Wrestling

- 21 In as much as studies have pointed out that the lines between spectacle, sport, television entertainment and theatre are blurred with professional wrestling,<sup>9</sup> little (if any) focus has been made on the relationship between professional wrestling and contemporary photography. In fact, certain codes present in pro-wrestling seep over into Pinzón’s photographs, imparting a more complex notion of hero (which will be analyzed more fully in the final part of the article). Professional wrestling and photography as cultural forms both offer representations structured around conventions and rules to create meaning. They are produced according to social and aesthetic contentions. We are going to see the proclivity of the pro-wrestling/ superhero genre to cross boundaries making Pinzón’s photographic series universally appealing, while at the same time supplementing meaning. They include: mass appeal, costume and excess, as well as narrative.
- 22 Professional wrestling and Pinzón’s Superheroes photo series are both visual experiences made for the masses.
- 23 Roland Barthes, in his eminent essay on pro-wrestling clarifies that, “Wrestling is not a sport, it’s a spectacle...” (p.23) Indeed, multiple studies have explored the relationship between pro-wrestling and theater. However, as Dalbir Sehmy remarks, “Culturally, when we think of art, we don’t think of professional wrestling” (p.2). Pro-wrestling occupies the status of low art, appealing to the working-class/ the masses ever since its beginnings in taverns in postbellum NY’s Bowery district in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the tavern stage, to the carnival tent, and the music hall stage, to the gymnasium, auditorium and finally the superdome, wrestling has been a sport of the people, expected to be performed in front of an audience. For those unable to attend the wild frenzy of matches, the local press kept the masses informed of regional events. But by the 1950s, the small television screen brought pro-wrestling into the mainstream of American popular culture. Today, daily hype on mass media broadcast entertainment of the WWE

(World Wrestling Entertainment) ensures that pro-wrestling as a spectacle is seen, and seen by the masses. On the other hand, art photography as high art (not to be confused with commercial photography), thanks to the unrelenting efforts of Alfred Stieglitz, has its place side-by-side paintings and sculpture within museums walls. As such, art photography is usually intended for an elite, informed audience. Even though Dulce Pinzón's photography belongs to the contemporary photography genre typically found in museums, she has specifically made this series available to a mass audience. She participated in the renowned photography festival *Les Rencontres d'Arles* in France. She has also taken part in the PhotoIreland Festival in Dublin and another in Bogotá, Colombia. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers, including *Marie Claire* (South Africa and Thailand editions), *Mother Jones*, *Rolling Stone* (Italian edition), *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Washington Post*, just to name a few (Pinzon 2013). In addition to museums, she intentionally exposes her work in schools round the United States and in cultural centers such as the FNAC in France, for example. In 2012, Pinzón's series was published in a book format, thus increasing even further her possibilities of reaching a wide and vast audience. And finally, her entire series is accessible on Internet on her official website ([www.dulcepinzon.com](http://www.dulcepinzon.com)) as well as on many other websites. This wide circulation in diversified venues, media and countries reflects both her desire to reach a mass audience as well as the mass audience proving its interest in her photographic series.

- 24 In both the superhero and the wrestling genre the costume is what makes the hero manifest. Christophe Lamoureux specifies in his book, *La grande parade du catch*, that the costume in wrestling is an eye-catching connotation, "Much like the excessive codes of physical appearance and behavior, the costume is sufficiently stereotyped to function immediately as both an eye-catcher and as a powerful connotator of intentions" <sup>10</sup> (1993 p.306)
- 25 Thus, the costume is a necessity of character, establishing their role visually for the audience. It is, "essential to role identification, for the characters that wrestlers assume are highly stylized; thus the costume becomes symbolic of how the wrestler will act in the ring based on the role he will play." (Morton p.105). The excess of the wrestler's costume accordingly guarantees an immediate recognition of the wrestler as either a "heel" (the villain) or a "face" (the hero). Likewise, "The superhero's costume place(s) his actions in a comprehensible context...(and it) announces who the superhero is and explains what he is doing..." (Coogan pp.27-28). Thus, as mentioned above, costume in the contemporary photography of Pinzón adds a fictional and defining dimension.
- 26 The "Real Story of the Superheroes" is composed of a series of photographs that capture a specifically directed event - the Mexican immigrant at work. Unlike mid-twentieth century photo-essays published in picture magazines such as *Life* in which the narrative was developed sequentially through the assembly of two to twelve photographs, or even contemporary "tableau" which incorporates narrative into a single image, no story unfolds in Pinzón's photographs. Photo after photo depicts a new subject, placed in a new environment, performing a new task. The narrative repeats itself, emphasizing the redundancy of the tasks set before the Mexican workers. This sensation of repetition is intentionally construed through Pinzon's ability to photographically manipulate the plastic elements communicating movement and time. The Mexican immigrant and the members of society incorporated within the frame are not on the same scale of motion. As Boy Wonder leans inertly against a street pole, the sharp focus and his centrality



within the lines of perspective reinforce the impression that he is stuck in time. In dramatic contrast, the blurred passers-by roaming down the street create the impression that society continues to advance while Boy Wonder remains stuck in the same situation. Or in the case of the waiter Mr. Fantastic (Mexico)/Mr. Elastic (United States), this time society appears to be frozen in time as he incessantly repeats the same gestures. In both cases, society and the workers encapsulate contrasting temporalities.

- 27 Despite a certain absence of narrative, Pinzón's photos do draw upon the superhero/pro-wrestling conventions to articulate narrative. The wrestling match provides an on-going drama with "...matches that will build a continuous crescendo toward a never resolved mythic, ultimate showdown between good and evil." (Morton p.68) These plotlines are constructed to last weeks on end before the face, the "good guy", eventually prevails. It is about performance, not truth. Applying this logic to Pinzón's photographs, the viewer identifies the Mexican worker as hero/face and awaits triumph.
- 28 In short, Pinzón's photos, instead of being reserved for an elite group of viewers, have been purposely widely circulated. Major elements of narrative, costume and excess inform the viewer that the Mexican is the face, the hero, within the ring of the American society. The superhero genre dominates through the photograph's construction of narrative which enhances alienation and exclusion. Like the face/superhero who struggles against the forces of evil, will the superhero Mexican immigrants overcome the powerful status quo?

## Resisting Redefinition as Heroes

- 29 Despite the popularity of Pinzón's narrative and the conformity to the superhero/face genre, linked to social and political context of new millennium New York, her defining of hero as a Mexican immigrant resists redefinition. In fact, these codes seem to weaken Pinzón's "hero" discourse by rendering it more ambiguous. The use of superhero and pro-wrestling costumes in order to render manifest the Mexican identity as heroic, is not a distinction as cut and dry as Pinzón most likely intended it to be. Pinzón's idea to dress grown adults up in Halloween costumes, stick them in their work environment (where tensions may already be running high) and take their picture is quite excessive – even if it has clearly defined the subject as the "hero". Or has it? One could easily scoff contemptuously at the derision as another could appreciate the joke. In any case, this could have a counter effect – instead of admiring the Mexicans' courageous endeavors, the viewer could also question the seriousness of the "heroic" Mexican. At the same time, the superhero genre leads the viewer to understand that where there is a superhero, evil forces must be lurking not too far away. As for wrestling, Morton and O'Brien remind us it "is social by its very nature and to exist requires the other, friend or foe." (Morton p.1)
- 30 The oddity in Pinzón's photo series is that the *other* is not immediately apparent. The question then arises: who or what is that evil force? The superhero has been made obvious, but the evil villain much less so. One might suggest the American society as the evil foe or perhaps Poverty itself which forces one to leave country and family to survive. Or yet again, perhaps it is Big Capitalism which is able to exploit workers through agreements such as NAFTA? Or then again, is the villain the superhero's alter-ego (the real Mexican)?



- 31 Sharon Mazer, in her sociological study of wrestling “Real Wrestling”/“Real Life,” explains that the wrestling narrative finds some of its source in current events. She explicates, “For the fans, not only are the stories that are told to them in the ongoing professional wrestling narratives drawn from life; life itself can be read through the structures and understandings that professional wrestling provides. Current events become material for characters and stories...” (Mazer 71). The time span during which Pinzón worked on her series covers the post-9/11 period until her book was published in 2012. During this time, the September 11-terrorist attacks on American soil raised fears of national security that were in turn aggravated by the tumultuous situation of immigration in the US and the ensuing Great Recession increased anxieties about immigrants ‘stealing’ jobs. Most 21<sup>st</sup> century immigrants come from Latin America, especially Mexico. There are an estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the US, over half of which come from Mexico. However, this undocumented population plays an important role in the US economy, notably in the agriculture, construction and service sectors (Passel). During the Great Recession, this became a great source of tension. Fears arose that this influx of Mexicans and other Latin Americans could challenge the WASP dominance both culturally and linguistically. This ethnocentric phobia is formulated by the American academic Samuel Huntington in March/April 2004 issue of *Foreign Policy*, “The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril.” These and other such arguments pushed forward legislation for stricter border control and attempts for more restrictive immigration laws at the State level (Arizona Law of 2010).
- 32 Through the narrative being played out by the two antagonists in the ring, the audience lives out real frustrations vicariously as political, social or economic events/conditions are replayed. “...(T)he wrestling match becomes a form of what (Clifford) Geertz terms, “imaginative realism,” whereby the struggles, unresolved difficulties, and ambiguities of everyday life are acted out for the (...) audience in a way that is exhilarating and meaningful.” (in Murray p.57) Pinzón’s “superheroes” are in the ring of American society playing out a larger narrative of American culture and immigrants searching for the American dream, their dream. The spectators/viewers may cheer them on, hoping that someday they reach their goal, or despise them for threatening American workers’ job security. This fear of Mexicans may play into one of the most common tropes in wrestling: the evil foreigner. Evil foreign heels are pitted against “a devoted American patriot”<sup>11</sup>: the Iron Sheik during the Iran Hostage Crisis, the Russian Nikolai Volkoff (along with other “Soviets”) during the Cold War and more recently, Muhammad Hassan whose career came to an end when, during a match after 9/11, the plot line had a group of hooded men (read terrorists) come into the ring to help him take down the Undertaker. The question again arises: are Pinzón’s subjects representing the American patriot or the evil foreign heel? In light of the social and political context, it seems that Pinzón used a technique common in wrestling to keep the Mexican worker from being understood as the ‘evil foreigner’ in order to portray him as hero – the discourse of the minority “face”. The minority hero (a consequence of the Civil Rights Movement on wrestling) – “symbol(izes) those persons who have fought and will continue to fight to get

to the top.” (Morton pp.150-1) Despite all their hardships, just like American folk heroes, their hard work, commitment, virtue, etc. help them succeed while at the same time serve as a reminder that America is the land of opportunity. By exploiting the convention of the minority face, Pinzón takes the risk of reproducing the binary trap that set apart the good versus bad immigrant.

- 33 In his study, Morton explains the limitations of the wrestling minority character, “A minority member can be a hero only as long as he can be a hero for all the people. The moment he too distinctly emphasizes his ethnic background he can not have widespread appeal.” (Morton 153) Simply saying, the minority may be accepted as a hero as long as he downplays ethnic/racial uniqueness and focuses on American values. This is reflected visually in Pinzón’s photo series as nothing specifically denotes “Mexican” (with of course the exception of El Santo who was left out of her book). Looked at from a documentary perspective, the photographs don’t illustrate a murky America; visually, the “Superheroes” work environment does not appear as hazardous, deplorable nor extreme – just hard (in which other minorities such as African-Americans or even teenagers could hold). Like the wrestling minority hero, Pinzón’s emphasis is on values – their dedication to their work.
- 34 Unfortunately for Pinzón’s Mexican subjects, she blurs her message of the minority hero by intentionally including the legends. As pointed out earlier, her idea is to emphasize their hard work and sacrifice; nevertheless her anchorage draws attention away from the visual “hero” and refocuses it on the Mexican identity. This evokes the superhero’s alter ego. Does Pinzón’s superhero embody the superhero/everyday man/woman dichotomy like Superman and Kent Clark or the superhero/villain duality like Batman’s adversary, Two-Face? Or even more confusingly, do her superheroes embody the instability of the contemporary wrestling “face” whose character may shift across the lines of good and evil. “Wrestling heroes and villains are defined chiefly through their opposition, as a villain can become a hero by engaging in a feud with one even more villainous than he or she. Similarly, a hero can become a villain by coming into conflict with a hero more popular than he or she.” (Ford pp. 9-10)
- 35 Hence, the nature of Pinzón’s Mexican superheroes is questionable and elusive. Pinzón’s hero reflects the ambiguous nature Mexicans have in the American society. Are they to be seen as Mexicans? As Americans? As Mexican-Americans? As the devoted American patriot or the loyal Mexican temporarily working in the US? As long as they appear to represent American values, without ethnic or racial emphasis, they are lauded as the underdog minority. However, if their patriotism may be doubted and their loyalty to the American homeland is uncertain (as could be suspected by the large sums of dollars sent back to Mexico) distrust and suspicion will prevail among (certain) Americans. They are indeed, on the one hand the evil foreign heel and on the other, the minority underdog diligently applying American values. The perception continues to slide.
- 36 Not only is the heroic nature problematic, the “Story” Pinzón has written communicates a narrative of entrapment. As part of the superhero genre, the superheroes are without hope (Ndaliani p.3) “Occupying a space outside culture, the super/hero often serves the function of mediator figure that enters a community in crisis with the aim of resolving its conflicts and restoring the status quo.”(Ndaliani p.3) This lack of hope is in fact present in the narrative of “The Real Story of the Superheroes” presented through Pinzón’s use of tableau photography.

- 37 Even if they are parts of larger works, narrative is loaded into a single frame (Cotton p.49). As the series advances page after page, Pinzón provides a new variant on the same scenario: just a new superhero in a new workspace. Likewise, the feeling of no escape and redundancy permeate each individual frame in which we can imagine the progress (or lack of) of the day's events. The subjects are caught in the ring, trapped in a cycle of endless recommencement: El Chapulin (Red Grasshopper), the construction worker, echoes Sisyphus; Wonderwoman's laundry (like our own) never ends; and Harvey the Bird man awaiting the subway echoes the French expression "metro, boulot, dodo" – the notion that every day revolves solely around work. Here again, the narrative traps the subjects into the personae of the workday – their individuality (evoked by their name and their hometown) is lost. They are playing out the role that has been assigned to them much as the wrestler in the ring follows his script. Visually, Pinzón confirms a lack of solution for the Mexican superheroes. The narrative created through Pinzón's use of tableau photography asserts impasse, inertia.
- 38 While the 'fans,' or rather viewers may encourage the heroic Mexicans in their pursuit of the American Dream, Pinzón makes it clear that there is little hope that they may attain it. Richard Reynolds affirms, "The superhero has a mission to preserve society not to re-invent it." (77) Mentioned earlier the selfless mission has been to help the Mexican community. No conflict is resolved, tensions are perhaps even acerbated. The message is that no matter what their efforts, as long as the source of their loyalty lies beyond the American borders, nothing can change. The superhero is not so super as he/she remains helpless faced with the status quo.

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## NOTES

1. <http://www.dulcepinzon.com/superheroes.htm>
2. Her photo series which began being exhibited in New York city and then across the United States, has been shown all around the world in countries such as China, Italy, Mexico, Australia, France and has been attributed prizes including the Ford Foundation fellowship.
3. "Dans le rituel de la parade (du catch), le costume de scène donne au divertissement sa dimension théâtrale. Ce que le surnom dit du rôle, l'habit de catch montre - de visu -, toujours avec des hypersignifiants. Peignoirs, justaucorps, cagoules, masques, chaussures, gants, coiffures et accessoires divers composent une surenchère dans la désignation des types moraux à interpréter par les lutteurs."
4. From "babyface."
5. As Angela Ndalianis reminds us, the post September 11, 2001 period during which Pinzón began her superhero photo series witnessed a revival in the superhero in the cinemas and television series. (p.1)
6. She was an organizer in the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 338. (Cattaruzza ; Suarez De Jesus)

7. In addition to the book, all of the photographs mentioned in this article are posted on Dulce Pinzón's website: [http://www.dulcepinzon.com/en\\_projects\\_superhero.htm](http://www.dulcepinzon.com/en_projects_superhero.htm)

8. We can refer to Max Weber's definition of the "Spirit of Capitalism" in which he bases his arguments on Benjamin Franklin's writings. Weber explains, "...the idea of a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital...is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic." (Weber, p.17)

9. See chapter 3 'Professional Wrestling's Roots in Theatrical Traditions'. Morton pp.103-125.

10. "Comme les codes excessifs de l'apparence physique et de la présentation de soi, le costume est suffisamment stéréotypé pour fonctionner immédiatement à la fois comme "attrape-regard" et comme puissant connotateur d'intentions"

11. "...the professional wrestling scenario follows in the line of dramatic literature that has evolved from the basic formula of Prudentius' fifth century heroic poem *Psychomachia*. One element of this formula is that as the characters who embody the various vices and virtues meet in combat, they must be somehow appropriately aligned....Thus, if there is an evil foreigner in the wrestling script, he must have a devoted American patriot to offset him in the ring wars." (Morton p.147)

## RÉSUMÉS

In response to popular attention drawn to September 11, 2001 heroes, Mexican photographer Dulce Pinzón created the photographic series "The Real Story of the Superheroes" to draw attention to what she considered heroic exploits performed by Mexican immigrants on a daily basis in New York City. Her images draw heavily upon superhero/pro-wrestling codes to impart meaning. Through analysis of the photographer's objective and photographs, this paper demonstrates that the correlation between the two cultural forms convolutes understanding and re-emphasizes the polysemy of photography and the difficulty (despite clear anchorage) to impose a specific understanding – that of Mexican immigrants as heroes.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés** : Dulce Pinzón, photographie contemporaine, catch, immigrants mexicains, super-héros

**Keywords** : contemporary photography, wrestling, Mexican immigrants, superheroes

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