Fiction Puzzles: Globalization and Ensemble Narratives

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FAGO CONSTAR

Que a devandita tese de doutoramento reúne os requisitos formais e técnicos necesarios para a súa lectura e defensa pública.

A Coruña, 8 de xullo de 2019

Asdo: Begoña Simal González

ABSTRACT

The process of globalization has never been so widespread as in current times. Technological developments, migratory flows, and the power of transnational corporations and the Global North have established a new paradigm, characterized by worldwide interconnectedness. Furthermore, both personal and structural violence constitute a prevailing force in society. Literature and films are certainly no strangers to this context, often exploring it. Therefore, this dissertation studies the representation of globalization and violence in ensemble narratives. I maintain that, with their multi-protagonist structure, ensemble narratives excel at reflecting our globalized world, while echoing violence through thematic content and through formal narrative violence. The corpus includes novels and films in which globalization and violence are relevant issues: Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997), Ito Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* (2000), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000), Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004), and Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006). For this analysis, literary and film theories such as narratology and Film Studies are used to tackle the main aspects of ensemble narratives and formal narrative violence. Also, this dissertation resorts to globalization studies, postcolonial theories, and transnational theories, among others, to discuss the corpus from various perspectives.

RESUMO

O proceso de globalización nunca estivo tan estendido como agora. Desenvolvementos tecnolóxicos, fluxos migratorios e o poder das transnacionais e do Norte Global estableceron un novo paradigma caracterizado pola interconectividade mundial. Ademais, a violencia persoal e a estrutural constitúen forzas imperantes na sociedade. A literatura e o cine non son alleos a este contexto, o cal exploran a miúdo. Así, esta tese estuda a representación da globalización e a violencia nas *ensemble narratives*. Coa súa estrutura multi-protagonista, manteño que as *ensemble narratives* destacan ao reflexar a globalización, facéndose eco da violencia co contido temático e a violencia narrativa formal. O corpus inclúe novelas e películas que examinan ámbolos temas: *Tropic of Orange* (1997) de Karen Tei Yamashita, *El Puente/The Bridge* (2000) de Ito Romo, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) de Kiran Desai, *Traffic* (2000) de Steven Soderbergh, *Crash* (2004) de Paul Haggis, e *Babel* (2006) de Alejandro González Iñárritu. Para explorar os aspectos formais das *ensemble narratives* e a violencia narrativa formal, usarei teorías literarias e cinematográficas tales como narratoloxía ou *Film Studies*. Para analizar o corpus desde diversas perspectivas, recorrerei a estudos de globalización, teorías postcoloniais e transnacionais, entre outras.

RESUMEN

El proceso de globalización nunca estuvo tan extendido como ahora. Desarrollos tecnológicos, flujos migratorios y el poder de las transnacionales y del Norte Global establecieron un nuevo paradigma caracterizado por una interconectividad mundial. Además, la violencia personal y la estructural constituyen fuerzas imperantes en la sociedad. La literatura y el cine no son ajenos a este contexto, el cual exploran a menudo. Así, esta tesis estudia la representación de la globalización y la violencia en las *ensemble narratives*. Con su estructura multi-protagonista, mantengo que las *ensemble narratives* destacan al reflejar la globalización, haciéndose, asimismo, eco de la violencia con el contenido temático y la violencia narrativa formal. El corpus incluye novelas y películas que examinan ambos temas: *Tropic of Orange* (1997) de Karen Tei Yamashita, *El Puente/The Bridge* (2000) de Ito Romo, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) de Kiran Desai, *Traffic* (2000) de Steven Soderbergh, *Crash* (2004) de Paul Haggis, y *Babel* (2006) de Alejandro González Iñárritu. Para explorar los aspectos formales de las *ensemble narratives* y la violencia narrativa formal, usaré teorías literarias y cinematográficas como narratología o *Film Studies*. Para analizar el corpus desde diversas perspectivas, recurriré a estudios de globalización, teorías postcoloniales y transnacionales, entre otras.

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Introduction[1]

The fourth episode of the final season of *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), "The Last of the Starks," has recently left us with an interesting anecdote. This TV show, produced by the American network, HBO, has been extremely popular from beginning to end, thus contributing to the process of Americanization as well as claiming its right to belong to the global culture. The eighth season of the show has been met with passion from the fans, who have fervently criticized the series finale. The ending of the show has been (and still is at the moment of writing these lines) a trending topic on the Internet, where a scene in particular has drawn many viewers' attention. In "The Last of the Starks," numerous fans were able to spot a "prop" that was mistakenly forgotten on set: a Starbucks cup of coffee (00:16:36). One way to read this blunder is by claiming that the overwhelming expansion of transnational companies such as Starbucks has reached as far as medieval-like Westeros, where the process of Americanization is also underway. It is precisely this pervasive presence of—and domination exerted by—transnational corporations and the U.S., in relation to the phenomenon of globalization, which constitutes one of the main concerns of this dissertation.

The relevance of the process of globalization as well as its representation in literature and films has prompted this dissertation, which explores one kind of narrative in particular: ensemble narratives. It is my contention that, through their multiple plotlines and protagonists, ensemble narratives excel at reflecting the consequent interconnection that comes with our increasingly globalized world. The other prominent leit-motif in the present study is violence. On the one hand, violence is a prevailing

[1] The results of this research have been possible thanks to the funding from the Programa de axudas á etapa predoutoral da Xunta de Galicia (Consellería de Cultura, Educación e Ordenación Universitaria) and from the Spanish Research Agency (Agencia Estatal de Investigación), Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, which funded our research project "Literature and Globalization: A Transnational approach to American Literature" (ref. FFI2015-66767-P, AEI/FEDER, UE).

force in our societies, exercised at a personal and a structural level. On the other hand, violence is one of the most significant issues that the selected corpus tackles. Consequently, this dissertation not only explores violence as part of the thematic content of these narratives, but also in relation to how narratives echo violence at a formal and narratological level—what could be considered formal narrative violence. Therefore, the main goal of this doctoral thesis is to elaborate an in-depth analysis of ensemble narratives at a formal and thematic level, emphasizing and recognizing the importance that literature and films have in our societies, and hopefully raising awareness regarding the process of globalization and its—often violent—consequences on our lives.

The process of globalization has never been so widespread as in current times. The concept of globalization gained popularity and was included in dictionaries during the 1960s, with scholars like the economist Theodore Levitt contributing to its expansion in the 1980s and 1990s: its use "erupted in the 1990s with explosive energy in both public and academic discourses that sought to make sense of momentous social change" (James and Steger 418-19; Lane 861).[2] The development of science and technology—particularly Information and Communication Technology (ICTs)—in the last decades has enabled almost instantaneous communication among people, and mass media are able to broadcast all sorts of events from every corner of the world. As a result, in our shrinking world, most individuals have access to a large variety of data in the blink of an eye, primarily through the Internet, thus fostering interconnection and, theoretically, empathy with others. The numerous technological developments and the almost instantaneous access to information also reshapes traditional conceptions of time

[2] According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the first known use of the word "globalization" was in 1930 ("Globalization"). Furthermore, Google's Ngram Viewer also reflects that the presence of the term "globalization" in digitalized books increases substantially from the 1980s onwards ("Globalization," *Ngram*).

and space, as captured by David Harvey's concept of "time-space compression," as we shall see in Part I of this dissertation.

The presence of transnational corporations (TNCs) and the commodities they produce is visible all around the world, even where poverty is the common denominator. This underscores the "slow" violence to which the lower classes are subjected,[3] since these individuals may have access to those goods, such as a can of Coca-Cola, yet not to basic needs like running water. The marginalization of individuals relegated to the lower ranks of the social structure is also an issue that has received more attention from the media, increasing the general awareness of problems such as poverty, labor exploitation, homelessness, and many others. The distribution of wealth is still significantly unequal not only in the developing countries, but also in the industrialized ones, and not only between the developed and the developing countries, but also within each of them—for the amount of impoverished people keeps increasing all around the world (Kapstein 8).[4] Notwithstanding the growing literal visibility of the impoverished, the homeless and other marginalized people, these still remain invisible for the authorities and the rest of the society in sociopolitical terms. Those who suffer an overwhelming marginalization are increasingly aware of their invisibility: the process of globalization along with the significant technological developments in the last fifty years or so have brought these individuals closer to wealthier lifestyles that are unattainable for them. For example, as traveling becomes easier than ever before, a

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[3] A triadic model of inequality divides society into three large groups: "upper, middle and lower [...] classes"—that is, "the rich, the poor and those in between" (Bottero 17). This use of the term "classes" dates from the 18th century, influenced by the "economic changes of the Industrial Revolution and the political conflicts of the American and French revolutions" (Williams 28).

[4] The findings published in the "World Economic Forum's Inclusive Development Index 2018" show that "[i]ncome inequality has risen or remained stagnant in 20 of the 29 advanced economies, and poverty has increased in 17" (4). Even though the majority of "emerging economies have improved in these respects, with 84% of them registering a decline in poverty," it should be underscored that "their absolute levels of inequality remain much higher" (4). Furthermore, in "both advanced and emerging economies, wealth is significantly more unequally distributed than income," and, in recent years, "wealth inequality [has risen] in 49 out of the 103 economies" included in this index (4).

large number of tourists visit "exotic" locations where poverty and other issues are very much present. The invisible individuals thus witness the lifestyle and commodities that they will never be able to own. The mass media[5] and the help the marginalized receive from official institutions, organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also open the eyes of the invisible ones to a life that is impossible for them to reach.

The process of globalization influences individuals as well as the economic, social, political and cultural relationships among countries. Economically developed nations have built a relationship of dependence with developing ones. This relationship inherits the world order that was the norm during colonial times. New empires such as the United States have joined the traditional ones from Europe and have established networks with economically developing countries from Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia. According to Timothy Brennan, the dynamics of globalization primarily follows a U.S. model, although other countries have also benefited to a certain extent (881). However, the outcome of this process has been mostly beneficial for the United States. At an economic level, in spite of the increase in poverty and the stagnation of the middle classes, globalization and trade agreements have been largely profitable for American[6] politicians and big companies as well as the "top 1 percent," that is, the "richest several hundred thousand Americans" (Stiglitz xiii, xvii). In cultural terms, there is a development of a global culture that has been argued to often lean towards the homogenization of the numerous cultures in the world, with countries from the Global

[5] Paul James and Manfred B. Steger mention that images of "the global" were popular during the early 20th century among the media, which contributed to the eventual use of the concept of "globalization." For example, some newspapers like the *Boston Globe* used the word "globe" in their titles, airlines such as Pan American World Airlines had a blue globe as their logo, and some Hollywood studios chose the planet Earth as their logos, as in the case of Universal (422).

[6] For the sake of brevity, I will use "American" in this dissertation. However, my term of preference would actually be "U.S. American." This demonym specifically refers to the United States as opposed to "American," which may be applicable to America, the continent.

North as the primary contributors, especially, the United States.[7] Nevertheless, it should be noted that, as Paul Jay remarks in his landmark study *Global Matters*, only certain appealing aspects from some cultures are incorporated into others (3). Sometimes, those elements that are added are reshaped, thus allowing for a certain degree of agency in the process of cultural transformation.

It can be argued that, in the current paradigm or "world system" (Wallerstein 1974),[8] the new empires introduce their cultures and products into their "neocolonies," ruling over them, along with TNCs and monetary organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), exercising structural violence on the subjugated as was the case with the process of colonization. It is worth pointing out, however, that this violence is not physical. Instead, it refers to Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony: "the unity of knowledge and action, ethics and politics, where such a unity, through its proliferation and concretization throughout society, becomes the way of life and the practice of the popular masses" (Fontana 5). Furthermore, hegemony means "the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates" (Eagleton 112). Thus, the power of organizations like the IMF is a product of social agreement and consent.

[7] The so-called Global North, that is, the economically developed countries—particularly Western Europe, the United States, Japan, and increasingly China—tend to be the ones that export their products, culture, values and traditions to the rest of the world, largely through the media and the Internet.

[8] Wallerstein defines world-system as a "social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence," in which the "conflicting forces" not only "hold it together by tension," but also "tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage" (347). This capitalist world-system is divided into the "core"—the developed countries—, the "periphery"—the underdeveloped countries—, and the "semi-periphery," which are in between. The core—e.g. North America, Europe, Japan—has the economic, political and military power to exploit both the semi-periphery and, above all, the periphery, taking advantage of their "cheap labour, raw materials, and agricultural production" (Elwell 167). On the other hand, the semi-periphery, while exploited by the core, also exerts domination over the periphery and has "expand[ed] [its] manufacturing activities, particularly in areas that are no longer very profitable for core countries" (Elwell 167-68). These relationships of power are not always stable, though, since each member strives for its own advantage, which may lead to revolutionary changes in the system (Wallerstein 347; Elwell 168).

One of the main players in this neocolonial paradigm are transnational corporations. In relation to the global market, the process of globalization has led the economies of the world to have a relationship of interdependence, which is largely dominated by these TNCs, particularly (but not exclusively) American ones. The considerable growth of transnational corporations during the 20th and 21st centuries, along with the fact that they are usually able to successfully settle anywhere, have thus allowed them to determine almost exclusively how the interdependent world economy functions regardless of geographical and political borders, introducing (or imposing) their products into/upon multiple cultures. These corporations are indeed one of the main elements in the process of globalization; they export their products to other countries, influencing their cultures and societies. The profit that these companies can bring to the different governments also pushes countries to compete against one another, with the ultimate goal of attracting as much investment from these TNCs as possible. Hence, these companies disregard the physical borders of the nation-states, whose power is often reduced to the (often lax) regulation and surveillance of the activities of those corporations. The relationship between TNCs and governments is also connected to the process of outsourcing in the pursuit of profitability. Different stages in the chain of production are carried out in assembly factories that these companies set up in the Global South, especially, countries where taxes and regulations are more lax and cheap labor is abundant, as is the case with China, India and Mexico.[9] The products then return to the home countries of the TNCs—usually the Global North—either to be finalized or to be directly commercialized, sometimes at a cheaper price than that of the small local businesses, which are often ousted from their traditional markets by TNCs. Since the narratives produced in a U.S. context is one of our primary concerns, this

[9] At the turn of this century, competition arose in Asia, where wages were much lower than in Mexico. Many TNCs relocated their Mexican assembly factories to Asian locations such as China, Thailand or Bangladesh, to keep or increase their profits, while depriving Mexican economy of one of its pillars.

dissertation will pay attention to the assembly factories on the U.S.-Mexico border, the Mexican *maquiladoras*, an eventual consequence of the Bracero Program (1942-1964) and then greatly supported by the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as discussed in more depth in Part I.

Even if Mexico did reap profits from the agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement has been mostly beneficial to the United States, underscoring its control over the southern neighbor in their neocolonial relationship. Furthermore, on a more negative vein, the agreement has gathered opponents too. Opposing voices claim that NAFTA, even though beneficial for the global capital, TNCs and governments, has been rather detrimental for local businesses, workers and the environment. Most of these *maquiladora* employees can only hope for the minimum wage, and the conditions in which they work are extremely unhealthy, exposed to industrial waste and toxics, which contribute to the environmental pollution too. The increase in commerce and the transportation of raw materials as well as finished goods has also allowed for a growth in the numbers of (undocumented) immigrants from Mexico into the United States, leading to an overmilitarization of the border and an environment of violence added to the illegal crossing of these political boundaries, the smuggling of drugs and people, and other crimes such as assault, murder and rape.

Indeed, violence is a prominent issue in the present study, as anticipated at the beginning of this introduction. To be more specific, I am particularly interested in teasing out the connections between violence and globalization. As reflected in the chosen corpus, violence has always been a constant in the interaction among individuals at all levels in life. According to Johan Galtung, there are three main types of violence: personal or direct violence, structural or indirect violence, and cultural violence. Personal violence, which tends to be shocking, has a specific perpetrator, whereas

structural violence, whose effects are usually slower, does not; it is part of the system. Last but not least, cultural violence justifies the exercise of personal and/or structural violence through cultural aspects. All three types of violence are present in our globalized societies and are represented in the ensemble narratives explored here. An equally productive concept is Rob Nixon's "slow violence." Albeit originally applied to environmental issues, this theory can be extrapolated to socio-economic violence. Nixon's term underscores the fact that "environmental" violence is neither immediate nor shocking. Instead, this type of violence is persistent through time as in the case of environmental pollution, poverty, and other long-lasting issues. As such, slow violence is connected to structural violence, since both are part and parcel of the system.

The increasing interconnectedness—at a sociopolitical, cultural and economic level—associated with the paradigm of globalization has been echoed by literature and films for decades. Among those that deal with these phenomena most effectively—albeit not exclusively—is the ensemble narrative. Particularly from the 1980s onwards, ensemble narratives have gained popularity, as has been underlined by María del Mar Azcona Montoliú, among others. As we shall see in Part II, many scholars have explored and described this type of narratives: David Bordwell, Linda Aronson and John Bruns, to cite a few. Characterized by having multiple protagonists, these narratives resemble jigsaw puzzles, since the different characters and their individual plotlines, initially disconnected from each other, become intertwined usually due to sheer serendipity, primarily through events such as accidents, (brief) relationships among the characters, or the presence of an object in common, acting as a nexus. Moreover, the information that is provided by each thread is necessary to fully understand the overarching plotline. Hence, these formal devices—the numerous pieces comprising the puzzle—may be utilized to explore or accentuate not only the

(coincidental) intertwining of individuals but also the process of globalization. Additionally, due to their formal structure, which lacks a single protagonist or, more accurately, has multiple protagonists, these narratives give equal relevance to their characters, which translates into similar discourse time. Furthermore, ensemble narratives allow for the many characters to inhabit or come from different locations and/or different ethnoracial backgrounds. In turn, this enables a contrast between a variety of contexts or multiple points of view about the same "reality," in what resembles a holographic image, as explained in Part II. As a consequence, it is easier to engage in an exploration of topics such as globalization, migration, racism, personal relationships, social inequality, and other issues from a range of perspectives. In other words, ensemble narratives give voice to individuals from different nations, ethnoracial groups, social classes, and genders, instead of focusing on one single character or point of view. This multi-perspectivism can potentially give a more comprehensive view of the issues dealt with in the narratives as opposed to the more conventional and traditional single-protagonist narratives, which tend to focus on a single point of view, that of the hero(ine).

The contrast between ensemble narratives and single-protagonist texts extends to the reader/viewer as well. The narrative structure of the former tends to be more complex than that of the latter due to the multiple plotlines and characters. The development of each of these threads is constantly postponed, since the plot changes its focus from one protagonist to the next. Thus, ensemble narratives ask for a more active reader/viewer than single-protagonist ones. Adding to this, it is not a rarity for these works to employ disruptions in the chronological linearity of the events through the inclusion of analepsis—flashbacks—or prolepsis—flashforwards. Consequently, depending on how "chrono-illogical" the text is, such a narrative technique may prove

challenging—even confusing—for the audience. Therefore, once again, the understanding of this type of narrative may present itself as a more demanding task for the reader/spectator, who not only needs to follow the events taking place in multiple threads of equal or similar relevance, but also to pay enough attention so as to be able to put the pieces together and in chronological order.

Echoing this intrinsic multiplicity of characters and threads, this type of narratives has suitably received a wide variety of labels, leading to terminological issues that will be addressed in detail in Part II of this doctoral dissertation. Here, however, I would like to highlight that, even if I use different labels for the sake of variety, my preferred term is "ensemble narrative." This term underscores basic aspects of this doctoral thesis. "Ensemble" emphasizes the French meaning of the word: together. The multiple protagonists and threads are connected and united; this entails that all of them are required to fully understand the narrative in its entirety. On the other hand, "narrative" underlines one of the arguments of this study: regardless of the medium and its exclusive characteristics, a narrative is still a narrative. Here, I argue that both films and literature may tell a similar story. Of course, they do it their own way, taking advantage of their audiovisual or written nature. Nonetheless, the core of the story may be the same. Approaching films and literature as narratives, first and foremost, means that most critical theories—with the logical exceptions—can and will be applied to both.

Sprouting from the relevance of current globalization, this doctoral thesis constitutes an analysis of the ways in which the increasing global interconnectedness has influenced our lives as individuals and as members of communities, as explored in literature and film. Therefore, this dissertation will address the formal aspects of ensemble narratives and will tease out the ways they engage with themes such as

globalization, racism, multiculturalism and sociopolitical borders, as well as the overarching issue of violence reflected both thematically and formally. To materialize this, I have selected three novels and three films written or directed by members of different ethnoracial groups and nationalities; these narratives are either set in or directly related to the United States. Added to this multiplicity of backgrounds and contexts, the temporal dimension should be highlighted as well, for all these works were published in the 1990s and 2000s, when contemporary globalization became more visible. As might be expected, then, none of the works analyzed in this dissertation has a specific protagonist. Instead, we find multiple plotlines revolving around several characters that share similar relevance and discourse time. Not only that, but all the texts in our corpus have protagonists that are part of different ethnoracial groups. On the one hand, we will study the following novels: Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997), Ito Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* (2000), and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). On the other hand, the films that will be analyzed are *Traffic* (2000), by Steven Soderbergh, *Crash* (2004), by Paul Haggis, and *Babel* (2006), by Alejandro González Iñárritu.

In order to analyze ensemble narratives in relation to globalization and violence, this dissertation has been divided into four parts. The first part will provide an overview of the main issues explored here, globalization and violence. This part opens with the historical background of globalization, contrasting different academic voices in relation to the origins of this process. The neocolonial paradigm is brought to the fore as well, for it highlights the socioeconomic and cultural domination exerted by the Global North over the Global South. As a consequence, one of the focuses of this dissertation is the relationship between the United States and Mexico. This examination will be tackled using the work or critics working in the fields of Border Studies, Postcolonial Studies,

and Globalization Studies, such as Paul Jay, Ulrich Beck, Walter Mignolo, Joseph Stiglitz, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih. Before embarking on the formal analysis of ensemble narratives, I will devote some time to discussing the notion of violence, primarily focusing on Galtung's aforementioned taxonomy and Nixon's concept of slow violence.

The second part, which comprises four chapters, is an exploration of the formal aspects of ensemble narratives. This part will open with a discussion of terminological issues in relation to ensemble narratives. Section 2.1 will then investigate the history of this type of narrative both in literature and films. We will also examine the traces left in ensemble narratives by both "high-brow" and popular genres, like short story cycles, soap operas and TV series, which often share a multi-protagonist structure. After this historical overview, we will embark on an analysis of the main formal techniques that are recurrent in ensemble narratives, such as the fragmented multi-protagonist structure or the lack of linearity. In section 2.3, we will engage in a discussion of the differences between ensemble narratives and single-protagonist counterparts in terms of the process of readers'/viewers' involvement. In particular, we will analyze the impact that the fragmented structure of these narratives has on the development and confirmation or debunking of the hypotheses with which the readers/viewers come up while experiencing the narrative. The second part of this dissertation will close with an exploration of one of the main strategies that ensemble narratives have at their disposal in order to intertwine their protagonists and plotlines: the frequent use of coincidences, serendipity and "fate." This strategy deserves attention, for it echoes the global interconnectedness and the fact that we live in a "small world." For the theoretical foundations of Part II, I will resort to narratology, structuralism, and Film Studies, using

concepts and theories developed by critics like Gérard Genette, David Bordwell, María del Mar Azcona Montoliú, or Rick Altman, among others.

After the overview of globalization and violence, and having discussed the main characteristics of ensemble narratives, Part III—also comprising four chapters—will engage in an in-depth analysis of the chosen narratives, which orbit around the issues of globalization, immigration, neocolonialism, violence and interconnectedness. I am particularly interested in the ways in which these texts approach the process of globalization, how they portray different types of violence, and how these two issues are connected. The first section, 3.1, analyzes the domination that the United States exerts over Mexico and the rest of Latin America, as well as the expansion of transnational corporations to the detriment of local and national products and cultures. In the following section, we will focus on the immigrant characters in our corpus in order to comment on their immigrant experience in the United States. Section 3.3 primarily addresses the U.S.-Mexico border area in relation to its violence and hybridity. Last but not least, the fourth section is devoted to individual and collective characters that are invisible at a social level, underscoring the structural and personal violence they are forced to endure.

In the final part of this dissertation, I will try to elucidate how ensemble narratives may reflect violence through and in relation to formal techniques, thus intertwining the first two parts of the thesis. Apart from their thematic content, it could be argued that the selected corpus of films and literary texts echoes violence at a formal level. The very puzzle-like structure of ensemble narratives alludes to friction and violence. The narrative is split into several threads that need to be "glued" back together in order to both make sense and become meaningful. Furthermore, another narrative strategy that denotes formal narrative violence would be the juxtaposition of the

multiple threads. These plotlines clash against each other and, as will be discussed, this formal juxtaposition works in unison with the thematic content, underscoring the violence that is present in the narratives. Apart from the formal violence in relation to the narratives themselves, this dissertation will explore a possible violence that narratives exercise on the readers/viewers. The cathartic experiences that readers/spectators have during the reading/watching process, the challenging and even confusing narrative structures that demand a particularly active engagement from the readers/spectators, or the limited details provided by the narratives are some of the issues that will be addressed in the fourth part of this dissertation.

The increasing importance of ensemble narratives prompts an analysis of how their formal structure and themes interact with our globalized societies. While previous critics such as Azcona Montoliú have explored the characteristics and nature of multi-protagonist films, what I intend to do in this doctoral thesis is to elucidate the ways in which the two types of ensemble narratives, films and novels, correlate and influence each other. In this regard, this dissertation aims at contributing to the conjoined study of this type of narratives, emphasizing the similarities and differences between the two media. Furthermore, it is also an attempt to enrich the research on these narratives in relation to our (violent) globalized world, since the phenomenon of contemporary globalization is a recurrent theme in these texts. Ultimately, this thesis will hopefully allow us to become more aware of the globalization process, including the negative and positive effects it has on our lives.

Part I – In the Background: Globalization and Violence

The ensemble narratives chosen for analysis embark on an exploration of issues related to the process of globalization and depict a significant presence of different types of violence in the multiple plotlines. This underlying violence is thus a key component in the corpus and alludes to the fact that violence is part of the foundations of our social interactions. Furthermore, to a certain extent, the phenomenon of globalization also seems to facilitate and foster contexts in which different sorts of violent events and behaviors are possible. The opposite is indeed true as well, for the increased contact with people from a plethora of backgrounds may lead the way to a better understanding of each other. Due to the development of technology, including Information and Communication Technology (ICTs), not only is migrating easier than ever, but also having access to information regarding both local and global contexts. On the one hand, the increased awareness of the existence of individuals from different cultural backgrounds may indeed encourage more tolerance; on the other, it may have the opposite effect, bringing about violence. The influence of the global market as well as the domination exerted by transnational corporations, world organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the superpowers of the Global North[10]—mainly the United States—are frequently translated into structural violence: low wages, local businesses unable to compete against big companies, exploitation of natural and human resources to obtain as much profit as possible, to name a few. Consequently, since the end of the 20th century, nations have "been profoundly transformed by the new

[10] The term "Third World" was coined by Alfred Sauvey in his 1952 article, "Trois Mondes, Une Planète" (Tomlinson 309). In the context of the Cold War, the countries of the world were divided into three groups: the "First World"—the U.S. and its allies—, the "Second World"—the USSR and its allies—, and the "Third World"—neutral countries. Soon, "Third World" became pejoratively linked to impoverished regions such as Africa and Asia. Hence, the term has been rejected mainly by post-colonial studies (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 231). Alternatives to this categorization of countries are Global North and Global South. For a full description of these new terms, see Levander and Mignolo 3-7.

dynamics of globalization" (Simal, "Disrupting" 277). Furthermore, there has been a "transnational turn" in American studies, with the transnational increasingly taking a central role. As such, the approach likely changes from a focus "on the United States as a static and stable territory and population" as well as their "most characteristic traits" to the U.S. nation "as a participant in a global flow of people, ideas, texts, and products—albeit a participant who often tries to impede those flows" (Fishkin 24). Therefore, in this chapter, we will look at the issue of violence and its different types, on the one hand, and, on the other, the evolution of the process of globalization and its possible connection with violence, primarily in an American context.

1.1. The New Oppression: Globalization as Neocolonial Violence

The expansion of the European empires due to the colonization of what became the American continent allowed them to rule the entire world, subjugating the native peoples and communities by exercising extreme personal and structural violence. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Walter Mignolo establishes different periods when the American continent was controlled by different Western powers that imposed their civilizations—from 1500-1750 (Spain and Portugal), from 1750-1945 (England, France and Germany), from 1945-2000 (the United States) (7). For Santiago Castro-Gomez, the period 1880-1914 can be labeled as the "era of imperialism," with most of the world ruled by European powers such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy (284). These European powers hence established a relationship of sociopolitical and cultural domination with their colonies all over world (Quijano 22). Using the belief that Europeans had the duty

of "civilizing" those "inferior" peoples (Kipling's "White Man's Burden") as a justification for violence also entails cultural violence, not only in the sense of resorting to cultural differences to support the exercise of violence but also in the sense of exerting violence against other cultures.

The overwhelming power that European nations wield over their colonies and other nations for centuries starts to wane and decline, nonetheless, in a process known as decolonization, which begins in the late 18th century and ends after the Second World War. According to John McLeod, there are three main stages in this historical process, starting from the moment when the British Empire loses its colonies in America in 1776 (9). It can be argued, however, that it is not until the 19th century when the process of decolonization in modern times substantially begins in the Spanish Empire. Yet, many countries that are part of the British Empire do not attain their formal independence until after WWII, once maintaining these colonies is no longer affordable. Nevertheless, globalization has contributed to establishing a neocolonial paradigm that presents itself as a continuation of colonial imperialism.[11] As pointed out by Jeremy Brecher et al., globalization has allowed for the restoration of "much of the global dominance of the former imperialist powers, such as Western Europe, Japan, and, above all, the United States" (3).[12] Notwithstanding the formal end of colonialism, former colonies and other Global South countries, albeit officially independent, are indirectly controlled by the United States, Japan and the ex-colonial empires from Europe through economic means, culture, education, transnational corporations and different monetary organizations.[13]

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[11] Some critics note that colonialism and imperialism are not the same: "imperialism is an ideological concept which upholds the legitimacy of the economic and military control of one nation by another," whereas colonialism is "only *one form of practice* which results from the ideology of imperialism, and specifically concerns the *settlement* of one group of people in a new location" (McLeod 7; italics in the original).

[12] Indeed, the two World Wars helped to consolidate the U.S. as the primary world superpower.

[13] This is connected to the issue of "coloniality." In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity,* Mignolo states that "[c]oloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western

European imperialism is not dead, but, as Sue-Im Lee claims, it survives under a different guise: "the great narrative of development and progress underwriting the First World's global economic policies must be understood in direct continuation with imperialism" (511). The influence of the neocolonial powers may also be visible in nations that have never been colonies, where, for instance, TNCs often replace national and local businesses, which cannot compete against capitalist giants.

The term "neocolonialism" was coined by the first Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah, in his book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, published in 1965. Here, the author explains that, after attaining independence, occupied territories do not become colonies once again. Instead, the control achieved mainly through economic and monetary means as well as cultural institutions and organizations. This way of actualizing control is not as conspicuous as the physical occupation of a territory, although he claims it is more oppressive. Nkrumah explains that the State that is under a neocolonial control is independent and sovereign in theory, yet "its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (ix). In order to make the domination of these underdeveloped countries possible, the neocolonial powers require internal allies—"the compradors"—, a social class that has economic and political interests in common with the foreign powers.[14] With the internal help of "compradors" that are benefited by supporting the ruling activities of the new empires, these foreign powers have established a relationship marked by neocolonialism with the so-called developing countries. The word "comprador" refers to the "middlemen" that link foreign manufacturers with the national market, a business that represents an important

civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed, dimension" (2). This issue will receive further attention later.

[14] In the colonies, European empires developed native elites to facilitate the domination over these territories. Frantz Fanon explains in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the "European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite […] with the principles of Western Culture" (7). "After a short stay in the mother country," the chosen candidates "were sent home, whitewashed" (7).

source of wealth for them. Compradors also get profits from the monopolies established by the superpowers in the neocolonies. George Klay Kieh, Jr. maintains that "neo-colonialism has created an enabling environment in which they [compradors] can enrich themselves," while "deprivation and impoverishment" have been imposed "on the subalterns through the process of neo-liberal reforms anchored by the 'structural adjustment programs' of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)" (167). More importantly, Kieh provides a clear example of how the relationship between neocolonies and new world powers works: "the dominant state gives economic and military aid to its neo-colony for the ostensible purpose of compensating the bureaucratic compradors, who manage the affairs of the state" (167). These arrangements guarantee the actual control that the superpowers have through local members of the subjugated nations. Nonetheless, when the compradors are no longer of any use for the neocolonial superpowers, these frequently abandon, murder or overthrow their "pawns" (Kieh 167).[15] According to this political theory, the interests of the monetary agencies and the countries from the Global North have thus truncated the growth of economies of the Global South.

Neocolonialism, understood as the world domination in the form of political and financial institutions, TNCs, the world market, and cultural influences, has been favored by the process of globalization and the subsequent increase in communication, transportation of goods, people, ideas and culture, among many aspects. Paul Jay remarks that globalization, initially, referred to the "emergence of a global economy grounded in modernization and fueled by the expansion of Western capitalism" ("Beyond" 34). It is not only the economy that "crosse[s] nation-state boundaries" along

[15] For more information on the comprador system, check Julie Hearn's article "African NGOs: The New Compradors?" Here, she gives an overview of the theoretical background of the compradors and the current neo-imperialistic domination of the Global North exerted on Africa with the help of local NGOs.

with the "rise of transnational corporations," culture does it as well: there is a global exchange of cultural products and commodities across borders (34). The phenomenon of globalization has been more prominent since the 20th century, especially, due to developments in technology and communication. Distances and time, or our perception of them, are thus "shrunk" by the almost instant transference of information from one corner of the globe to another.[16] The exchange of information and telecommunications as well as the intertwining of societies and markets have never been as fast and widespread as in present times, mostly due to the technological developments of the late 20th century. The "shrinking world" influences our lives, both individually and collectively. To start with, there has been a significant change in the perception of time and space. According to David Harvey, time-space compression has sped up during the past few decades, influencing political and economic practices, the balance of class power, and our everyday life. In addition, new organizational forms, technologies and production have been developed (Harvey 284). Moreover, trends, ideas, values, the way in which people interact with each other, almost anything is more ephemeral and they are discarded more quickly. Labor has also been affected by this change in "speed." Laborers have experienced a faster deskilling and reskilling, necessary for new labor needs. Money flow has been improved thanks to electronic banking and plastic money. The masses consume faster too, which concerns not only material products but also lifestyles and leisure activities (Harvey 285). Zygmunt Bauman, referring to the instantaneity of communication and action in the past few decades, underscores the subsequent "annihilation of time" (117). Similarly, space has lost much of its relevance

[16] This increasingly technological and interlaced world was labeled as the "Global Village" by Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s. The term was brought to the spotlight by McLuhan's books *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).

as well: "any place can be reached almost instantly now in the age of globalization," which is why "space has lost the worth it used to have" (Echeverría Domingo 146).

As can be seen, the phenomenon of globalization and the multiple developments in technology and communication are intrinsically connected, deeply affecting the world economies, societies, cultures, and political systems (Pieterse 70).[17] Thanks to technological developments and improvements in means of transportation and communication, the acceleration of time shrinks space. This leads to a change in political and cultural borders and boundaries, fostering a global economy and culture. Indeed, along with an increase in migration, the movement of information, technology, ideas, capital and cultural products are distinctive features of the process of globalization (Ibarrola-Armendariz and Firth 9). But what about the situation prior to the technological boom of the late 20th century? Was the process of globalization already under way? Could the pre-20th century political, economic and sociocultural interconnections be labeled "globalization," or is it a term exclusive to current times, to the last few decades? As we shall see next, both points of view have supporters in the academia, even though most scholars tend to agree that the phenomenon started centuries ago.

There are two main positions regarding the origins of globalization. One view considers it as a contemporary phenomenon, developing over the last two centuries, whereas the other perspective states that this process begins with the European expansion to the West, or even earlier. On the one hand, it can be argued that globalization is not a recent phenomenon, but a centuries-old one. Albeit

[17] I understand postmodernity in the Marxist-historical sense favored by Fredric Jameson and David Harvey. Ellen Meiksins Wood describes it as a "phase of capitalism where mass production of standardized goods, and the forms of labour associated with it, have been replaced by flexibility," including "new forms of production, […] diversification of commodities for niche markets," and "mobile capital," which are possible due to "new informational technologies" (540).

acknowledging the acceleration of the process from the late 20th century onwards, due to technological developments, some claim that globalization originated in the 15th or 16th centuries when European colonizers arrived to the "New World,"[18] or even earlier in China and other Eastern regions.[19] Hence, in its origins, globalization would not be an exclusively Western process, and considering it a contemporary phenomenon would disregard the historical contributions and influence of the East on more recent phases of globalization (Jay, *Matters* 39). On the other hand, globalization is also reckoned a recent process mostly triggered by the technological developments, the creation of global financial institutions and organizations, and the expansion of TNCs and the media, both of which ignore national boundaries.[20] For the scholars who support this position, during the second half of the 20th century, especially from the 1980s onwards, there has been an acceleration in the production and consumption of commodities—cultural exchanges too—, facilitating their transportation among different markets worldwide (Harvey 285).

Regardless of whether globalization is a recent phenomenon or not, its acceleration in the late 20th century, prompted or facilitated by the ICT revolution, is undeniable. These technological and scientific developments have caused social changes to be more widespread, not only because "change happens more quickly now," but also because "we know about the consequences more quickly" (Greenway xix). One of the more noticeable changes is the general awareness of poverty. The expansion of mass media has enabled more visibility of this poverty throughout the world, not only

[18] For more information on this positioning regarding the origins of globalization check Paul Jay's *Global Matters*, Roland Robertson's *Globalization*, or Rainer Winter's chapter "Global Media, Cultural Change and the Transformation of the Local" (204-21).
[19] Janet Abu-Lughod claims that globalization actually emerged in the East back in the 13th-14th centuries. Other voices such as Amartya Sen go further back to the year 1000 to find these origins.
[20] Some authors who opine that globalization is a contemporary process are David Harvey and Arjun Appadurai. For a discussion of globalization as a contemporary phenomenon, see Harvey and Appadurai's *Modernity at Large*.

for those who merely witness it and, to a certain degree, allow it to exist, but also, and more importantly, for those who suffer it—Buzzworm in *Tropic of Orange* addresses this issue, as will be presently explored. With an increased access to information, the impoverished people are more aware of the fact that they are denied the possibility of covering their basic human needs, while other individuals benefit from the unequal distribution of wealth. In Walter LaFeber's words, the process of globalization has helped to widen "the gaps between rich and poor, while ironically" the new technologies that have significantly contributed to contemporary globalization have allowed for "those gaps [to become] glaringly apparent to the poor" (2). Nevertheless, the Global North does not support those who live in the impoverished countries; instead, it keeps suffocating the Global South in order to make profit while, at the same time, rejecting the influx of immigration (Lauter 27). Therefore, the gap between the rich and the impoverished continues to increase, which, as shall be discussed later, constitutes an evident case of structural violence.

Globalization and technology have made traveling much easier, faster and cheaper. Tourists often choose (exotic) destinations where poverty is unavoidably and overwhelmingly present, as happens in *Babel*. Tourists, mostly from the Global North, visit places where impoverished people live in order to have a first-hand experience of the lifestyle of the less privileged. However, this kind of tourism is highly controversial. Some claim that poverty tourism is "voyeurism," thus criticizing it for the harm it may cause to the residents; whereas others acknowledge the potential harm, but also state that this tourism can be educational and contribute in some way to the "tourists, operators, and residents," thus perceiving poverty tourism as possible "economic development activities" (Whyte et al. 339). Traveling is one more symbol of wealth,

and this also allows impoverished people to be exposed to the "luxuries" they will never be able to have.

The power of global mass media cannot be underestimated. Thanks to the developments in the ICTs, the access to information and images of the world is also possible for the impoverished, who become increasingly aware of the unequal distribution of wealth. In relation to this, Arjun Appadurai's concept of mediascapes proves useful. As defined by Appadurai, mediascapes allude, on the one hand, "to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world," and, on the other hand, "to the images of the world created by these media" ("Disjuncture" 9). As a consequence, mass media is also able to influence its audience with news and images that are marketable and marketed. Furthermore, Appadurai highlights that the "lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes" that the audiences "see are blurred": without having "direct experiences of" what those images refer to, these audiences "construct imagined worlds which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world" ("Disjuncture" 9). The unequal distribution of wealth is not only more conspicuous due to the media. TNCs have also expanded their markets, reaching impoverished people as well, introducing them to the commodities of the West mostly—the impoverished may lack food and shelter, but a can of Coca-Cola will surely get to them somehow. Despite culture not being just a commodity, products such as this popular soft drink are part of the cultural globalization—Coke is indeed a cultural symbol all over the world. Technology contributes to the spread of these cultural symbols that are marketed by TNCs across boundaries (Beck, *Globalization*

43), even to those who hardly have any means to purchase them. In addition, both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental institutions are meant to help those in need, allowing them to catch a glimpse of the lifestyle of those who are luckier. However, contributing to the survival of poverty, the global institutions and organizations created to solve social, political and economic issues have often failed "to successfully manage and administer economic globalization and the social and cultural disruptions it can bring" (Jay, *Matters* 54).[21] Poverty is too profitable to let go of it.

As is the case with the origins and nature of globalization, different views are associated with its cultural aspects. Some argue that the process of globalization results in homogenization, whereas others claim it enables the combination and reinvention of cultures (Welsch). At a cultural level, globalization has a significant impact on local communities, with "a few countries and companies" exerting their domination all over the world and leading to a more uniform culture (Brecher et al. 4). Americanization is the strongest influence in the expanding global culture. Put differently, the global culture has received a significant contribution from American culture. For this reason, critics such as Shaobo Xie claim that globalization is another name for Americanization, for it tends to allow for the predominance of the values, lifestyle, profit, and the imperialistic logic of the United States—the American military power as well as the exportation and, to a certain extent, imposition of the U.S. culture foster and secure this prevalence (888, 892-93).

Before moving forward, we need to try and define what we mean by Americanization. Richard Kuisel defines it as the "import by non-Americans of

[21] Jay mentions that, "[a]s an institutional practice, globalization has its origins in the July 1944 UN Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, a meeting that resulted in the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)," in order to help reconstruct Europe after WWII and, later on, regulate the end of "colonial rule in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, and culminating in the demise of Communism in the late 1980s" (*Matters* 54).

products, images, technologies, practices and behaviour closely associated with America/Americans," and it also includes "the adoption of mass consumption, market capitalism, and mass culture," starting in the late 19th century (96-97). For George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, "Americanization [is] a powerful one-directional process that tends to overwhelm competing processes (e.g. Japanization)," precisely the reason why "local forces" try to "resist, modify and/or transform American models into hybrid forms" (35). The authors underscore that both Americanization and McDonaldization are a relevant part of globalization and their influence is more powerful than that of other regions (44). These two processes, albeit different, "are interrelated and tend to reinforce each other" (Kooijman 14). While Americanization is the influence of American culture on other cultures, McDonaldization is the adoption of the characteristics that are intrinsic to these fast-food restaurants not only by foreign cultures but also by multiple spheres in the U.S.—culture, economy, and so on. As a result, the United States has also been "McDonaldized." McDonaldization entails the efficiency of a minimal use of time to get what is desired, the idea of quantity over quality—the more and faster production is achieved, the better—, predictability in the tasks employees have to carry out, and a control of the workers added to the use of machines and software to do humans' jobs. Both of these processes contribute to what George Ritzer has called "grobalization," which "focuses on the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and other entities and their desire—indeed, their need—to impose themselves on various geographic areas. Their main interest is in seeing their power, influence, and (in some cases) profits *grow* (hence the term "*gro*balization") throughout the world" (194; italics in the original). As a consequence, homogenization is favored, since the world is turned "into one global consumer market, in which the very same products are being consumed in very similar surroundings

around the globe" (Kooijman 12). From this point of view, Americanization is thus a "form of 'cultural imperialism'" (Kuisel 98). If American cultural imperialism brings homogenization, non-hegemonic cultures may be "seen as passive victims of a globally mediated American mass culture that threatens local and national cultures" (Kooijman 11). However, it can be argued that other cultures are also active in this process, for they incorporate what they deem interesting about U.S. culture (Kuisel 111) and disregard the rest. Global culture and Americanization may be rejected by those who consider them the reasons behind the loss of the national and local culture, ideology, and values. The influence of the global culture thus reshapes the way people would like to be and live, which are no longer associated or tied to a specific geographical area and its corresponding cultural identity (Beck, *Globalization* 66).

In spite of the overarching influence of both global culture and Americanization, local, national cultures select what to adopt from them, contributing to their own transformation rather than a process of homogenization. Wolfgang Welsch remarks that one of the general characteristics of cultures in current times is precisely their hybridization: multiple cultural aspects increasingly interweave with other cultures, which "applies on the levels of population, merchandise and information," and the outcome of this hybridity is that nothing is "absolutely foreign" or "exclusively 'own'" anymore (Welsch 198). The result of the addition of varied aspects of the global culture to the local one differs in each case. Paul Jay argues that globalization is a process that "facilitates new ways of agency, [which] has more to do with the intelligent and imaginative negotiation of cross-cultural contact than with avoiding such contact" (*Matters* 2-3). Adding to this, Natan Sznaider and Rainer Winter claim that "[g]lobalization involves the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or—in a more abstract vein—the

universal and the particular (or if you will the 'American' and the 'local')" (3). This quote conjures up the concept of the "glocal," first put forward by Roland Robertson. The term, which combines the global with the local, was adopted by Japanese economists, mainly during the 1980s, to refer to what is often called micro-marketing: "the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets" (*Global Modernities* 28). Therefore, the glocal applies to the adaptation of global products, market and culture to the context of the local to encourage acceptance in foreign communities. Modifications are made to goods, services, products and cultural aspects to cater to the differing tastes of the receiving communities. Subsequently, the perspective of "glocalization," Ritzer explains, "emphasizes global heterogeneity," often rejecting "the idea that forces emanating from the West," especially the United States, "are leading to economic, political, institutional, and—most importantly—cultural homogeneity" (193-94).[22] The combination and reinvention of local and global cultures enables the rise of hybrid "supercultures" thanks to the interconnection among "apparently unlimited access to cultural resources from (sometimes very) distant places" fostered mostly by improvements in technology and communication witnessed in recent decades (Sznaider and Winter 4). Most globalization scholars stress the fact that this globalizing process is here to stay. The constant mixing of national and cultural identities is a reality, favored by the increase in migration and communications (Beck, "Cosmopolitanism" 21). These global flows do not produce one single result, though. The combination of cultures produces hybrids characterized by difference (Winter 218). Even if they all share traits from a common, global culture, the process of adoption of those traits is not the same across cultures.

[22] Maurizio Ascari connects this to postcolonial theory's favoring of cultural hybridization in detriment of the colonial "us vs them": "Our identities are indeed hybrids, and it is increasingly difficult to describe something as entirely foreign or entirely our own" (7-8).

Notwithstanding the dominant position of the United States, it should be noted that the increasing hybridity of cultures also has an effect on both American culture and the Americanization of other cultures. U.S. culture is not immune to the influence of other cultures. Pieterse stresses the fact that the U.S. has a very heterogeneous population, TNCs that not only work and capitalize or reap profits in the States (79). Furthermore, transnational migratory flows and diasporas change the "American" culture, implementing "trends of Europeanization, Asianization and Latinization" of the country, both "economically and culturally" (79).

Another contribution made by Americanization to globalization is consumerism, which encourages faster rates of production and is often deemed to be negative. Yet, Sznaider and Winter argue that, although the U.S. is an expert in mass consumption, "this perception considers consumer culture as some sort of imported, contagious disease, rather than intrinsic to mass prosperity" (2). This influence has contributed to the emergence of a global middle-class, which shares interests, hobbies and purchasing decisions—particularly, products from TNCs. In fact, as Keith Suter reminds us, "[t]his class often has more in common with members of the middle-class in other countries than it has with its own working class/peasants", and foreign middle-classes are more of a target market for companies than local working-classes (74).

It is thus appropriate to distinguish the global from the transnational, as Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih do in *Minor Transnationalism* (2005). Although the latter is part of the former, the authors deem the global as a "homogeneous and dominant set of criteria," while transnationalism "designates spaces and practices acted upon border-crossing agents, be they dominant or marginal" (5). Indeed, I would agree that the global tends to foster a homogenization across cultures, which is imposed on those in less powerful positions, even if it can also be argued that the cultures that are

influenced by the global culture "select" what they want to add to themselves. Hence, they are able to have a certain degree of agency regarding their own reshaping, as previously discussed. Nonetheless, the source of this cultural influence is mostly the same for every culture—the "global culture"—, and those who are in a powerful position, such as the U.S., are capable of having a more significant contribution to this global culture.[23] Conversely, transnationalism refers to that which crosses national borders, regardless of whether or not they are in a position of power. In the context of American Studies, transnationalism moves from exploring the U.S. "as a static and stable territory and population" to "the nation as a participant in a global flow of people, ideas, texts, and products" (Fishkin 24). Hence, in literary studies, the focus of the analysis not only includes the nation—the United States in this case—, but also its cultural and political relations across and within national boundaries, with the "study of minority, multicultural, and postcolonial literatures," as well as globalization (Jay, *Matters* 2).[24] In the current world, what happens beyond and within the borders of a nation can no longer be separated. The transnational is neither the national nor the international: "It is rather an 'internationality' that lies within the nation and a 'nationality' that is not—for better or for worse—overcome or dissolved in and by the

[23] Nowadays, cultural interconnection is conspicuous, with similar lifestyles found in a wide variety of cultures. As Welsch points out, these "way[s] of life" are "global in tone" and a "consequence of migratory processes, as well as of worldwide material and immaterial communications systems and economic interdependencies and dependencies" (197-98).

[24] Multiculturalism refers to differences and identity integrated in culture: "a body of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people understand themselves and the world and organize their individual and collective lives" (Parekh 2-3). Bhikhu Parekh identifies three forms of cultural diversity. Subcultural diversity is the difference in beliefs and practices in certain aspects of life or having different lifestyles outside the norm (e.g. gays). It aims for diversifying the culture in which it is embedded. Perspectival diversity is the challenging of basic aspects of the existing culture (e.g. feminism and patriarchy)—it is often more resisted by the dominant culture than subcultural diversity. Communal diversity concerns communities that live according to their values and beliefs (e.g. the Amish). Their cultures are historically well-organized and, "depending on its depth and demands," this diversity is easily accepted by the dominant culture or not. A multicultural society would either welcome the demands of these communities or try to assimilate them "into its mainstream culture either wholly or substantially" (Parekh 3-6). Multiculturalism in the U.S. "is informed by the Civil Rights Movement and other emancipatory movements that promoted identity politics, and by the cultural turn that has transformed the humanities since the 1960s" (Rubin and Verheul 8).

international" (Gearhart 36). As a consequence of this duality in internationality and nationality, transnationalism allows hybridization and cultures to be produced without the mediation of the center, whereas globalization spreads all over the world and pulls different cultures to be "tested by its norm" (Lionnet and Shih 5).

Additionally, scholars point out the existence of a variety of transnationalisms. The transnationalism from above is the one of the media, TNCs and elite-controlled macrostructural processes that share "utopic views of globalization, which celebrate the overcoming of national and other boundaries for the constitution of liberal global market, the hybridization of cultures, and the expansion of democracies and universal human rights" (Lionnet and Shih 6). The concepts of transnationalism from above and from below refer to those of "globalization from above" and "globalization from below," coined by Jeremy Brecher et al. The authors claim that the globalization from above is and should be resisted. People who have been negatively affected by the interests of the elites, TNCs and the wealthiest nations organize in a movement based on solidarity—"globalization from below"—in order to fight the overwhelming increase in poverty and environmental hazards as well as the potential loss of "meaningful self-government" (ix). On the other hand, Lionnet and Shih remark the existence of dystopian views of globalization, focused on the environmental and health hazards, the McDonaldization of cultures, the inequality between rich and poor, the increased exploitation of the Global South labor to contribute to the growing wealth of the Global North, and the hegemony of Western capitalism (6). The resistance to globalization and transnationalism from above is indeed the transnationalism from below: the non-elite that rejects the idea of assimilation to the practices of a nation-state. This relationship of assimilation and opposition is the one that connects cultural majorities and minorities,

the latter receiving more visibility thanks to global media and an increased migration (Lionnet and Shih 6-7).[25]

Another issue that is connected to globalization and, more specifically, to the power the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, Europe continue to have, is that of "coloniality." Mignolo links coloniality to modernity and globalization, explaining that the idea of "modernity" originates in Europe, bringing to the fore the achievements of the Western civilization. In contrast, "coloniality" or the dark and negative side of modernity remains concealed, even if it is an intrinsic part of modernity; in fact, the "global modernities" are also "global colonialities," backed up by the (former) colonial powers (2-3). In spite of the end of political colonialism, this coloniality still persists among former colonizers and colonized, as well as neoempires and their neocolonies. It is realized in terms of culture, economy and power, even if there is no territorial occupation.

The relevance and scope of action of these international agents as well as the process of globalization transcend the boundaries of the nation-states. Even if the U.S. is still a key player, it is not the unique hegemonic power anymore—there is no longer one center, one power, overseeing and dominating global interactions. Instead, there is a turn towards a global, polycentric world, an argument that is maintained by Mignolo and Jay, among others, who claim that this process cannot be reverted, for the nation-states are not the basic element in global relations any more. Now, the nation-states are not central, but peripheral, sharing their power with TNCs, intergovernmental

[25] Gearhart reinforces the idea that there are two types of transnationalisms: the "good" version of transnationalism tolerates and welcomes different cultures and nations, while a "bad" transnationalism takes advantage of the weakness of the nation in the pursuit of market and labor exploitation as well as exerting violence both on individuals and groups (39).

organizations and NGOs.[26] Jay explains that there is a difference between the first and later phases of globalization. During the former, the nation-state is at the core of the capital development on their pursuit of expansion through colonization. Conversely, recent phases of globalization witness the rise of TNCs and the mass media, which garner more power than nation-states—to a certain point, ruled by those TNCs and media—albeit maintaining unequal economic results (*Matters* 47). In spite of the growing influence of TNCs and global institutions in detriment of the power of nation-states, Lionnet and Shih maintain that the latter "are alive as mechanisms of control and domination even when transnational corporations are supposed to have dissolved their boundaries" (9). Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin introduce another nuance into this discussion: the states still have the function of surveilling property rights, contracts, currencies, they maintain the different relations among social classes, and take measures to fight crises. TNCs still have to deal with the roles of the states, which contribute not only to their own but also to the corporations' capitalist interests in the global market, with the U.S. as the main supporter and the U.K. the first to develop the empire in terms of economic, political and military power (1, 5).

One of the most relevant effects that globalization has had in the economy of nations and corporations relates to the labor market. Borrowing Harvey's words, "[f]aced with strong market volatility, heightened competition, and narrowing profit margins, employers have taken advantage of weakened union power and the pools of

[26] A possible demise of the nation-state was announced at the end of the 20th century, since, as Jay purports, "in a thoroughly globalization economy the nation-state's power to regulate and control the flow of commodities and information among transnational entities is [largely] diminished" ("Beyond" 34). However, the nation-state still has significant power as shown by the U.S. president, Donald Trump, and his administration. He has proven that national borders still matter in our globalized world (Stiglitz xi). Taking advantage of the economic stagnation of the lower and middle classes in the U.S., Trump has made controversial promises such as building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border to keep immigrants away from the U.S. Also, he has taken measures that are detrimental to corporations. For example, in April 2018, American companies were temporarily banned from selling products to the Chinese telecommunications giant, ZTE, claiming that the company spies on the U.S. for the Chinese government (Freifeld).

surplus (unemployed or underemployed) labourers to push for much more flexible work regimes and labour contracts" (150). Subsequently, the need workers have to sell their labor characterizes the process of globalization: apart from paying low salaries, "employers have downsized, outsourced, and made permanent jobs into contingent ones" while taking advantage of lower or worse "job security requirements, work rules, worker representation, healthcare, pensions, and other social benefits" (Brecher et al. 3). Employers often try to "disrupt the organized power of the working class" and "to foster the spirit of competition amongst workers, while all the time demanding flexibility of disposition, of location, and of approach to tasks" (Harvey 187). Sometimes, policies and measures such as these are detrimental for the workers, the economy and society in general, with "little if any gain in growth" and "a significant increase in inequality," as Stiglitz already remarked in his 2002 edition of *Globalization and Its Discontents* (Stiglitz 177).[27] Furthermore, as David Greenway claims, contemporary globalization has influenced the position of the unskilled workers as opposed to the skilled ones in connection to trade and technology: the unskilled laborers from the "Global North" are more likely to have lower wages or lose their jobs than their skilled counterparts, since most unskilled tasks are carried out in the "Global South," while "the extraordinary technological change […] has increased the demand for skilled workers and in economic terms increased their lot" (xix). Therefore, the production of goods is frequently moved to the Global South. Globalization has altered trade by fostering the act of outsourcing during the chain of production of a commodity, which in turn negatively affects less-skilled workers, mainly from industrialized countries. According to Robert Anderton and Eva Oscarsson, outsourcing takes place when "firms take advantage of both the low-wage costs of the LWCs [low-wage countries] and modern

[27] In this dissertation I will be using the revised, 2017 version of Stiglitz's *Globalization and Its Discontents*. This new edition also includes the original one from 2002.

production techniques," thus resulting in a "process of manufacturing" products that "can be broken-down into numerous discrete activities" (14). This is achieved "by moving the low-skill-intensive parts of production abroad to the LWCs," whereas the firms still "carry out the high-skill-intensive activities," and after the "low-skill activities have been performed the goods are then imported back from the LWCs and either used as intermediate inputs or sold as finished goods" (14). The process of globalization thus presents itself as a promoter of a "destructive competition in which workers, communities, and entire countries are forced to cut labor, social, and environmental costs to attract mobile capital. When many countries each do so, the result is a disastrous 'race to the bottom'" (Brecher et al. 5). The "only winners" in this race are the TNCs, whereas the "rest of society, in both the developed and developing worlds, is the loser" (Stiglitz 28).

A consequence of the phenomenon of outsourcing is the decrease in the number of low-skilled jobs in industrialized countries, as this part of the process of production is taken to countries where the manufacturing is cheaper for the companies—particularly, TNCs—, taxes are lower or almost non-existent, and regulations are more lax. In their pursuit of profit, corporations must expand the reach of their consumer products to the global market, which allows these TNCs to increase their production and sell their commodities at cheaper prices, even to consumers from developing countries as long as "the level of wealth in such [countries] reaches some minimal level" (Ritzer 200, 205). In practical terms, TNCs seem to "disregard" boundaries and borders if the expansion of their activities to other markets is profitable, and they also "view the entire world as a single market" for their products and services (Brecher et al. 2).[28] These corporations

[28] Although they now have more power than ever, TNCs are not a recent phenomenon: the earliest American TNCs—e.g. Singer, Edison, Westinghouse—date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, expanding their foreign investments in the 1920s and becoming the "institutional expression of the

adapt to multiple cultural contexts, perhaps combining local products with what they produce. The resulting commodities are more attractive to the different cultures, although still maintaining most of their characteristics, their essence.[29] Consequently, TNCs are able to determine almost exclusively how the interdependent world economy functions regardless of geographical and political borders, introducing (or imposing) their products into/upon multiple cultures. As pointed out by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their well-known *Empire* (2000), these "financial powers […] produce not only commodities but also subjectivities"; in other words, "they produce needs, social relations, bodies, and minds—which is to say, they produce producers" as well as "hierarchies, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and […] crises" (32, 424).[30] Indeed, TNCs shape "not only the economy but society as a whole," mostly due to their control of "capital, taxes, [and] jobs" (Beck, *Globalization* 2).

These corporations not only introduce their products in multiple countries and cultures, they also relocate their assembly factories to countries where labor is cheap, taxes are low and regulations tend to be more lax, which facilitate the process of outsourcing. This drastic change in the production of commodities, which began in the 1970s, is one of the most characteristic aspects of the process of globalization (Brecher et al. 2). In this new economic regime, workers have lost much of their "bargaining

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'globalization of production'" from the 1950s-1960s onwards (Panitch and Gindin 30, 113). In fact, these TNCs already "became the fundamental motor of the economic and political transformation of postcolonial countries and subordinated regions" towards the end of the 1970s (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 246).

[29] For instance, McDonald's added the teriyaki burger in Japan, blending the local culinary culture with the—originally—American tradition. The "standard" burger is offered though, and the main features of this fast-food restaurant are similar to the McDonald's that can be found anywhere in the world, even if minor changes are made to suit the needs and requirements of the local people.

[30] Smaller and local companies are more vulnerable to the consequences of outsourcing and imports and to the presence of TNCs, as seen in *Tropic of Orange*. Anderton and Oscarsson explain that "less-competitive firms—most likely comprising low-tech companies offering low quality products, perhaps associated with minimal R&D spending and a high proportion of low-skilled workers in their labour force—would be squeezed out of business" (13). Local markets and cultural production decrease due to the preference for American commodities (Xie 893), and, I would add, products from non-American TNCs too.

power." As detailed by Stiglitz, corporations can "threaten to move their factory elsewhere" to countries that offer them more favorable and profitable conditions (19). Therefore, workers, unable to "stop [the] outsourcing of jobs," have little choice but "to accept lower wages and worse working conditions" (19). The relocation of factories can be exemplified by the Mexican *maquiladoras*, addressed by some of the narratives in our corpus. Lured by the low taxes offered by the Mexican government, TNCs—mostly from the U.S.—moved these sweatshops to the U.S.-Mexico border after the authorities of this country launched the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), in 1965, to battle unemployment in the area caused by the finalization of the Bracero Program in 1964. An agreement that would contribute to the neocolonial relationship between the United States and Mexico,[31] the goal of the Bracero Program (1942-1964) was to bring Mexican men (women were excluded)[32] to the United States to temporarily cover the labor shortage caused by WWII, primarily in agricultural fields (Clemens et al. 1470), one of the main economic links between both countries.[33] However, incapable of meeting the demand for work, the amount of "illegal" immigrants increased, with American employers often seeking profit by encouraging "braceros to overstay the limited tenure of their contracts" (De Genova 165), yet threatening them "with return to Mexico if they filed any complaints" regarding working or living conditions (Molina

[31] The neocolonial relationship between the U.S. and Mexico begins with the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848). The conflict starts after the U.S. annexation of Texas, an independent republic from 1836 to 1845, due to a dispute about the border between Mexico and the United States: the Nueces River or further south at the Rio Grande respectively. After Mexico rejects the U.S. proposal of purchasing ports on the Californian coast, war begins on the Texas-Mexico border. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ends the conflict, and Mexico loses half of its territory to the U.S.—the Gadsden Purchase (1853) completes their loss of territory after selling lands located in current New Mexico and Arizona. The inhabitants of those lands could either stay and become Americans or go south to remain Mexicans, yet abandoning their properties. In two weeks, the Mexican American ethnoracial group emerges, starting a history of discrimination. Monica Rankin states that this war and the signing of the treaty are often considered the beginning of the American "political, economic, and cultural hegemony over Mexico and Latin America" (277).

[32] By not having their families in the U.S., those men were more likely to return home, as intended by the Mexican Government.

[33] The Bracero contracts were temporary: during the first stage, covering WWII, these would last from six weeks to six months (Clemens et al. 1470; Cohen, *Citizen* 23). During the second stage, when the program peaked, the duration was reduced to forty-five days (Cohen, *Citizen* 23).

1028). The increasing number of undocumented immigrants encouraged a growing racism towards Mexicans and led to the Operation Wetback (1954), thus deporting thousands of undocumented Mexican workers—this operation along with the eventual termination of the Bracero Program were the beginning of a U.S.-Mexico relationship characterized by "illegal" immigration.[34]

After the Bracero Program was finalized, a large number of Mexican workers had to return to Mexico. Many ended up settling close to the U.S.-Mexico border, overpopulating the area and drastically increasing unemployment and poverty. The Mexican government thus decided to implement the Border Industrialization Program (1965), hoping to attract TNCs in order to set up *maquiladoras*. Companies, mostly from the U.S., were thus lured by the advantages offered by the Mexican government, such as cheap labor and low taxes, especially during the 1980s (Bergin et al. 1666). The number of *maquiladoras* and the job opportunities they offer exponentially increased during the 1990s mostly due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) taking effect on January 1, 1994, and involving Canada, the United States and Mexico.[35] To bolster the interconnection among their economies, tariffs were modified—either their reduction or elimination altogether. The lower tariffs and taxes required to settle

[34] Significant Mexican immigration into the U.S. started in the late 19th century when legal restrictions were lenient. Mexican workers were essential to develop "mining, railroads, ranching, and agriculture" in the U.S., where many immigrants could enter and work without "official authorization or documents" (De Genova 162). Despite the creation of the Border Patrol in 1924 to control Chinese immigration, Mexicans kept entering the U.S. until the Great Depression (1929), enticed by job opportunities in the American railway and agriculture and to escape the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The financial regression of the early 1930s led to an increased hostility towards Mexicans, who were scapegoated and "excluded from employment and economic relief" (De Genova 164)—many were deported or returned to Mexico (Molina 1027). The prosperity brought by WWII and the shortage in labor due to the war allowed for the launch of the Bracero Program. The Mexican immigration kept rising during the following decades. The 1990s witnessed an increase of "nearly five million people" (Card and Lewis 193), and the peak was reached in 2007, with 12.8 million Mexican immigrants in the U.S. (Gonzalez-Barrera 7). However, "the improving Mexican economy, [a] stepped-up U.S. immigration enforcement, and the long-term drop in Mexico's birth rate" changed Mexican migration: "between 2010 and 2017, the number of Mexicans first flattened out and then started a slow decline in 2014," shrinking to 11.3 million in 2017 (Zong and Batalova).

[35] NAFTA was preceded by the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement signed in 1989. This economic agreement was meant to facilitate imports and exports from both countries as well as investments.

assembly factories and to produce on the Mexican border allowed for potential profits that attracted corporations, and the *maquiladora* industry grew once more. In the name of profit—mostly of TNCs—, trade agreements alter different regulations in the countries involved, where the citizens "lose from the weakening of important protective regulations" (Stiglitz 27). NAFTA, exemplified by *maquiladoras*, reflects a widespread trend in globalization: relocating production of commodities to the Global South, where cheap labor is more frequent and abundant, and then reaping profits and consuming the finished product in the Global North, where the invested capital is from (Allegro, "NAFTA" 187-88). In this way, the *maquiladoras*, owned not only by U.S. companies but also by European or Asian corporations, became the main source of underpaid labor for Mexican workers.[36]

The presence of these *maquiladoras* as well as the impact of NAFTA have also been negative for some. Local businesses are incapable of competing against TNCs, and many owners of these smaller businesses have lost everything, being forced to move to *colonias* on the border. Also, *maquiladora* employees work for very low wages in extremely precarious and unhealthy conditions, often exposed to industrial waste, as echoed in Ito Romo's novel *El Puente/The Bridge*. Furthermore, the natural environment is also negatively affected by *maquiladoras*, since their toxic waste is usually thrown into the Rio Grande, polluting the water and the air. The relocation of these factories, mainly owned by American companies, as well as the toxic waste that they produce "aggravat[e] the problem of eco-inequality on a global scale" (Buell 644): pollution from factories has decreased in the Global North to the detriment of the Global South.

[36] Most of these assembly plants are located in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, while Matamoros, Reynosa, and Mexicali are "second-tier centers of maquiladoras," and Nuevo Laredo—the setting of Romo's novel along with Laredo on the U.S. side—, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuna, and Nogales are "third-tier centers." These factories have settled in cities in the inner regions of Mexico too (Martínez 27).

The increase in the transportation of goods has contributed to larger numbers of undocumented immigrants entering the U.S. from Mexico. Consequently, the U.S. government has put an emphasis on the surveillance of the border, resulting in an overmilitarization of the area—once again reflected by Romo's narrative—, while pushing the migrants to more dangerous, even deadly areas such as the extremely hot and cold deserts and mountains (Cornelius and Salehyan 142; Cornelius 669-70).[37] Due to these dangers, *coyotes*—migrant smugglers—increased their fees, thus attracting "organized crime syndicates" related to "narcotics flows and other contraband" (Cornelius 668; Rosenblum and Brick 14). In order to "discourage illegal entrances," the strategy is "enforcement through deterrence," which consists in "the deployment of large-scale and highly visible enforcement resources along the most heavily trafficked parts of the border" (Rosenblum and Brick 8). Nevertheless, the higher wages in the U.S. and the subsequent possibility of sending remittances to the members of the family that stay in the home country are enticing reasons to emigrate, especially, working age migrants (Cornelius and Salehyan 141)—this is certainly not exclusive to Mexican immigrants, as can be seen in *The Inheritance of Loss*, for example, with the Indian Biju, who struggles in his quest for a better life in the United States.[38] Consequently, the

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[37] Border enforcement was heavily funded during the 1990s, with a subsequent twofold increase in the number of agents of the Border Patrol and multiple border enforcement operations: "Hold-the-Line" in El Paso (1993), "Gatekeeper" in San Diego (1994), "Safeguard" in Arizona (1994, although significantly funded in 1999) and "Operation Rio Grande" along the south Rio Grande Valley of Texas (1997) (Cornelius 661-64). To strengthen the surveillance of the border, measures have been taken: the fencing of the border in "urban areas where illegal entry was most visible," a larger number of agents, the use of "remote video surveillance systems, infrared monitors, seismic sensors that can detect footsteps, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), and computerized databases to identify recidivists and people-smugglers among those apprehended" (Cornelius and Salehyan 142).

[38] Significant Indian immigration to the U.S. begins in the late 19th and early 20th century with Sikh men migrating to work in farms and the railroad (Kibria 206). The Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924 limit the number of Asian aliens in the U.S. (Min 11-12), and the "1923 Supreme Court rul[es] that Indians [are] ineligible for naturalized citizenship" (Powell 146). Adding to these legal obstacles, the Great Depression makes it unappealing for new immigrants to enter the U.S. (146). After the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolishes immigration restrictions based on country of origin and largely increases the quotas of immigrants, Indian immigration is reignited. Most of them middle-class and educated, enter the country "on the basis of employment-based skills [e.g. physicians and engineers] or family reunification" (Kibria 207; Mehta and Belk 398) and as "foreign students" that later become "permanent

overmilitarization as well as the "illegal" immigration add up to the different sorts of crimes that happen along the border—drug and human smuggling, murder, rape (often suffered by female undocumented immigrants on their way to the U.S.)—, which prompts an environment of violence. Indeed, this violence, exerted in multiple forms, is also present in our corpus, and will be analyzed in Part III; hence, it may prove useful to linger on the very nature of violence before going any further.

1.2. What a Violent World: An Overview of Violence

The consequences of globalization are increasingly inescapable, leaving very few individuals unaffected by them. This is conspicuous in dimensions ranging from the environmental to the social realm. The impact that factories owned by transnational companies have on the environment is both local and global, ignoring as it does the borders of the nation states as well as whether industries are settled in the Global North or South. Social issues such as the unequal distribution of wealth within and across nations, foregrounded by globalization, can also be found in both the "developed" and "developing" countries. These consequences, albeit not exclusive to globalization, are fostered by the capitalist and predatory practices of TNCs supported by the governments of the different nation states of the globe. Although fiercely exploiting natural resources, absorbing, merging and ruining local companies, corporations and politicians alike seem to look the other way when it comes to dealing with the side

residents" (Min 14). The third phase starts in the 1980s. Most Indian immigrants go to the U.S. "under the provisions of family reunification" (Kibria 207) and are not as highly educated as the post-1965 Indian immigrants (Kurien 266). The Immigration Act of 1990, however, allows for "highly skilled temporary labor" to be expanded, which benefits "Indian IT specialists" that "immigrate to the United States" (Min 21).

effects of these activities. Even though this course of action is usually not considered to be an act of violence, different authors (Galtung, Nixon) do label those measures as such, and, as we shall see, our corpus contains multiple cases of violence both at a structural and at a personal level. Nevertheless, let us first explore what violence entails.

As Craig A. Anderson and L. Rowell Huesmann state, there is a difference between aggression and violence. These terms are not interchangeable, even if, in general use, they are. Human aggression is defined as "*behavior directed toward another individual carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm*" (Anderson and Huesmann, 298; italics in the original). The scholars further explain that, although harm is not necessary for aggression to happen, the intention of harming others needs to be conspicuous—this damage encourages the victim to avoid it (298). Wayne A. Warburton and Craig A. Anderson list a variety of forms of aggression, including physical aggression (physical harm), verbal aggression (harm through the use of words), and relational aggression (damaging someone's reputation), which may be the reaction to a provocation or a carefully planned action to cause harm; all these can either be direct—the target is present—or indirect—no physical presence of the victim (373-74). On the other hand, violence is generally defined as physical and/or psychological aggression taken to an extreme, the highest degree of aggressions, as in death, severe injuries, and emotional harm, among others: "All violence is aggression, but much aggression is not violence" (Anderson and Huesmann 298). Nevertheless, "violence may or may not be intentional," whereas aggression is (Christie and Wessells 1957).

Furthermore, scholars like Daniel Christie, Michael Wessells or Johan Galtung explore different types of violence, even though they are interrelated to some extent: episodic or direct violence—personal or direct in Galtung's terms—, structural or indirect violence, and cultural violence. Direct violence tends to intentionally hurt

individuals in a short period of time, it is a constant deprivation of basic needs, affecting the victim's well-being, and it is shocking, spectacular and visible. Conversely, indirect violence is characterized by a slower and intermittent pace in the exertion of its harming effects than direct violence, it is not perceived immediately, and, perhaps more importantly, structural violence is considered to be "normal," part and parcel of the system in which we live, "a result of the way in which institutions are organized, providing some people with material goods as well as representation and voice in matters that affect the well-being while depriving others" (Christie and Wessells 1957). Cultural violence is defined by Galtung as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" ("Cultural Violence" 291).[39]

The functions and power of the institutions also depend on the members of society. Institutions are able to function thanks to "sufficient consent or acquiescence" from the people (Brecher et al. 20). Hence, there is a "collective *acceptance* or *recognition*" of the status that institutions, people and objects have in society, even if we may not approve of that status (Searle 8).[40] The power that these institutions have in society is the product of consensus, which refers to Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony." Contrary to domination, which "is the enforcement of certain rules through military or police violence," hegemony would be accepting the supremacy of a

[39] Structural violence is related to Louis Althusser's ideological State apparatus (ISAs). Expanding on the Marxist conception of the State as a repressive apparatus, the author establishes a distinction between the repressive State apparatus and the ISAs. The former is unique and contains "the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc." (Althusser 1489). It functions primarily by repression (including physical violence) and, secondarily, by ideology. The latter are plural and function by ideology: the Church, schools, the family, the media, the arts, and sports, among others (1489). Both of them are intertwined and allow the ruling classes to maintain a dominant position. Yet, the ISAs are also the sites where class struggle is possible, since the "resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there" (1491).

[40] For example, the president of a nation can perform his/her function as president because s/he is collectively recognized as such.

certain ruling social group (Rachar 13). As Terry Eagleton explains, in "the parliamentary system in Western democracies," the power of hegemony "is a crucial aspect," because it allows for "the illusion of self-government on the part of the populace" (112). In addition, as Gramsci himself states, relationships of hegemony take place both "within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed," and also "in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations" (350). Nevertheless, these institutions may have a coercive power, especially, on those who have different interests or interfere with the interests that the institutions protect. In addition, the power that institutions have is maintained through different ways that "range from education to media, and from elections to violent repression" (Brecher et al. 20). Through these means, institutions and governments are able to control most aspects of society, including "family, education, money, the economy generally, private property, and even the church" (Searle 161).

In addition to the aforementioned types of violence, which are frequently intertwined, it is also relevant to bring Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence into our discussion. This type of violence arguably shares traits with Galtung's structural violence in that it is not shocking, not worth the attention of the mass media, and has nonspecific victims. Besides, Nixon claims, both concepts share a "concern with social justice, hidden agency, and certain forms of violence that are imperceptible," even though slow violence alludes to the current perception of faster time due to advanced technology that facilitates traveling as well as (almost) instant access to information and communication worldwide (10). In Nixon's own words, slow violence is a "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at

all" and lacks an open ending (2, 6).[41] Moreover, both structural and slow violence may lead to more conspicuous forms of violence.

Another social factor arguably involved in slow violence is racialization. Ethnoracial groups[42] are often positioned in different ranks in the social structure, and this lack of equality may foster violence. Ethnic violence is defined by Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin as "violence perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or a representative of a state), and in which" ethnicity is "integral rather than incidental to the violence"—violence is directed at individuals from a different ethnicity (428). Nevertheless, it is significant that the authors underscore the fact that in "the study of ethnicity, ethnic conflict, and nationalism, accounts of *conflict* have not been distinguished sharply from accounts of *violence*. Violence has generally been conceptualized—if only tacitly—as a *degree* of conflict rather than as a *form* of conflict, or indeed as a form of social or political action in its own right" and in "the study of collective or political violence, on the other hand, ethnicity figured (until recently) only incidentally and peripherally" (425-26). Violence thus seems to be somewhat detached from ethnoracial aspects in the studies of these issues. Nonetheless, ethnoracial differences are frequently reasons for exerting violence. As will be argued, in the selected narratives both personal and structural violence affect a variety of characters racialized as African Americans in *Crash,* Latinos in *Tropic of Orange*, or a range of racialized immigrants in *The Inheritance of Loss*, in terms of discrimination, physical violence, lack of opportunities.

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[41] In contrast to this, Nixon mentions the existence of rapid violence, whose damage is characterized by immediacy and visibility, regardless of whether the perpetrators are clear or not—it could be personal or structural violence.

[42] I will be using Hollinger's inclusive term, "ethnoracial" to talk about two difference concepts: race and ethnicity. "Race" tends to refer to the physical appearance of individuals, mostly, skin color; and racial constructions serve the interests of certain people. On the other hand, "ethnicity" not only involves physiological features, but also and more importantly cultural aspects such as social practices and traditions (McLeod 110-11).

A further distinction focuses on whether violence is of a psychological or a physical nature, as discussed by Galtung. Both psychological and physical violence can potentially be exerted at a personal and/or a structural level, as well as being justified by cultural aspects.[43] Physical violence involves damaging the body of one or more individuals with death being the extreme realization of violence as well as the limitation of physical movement as in restrictions in terms of means of transportation for a community or sending someone to jail. Psychological violence, on the other hand, includes "lies, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats, etc. that serve to decrease mental potentialities" and limit our capabilities (Galtung, "Violence, Peace" 169).

Violence can also be categorized depending on its perpetrator. Direct or personal violence has a specific actor or perpetrator, whereas indirect or structural violence as well as slow violence cannot be attributed to anyone in particular. All of these types of violence may cause death, injuries, and manipulations of different sorts, yet in structural and slow violence, this hostility is part of the structure, the system, and "shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances," with "certain stability" that does not foster rapid social and cultural changes, and may be perceived as social injustice, lack of equality and deprivation of basic needs, namely, food and shelter (Galtung, "Violence" 170, 171, 173; Christie and Wessells 1957).[44] Since personal violence tends to be conspicuous, immediate and, above all, visible (e.g. a group of criminals robbing a bank, a homicide), hostile events and behaviors that involve

[43] Galtung mentions that cultural violence changes the moral perception of an action depending on the situation or context—e.g. killing in the name of the nation is acceptable or even desirable on certain occasions whereas killing to benefit oneself is wrong ("Cultural Violence" 292). Cultural violence can also be understood as violence against a certain culture, which would depend on cultural aspects as the justification for violence too.

[44] Concerning basic needs, there are four main classes: "*survival needs* (negation: death, mortality); *well-being needs* (negation: misery, morbidity); *identity*, *meaning needs* (negation: alienation); and *freedom needs* (negation: repression)" ("Cultural Violence" 292; italics in the original).

obvious perpetrators and victims are usually labeled as violence. Galtung states that "[p]ersonal violence *shows*. The object of personal violence perceives the violence, usually, and may complain – the object of structural violence may be persuaded not to perceive this at all" ("Violence, Peace" 173). Adding to this, Rob Nixon claims that "[v]iolence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (2). In opposition to this, the specific perpetrators and victims of structural violence are not exactly known, since the range of influence of this type of violence is much wider (e.g. racist attitudes, political corruption that impoverishes a country, and so on). Nevertheless, it is structural violence the one that causes most harm. For instance, as will be discussed in the analysis of the chosen narratives, individuals who are positioned in the low ranks of the social structure are victims of consistent structural violence. Some of the characters in our corpus are undocumented immigrants or homeless people, who suffer a deprivation of some, most or all of the basic human needs to survive such as access to running water, electricity or even (adequate) housing. This is a seriously damaging form of violence.

Perhaps the most paradigmatic pattern of indirect violence is poverty, which, in many cases, leads to death—the most extreme realization of direct violence. As will be seen in the analysis of the narratives, some characters face this full or partial deprivation of basic needs. However, since there seems to be no particular individual or group that can be actually blamed for this, it is not that easy to identify or associate poverty with violence, at least, in the collective mind—individuals tend to consider it a consequence of social injustice, of the unequal distribution of wealth, but not as structural violence.[45]

[45] The violence of the unequal distribution of wealth may foster migration. The reasons to migrate can be grouped in three categories: "push factors" in the home country, "pull factors" in the host country, and "social networks." "Push factors" include economic issues and non-economic reasons like "authoritarian

Furthermore, poverty is a type of violence whose most drastic effects, such as death, are not instantly apparent; the damage done is neither immediate nor spectacular—other than when starving African children flash on the news for two minutes before the sport news helps us forget that reality. It is not only an issue of disassociating poverty from violence, it is also the fact that society in general tends to ignore the existence of poverty as well as other cases of structural violence. And, perhaps, worst of all, we are somehow complicit with this structural violence exerted on those individuals, be it African children, the homeless, "illegal" immigrants, lower-class fellow citizens, or even ourselves.[46]

Violence is connected to both the actual and the potential, meaning that violence happens when the actual situation or event can be avoided. Furthermore, violence contributes to the separation between what could be and what actually is (Galtung, "Violence, Peace" 168-69). In other words, violence is the existence of the negative reality, a condition in which achieving a better and more positive situation for individuals is denied or limited. For instance, the fact that *maquiladoras* and other assembly factories are mainly settled in the Global South, offering extremely low salaries to their employees, who work long hours in unhealthy environments, would qualify as structural violence. The possibility of improving the work environment as well as the laborers' retribution for their services exists. Hence, hardly having any actual alternatives to these exploitative conditions other than quitting their jobs is an act of violence perpetrated by corporations and governments against those workers, even if

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or corrupt governments." "Pull factors" are job opportunities, safety, and higher wages offered by host countries. "Social networks" link immigrants with those already in the host country—mainly "communities of co-nationals," who are "typically from the same village and area" (Rosenblum and Brick 2). In our corpus, push and pull factors are exemplified by Amelia, Biju and Farhad, for instance, while Saeed Saeed also reflects social networks by helping people from his hometown to migrate to the U.S.

[46] An opposite view is also possible with the media raising awareness of poverty. Apart from the news, voices such as Barbara Korte argue that literature and other forms of art do speak of poverty in a critical manner. Often addressed to individuals from the Global North, these works can influence the perception they have of poverty and the impoverished (305), thus increasing awareness.

this violent reality is masked behind alleged successes such as an increase in production, cheaper commodities, economic growth for the country, job opportunities and the like.[47]

It is open to debate whether the process of globalization, in increasing the intertwining of cultures and people, can foster or deflate conflict. Such global interaction, albeit generally positive, for it may facilitate cultural exchange even if homogenization cannot be completely ruled out, can also lead to hostile attitudes towards others. It is increasingly difficult to stay within a closed group or community, isolated from the larger, planetary community. Exposing oneself to the out-group is more frequent than ever, and this contact may encourage both tolerance and disputes. The capitalist system that backs up mass production regardless of the negative consequences on the environment and the people, the favoring of cheap labor and low wages, the unequal distribution of wealth, poverty, the exhaustion of resources, the neocolonial relations among countries, the overwhelming influence of TNCs and international organizations such as the IMF or the WTO, the discrimination against immigrants and other social groups, legal measures that limit immigrants' and other individuals' freedom, or political and police repression are among some of the examples of violence currently present in our societies and echoed by the selected narratives that will be explored in Part III. Personal, structural and cultural violence is a key component in the chosen corpus, narratives that depict the constant clashing among people as well as the deprivation of basic human needs some individuals suffer. The effects of economic agreements and treaties such as the North American Free Trade

[47] The uneven distribution of resources of all kinds—economic, cultural, educational, medical—"is aggravated further if the persons low on income are also low in education, low on health, and low on power – as is frequently the case because these rank dimensions tend to be heavily correlated due to the way they are tied together in the social structure" (Galtung, "Violence, Peace" 171)

Agreement (NAFTA),[48] the *maquiladora* industry or the domination exerted by TNCs, often detrimental to those who are in a weak position, are addressed by the narratives and discussed in the previous section. As can be gathered from the narratives, violence is all around, as if it were the natural and given state of the interaction among individuals, both at a personal and a structural level. Moreover, violence seems inescapable, which is highlighted by the use of fate in these narratives, most conspicuously in *Crash*. Violence, in its many shapes and forms, is frequently answered with more violence in a spiral of hostility that interconnects everyone, another echo of our increasingly globalized world.

The worldwide interconnections prompted by the process of globalization can be reflected particularly well by ensemble narratives through their multiple protagonists and plotlines that are also intertwined. Therefore, in the following part, I will embark on a formal analysis of the main distinguishing characteristics of ensemble narratives. For this task, narratology will be pivotal, since it will allow me to scrutinize the most significant features that differentiate ensemble narratives from more conventional single-protagonist counterparts. Even though narratological terminology will be introduced and explained during the formal analysis, emphasis should be put on the distinction between the Russian Formalists's *fabula* and *syuzhet*, especially, when delving into the complex and possibly challenging narrative structure of ensemble narratives. Gérard Genette's concepts of analepsis and prolepsis will also prove useful to address the lack of linearity that ensemble narratives, albeit not exclusively, present,

[48] Trade agreements have been one of the main targets reflecting a discontent with globalization, Joseph Stiglitz claims (23). Even though NAFTA has been largely beneficial for the United States, the current president, Donald Trump has criticized the deal. One of the reasons is that the trade deficit with Mexico—"the gap between U.S. exports to Mexico and its imports"—is significant, Stiglitz explains (24). However, the author remarks that despite having large trade deficits with other countries such as China or Germany, Mexico has suffered "Trump's wrath" the most without a proper explanation; Stiglitz's guess is that "it may be just racism and bigotry" (24). Notwithstanding the negotiations on NAFTA, the Trump administration has not had any "serious proposals on how to reverse the trade deficit with Mexico" (xxx).

as exemplified by some of the works included in the chosen corpus. Therefore, it is time to take apart these fiction puzzles.

Part II – Ensemble Narratives: Fiction Puzzles

"One for all, all for one" could very well summarize the essence of ensemble narratives. With its puzzle-like structure, every piece, every plotline is necessary for the full understanding of the narrative as a whole, whereas the entire narrative allows for a better and more meaningful understanding of each thread. The fragmented structure may nonetheless prove itself challenging for the readers/viewers, who might need to be more actively engaged than with conventional single-protagonist narratives, as we will explore later. The works of fiction, either cinematographic or literary, characterized by their multiple protagonists and plotlines that eventually crisscross have been given a variety of names: "ensemble narratives" (Cate, Ramon, Ross), "multiple-focus narratives" (Altman), "hyperlink cinema" (Quart), or "multi-protagonist narratives" (Azcona Montoliú). Apart from these four common labels, other terms have been proposed by critics to describe this type of narratives. Evan Smith, for instance, favors the term "thread structure," where "[e]ach thread is a separate main story and all threads have roughly the same dramatic weight" (88). His article goes on to argue that these stories are much shorter than, or not as developed as, the stories in traditional narratives, which instead tend to focus on one single thread. Nevertheless, E. Smith himself establishes a major difference between "ensemble films" and "thread structure": the former is "only one main story, a single dramatic journey" which is shared by multiple characters, whereas "thread structure" involves "several bona fide protagonists, each the hero in his or her own story" (90). Another possible term would be John Bruns's "polyphonic film," which would be an apt description of narratives featuring the "visualization or arrangement of multiple voices of equal importance" (189). Similarly,

David Bordwell's "network narrative" would be an adequate description of those narratives where all the characters are—or seem to be—connected. These connections can become rather complex when the number of characters increases (*Hollywood* 99). Apart from the wider labels listed above, Sandy Carmago claims that there are "two kinds of multi-protagonist films," what Margrit Tröhler defines as "group films" and "mosaic films" (Carmago). While the former "feature an ensemble, a single large group such as a family or a gang whose stories are linked spatially to some central meeting place," the latter "present a number of small groups, couples, or single characters. Initially, these people are linked only insofar as they happen to live in the same city at the same time, though eventually, as the narrative goes on, their stories become enmeshed, largely through coincidence" (Carmago). In our corpus, all the narratives would be mosaic narratives except for *The Inheritance of Loss*, which would fit in the first group: the characters are mostly connected to the same Indian family and to Kalimpong, where they live or come from.

Although I will be using different labels throughout this dissertation for the sake of variety, my choice of preference is "ensemble narrative." Apart from echoing the fact that the multiple protagonists and plotlines are intertwined and together, this label underscores a central argument in this thesis: regardless of the medium and its exclusive characteristics, a narrative is still a narrative. According to Monika Fludernik, there are three main levels in the narrative: "*narration* (the narrative act of the narrator), *discours* or *récit* proper (narrative as text or utterance) and *histoire* (the story the narrator tells in his/her narrative)" (2). The first two would constitute the "narrative discourse," which "reports, represents or signifies" the story (2). Therefore, for the scholar the "same story can be presented in various guises," with the same core, although, these multiple versions of the story may complement one another or highlight "different aspects of the

story" (2-3). Furthermore, films and literature are both narratives and, as such, their theories can generally be applied to both, with logical exceptions, and the label "ensemble *narrative*" does not exclude either. On the contrary, the term transcends the medium, it embraces both.

Therefore, in this dissertation, we explore literature—specifically novels—and films in an intertwined manner. Ever since its birth, cinema has been closely connected with literature. Apart from original scripts, literary works have been, to this day, one of the main sources from which motion pictures have been able to draw inspiration. Early short films such as *Alice in Wonderland* (1903), *Frankenstein* (1910), or *Scrooge, or, Marley's Ghost* (1901, based on Charles Dickens's 1843 novella *A Christmas Carol*) were already inspired by well-known literary pieces.[49] By adapting literature to the big screen, movies "added prestige to the new art form"; during the first two decades of the 20th century, films were already long and complex enough, with "[s]tories derived from celebrated literature or portraying important historical events [which] counterbalanced the popular slapstick chases and crime films" (Thompson and Bordwell 12, 41). Hence, it is worth noting that, in spite of the differences deriving from their intrinsic features, literature and cinema are certainly similar, for they are both narratives, after all. At the same time, it cannot be denied that language is a far more relevant element in written or textual narratives, whereas it only plays a part in film narratives. In the latter, the visual image predominates, with "sight and sound" as its media (Fludernik 114). In film the "iconic representation can be extended to cover actions, gestures, […] costume"; however, even if facial expressions do hint at certain emotional or mental processes, in

[49] The relationship between literature and cinema also involves short stories and ensemble films as seen in Robert Altman's movie *Short Cuts* (1993), for example. The film is based on Raymond Carver's short fiction. As Kasia Boddy says, the director interweaves "nine Carver stories […] into a complex narrative," adding one more story by the screenplay writers, Frank Barhydt and Altman himself (3).

order to represent thoughts or feelings, movies[50] often resort to words (102), often spoken by a narrating voiceover. On the other hand, written as well as oral narratives have language as their medium of representation (64). Literature depicts or conveys images and ideas by evoking thoughts and appealing to the imagination of the reader. Nevertheless, throughout time, and especially since the invention of the printing press, the visual and the acoustic aspects[51] of literature—for example, prehistoric paintings, illustrations in books, and oral storytelling—have been replaced by written texts (2). Therefore, written and textual narratives favor and depend on language more than films do. This does not mean that film narratives do not make use of language, though, even if they heavily rely on images.

The similarities between both media sketched above make it possible to utilize film theory in relation to literature and vice versa, which is an essential component of the analysis carried out here. In order to support this argument, I would like to resort to Rick Altman's words. In his 2008 book, *A Theory of Narrative*, the scholar claims the following:

> However different the media that serve as a given story's vehicles—however distinct the oral, written, illustrated, or film version of a particular narrative—we readily recognize a story's ability to be translated into different forms and yet somehow to remain the "same" story. Clearly, narrative exists independently of the media that give it concrete form. (1)

[50] In this thesis, I use *film* and *movie* indistinctly. *Movie*, originally an American term, alludes to moving pictures, while *film* refers to the celluloid on which the camera captures images. Albeit synonyms, their etymology suggests different connotations: movement and action on the one hand, and material (like paper), on the other.

[51] In Klarer's words, "[n]ot only the visual—writing is always pictorial—but also the acoustic element, the spoken word, is an integral part of literature, for the alphabet translates spoken words into signs," thus echoing the tradition of "oral poetry" (2). The oral tradition in literature, marked by narratives memorized and passed on by bards, has become relevant again from the 20th century onwards with the radio, audiobooks and lyrics of songs "display[ing] the acoustic features of literary phenomena" (Klarer 2).

In classic poetics, the basic pattern in narratives is usually the same: a given situation is presented and the (main) characters introduced; for some reason, this situation is disrupted, thus creating a problem that needs to be solved[52]; once this disruption is finally dealt with, the narrative reaches its resolution. Tzvetan Todorov gives a detailed account of the different stages of narrative development in "The 2 Principles of Narrative," where he divides the narrative into five main moments: first, the narrative presents an initial equilibrium; then, this situation is disrupted by an action; later on, the characters recognize that the equilibrium has been lost; after this, the characters attempt to bring the equilibrium back; and, finally, the initial equilibrium is restored (39). Todorov's theory can be applied to both film and literary works, since the basic and frequent narrative structure utilized in the two media follow these five linear segments, establishing a Hegelian "thesis/antithesis/synthesis"[53] (Lacey 92) or the clear Aristotelian "beginning, middle and end" in the narrative: a beginning does not follow anything, yet it precedes the middle, which necessarily follows the beginning and is followed by the end with nothing afterwards (Aristotle 31). Therefore, the manner in which the narrative is transmitted may differ, but it is still a narrative: "It does not matter to the 'situation/disruption/resolution' pattern whether the narrative is spoken, written or acted" (Lacey 85). That is why both film and literary narratives, in spite of using different media, contain plots, stories, and characters. In addition, they fulfill the same needs in the viewer/reader: aesthetic pleasure, providing new knowledge, reflecting and/or criticizing different aspects of our society, entertainment or a means to

[52] According to some literary critics, especially poststructuralists, not all narratives follow the same basic structure. Modernist authors like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Burkhard Niederhoff explains, do not use an "Aristotelian arrangement of incidents," linked with a beginning, middle and end (343). In addition, not every narrative has closure—an ending to the main conflict. For instance, soap operas and TV series can theoretically continue being broadcast *ad infinitum* and, on the other hand, prequels go beyond the beginning of the narrative further into the past (Abbot 53).

[53] This triad echoes the Hegelian dialectics. Applied to the conventional narrative structure, the initial state of affairs (thesis) is somehow disturbed or negated (antithesis), and, from these two instances a solution to the disruption is achieved (synthesis). In other words, a problem breaks with the situation proposed at the beginning of the narrative, encouraging the protagonist(s) to react and solve the issue.

(momentarily) escape from reality. This catalogue of functions is as much indebted to the classical concept of mimesis—the imitation of nature and human action—,[54] as to the double role of *docere et delectare*—the idea of teaching and entertaining.[55]

From a mimetic point of view, it is a fact that both literature and cinema, may represent similar events and scenes: comic scenes, love scenes, and even "action" scenes (explosions, fights, chases, and the like). However, it is worth mentioning that, depending on the medium, these events may not have equal effects on the viewer or reader, and some of these scenes do not always work when adapted from novel to film or vice versa because of the insurmountable differences between both media. For instance, for many viewers a car chase in a movie is usually exciting, "fun" and fast-paced. A description of the same car chase in a novel, however, might end up being awfully tedious and unappealing to readers. In this case, the parallelism would not be effective.[56]

In spite of the similarities between both literature and cinema, it cannot be denied that each of medium has its own effects, which cannot be equally attained by the other. The fact that each privileges linguistic or visual aspects determines the way the narration is carried out: "A novel mainly *tells*, through diegesis"—a narrator narrates and comments on the actions of the characters—, while "a film mainly *shows*, through

[54] Aristotle's concept of mimesis is related to the imitation of nature. Art may not only imitate but also show an improved and more beautiful version of the original. Therefore, mimesis and the similarity between the object and its representation allow for a better moral understanding of what is real. Moreover, it challenges reality, since mimesis is also connected to what is possible (Benito et al. 13).

[55] The famous Roman dictum, which includes a third term—*docere, delectare et movere*—was introduced by Cicero to summarize the main goals that the ideal orators should achieve with their speeches: "the winning over, the instructing and the stirring of men's minds" (285). Hence, the orators are supposed to persuade others by teaching, pleasing and emotionally moving the audience. "The teaching," Donald Lemen Clark explains, "is the appeal to the intellect of the hearer by means of proof. The pleasure is afforded by a euphonious style, and by fables and stories. The audience is moved to action by the appeal to their feelings" (120). These goals were later extrapolated from oral speeches to written texts, including fiction.

[56] Novels do include action scenes, however; in fact, an example of a fight (which is not tedious, by the way) can be found in Yamashita's novel, *Tropic of Orange*, as will be discussed later.

mimesis"—the characters themselves imitate human behavior and are in charge of performing the action (Fulton et al. 98; italics in the original). Furthermore, some things can be effectively done in novels and other written texts but not in audiovisual media like films, and vice versa. For instance, the complete lack of any physical description of the characters is possible in novels or poems.[57] However, the visual nature of movies would not allow this, at least not without going through painful efforts, for even if the characters are fully covered in clothes, for example, the viewer would still be able to make an educated guess regarding their height or size. Therefore, as Wolfgang Iser puts it, "the imagination is put out of action" in films when referring to how the characters look like: there is only one possible visualization of these characters precisely due to the visual nature of movies, yet novels allow for several possibilities, which depend on how the readers picture and imagine those characters ("Reading" 288). Conversely, some strategies and techniques typical of cinema are out of the reach of written texts. For instance, lighting effects would not achieve the same effect in novels as in movies. In films, lights and shadows can be used to focalize, placing particular emphasis on what needs to be the focus of attention. Another example would be the fact that filters and colors can be applied to films to distinguish different plotlines. A description of the implementation of these lights, shadows and colors would not be as efficient in a description written on a sheet of paper. Also, even if different plotlines in a novel are printed in different colors, the images of a film would work together with the tones chosen for each thread and achieve or emphasize an idea or message, as we shall see in our analysis of *Traffic*. Consequently, despite the similarities between literature and films, there are differences that, sometimes, make it "impossible to have exactly the same effect" in both media (Walder 11). This is important for this dissertation, since

[57] Even though dramatic texts might deprive characters of physical descriptions as well, the performance of the play is visual, thus asking for choices on the matter. However, this is an exception in literature, for drama can be approached as purely textual or hybridly textual-audiovisual.

certain aspects of the analysis will not be possible to apply to some narratives or, at least, not in the same way.

The close relationship between both media can also be perceived in the experimentation they sometimes engage in. Experimentation with narrative structures and, in particular, interconnected narratives have a longer tradition in literature than in cinema. Genre conventions have frequently been challenged throughout history. Nonetheless, it can be safely argued that one of the most experimental movements in literature, modernism, chose to make narrative structures much more complex than before.[58] As is well-known, the novel in the Western world originated during the 17th and 18th centuries. This genre tends to favor realistic and complex characters as opposed to the typified, allegorical heroes of its predecessor, the epic (Klarer 11) or the romance. Jeremy Hawthorn adds that the novel is characterized by its "formal realism," for "it is stocked with people and places that *seem real* even if they are imagined," including the "lives of the sort of human being who would not" be depicted in the previous romance, since in the romance or in the epic, the characters and settings "seem (and were meant to seem) unreal in important ways" (47, 49). By the 19th century, the novel had already achieved a "'mature' development" that included the use of the conventional narrative structure described above, a pattern that would soon be altered by modernism (Lacey 92).

Having addressed the complex relationship between film and literary narratives and both the terminological issues regarding ensemble narratives, it is time now to

[58] Modernism starts at the end of the 19th century, reaching its zenith in the early 20th century after WWI. Among other aspects, literary modernism is characterized by "a breakdown of any linear narrative structure following the conventional Aristotelian model which prescribes beginning, middle, and end" (Habib 628). This literary movement, just as post-modernism would do again in the second half of the century, "break[s] with the 19th century realism," and away from "established rules, traditions and conventions," engaging in daring experiments in "form and style" (Mihoc 109, Cuddon 516).

provide an overview of the development of the genre (section 2.1.) before turning to its main characteristics (section 2.2).

2.1. The Birth of Ensemble Narratives

Ensemble narratives are not a recent phenomenon. In fact, they have been around for many centuries in literature, and for decades in cinema. Furthermore, they both influence and are influenced by popular media such as television. As will be addressed in this section, ensemble narratives, especially films, have received influence from soap operas from the second half of the 20th century. The typically multi-protagonist narrative structure of soap operas, along with their popularity, had an impact on the number of ensemble films to be produced during the second half of the last century, which may have fostered their increasing popularity. On the other hand, the short story cycle is also connected to ensemble narratives with its multiple stories that tend to be interconnected even if it is just through a common theme or setting. Despite the fact that ensemble narratives tell a wide variety of stories, ranging from the Grail romances of the 12th century to “low-brow” films like *American Pie*, it is my contention that they are particularly suitable for the representation of our increasingly globalized world. The characteristic interconnection among the multiple plotlines and protagonists as well as their coincidental crisscrossing alludes to the idea that, in our “shrinking world,” we are all intertwined.

Ensemble narratives, characterized by a fragmented narrative structure with several main characters, have a long tradition in cinema and, particularly, in literature. As previously mentioned, one of the first examples of narratives that have multiple

protagonists is the 12th century Grail romances (e.g. Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*), which would also influence the eventual development of the novel in the 17th and 18th centuries (Klarer 68). Rick Altman points out that these romances made use of "hyperbolic modulations," which establish a relationship between characters, objects or experiences that do not seem to be connected in any way, "whereby the character followed in one chapter or section is replaced—after a short white space on the page—by a different character in the next chapter or section" (Altman 26).[59] Therefore, in the Grail romances, the plot would follow one character and then move to another with "[n]o explanation, no connection, no sense of spatial or conceptual leading" (26). Adding to this, it could also be argued that another aspect that ensemble narratives and the Grail romances have in common is the technique known as *entrelacement*.[60] As Elissa B. Weaver defines it, this technique comes from the French and the Italian chivalric traditions, and it "is an ordering of the narration in which narrative sequences are interrupted, separated, and recombined with other narrative sequences," thus creating "suspense as the reader is made to read stories belonging to different plot lines before returning to the point of disjunction" (126). The multiple threads in ensemble narratives are indeed interlaced, thus making the reader/viewer wait until the discourse returns to a specific thread and protagonist.

Moving on to the 14th century, two other notable examples of ensemble narratives are Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Focusing on multiple, recurring characters and plotlines, these medieval texts have been seen as predecessors of the short story cycle or composite novel, which can be considered ensemble narratives. In Boccaccio's narrative, which

[59] It was during the late-19th century when the white space between chapters started meaning a change of character or plotline. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it would usually mean a jump in time (Altman 247).
[60] *Entrelacement* appropriately means "to intertwine" in French, thus echoing the interconnections among characters and plotlines in ensemble narratives.

would serve as inspiration to Chaucer's, several characters gather in a villa sheltering themselves from the Black Death. Thus, the characters are intertwined by a common setting, a prominent feature in ensemble narratives. In the villa, the multiple characters tell a variety of stories that deal with different themes, some are meant to teach a lesson or set an example, being more didactic, whereas others have a lighter, more comic(al) tone, serving the purpose of entertaining. This narrative makes use of a frequent strategy to gather individuals from varied "classes, professions, and sexes" involved in an "emergency status provoked by a plague" (Altman 248). On the other hand, Chaucer's work also focuses on a group of characters, although, in this case, they engage in a story-telling contest during their pilgrimage to Canterbury. As Mario Klarer states, in these two "cycles of tales," there is a "frame narrative—such as the pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Thomas Becket in the *Canterbury Tales*—which unites a number of otherwise heterogeneous stories" (13). The narratives that contain other narratives that are embedded are called "frame narratives" (Abbott 25). These frame narratives can be "either at the beginning, or at the end, or both at the beginning and end of a narrative," as well as "interpolated at some point in the text" (Fludernik 28). This use of a frame narrative that connects or embraces multiple plotlines and narrative levels is present in many ensemble narratives, even though it is not necessarily an exclusive or characteristic feature, for frame narratives are used in single-protagonist narratives as well. In ensemble narratives, the multiple protagonists and their threads are part of an overarching plotline. The different threads are heterogeneous even though they are indeed intertwined and contribute to the plot as a whole. From our corpus, the most noticeable example is Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*, which has a circular structure, with a frame narrative at the beginning and at the end, precisely coinciding with Tomasita's chapters—although the reddening of the Rio Grande is her fault, the other

chapters and protagonists are connected to this main event and contribute to the overarching plotline in the narrative. A possible difference between ensemble narratives and short story cycles, in this sense, is the fact that the interconnection among protagonists and among plotlines tends to be more conspicuous in the former, while short stories may be completely disconnected from one another, only sharing the frame narrative as in the case of Chaucer's narrative, or any other aspect such as themes or settings. In spite of this difference, the development of both the short story cycle and ensemble narratives are close to each other.

Ensemble narratives have also been influenced by different serials such as the magazine and newspaper serials. These journals published novels in multiple installments as well as short stories, which would contribute to the development of the short story cycle. Due to the prohibitive prices of books during the 17th and 18th centuries, "large works" such as "histories, geographies, encyclopedias, romances, and the Bible" started being published in much cheaper fascicles—i.e. part-issue prints or "publication in numbers"—in order to "expand the market, and thereby increase profits" (Hagedorn 29). In the following century, the large majority of these serialized publications were fiction, both novels in installments and short stories. Subsequently, the birth and development of the short-story cycle during the late 18th and 19th centuries were influenced by the regular publication of short stories in magazines (Klarer 13). The success of these periodic publications not only contributed to the development of the short story cycle, but also to the birth and evolution of the soap opera and the TV series, which have influenced ensemble novels and films too, as will be explored later.

The short story cycle or the composite novel, as proposed by Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris, can be traced back to the 19th century, reaching a mature stage during the 20th century (e.g. James Joyce's *Dubliners,* published in 1914). Nonetheless, James

Nagel mentions that the origins of the genre go way back to old literary works such as Homer's *Odyssey* or the stories in *A Thousand and One Nights* (2). Medieval narratives such as the aforementioned *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* are considered precursors of the genre as well. By this time, these texts had already showed that "two ideas became clear in the concept of cycle: that each contributing unit of the work be an independent narrative episode, and that there be some principle of unification that gives structure, movement, and thematic development to the whole" (Nagel 2). Although the term "composite novel" originally made reference to novels written by multiple authors, from the 1970s onwards its use shifted towards a collection of stories that attains coherence once they are grouped all together; thus, the literary genre is defined by Dunn and Morris as follows: "*The composite novel is a literary work composed of shorter texts that—though individually complete and autonomous—are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles*" (2; italics in the original). This interrelation may not be conspicuous enough. If that is the case, then, the readers should establish the connections, "perhaps by locating a unifying or regulating element bridging the individual stories that could help interpret and integrate the text-pieces even if their juxtaposed arrangement does not suggest an overt organization" (Puşcaş 213). One of the 19th century forerunners of the composite novel is the "village sketch," which focused on the description of life in a particular location: "in such works one could capture 'a sense of place' in many minute particulars, including among these particulars an ethos of community that reflects the complex network of human lives" (23). Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*, for instance, explores a community living in one common setting: the book revolves around the U.S.-Mexico border as well as the complex and certainly complicated lives of those who reside there, especially, women.

While there are some examples of narratives employing a variety of devices to foster the multiplicity of characters between the end of the Middle Ages and the advent of the modern era, in 1789,[61] it was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when fragmented narrative structures and multi-protagonism became a prominent feature in literature. Realism emerged in France during the first half of the 19th century, reaching its climax towards the end of the century. Late 19th century realist and naturalist novels such as Émile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), Emilia Pardo Bazán's *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886), or Benito Pérez Galdós's *Misericordia* (1897) feature a variety of characters, frequently with several protagonists, in an attempt to provide a comprehensive representation of the society of the time; they do so in what these authors claim to be realistic ways, including "factual details" that seemed to be "accurate" (Hawthorn 50).[62] Realist writers break away from the "palpably supernatural" (Chodat 86), as well as the previous "romantic idealism, melodrama and a starry-eyed lack of concern for contemporary economic and social issues" (Fludernik 53). These novels include "'low life' and the experiences of those deemed unworthy of artistic portrayals by other artists" (Hawthorn 49). In his insightful and classic book *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt points out that the French Realists claimed that their novels distanced themselves from the "more flattering pictures of humanity," because those narratives "were the product of a more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life than had ever been attempted before" (11), posing questions regarding the "rapidly changing social and political world" (Speight 30). This is one of the points of connection between the

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[61] Examples of ensemble narratives in those intervening centuries are the story collections in Renaissance texts or, in the early modern period, the "Spanish Inn" novels, where different characters share their stories, (Altman 248).

[62] It should be noted, however, that these realistic ways are mainly "based on illusion: the trick is to make the world of the novel seem like part of the real world and not, as is generally claimed, to depict the real world. Instead of imitating reality, realistic novels refer to aspects of reality which are already familiar to readers" (Fludernik 55).

19th century novels and our corpus: both focus on "ordinary," everyday life.[63] The modern novel, as Robert Chodat puts it, revolves around the "unheroic, the commonplace," with "characters less defined by valorous deeds than by ordinary labor" and primarily belonging to the "emerging professional classes" and in connection to the "life of the family, which is typically a less tribal unit than in earlier narratives" (88). Most of the characters in the chosen narratives are part of these professional classes and develop ordinary labor, and even those that are not surrounded by commonplace contexts, such as the druglords in *Traffic,* are also approached and depicted in realistic ways.

Realist narratives are also connected to previous stages in the development of the novel as a genre, and not only the context but the characters too are subjected to realistic descriptions. Watt explains that characterization and the presentation of background are essential in the novel, paying special attention to the "individualisation [and development] of its characters [in the course of time]" and to the details regarding "their environment" and everyday life (18, 22). Furthermore, the realist novel explores the characters in terms of emotions and empathy as well, an issue that will receive attention later. Even though the realist novel is not the only one that addresses the emotional experiences of characters, John Gibson remarks that, in these 19th century narratives, the "minutia of life" is a "matter of affective concern": "[w]e are often granted access to a character's psychological interior as it registers the significance, both cognitive and emotional, of experience: of the 'doings and sufferings' that appear to be characteristic of creatures such as ourselves" (239). With regards to the relevance given to everyday life events and emotions, the selected narratives pay special attention to the social, cultural, political and economic context and issues such as globalization,

[63] Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* would be an exception to this, for it does not focus only on the "ordinary."

which are some of the primary pillars of the corpus. Furthermore, the exploration of the characters in relation to their context, their backgrounds and their emotions is of the utmost relevance too. Such information allows for a realistic depiction of those characters.

Apart from an exploration of a variety of characters and their contexts, it is worth noting that the 19th century realist novels also show that the individual's behavior is controlled by forces that are out of their reach (Altman 257). This is even more evident among naturalistic novelists of the period, most of whom shared the belief that "heredity determines a person's nature, which determines his or her actions" (Cowburn 164). These ruling forces that foster a sense of determinism bring to mind one of the main characteristics of ensemble narratives: the characters and their coincidental interconnections seem to be the consequences of the whims of fate, as will be discussed later.

The first half of the 20th century witnesses the emergence of modernism, which introduces characteristics that are often present in ensemble narratives (see section 2.2). Authors such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf or, in the U.S. context, John Dos Passos with his extensive experimental novels, break away from conventional narrative structures and strategies. The literature of this period rejects and challenges "traditional realism (chronological plots, continuous narratives relayed by omniscient narrators, 'closed endings', etc.) in favour of experimental forms of various kinds" (Barry 79). Some of the changes that modernism brings are the focus on subjectivity, reflected by the stream of consciousness technique, a departure from the objectivity that an "omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral positions" mean, the experimentation and combination of literary genres, and the use of "fragmented forms, discontinuous narrative, and random-seeming collages of disparate

materials" (Barry 79). Innovative and experimental narrative strategies are also present in the postmodernist literature of the second half of the past century. Postmodernist fiction is generally characterized by "bricolage or pastiche," the "juxtaposition of 'low' with high culture," and the "mixing of styles and genres" (Nicol 2).[64]

If ensemble novels have a long tradition in literature, ensemble narratives in cinema are not a recent phenomenon either. Nevertheless, ensemble films "used to be considered of interest only to art-house audiences" and only in recent times has the number of their followers started to increase (Aronson 167). In fact, it was not until the last two decades of the 20th century that multi-protagonist films became more popular, in part thanks to the attention received from critics. The origins of this genre can be traced back to silent movies like *Intolerance* (1916), by D.W. Griffith (Azcona, *Multi-Protagonist* 9). An even more relevant example among classical Hollywood movies can be found some years later, in a sound film, Edmund Goulding's *Grand Hotel* (1932), which materialized the idea of gathering most of the Metro Goldwyn Mayer's stars in a single motion picture. Hollywood studios became more interested in this type of films after the Second World War, as exemplified by the 1946 musical *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Azcona, *Multi-Protagonist* 11). By this time, multi-protagonist films already included some of the distinctive characteristics that would eventually get consolidated: "an inclination towards open endings (although not in the case of the musicals), a concern with the (love, sexual, or friendship) relationships between the characters rather than with a strong cause-and-effect line of action, and a special amenability to combine with a multiplicity of genres" (Azcona, *Multi-Protagonist* 13). During the 1960s,

[64] For instance, the parody inferred by the wrestling match between SUPERNAFTA and El Gran Mojado points at the mix of "low" and popular culture with more "serious" and intellectual issues. Furthermore, by introducing Arcangel's political poems, *Tropic of Orange* combines poems with the novel. However, this inclusion of poems may also allude to the combination of narration with other forms of texts used in earlier times, like the multi-protagonist "prose romances of the late Renaissance," which often used white spaces not only to move from one character to the next, but also to include "stories, letters, poems, tomb inscriptions, legal manual, and what-have-you" (Altman 246).

although there was a slight increase in the number of ensemble films being produced, they were still the exception to the norm. At the time, as David Bordwell states in *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, while some movies would focus on one or two protagonists, other characters and their plotlines were relevant as well (95).

Despite the growing popularity of ensemble movies, they would remain an oddity until the 1970s. One of the milestones in the development of ensemble films was the 1970s "disaster movies." These motion pictures enjoyed widespread popular acceptance, in part due to their all-star cast. Also alluring was the fact that they "revolve[d] around a life/death situation caused by either a natural disaster or a human action in which the efforts to escape and/or control the catastrophe feature[d] as the strong line of action that unifie[d] their multi-protagonist casts" (Azcona, *Multi-Protagonist* 15). Furthermore, this type of narrative does not have a specific protagonist. The several plotlines that comprise the film might have their own heroes or heroines. Thus, there is not a unique hero or heroine. As a consequence, the film devotes approximately the same amount of time to each of the characters. The fact that during the 1970s ensemble films would have all-star casts would serve at least three practical purposes: first, to avoid misleading the spectators, who might think that a certain character is more important simply because s/he is played by a "celebrity," hence the film would feature several famous actors; second, it would be easier for the audience to distinguish each plotline by identifying them with the familiar faces of those "stars"; third, and more obviously, an all-star cast would certainly constitute a good marketing move that would certainly attract a large number of viewers (17). Moreover, the fact that a character was played by a "celebrity" in these movies did not imply that (s)he would not meet their (catastrophic) end. This is clearly the opposite of what is the norm

in traditional single-protagonist films, where the protagonist tends to be played by the best-known artist and usually survives at the end.

The three following decades witnessed a much larger number of ensemble films, proving an increase in their popularity. The last decade of the 20th century also witnessed the first examples of films where (some of) the characters did not seem to be linked to each other in any way, even if their lives and plotlines eventually crisscross—the three movies analyzed in this thesis would fit here. Having earned their fair share of popularity, Linda Aronson maintains that ensemble films can also be commercial products dealing with a wide range of genres (167). The two predominant genres in recent times have been the thriller and the melodrama: "multi-protagonist movies found the thriller and the melodrama particularly conducive to their take on contemporary cultural phenomena and the impact of globalization and transnationalism on individual lives" (Azcona, *Multi-Protagonist* 24)—the motion pictures analyzed in this dissertation are examples of this.

The expansion of ensemble films has been achieved due to a variety of factors. One of the possible reasons for such growth may be the "emergence of network theory in the 1980s and 1990s," or theories like the "six degrees of separation" or the "butterfly effect" (chaos theory), which became part of the popular culture (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 100).[65] As will be elucidated in later sections, the multiple protagonists in ensemble films are interconnected in some way—e.g. a common setting, relationships among them, a circulating object—, and this intertwining is often dictated by "fate" and

[65] On the one hand, the butterfly effect in chaos theory is the concept that minimal changes can make big and significant differences, characterized by their unpredictability. On the other hand, the six degrees of separation is the theory that claims that every individual is connected to any other in the world by six steps at the most. John Guare's homonymous play, which was adapted to the big screen in 1990, precisely toys with this idea.

coincidences. Therefore, these narratives echo the idea of everyone being interconnected in our globalized world.

Another reason behind the increasing numbers of ensemble movies may be the fact that they became popular in Europe and Asia, two markets that have a significant influence on Hollywood—contrary to European and Asian films, and in spite of their influence on American counterparts, Hollywood tends to add "redundancy and happier endings" (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 102-3). Furthermore, some of the American ensemble films are "art cinema," often connected to European cinema, which offers an alternative to Hollywood mainstream movies. Also, these multi-protagonist films are sometimes independent films.[66] As such, they are frequently aimed at specific audiences (Thompson and Bordwell 335). Independent films started receiving more support from studios after the 1960s, when they acknowledged the potential that these movies had. Those Hollywood-based directors influenced by European counterparts wanted to make films that were different from the typical Hollywood creations. Studios opened secondary branches that were meant to produce independent art cinema and directors had more freedom regarding what to do with the film, something that is not common in mainstream cinema: "Off-Hollywood filmmakers also designed their fare for overlooked [minority] audiences" (Thompson and Bordwell 699).[67]

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[66] Art cinema refers to movies that are not meant for commercial theaters and mainstream audiences. These art films are valued as artistic or cultural works and are often experimental (Thompson and Bordwell 324), thus certainly being more challenging for the viewers than blockbusters. Independent films are not produced by major studios, tend to have lower budgets and smaller audiences than mainstream counterparts.

[67] Directors from ethnoracial minorities such as the African American, Spike Lee, became well-known in Hollywood from the 1980s onwards, with films that often address these minorities. The primary literary influences during the 1970s and 1980s "were [also] writers of color, especially representative women like Toni Morrison [and] Maxine Hong Kingston" (Lauter 28). These minorities were incorporated in "society at large" as well as by the American university, with scholarly publications during the 1990s and programs that included "[f]iction writers from many different cultural backgrounds" (Rubin and Verheul 9).

Nevertheless, one of the most notable contributions to the expansion of ensemble movies may come from "soap operas and ensemble-cast TV series" (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 100). As popular forms on TV, soap operas and TV series, divided into multiple episodes, are indeed indebted to literature.[68] They can be traced back to the 19th century Victorian novels: the three-volume novels—also known as triple deckers—and the publication in installments, for example, in magazines (Lacey 34; Keen 19). The genre of the soap opera emerged in the 1930s with the purpose of "lur[ing] women to daytime radio and advertisers to program sponsorship," as Allen points out (2). Therefore, the first soap operas were addressed to a specific type of female audience: housewives. Originally sponsored by detergent companies to market their products,[69] these narratives "featured prominent female protagonists" (Hagedorn 35) and "dealt with domestic issues that were seen to be the prime concern of the woman in the family" (Lacey 221). During the 1930s and the 1940s, radio soap operas were extremely popular. However, in the 1950s, television becomes the main mass medium and wins the battle against the radio in terms of audience and sponsors. Consequently, the latter loses its soap operas and other serials, thus returning to its original programming: "news reports, talk shows, and recorded music" (Hagedorn 36-37). Television brings the cinema to the home environment, giving the audience more access to news bulletins, as well as forms of fiction such as films and soap operas.

[68] The division of TV series in episodes has a connection to literature. As Suzanne Keen remarks, the "term most often used to indicate an installment on television (or, in earlier years, on the radio or at the movies), the 'episode,' has its roots in prose fiction, particularly in romances and picaresque fictions" (20).

[69] The first radio soap opera was financially supported by Procter & Gamble in 1932. Being sponsored by detergent companies gave the genre part of its name—soap. The term "opera" comes from the melodramatic nature of these narratives (Fulton et al. 178).

The fragmented structure and the focus on several characters, so typical in multi-protagonist fiction, are also intrinsic to soap operas and ensemble-cast TV series.[70] Even though most of them have a single protagonist, soap operas and TV series tend to revolve around a large number of characters more often than films. In fact, the connections and intertwining of the different characters and their plotlines are one of the main ingredients for a TV series or a soap opera (Grace 58). Robert C. Allen remarks that soap operas include several plots and characters, which are intertwined and interact with each other in "complex, dynamic, and unpredictable relationship[s]," thus making the viewers wonder both the direction of the plot and the relationship these plotlines have (17-18)—these two questions are indeed prominent in ensemble narratives, including films and novels. For instance, Thompson highlights that the intertwining of relevant plotlines has a long tradition in the genre and a "modern American hour-long daytime soap opera typically keeps eight to ten stories going at once" (56).[71] The multiple plotlines and characters give soaps and TV series a unique narrative structure, which potentially allows the show to go on forever (Lacey 38)—this is not the case with ensemble novels and films, even when they have several prequels and sequels. In soap operas and TV series, some plots or subplots may be abandoned for a while and resumed later on when the producers deem so convenient. Some characters may leave the show and return at a later stage, or receive more or less attention, depending on the episode. Moreover, these shows tend to be non-linear with "any kind of disordering or repetition" (Fulton et al. 182). Consequently, they are creating and resolving narrative

[70] Yamashita's debut novel, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, is partly influenced by Brazilian soap operas—*telenovelas*—, not only due to its ensemble structure, but also because of characters such as Batista and Tania Aparecida Djapan, who are overdramatic and passionate, regularly arguing until they find the injured bird that eventually becomes their messenger pigeon.

[71] Regarding the structure of soaps, Kristin Thompson explains that "American daytime soap operas, which appear daily and do not have reruns, can last either a half or a full hour. Either type requires a staggering 260 episodes per year" (39). The main cliffhangers are "at the end of the Friday episode" to keep the audience interested and discussing what might happen on Monday during the weekend (Allen 17).

strands all the time (Lacey 39). As such, the TV series and the soap opera (do not or) are not intended to reach a closure or dénouement until they are eventually over.[72] The number of episodes can keep increasing as long as the audience remains interested and there is enough budget to produce the show (Fulton et al. 179).[73]

Nonetheless, it should be noted that not all TV serials are equally categorized. Yvonne Grace differentiates series and serials: a series is a "drama that is open ended. A core cast of returning characters. The backdrop remains the same and is returned to each week. […] There may be several stories per episode which are resolved, but the series plotline, that which is carried by the core returning cast, remains open"; in contrast, a serial is a "drama of more than one or two parts with a strong serial element. A core cast of returning characters and an over-arching plotline, but in this case the plotline is ultimately resolved" (37).[74] In spite of these differences, Nick Lacey mentions that both series and serials may have several subplots, although most of them usually have "*one* overarching narrative which runs through *all* the episodes" (34; italics in the original). Moreover, their episodes usually finish in a climactic moment—cliffhangers—or with some sort of question that will be answered in the following episode(s) in order to keep the viewer interested in the show. Similarly to TV series and soap operas, ensemble narratives have a prominently episodic nature, with the narration constantly moving from one plotline to the other. Subsequently, the viewers/readers are forced to continue

[72] The American soap opera *Guiding Light* is the longest-running soap in U.S. history. It started as a radio program in 1937 and then moved to TV in 1952 until its final episodes were broadcast in 2009. Adding up the episodes on both radio and television, the show has over 18000 episodes—in case anyone wants to binge-watch it. Other examples of extremely long soap operas, with more than 10000 episodes, are *As the World Turns* (1956-2010), *General Hospital* (1963-), and *Days of Our Lives* (1965-), all of which show the flexibility and popularity of the genre.

[73] Throughout the years, soap operas and TV series have also utilized narrative structures that move away from conventional patterns: "television, once the province of all things conventional, is also increasingly presenting more complex narrative forms to highly receptive audiences" (Aronson 167).

[74] TV series leave open the possibility of the viewer feeling identified with several characters. Meant to last long periods of time—unless they get cancelled—, they can and have to devote more time to the development (and evolution) of each character. The length of these narratives often allows for more detailed characters regarding their personalities and actions as well as the events that take place in their plotlines, which affect how the readers/viewers interact and identify with the characters and the narrative.

watching/reading in order to find out how the different threads go on, including the overarching plotline.

The multi-protagonist structure has received different critical appraisals depending on whether it appears in soap operas or films. Soap operas are rarely considered to be high-quality products; and yet, "whenever a non-soap opera text adopts soap practices, that text is seen as doing something daring" (Carmago). Common and popular narrative structures suddenly become experimental and highly esteemed when introduced in audiovisual fiction other than soap operas. Frequently, films have a more complex approach to this narrative structure than soap operas. Besides, multiple threads are not the usual structure in movies, which tend to be built around single protagonists, with perhaps only one (major) plotline. Traditional Hollywood cinema also tends to be mostly linear, chronologically speaking. Hence, the spectator does not need to pay full attention to everything that is happening on screen in order to follow the story, as mentioned before. On the contrary, soap operas often use this multi-protagonist structure—and even if there is one single protagonist, the number of characters is abundant; therefore, it is not experimental, unusual or daring. They also tend to be reiterative and over-explanatory in order to provide information and background to new viewers, who may start watching the soap opera anytime, or a regular viewer that missed one or more episodes (Thompson 63-64). It should also be noted, however, that the "emphasis in soap operas is on talk rather than action" (Allen 19). In spite of the plot twists to keep the audience hooked, most soap operas are much "simpler" and straightforward than multi-protagonist movies, making them easier to follow.

Nevertheless, the fact that soap operas are perceived as an example of popular culture should not be ignored. Popular culture is rarely regarded as comprising quality

products.[75] For instance, there are few cases of TV shows that are considered to be "masterpieces," a distinction less frequent than in other arts.[76] Thompson mentions that "[i]n the early decades of television, theorists and critics working in the more established arts were reluctant to scrutinize the new medium closely," instead "[s]cholars of literature tended to dismiss television or to consider it an actual threat to cultural standards and to education" (3, 4). Furthermore, the fact that soaps were largely addressed to a female audience is connected to the negative consideration of the genre. Allen points out that "American audience research in the 1940s cast soap opera listeners as a distinctively different audience group with special needs and lacks, which, presumably, the (male) audiences for other types of programming did not have" (6). The scholar goes on to say that, consequently, the "average" woman watching soap operas was supposed to have deficiencies, "whether emotional, psychological, social, relational, or some combination of them all," and this negative consideration of the soap opera and its audience would remain "in both 'serious' and popular discourse" until the 1980s (6).

On the other hand, it should be taken into account that TV industry is a "younger" industry than that of films, even if it has matured over the years. Moreover, during its first few decades it used to be less daring than cinema. In contrast, movies were bolder and offered different themes or depictions than those that were common and allowed on TV. Censorship was an issue for cinema in the U.S. until the 1960s,

[75] As pointed out by Jaap Kooijman, the academic analysis of pop culture also tends to be "equated with its object, judged to be just as light," when included in scholarly publications. Conversely, when these analyses appear in non-scholarly sources such as magazines, they run the risk of being called "pretentious." Consequently, the author states that "the academic analysis of pop culture" is "[d]oomed to be either too lightweight or exceptionally pretentious," thus being "just as ambiguous as pop culture itself" (19-20).

[76] Shows such as *The Wire* or *The Sopranos* are often considered two of the best series ever created in the U.S., due to their elaborate plotlines, psychologically complex characters and faithful depiction of reality. Other examples include *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Seinfeld*, and *The Simpsons*, to cite a few. For a more detailed list, check the "101 Best Written TV Series," by the Writers Guild of America.

especially during McCarthy's administration in the 1950s, "when suspected 'unAmerican activities' in the motion picture and broadcasting industries were rigorously investigated" (Fulton et al. 179). As Thompson and Bordwell explain in *Film History* (2003), theaters needed certificates to show films that had to be approved by official boards of censors (334). Once these approvals were no longer necessary, theaters could show more independent films, which usually touched upon more controversial subjects than mainstream movies (335). The scholars mention that the possibility of producing "films with more daring subject matter" became one of the ways in which movies could compete against television, whose content was strictly scrutinized and censored (335). The censorship that rules over TV—mostly networks—is present even today, although it is not as strict as it used to be. Cable TV, mainly premium networks such as HBO or Showtime, has enabled the production of more mature and complex shows. Also, the censorship regulations for premium cable TV are more lax than those for basic cable and, particularly, for network TV. Therefore, "taboo" issues such as sex, violence, homosexuality, drugs, swear words, and so on can be depicted more explicitly on cable TV. These significant changes experienced by TV are indeed a reflection of the changes that have prevailed in society as well. During the last few decades, controversial issues have generally been more openly discussed on screen.

One can argue that in the second half of the 20th century spectators, partly because of the episodic nature of soap operas, grew more used to fragmented, ensemble narratives. The puzzle-like structure of soap operas and TV series influenced ensemble narratives in films. David Bordwell underscores that "soap operas and ensemble-cast TV series probably yielded more proximate models for cinema"—particularly ensemble narratives—than literature, for "audiences' familiarity with soap operas and the longer-

running story arcs of prime-time television […] readied them for such multiplot pictures" (*Hollywood* 97, 100). Even though TV and cinema may be closer to each other than to literature, I would not rule out the influence of literary narratives on the development of ensemble films. It is possible that some filmmakers were more influenced by the literary tradition than by the popularity of soap operas. Moreover, even if the inspiration comes from "soaps," these, in turn, during their first steps on the radio in the 1930s, had been inspired by romance novels. The growing popularity attained by soap operas after moving to television in the 1950s may have contributed to the increasing number of ensemble films produced during the 1960s-1970s onwards.[77]

Ensemble narratives, therefore, have a long history, even if they became particularly popular in the 20th century. The intertwining intrinsic to these fragmented narratives also takes place among genres and media: the multi-protagonist nature of popular TV series and soap operas had an impact on the ensemble films produced during the last decades of the 20th century, which may be the reason for their increasing popularity. In addition, we have also seen how the short story cycle, with its multiple stories that tend to be interconnected even if it is just through a common theme or setting, is also a forerunner of contemporary ensemble narratives. In the end, novels, films, short story cycles and TV series interact and influence each other in an ensemble of media.

[77] Some TV series echo the narrative structure of the short story cycle, while others would be closer to the structure of the novel. In some TV shows, each episode focuses on one of the protagonists while adding details to the overarching plot—e.g. *Skins* (2007-2013). Other TV series introduce new characters and plots in each episode, which are independent from each other, albeit linked by the setting or theme as in *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964)—the intertwining element is the mystery of the events that happen in the "twilight zone." Closer to the narrative structure of the novel, the sense of continuity between episodes is more prominent in other TV series—the episodes would be more similar to the chapters in a novel. Some of these shows may have one protagonist and focus on the general plot that mainly follows the hero(ine)—e.g. *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013)—, whereas others deal with several protagonists, whose threads contribute to an overarching plotline as in *Heroes* (2006-2010).

2.2. Understanding Ensemble Narratives

Having touched upon the most relevant milestones in the development of ensemble narratives, it is time now to address what characterizes the genre. For this purpose, we are going to delve into the main traits of ensemble narratives, in contrast with single-protagonist counterparts. This comparison will also shed light on how their departure from a more conventional narrative structure may prove a challenge for the readers/viewers.

Contrary to what happens in ensemble narratives, conventional film and literary narratives tend to revolve around a single protagonist or "hero(ine)" who is set to achieve something and bring a resolution to the narrative. Accordingly, the narrative gets moving due to the wishes and objectives of this main character, "the *goal-oriented protagonist* [whose] goals define the main lines of action" (Thompson 22). In other words, the classical Hollywood film resorts to the classical hero and quest, a pattern that has a much longer tradition in literature and oral storytelling, as analyzed by Joseph Campbell in his well-known *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.[78] According to Bordwell, the classical Hollywood film is built upon individuals that need to find a solution to a problem or achieve goals. Along the way, these characters face obstacles and, at the end of the story, they either succeed or fail (*Narration* 157). Put in the words of Helen Fulton et al., the "good" Hollywood plot is supposed to catch the attention of the audience through the following basic structure: "a given state of affairs is

[78] Schematically summarized, the classical narrative can be divided into three acts with a variety of archetypal characters that come into play. After a disruption in the ordinary world of the hero(ine), this character is pushed towards the adventure. S/he will meet several characters and obstacles before attempting to defeat or overcome whatever caused the disruption. Only then the original state of affairs of the hero(ine)'s world will be restored. For a more detailed description of the stages of the narrative and the main archetypes, see Campbell and Vogler.

interrupted by some 'cut' in the real; readjustments and losses occur, but finally a new, improved state of affairs emerges from the central character's wrestling with that 'cut' in things"; these "cuts" may be, among other elements, the appearance of a villain, a disaster, a threat, or an emergency (55).

Therefore, the most distinctive aspect of ensemble narratives is precisely that they have several characters and multiple plotlines (Aronson 172), which is clearly a shift from the traditional model of telling stories. Amy Corbin explains that multi-thread narratives, the term she prefers, "have several storylines running relatively autonomously, with characters secondary in one storyline often featuring centrally in another, in an attempt to replicate a social network in which individuals play larger and smaller roles in various social and vocational groupings" (61). Subsequently, both in literature and cinema, the plotlines and the protagonists tend to be quite independent from each other, at least initially. However, in spite of the existence of several threads and main characters, an ensemble narrative can also be perceived as a single-focus or dual-focus story, especially, during the first chapters or minutes, since these are more traditional strategies than the multiple-protagonist structure (Altman 287). Such a preconception of a more conventional narrative structure is applied to ensemble narratives, because readers/viewers are significantly more exposed to single-protagonist narratives. Ensemble narratives are not common in literature or cinema—even those narratives that do portray several characters tend to revolve around one single protagonist. Among mainstream Hollywood films, ensemble narratives are scarce, for mainstream movies are much more commercial than independent cinema, hence offering more simplistic and accessible narratives. Consequently, as non-mainstream fiction, ensemble films do not get that much attention and support from most media institutions, which is also connected to the fact that a large percentage of the audience

prefers conventional narratives (Lacey 121). However, ensemble narratives are not completely alien to readers/viewers: like single-protagonist narratives, the multiple characters in ensemble narratives have certain goals and undergo change, although these may be the consequences of their crisscrossing. In conclusion, we can say that replacing the usual single protagonist with a multiplicity of main characters, as is done in ensemble narratives, constitutes a significant departure from more conventional narrative structures, especially if we take into consideration the long tradition the single protagonist has had both in cinema and literature.

Due to the multiplicity of protagonists in ensemble narratives, some authors state that these characters may be considered to be minor characters instead. John Bruns explains, all the characters in polyphonic movies, or as I prefer to call them, ensemble narratives, seem to be minor characters (203). The apparent little relevance of these characters may be stressed by the fact that their plotlines seem to be disconnected, thus being minor threads in the narrative. For instance, Sue-Im Lee comments that the "disjunctive organization" of *Tropic of Orange* "leads to an atomistic sense of each character's life, as each chapter seems to stand on its own with little continuity from the other" (506)—the narrative is divided into forty-nine chapters, seven in each of its seven sections, corresponding to the days of the week. Hence, each character has one chapter per day, as indicated in the "HyperContexts" that Yamashita includes before the actual novel. Nevertheless, in spite of S. Lee's argument concerning the "little continuity" between chapters in *Tropic of Orange*—a point I agree with—(506), none of the sections or plotlines of these works can be completely seen or read independently from the others, due to the connection between them. I maintain that, even though it can be argued that none of the characters or their threads stands out more than the others in the works discussed here, the multiple plotlines create the plot as a whole, and each

narrative thread also alludes, to a greater or lesser extent, to the other plotlines. Reading or watching only the threads that focus on one of the characters is indeed possible, but at the cost of skipping relevant information that is provided by the narrative as a whole. All the different threads are indeed necessary for the reader/viewer to understand the overarching, general plotline in the narrative. For instance, in the case of González Iñárritu's Death Trilogy, the filmmaker uses a technique that, according to Mihoc, resembles the painting technique known as pointillism,[79] since the "small bits of action" only make sense when "the viewer is able to take distance and see the whole" in order to understand the connections between the characters and their plotlines (110). Each protagonist and plotline may be "small dots," yet all of them are necessary to see the entire picture. Hence, the little continuity and independence are only apparent for the most part. Once the readers/viewers learn enough about the narrative, they can start establishing connections among the characters and their threads, and for this, all the parts of these narrative puzzles are required.

The selected corpus, like many other multi-protagonist narratives, includes novels and films revolving around several characters and the reader/viewer is given bits of information in every chapter or scene. Furthermore, these characters are part of different ethnoracial groups. Then, the literary selection includes Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Ito Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*, and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*. The four protagonists in Desai's novel—the judge Jemubhai Patel, his granddaughter Sai, his cook Panna Lal, and the cook's son Biju—are South Asian, Indian, although the narrative has different settings: New York in Biju's thread, England during Jemubhai's flashback memories from the late 1930s onwards, and India

[79] Pointillism is a technique that uses "tiny primary-colour dots […] to generate secondary colours" (Mihoc 110). Seen from the distance and as a whole, the painting makes sense to the spectator. González Iñárritu himself also mentions that his 2003 film, *21 Grams*, is based on this painting technique (Solórzano).

in the remaining plotlines.[80] Set in Laredo-Nuevo Laredo, an urban area along the U.S.-Mexico border, Romo's novel has fourteen protagonists with their homonymous chapters, which highlights the similar importance they have in the novel: Tomasita, Carlota, Cindy, Lola and Lorena, Estela, Perla, Lourdes, Pura, Cristina, Rosa, Sofia, Soledad, and Adelita. It is not always specified whether these women are from the Mexican side or the American side of the border, which underscores the fact that, in practice, the U.S.-Mexico border area can be more productively understood as borderlands (Anzaldúa), a space of blurry borders between two cultures that crisscross each other. *Tropic of Orange* revolves around seven protagonists from varied ethnoracial groups: the Vietnamese American Bobby, the Mexican Rafaela, the Japanese American Emi, the Chicano Gabriel, the Sansei Manzanar, the African American Buzzworm, and the mythical Arcangel, who represents Latin America as well as the natives from the American continent.[81]

The films that will be explored in this dissertation are Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*, Paul Haggis's *Crash*, and Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic*. *Babel* has eight protagonists: the Americans Richard (Brad Pitt) and Susan (Cate Blanchett), the Moroccan children, Yussef (Boubker Ait El Caid) and Ahmed Said Tarchani), the Mexicans Amelia Hernández (Adriana Barraza) and her nephew, Santiago (Gael García Bernal), and the Japanese Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi) and her father, Yasujiro Wataya (Kōji Yakusho). It could be argued that, as Antoaneta Mihoc states, the film connects not only people, but peoples, since the characters are from different parts of the globe (113). *Crash* has twelve main characters that highlight the variety of ethnoracial groups

[80] Considering the fact that this thesis will focus particularly on an American context, special attention will be paid to Biju and his experience in the U.S., albeit not disregarding other relevant aspects of the novel.

[81] *Sansei* is a term used to refer to third-generation Japanese Americans. *Nisei* would be second-generation individuals. These terms are utilized both in North America and in South America, where Japanese communities were established ("Sansei").

coexisting—and clashing—in Los Angeles: the white Americans Jean Cabot (Sandra Bullock), Rick Cabot (Brendan Fraser), Sgt. John Ryan (Matt Dillon) and Officer Tom Hansen (Ryan Phillippe), the African Americans Det. Graham Waters (Don Cheadle), Cameron (Terrence Howard), Christine (Thandie Newton), Anthony (Ludacris) and Peter Waters (Larenz Tate), the American Latinos Ria (Jennifer Esposito) and Daniel (Michael Peña), and the Iranian and U.S. citizen Farhad (Shaun Toub). Last but not least, Soderbergh's *Traffic* focuses on seven protagonists: the white Americans Robert (Michael Douglas) and Caroline Wakefield (Erika Christensen), the African American Montel (Don Cheadle), the American Latino Ray (Luis Guzmán), the Mexicans General Salazar (Tomás Milián) and Javier (Benicio Del Toro), and the white European Helena (Catherine Zeta-Jones).[82]

From these narratives, there are two whose multi-protagonist structure may be contested. Regarding *El Puente/The Bridge*, some critics claim that Tomasita is the "central character" or the "main protagonist" (Ibarraran 138, Antxustegi 273). Nevertheless, I would argue that the noun "protagonist" should be in its plural form, for the other thirteen women are as central as Tomasita. Even though she is the one that accidentally initiates the chaos of the red river event, the other characters are equally relevant, as they provide the necessary details in the narrative.[83] Although Romo's book opens and closes with Tomasita as the central character, other than in her own chapter, she is only mentioned in Adelita's. Therefore, the narrative follows all these women in a similar manner, with most of them also being present in a chapter that focuses on some other character.

[82] It is not clear where Helena is from. Catherine Zeta-Jones is from Wales, so it is possible that Helena is British as she has a British accent.

[83] The different plotlines develop the experiences of each of these protagonists and, at the same time, they give the necessary information to fill in the gaps concerning the reddening of the Rio Grande; the red river thread progresses through the multiple plotlines.

The other narrative that might seem to waver between single and multi-protagonist narratives is *Traffic*. The character of Javier in Soderbergh's movie may certainly be perceived as the heroic central figure.[84] I argue, nonetheless, that the relevance of the other characters does not let him be the sole protagonist. Ensemble narratives give a similar degree of importance to their characters, and their different plotlines help build the plot as a whole. And *Traffic* is no exception. Among its varied themes, arguably the most significant one is the smuggling of drugs, and the film explores it from multiple angles and locations: Mexico, the U.S., users, dealers, private sphere, public sphere, politicians, police, *narcos*. The spectator thus gets a general and comprehensive understanding of the plot and the theme of drugs through a multi-protagonist perspective.

The exploration of the U.S.-Mexico border in connection to the culture of the borderland in Romo's novel and the comprehensive representation of the smuggling of drugs across and on both sides of the border in *Traffic* resemble the relationship that D. Emily Hicks establishes between the border and holography. In her 1991 book, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*, she explains that holographic images are "created when light from a laser beam is split into two beams and reflected off an object. The interaction between the two resulting patterns of light is called an 'interference pattern,' which can be recorded on a holographic plate" that "can be illuminated by a laser positioned at the same angle as one of the two beams, the object beam. This will produce a holographic image of the original object" (xxix). Comparing this holographic image to the border, the scholar goes on to say that a "border person records the

[84] Contributing to his heroic traits, Javier puts an altruistic price to the information he provides to the DEA in order to bring down General Salazar and the Juárez Cartel. The DEA would pay for a baseball field in Tijuana, so that children can play instead of becoming victims of drugs. Javier's action is somewhat redeeming for having initially agreed to cooperate with the corrupt Salazar and it also breaks with the largely negative depiction of Mexicans throughout the narrative.

interference patterns produced by two (rather than one) referential codes, and therefore experiences a double vision thanks to perceiving reality through two different interference patterns," which are juxtaposed by border writers in their border narratives (xxix). Consequently, the resulting interaction "permits a new, multi-perspectivist understanding on the part of the readers who become aware of the different codes and begin to see their clashes, complementary aspects and reciprocal questioning" (Simal, "Cariboo" 87). Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* reflects the cultural interaction and the interference patterns on the borderlands, where the characters from both sides of the border deal with issues such as death, poverty, violence, and discrimination, among others.[85] In Soderbergh's *Traffic*, there is a multiplicity of perspectives regarding the smuggling and consumption of drugs, thus offering an encompassing image of the issue at all levels and on both sides of the border. Relevant for our critical purposes, building a narrative around several characters, either in films or literature, allows for the treatment of social issues and different sorts of relationships focusing on multiple contexts and points of view that share a similar degree of importance. Exploring a wider spectrum of topics or the same one from several perspectives is possible by including similarly relevant characters from different social strata, nationalities, genders, and so on.[86]

We should now delve into the characteristic ways in which the several threads intertwine: what are the elements that interconnect the plotlines in ensemble narratives?

[85] This association between border and violence echoes others such as that of "regenerative violence" and the myth of the American frontier, theorized by Richard Slotkin in the 1970s. The foundation of America was marked by the violent victory over wilderness as the frontier was pushed westwards. "The first colonists," Slotkin claims, "saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation" (*Regeneration* 5). Yet, regeneration involved violence, and thus, "the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (*Regeneration* 5).

[86] According to Azcona, the two main concerns of ensemble films are "cultural changes in intimate matters and the various effects in people's lives of globalizing and transnational processes" (*Multi-Protagonist* 8).

Multi-protagonist narratives often have a common setting, a common theme or a combination of both, which are present in all of the threads, giving a sense of unity to such fragmented fiction puzzles. Furthermore, the idea of an inevitable interconnectedness in our globalized world is reflected by the frequent use of coincidences and "fate" as a device to intertwine the protagonists in ensemble narratives—the issue of serendipity will be further explored in section 2.4. In relation to the use of a common setting as a unifying element, Bordwell explains that a "space-based ensemble film is almost always restricted in time as well" (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 97). Ensemble films, according to Hsuan L. Hsu, usually "occur over the course of a few days," thus making use of "recurrent scenes and activities that emphasize the pace of everyday life" (135). Azcona points out that, according to Tröhler, ensemble films have two main characteristics: "the central meeting place and the location of the action in a clearly bounded and short temporal interval such as a weekend or a national or religious holiday" (*Multi-Protagonist* 20). Thus, at first, the characters in ensemble narratives tend to have a city or a location in common as the sole nexus among them. It is only some time later when the events force them to interconnect with each other as the narrative progresses.

Drawing examples from our chosen corpus, all the characters in Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* are connected by locations: Mazatlán and Los Angeles serve as the main settings for a period of one week, even if there are a few flashbacks and references to past events.[87] While Mazatlán is almost exclusively visited in Rafaela's plotline, other characters—Bobby, Arcangel and, especially, Gabriel—also have a connection to this Mexican location. It is the city of Los Angeles the common location that intertwines all the protagonists in the novel. Similarly, Haggis's *Crash* also takes place in L.A.,

[87] Even though Rafaela starts the book living in Mexico, she has lived in L.A., where she will return; also, Arcangel is on his way to the City of Angels.

spanning only two days—"yesterday" and "today." Therefore, apart from the main theme of racism and prejudice, which applies to all the protagonists either as victims or perpetrators, all the characters and the plotlines converge in the City of Angels.

Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* also revolves around characters who are linked by a single location: the U.S.-Mexico border is the primary setting of the narrative. Moreover, its temporal interval is restricted to a couple of days, revolving around the "mystery" of the red Rio Grande. *El Puente/The Bridge* reflects certain traits that short story cycles and ensemble narratives have in common, especially, when establishing links among the stories or plotlines. As Suzanne Keen purports, the different stories in short story cycles tend to be connected by the setting or the subject, for instance (25), a feature that is indeed shared with ensemble narratives, as aforementioned. Therefore, some short story cycles include stories that, albeit independent to a certain extent and often focused on different protagonists, share settings or themes and are all interconnected, contributing to the general plot. Robert M. Luscher mentions that the stories in a short story cycle tend to "grow out of a larger controlling idea that may either precede them or take shape during their creation," which "can provide a clear sense of place, character, or theme" for the stories (153). For this reason, reading all the stories in a short story cycle would allow the reader to have a full—or, at least, better—understanding of the entire narrative: each story "catches fragments rather than whole pictures," and by "[m]oving from one story to another, we may reach a fuller understanding of an earlier conflict, only partially resolved in its own section" (Puşcaş 213).[88] Indeed, each of the fourteen threads in Romo's narrative contributes to the overarching plotline and is essential to fully comprehend the novel. Furthermore, those threads are also linked by a common subject: describing life in a particular location, the

[88] On the other hand, in a number of short story cycles, the stories are indeed independent without an overarching plotline. Only few aspects may be shared such as the setting or the main theme.

U.S.-Mexico border. *El Puente/The Bridge* thus echoes the old genre of the "village sketch (see section 2.1), since it revolves around the borderlands as well as the complex and certainly complicated lives of those who reside there, especially, women. These multi-protagonist women, in turn, constitute a "collective protagonist," which is another possible element unifying the different stories in this case. This type of protagonist is a "'collective'—literally (a couple, a family, a club) or figuratively (a representative, an archetype, an ideal)" (Dunn and Morris 60). In the case of *El Puente/The Bridge*, the fourteen protagonists represent the archetype of the border woman, the one who faces all sorts of obstacles in the private and the public sphere and needs to struggle against patriarchal structures, the *maquiladoras*, and the abusive working conditions condoned by oblivious governments.

The unwritten rules of the brief interval and the bounded location so typical of ensemble narratives are not always strictly followed, as *The Inheritance of Loss*, *Traffic* and *Babel* prove. Somewhat differently, Desai's novel is primarily set in Kalimpong and in New York, while the judge's flashbacks take place in England for the most part. Furthermore, *The Inheritance of Loss* does not present a time interval comprising only a few days. On the one hand, the present moment in the narration spans several months, and, on the other, Jemubhai's plotline is almost entirely an analepsis, for he often revisits his memories of the time he spent in England and of the early years of his marriage to Bella—events that shaped him into the hateful and frustrated person he became. In the case of Soderbergh's *Traffic*, the movie features three settings: San Diego and Ohio (especially Columbus), in the United States, and Tijuana, in Mexico. In this case, the theme of drugs is the link that interconnects the characters—the War on

Drugs as well as the smuggling and the consumption of these substances.[89] However, most of the protagonists do end up crisscrossing at some point by moving to other locations (e.g. Robert Wakefield, whose plotline is mostly set in Columbus, meets General Salazar in Mexico). Last but not least, the story in González Iñárritu's Babel does take place during a brief interval, spanning only a couple of days. However, once again, there are three different main settings: Morocco, U.S./Mexico, and Japan, which makes the narrative more amenable to a "global" approach than, say, Romo's novel. Apart from themes such as the lack of communication, which is present in all the plotlines, what intertwines the characters and threads here is not a place or location, but an object: a rifle. Chieko's father, Yasujiro, gives this gun to his hunting guide, Hassan, during a trip in Morocco he took in the past. Hassan sells the rifle to his neighbor Abdullah, Yussef and Ahmed's father. It is this weapon that the Moroccan children use to accidentally shoot Susan. This would be one of the strategies that allow authors to "keep things unified and understandable," tying "the characters together by a circulating object" (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 97).

Apart from thematic links related to the content of the narratives, ensemble narratives may resort to certain formal strategies in order to connect and distinguish the different plotlines as well as to highlight an intertwining between the characters. With the purpose of "connect[ing] disparate sequences," multi-protagonist films tend to utilize "rhyming visual threads and graphic matches—most often cuts between different characters driving cars or walking through doors to different buildings—," in addition to "rapid cross-cutting or 'short cuts,' a propensity for montage and continual camera

[89] In the posters of this film, the most interesting aspect is the tagline: "No one gets away clean," which reflects the violence in relation to the world of drugs (see fig. 1 in Appendix 1). The word "clean" allows for different interpretations. It alludes to the consumption of drugs, since being "clean" means not doing drugs, while it also bespeaks honesty, lack of corruption. Furthermore, it refers to the fact that all the characters are somehow affected by drugs: they traffic, consume or fight these substances.

motion, [and] scenes choreographed to music" (Hsu 135). Furthermore, the use of colors and filters can also aid the spectators to identify the different plotlines. In the case of Soderbergh's *Traffic*, the movie resorts to such a formal strategy to establish a distinction between characters and their threads. Therefore, the viewers immediately realize which subplot—and the corresponding characters—they are watching, which is helpful during the process of understanding and following the narrative. We will return to this color-coding strategy in section 3.3.

In contrast with movies, most literary genres are "limited" to the use of written words, thus typically excluding colors or images.[90] Nevertheless, language is powerful and versatile enough to attain a similar effect and distinguish plotlines or to establish a connection among the characters. In the case of Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*, there are constant references to a peculiar feature of the location where the narrative is set, underscoring a nexus among the protagonists. The hellish weather that hits and heats up the U.S.-Mexico border is mentioned in every chapter, thus acting as one of the unifying elements in the novel as well. Along with the weather, the use of Spanish words also reminds the reader of the location and the ethnoracial background that the characters share. Similarly, Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* includes words in Hindi, denoting where the characters come from, even if the multiple plotlines are set in different locations—India, England and New York. On the other hand, novels are also able to distinguish the plotlines, thus allowing the readers to identify what thread they are reading. From our corpus, Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* is the novel that plays the most with styles of writing, often adapting the register and style to each character/focalizer. For instance, Bobby's chapters are primarily written using short sentences, sometimes just phrases separated by periods, and, on some occasions,

[90] In order to differentiate the plotlines, pictures and a variety of colors may be used when printing a novel, for example, although this does not apply to this particular corpus.

ungrammatical or colloquial in nature: "Bobby's time to kill is up. He's gotta meet the snakehead. Get a stall in a restaurant. Second stall on the right. No one there yet. Bobby orders tea. He could order a beer, but he doesn't. Against his rules. Beer for after hours only. Lately, though, he could screw the rules" (Yamashita 99). By utilizing such short sentences, the novel reflects Bobby's stressful, unstable life as an immigrant in L.A., as well as his lack of time due to his long hours of work. Another distinguishing use of language found in Yamashita's novel is Arcangel's political poems, in which this character often reflects on Latin America and its exploitation during colonial and neocolonial times. In addition, Arcangel's free verse poems are written in italics, never filling in the entire line, which differentiates them from the rest of the text. Last but not least, while the rest of the characters' chapters are narrated by a heterodiegetic narrator, Gabriel's sections are homodiegetic—he is the narrator of his own chapters:[91] "I checked the giant arrival/departure board over the international gangway at Bradley International. […] I could see the wave of Koreans pushing their carts with luggage up the ramp" (Yamashita 86). Therefore, the reader is able to immediately identify his chapters through the first-person narration. As Benito et al. point out in *Uncertain Mirrors*, the novel is reminiscent of the "1930s L.A. of gangsters and detectives, as seen through the eyes of Gabriel Balboa" (81). Significantly, the journalist likes old, black and white movies. It is no coincidence that detective stories are an important part in the literary tradition of Los Angeles. Therefore, we argue that, in her novel, Yamashita combines this traditional genre so relevant in the literature of the city with the modern and technological side of L.A.[92] Moreover, being a journalist, Gabriel acts as if he were a detective. He witnesses a large number of events in the novel, and faithful to his job as

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[91] The fact that *Tropic of Orange* is a written text allows it to "play" with Gabriel's name. Considering that he is a third-generation Mexican American and that he is eager to get in touch with his Mexican background as much as possible, it is not clear whether his name has an English or a Spanish pronunciation. Both would be possible, which echoes his hybridity.

[92] This connection is also seen in Emi, who is completely keen on technological progress.

a journalist and to the detective tradition, his chapters are written in the first-person singular and from his point of view, although journalists are supposed to be objective: "Even if fully immersed in a world of mass media contamination, Balboa sticks to real facts in the traditional way of the detective, while his narrative 'I' struggles to keep authority over his (textual) world" (Benito et al. 81).

Apart from the different registers or styles according to the protagonists, it is also possible to identify the character that is the main focus in each chapter by reading the titles in "Contents." As mentioned earlier, Yamashita's novel is divided into seven sections, corresponding to the days of the week. In turn, each section has seven chapters, one per protagonist. While the subtitles of the chapters usually refer to the primary setting of the events narrated in each chapter, the titles, which are written in bold, are clues suggesting the character that is the main focus. These titles can thus be grouped by protagonist, for they have something in common, sometimes alluding to distinguishing features of those characters, as I will now try to elucidate. Buzzworm's chapters have titles that can all be connected to the radio in some way, thus reflecting his habit of listening to it (e.g. "Chapter 4: **Station ID** – Jefferson & Normandie"). In Bobby's case, his chapters are titled in a way that reminisces expenses and money, which are among his main concerns throughout the narrative (e.g. "Chapter 12: **Car Payment Due** – Tijuana via Singapore"). Being a TV producer, the titles of Emi's chapters allude to her job (e.g. "Chapter 9: **NewsNow** – Hollywood South"). Similarly, the titles of the chapters that focus on Emi's grandfather, Manzanar, echo the traffic of Los Angeles, the inspiration for the man's music (e.g. "Chapter 35: **Jam** – Greater L.A."). Then, all of the chapters focusing on Rafaela refer to times of the day (e.g. "Chapter 1: **Midday** – Not Too Far from Mazatlán"). The "midday" reference may be due to the fact that, for the most part of the narrative, Rafaela is in Mazatlán,

particularly, in Gabriel's hacienda, which is crossed by the Tropic of Cancer. Furthermore, Rafaela is the one that takes care of Gabriel's garden, the original location of the mysterious orange that symbolizes the sun. Apart from looking after these plants and trees, Rafaela is the mother of a baby. The child is called Sol, which means "sun" in Spanish, and he represents a new beginning—a new day—in which the U.S. domination over Mexico and Latin America presumably ends. This new beginning is possible thanks to Arcangel, who turns into El Gran Mojado in order to wrestle his American counterpart, SUPERNAFTA. Thus, Arcangel can be argued to be the protagonist that leads the fight against the United States—he is the one who acts and reclaims L.A. for Mexico by pushing the U.S.-Mexico border northwards. Indeed, action is precisely what the titles of his chapters denote (e.g. "Chapter 23: **To Labor** – East & West Forever"). Furthermore, these verbs and actions can be associated with the immigrants that Arcangel represents as well: to wake, to wash, to eat, to labor, to dream, to perform, to die. The immigrants in the U.S. live to work until they die, dreaming of a better future—the so-called American Dream. As infinitives, these verbs also imply that these actions are repeated *ad infinitum*—a daily habit that is mindlessly performed again and again in a cycle of life, work, and death in endless reiteration. Also, the lack of a specific subject for these verbs could mean that such actions apply to all immigrants. Last but not least, Gabriel's chapters are titled alluding both to his heavy workload as a journalist and to his interest in disaster movies (e.g. "Chapter 39: **Working Weekend** – Dirt Shoulder").

Despite the use of a variety of strategies to establish links among the multiple protagonists and plotlines and also to distinguish each thread, the puzzle-like structure that is characteristic of ensemble narratives may prove somewhat challenging for some of the readers/viewers. The fundamental shift from conventional narrative structures

that usually revolve around one protagonist and one main plotline also has an effect on the readers/viewers.[93] As will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3, the single-protagonist narrative allows the viewer or reader to identify with the hero(ine) rather easily, or at least to perceive—completely or partially—the fictional world through his/her eyes, as s/he is the character we follow or focus on during our experience of the narrative. Conversely, ensemble narratives hinder these tasks of identification and empathy. Several characters are introduced to the audience, each of them with different points of view about the events of the narrative.[94] In practical terms, this means that, since the characters in ensemble narratives are similarly relevant, they are "forced" to share screen time or pages, which translates into less time given to the audience to spend (and identify) with each protagonist.

The challenges posed by the multi-protagonist structure of ensemble narratives can also be connected to how humans interact among themselves. Jaimie Arona Krems and R. I. M. Dunbar purport that the challenging experience ensemble narratives offer to the viewers/readers may be connected to the "social brain hypothesis": the larger brain of primates is the evolutionary consequence of their complex societies.[95] Nevertheless, regardless of the need to interact with several individuals, the bigger the groups, the more difficult it is to maintain contact: "Humans represent the current upper limit of this distribution, with a brain size that constrains group size to around 150 individuals," with

[93] Arguably, they constitute one of the main reasons for making a film or writing a novel, which can be seen as a product or commodity: "Most media products have an exchange value [the value the commodity acquires in the market] disproportionate to their use value [the function of an object] because they are not simply 'used' by audiences (paying and non-paying) but exchanged as commodities by producers, distributors, advertisers and other kinds of customers in the media marketplace." (Fulton et al. 3).

[94] Chimamanda Adichie underscores the danger posed by the "single story," one single perspective that can be transmitted by and through literature. In her 2009 TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," the author explains that literature may be utilized to increase the power of a point of view, spreading stereotypes about a nation or its inhabitants. Such power should be contested by the inclusion of multiple points of view in narratives, reflecting the diversity of individuals. For this, ensemble narratives, with the similar relevance shared by the many protagonists, seems an adequate tool.

[95] See R. I. M. Dunbar's article, "Neocortex Size and Group Size in Primates: A Test of the Hypothesis" (1995).

"support groups" and "conversational groups" including four or five members (Krems and Dunbar 415-16, 419). Therefore, an increase in the number of characters results in a more significant fragmentation of the narrative and its challenging structure. Notwithstanding the obstacle of initially having as little knowledge as the characters themselves, the viewer/reader is eventually "given enough clues to figure out all the connections and stages of cause-and-effect," thus achieving a greater knowledge and awareness than those of any of the characters (Corbin 63).

The multiple protagonists and plotlines are not the only traits that contribute to the more demanding experience of reading/watching ensemble narratives. Albeit not exclusive of this type of narratives, the lack of linearity and other strategies that manipulate the duration and the order of the events influence the time that is needed by the narrative for the narration of those events, which may end up being postponed by others that happened at an earlier stage in the story. In *Figures III* (1972), Gérard Genette speaks of four ways in which the "duration" of the text can be altered. This "duration" refers to the relation between the time taken by the events of the story and the time required to read the text; i.e. the "narrative time" and the "discourse time." Thus, an entire year in the story may be summarized in only one paragraph, which can be read in just a few seconds. Genette labels the modifications in duration as "anisochronies," which are the following: "descriptive pause" (there is a deceleration in the progression of the story, since the text may be devoted to a thought or a description); "scene" (both the narrative time and the discourse time coincide, primarily in dialogues); "summary" (the narrative time is longer than the discourse time, e.g. the events that take months in the story are narrated in one single paragraph); and "ellipsis" (part of the narrative time is omitted in the discourse time). Due to these changes in the narration, its rhythm is altered as well. Furthermore, the process of "retardation," which

means delaying the events, is present in all sorts of narratives. The outcome of those events and the very end of the story will be postponed by "complications, subplots, or digressions" (Bordwell, *Narration* 38). This retardation is more noticeable in ensemble narratives precisely due to their ensemble nature. The narration is not devoted only to one protagonist, but to several, and the different plotlines intersect each other. Consequently, the viewer/reader has to wait to find out what happens next with or to a specific character or plotline, possibly needing to pay more attention to the events that take place in the different threads in order to follow and fully understand the narrative.

Precisely due to the multiplicity of characters and the shifting from one thread to another, the reader/viewer is left "hanging," wondering what is going to happen next in each of the plotlines. In our corpus it is *Tropic of Orange* that keeps us waiting the longest, since the novel only devotes one chapter per section to each of the protagonists. Therefore, in order to find out how the events in a specific thread progress, we usually need to read several pages. Romo's book also delays the delivery of all the information needed to explain the reason behind the main event in the narrative: the reddening of the Rio Grande. In this case, each chapter reveals more and more details about the overarching plotline. Nevertheless, once again, each chapter is centered on a protagonist and a specific moment during the events surrounding the mystery of the red river. As a result, the narrative structure makes the reader wait and keep reading in order to find out more about this strange event. The reader is not only introduced to a new character and plotline, but also to a new piece of the puzzle, and it is not until they reach the final

chapters that they have enough information to understand what is actually happening in the main plotline that frames the others.[96]

This fragmentation and subsequent postponement in the development of the events in each plotline resemble the fragmentary quality of serial narratives. These narratives are represented in a variety of media such as magazines, newspapers, radio, and television. The main feature of these serial narratives is the fact that they are divided into episodes. Furthermore, the way in which these narratives are consumed by the readers/viewers differs from that of the novel or the movie. On the one hand, when reading/watching serials, the audience is "at the whim of those who command the medium that presents serial texts" (Hagedorn 28). That is to say, in order to consume the next episode or installment, we need to wait until it is released. On the other hand, as Hagedorn explains, a "classic text [such as a novel or a film] can be consumed however the consumer wishes, because he or she generally has material control over the text in its entirety before beginning to consume it" (28). This is particularly true when we have access to the physical or digital copies of these texts—e.g. books, ebooks, blu-rays, streaming services—, thus being able to control the way in which we read or watch them.[97]

Apart from the noticeable retardation in ensemble narratives, the readers/viewers may also need to chrono-logically (re)order the events from the multiple plotlines. To explain the effects that devices such as the multi-thread structure or the lack of linearity have on the narration, the terms *fabula* and *syuzhet* prove highly useful. During the early 20th century, the study of literature undergoes an important change thanks to

[96] In fact, retardation is present in every *syuzhet*, withholding data regarding the *fabula* in order to create curiosity in the reader/viewer. Bordwell mentions that "the end of the story, or the means whereby we arrive there, will be withheld" (*Narration* 52).
[97] We can watch the narrative in its entirety in movie theaters too. However, we may need to wait and submit ourselves to the "whims of the medium" if the movie is part of a saga like *Star Wars*, which also echoes the serial narrative.

Russian formalism, mostly represented by Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Vladimir Propp, and Yuri Tynianov, to name a few. Unlike previous approaches in literary criticism, these scholars concentrate on the formal aspects of literature much more than on the content or the author. Their main object of study is "literariness," which Roman Jakobson defines as "that which makes of a given work a work of literature" (qtd. in Erlich 172). In their analysis of a narrative, the author and the historical, cultural and sociological contexts are de-emphasized, privileging instead generalizations that apply to texts from different periods (Keen 7). A significant contribution made by Russian formalism is the analysis of literary works in terms of characters: for instance, Vladimir Propp's analysis of Russian folktales, which have the limited number of thirty one character types with specific functions such as the hero, the antagonist, and so on. However, I would like to focus on the fact that formalists, as is well known, distinguish "plot" and "story." While the story is simply a description and sequence of events, the plot is the structure that determines the narration of the story and how the events are connected (Habib 607). It should be noted that the story always follows a chronological order, whereas the plot may alter the order of the events (Lacey 20). Russian formalists, defined the plot—*syuzhet*— as the "order and manner in which events are actually presented in the narrative," whereas the story—*fabula*—is the "chronological sequence of events" (Cuddon 328). In other words, *fabula* refers to the events as they happen, whereas *syuzhet* is the way in which those events are narratively deployed.

The use of previous knowledge is an ally for the viewer/reader in order to perceive the narrative as logical. The information given by the narrative helps the viewer/reader to make sense of the *fabula*, applying already known data to it—for example, types of individuals, actions, locations, and so forth—(Bordwell, *Narration*

49). Additionally, since the *syuzhet* is the manner in which the *fabula* is told, it allows a better understanding of the transformations made by the author on that story, such as altering the chronological order of the events, i.e. an "anachrony." Bordwell explains that, sometimes, the *syuzhet* might help us connect the events in a chronological order, whereas, on other occasions, it may obstruct that process as in a non-logical narration (*Narration* 51). This anachrony "tend[s] to be more drastic when the fabula is more complex" (Bal 83). The lack of linearity is achieved by different structure devices, like starting the narration *in medias res*, in the middle of the action, already found in Ancient Greek literature. Non-linear narratives may also include concepts that Gérard Genette introduced or developed in *Figures III* such as analepsis (flashbacks), prolepsis (flashforwards), or simultaneous events.[98] Either way, the *syuzhet* will sooner or later provide the reader/viewer with the necessary information to sort out the events of the *fabula*.

The non-chronological narration is fairly common in ensemble narratives, even if it is not an exclusive trait. Often "playing with time and character's personal history, plot twists" or "jumping between the beginning and end" (Mihoc 110), ensemble narratives depart from more conventional counterparts where events tend to follow a linear chronology. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the non-linearity applies to the way and the order in which the events are told in the narrative, not to the story, which "by definition is linear," since it "can only go forward in the one direction that time moves" (Abbot 30); put differently, what is non-linear is the *syuzhet*, not the *fabula*. Therefore, the use of analepsis and prolepsis, added to the several interconnected

[98] As is well-known, an "analepsis" is an event that happened prior to the moment where the narration is at—or, more simply, an event that happened in the past. Conversely, a "prolepsis" is an event that takes place at a later stage in the story—that is, in the future. Both of them are examples of "anachronies," a term used by Genette to refer to those discrepancies in the order in which the events are narrated in the text (79).

threads, hinder the process of understanding or following the narrative—the judge's plotline in *The Inheritance of Loss* frequently resorts to flashbacks when exploring Jemubhai's memories.

Regardless of the lack of chronological linearity, readers and viewers always try to sort out the events in a linear order that makes sense to them; we seek for sequences of cause and effect. The "interesting thing," Seymour B. Chatman states, "is that our minds inveterately seek structure, and they will provide it if necessary. Unless otherwise instructed, readers will tend to assume […] a causal link" between events (*Story* 45-46). Even the mere succession of events encourages the readers/viewers to establish causal links based on the information they are provided: "given the information we have, and the narrative form in which we have it, we will read a causal connection whereby what comes after […] is triggered by what went before" (Abbott 38). Nevertheless, this is not always the case and some genres such as detective novels and films usually play with causal links. Also, non-linearity in a narrative can mislead us into establishing wrong sequences of cause and effect or even the opposite, not being able to find certain links—for instance, the spectators of *Babel* may initially be unable to find the reason why Richard is intransigent when talking on the phone with Amelia due to the lack of linearity in the narrative. Both in literature and in cinema, conventional narratives are often constructed around a succession of events—and then what happened?—, which tends to make these narratives easier to understand and more accessible to the readers/viewers.[99] Thus, the general appeal of mainstream Hollywood films lies partly in their linearity and "their ease of comprehension on a scene-to-scene level"

[99] In his classic *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E. M. Forster states that an "audience of cave men" or "their modern descendant [,] the movie-public" would "only be kept awake by 'and then—and then- - -" as they can simply "supply curiosity" to know what happens next (61). This curiosity to know what happens next is a relevant element in *One Thousand and One Nights*, for instance, since Scheherazade survives thanks to her storytelling skills that allow her to "keep the king wondering what would happen next" (Forster 22).

(Thompson 23). Conventional narratives "must always be chronologically constructed [,] otherwise they would be judged to violate the rules of our universe; they would destroy the rules of logical causality" (Lacey 18). Nevertheless, when mystery is introduced and the linear order of events is altered, both causality and chronology are suspended (Niederhoff 347), and we start looking for the reasons for that mystery, of why something happened.[100]

In order to reestablish a chronological order that satisfies our need for sequences of cause and effect, we resort to a combination of multiple aspects. Such elements, according to Barbara Herrnstein Smith, include the reader's previous "knowledge or beliefs concerning the chronology of those implied events" taking into account other sources and narratives; knowledge of the language of the narrative, such as verb tenses or adverbs; the reader's "familiarity with the relevant conventions and traditions of the style and genre of that narrative"; an awareness of the "sense of the 'logic' of temporal and causal sequence" regarding the events that take place in the narrative; and "universal perceptual and cognitive tendencies involved" in the reader's organization of information (226). After all, knowing how the world works aids the reader when trying to understand the way in which a narrative works (Chatman, "Learn" 312). In addition, Forster claims that the reader needs both intelligence and memory. The former is required, because an intelligent reader—or viewer I would add—perceives new facts in an isolated manner and "related to the other facts that he has read on previous pages," even if s/he cannot comprehend yet (61). The latter is connected to intelligence, the scholar underscores, for readers/viewers need to remember what they read/watch in order to understand the mystery (62). From our memory, we retrieve the information we read/watched to make sense of the narrative. Hence, our previous knowledge of the

[100] Non-linear structures also add "excitement and suspense," even if it is only a rearrangement of a "predictable or meandering linear narrative" (Aronson 167).

chronological order of events and our sense of cause and effect both in other narratives and in what we consider to be our real world would aid us when following the multiple threads in ensemble narratives. In our corpus, the narratives that play with linearity in a most blatant manner are *Crash* and *Babel*, which go back and forth, juxtaposing events that take place at different moments in the narrative. Haggis's film starts with a car crash and a crime scene belonging to "today." Then, the narration goes back in time to "yesterday" before catching up with the opening scenes. Likewise, *Babel* defies a chronology. For instance, the majority of the events in Amelia's thread happen after most of the events in Susan and Richard's plotline. The narrative sequence or *syuzhet,* however, does not reflect this, since it introduce the events in an unchronological order. The intersection of events that do not follow a chronological order thus becomes more confusing thanks to the fragmented ensemble structure.

As a result of such challenging narrative strategies, the puzzle-like structure, together with its prominent lack of chronological linearity, makes it particularly difficult for (some of) the viewer/readers to know what is going on; even a second (or subsequent) viewing/reading would be advisable not to miss details. Albeit focused on literature, Wolfgang Iser remarks that reading—and I would add watching—a narrative for a second time often allows for "familiar occurrences to appear in a new light," thus being "corrected" or "enriched": as readers/viewers, we "establish connections by referring to our awareness of what is to come, and so certain aspects of the text will assume a significance we did not attach to them on a first reading, while others will recede into the background" ("Reading" 285-86). At any rate, some time is required to "digest" or process the narrative. Nevertheless, literature and cinema differ with regards to a chronological understanding of what the readers/viewers are reading/watching, because of the diverse ways in which these individuals interact with their respective

narratives. As Bordwell explains, even if the narration is not linear, we still tend to sort the events in a chronological order by using our previous knowledge, a truism that can be applied to any sort of narration. However, the main difference between movies and literary works lies in the fact that "cinema's viewing conditions add a constraint: under normal conditions, it is not possible to review stretches of a film as one can reread passages of prose"; therefore, the viewer is forced to decide whether to rearrange the events in a logical and chronological order or to lose track of them. Nonetheless, the spectator may also want to rewatch the film to find out more details (*Narration* 33).[101]

Before concluding this section, I would like to devote a few paragraphs to two traits of ensemble narratives that particularly apply to our corpus. On the one hand, some of these narratives are melodramas. On the other, favoring a realistic representation of our world, these novels and films do not include characters that can be labeled as "villains." Such an absence constitutes a break not only from conventional traditional narratives, but also from the possible influence ensemble narratives have received from soap operas, where the villain is a recurrent archetypal character.

The fact that some of the ensemble narratives in the selected corpus are melodramas is an aspect they share with soap operas. Melodrama was popular in 19th century drama. Inhabited by archetypal characters, melodramas favor "the use of signs such as meteors, lightning, spectres, crosses in flames and rising tombs," as well as performances characterized by intense emotions conveyed by the "actors' non-verbal communication" (Lacey 197). Until the late 1920's, movies were silent and, as Lacey points out, the melodramatic style of acting utilized in theaters was useful for films at

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[101] The introduction of the VHS, the DVD and other digital formats such as online streaming or downloads have made watching a movie multiple times much easier, which has indeed been favorable for the development of ensemble films, and which might suggest that complex narrative structures will become more and more common (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 103; see Klarer 2-3).

this early stage (197). From our current perspective, the melodramatic plots, compounded by the exaggerated gestures of the performers, seem unrealistic, unbelievable, and even "cheesy." This is one of the five traits that Elisabeth Anker singles out in order to define the genre. Firstly, in melodramas, moral virtue is linked to suffering and "can be increased through heroic action." Secondly, there are three main types of characters, namely, the "ruthless villain, a suffering victim, and a heroic savior" that is able to "redeem the victim's virtue through an act of retribution—the hero and the victim may be the same person. Thirdly, the narrative includes "dramatic polarizations of good and evil, which echo in the depictions of individuals and events." Fourthly, emotions and actions interact to "create suspense and resolve conflict." Lastly, it is characteristic to make use "of images, sounds, gestures and nonverbal communication to illuminate moral legibility as well as to encourage empathy for the victim and anger toward the villain" (24). For Nick Browne et al., melodramas "situate conflict inside the family and the larger social community, stressing personal transformation over and above the accomplishment of objectives requiring force" (356). However, it should also be noted that the experience that results from reading or watching a narrative depends on each individual, mostly due to our different backgrounds—gender, class, education, or age to name a few—, previous experiences and knowledge, all of which influence the reading/watching experience (McQuillan 85-86). Therefore, depending on their background, some readers/viewers may be put off by the melodramatic nature of narratives, whereas others, even today, may welcome the exaggerated representation of emotions.

The melodramatic touch in our ensemble narratives can be seen in the manner in which the characters act and interact. As Bordwell claims, González Iñárritu's *Babel* combines the two typical plots in traditional Hollywood cinema, which are the

heterosexual romance and the quest: "Usually the classical syuzhet presents a double causal structure, two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere—work, war, a mission or quest, other personal relationships. Each line will possess a goal, obstacles, and a climax" (*Narration* 157). At the same time, even though the romantic interest and the goals of the protagonist(s) are different, they tend to be "causally linked" (Thompson 22-23). González Iñárritu's cinemative narrative includes these two plots: Richard and Susan travel to Morocco in order to bring the spark back to their relationship and he ends up doing everything possible to save her life, which appeals to the viewers' emotions. Similar tragic endings await the other protagonists. The Moroccan family is arrested and Ahmed is severely wounded when he is shot by the police. Chieko seeks love (in general), even though her eagerness to find it and her possible suicide attempt reflect her need of acceptance and her loneliness, aggravated by her mother's suicide and her distant relationship with her father. And Amelia is deported from the United States after "illegally" working there for sixteen years. Hence, *Babel* offers a variation on the typical Hollywood plots. If, as Bordwell claims, classical Hollywood narratives end with a "victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals" (*Narration* 157), González Iñárritu's film differs: it is far from being a straightforward narrative. In addition, the film ending is rather open, since the spectator does not know what will happen to some of the characters, especially, the Moroccan family. Even though it is clear that the family is arrested, the viewers do not know what their punishment is, whether Ahmed dies, and so on. Urtiaga points out that this contributes to the irrelevance of the Moroccan family, for the viewer does know the outcome of Susan and Richard's thread (108-9). This lack of information denies any assurance regarding the child's well-being, which may possibly heighten the spectators'

emotions, making them worry about Ahmed. Besides, even if we construe the narrative in positive terms and imagine the characters as ready to overcome their tragic pasts and presents, it does not feel like a "decisive victory." The characters lose too much along the way, particularly, the Moroccan family and Amelia, characters that are defeated at the end of the film. Therefore, there is no clear "sad" or "happy" ending in the movie, at least, not if we look at the narrative as a whole. Just as the entire film might make us feel somewhat "uncomfortable" due to the multiple plotlines, we are unlikely to be satisfied with this "bittersweet" ending, in which some of the characters seem to win whereas others seem to lose.

Melodrama shows up in Haggis's *Crash* as well. This is most noticeable when Farhad shoots Daniel and his little daughter: the close-ups of their faces crying emphasize—and exaggerate, one may argue—the emotionally loaded nature of the scene. Another example could be Christine's car accident, when Sgt. Ryan "heroically" saves her life.[102] Despite being reluctant to being aided by Ryan, who had molested her before, Christine has no option but to eventually accept his offer, since the car is catching fire. She cries as the vehicle explodes, also letting Ryan hold her, in spite of the prior abuse. The resulting scene "functions as a melodrama of 'reverse racism,' in which Ryan heroically atones for violating the woman by saving her life, literally liberating her from her seat restraints" (Hsu 133). Thus, the movie never seems to "go the extra mile" to condemn certain behaviors and attitudes. Instead, the narrative seeks to redeem Ryan: the setup for his "heroic" deed is such that it attempts to evoke

[102] Two of the movie posters focus on these melodramatic moments in *Crash*. Daniel holding his daughter after Farhad shoots them and, on the other hand, Christine and Sgt. Ryan embracing each other after her car explodes suggest melodramatic aspects in the film (see fig. 2 and 3 in Appendix 1). On the other hand, they point at violence being exercised against the characters, as we find out during the movie. However, there may be an allusion to love and compassion—those two scenes revolve around these feelings as a reaction to episodes of violence. Another implication in these posters refers to the initial lines uttered by Det. Waters, when he says that people in L.A. have lost their sense of touch, which is why they crash into each other. Here, the characters are holding and protecting one another. This suggests that there should be a change in the way individuals interact—hostility and prejudice or racism should be left behind.

redemption and forgiveness in the audience, even though it is undeniable that he abuses Christine and the power he has as a law-enforcement officer when he finger-rapes her. The movie makes use of an "angelical musical accompaniment" that is "pushed to the fore" while "all screaming voices are removed"; a "more traditionally 'realistic' soundtrack with voices" is discarded, thus underscoring redemption (Horton 19). For some viewers, Ryan risking his life to save Christine may be enough to grant him that redemption, even if, in real life, the same viewers would consider Ryan's abusive behavior unforgivable. This is connected to the fact that "an emotion that is justified in response to the contents of the fiction might not be justified in response to analogous circumstances occurring in real life" (Gilmore 402). In other words, we may react differently to the same situation when reading or watching a narrative, especially if the contents of the narrative intend to evoke certain emotions in the readers/spectators. Furthermore, feeling antipathy toward characters yet sharing what they experience at the same time is possible too. According to Amy Coplan, the reason for this is not empathy, but "emotional contagion," which, as the scholar explains, is not linked to our thoughts or reasoning regarding the characters or what they do, but "involuntary [emotional] responses to what we perceive" ("Catching" 34). In Ryan's case, seeing his face showing a mixture of feelings that may go from remorse and guilt to even more basic emotions such as sadness could make the spectators experience the same emotions in an involuntary way. However, it could be argued that Ryan and his behavior foster little conscious empathy among the audience. Therefore, as Coplan puts it, "[i]n such cases, actors' facial expressions can still produce experiences of emotional contagion, which do not rely on a more comprehensive cognitive engagement with the narrative" ("Catching" 35).[103] Despite sharing Hsu's opinion—Ryan saving Christine serves the

[103] Emotional contagion and our emotional engagement with the characters are more effective with films than with literature, Coplan explains, because this process "requires direct sensory engagement and

purpose of attempting to redeem himself in the narrative—, I consider that neither does he achieve his atonement nor is his abuse redeemable, no matter how guilty and remorseful he may feel after their first encounter. Ryan may liberate Christine "from her seat restraints," but not from the social restraints and subjugation that being black, a woman and, in this case, a civilian entails.

The large number of protagonists and plotlines in ensemble narratives might represent a challenging reading or watching experience, for readers/viewers need to pay particular attention to the plot in order to establish and find links between the main characters and the events that revolve around them. The introduction of characters to the reader/viewer also initiates a process of identification between them. Based on the information s/he gets about the protagonists—their backgrounds, actions, traits, decisions, and so on—, the reader/viewer establishes a connection with said characters. In single-protagonist narratives, this process tends to be more straightforward, since the audience is usually expected to "bond" with the main character, who gets significantly more discourse time. However, discourse time in ensemble narratives is shared among all the protagonists, who are all equally or similarly relevant. Therefore, the reader/viewer goes through the process of identification with all the protagonists. Furthermore, readers tend to focus on the protagonist and remember the events surrounding her/him more easily. In this respect, ensemble narratives, once again, might prove more challenging, asking the reader/viewer to give equal treatment to every protagonist. In the following section we will turn to the matter of the identification between readers/viewers and characters in ensemble narratives.

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involves automatic processes," which the audiovisual nature of movies enables ("Catching" 26).

2.3. "You Feel Me?" – Viewer/Reader Identification in Ensemble Narratives

In the globalized and complex world where we live, the increasingly social, political and cultural interconnections seem to blur or multiply the different points of view that dictate the way in which we experience our contexts. The numerous sources of information as well as the exposition to a variety of cultural influences, both local and global, may increase the difficulty of discerning what we may accept or reject or what we feel identified with, even if the larger amount of options offered expand the possibilities from which to choose. This multiplicity of options is echoed by the fragmented multi-protagonist nature of ensemble narratives. As opposed to the more conventional single-protagonist narrative, the larger number of main characters in ensemble narratives may pose a challenge for some readers/viewers, especially if they are not used to such a fragmented structure. Furthermore, for the readers/viewers the process of identification with the protagonists may be somewhat hindered, precisely for being introduced to several main characters. If the viewers/readers are not accustomed to the ensemble structure, it is possible that they do not empathize or connect with the protagonists as easily as it often happens in mono-protagonist counterparts. The "bond" between the viewer/reader and the film/novel is better achieved through the identification with a single-protagonist fiction, since a connection between the viewer/reader and the main character is indeed expected (Carmago). In fact, some critics claim that viewers and readers take the point of view of the protagonist when experiencing a narrative, remembering more easily events and contents that surround

and involve the protagonist.[104] As viewers or readers, we look for a character through which we can experience the world and the events of the narrative. Nonetheless, ensemble narratives force us to spend time with several protagonists, which may interfere with the process of identification with those characters to a certain extent. Consequently, the multiple protagonists in ensemble narratives can have positive or negative effects. On the one hand, we might not be able to empathize with the characters as easily we may do with single-protagonist narratives. On the other hand, in contrast with narratives that revolve around only one protagonist, ensemble narratives offer more options to choose from in case we fail to identify with some of the protagonists. In this section I intend to explore the complexities of this process of identification among viewers and readers of ensemble narratives.

Contrary to TV shows, ensemble narratives in literature and, mostly, cinema are unable to devote a significant amount of time or pages in order to offer very detailed backgrounds for the protagonists. As a consequence, the viewers/readers have less information about them when establishing a connection with those characters. However, this does not mean that the process of identification with the characters is not possible, it is simply different. The narratives explored here are no different than other multi-protagonist texts, for they do not give much time to delve into each major character. "When plot structure and narration emphasize three or more protagonists," Bordwell notes, "things get more complex," and it is possible that some of the plotlines or the characters might end up being more detailed than the others, even if the protagonists "are given equal emphasis, based on screen time, star wattage, control over events, or other spotlighting maneuvers" (*Hollywood* 96). However, the media themselves have

[104] See Amy Coplan's "Empathic Engagement with Narratives Fictions," as well as the various studies carried out by Mike Rinck and Gordon H. Bower, John B. Black, Terrence J. Turner and Gordon H. Bower, Jaime Rall and Paul L. Harris, and David J. Bryant, Barbara Tversky and Nancy Franklyn.

their own limitations. On the one hand, films seldom have a lengthy duration. As the attention span of the audience is likewise limited, films range from "85 to 140 minutes of advertisement-free action, with three hours not uncommon in recent years," and TV show episodes have a limited duration as well, rarely being longer than one hour: around 22 minutes for the "half-hour" program and 47 for the "hour" program (Thompson 39). Some miniseries or special episodes may be one hour and a half long. Also, genre frequently dictates the length of the episodes: the running time of comedy shows tends to be twenty or thirty minutes; drama lasts between forty and sixty minutes; and "dramedies" can go either way depending on whether they are more comedy or drama. The fact that TV episodes are shorter than movies might be related to the home environment. There are more elements that may distract us at home than at the cinema, where the room is completely dark and relatively isolated from external noise, allowing us to focus on the screen and the soundtrack of the film in a "state of hypersensitivity" (Lacey 107). The dark room and the possibility of being isolated from external stimuli as well as from the other viewers radically contrast with the lights and flashes of the screen, which, according to Laura Mulvey, contribute to the "illusion of voyeuristic separation" (836). The scholar mentions that one of the pleasures that cinema allows for is scopophilia—looking and being looked at can be a source of pleasure—, and films give us the opportunity of looking at "another person as object," which whom we may identify as well: cinema produces "ego ideals" with celebrities and "the glamourous impersonat[ing] the ordinary" (835-36).

Unlike movies, novels are much more flexible regarding length. They can have roughly one hundred pages or thousands of them, which potentially allows for more

developed characters.[105] Dennis Walder highlights that "anything seems possible" in novels, and readers are still interested in extremely long literary works (12). Hence, novels "tend to be much longer than a commercial film, and even mainstream popular novels often have more complicated plots and characters than a film can handle" (Thompson 75). Nevertheless, it is important to consider that length is connected to what we expect from the narrative. Walder points out that "a novel should engage us for long enough for us to feel it has dealt with its subject in some depth and complexity" (12). Therefore, shorter novels may satisfy our expectations, whereas others do not take full advantage of their more extensive length. Here, it is worth bringing to the table Edgar Allan Poe's famous theorization of the short story as a genre. Published in *Graham's Magazine* (1842), his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story collection, *Twice-Told Tales*, purports that short stories are long enough to engage the reader. He considers this genre to be the most appropriate, since it allows the readers to remain interested in the narrative until its very end. They are able to identify with the characters and their plotlines and, more importantly, these texts can be read in one go, for they would not "exceed in length what might be perused in an hour" (Poe 298). The attention span and patience of the readers would be tested by longer genres such as the novel; they would get tired of reading, sooner or later, and choose to focus on a different activity. This is why the short story is superior to the novel, in Poe's view. As a result, the short story would indeed feature a "unity of effect" or totality, whose relevance is significant for the American writer. Conversely, this unity or totality, he claims, "cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one

[105] The classification of short novels is blurry, for they stand in between short stories and novels. The short novel has "between about fifty and hundred and fifty pages (or 20,000 and 40,000 words)" with more characters than short stories and "often divided into parts or chapters" (Scofield 4-5). In English, a short novel is called a *novella*, an Italian-origin term that "comes from the name for certain short prose narratives popular before the novel," such as the stories in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (Walder 12). Martin Scofield adds that the term entered the English language through the German *Novelle*, introduced by Goethe in the 19th century to "classify an important genre of longer stories from Kleist to Thomas Mann" (5).

sitting" (Poe 298), an action that is likely to be interrupted the longer it takes to be completed. Norman Friedman, among other critics, has contested Poe's claims. For the scholar, singleness of effect and the sense of unity is not only achieved by the short story. Despite not being read in only one sitting, novels can also have unity. Friedman states that, when we resume reading a novel, we simply remember where we stopped and, then, keep "building the whole piecemeal in our heads as we go along" (25). He adds, however, that recalling details is easier in short stories than in novels, "mainly because of the way memory works in relation to quantity and duration" (25).

The literary works analyzed here are not excessively long. Therefore, the amount of information given regarding the characters, which goes hand in hand with the length of the narratives, can be somewhat limited, especially, because of the number of protagonists; the most conspicuous case is Romo's novel. Although the details are not abundant due to the limitations in length, this does not mean that they are generally lacking. In fact, the characters and their context are among the main focuses of these narratives, thus achieving their exploration of a wide variety of social issues. We should also take into account that the author decides what information to give and what to withhold. Bordwell explains that what is given is the *syuzhet*, which organizes the components of the narrative, and the style, which depends on the medium (*Narration* 50). Furthermore, the *syuzhet* can leave gaps, which should be there deliberately—otherwise, it might be a slack or careless narration—and can serve different purposes. Parts of the *fabula* may be postponed or even omitted, because no events are worth telling (54-55). In Michael Kowalewski's words, "[a]n author, no matter how exhaustive or ambitious his descriptions, could never include every detail about a particular place, person, or action (not would most authors care to include everything)" (30). Wolfgang Iser's concept of "gaps" proves useful for this discussion as well. From

a reader-response theory perspective, these gaps play an essential role in the interaction between narratives and readers. Iser explains that there is a process of communication between the text and the readers (*Act* 54). While reading, the readers are implicitly asked to resort to their knowledge—of the narrative itself, of other literary works, and of real life—as well as their imagination to actualize the meaning of the narrative and understand it. The fact that the narrative is, to a certain extent, incomplete "is not experienced as a deficiency or a perceptual deficit in realistic sequences. The incomplete form of those sequences takes shape instead as an imaginative insufficiency upon which a reader is invited to act" (Kowalewski 30). Jonathan Gilmore adds that readers often have to "infer unstated facts in a fiction from what is directly asserted" and, for that, they need to resort to their "background beliefs [. . .] about the real world" or "by importing such beliefs into the narrative" (396). In other words, as Martin McQuillan remarks, the "meanings that you as a reader will produce in relation to a text are affected by all the things which make you up as a person. The actual time spent reading is important but your experience of reading will also be informed by the experiences you bring to that moment of reading" (85). The meaning that readers build by using their imagination is based on the information that is provided by the narrative. However, what is not included in the narrative also needs to be imagined and interpreted by the readers. What is not mentioned and the absence of connections between elements in the narrative constitute the "gaps"—*Leerstellen* in German—, which, in Iser's words, "can only be filled by the reader's imagination" (*Act* 84). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the readers cannot fill these gaps with anything they want. Thomas Brook highlights the difference between *Leerstellen* and *Löcher*, another word that can be translated into English as "gaps." It is worth highlighting that, as Brook remarks, a "*Leerstelle* is not merely an emptiness [which may characterize a "gap"]; it is a form of

emptiness that determines to an extent how it can be filled" (56).[106] In other words, the readers are guided to a certain degree when filling in those "gaps." It is the omissions in a narrative what give it dynamism, Iser mentions, and the readers, making use of their previous knowledge, establish connections and fill in the gaps with the information that is given in the narrative ("Reading" 284-85). The filling in of gaps depends on each reader/viewer, which is why "one text is potentially capable of several different realizations," and modern, fragmentary narratives exploit these gaps more than traditional narratives, since the reader is often focused on finding connections (285). This is indeed the case with ensemble narratives, in which the readers/viewers often need to be more active when establishing connections between the multiple characters and plotlines.

In order to establish connections and to understand the narrative, the readers/viewers also develop and come up with hypotheses that will be either confirmed or debunked as we keep reading/watching the narrative. Ensemble narratives, furthermore, intertwine different plotlines or threads. Consequently, to confirm our hypotheses regarding one of the protagonists, for instance, we need to wait until the plot returns to her/his plotline. In other words, delaying the events by interrupting the narration of a plotline to focus on another one allows the viewers/readers to come up with different hypotheses of what is going on in each of the threads, thus having to wait in order to prove those hypotheses to be true or not. The development of hypotheses is one of the main reasons why we are interested in knowing what will happen next: "Either the reader's expectations are met half-way and generally confirmed, which can be satisfying if the reader wishes to have them confirmed. Or these expectations are

[106] Brook also points out that Iser is aware of the limitations in the translation of *Leerstellen* as "gaps." Hence, "Iser in *The Act of Reading* uses 'gaps,' 'blanks,' 'vacancies,' or 'places of indeterminacy,' depending on the context" (56).

thwarted, which can also be satisfying if the reader likes a challenge," thus experiencing a violation of the expectations and surprise (Gupta 95; Abbott 54). By reading or watching the narrative, these hypotheses and expectations are constantly modified as well. Moreover, the change in these expectations influence what we read or watched before, which may have "a different significance from that which it had at the moment of reading" (Iser, "Reading" 283). Put differently, throughout the process of reading or watching, we think about what we will possibly read/watch next in relation to what we have already read/watched, which, in turn, is influenced by what we are currently reading/watching.

The hypotheses that we come up with throughout the process of reading or watching a narrative may not be (fully) confirmed. Sometimes, there may be an open ending, leaving the reader/viewer wondering what happened or will happen to the characters, not "answering questions or solving riddles, but […] posing new questions that resonate in the audience long after the story is over" (Vogler 218). Furthermore, the amount of information specified in the narrative may influence our hypotheses. Bordwell establishes a distinction between types of *syuzhets*: a "rarified" *syuzhet*—the one that does not give enough information about the *fabula*—and an "overloaded" *syuzhet*, which gives too many details (*Narration* 54). Then, he goes on to explain that this differentiation is connected to each genre: "The momentarily overloaded or rarified approach of the mystery film is in fact normal for syuzhet construction in its genre" (54). In ensemble narratives, the *syuzhet* typically gives information regarding the fabula in pieces. Each plotline adds something to the general or primary plotline, so the readers/viewers can infer what is happening and prove or disregard their hypotheses. Furthermore, ensemble narratives, unlike more traditional counterparts, tend to present

less detailed backgrounds for the numerous protagonists, who share the spotlight of the narrative.

The amount of information concerning what would belong to previous stages in the *fabula* and the characters' background differs among the works included in our corpus. From these narratives, Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* and Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* are the ones that give more details about the past of their characters.[107] Desai's novel does provide information about the characters' background, mainly through Jemubhai's repressed memories and the conversations Sai has with Panna Lal. Sai's presence in Cho Oyu along with her curiosity about her family's past trigger her grandfather's memories about his hurtful experience in England, his return to India, Sai's arrival at the house, and his tragic relationship with Bella, to cite a few examples. Panna Lal, in addition, provides Sai with details that the reluctant judge does not want to share with her, as well as information regarding her deceased parents. The cook also brings to memory Biju's childhood, allowing the reader to learn more about the past of this protagonist. Furthermore, the novel provides information about Gyan's Nepali background and family, adding significance to his clashing relationship with Sai. Also, there is a gradual, yet significant change between the Biju that has just arrived in the U.S. and the one that goes back to Kalimpong.

In contrast to *The Inheritance of Loss*, the reader is not given many details about all of the characters in Yamashita's novel. To cite an example, the account of Gabriel's past life in *Tropic of Orange* has more gaps than Bobby's, to which the narrative devotes quite a few pages. Then, in the much shorter novel *El Puente/The Bridge*, we barely have information about the background of the fourteen female protagonists. The

[107] Here, the comparison between the selected narratives is somewhat "unfair," since they are different forms of fiction. Undoubtedly, the novel allows for a deeper development of the characters than the films.

book is much more focused on what is currently happening to them in terms of the narrative time and on the red river event. This is partly due to Romo's choice of style, one much closer to vignettes, between a novel and a short story cycle. As a matter of fact, we do not "spend" much time with each character, as they mostly get a similar amount of intra-diegetic time. However, short stories and ensemble narratives do share the fact that the plot has to be more selective (Klarer 13). Short stories are precisely short, whereas in ensemble narratives, the intra-diegetic time is shared among the protagonists. Thus, in order to focus on more relevant details, information about the characters' backgrounds, for example, may not be included. Consequently, the characters do not seem to undergo great changes. Due to the transformations in the characters, the spectator's opinion about them might also change (Weber et al. 464). This might end up influencing our perception of the entire narrative, confirming or debunking our hypotheses about the characters or the events. Moreover, if we reject those transformations for whatever reason—e.g. morally unacceptable for us, boring or unappealing, unrealistic considering the character's background and development—, we may end up quitting the narrative.

If the novels already give very few details about their characters' earlier lives, the movies in the corpus are even sketchier. As a consequence of having multiple protagonists, these narratives do not facilitate a detailed development, they provide no in-depth Bildungsroman for each of the main characters. They only give enough information to build the plotlines, such as Carlos Ayala's (Steven Bauer) illegal activities in *Traffic*. *Crash* centers its attention on the two days when the story takes place and, even though part of the action happens during "yesterday," it does not go further back to provide the viewer with more background information. In *Babel*, the most significant element from the past is the rifle that is used to accidentally shoot the

American tourist and ends up connecting the multiple plotlines with their characters. In other words, the reader/viewer perceives echoes from the past in these narratives, yet most of the action concerns the present consequences of those past events.

Highlighting the limited details given to the spectator, *Crash* starts *in medias res*. This not only confuses the viewer to a certain extent, but also breaks with the traditional narrative structure and deprives the viewer of the necessary background information to follow the story, thus hindering a quick comprehension of it. *Babel* also plays with linearity, making the spectator believe that all plotlines are simultaneous. As Mihoc observes, linear narratives hardly allow the spectator to participate in the movie, whereas the postmodernist non-linear and more experimental narratives disregard the viewer's expectations, "in order to create a work in which a less-recognizable internal logic forms the film's means of expression" (109).[108]

Due to the limited details and the fragmented structure, which may also lack a chronological linearity, ensemble narratives can prove themselves more challenging for the readers/viewers than conventional single-protagonist narratives. As Michael Z. Newman contends, "[t]his expository mode might encourage spectators to formulate inferences about the characters and narrative events and hypotheses about where the film might be going, but does not make clear how the different pieces fit together according to schemes of time and causation." The viewer is, on more than one occasion, unable to figure out what is happening in the film. Such a (dis)order confuses spectators. We are misled by how the events are narrated (*syuzhet*). Precisely because of that we become more active viewers: in these ensemble narratives we are forced to pay more attention than we would probably do when watching more conventional

[108] In literature, trickster characters tend to "interrupt, to overturn a traditional way of reading" (Schmidt 66). The resulting effect of the "shifting and ambiguous" nature of these tricksters is a more challenging experience for the reader, who is forced to "actively engage with the text" (Simal, "Trippers" 150).

Hollywood films.[109] Furthermore, since ensemble narratives jump from one plotline to another, we have to wait in order to find out what will happen next to a certain character and confirm the hypotheses that we have made so far. Fate also plays a major role in this type of narrative, as mentioned before. Hence, when the *syuzhet* messes with the chronological order of the events, it is also challenging causality. We wonder why an event happened, what caused it, was it fate? Eventually, there is a clear mundane explanation in the movie. Nevertheless, it is common to attribute inexplicable events to fate or to coincidences or to a higher power, especially when trying to find a reason for death, one of the main themes in González Iñárritu's *Babel* and his Death Trilogy: *Why now? Why her/him? It was her/his time; It was her/his fate; It was a coincidence*; *It was God's will; etc.*

Since the events are not presented in a chronological order and there are abundant coincidences in these narratives, it is not easy to find a reasonable explanation to why they happen. Therefore, putting the pieces together while watching or reading these narratives may not be an easy task. However, is this difficulty positive or negative? It surely depends on the spectator's willingness to engage and actively participate in this type of experience. Some viewers might reject this narrative structure, or even find it somewhat incoherent. Moreover, we are likely to miss a few details the first time we watch the movie or read the novel, which could also be regarded as "negative." Albeit possibly being a risky narrative structure, I believe that these narratives present the spectator/reader with a more gratifying experience than traditional (Hollywood) narratives. It can surely be approached as a challenge, a high-quality

[109] González Iñárritu's *21 Grams* takes the lack of linearity to the next level, where the very first scene the spectator watches would happen half way through the movie, chronologically speaking. Another example would be our failure to understand why one of the protagonists, Paul, is bleeding out in the car when in the previous and following scenes, he is fine. Hahn claims that, in this film, "it is difficult to feel settled in a certain moment (or location), since past, present, and future continuously flow into one another, and appear equally real at all times" (54). By playing with linearity, the film may be addressing one of its main themes, death, when the notion of time ceases to exist, as there is no past, present or future.

"puzzle" that we have to solve as viewers or readers. Whenever we find matching pieces in a multiple-protagonist narrative, we feel somewhat accomplished, for we are closer to understanding the interconnections between the characters: "Convinced that they are breaking new ground each time they recognize a new thematic intersection, readers experience the excitement of the explorer, the inventor, indeed the alchemist" (Altman 288).

It can be argued that all narratives require the readers/viewers to construct meaning: "readers—and not only authors—engage in an active process of production-in-use in which texts of all kinds […] are received by their audiences not as a repository of stable meaning but as an invitation to make it" (Harkin 413). As a consequence, the reader/viewer performs a function in the process of reading, which happens "over a period of time," and, through reading and making meaning, "a text might be said to exist" (McQuillan 84). It can be argued that ensemble narratives underscore the fact that readers/viewers are actively engaged when experiencing and comprehending a narrative due to the complexity of the narrative structure with the multiple characters and threads. Due to their challenging narrative structure, viewers faced with such fiction actively engage and "perform operations" on the story: "When information is missing, perceivers infer it or make guesses about it. When events are arranged out of temporal order, perceivers try to put those events in sequence. And people seek causal connections among events, both in anticipation and in retrospect" (Bordwell, *Narration* 34). As such, then, the narratives here explored work like a "puzzle," in which the viewer is somewhat forced to participate actively and put the pieces together in order to fully understand and follow the plot.

Nevertheless, apart from enjoying the narrative of the film, the spectator is presented with another way of appreciating the experience: "The pleasure in watching,

to a large extent, is the pleasure of working out explanations for how people and events are connected" (Newman). We, as viewers or readers, are trained and used to linear stories, where we may have a fairly accurate idea of what to expect next, especially, because linearity is connected to causality. However, ensemble narratives often present their events in such a (dis)order that it requires us to pay full attention to solve this formal "puzzle," looking for ways to sort the pieces in a logical manner. It is thus relevant for a narrative to foster the readers'—and viewers'—imagination "in the task of working things out for" themselves, since "reading [and watching are] only a pleasure when it is active and creative," in other words, when the audience of the narrative is challenged by not receiving "the whole story" (Iser, "Reading" 280). Yet, as remarked by Wolfgang Iser, the literary work should encourage neither too much nor too little creativity and imagination from the readers to avoid them quitting the narrative ("Reading" 280).

Another significant aspect of narratives in general is how the spectator/reader is guided through the process of "meeting" and, if possible, "bonding" with the characters. Feeling identified or not with the characters on screen influences the spectator's ego (Mulvey 837). According to Mulvey, cinema allows the audience to both lose the ego temporarily and reinforce the ego. The way the ego perceives the world seems to be forgotten, which Mulvey links to the "pre-subjective moment of image recognition" (836). She goes on to explain that this moment of recognition alludes to Jacques Lacan's description of the child's self-recognition in a mirror. Lacan's mirror stage delves into the formation of the "ego" or "I" and the recognition of oneself as other. At the age of six months, babies can indeed identify themselves in a mirror, according to this theory. Thus, the child can also distinguish himself/herself in the reflection as well as in relation to other individuals and things (94). This self-recognition, Lacan explains,

precedes the identification with other individuals as well as language (95). Furthermore, the French psychoanalyst labels the reflected form as the "ideal I" or the "ideal ego," which is perceived as superior to the actual body. Returning to Mulvey's connection between the mirror stage and films, the scholar states that cinema focuses on the human form, which fosters a "fascination with likeness and recognition" (836). Consequently, this echoes the process of identification that takes place during the mirror stage, for the screen shows other individuals in whom we can recognize ourselves yet who differ from us as well. Moreover, Mulvey purports that celebrities constitute "ego ideals," which are also similar but different than our own, and this allows our ego to be reinforced when experiencing the process of "likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)" (836). The attraction that the characters have, in turn, affects the active interest of the viewer/reader in the narrative. Walder underscores that it is required for us to "believe in the characters and their story, even while knowing on some level that it is imaginary. It is also what makes us want to read on" (15).

The process of identification with the hero(ine)—or one of them—is related to Aristotle's concept of catharsis. Aristotle claims that the performances in tragedies have the function of purifying the audience's emotions: "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (23). This purification can be achieved with any other type of narrative as well. Conventional single-protagonist narratives will encourage the viewer/reader to identify with the hero(ine), although it is possible that the audience may also have a similar reaction towards other characters. Furthermore, in conventional narratives, the hero(ine) usually wins at the end. Therefore, by siding with this character and experiencing the events s/he goes through, we are able to be part of that success and experience it as well, thus being able to purge our emotions. Multi-protagonist narratives hinder this process and make it more convoluted, however. Some

heroes or heroines may not win, contributing to our feeling of frustration if we felt identified with one of those "losers." Either way, experiencing a wide range of emotions is indeed possible, frustration or disappointment included.

The identification with the characters while reading or watching a narrative is also linked to the feeling of empathy. It is in fact empathy what allows us to have an "intimate and powerful form of *identification*," underwriting "our capacity […] to feel not just *for* another but *as* another" (Gibson 234; italics in the original). In "Catching Characters' Emotions: Emotional Contagion Responses to Narrative Fiction in Film" (2006), Coplan underscores the fact that when we empathize with characters, we do not only "take on the character's emotional states," but also the "psychological perspective" (31). In order to feel as another, it is required to have imagination. We imagine someone else's narrative. In the case of literature and films, the reader/viewer imagines that she believes, thinks and reasons in the same way the characters do (Coplan, "Catching" 31), and the more details and characterization we have about them and their experiences, the more we might empathize (Goldie 195). Furthermore, as Grace contends, "[a] story expresses and extracts opinion. It engages an audience by being relevant to their lives. In turn, the audience empathises with the story, shares it and, by extension, celebrates that story and the characters that tell it" (54). Adding to this, Altman highlights that the intersecting plots constitute another obstacle when trying to identify with the multiple characters, whereas in a single-protagonist narrative, everything is seen or assessed according to the protagonist, even if the narration follows another character at some point (264). Indeed, mainly due to the similar relevance of the protagonists, the intra-diegetic time is shared among many characters and, the more they are, the less contact the readers/viewers can have with them. This situation is similar to our social interactions in real life, where, as Krems and Dunbar claim, "time budgets are known to

constrain social bonds," impacting not only on their quantity but also their quality (423). In other words, if our social networks have a large number of individuals, we cannot spend significant amounts of time with all of them, thus being unable to forge a close and meaningful relationship.

Consequently, the multiple-protagonist narrative proves demanding for both the viewer/reader and the filmmaker/writer, as it moves them away from the more comfortable single-protagonist structure. In literature, ensemble novels such as Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* implicitly ask for the reader to "keep track of the mental state" of several characters (Krems and Dunbar 414). Ensemble literature compels readers to "rewrite" the narrative as they read it. The rewriting that the reader performs not only fosters identification with the characters, but also engages the reader intellectually (Altman 286).[110] Furthermore, in multi-protagonist films, the complexity of the characters and their psychology tend to be more developed than in mainstream movies. The frequent open endings, the "slower" pace of the films (e.g. longer average shot length), as well as the ensemble nature make the viewing of these movies more challenging and less attractive to those spectators used to mainstream cinema. Despite the potential challenge posed by ensemble narratives, I would argue that having more characters also gives the viewer/reader more opportunities to empathize with either all of them or only a few, even if we spend less time with each of those characters. Following a similar logic, building the narrative around a protagonist can also be rather risky, since this character carries the weight of the entire narrative on his/her shoulders. Therefore, if the viewers/readers dislike or fail to empathize with this character, their

[110] In Altman's view, this rewriting has three stages. First, the reader is introduced to each character and s/he follows them one by one, "identifying with some more than others," and "fitting each piece into an overall outline of the story presented" (286). Second, the reader "reorders the narrative material according to" the information given and learned as s/he keeps reading (286). Finally, the reader perceives characters and their actions in "thematic terms" based on the "common traits or themes that bring" them and "events together" (286).

interest in the narrative as a whole might decrease, because of the significant amount of time spent with the protagonist.

Apart from the potential catharsis and the identification with the character(s) of the viewer/reader's choice, the linking process between the characters and the audience creates a common world between them, with the latter playing the game of "buying" what happens in that world—the so-called "fictional pact." This pact is part of the process of enjoying the experience of reading or watching fiction and the fulfillment of our expectations regarding the narrative, which will encourage us to read/watch more: "We read literary works with certain expectations, and it is a crucial part of the reason we read, and the pleasure we obtain, that those expectations are satisfied" (Walder 6). This fictional world is global too, since it somewhat connects its viewers/readers. On the one hand, the characters and the viewers/readers are all intertwined by the fictional world from the movie/novel. On the other hand, the narrative itself also acts as a nexus that connects the viewers/readers that experience the narrative. In other words, just likethe rifle that interweaves the multiple plotlines in González Iñárritu's *Babel*, the reading/watching experience of a narrative and the narrative itself would interconnect its viewers/readers. As such, it is a microcosmic reflection of the larger globalized world outside the film/text.

Coming back to the issue of viewer-character bonding, Murray Smith suggests three different stages, in which the viewer/reader connects with the characters. The first stage is "recognition," the first moment when the viewer/reader makes contact with the characters. The viewer/reader perceives the "image of a body" and receives information regarding them, hence trying to figure out the personality of the characters, as in real life (M. Smith 40). In this case, there is a significant difference between films and novels—or visual and written texts. Regarding the physical appearance of the

characters, a movie does not make its audience use their imagination to picture the image of a body, for there is only one possibility when perceiving the image of a body and receiving information about how the character looks like. In contrast with this, a novel needs the readers to use their imagination to create images from the words written on the page. With the information that the readers receive, they are aware of the existence of the characters. Moreover, they can have an idea of how those characters look like—their appearance. Nevertheless, there are several possibilities when creating the image of those characters in the imagination of the readers. Wolfgang Iser compares the reaction of the readers when watching the film version of a novel. He explains that, while reading the narrative, one is never able to have an accurate idea of the characters's appearance. Yet, when watching the movie, we may be surprised by how the characters look like, perhaps, different than what we had imagined. Iser underscores that the reader "is able to visualize the hero virtually for himself, and so his imagination senses the vast number of possibilities"; however, when watching the film, "he is confined merely to physical perception, [for] these possibilities are narrowed down to one complete and immutable picture, [and] the imagination is put out of action" ("Reading" 288). In much the same vein, H. Porter Abbott explains that films are "crowded with instances of narration" largely in charge of the characters, and, although "we still have to fill in, imaginatively, the details of the stories they tell, we watch and hear them as they do their telling"; hence, "the actors do work for us [with their gestures and pauses]," something "we have to do entirely ourselves" when reading (73). Regardless of this difference, readers also try to understand the personality of the characters in this stage of recognition. In the chosen narratives, the viewer/reader might be misguided when meeting the characters, as multi-protagonist narratives tend to hinder the development of these stages, thus making the "bonding" between the viewer/reader and the characters

either more complex or a failure. For instance, when Caroline is seen consuming drugs in *Traffic*, we might not associate her with the fact that she is an outstanding student. Therefore, we are indirectly led to think the opposite, which fits a more stereotypical image of drug addicts. Likewise, *Crash* introduces Anthony and Peter as they are criticizing society for automatically considering them dangerous and potential crooks, just because they are two blacks in a white upper-class neighborhood; the irony lies in that they are in fact carjackers.[111]

The second stage in this process of connecting with the characters is "alignment." Once again, ensemble narratives make this process more difficult. According to Murray Smith, the alignment stage is achieved by making the viewer/reader "spend" time with the character, thus having access to "their actions and to what they know and feel" (41). This process is more effective with single protagonist narratives, since this character is devoted full attention and/or most of the time/pages. In addition, we tend to experience the narrative and its events through the focalization of the protagonist or in relation to him/her. This, however, does not mean that we necessarily align with the protagonist—or any other character for that matter—throughout the entire narrative: we do not "empathically identify with all characters in a work," and "our engagement with any one character [may not be] from cover to cover empathic" (Gibson 239).

However, in ensemble narratives, all the main characters and their perspectives are equally important, and they all get a similar amount of time or pages. The most notorious example is *El Puente/The Bridge*, which devotes a chapter to each of its

[111] In *Tropic of Orange*, we are mostly misled by Emi, who is not the stereotypical Japanese American most readers have in mind. For instance, she does not enjoy typical Asian food, her friends at the network where she works are all whites, and she has a critical and sarcastic attitude towards Asianness (Yamashita 23).

characters—Tomasita gets the opening and closing chapters in a circular structure. Therefore, the narrative "forces" the reader to follow one character at a time—except for the chapter "Lola and Lorena," which focuses on both women. *Tropic of Orange* has seven main characters, who, in turn, get seven chapters each[112] and participate in the sections that "belong" to the other characters. In Desai's novel, we "align" with Biju and Sai mostly, since more chapters deal with their plotlines, but also with Jemubhai and Panna Lal. The judge is, perhaps, the character that creates the most contradictory response in the reader. The painful experience he lived in England explains to a point the source of his rage and hatred. Hence, the readers might feel pity for him and understand him. Nevertheless, Jemubhai's anger also makes him a despicable character, leading him to detach himself from his family and whatever is Indian. His most shocking actions, however, are connected to his relationship with his wife, Bella. He abuses her, shames her and gets her killed for representing everything that is Indian—thus, not Western—, and reminding him of his own Indianness. This is a case of racial shadow projection. Carl Jung speaks of the "shadow," which he defines as "the 'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the content of the personal unconscious" (660). The shadow may therefore include "characteristics of one's opposite gender, qualities within oneself that stir embarrassment or shame, as well as inferior and reprehensible qualities," as Kenneth Reeves explains (81). However, this shadow is rarely acknowledged by oneself, even if what is hidden is considered to be positive by society, and when this occurs, we unconsciously project our shadow thus

[112] The number seven is generally associated with perfection and the Judeo-Christian myth of the creation of the world. In *Tropic of Orange*, it would be the creation of a new L.A., and a new world where borders have been reset and the Global South is no longer exploited by the Global North. Moreover, a new world or beginning denotes a circular structure, which is also reflected by the fifty-two-year cycle and the doom at the end of it mentioned by Arcangel, referring to the fifty-two-year centuries in the Aztec calendar (Yamashita 50). In turn, the beginning of a new century or cycle is echoed by the changes and the new beginning Arcangel fights for at the end of the novel.

perceiving our "negative" characteristics in other individuals, which allows us to feel superior. By doing this, we attempt to rid ourselves of those undesirable features. Furthermore, identifying the shadows we project onto others also fosters hostile attitudes towards them and a possible desire of harming them. Taken to more extreme situations, if the projectors have power, Reeves mentions, their harmful actions may indeed reach entire groups as in the case of African Americans in the United States: "Not wanting to see its own capacity for violence, White America can see it in African American men," a violence that, from the point of view of the "White America" can justify the use of violence and other harmful measures against African Americans—the goal here would be tackling the issue of violence yet the outcome is actually its perpetration (82). Hence, racism and shadow projection can be linked. Reeves explains that "racism is a form of shadow projection," for the dominant group in society "refuses to see a disowned aspect of its own nature," instead, they perceive it "in a racial or cultural minority," thus allowing "harm to befall that minority" (82). Focusing on Jemubhai's case, he is a victim and a perpetrator of racism and shadow projection. On the one hand, he has to endure the racism perpetrated by the British against the Indians. On the other hand, he projects his own shadow onto Bella. In her, he perceives everything he dislikes about his Indian self, fueled by his fervent desire of becoming and being as British as possible. However, he is never seen as British, thus his wish is denied to him during his stay in England and after returning to India. The projection of Jemubhai's shadow onto Bella fosters—and, for him, justifies—an environment of violence, a violence that symbolically echoes the one exerted by the British Empire against India. Desperately unable to eliminate his "inferior" Indian self, the judge ends up getting Bella literally killed. Therefore, the process of identification with Jemubhai is

hindered: his extreme decisions are unjustifiable for the readers in spite of the life of humiliation and failures the judge has endured.

Compared to the novels, movies have a more limited duration, giving the spectator less time to "spend" with the characters. As mentioned before, in ensemble films, all the protagonists receive a similar amount of screen time. Furthermore, in multi-protagonist films all the characters are "given close-ups, camera movements, and compositional prominence" (Carmago). However, both forms of ensemble narratives—novels and films—offer us significantly less time to focus on each character than a single-protagonist narrative. Hence, we might not have enough time to establish some sort of "bonding" with all the characters.

The third and last stage described by Smith in "Altered States: Character and Emotional Response in the Cinema" (1994), is "allegiance." Here, the viewer/reader morally judges and/or questions the characters after having gathered all the information and traits the narrative offers about them (M. Smith 41). Smith also observes that "attitudes related to class, nation, age, ethnicity, and gender" influence the process of alignment (41). If the viewer and the character share some of those aspects, it might be easier for the spectator to feel "identified with" that character. The fact that we "like" or "dislike" them is crucial in our judgment, as Carmago points out. In the selected novels, the characters are not particularly reprehensible. None of them is negative enough to be morally condemned; the reader might empathize with them or not, though. The central character that is more likely to be disliked in Desai's novel is Jemubhai, mainly, due to the way he treats other people such as Bella or Panna Lal; however, as mentioned before, he has suffered in life as well. *Babel* presents the viewer with characters that, perhaps, allow mixed feelings to appear. Nevertheless, once again, their actions are not utterly objectionable. Consequently, the viewer/reader might need some time to be able

to make a decision whether to feel empathy or antipathy for them, or even a mixture of both reactions. Sgt. John Ryan's actions in *Crash* may initially lead the spectator to reject him, although he is supposed to somewhat redeem himself later in the narrative. In addition, "empathy" and "sympathy," albeit similar, do not have the same meaning. The former includes positive and negative experiences whereas the latter is connected to negative ones. Furthermore, sympathy is an emotion we feel "*for* someone," John Gibson states, empathy, on the other hand, is a way to experience emotions—an empathic experience in which we try to adopt someone else's "first-person perspective": "I represent myself as *sharing* an emotion not just with you but, as it were, *as* and *because* you do" (235, 237; italics in the original). Also, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the main difference would be that one of the possible meanings of the latter alludes to a "feeling of loyalty" and a "unity or harmony in action or effect," which are not applicable to "empathy" ("Sympathy"). Regarding the process of identification that concerns us, I would argue that sympathy in the sense of feelings of loyalty could also be connection to the identification between readers/viewers and characters, for this loyalty can be linked to an allegiance to someone or something. In other words, the readers/viewers may be loyal to the characters with whom they identify the most.

Only *Traffic* facilitates the spectator's process of making a judgment. The most negative characters in the film, Juan Obregón and the African American drug dealer, are meant to elicit a feeling of rejection in the viewer and there is no room for redemption here. Furthermore, characters like General Salazar, Carlos Ayala, or the Ayalas's attorney, Arnie Metzger (Dennis Quaid), are not meant to encourage empathy either. Their lack of honesty would generally push the viewers to dislike them. The most interesting case, in this sense, is Helena Ayala, who might be the most difficult

character to pass judgment on. At first, her decision of "becoming her husband" by taking control of his drug smuggling business is (or is supposed to be) reprehensible. Moreover, one of the reasons why she goes on with this illegal activity is to maintain her wealthy lifestyle. "Helena," Neil Narine observes, "continues to prioritize appearances and her own pleasure. She elects to broker future drug deals rather than sell her valuable paintings, begins a secret affair with her corrupt lawyer Arnie […] and even has a disloyal witness killed. Helena, we learn, likely knew of her husband's drug connections long before his arrest" (126). However, it should also be taken into consideration that her son, David, receives a death threat from the Obregón brothers. Furthermore, none of the Ayalas's legitimate business is profitable enough to collect the required money to pay Carlos's debts. Hence, Helena is forced into a situation where she does not have too many choices but to continue trafficking drugs in order to settle the debt with Juan Obregón. In other words, Helena's decision might not be entirely reprehensible, after all. And yet, once the problem with the drug cartel is solved, she does not quit the drug business, encouraging the viewer to feel less sympathy for her.

Readers/viewers, regardless of the character(s) we side with, are implicitly asked to make moral judgments regarding the characters and the events of the narrative. Judging is part of the process of experiencing the narrative, bonding and identifying/rejecting the characters, and so forth. Our personal moral codes and ethics are involved when facing a narrative; we consume it and react to it based on our previous knowledge, which includes our own values. Indeed, not only when judging the characters but also when making sense and meaning of the narrative as readers/viewers, we are influenced by our own background and biases, which are "dependent upon a great many variables, including historical and cultural conditioning" (Głowiński and Godzich 75). The narrative may also appeal to ideological or moral codes on purpose

for a variety of reasons—among them denouncing a social practice, delivering a message, as propaganda. The author, in addition, suggests a particular interpretation of the narrative, including its characters. In the words of Linda M. Scott, "[w]hat binds together the [authorial] intention and the anticipated response [from the readers/viewers] is shared knowledge of cultural conventions and the invocation of probable strategies for reading" (63). Furthermore, the narrative itself is based on moral codes. Like it or not, we are always judging everything and everyone. We have to ponder if what happens around us is positive or negative for us, and, in order to do that, we have a set of social and personal values that help us approve or reject certain choices and events, including those that take place in narratives.

After exploring how the fragmented multi-protagonist structure in ensemble narratives influences the process of identification between viewers/readers and characters, as well as the development of hypotheses while watching/reading a narrative, it is time now to turn to the analysis of one of the most frequent devices that ensemble narratives mobilize in order to make the protagonists intertwine: coincidences. Often, the paths of these characters intersect due to the whims of serendipity. They may be strangers that bump into each other in a common location or, perhaps, it is an object that links all the plotlines, as in the case of the rifle in *Babel*. In other cases, events "planned" by fate are the reason behind these interconnections, or else the protagonists's paths crisscross thanks to relationships they have with other characters that act as nexuses. Consequently, ensemble narratives seem to foster the idea of everyone being interconnected in a "small world," thus echoing the process of increasing globalization. Hence, the use of coincidences, a trait that is characteristic of ensemble narratives, will be the primary focus in the next section.

2.4. It's a Small World: Globalization, Coincidences and Ensemble Narratives

The large number of characters typical of ensemble narratives makes it possible for the authors to explore different social and cultural backgrounds, as well as the way in which they are connected to one another. Furthermore, it is my contention that ensemble narratives, through their multiple plotlines and characters, also reflect the interconnection that characterizes our increasingly globalized world. In this regard, I agree with Azcona when she argues that

> the development of the multi-protagonist genre in the last two decades has run parallel with the significant impact of a series of scientific and social discourses—such as chaos theory, the butterfly effect, the global village conception of the world and six degrees of separation theories—which have both challenged traditional notions of causality and emphasized the network nature of human life and interaction in an increasingly shrinking and globalized world. ("A Time" 114)

This type of fiction reflects our globalized world in which cultures and people interact more and more, partially dissipating social and cultural borders and differences. For instance, *El Puente/The Bridge* focuses on the constant crossing of the social and cultural border between Mexico and the United States, where the distinctions between both sides are somewhat blurry, with individuals living and working on either side of the border, regardless of where they are from. Concerning these boundaries, Ibarraran points out that Romo's novel "as a whole, its setting, characters, as well as its style and language, indeed continuously cross and challenge definitions of simplicity and extraordinariness, and symbolically represent the permeability of boundaries (both real and metaphorical)" (138). This constant permeability of boundaries and the ever-present crossing of borders in the novel is echoed in its formal aspects. I would argue that the

narrative crosses borders and boundaries at a literary and structural level. With its vignette-like structure, *El Puente/The Bridge* devotes one chapter to each of its characters, with the exception of Tomasita, who gets two, and Lola and Lorena, who share theirs. Nevertheless, most of these fourteen women are present in chapters that follow other characters. Consequently, there is a crossing of "literary borders" between those chapters, and the narrative itself resembles the International Bridge, working as a bridge between the characters and their plotlines. As a result, the thematic content and the formal structure are closely connected in Romo's novel, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapters.

Yamashita's narrative is also interested in exploring the dissipating borders in relation to the process of globalization. Mark Chiang underscores that much of "Yamashita's work […] is characterized by various efforts to create symbolic or figurative representations of globalization," for example, the orange "in which the Tropic of Cancer is embedded" in *Tropic of Orange* (841).[113] Similarly to the canvas-like 19th century realist novels (see Chiang 841), Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* and the other narratives included in this corpus include a large number of characters in order to achieve an in-depth exploration of a variety of social issues from different perspectives. Hence, ensemble narratives are a suitable type of narrative to discuss and reflect globalization. It bears repeating that their literary tradition spans several centuries, from the Middle Ages to the realist novels populated by multiple characters.[114] Furthermore, ensemble narratives make use of the same techniques and strategies included in single-protagonist narratives: characters whose state of affairs is disturbed and need to solve a

[113] Globalization is also present in the other novels written by Yamashita. The most conspicuous cases are *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *I Hotel* (2011). The former, set in Brazil, follows a Japanese immigrant, a ball that floats around his head, an American businessman working for a corporation that exploits natural resources in the country, and other Brazilian characters, all connected by the Matacão plateau in the Brazilian rain forest. The latter narrates the experiences of several characters, staying at the International Hotel in San Francisco's Chinatown from 1968 onwards.

[114] In the case of films, the situation is similar, as we saw in section 2.1.

problem or attain goals, a process that will push them to undergo change. In fact, if we choose to focus on only one of the several protagonists, ensemble narratives can be seen or read as single-protagonist narratives, even though that is unlikely the intention of the author.

Apart from the main feature of ensemble narratives—having several protagonists—, the characters are frequently intertwined through coincidental events, as has been anticipated. Hilary P. Dannenberg defines coincidence as "*a constellation of two or more apparently random events in space and time with an uncanny or striking connection*" (93; italics in the original). In their analysis of certain international co-productions, Hester Baer and Ryan Long argue that these films share a "common aesthetic and thematic concern with contingency, chance, and coincidence, and with the lines between reality and fiction"; as a result their "plot and narrative structure" crystallize into "circular, fragmentary, or repetitive narratives, alternative or competing realities, and multiple versions or outcomes of the same story" (150). The multiple plotlines and protagonists that characterize these narratives often crisscross due to predictable coincidences, "whereby two sets of characters, both of whom we have been following in separate chapters or sections of the novel, meet" (Fludernik 46). Furthermore, the different threads are "shaped by the usual goals, obstacles, appointments, deadlines, and the like. And unlike coincidences in real life, movie coincidences create 'small worlds' in which characters will intersect again and again, especially if the duration and locale of the action are well circumscribed" (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 98). This echoes our shrinking globalized world, in which we are individually and collectively interlaced. Such coincidences are accepted by the audience, since they can actually happen in real life (97). Coincidental events may not only end up intertwining characters that the readers/viewers have been following in the

narrative, but also new characters that are strangers to the protagonists we already know (Fludernik 46).

Among the works analyzed in this dissertation, in some cases the characters interact more than in others; for example, the protagonists in *Crash* share the same time and place, whereas in *Babel* the characters are in different locations that are only connected by the rifle. In order for these coincidences to happen, fate comes into play, and its role is that of an external force that controls the lives of the characters. Azcona points out that, in such films, the individual seems to be at the mercy of fate:

> Randomness shows how fragile human existence is, since it can drastically alter their lives. The characters are not in control of their own lives. Yet this does not mean that the individual is not responsible for his actions. On the contrary, the fact that even a minuscule event can lead to significant changes implies a huge responsibility. (*Multi-Protagonist* 35)

Indeed, chance is, to a greater or lesser extent, present in all the works analyzed here. The globalized world also seems reflected by the coincidental connections between characters and their plotlines. Besides, by underscoring "randomness," the narrative of multi-protagonist fiction in general "challenges traditional narrative patterns" (Azcona, "A Time" 112). Furthermore, what the characters want "is also affected by the subordination of individuals to an overarching structure where randomness and serendipity reign and accidental encounters control characters' paths" (115). They are thus depicted to be somewhat at the mercy of "fate," which rules over the characters' decisions that are unable to escape the whims of randomness. Furthermore, this echoes the powerlessness and inevitability associated with both fate and the process of globalization. Both seem to be inescapable, controlling and influencing every aspect of our lives. Azcona's article goes on to argue that "[a]s a result of the genre's almost

obsessive interest in the external and uncontrollable forces ruling people's lives, the position and power of the individual characters is seriously compromised in multi-protagonist films" ("A Time" 114) and, I would add, novels. Regardless of their plans and desires, the characters in these ensemble narratives seem to be mere "puppets" in the hands of those external forces.

In the narratives discussed in this dissertation, "fate" and its effects on the characters have a varying degree of relevance. It could be argued that serendipity is not as present or conspicuous in Soderbergh's *Traffic* as in the other films and novels. However, the whims of fate are still present in this cinematic narrative. An example of pure chance would be the fact that Robert Wakefield, the newly elected American drug czar, finds out that his daughter, Caroline, is indeed a drug addict precisely at that crucial moment in his professional and political career. This contrived coincidence underscores the message that drugs can certainly affect anyone and that the War on Drugs is not only fought at a social, political and economic level, but also in the bosom of families.

Next on the chart, *The Inheritance of Loss* can be considered somewhat more coincidental than Soderbergh's movie. The relationship Sai has with her Nepali tutor, Gyan, may be deemed as a product of "randomness." On the one hand, Gyan, who eventually enrolls in the GNLF party, rejects Western culture and its influence on Nepal and India. On the other hand, Sai, raised by English nuns at a convent after losing her parents in an accident in Russia, embraces English and Western culture (e.g. Christmas), as well as Indian traditions. The difference in opinions makes the young couple argue, drifting away from each other until they end up breaking up, symbolizing

the clash between the East and the West as well as the Westernized East.[115] Another possible case of serendipity is the parallelism between Jemubhai and Biju. Both of them have terribly negative and humiliating experiences in England and the United States respectively, where they drastically fail.[116] Conspicuously enough, this correlation explores the similar consequences that colonialism and the neocolonial globalization have had in India. However, there are a couple of significant differences between these two characters. The judge is not an "illegal" immigrant in England. Besides, he always does everything he can to achieve his goals: succeeding in England and becoming as English as possible. Nevertheless, "fate" makes this impossible, for he is never good enough, the English always reject him and see him as Indian, as the Other. No matter how hard he tries to hide his Indianness, it will always be a part of him, and that is the main source of his unbounded hate. Apart from the potential economic benefits that Jemubhai's experience in England may represent, honor for his family is one of the reasons why his family sends him to England in order to study; after all, "[g]etting a prestigious foreign education in England or America is one way to" achieve that honor (Mehta and Belk 402).

In contrast with Jemubhai, Biju is an "illegal" immigrant driven by push factors—lack of opportunities in his home country—and pull factors—a prospect of a better life offered by the United States. Biju ends up failing to succeed in the U.S.,

[115] Sai reflects the Westernized East through her behavior—e.g. the way she eats, the festivities and celebrations she enjoys, and her lifestyle as a whole—, echoing the fact that aspects of the Western culture have been adopted by the East.

[116] The book cover of the 2006 U.S. edition of *The Inheritance of Loss* shows two storks flying towards stormy, yet hopeful clouds (see fig. 4 in Appendix 1). These migratory birds that return during springtime, the season of rebirth, may allude to individuals who migrate to foreign countries. In the novel, as in the cover, there are two "storks," two migrants: Biju and Jemubhai. Just like the birds, they travel to other lands, each in their own time. In both cases, the trip to the West is a source of hope for a better life. However, their hope is slowly eroded by the "storm" they find in the U.S. and England: humiliation, discrimination, rejection, failure, all exercises of violence. Eventually, both protagonists return to their homeland, as the storks do. Precisely because storks migrate back during spring, they are connected to the idea of rebirth and a new life (babies are brought by storks, right?). In Biju's case, he has to start from scratch back in India after the insurgents strip him of all his belongings, even his clothes—he experiences a rebirth and, as if he were a newborn, he only has his family.

where he only manages to get low-wage jobs, and eventually returns to India, thus losing almost everything he has.[117] However, on this occasion, there is an element of choice. Even if Biju is not fully aware of the consequences of his actions in New York, the fact that he rejects adapting to the host culture and favors instead his inherited Indian traditions, values and beliefs comes from his own will. It is true that "fate" hinders Biju's success in the United States: he goes from one underpaid job to another, from a bad job to a worse one. The lack of opportunities, added to the overwhelming discrimination against him, pushes him towards his Indianness, his "inheritance." For instance, he rejects working for any restaurant that serves steak, beef and anything related to cows for religious reasons: "One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what" (Desai 136). At this point, "fate" is no longer the main force behind Biju's misfortune, but himself. David Wallace Spielman contends that Desai implies that Biju's approach to facing a different culture as an immigrant is far from ideal (82). The novel seems to advocate some sort of adaptation to the host culture in order to succeed, for it mentions that "[t]hose who could see a difference between a holy cow and an unholy cow would win" (Desai 136). Biju, however, fails to do so.

Serendipity plays a major role in the development of the remaining narratives. *Tropic of Orange* depicts this type of random events, with coincidental connections among the characters, even though the reader might be left with the feeling that they are

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[117] The name Biju is likely to come from the name Vijaya ("Biju"), which means "victory" (Norman 268). Ironically, Biju never wins anything in the novel. In fact, he loses everything. In the U.S., he is far from his family, he faces discrimination and humiliation, only has access to low-wage jobs and lives in terrible conditions. The American context and culture forces him to question his inherited values and knowledge too; and when he returns to India, the insurgents rob them of all his possessions. Also, the name Biju means "jewel," from the French word *bijou* ("Biju"). This highlights the boy's connection to his father, Panna Lal, whose name means "emerald" (Norman 264). Both these names come from Sanskrit, stressing the Indian background and inheritance. The name Biju is popular in Bengal ("Biju"), the region where the novel is set. Thus, this name being popular and widely used denotes a representation of Indians in general and their experiences as immigrants. This echoes Fredric Jameson's "national allegory," which refers to narratives that focus on ordinary individuals and their lives in order to explore and reflect the nation.

not such. The protagonists of Yamashita's novel are often connected through coincidental relationships and networks with other characters. For instance, Emi is connected to Buzzworm through her boyfriend Gabriel, who is friends with Buzzworm. A significant intertwining that seems to be triggered by serendipity is the relationship between Emi and Manzanar. Even though both are Asian American, the reader may not establish a connection between them, since she is an upper-middle class TV producer and Manzanar is a former surgeon who chooses to become a homeless conductor of the highway traffic symphony uniting everyone in L.A. It is not until the second half of the novel when the readers learn that Emi is Manzanar's granddaughter, which reminds us of the coincidental family reunion so common in traditional coincidence plots (Dannenberg 93). Additionally, Emi is a victim of a tragic fate. At the end of the novel, the U.S. government massacres the homeless people living in the vehicles that got caught in a traffic jam. During this violent attack, Emi, who is working covering the development of this community, is shot to death. Even if this could be interpreted as Emi being in the wrong place at the wrong time, this event shows that violence affects anyone regardless of their background.

Nevertheless, there is also an exception in *Tropic of Orange*. Arcangel is not a victim of randomness and pure chances. To cite an instance, it could be considered pure chance that, after mysteriously disappearing from Gabriel's orange tree in Mexico, the orange ends up in the hands of a woman. Later on, this woman "coincidentally" sells this worthless, out-of-season orange to Arcangel, who eventually takes the fruit to the American side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Another example is the intertwining of Arcangel and Rafaela, which also seems to be a coincidence. After finding out that her neighbor's son, Hernando, is involved with the traffic of organs, Rafaela tries to escape from him by leaving Mexico with her baby, Sol, Hernando's target. Fate seems to bring

Rafaela and Arcangel together, and it is him who helps Rafaela by safely taking Sol to the U.S. when she can no longer run away from Hernando. Are these intersections coincidences or just events previously planned by the prophetic Arcangel? This character always seems to be where he is supposed to in order to achieve his goals of reclaiming L.A. for Mexico and Latin America. He knew that the Tropic of Cancer could be felt in the orange. Hence, it is possible that he also knew about the itinerary of the fruit and where to intercept it. Moreover, Sol represents a new beginning, a new Latin American L.A., and his name, "sun," is obviously connected to the orange that embodies the Tropic of Cancer. It may be that Arcangel knew all of this in advance and planned his meeting with Rafaela and Sol accordingly, to make sure the baby would get to L.A. As a matter of fact, he seems to be able to foresee the future, so he may be able to make his own fate and influence the fate of others. Therefore, Arcangel might be an "alter-ego" of the author, who controls everything in the world of the novel. God-like, this character is aware of all the events happening in that fictional world. Furthermore, since Arcangel is indebted to the trickster tradition,[118] understanding him as Yamashita's alter-ego underscores her parodic and sarcastic style, visible, for example, in the wrestling fight, Emi's attitude toward multiculturalism, and so on. Besides, Arcangel's foreshadowing abilities are possible due to his mythical and angelical essence. These features are reflected in his name and when he grows a pair of wings during his fight against SUPERNAFTA.

[118] Trickster characters are common in the mythology and folklore of different cultures. They often show cleverness and intend to rebel against the authorities and the social norms to establish a new paradigm. Other frequent features of the trickster according to Bradley John Monsma are "shape-shifting, cross-dressing, disruption, playfulness, and liminality" (83). Tricksters often travel and are able to "move between heaven and earth," Lewis Hyde says, sometimes, being the "messenger of the gods." The scholar also states that the trickster is a "boundary-crosser" in many ways, including the blurring of the distinction between "sacred and profane." In the case of Arcangel, this human yet angelical character, who is both mundanely sexual and sacredly prophetical, travels and crosses the literal boundary of the U.S.-Mexico border in order to fight for a new world in which Latin America will no longer be oppressed. To face this battle, Arcangel shifts into the wrestler, El Gran Mojado, and, as the bringer of a new paradigm, he reflects the idea of the trickster helping to make the world a "hospitable place for human life" (Hyde).

As a god-like figure, Arcangel's actions are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it seems that, like the rest of the characters, he is also a victim of randomness, simply being at the right/wrong place at the right/wrong time. Yet, when we factor in this mythical aura that surrounds the prophetic Arcangel, it can be argued that everything he does is (pre)determined by himself. This predestination echoes the idea of doing God's will. As John Cowburn states, "some schools of spirituality" teach "that God has a definite and detailed plan for each of us, so that whenever a person has a choice there is always one alternative which God wants him or her to choose" (236). Arcangel's ambiguous actions are apparently the product of God's will—or the will of some divine force or being that seemingly controls and oversees everything. Arcangel's path and course of action are the one alternative that God wants the angelical wrestler to choose. At the same time, however, Arcangel seems to be completely in charge of his own actions—is he a god himself? The fact that he is a prophetic character might also suggest he has a messianic destiny. Arcangel not only represents current Latin America and the Global South in general. Being half a millennium old, he stands for the native populations of the American continent, especially Mexico (e.g. the Aztecs), as well as for the *criollos*, "persons of Spanish or European blood who had been born in the New World" (Poole 16). The peninsular Spaniards felt superior to the *criollos* and, obviously, to the natives. However, Stafford Poole explains that *criollismo* or the "criollo consciousness" almost becomes a national identity during the 17th century, and *criollos* find a "justification for an extravagant sense of divine election and messianic destiny" in the stories about the apparitions of the Virgen de Guadalupe (17). When Arcangel turns into El Gran Mojado, the wrestler's cape has the image of Guadalupe, underscoring her relevance in Mexico (Yamashita 258). The *criollos'* belief in their messianic destiny may thus be echoed by the messianic Arcangel. This character is

protected by the virgin, who has chosen him. As an archangel, he serves God directly. If so, then it can be argued that Arcangel actualizes God's ultimate plan of bringing a new world where the oppression endured by the Global South is gone. In order to fight for this, the chosen one, Arcangel, turns himself into a wrestler in a shift from heavenly traits to more earthly ones—this might also echo God taking human form as the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to die for humans' salvation. On the other hand, El Gran Mojado highlights the importance of wrestlers and *lucha libre* in Mexican popular culture, while he also resembles the figure of the superhero, whose superpowers might be reminiscent of God's omnipotence—the sacred and religious is brought together with the mundane and profane. Subsequently, Arcangel reflects what Cowburn claims: that God has a definite and detailed plan for everyone; the new world is God's will, and through/as Arcangel, God's will is realized. Therefore, what can be concluded is that Arcangel may be an exception; unlike the other protagonists of Yamashita's novel, he is not really a victim of chance.

In the film directed by González Iñárritu, coincidence is one of the most important elements. What could be more unplanned than an accident (except for "premeditated accidents," which are not accidents)? In *Babel*, the main example of randomness is the shooting of Susan by Yussef and Ahmed, which happens purely by accident, triggering the chain of events that are part of their plotlines—an American tourist shot in a largely Muslim country also seems an unfortunate coincidence. Furthermore, the lives of all the protagonists, who are from different countries, start crumbling in one way or another until reaching the climax: Susan has to survive and Richard does everything in his power to save her life; the Moroccan family try to escape from the police when they are going to be arrested for the shooting and Ahmed is severely wounded by a shot in the back; Chieko has to deal with her mother's suicide,

the lack of communication and connection with her father and the constant feeling of rejection, mostly due to her impulsive sexual advances (done in the hope of mitigating her loneliness, a maelstrom of emotions that leads her to a possible attempt of suicide at the end of the film); and Amelia and Santiago face serious problems when crossing the border to reenter the United States, as the immigration officers believe they have kidnapped Susan and Richard's children, since they do not have the authorization to take them out of the country, a decision that will get Amelia deported from the States once her "illegal" status as an immigrant is found out.[119] Furthermore, even though the events are deployed in such a way that resembles linearity and simultaneity, the narrative is not linear. The shooting of Susan actually takes place prior to Amelia's trip to Mexico and her eventual deportation. In fact, at the beginning of the movie, Amelia has a conversation with Richard on the phone. At this moment, she asks about the possibility of going to Mexico to attend her son's wedding, but Richard is intransigent and rejects her request precisely due to Susan's accident. However, the viewer is not aware of the order of the events until the very end of the movie. Here, it is interesting to bring up the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy, which "describes the habit of assuming a 'because' relationship of two events that happen to follow one another" (Keen 81). The relationship between the conversation and the accident—two events that are separated from each other—is exactly the opposite of this fallacy. Instead of leading the viewer to assume a consequent relationship between two events that actually have no connection, the spectator is misguided by the plot in *Babel*, thinking that the two events are not linked, even though the accident is indeed the reason behind Richard's intransigent

[119] In González Iñárritu's previous film, *21 Grams*, fate is a key component. The characters' paths cross due to a hit-and-run that intersects the plotlines of the ex-convict Jack, who accidentally runs over Christina's husband, Michael, and their daughters. The third character that is intertwined by serendipity is Paul, who needs a heart transplant. He receives Michael's heart, falls in love with Christina and then tries to kill Jack to fulfill her desire of revenge. González Iñárritu also explores this fragmentary narrative structure in the first film of his Death Trilogy, *Amores perros* (2000).

behavior with the maid. Also, it is not until a later stage in the narrative that Richard phones Amelia from the Moroccan village where the wounded Susan receives help. Hence, the viewer is tricked by the plot due to non-linear order of the events and by the separation—or distance—between the accident and the phone call as well as between the same phone call in both Amelia's and Richard's plot line. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that neither the accident nor the phone call in Richard's thread is an analepsis included in Amelia's plotline. Instead, they are interlaced and thus constitute an example of *entrelacement*.

In Haggis's film, *Crash*, which also revolves around accidents "fate" significantly affects the lives of the characters as well. This movie uses one of the easiest strategies to make characters interconnect: to "have them meet unexpectedly" (Goldknopf 43). These intersections are constantly marked by cross-racial interactions, for racism is one of the main themes in the movie. The "*zero level* of character knowledge regarding the forthcoming [coincidental] meeting" of which Dannenberg speaks applies here, since most of these characters are unaware of the existence of the other protagonists whom they tend to bump into (99). For example, Farhad, who is a victim of racism in the United States, coincidentally has a racist attitude as well, since he puts the blame for his misfortunes on Daniel, the Latino locksmith he had hired to fix the backdoor of his shop. Daniel is likewise a victim of racist prejudice at the house of the Cabots, a white, upper-class American couple. Here, Jean complains about having a Latino changing the locks; she thinks Daniel is a gang member because of his tattoos. Daniel, in turn, trying to make the most of his blue-collar job, moves to a safer neighborhood after a bullet goes through his daughter's window. Nevertheless, he fails too, since Farhad shoots at him and his daughter, although the gun only has blanks and no-one is harmed. Another example of coincidence and a twisted turn of events is the

relationship between Sergeant John Ryan and Christine. Ryan orders Christine and her partner, Cameron, to pull over, and, once out of the car, Ryan molests her, abusing his power. Later in the movie, Christine has a car accident. Coincidence comes on stage once again, as the one that helps her is Ryan, even though she rejects his aid at first. Ryan's previous behavior is somewhat redeemed here. Here, the device of "converging fates" is used: when there is no event frame that affects all the protagonists, the characters and their plotlines are more independent, yet serendipity intervenes to trigger or make possible the crisscrossing of their lives, usually through a traffic accident (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 97). Last but not least, Detective Graham Waters's brother, Peter, is paradoxically a criminal; along with Anthony, he carjacks the Cabots. Towards the end of the film, Peter is "accidentally" killed by another police officer, Tom Hansen, an event that also responds to (unconscious) racism. Influenced mainly by the fact that Peter is black, Tom thinks Peter is going to pull a gun from his pocket and shoots him right away—actually, Peter is reaching for his St. Christopher statuette, the patron of travelers, to show it to Tom, who, coincidentally, also has one.[120] Near the scene of the crime, as if it were planned by "fate," Waters and his partner Ria have another car accident, and Waters finds his brother's dead body—here, the *syuzhet* finally "explains" what happened in the *fabula* after the first few scenes of the movie, providing the required information to establish a linear narration. These characters are complete strangers at first, yet the spectators expect their paths to cross: "When a multiple-protagonist plot brings strangers together, the more that the narration emphasizes their separate lives, the more we expect significant encounters among them" (Bordwell, *Hollywood* 99).

[120] Ironically, regardless of carrying this statuette, both characters commit serious crimes.

As we can see in the previous examples, the coincidences and the manner in which the characters crisscross in *Crash* tend to be tragic and violent in some way, underscoring not only the title of the motion picture, but also Waters's reflection at the beginning of the film: "It's the sense of touch. […] In any real city, you walk, you know? You brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something" (00:02:49-00:03:21). Waters's reflection exemplifies Hsu's vision of ensemble films, where the "individual characters and suburban couples share a sense of urban or suburban isolation, but the camera exposes or at least intimates connections even when characters feel most alienated" (137). In the case of *Crash*, the characters are unified by the common experience of racism, either as victims or as perpetrators (137). The characters are also connected by the fact that almost all of them are shown driving. Even the main criminals of the film, Corbin points out, are carjackers, stressing the premise of the movie, "that driving alienates Los Angeles residents and that crashes bring them together" (66).

In *El Puente/The Bridge*, the reddening of the river which connects all the characters is also coincidental and imbued with mysticism. The novel explores how complete strangers are gathered all together by one single event and, in some cases, their lives intertwine. For instance, Sofia bumps into Soledad while they are walking among the crowd during the "red river" event (Romo 117). They do not know each other and, in fact, they are dealing with their own problems surrounded by the chaotic and suffocating crowd that is watching the river, a chaos that is momentarily stopped by the miracle of life—Sofia assists Soledad when delivering the baby Clara.[121]

[121] This coincidental crisscrossing between the two women would also fit the "converging fates" of which Bordwell speaks to a certain extent (*Hollywood* 97). The scene somewhat defies Bordwell's statement, for the red Rio Grande is the event frame that affects and connects all the protagonists. However, the two

Furthermore, the verb "to bump into" denotes coincidence, accident, surprise, it is an unexpected action that happens by chance: "Looking desperately for her [Sofia's] husband, she bumped into a woman, halfway down the bridge, who was completely soaked and bent over in pain" (Romo 117). All the characters, in addition, are connected by the river. Apart from the reddening of its waters, which involves the fourteen women, every character throws or drops something into the river (e.g. petals, the blood of the newborn baby, a bottle of holy water).[122] A piece of them becomes part of the river and they all become one; the characters and their plotlines are united all together by the waters of the Rio Grande.

Ensemble narratives, both in literature and in cinema, offer a more challenging narrative structure. They are not common in either media—even those narratives that do portray several characters tend to revolve around one single protagonist. Among mainstream Hollywood films, ensemble narratives are scarce, for mainstream movies are much more commercial than independent cinema, hence offering more simplistic and accessible narratives. As non-mainstream fiction, ensemble films do not get that much attention and support from most media institutions, since a large percentage of the audience prefers conventional mainstream narratives (Lacey 121). Moreover, in ensemble narratives, the characters are often unable to find "aid and comfort from those sources (personal, social, or institutional) we normally turn to in hours of need" (Hahn 53). This is connected to the difficulty or impossibility to explain the events that lead

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women are complete strangers and, despite the crowd around them, "fate" takes Sofia to coincidentally aid Soledad in her hour of need.

[122] In his novel, Romo echoes the fact that women are the ones who suffer the most on the border. They are the main labor force at *maquiladoras*, earning very little money while working in unhealthy conditions. Apart from being discriminated against by socioeconomic policies, these women have to endure sexism and gender violence, product of a highly patriarchal society. Being the scope of this thesis vast enough, gender issues will not be discussed here. However, for more information, see Michelle Téllez's article, "Community Struggle: Gender, Violence and Resistance on the U.S./Mexico Border," which explores the aforementioned conditions, analyzing the experiences of multiple women from a border community or *colonia* engaged in social activism.

the characters to extreme situations, and their consequent extreme reactions, such as Farhad's (failed) attempt to shoot Daniel and his daughter in *Crash*. Albeit not making drastic decisions, Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* also lacks support from other people. Other than the sporadic phone calls and letters he exchanges with his father, his friend Saeed Saeed is the main source of help Biju has, even though the Zanzibari often seems to be focused on his own well-being, which can be understandable too considering he needs to succeed in the United States. Biju's experience in the U.S. is rather solitary—in spite of being in a city as populated and globalized as New York, the boy is mostly all alone. The lack of explanation of the events that push the characters towards extremes reflects the globalized and complex world where we live in. On some occasions, the increasingly social, political and cultural interconnections seem to blur or multiply the reasons why a certain event takes place. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the structure, together with its prominent lack of chronological linearity, makes it particularly difficult for the viewer/reader to know what is going on; even a second (or subsequent) viewing/reading would be advisable not to miss details. *Crash*, for example, "may be difficult to follow" for first-time viewers, while the complex structure of the film becomes easier "after multiple viewings" (Orbe and Kinefuchi 140). Wolfgang Iser remarks that reading—and I would add watching—a narrative for a second time often allows for "familiar occurrences to appear in a new light," thus being "corrected" or "enriched": as readers/viewers, we "establish connections by referring to our awareness of what is to come, and so certain aspects of the text will assume a significance we did not attach to them on a first reading, while others will recede into the background" ("Reading" 285-86). At any rate, some time is required to "digest" or process the narrative.

As we have seen, ensemble narratives diverge from the traditional narrative structures in both cinema and literature, where there is "a cause and effect chain of events for the characters, these chains characterized by the goals and obstacles that drive the story of each character forward. These chains of events occur in a relatively clear space and time, the story often being told in a linear fashion and moving from location to location in a clear manner" (Cate 5). With the aforementioned concepts of *fabula* and *syuzhet* in mind, we can analyze the distancing from the traditional narrative structure, which was explained in section 2.2. The author can make transformations in the story, such as altering the chronological order of the events as in the case of *Crash* or *Babel*. In González Iñárritu's movie, this is particularly perceived when Amelia and Richard have a conversation on the phone. On the other hand, in Haggis's film, the first scene shows Graham and Ria after having a car accident as well as his reflections on the fact that Angelinos have lost their sense of touch, which implies a certain violence or hostility in the way these individuals interact with each other—this aggressiveness is highlighted by the next scene in which racial insults are exchanged by Ria and the other driver, as well as by a crime scene that the police is investigating there. In both cases, the spectator lacks the required information to fully understand the events. In the former, Richard's harsh attitude is comprehensible once the viewer realizes the conversation takes place after Susan's accident. In the latter, the first scene actually belongs to a later stage in the *fabula* and will be understood once the *syuzhet* "goes back" to "yesterday" and provides the necessary events until that first scene that is part of "today."

As has been anticipated, it is my contention that the puzzle-like structure of ensemble narratives is suitable to reflect our globalized world. The multiple plotlines allow for an exploration of a variety of issues from different perspectives, all of which

are similarly relevant as underscored by the several protagonists that characterize these narratives. The third part of this doctoral thesis will engage in a detailed analysis of the chosen narratives, paying particular attention to the issues of globalization and violence.

Part III – “Unpuzzling” the Fiction

The contemporary nature of our corpus or, to be more accurate, the specific historical period in which their stories are set, allows for an exploration of the effects the process of globalization. The temporal setting of our ensemble narratives spans from the second half of the 1980s in *The Inheritance of Loss*—“It was February of 1986” (Desai 8)—to the first years of the 21st century depicted in the films.[123] In addition, their ensemble structure, as discussed in the previous part, is suitable for an inclusive representation of multiple realities and experiences in our globalized world. Such a representation is also possible due to the fact that all the characters come from different countries, having a variety of ethnoracial and cultural backgrounds.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, most protagonists except for the Nepali, Gyan, are from India, whereas other characters in the novel are from different corners of the world. However, some of them—Jemubhai and Biju—migrate to the West—the U.K. and the U.S. respectively—, whereas others remain in their home country—Sai and Panna Lal. Thus, the chapters focus on these four characters, changing the locations and the periods of time in which the plotlines are set, especially Jemubhai’s, which is centered on the memories of his life in England. Yet, since this dissertation focuses on globalization in the American context, my analysis, albeit not ignoring the remaining plotlines, will be largely devoted to Biju and his experience as an undocumented immigrant in New York City. The 19-year-old boy is a victim of discrimination for being an immigrant, works a series of jobs that only someone in his precarious condition would take, rejects the U.S. American cultural mandate, thus embracing his

[123] It is not mentioned when González Iñárritu’s film is set, though, but we can surmise it is the early 2000s.

Indianness, and, above all, is disappointed by the impossibility to fulfill his hopes and dreams of a better life in the States.

González Iñárritu's film, *Babel*, also devotes one of its four main plotlines to an "illegal" immigrant working in the United States. In this case, it is a Mexican live-in maid, Amelia, who has been living in this country for sixteen years and works for Susan and Richard Jones looking after their house and children. Unlike Biju, she seems to have achieved her goals in the U.S., generally speaking, even though the viewer does not know what she had to go through during her first years in the States. The American family is the focus of another plotline set in Morocco, a country they are touring when Susan is accidentally shot by Yussef and Ahmed, two local children. These children belong to an impoverished family that live in the Moroccan desert and contrast with the middle-class Joneses.[124] Hence, the narrative is centered on the Moroccan family as well, who are connected to the remaining plotline through the rifle used to shoot Susan. This thread, set in Tokyo, follows Chieko, a Japanese deaf teenager that suffers rejection and loneliness not only due to her hearing disability, but also as a result of her distant relationship with her father, the original owner of the aforementioned rifle. The film thus reflects multiple realities in terms of social class, national and ethnoracial background, and hardships in life, all of them interconnected in a globalized world due to an accidental shooting.

Coincidences and violence are present in Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* as well. Set on the borderlands surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border, the text denounces the catastrophic consequences that *maquiladoras* have both on the environment and on the

[124] This last name may be a pun referring to the idiom "keep up with the Joneses," which means to want the same things other people want or do to avoid having inferior social relevance. In *Babel*, the Joneses can afford traveling, a housemaid, a nice house and other commodities, exactly what Amelia can never have.

lives of those subaltern individuals who work in them and live nearby.[125] In the selected corpus, several characters suffer the consequences of their social status, with some of them literally pushed to the margins of society underscoring their invisibility, as in Tomasita's case, in Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*. This novel is set on the borderlands, an area that is characterized by the cultural hybridity of the inhabitants, for whom crossing the border is part of their everyday lives. The contrasts between the U.S. and Mexico are echoed in the plotlines of fourteen women, who dwell in both countries and face different forms of violence in the area, fueled by poverty, pollution, overmilitarization of the border, sexism, and personal abandonment.

The surveillance of the border is also addressed by Soderbergh in his film, *Traffic*, although, on this occasion, the main focus is the smuggling of drugs across this political boundary. The violence associated to this profitable transnational business is present in the multiple threads that revolve around politicians, public forces, cartels, smugglers, dealers, and drug users. The narrative also alludes to the effects economic agreements such as NAFTA have on the trafficking of illegal substances, due to the lower taxes and the decrease in official controls on the transportation of goods across the border that this treaty brought about. Similarly to *El Puente/The Bridge*, Soderbergh's movie depicts the contrasts between Mexico and the U.S. Yet, unlike the other narratives in which the depiction of Mexican and other immigrants is neither trite nor entirely negative, the representation of the United States and Mexico in *Traffic* is, for the most part, rather simplistic and stereotypical. The southern neighbor is intrinsically associated with violence, crime, corruption, poverty and backwardness,

[125] The subaltern are those individuals relegated to the margins of the dominant power structure; they are silenced and ignored for belonging to the lower classes of society (Spivak 79). Another concept that is applicable to the impoverished and the homeless, albeit associated to race, is that of the "damné," discussed by Frantz Fanon in his well-known *The Wretched of the Damned*. Nelson Maldonado-Torres explains that the "damné" is "either invisible or excessively visible," existing "in the mode of not-being there, which hints at the nearness of death, at the company of death" (111).

while the U.S. is mostly the opposite or, if there is crime, it is something that could be improved if the interests of those who rule the world wanted it.[126] Also, the U.S. is shown to be the only one that seems to make an effort in the War on Drugs.

Haggis's film, *Crash*, focuses on the issues of discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes and racism. Among the multiple protagonists, we find both immigrant and non-immigrant characters from a variety of ethnoracial groups who, influenced by racist attitudes, constantly crash and clash against each other. The hostility the movie portrays is rather conspicuous, establishing the idea that racist prejudices operate pervasively, regardless of the individual's background. Set in the early 2000s in the globalized city of Los Angeles,[127] where migration and the exposure to immigrants are significant, the narrative highlights the fear and rejection felt towards "aliens" in the U.S., particularly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Furthermore, the text shows a general sense of frustration and anger, for several characters seem incapable of achieving their goals in life not so much because of their own shortcomings but because of certain social restrictions imposed on them. Nevertheless, all the characters have to endure racism, often orbiting the line between victim and perpetrator, usually being both.

[126] Except for corrupt American lawyers like Arnie Metzger and the African American drug dealer that takes advantage of Caroline's drug addiction, lawlessness in the U.S. remains hidden, as does poverty, or rather, it is "contained" in racialized ghettos/slums. For Susan Boyd, the African American trafficker and the white teen victim is a drug myth portrayed in Hollywood films: drug dealers, usually black and viewed as evil, immoral people, "lure innocent youth" (398). The remaining American characters are honorable and trustworthy law enforcers and, regarding drugs, they are only users. Robert and Caroline stand out. He intends to bring an end to the War on Drugs, yet facing obstacles along the way, mainly his daughter's drug addiction. Despite hiding his child's problem to protect his public image, he is portrayed as a caring father, with moral integrity. The only "good," non-white Americans are the DEA agents Ray Castro, a Latino who dies in an explosion, and his African American partner, Montel Gordon.

[127] The concept of "global city," coined by Saskia Sassen in 1991, refers to "centers for international trade and banking" that also have four major functions: "first, as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy; second, as key locations for finance and for specialized service firms, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic sectors; third, as sites of production, including the production of innovations, in these leading industries; and fourth, as markets for the products and innovations produced" (Sassen 3-4). The main examples are New York, London and Tokyo (5).

Los Angeles is also the main setting in *Tropic of Orange*, written in 1997 and presumably set in a similar timeframe—1990s. This novel also includes characters from different ethnoracial backgrounds all of them connected to L.A. in some way. Significantly, the structure of the novel denotes its globalized and transnational nature. The setting of the action is frequently determined by the titles of the chapters (e.g. "En México," "Tijuana via Singapore," "Hiro's Sushi," "Pacific Rim Auditorium"). More importantly, the titles of the chapters that introduce the characters make reference to their origin or the location where they live: Rafaela—"Not Too Far from Mazatlán," Bobby—"Koreatown," Emi—"Westside," Buzzworm—"Jefferson & Normandie," Manzanar—"Harbor Freeway," Gabriel—"Downtown," Arcangel—"Marketplace." Furthermore, Rafaela and Arcangel's "initial locations outside of the city [L.A.] set the tone for the South's revenge [pushing the border northwards and reclaiming L.A. for Mexico], as both characters eventually make their way back to Los Angeles" (Joo 256). In addition, each section corresponds to the days of the week and denotes "a variety of California cultural codes," according to Alvina E. Quintana: "the new age sentiment of 'Summer Solstice,' automobiles or 'driving' culture and commuting 'diamond lane,' and the 'Cultural Diversity' that demarcates this city at the edge of the North/South Border is amplified with specific reference to the East/West 'Pacific Rim' border" (222). The outline of the contents of the novel found in "HyperContexts" is another reference to the transnational quality of the novel, since the outline "is formatted so that it can be read horizontally as well as vertically. Thus, the format blurs Japanese- and English-reading conventions" (Quintana 222). With the United States as one of the main actors in the process of globalization as well as the one setting that all the selected narratives have in common, let me open this textual analysis delving into one of the

most significant representations of the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico in this corpus: a scene where two wrestlers fight over the future of the world.

3.1. David vs Goliath: Portraying Structural Violence

In *Tropic of Orange*, the structural violence associated with economic globalization, in particular the neocolonial relationship between United States and Mexico, is symbolized by the fight between El Gran Mojado/Arcangel and SUPERNAFTA.[128] As Arcangel himself explains, he was born over five hundred years ago (1492) in the New World (Yamashita 198-89), a clear reference to the European colonization of America. Thus, he stands and fights for those who have been and are subjugated to the power of the colonial and neocolonial empires. To battle his archrival, SUPERNAFTA, he turns into the wrestler, El Gran Mojado. This transformation is also important. Mojado refers to "wetback," a pejorative way of calling (undocumented) Mexican immigrants in the U.S. Alluding to the crossing of the Rio Grande, the term dates from the 1920s and was mostly used during the Operation Wetback in 1954 and the rest of the decade (see section 1.1). With the main goal of reclaiming the City of Angels for Mexico and Latin America in general as well as achieving the liberation of

[128] The 1997 book cover also alludes to this relationship, foregrounding as it does the opposition between a highly industrialized area and a more rural one (see fig. 5 in Appendix 1). The former takes up almost half of the painting, whereas the latter, only one quarter. Moreover, it is barely visible, since the giant orange covers most of it. The industrialized area represents the L.A. and the Global North. At the center of the drawing, there are tall buildings, symbolizing capitalism, the U.S., the Global North, and TNCs, connecting with the content of the novel. Albeit not obvious, this hints at the structural and personal violence suffered by Latin America mostly, an issue addressed in the narrative. More significantly, these tall buildings are in front of the giant orange, a symbol of Mexico and Latin America, which may be the reason why the orange/sun covers most of the rural area. This clarifies the confrontation between the U.S. and Latin America, which is expanded in the narrative. In contrast to the city, the rural, "uncivilized" area stands for Mexico/Latin America. In this section of the drawing there are very few buildings, and the implied violence refers to poverty or a lack of financial resources as opposed to the urban area. Moreover, there seem to be harvest fields as well, possibly alluding to the exploitation of natural resources in Latin America.

the "neo-colonies" from the U.S. oppressor, Arcangel travels across the American continent to reach L.A. On his trip, Arcangel moves the U.S.-Mexico border northwards—the border is symbolized in the narrative by the Tropic of Cancer and an off-season orange from Mexico.[129] This endeavor alludes to the Mexican territories prior to being lost to the U.S., after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which put an end to the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). Once Arcangel arrives at his destination, migrating to the territory of his enemy, there is only one more obstacle to overcome and defeat: the imperialistic and violent nature of the United States itself, symbolized by the wrestler SUPERNAFTA. In this endeavor, violence is answered with more violence: Arcangel becomes another wrestler, El Gran Mojado, and fights his opponent to the death. Nevertheless, before exploring this battle, it is worth describing other events that take place on Arcangel's way to the U.S.

Before reaching L.A., pushing northward the U.S.-Mexico border and its allegorical counterparts, the Tropic of Cancer and the orange, Arcangel stops at the "Cantina de Miseria y Hambre" to have lunch (Yamashita 130). This five-hundred-year old prophet, who functions as an allegory of Latin American peoples, encounters that some of the customers "were miserable, some hungry, some miserable *and* hungry" in a case of structural violence (130). Regardless of the fact that he is still in Mexico, the food offered at the restaurant is typically associated with the American cuisine,

[129] As Melissa Sexton states, the orange "is the product not only of global trade but also of climate change" (24). The changes the fruit will bring in the hand of Arcangel have global origins and consequences, stressing the interconnection of characters and events depicted in the narrative. It is also striking how the book cover of the novel represents the U.S.-Mexico border: a wall with barbed wire on top of it (see fig. 5 in Appendix 1). This wall separates the industrialized area from the rural one, the Global North from the Global South, the U.S. from Mexico. Thus, this wall not only represents structural, personal and cultural violence itself, it also echoes the violence present along the border: "illegal" crossings, trafficking, deportation, overmilitarization, and abuse of different sorts.

"hamburgers, Fritos, and catsup"[130] (131). The tavern is usually full of people, who can only afford junk food. This constitutes a case of both structural and slow violence: the low wages of these individuals translate into a low-quality diet, which increases health risks that may result in morbidity and death. Furthermore, the variety of beers offered at the restaurant are all American (e.g. Bud Light, Budweiser, Schlitz, Miller, Hamms). When Arcangel asks for Mexican beer, the waiter offers him "Coca-Cola or Pepsi" (131). The national Mexican brands have been ousted by the imported American ones, and the food everyone is eating at the cantina is also U.S. American.[131] This could also be argued to be structural violence driven by contemporary economic globalization, since these large corporations from the United States end up taking possession of the Mexican market to the detriment of local companies. Only Arcangel is eating traditional Mexican food: "Arcangel looked around at all the hungry and miserable people in the cantina—all eating hamburgers, Fritos, catsup, and drinking American beers. Only he, who had asked the cook the favor of cooking his raw cactus leaves, ate nopales" (131).[132] The scene reflects the success of the fast food chains and diet, which are "one of the main features of global popular culture" and constitute a case of "'culinary imperialism' due to its invasive and destructive nature, not only regarding health issues, but also in terms of its socio-cultural implications," for several "traditional cultural values" are either lost or weakened, and leading to the "impoverishment of local food businesses" (Torreiro 61). Therefore, the result of the overwhelming expansion of fast food restaurants is a "homogenization of the food market all over the world, with

[130] *Catsup* is another name for *ketchup*. Despite the Spanish/Mexican name, Fritos are corn chips produced by an American company. One of its representative mascots was Frito Bandito, who used to steal Fritos, and was inspired on the stereotypical Mexican bandit in western films.

[131] This ousting of Mexican or traditional food is also represented in Romo's novel when Pura flies from Mexico City back to the border. Even though readers ignore the name of the airline or where it is from, the food Pura is given on the plane is not Mexican—ham sandwich, cheese sandwich, Coke and pickles (Romo 86). Airlines frequently offer food produced by TNCs, such as Coca-Cola, even if it is a domestic flight.

[132] A nopal is a vegetable made from the fleshy pads—the "leaves"—of Opuntia cacti, after removing the needles.

(almost) omnipresent food chains like McDonald's and products—with aggressive campaigns—such as Coca-Cola" (61). Arcangel finds an example of the Americanization in action in that cantina. Moreover, the fact that the only food available is fast food alludes to the American fast-food restaurants, such as, McDonald's. As we saw in section 1.1, some globalization scholars claim that the process of McDonaldization aims at homogenization: "It tends to reduce diversity in the means of consumption" (Ritzer and Stillman 37). Despite the Global North having a globalist perspective that is supposed to include everyone, the developed countries still remain central and are the ones that benefit the most from globalization.[133] Sue-Im Lee contends that "the omnipresence of American fast food and the domination of American brands are reminders of the rift that make the globalist 'we' impossible" (510-11). Thus, in her analysis of Yamashita's novel, she argues that "[t]he waiter and the diners of this roadside restaurant in Mexico exemplify an absolute immersion and identification with the American fast food fare and brand dominance" (511). These Mexicans have internalized the neocolonial power that the U.S. wields in both economic and cultural realms.

The influence of neocolonialism and the predatory and structurally violent behavior of TNCs have on such an important cultural element as food can also be perceived in Romo's novel. The Raisinets that Estela buys combine a Mesoamerican tradition with modern TNCs and "neo-empires." During pre-Columbian times, people in what later became Mexico may have often eaten raisins covered in chocolate, hence the native reference.[134] Raisinets is a brand mass produced by Nestlé. Although Nestlé is

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[133] The U.S. and mainly American TNCs are the ones that have been benefited the most by globalization in spite of Donald Trump's criticism against this phenomenon as well as the global trade and economic agreements. For an overview of the anti-globalization stance of the Trump administration, check Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Cathleen Cimino-Isaacs' essay, "Trump versus Globalization."

[134] Chocolate-covered foods and cocoa beverages were largely consumed in Mesoamerica. For more information, check John Edward Staller and Michael Carrasco's *Pre-Columbian Foodways*.

from Switzerland, it is one of the main food corporations in the world. Since most TNCs are from the Global North, Raisinets would represent a combination of the Mexican tradition with the modern Global North, in this case, the United States. Even more conspicuously, Patricia Bowles explains that Raisinets are one of the best-selling candies in U.S. history and they used to be made by the American company Blumenthal Brothers Chocolate Company, the original producers of the candy first introduced in 1927.[135] The candy represents the mixture of Mexican and American traditions, an example of a neocolonial slow violence in which there is a cultural and material imposition exerted by the American company on the Mexican tradition.

Moving back to the ultimate fight between SUPERNAFTA and El Gran Mojado, this graphically violent battle is the high point of the critique of NAFTA, an agreement that, as discussed in section 1.1., turned out to be much more profitable for the Global North, especially the United States.[136] In S. Lee's terms, this type of trade policies are a "highly marketable—indeed, invaluable—concept in the First World's culture industry" (502). Whether the agreement is fruitful or not would be measured in figures, yet the fact that it becomes a "market concept," a market product, is more relevant. By adopting these policies, countries from the Global North would be helping the Global South, thus resulting in a "global interconnectedness and oneness," a "globalist 'we'" (502). However, in this discourse, the Global North benefits from being in a central position as those in charge of helping and saving others. The rest of the world still depends on them.

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[135] The history of this candy also reflects the power of TNCs, leading to the disappearance of small, local companies. Blumenthal Brothers Chocolate Company was a family-owned business. However, in 1984, it was bought by one of the largest food and drink companies in the world, Nestlé (Bowles).

[136] During the negotiations on this agreement, Stiglitz states that "Mexico brought down its tariffs, on average, by 10 percentage points," while the U.S. "by only 4 percentage points—and the United States was allowed to keep in place its corn subsidies," which has been largely detrimental to the "poorest in Mexico, its corn farmers" (23).

In relation to this dependence on the Global North—particularly, the United States—, the manner in which SUPERNAFTA presents his reasons to fight makes him look as a heroic figure, protector and savior of multiculturalism, children, the whole of humankind: "'Today, my fight represents a challenge, not only to that Big *Wetback* [sic],' he spit, 'in the other corner, but to all the children of the world. To that multicultural rainbow of kids out there'" (Yamashita 257). Despite insulting his opponent before spitting, his splendid speech is supported by his serious, self-confident—but arrogant—attitude: "SUPERNAFTA never smiled. Humorless, he pointed his finger at the camera and intoned his cold bluster" (257). Nonetheless, the promises SUPERNAFTA makes during his speech represent an evident parody of how the American government "sold" and vindicated NAFTA, only unveiling its positive aspects (Wegener 90): "'And what's the future? […] It's a piece of the action! And that's what progress is all about […] How about twelve percent? You don't think twelve percent is enough? Look at it this way. What's twelve percent of a billion dollars? One hundred twenty million! That's multimillions […] It's your cut'" (Yamashita 257). In addition, his promises also echo those made by the proponents of globalization, a process that, according to its supporters, would benefit everyone: if workers and the poor accepted measures such as downsizing or the suppression of social protection, they would also be able to reap profits (Brecher et al. 4). SUPERNAFTA's words, "It's your cut," reflects what Stiglitz describes in *Globalization and its Discontents:* a promise of an economic growth by reducing or eliminating regulations and tax rates would be beneficial for all, "and even if those at the top got a larger share of the pie, everyone, even those at the bottom, would prosper" (xxxix-xl). Nevertheless, the outcome of these changes has been the opposite: "Inequality grew even more than expected, but growth slowed, with the result that in countries such as the United States, the vast majority have

seen incomes virtually stagnated" (xl). SUPERNAFTA mesmerizes his audience by promising "a piece of the action," which seems to be enough to change the mind of half of them, who start cheering for him (258). Consequently, it is implied that the half of the audience that accepts the deal offered by the American wrestler are enticed and persuaded to become compliant "compradors," in the Marxist sense of the word: in exchange for that enticing small "piece of the action," which would pave the way for them to attain a better or more privileged position, they will take whatever SUPERNAFTA gives them, indirectly allowing the United States to take advantage of the deal and get the most benefits. In addition, the U.S. contender expounds on what progress is: "There's an entire machine of banking computers and technological research and development that's working day and night to put together this billion-dollar package so you can have your cut. That's progress working for you. Some people don't want progress. My opponent doesn't want progress" (257). The progress SUPERNAFTA speaks of is strongly connected to technology and capitalism—banks, money, materialism, consumerism—associated mainly with the U.S. political and economic system. Therefore, if the United States stands for progress, El Gran Mojado is demonized for opposing it.

After SUPERNAFTA's promising speech, the figures he presents might be impressive enough to convince half of the audience, nevertheless, the "piece of the action" obtained by Mexico—this applies to the Global South as a whole—does not live up to the great expectations that have been raised. Personal violence tinges the event when SUPERNAFTA starts uttering offensive words and insults to his opponent. This verbal violence acts as a provocation, inciting a response from the other wrestler, also in

terms of personal violence. Dressed as or transformed into El Gran Mojado,[137] Arcangel uses his political poetry. No tonly are these poems a formal device employed to identify Arcangel's chapters, they also may allude to the storytelling and song traditions of pre-Columbian times. On this particular occasion, the goal of his political poetry is to criticize the supposed advantages that NAFTA would bring to Mexico:

> *The myth of the First World is that*
>
> *Development is wealth and technology progress.*
>
> *It is all rubbish.*
>
> *It means that you are no longer human beings*
>
> *but only labor.*
>
> *It means that the land you live on is not earth*
>
> *but only property.*
>
> *It means that what you produce with your own hands*
>
> *is not yours to eat or wear or shelter you*
>
> *if you cannot buy it.* […]
>
> *This is not about getting a piece of the action,*
>
> *about dividing into tiny pieces what is always*
>
> *less and less.*
>
> *How will ninety-five percent of us*
>
> *divide twelve percent?* (Yamashita 259; italics in the original)

[137] The wrestling match is narrated in a comic yet violent tone, while they are fighting to the death. The fighters move on the ring as if they were "dancing," resorting to all sorts of wrestling moves and different techniques, such as launching a missile or growing a pair of wings (Yamashita 261-62).

According to Arcangel, the advantages are not such when the efforts of the Mexicans are not rewarded, and the rich are not willing to share enough wealth and power. Even though these laborers are the ones working the fields and producing commodities, they will not have the right to reap most of the benefits and enjoy the results of their efforts if they are unable to afford what they make. Their lives are reduced to the mere production of goods, goods that they cannot own if they cannot purchase them. They work for the profits and benefits of those who do have power. The majority of the "action" stays in the hands of the elites, with leftovers divided among the impoverished and the middle-classes. The modernization and technological progress Arcangel speaks of is thus enjoyed only by that five percent. The poem has obvious (neo)Marxist inflections: people are perceived as labor. Individuals and their labor capacity or labor power—the capability of working and producing services or goods—are commodities. In exchange for a salary, people sell their labor power. As Friedrich Engels explains in *The Principles of Communism*, labor is a commodity like any other and, as such, it is priced following the same rules applied to other commodities. Moreover, he points out that the "worker receives for his labor not more than is needed" for him/her to go on producing, in other words, they get the minimum that "prevents the class of workers from dying out" (8). As the poem mentions, what these workers produce does not belong to them unless they can afford it, which they generally do not. Furthermore, the prophet explains the consequences of the neocolonial exploitation exerted by the U.S., the true intentions of his opponent. When mentioning the actual meaning of development, he repeats the structure of the lines, exclusively devoting a line to each of the true consequences: the fact that humans—Mexicans in this case—are reduced to their work capacities, the land being property, and that which is produced by laborers is for them to use if and only if they have the purchasing power. In addition, one single line is also devoted to stress the

fact that the leftovers meant to be shared among the impoverished consistently decrease. By being enforced, NAFTA would eliminate a large number of the obstacles in the circulation of capital and labor: "the North has come South" (Yamashita 132). Thus,

> the South has become another marketplace for the North's goods. The South functions as a source of raw material, of low-wage work force who earn a fraction of what their counterparts earn in the North, who work without health care and environmental and legal protection, whose small businesses and farms cannot compete with the massive dominance of US products in the domestic market. (S. Lee 512)

In a largely capitalist system, human beings become numbers to whom a specific task is assigned and individuals are not entitled to own anything if they are not able to afford it. The financial support Mexicans would get from NAFTA is constantly reduced, as El Gran Mojado mentions, and despite being a large amount of money, it would have to be distributed among an even larger number of people. In "The US-Mexico Borderlands Write Back: Cross-Cultural Transnationalism in Contemporary US Women of Color Fiction," Claudia Sadowski-Smith explains that "NAFTA predominantly benefits transnational corporations and elites in the U.S. and Mexico": on the one hand, "it has made U.S. borders more porous so that U.S. capital can travel freely into Mexican *maquiladoras*," and, on the other hand, it has "contributed to fixing the position of various U.S. racialized groups and large parts of the Mexican population, especially its indigenous people, at the bottom of a global socio-economic hierarchy" (94).

Despite being marketed as beneficial for Mexicans too, NAFTA favors social inequity, hindering social climbing, and nurturing racism on both sides of the border. Besides, the agreement allows a large amount of money to be injected in the *maquiladora* business, in which thousands of Mexicans work for low salaries. As we

saw, Mojado alludes to the central role the Global North plays in aiding underdeveloped nations:

> *I do not defend my title for the*
>
> *rainbow of children of the world.*
>
> *This is not a benefit for UNESCO.*
>
> *We are not the world.*
>
> *This is not a rock concert.* (Yamashita 259)

These lines refer to the 1985 song "We Are the World," by USA for Africa, integrated by the most important American musicians at that time. Even though "USA" stands for "United Support of Artists," this acronym refers to their country of origin as well. The United States is more central in that "we" than the rest of the world. Consequently, Kooijman underscores that this "charity pop record," which turns "charity into another form of consumption," was not only meant to "raise western awareness of the Ethiopian famine and to collect money for aid" (21, 24). The song's purpose was, above all, to "showcase [the] American superstars who function as ideological ambassadors of American values such as freedom and democracy within a free market economy" (21). Nonetheless, it "is an optimistic fantasy of a multicultural world that promises a happy ending to an African tragedy," thus failing to explicitly address the "political reality of African famine and poverty" as well as "its causes or possible solutions"—the music video does not even show images of the famine, "only the smiling faces of the American pop stars recording their message in the studio, singing about the promise of a better future, as 'we' are all God's children sharing one world as a family" (23-24). In addition, the idea of humanity being one big family is underscored by the fact that "[o]ld and young, male and female, black and white" singers, "with their specific

musical genres, ranging from soul, country, and gospel, to folk, pop, and rock," become part of this charity record, thus being "a true celebration of American multiculturalism," which acts "as a mirror of the world, where people of all nations come together as one to pursue their common American Dream" (Kooijman 23-24). The idea of a multicultural world and the rainbow of children, with black and white and everything in between, is precisely what SUPERNAFTA boastfully claims to fight for. Nevertheless, Arcangel does not fall for SUPERNAFTA's (empty) promises of a better future, similar to the promises made by the song "We Are the World," as Kooijman contends. Furthermore, Arcangel is not so much mocking "the First World's philanthropic enterprise at large," as he is criticizing the ease "with which the globalist 'we' circulates in the First World's political, economic, and cultural discourse," a "globalist we" required for the First World's "narrative of 'progress' and 'development'" (S. Lee 502). In other words, countries from the Global North resort to the "global we" in order to justify, promote and define what "progress" and "development" are for these nations. Promises of a share of the wealth are used to maintain the neocolonial relations with developing countries, the very same promises the American wrestler makes to the audience in the narrative. Therefore, by claiming that "*We are not the world*," El Gran Mojado is denying being like the United States. He is wise enough to understand and see the "big picture": the slow/structural violence exerted by the U.S. on Mexico and Latin America or, in other words, the Global North on the Global South. Hence, he rejects using the "global we" for his own benefit, as the U.S. authorities have done.

The parodic tone employed in the personification of both the US and Mexico involves their appearance as well. SUPERNAFTA is depicted as a cyborg fighter, thus emphasizing the technological sophistication and the military power of the United States. Besides, the way he stands is reminiscent of heroes in American films and TV

shows: "The flipping photographic image of a masked man in a titanium suit with a head of raging fire somersaulted and spread itself neatly over each screen. He stood, arms crossed and legs spread like the Terminator or Johnny Mnemonic or the Five Million Dollar Man…" (Yamashita 256-57). The characters that SUPERNAFTA resembles are all cyborgs, either a robot with the appearance of a human like the Terminator—he even alludes to the famous catchphrase "Hasta la vista, baby"—or humans with bionic implants, as was the case of Johnny Mnemonic and Steve Austin, the hero in the series actually named *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Moreover, the narrator points out that "[n]ational heroes like SUPERNAFTA were usually replicants of some sort" (257). American heroes are never fully human; instead, they are the product of human technology and science; they are artificial beings as opposed to the more natural, human like El Gran Mojado.[138] In SUPERNAFTA's case, the warmth of his words, even though feigned, is associated with his apparent human side, while his true arrogant self is symbolized by the coldness of his machine-like body. However, his mechanical side is emphasized to make the difference between both fighters even more obvious. Furthermore, the novel alludes to the "replicants," the cyborgs from the film *Blade Runner*.[139] Other examples of SUPERNAFTA's bionic features would be his teeth, which look like "microchips" (261). More importantly, the "final weapon" SUPERNAFTA uses to kill his rival at the end of the battle is a "missile launcher," accounting for and foregrounding American military power (262). The large number of weapons SUPERNAFTA has alludes to U.S. military forces and the overmilitarization

[138] In relation to this artificiality, Donna Haraway claims that "[l]ate twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines" (293-94). The cyborg is a combination of both the artificial and the natural.

[139] *Blade Runner* is based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The term "replicants," however, is only used in the film version. In the novel, these cyborgs are called "androids." As Hee-Jung S. Joo explains, Ridley Scott's motion picture is a L.A. disaster movie that also deals with multiculturalism in Los Angeles, albeit portraying it as the cause for disaster instead of vindicating it, as *Tropic of Orange* does (246).

of the U.S.-Mexico border, and constitutes a threat of the utmost violence and destruction. The structural violence of the system will be translated into personal violence against Mojado in this allegorical wrestling match. Put differently, the structural violence the United States as well as other world powers exert on developing countries is echoed by this personal, one-to-one fight.

In the other corner, El Gran Mojado is not only a parody of the stereotypical Mexican wrestler, but also of its "Americanization and [the] self-mockingly Hispanic interpretation of it" (Wegener 91). This fighter wears "a ski mask of camouflage nylon, blue cape with the magic image of Guadalupe in an aura of gold feathers and blood roses, leopard bicycle tights, and blue boots"; besides he stands, "arms crossed and legs spread like a Power Ranger or a Ninja Turtle or Zorro" (Yamashita 258). His clothes are extremely colorful, and the virgin of Guadalupe brings echoes of Mexican religious beliefs (see description of Arcangel's attire in section 2.4). Moreover, he "appeals to a transnational, pan-American resistance against the policy of NAFTA in his speech, he also ironically and playfully invokes the stereotype of a lascivious Latin-American *machismo* [sic], thus winning his [male] audience's sympathy and laughter" (Wegener 91). Apart from his stereotypical Latin American features, Mojado is also compared to heroes like *Zorro,* whose story is set in Los Angeles too, and fights against villains that want to rule California. Nonetheless, such superheroes stand out for their "ridiculous" outfits, which cover the characters' faces with either masks or helmets. The battle between the wrestlers is thus not only pervaded by violence but also by a parodic type of humour, a sarcastic style that Yamashita chooses for the depiction of the United States and Latin America in order to advocate that the oppression that the former exerts on the latter should end.

Furthermore, the opposition between both fighters involves their very nature too. While SUPERNAFTA as I mentioned before, is an artificial being, its foil, El Gran Mojado, has a human appearance but morphs into a miraculous winged angel during the battle (262), doing honor to his name Arcangel. In the end Arcangel is not a machine, but he is not natural either. Possessing a certain "divine" nature, he can even be seen as the emblem of "purity," which would reinforce his prophetic nature. This would also reinforce the contrast between technological and mythical realms.[140] Besides, as a prophet, El Gran Mojado conjures up the image of the archangel Gabriel, who announced the birth of Jesus; in Arcangel's case, he guides Mexicans to the birth of a new City of Angels.[141]

The details of the financial supporters of the "show" also deserves close reading. The wrestling event is "[s]ponsored by a generous grant from the Ministry of Multicultures. Brought to you by the CIA, the PRI, the DEA, and the INS" (Yamashita 256). The grant from the fictional "Ministry of Multicultures" denotes the lip service the U.S. government pays to ethnoracial diversity. This superficial attention is another misleading strategy that the government uses to gain popular support. It would work much like the "globalist 'we'" that Sue-Im Lee discusses in her aforementioned article. In addition, the Ministry of Multicultures contrasts with the other sponsors of the battle. These are real government institutions: the Central Intelligence Agency in charge of the

[140] While technology is a product of scientific advance, myths are related to pre-technological magic and fantasy, usually providing irrational explanations for unknown occurrences, generally based on deities or otherworldly creatures and beings. As defined by Mary Magoulick, "[m]yths are symbolic tales of the distant past (often primordial times) that concern cosmogony and cosmology (the origin and nature of the universe), may be connected to belief systems or rituals, and may serve to direct social action and values."

[141] The narrative alludes to the birth of Los Angeles. Missionaries built the Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in 1771 and, ten years later, El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles de Porciúncula was founded nearby. Thus, Arcangel acts as the founder of a new Los Angeles, referring to the actual origins of the city. The fact that the mission that was built in the area was called Gabriel Arcángel also points at Gabriel, who builds a traditional Mexican house in Mazatlán to connect with his Mexican background. Wanting a traditional rancho refers to that 18th century mission. Besides, the first settlers of the future Los Angeles area were the Tongvas or Gabrieleños.

American national security, the Drug Enforcement Administration that investigates the illegal traffic of drugs, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which used to handle the regularization of immigrants in the United States. The PRI might refer to the conservative Pacific Research Institute from California that supports a free economy and receives funding from corporations such as Pfizer or Exxon Mobile (Ungar), or to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, a Mexican political party that undisputedly governed the country from 1929 to 1989 (Rama and Stargardter). The first defeat in state elections suffered by this Mexican political party happened in Baja California, which could allude to the Mexican loss of the area that later became the U.S. Southwest. The region that is now California used to be part of Mexico before it lost the territory to the United States. Therefore, the PRI not being able to win the elections in Baja *California* might echo the Mexican defeat against the northern neighbor.

The scene narrating the wrestling match combines the violence that is characteristic of such an event with humor. At a certain moment, the very description of the battle is steeped in a tone of slapstick comedy: "SUPERNAFTA lowered his head and singed Mojado's behind. Mojado, in turn, ran after NAFTA with a bucket of water, followed by a frantic referee" (Yamashita 261). Yet, right after this moment of comic relief, the fighter from the North plays one of his tricks to try to defeat his opponent: "As everyone speculated and feared, SUPERNAFTA holographed himself into three but Mojado instinctively knew the real villain" (261). The wrestler becomes the three members of the trade: the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Even though Arcangel is read as a symbol of Latin America, Mexico and their inhabitants, perhaps "Mexico" refers to its government on this occasion rather than the people; just like the U.S., represented by SUPERNAFTA, the Mexican government also takes advantage of its citizens. Nevertheless, Mojado is smart enough to recognize the true enemy, the United

States. However, later on, due to the brutal violence they have exerted on each other, both rivals are exhausted, injured, and bloody, and they look alike, they are the same: "*no one could distinguish one fighter from the other*" (262; italics in the original); after all, both resort to violence as a solution. This passage constitutes an allegorization of violence, in which their personal physical conflict/fight echoes the larger social conflict/violence.

However, in spite of SUPERNAFTA's victory, as Wegener claims (91), the battle does not have the satisfying, conclusive ending readers might expect. Instead, it is abruptly finished, and, apparently, no significant change seems to come from the fight, for the chapter closes by highlighting that "[s]omewhere the profits from the ticket sales were being divided. A new champion was being groomed" (Yamashita 263). The wrestling match was profitable for the sponsors, which, in Wegener's view, confirms the "discursive propaganda machine that is targeted on concealing the sheer economic rationality of its agenda" (91). In other words, the "Ultimate Wrestling Championship" was about money. Robin Blyn states that the "only winners" of this battle are the "corporation that owns the Pacific Rim Auditorium [where the event is held], the television sponsors, and the governmental agencies and political parties that assure their profits" (205). Furthermore, the novel ends on a bittersweet note. In spite of Arcangel's victory, which seems to hint at a new beginning, the final sentence does leave us with a feeling of history repeating itself. The battle between these two fighters closes "another fifty-two-year cycle" (262)—echoing the Aztec calendar—, but a new one begins. New wrestlers, new champions, are getting ready for the fight. Both the desire of making profit ad violence are not over yet and are unlikely to ever stop. This implies that, even if it can be argued that the new paradigm for which Arcangel sacrifices himself seems to

be possible, the domination exerted by the oppressors and the resistance from the subjugated will eventually continue.

One final comment about this "grandiose" event would concern the place where it is held: "the Pacific Rim Auditorium […] at the very Borders" (Yamashita 256). The name of the auditorium is ironic in this context, for what is about to happen is not "pacific," peaceful, besides "Rim" is a (almost) a homophone of "ring." Yamashita takes this fight to the borders, where the contact between cultures is more notorious. Moreover, she broadens the scope of the NAFTA dispute to include the nations involved in the Pacific Rim.[142] Arif Dirlik argues that what the term means is not clear. From a geographical perspective, "Pacific Rim (or Pacific Basin) refers to societies situated on the boundaries of the Pacific Ocean and within it" (Dirlik 3). However, he points out that the term usually spans "what used to be called East Asia" (3). He states that "economic, social, political, military and cultural" relationships are also fundamental in the meaning of the term (4). Furthermore, the "'Pacific Rim' began as a parallel initiative to the European economic community [sic] and anticipated the formalization of the North American Free Trade Agreement" (R. Lee 235). Whatever the case may be, the United States has also been involved in the development of the most prominent economies of the region, namely Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, "even if that meant the ambivalent recognition that capitalism had been de-Westernized" (R. Lee 235). Yet, not every East Asian country has been able to improve their economy. As is the case of the American continent, the Pacific region comprises "some of the most successful examples of capitalist development in the world," but also "some of the sorriest products of the capitalist world system

[142] In her article "Mapping L.A.: Teaching Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* through GIS," Anastasia Lin includes a detailed world map where the Pacific Rim is delimited: roughly speaking, all the Asian, Oceanian and American countries whose coasts are bathed by the Pacific Ocean.

[which] now survive as nuclear and chemical dumps for the First World" (Dirlik 7). The United States and the Global North have benefited only a few, but damaged the rest. In this novel, therefore, Arcangel's fight for Mexico and Latin America creates a communal feeling of solidarity and resistance against the oppression of the Global North, especially the United States, as suggested above. The Pacific Rim Auditorium underscores that Asians are included in this feeling of community as well.[143]

Some of the agents that contribute to the domination of the Global North over the developing countries are the transnational companies, as discussed in section 1.1. The control these corporations exert on the economy and society as a whole allows them to influence most aspects of the current politics, markets, and lifestyles. Furthermore, they are able to settle almost anywhere in the world by adapting their products to the needs and tastes of different cultures. Thanks to the numerous technological developments during the last decades, the process of production can be split into multiple phases. Thus, these TNCs are encouraged to relocate their assembly factories as well as other services in countries where taxes and wages are lower, and the regulations from governments are more lax: TNCs "*decide for themselves their investment site, production site, tax site and residence site*, and to play these off against one another" in order to achieve the most beneficial conditions (Beck, *Globalization* 4).

The presence of TNCs around the world is depicted in *Babel*, and the company is no other than Coca-Cola. A can of this famous soft drink is what Susan orders in a local restaurant during her trip to the "exotic" Moroccan desert with her husband, Richard. Since Susan believes that the local tap water is not potable, she refuses to drink

[143] The inclusion of different subjugated peoples may well allude to the Rainbow Coalition from the late 1960s and early 1970s. This coalition, founded in Chicago, included activist parties and organizations such as the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, and the Young Patriots (Mantler 251). Its purpose was to support and fight for the rights of ethnoracial minorities and the lower classes in general—African Americans, Latinos, whites.

that nor any other local beverage and makes Richard throw the ice away, which denotes a negative attitude towards Morocco and what it can offer, for instance, in terms of culture.[144] Therefore, Coca-Cola presents itself as a link to the U.S. for Susan, even though, as shown in the film, the products of this TNC can be found anywhere in the world—products that have indeed become part of the global culture. In a location that is foreign—and undesirable—to her, Coca-Cola gives Susan a sense of familiarity, for the taste of Coke is similar around the world. Hence, the scene exemplifies the hybridity of the glocal: a local traditional restaurant in Morocco offers not only local traditional food, but also one of the main symbols of the overwhelming power of the omnipresent TNCs, globalization, consumerism, Americanization and “Coca-Colonization.”[145]

The presence of TNCs is not truly significant in Soderbergh’s *Traffic*. However, during a meeting, Wakefield has a conversation with a representative of the media. Interestingly, what is implied here is that mass media corporations do not care about the War on Drugs, unless it provides them with “marketable” stories they can tell on TV, the newspapers and other channels of “information.” In other words, if Wakefield wants his actions as Drug Czar to have visibility, he should give the mass media something they can find profitable. This role of the media, as reflected by *Traffic,* brings to mind Appadurai’s mediascapes. The images and events created, manipulated and distributed

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[144] Susan also uses her own silverware and refuses to eat food that contains fat, possibly thinking the health conditions and cooking precautions would not match her Western standards. Despite her behavior, it is possible that potable water in Morocco may not be as abundant as in the U.S., even if that is the consequence of the slow violence the Global South is subjected to by the Global North. On the other hand, to be fair, her complaints may not only arise from a potential sense of superiority for being Western and American, but also from her (implicit) rejection of the idea of making this trip with Richard due to their marital problems.

[145] Steven Flusty explains that “[a]t its extreme the reach of TNCs (particularly those of the United States, Europe and Japan) takes the form of coca-colonization, a seeming force of neocolonial nature by which Western consumer culture is globally disseminated to supplant all other cultural forms” (147). The term Coca-Colonization was “coined during the 1950s French Coca-Cola debates, used to denounce the growing import of American consumer goods that allegedly threatened French national culture” (Kooijman 34-35). Kooijman stresses that Coca-Colonization “implies that the process of Americanization is indeed a form of cultural imperialism” that homogenizes “global pop culture” and also “a process […] based on a paternalistic discourse which tends to reduce its global subjects to a state of childlike innocence and pleasure,” emphasized by the “refreshing taste of Coca-Cola” (35).

by the mass media, which are highly influential in society, are meant to benefit these companies either directly or indirectly. As put by Appadurai himself, the images disseminated by the media, which include films, respond to "the interests of those who own and control" these images ("Disjuncture" 9). Consequently, the "world of news and politics" is largely intertwined with "the world of commodities" (9). Similar cases can be found in González Iñárritu's *Babel* and Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*. In these two ensemble narratives, both the mass media and the authorities create terrorists out of two events that are actually accidents. In the movie, the global mass media show the Moroccan family as (potential) terrorists to the entire world. Even though the authorities do consider the possibility of a terrorist attack against the tour bus full of Western tourists, this news is a product of both the media and politics. Such an alarming story, especially after 9/11, is surely more marketable (and sensationalist) than simply stating what it actually was, an accident. Therefore, viewers from all over the world perceive the Moroccan family as terrorists due to the influence exerted by the mass media. On the other hand, in Romo's novel, Tomasita is labeled as an environmental terrorist after the reddening of the Rio Grande. Although it is not mentioned whether the government and the media deliberately create the story of Tomasita as an environmental terrorist, shown to be more dangerous than the overwhelming pollution produced by the *maquiladora* industry, it can be inferred that the actual facts involved in the red river event—Tomasita throwing dried mulberry powder into the Rio Grande—are not interesting enough for the media and the politicians. In contrast, news about environmental terrorism would be much more marketable and likely to draw the attention of the audience, the consumers. Furthermore, the helicopters belonging to the different TV networks fly over the red river throughout the entire narrative while dozens of journalists rush to cover the event as well. These media corporations seem desperate

to have exclusive news and to be the first to reap profit from the potentially life threatening reddening of the river—if truly caused by an environmental terrorist, these red waters may put the population of the area at serious risk. It could be argued that, on the one hand, those journalists echo hyenas, scavengers, while, on the other, the helicopters flying over the Rio Grande are reminiscent of vultures, ready to feed on carrion—since dying bodies or decaying flesh may also be connected to the fact that the red river resembles blood and evokes death, connotations highlighted by the dangerous yet fictitious environmental terrorist attack.

Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* does not ignore the influence of corporations. In order to illustrate that TNCs also entail transnational tragedies, I resort to Bobby and his family. Bobby is originally from Singapore. Even though Singapore is one of the prominent capitalist countries in Asia, the American presence there is not entirely positive. Bobby is an undocumented Asian immigrant in the United States. As a child living in Singapore, he has to sneak into Vietnamese refugee camps, where he would pass for a Vietnamese orphan, a victim of the Vietnam War. In the camp, Bobby might be selected to migrate to the United States, where he thinks he will have a better future. This may echo the relocation of Vietnamese refugees to the United States after the Vietnam War—the "boat people"—as well as the fact that "Vietnamese Americans became visible and recognizable as an ethnic group" in the U.S. also after the conflict (Simal, "Return" 82).[146] Bobby is forced to do this because his father no longer has the financial means to support the family. Bobby's father used to own a bicycle company in Singapore, a profitable business that allowed them to have a "good life. Good money"

[146] Having migrated to the U.S. as a preteenager, Bobby may be a member of the 1.5 generation: "Although not born in the United States, these 1.5-generation Vietnamese Americans would attend American schools and, in some cases, universities [e.g. Bobby's brother]; they would live and work in the new country, thus combining" their memories of Vietnam with the influence of American society (Simal, "Return" 82).

(Yamashita 17). However, their prosperous situation is brought to an end when an American TNC opens a factory in that country, attracting all the workers with its new technology and slightly better salaries: "Paid fifty cents more" (18). As a result, Bobby's father closes down his factory, since it is impossible for a smaller business to compete against a capitalist monster. The ease with which TNCs adapt to new markets and contexts allows them to change strategies to keep reaping profits.[147] Even though the U.S. corporation that moves to Singapore in *Tropic of Orange* does not buy out Bobby's family's bike shop, it certainly adapts to the market, offering benefits to its workers and to the consumers. Furthermore, this TNC "colonizes" the bicycle market in some of the most successful economies in the Pacific Rim, all of them places where this means of transportation is widely used: "Pretty soon, American company's selling all over. Exporting. Bicycles go to Hong Kong. Go to Thailand. To India. To Japan. To Taiwan" (18). The style used in this quotation is characteristic of Bobby's chapters, as mentioned in Part II. Nevertheless, in this particular case, the short sentences conjure up the speed with which TNCs act and take over other markets, leading local businesses to their demise. In addition, they also echo Ritzer and Stillman's McDonaldization and its process of production, which is efficient, calculable, predictable and controlled. Bobby's sore memories close with a feeling of impotence, a victim of the slow violence perpetrated by corporations with the support given by governments and institutions. Fighting against the power of the American company is therefore futile. No David and Goliath here; the strongest, the giant, wins: "That's it" (18).

[147] Suter claims that, for instance, "if a government tries to protect its own industries by keeping out imports, such a corporation will try to buy out local companies" to "produce goods within that country" (68).

The overwhelming expansion of these TNCs is also explored in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. While working at a rather luxurious restaurant in New York, Brigitte's, Biju overhears conversations multiple businessmen have:

> "We need to get aggressive about Asia," the businessmen said to each other. "It's opening up, new frontier, millions of potential consumers, big buying power in the middle classes, China, India, potential for cigarettes, diapers, Kentucky Fried, life insurance, water management, cell phones—big family people, always on the phone, all those men calling their mothers, all those mothers calling all their many, many children; this country is done, Europe done, Latin America done, Africa is a basket case except for oil; Asia is the next frontier. Is there oil anywhere there? They don't have oil, do they? They must…." (Desai 136)

According to the logic put forward in this fragment, after exploiting the available resources and markets in the United States, Europe and Latin America, corporations move on to the next source of income: Asia.[148] Above all, China and India present themselves as the main markets where to sell Western, Global North products and culture once sociopolitical and economic changes have opened their economies to foreign capital.[149] Furthermore, the conversation highlights the fact that Africa has no purchasing power to encourage these companies to sell their commodities there. The only reason why this "hopeless" continent is relevant to TNCs is Africa's oil reserves. This implies a complete exploitation of the resources of the continent without "giving" anything in return: no real investments, no products to (allegedly) bring modernization—e.g. cell phones, life insurance, water management—, and an expiration date of that exploitative interest due to the limited availability of this fossil fuel, which

[148] Mohsin Hamid's novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* resembles a guide to go from poor to rich in a fictional Asian country. The protagonist, who comes from an impoverished background, ends up having his own business selling bottles of purified water to impoverished people. He makes profit out of the needs of the less privileged in a similar way TNCs and the Global North reap benefits from the Global South.

[149] China and India not only open themselves to foreign capital, products and culture, they also export their own to the West.

suggests a complete abandonment after these reserves run out. The same is also implied of Asia. The one and only focus of these businessmen is profit, reflected by the fact that they ignore whether Asia has oil or not. TNCs will simply take what they want.

It is worth remarking that segments of the conversation resemble a checklist or even a shopping list: "this country is done, Europe done, Latin America done, Africa is a basket case except for oil" (Desai 136). Countries and continents are perceived only in marketable terms, as if they were (sources of) commodities to be consumed and then disposed of. This rhetorical device underscores the indifference and coldness of TNCs and their profit: these companies settle in a new market, exploit it and move on to the next, echoing the course of action of colonizers. Furthermore, even though these corporations are embodied by a group of business people, they are not given an identity or any personal background. They do not seem to have specific personalities, but look exchangeable with each other; they act as "generic," stereotypical business people who only care about businesses and profits. Hence, TNCs, regardless of being represented by actual people, are implied to be anonymous forces.[150] The ease with which corporations move from one location to the next and succeed in all cases may be possible due to this flexibility and exchangeability, the potential lower prices offered by TNCs, as well as the reach of their business in terms of the markets where they can send and sell their products.[151]

[150] For Hardt and Negri, the new global form of sovereignty or "network power" is anonymous. This network is composed of the "dominant nation-states, […] supranational institutions, major capitalist corporations," among others (*Multitude* xii).

[151] Customers do not always care about purchasing and supporting local products, even if "home bias" is possible. They buy products for many reasons—social standing, trends, value for money, more effective marketing campaigns—even if their decision harms local companies and workers. TNCs are able to "nestle everywhere, settle everywhere," hence being virtually impossible to limit the penetration of their investments, and instead, making other governments compete to attract as much foreign capital as possible by offering corporations all sorts of advantages (Panitch and Gindin 113-14).

Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* depicts the growing tendencies of consuming cheaper commodities that are mass-produced by TNCs. Nonetheless, the narrative also offers the opposite position, that which favors local products instead. Gabriel chooses to build a house near Mazatlán, Mexico, where he plants trees in its garden. The house itself is a hybrid born from two cultures: Mexican and American. Yet, Gabriel wants his house to be as Mexican and traditional as possible: "He seemed to be building a spacious hacienda, maybe a kind of old style ranchero, circa 1800, with rustic touches, thick adobe-like walls and beams, but with modern appliances" (Yamashita 6). The combination of the modern and the traditional echoes the opposition between SUPERNAFTA and El Gran Mojado and what each wrestler supports. Gabriel wants to keep the house as Mexican, traditional and "pure" as possible. However, he does seem interested in the progress implied by modern appliances, a progress of which SUPERNAFTA speaks. This progress is linked to the postmodernity marked by a shift that primarily TNCs brought in relation to production, the circulation of capital and goods across borders as well as the way in which these commodities are consumed. The combination may also refer to the modernization and the introduction of this progress in Mexico. El Gran Mojado, who mainly stands for Mexico, rejects the idea of being like the U.S. Nevertheless, the benefits of this progress—mostly technological, in Gabriel's case—are desirable for Mexico, symbolized by the hacienda and Gabriel's Mexicanness. This desire for Mexicanness may be connected to the economic concept of "home bias" too. As Paul Brenton explains, "[h]ome bias implies that, other things being equal (mainly prices), consumers will still have a preference towards the purchase of domestically produced goods. To some extent this reflects history and culture but it appears to go much deeper than this"; even within the same country, people prefer to buy the local product (143-44). In spite of living in the United States, Gabriel wants to

feel Mexican and this house is the way he has to experience Mexico. Despite trying to favor Mexican products when purchasing appliances for his Mexican home, several goods found in the house are originally from the United States. The hybrid aspect of the house also involves time and history, for it is traditional, "[o]ld-fashioned," but modern; in this case, Mexican, but American too. Except for the faucets, whose label reads "'[h]echo en México'" (68), most of the modern commodities Gabriel buys for the house, such as the toilet bowl, are imported from the United States, since they are cheaper and of better quality, as Rafaela, the housekeeper, explains to Gabriel: "'You get what you pay for, except that's not really true here [Mexico], but I just want to save you some money" (7). This nullifies the "home bias," since there is no commensurability in price or quality between Mexican and American products, and this clearly benefits American commerce, which is depicted as more honest, fairer than a national, Mexican market.[152]

However, Gabriel is the only one who wants a traditional Mexican hacienda with Mexican decorations. His opinion is opposed, to a certain extent, by both Doña Maria and Rafaela. Doña Maria, a Mexican neighbor in Mazatlán, prefers a "French Mediterranean look—marble staircases, Louis the 14th cherrywood side tables, silver candlesticks and porcelain figurines behind beveled glass" (Yamashita 65). She considers a French decoration to be "better," perhaps more "fashionable," since it comes from a Global North country; it is the unusual, the exotic. A Mexican decoration would be too common and predictable in that geographic context. At the same time, this can be read as an instance of internalized inferiority: everything that looks Western (French, in this case) is "superior" to the native traditional culture. Therefore, it could be argued

[152] Products such as technology, services, utilities, and cars tend to be more expensive in Mexico than in the U.S., while food, public transportation and housing, for example, are significantly more affordable (Pickell; "Living in Mexico").

that the rejection of traditional Mexican decoration can be construed as an instance of cultural violence. Doña Maria, among other individuals, contributes to a negative perception of that traditional Mexican culture, hence favoring and supporting the domination exerted by the Western cultural offer. Contrasting with this view, Gabriel’s fervent desire to own a traditional hacienda would represent a position of cultural resistance that attempts to counterbalance the perceived “inferiority” of Mexican culture.

The differing opinions about the decoration could be an example of the dynamics of global culture, as discussed in Part I of this dissertation. Doña Maria and even Gabriel are influenced either by an external, foreign cultural reference or by the native, traditional culture. A traditional French decoration in this case is introduced by this global culture, hence becoming a point of reference for members of other “cultures.” In other words, the middle classes seem to be interested in similar decorations regardless of their homeland. Gabriel, apart from favoring a Mexican design of the house, wants modern appliances, mainly brought from the United States, and, most likely, produced by corporations. This not only represents his American “half,” but also the influence of the global culture, specifically, Americanization. Rafaela adopts the global culture and embraces Americanization too, for she suggests Gabriel to send her copies of American magazines about decoration so as to get ideas for the hacienda, a proposal he rejects for not being traditional (Yamashita 7). She shares interests with the American readers of those magazines in spite of her being Mexican. However, her suggestions may come from the years she spent in the States, thus becoming culturally “hybrid” too. This difference in preference can also be perceived in the juxtaposition of reproductions of Van Gogh’s and Picasso’s paintings along with decorations of Frida

Kahlo and the Aztec god, Quetzalcoatl. The works of the European artists are Rafaela's choice, whereas the Mexican Kahlo and Quetzalcoatl are Gabriel's doing (65).

Regardless of the efforts Gabriel makes to fulfill his desire to feel Mexican and have a "truly" Mexican house, he is rather clueless when it comes to maintaining it. For instance, he leaves an old vacuum cleaner, purchased in the U.S., so Rafaela can clean the house: he does not seem to be aware of the fact that the lights frequently go off in Mazatlán, rendering the machine useless. Rafaela also runs out of bags for the vacuum cleaner and these cannot be recycled, leaving her no option but to use the more traditional broom to sweep the floor. Furthermore, there is an opposition between the vacuum cleaner, which would represent the modern American technology, and the broom, or the more "traditional" Mexico, also fitting the hacienda-like building. The Electrolux, an appliance that also represents the mass production that characterizes TNCs, eventually breaks down when Rafaela tries using it with no bag and pieces of crab get jammed in the engine. The animals from this Mexican place "kill" the technological American presence in the house, an object unsuited for that location. In other words, it could be argued that the natural environment wins the battle not only against the negative consequences of human activities on the "natural environment," but also against the general exploitation fostered by corporations. Moreover, Mexico and Mazatlán are neither the place for the vacuum nor for Gabriel: "When Rafaela told Gabriel that the Electrolux had died, there was an uncomfortable silence on the other end of the line, probably because Gabriel had had some idea that a stainless steel vacuum cleaner was something incredibly wise to have in the salty humidity of Mazatlán" (Yamashita 4). Following the argument of the house representing his Mexicanness, Gabriel's inability to maintain the hacienda-like building may be linked to his actual lack of "Mexicanness." Gabriel does not know how to be Mexican and he

will struggle with his American-Mexican hybridity. In spite of his attempts to (re)Mexicanize himself, he is unable to do so, as can be seen in the use of convenient U.S. commodities in the Mexican house. Furthermore, not having enough money, the journalist is unable to finish the building. Once again, the impossibility to complete the building suggests that Gabriel cannot fully achieve Mexicanness. The part of the house that is constructed needs to be repainted, the doors are full of termites and the rusty metal windows need to be replaced with aluminum ones. This could be interpreted as Gabriel having to reassert and "work" on his Mexicanness.[153] Interestingly enough, the house is commended to Rafaela, who, being "truly" Mexican or at least "more" Mexican than Gabriel, does know how to take care of the hacienda, as can be seen in her daily sweeping of the floors.

Cultural hybridity is also present in Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*. During the red river event, Soledad is helped by Sofia to give birth to Clara on the bridge. The paths of two strangers cross to be part of the miracle of life among the hectic crowd in an intense scene that echoes the cooperation among people on the borderlands. Soledad walks towards the U.S. side of the border to have her baby there, so that the child would be American instead of Mexican. Despite lacking information regarding Soledad's background, "[t]he reader becomes conscious about the advantages or expectations Soledad might have for having her baby born in North American soil" (Antxustegi 254). However, when she steps on the bridge, she feels a piercing pain and she has to deliver the child right in the middle of the International Bridge. It is as if fate does not want Soledad to have Clara on neither side of the border. Clara, from the very beginning of her life, has a more important role. The baby is neither Mexican nor American, but she

[153] A similar situation is described in Desai's novel. Gyan's house is poor, unfinished and chaotic. Only the footprints of the house are there, waiting for someone to build what is left. In this case, the building represents India and/or Nepal, countries that seem to be "unfinished," exploited by the colonial empires and then abandoned to their fate (Desai 255).

is also both at the same time. In other words, she is the personification of the border culture Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of in her famous *Borderlands/La frontera*: a culture that is born from the "lifeblood of two worlds [Mexico and the U.S.] merging to form a third country—a border culture" (3). At least, three other interpretations of Clara can be made. Firstly, it could also be said that, as she is not from any country, she is from the world, since she is born on the International Bridge. Secondly, she represents the people, both Mexicans and Americans, who cross the border every day and are the protagonists of the novel.[154] And thirdly, I would argue that the baby is the personification of the novel itself, for its narrative springs from the very borderlands and those who live on this side, on that side and on both.

The birth of this baby could be connected to the hot rain as well, which "mingled with the warm water of Soledad's womb, dripping slowly down her legs" (Romo 119). This rain and the rather extremely warm weather that is repeatedly mentioned throughout the narrative might resemble a "hellish" space. Nevertheless, water is the main source of life, even if the storm is also an element of natural violence, which may echo the harshness and violence of hell. Either way, during the birth, Clara's and Soledad's blood is present from the very beginning of life, uniting them as mother and daughter despite birth being a physical separation from the mother. In other words, mother and daughter, different generations of Mexicans and Americans, of hybridity, inhabitants of the borderlands are bonded by blood. This mixture of Clara's and Soledad's blood ends up "dripping from the baby onto her [Sofia's] face, onto the sidewalk, into the red, red water of the river" (Romo 118). The mother's pain and the traumatic experience of coming to this world, all add up to the violence and emotion of birth. Furthermore, in an ecocritical vein, the mixing of their blood and the waters of the

[154] Furthermore, Antxustegi states that "[h]aving a baby born right in the middle of the border might also symbolize the border-crossers' rebirth and hope of transformation" (254).

Rio Grande implies that the people from the borderlands are part of the river, and vice versa. Additionally, in a broad sense, the association of natural rain-water and human water implies that nature and humans are part of each other. Even human existence could be argued to be represented by the rain, which begins and ends suddenly just like human life. Hence, Clara, whose name suggests clarity and purity, would be the character that brings hope regarding a desirable relationship between humans and nature, one that allows us to respect the environment in order to respect ourselves.

3.2. Strangers in the Land of Opportunity: The Immigrant Experience

The unequal distribution of wealth and the neocolonial exploitation of developing countries do not need to reach extremes such as death to constitute violence. The deprivation of life opportunities fosters an environment of structural violence, often leading individuals to make the decision of migrating to other countries—primarily, the Global North—in hopes of attaining a better future. The numerous migratory restrictions that immigrants have to face frequently leave them no choice but to enter a foreign country without the required documents. These people, exposed to the limitations this "illegal" condition imposes on them, are often forced to endure discrimination, subhuman living and working conditions, little or no support from public institutions, and criminalization, among a variety of hardships. As Brecher et al. remark, the "downward pressures of globalization have been focused most intensively on discriminated-against groups that have the least power to resist," among whom we find immigrants as well as "racial and ethnic minorities" that are often exploited and "abused as scapegoats for the economic troubles caused by globalization from above"

(7). The selected corpus echoes the immigrant experience in our neocolonial, globalized world, with Biju arguably being the most significant case.

In Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, the reader is asked to empathize with the 19-year-old Biju's experience as an undocumented immigrant in the U.S., where he faces persistent labor exploitation, discrimination, humiliation and a series of obstacles that do not allow him to actualize his hopes of having a better life there than in his home country, India. One of his first jobs in New York is in a restaurant kitchen, which happens to be in the basement. Similar to Buzzworm's neighborhood in *Tropic of Orange*, which is supposed to remain hidden from the rest of the people, as will be discussed later on, the fact that the kitchen is in the basement makes it possible to conceal and ignore what "should not" be seen by the customers, who are more privileged than the employees downstairs.[155] These immigrants—both documented and undocumented—should remain invisible to the eyes of the customers, as well as below them, under their feet, as if these customers were superior to the immigrants working in the kitchen. This intended concealing of these employees in the basement, aggravated by low salaries and exploitative working conditions that are difficult to prove, represents an act of structural and slow violence against Biju and the other immigrants. The fact that they work in a basement highlights their low rank in the social structure. According to Galtung, in a structure, actors—those who pursue their own objectives—interact with each other in multiple systems or at different levels, with some having more power than or over others ("Violence, Peace" 175). In Biju's case, the boy has a working relationship with the host culture and, in general socioeconomic terms, he is also a member of that host culture, contributing to it, albeit unauthorized due to his "illegal" condition. Throughout the novel, Biju and other undocumented immigrants are

[155] In some restaurants, witnessing the preparation of ("exotic") dishes is desirable, part of the culinary experience. Yet, the kitchen where Biju works is not "exotic," and cooking is not a "show" either.

constantly positioned in low ranks, with no opportunities to attain the “potential” Galtung speaks of: better working conditions, higher salaries, or legal documents to reside in the U.S., among other aspects. Therefore, this being at the bottom of the structure is symbolized by the kitchen basement; they are below, under the feet of their employers, the customers and the general American population; there is a parallelism between this downstairs world and the term of the under-class. Additionally, in a religious vein, the kitchen basement—a small, hot room in which the workers seem to be trapped or locked up—echoes famous allegories of the underworld and hell, common in Greco-Roman and Christian literary traditions.

Furthermore, these restaurants also echo the colonial past and neocolonial present: “*Biju at the Baby Bistro.* Above, the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian. And, when a Paki was hired, it was Mexican, Indian, Pakistani,” and later “Biju at Le Colonial for the authentic colonial experience. On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native. Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian” (Desai 21; italics in the original). The employees that work in that kitchen are immigrants from developing countries, members of ethnoracial minorities in the U.S., and the basement could be argued to represent the Global South. On the other hand, most of the waiters who serve customers on the first floor are implied to be Americans; therefore, the upper floor of this French restaurant would stand for the Global North:[156] “As some minorities make themselves conspicuous, others must live their lives unseen. Paradoxically, it can often be the visible minorities who are in certain respects invisible” (Young 26). Furthermore, Jay mentions that “[t]he characters in the New York portion of Desai’s narrative are people with precious little time for celebrating their diversity or experiencing the liberatory possibilities of hybridity or multiculturalism,” thus further

[156] The European nobility and gentry as well as their servants could be translated here into a Global North/South divide. Likewise, the caste system would apply too, which seems inescapable for Biju.

highlighting "the decidedly uneven economic and cultural effects of globalization in the metropolitan West, on its tendency to both create and exploit a kind of tribal underclass of transnational diasporic workers" (*Matters* 120). Biju and the other undocumented immigrants are secluded from "mainstream" society by working "in the shadows," in the dark of night, where those individuals who have more power and wealth do not have to see them. This invisibility, in turn, contributes to a diminished sense of guilt that the more privileged may have regarding the unequal distribution of opportunities: out of sight, out of mind.[157]

The lack of alternatives Biju finds in New York sets a scenario in which the immigrant's frustration is foregrounded. Biju's father, Panna Lal, increasingly exposed to a Western lifestyle, in part due to globalization and to working for the obsessively Westernized Jemubhai, wishes for a better future for both himself and his son. They are both victims of the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities, but also of global consumerism.[158] Fueled by the desire of improving their status and lifestyle in India, the cook decides to send Biju to the United States: "One day his son would accomplish all that Sai's parents had failed to do, all the judge had failed to do" (Desai 85). Generations of South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis…) have tried to find a better future abroad, often to no avail. Biju and Panna Lal wish for the lifestyle of the upper classes, similar to what the judge used to have, a way of living that is inspired by Western lifestyles. Regardless of their Indian background, they are exposed to the

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[157] Biju's coworkers throughout the text are immigrants too. This suggests that, regardless of the type of restaurant it is—e.g. Indian, Italian—or the kind of food that is offered, everything is prepared by immigrants, who usually have to take the unwanted job of serving others. These metropolitan restaurants and their basements constitute a multicultural and global blending, "a whole world in the basement kitchens of New York" (Desai 22), in which the neocolonial relationships are revisited.

[158] This echoes the opposite concept, "degrowth," which promotes a decrease in mass-production and consumption, for these are stated to be detrimental to the environment and to foster social inequality. Like these characters, many of us could live with fewer material goods. However, we are influenced by consumerism, an intrinsic part of capitalism and our global culture; we become enthusiastic consumers and contribute to the capitalist circle of production, consumption and waste.

global culture and Americanization, which leads towards homogenization to a certain extent, in spite of the differences produced by the mixture of U.S. and other cultures, as mentioned before. Middle classes all over the world thus tend to have more similarities among them than with the lower classes that share the same culture. This is perceived in other characters of the novel such as the judge,[159] Sai, Lola and Noni, who are heavily influenced by the global, Westernized culture.[160] This global consumerism that contributes to a cultural homogenization worldwide is alluring for Biju and his father; yet, they cannot afford that lifestyle, not only because they are servants, but also because they live in a rigid caste system that significantly hinders climbing the social ladder. The alternative they have is sending Biju to the U.S. to pursue the so-called American Dream: Panna Lal "imagined sofa TV bank account. Eventually Biju would make enough and the cook would retire" (Desai 17). Panna Lal believes that his son will achieve that goal in the US, a country that the cook always considers superior to India.

Once in the U.S., Biju faces a dilemma not unfamiliar to immigrants. During his stay in New York, his father's friend and contact in the States, Nandu, advises the boy to return to India, since he is still young enough to have opportunities. On the other hand, those who stayed in India suggest him not to leave the United States. Neither the homeland nor the host country seem to offer Biju the opportunities he needs. In

[159] The consequences of colonialism in India are explored through Jemubhai. His relationship with his Indian wife, Bella (Nimi after marrying him), is significant due to the extreme violence he exerts on her for representing India and Indian culture—the judge is obsessed with being Westernized, rejecting everything that is Indian. Even though he did have some sort of affection for her before going to England, his negative experience as an immigrant in the heart of the British Empire and his constant failure when trying to become as English as possible push him towards an immense hatred. He despises his Indian self and himself for being Indian. This self-violence is extrapolated onto Bella, who is too Indian for his likings, as she symbolizes everything he hates. Their relationship hits rock bottom when he violently rapes her, and the constant mistreatment ends up with Jemubhai getting Bella killed in order to get rid of her very existence.

[160] Lola, Noni and, above all, the judge mimic British behavior and echo the British colonial times. Colonialism is mostly reflected in these characters through the internalization of the "superiority" of the colonizers' culture, language, and values, and the justification of their own "inferiority" (McLeod 18). Sai additionally introduces the effects of Americanization, which could be argued to follow a similar path, exporting the U.S. culture, products, and so on, which are often deemed "superior" than other local cultures.

addition, the quota of Indians in the host country is full and there is no more room for more, no more chances for legal immigrants (Desai 88). Neither his home country nor the US seems to allow him to reach Galtung's potential; instead, limitations are imposed on him, thus rendering Biju a victim of structural violence. Where to go then? What to do? As Jay cogently argues, Biju's problems in the U.S. are both economic and cultural. As an illegal immigrant, he is forced to take low-wage jobs. However, as stated above, his Hindu-related reluctance to serve beefsteak further aggravates his financial hardships (*Matters* 121). Biju finds it overwhelmingly difficult to leave his Hindu beliefs, his "Indianness," behind, as those Indian executives who order steak seem to have done.[161] These businessmen embrace the global culture, abandon their own cultural values and traditions, and do what is necessary in order to achieve financial success. In contrast, Biju represents those diasporic subjects "living here and remembering/desiring another place" (Clifford 255): although Biju lives in the U.S., India is still too present for him.

Furthermore, Biju is trapped in the United States due to the lack of a green card. The card is not only his way in, but now that he is in the U.S., if he wants to leave, it is his way out too. Biju envies documented immigrants, those who could enjoy their life in the U.S. But he is "illegal," and, like most "illegal" immigrants, he cannot leave and he may not see his family ever again. His freedom to come and go is limited by the restrictions of the law, which both perpetrates and perpetuates structural violence. Biju has to ponder the possibility of never seeing his father again, which can be construed as a form of punishment for having entered the United States without the required documents. In this reading, the U.S. itself is Biju's prison, where his freedom, life

[161] Ecaterina Pătraşcu points out that "[t]he present American experience does not convince Biju in any way to adapt to the new reality, the one so much desired when still in India," hence he chooses to keep to his "'*home values*,' his back-home morality and the inherited religion," in a somewhat stubborn way that becomes an insurmountable obstacle to succeed in the U.S. (92).

opportunities and respect as an individual are severely compromised. Paula Naya declares that, when immigrants leave their home countries looking for a better future, "[i]t is assumed, sometimes wrongly, that their situation in the host country, in this case America, will always be better than the living conditions in their home countries" (76). In Biju's case, his expectations are certainly not met. His "illegal" situation and the subsequent restrictions he has to endure thus make Biju a disposable employee who is repeatedly denied a chance of being socially accepted. The nineteen-year-old boy constantly changes jobs for reasons that range from being fired to quitting himself due to cultural differences, as explained earlier. Biju is bound to be unemployed unless he accepts low-wage jobs, working and living in terrible conditions. As stated by Brenton, "[j]ob loss can lead to substantial costs to the individual both during spells of unemployment but also afterwards if they are forced to take a lower paying new job. Therefore, from the perspective of social exclusion, the quality of work, in terms of its duration, stability and income, is crucially important" (136). This is what happens to Biju, who changes jobs with an overwhelming frequency. Interestingly enough, he mostly works at fast food restaurants, underscoring the *fast* pace at which he is hired and fired.[162] By working at junk food restaurants, one of the main culinary symbols of the U.S., it is implied that immigrants—documented or otherwise—contribute to the functioning of the country. Moreover, Biju's franticness is connected to the fact that he is an undocumented immigrant, who seems to be running away all the time: "He [Biju] worked at Don Pollo—or was it The Hot Tomato? Or Ali Baba's Fried Chicken? His father could not remember or understand or pronounce the names, and Biju changed jobs so often, like a fugitive on the run—no papers" (Desai 3). In fact, he has no choice

[162] Living in New York points at the multicultural context of arguably the most global city in the world as well as to the fast pace at which individuals tend to live in metropolises. Then, the immediacy provided by technological developments in our globalized world is reflected by the promptness of fast food and the "McDonald's" business model, i.e. McDonaldization.

but to "quietly disappear" when one of his many bosses, Frank—who is actually not "frank"—tells him and his coworkers that a green card check is required (Desai 16). His "illegal" condition leads him towards a "spiral of illegality," since Biju ends up renting a room from another "illegal" immigrant that makes profits from undocumented immigrants by illegally renting out "basement quarters by the week, by the month, and even by the day, to fellow illegals" (Desai 51). Biju is forced to take jobs that are increasingly worse, be it in terms of salary, working conditions (e.g. delivering food on a bicycle during winter or working in a basement kitchen),[163] or compliance with his religious views and traditions (e.g. selling beef). This reflects the fact that, often, "when a worker is displaced, he or she is likely to find the next position only at lower pay and benefit levels" (Kapstein 99). This is one of the examples that show that the "exploitation and social domination on a global scale, the main lines of world power today, and the distribution of resources and work among the world population" are mostly detrimental and discriminatory against "members of the 'races', 'ethnies', or 'nations' into which the colonized populations were categorized […] from the conquest of America and onward" (Quijano 22-23). Hence, it could be argued that Biju is subjected to structural violence, for he is pushed towards poverty and significant difficulties to cover his basic needs based on his condition as an "illegal" immigrant. Little by little, Biju's hopes for success in the Land of Opportunity are demolished and

[163] Traditionally, snow, ice and cold have been associated with "harsh, frightening and potentially deadly" conditions, "despite the presence of kinder images like chubby snowmen" (Hansson and Norberg 8). The representation of cold often suggests a denial of life (8). In Biju's case, he endures tortuous experiences in New York while delivering food during the cold winter nights; the labor exploitation he is subjected to is life-threatening. Winter might symbolize the U.S. too. The weather is different and much colder than in most parts of India, thus being opposites, while snow may also represent the U.S. By falling everywhere, covering and claiming everything, snow and its whiteness might be linked to the white majority in the country, whereas its coldness could symbolize the rejection Biju suffers in this host culture. These hardships bring him sadness and grief, feelings associated with winter. On a different note, cold is often related to the "route to self-discovery," for it can "strip away everything except the most essential aspects of the self" (Hansson and Norberg 21). In the U.S., Biju hardly owns anything and he is mostly alone, trying to survive with as little as he can get. This experience, however, allows him to discover himself and to realize that he cannot give up on his Indianness, thus rejecting the U.S.

the so-called American Dream becomes a nightmare, fueling his rejection of almost everything that surrounds him.

In addition to his constant failures at work and the resulting poverty in which he finds himself, Biju is also discriminated against in the working environment because he is South Asian. During his second year in N.Y., he works at Pinocchio's Italian Restaurant. Here, he is discriminated against by the owner's wife, who dislikes Biju's "smell" and "oily" hair. Instead, she would have preferred an employee from the poorer countries in Europe, such as Czech Republic or Bulgaria, with whom she thinks she might have had something in common—e.g. skin color or traditions (Desai 48). As can be seen, the origin of these immigrants influences their consideration in the host country: the more similar these immigrants are to the host culture, the less rejected they are. Even though embarrassed, the owner of the restaurant, allegedly with the purpose of helping Biju, buys a variety of products for the boy so he can wash himself—which is condescending. The metaphorical resonance of this move is rather obvious: Biju is encouraged to wash away his Indianness in order to be acceptable and accepted by his bosses and Americans in general. Nonetheless, the owners think that purchasing these products is not only the "right thing to do," but also an investment of sorts: they want to change Biju to fit the standards of the host culture as much as possible, so that the boy can work and be profitable for them. This is most conspicuous when, after firing Biju, the wife tries to comfort her husband. From their perspective, they are convinced they have made the right decisions to help their employee, who, in their opinion, has ungratefully rejected the opportunity proffered by them: "You even *bought* the soap," mentions the wife to the owner (Desai 49; italics in the original). As such, the owners of the Italian restaurant unconsciously perpetuate the structural and cultural violence that

takes the shape of discrimination against immigrants, especially those hailing from starkly different cultures, like Biju.

Yet, the limitations and violence Biju has to face are not only related to the working environment. Towards the end of the novel, in spite of knowing that, as an "illegal," he will not have a second chance to enter the U.S., Biju decides to return to India. Such a decision sprouts from the constant humiliation and discrimination he has suffered in the U.S., an ordeal aggravated by the fact that he is an undocumented alien. For instance, he is sometimes interrogated by the police at late hours of the night for no reason other than looking like an immigrant, which echoes recent legal—and criminalizing—measures taken in the United States to "regulate" undocumented immigration, such as the harsh Arizona Senate Bill 1070, signed into law in 2010 (Archibold) and "which makes unauthorized presence in the state a criminal offense" thus requiring "state law enforcement personnel to conduct immigration screenings for anyone arrested whom they suspect to be unauthorized" (Rosenblum and Brick 12). "Migration," claim Jennifer Hyndman and Alison Mountz, "is often represented as the 'dark side' of globalization. The events of 9/11 have only magnified fear of 'the other.' From the perspective of states, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants embody insecurity by testing the porosity of political borders" (80).[164] Discrimination against immigrants like that experienced by Biju can also be read as an instance of "intergroup hostility." Christie and Wessells explain that such hostility "is likely to occur when members of two or more groups are in competition for some resource, particularly when the structure of the conflict is zero-sum—one side's gain is the other side's loss." The authors explain that this tension may be caused by the perception of one side being

[164] Despite being set in the 1980s, Desai's novel was written after the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, the narrative in general and Biju's experience in the U.S. may be influenced by the increased post-9/11 fear and rejection of (undocumented) immigrants.

wealthier or getting more resources than the other, even if, in actual fact, it is a relative deprivation—that is, those who have less resources are not completely deprived (Christie and Wessells 1958). Individuals thus develop an “in-group” vs “out-group” relationship, a variant of the well-known dichotomy “Us vs Them,” with people feeling identified with the in-group and potentially, albeit not necessarily, leading to hostile behavior towards the out-group: violence would take place when this relationship of opposition is “coupled with processes such as oppression, real or perceived threats or mistreatment at the hands of the out-group, hostile ideologies, hatred, and a sense of victimization” (Christie and Wessells 1958). They further mention that the in-group is imbued with positive traits and their general attitude towards the out-group is usually deemed as positive and peaceful, and violence is thus the product of a particular situation. On the other hand, the out-group is exactly the opposite: their negative nature is unchangeable and their positive actions are occasional (Christie and Wessells 1959). In Biju’s case, he is a member of the out-group during his stay in the United States. The boy is likely being a victim of hostility and discrimination. Although the host culture may claim to welcome immigrants, when or if immigrants reject the idea of adopting and adapting to the host culture—as is Biju’s case—, the in-group may blame the immigrants—the out-group—for refusing to become part of the host culture, favoring potential hostility. In other words, the in-group will claim that the immigrants reject the welcoming attitude allegedly offered by the host culture.

In spite of his terrible luck and lack of options, Biju eventually finds a job at the Queen of Tarts bakery, which could be considered an improvement from working in a kitchen basement.[165] Here, he meets and becomes friends with Saeed Saeed, an undocumented immigrant from Zanzibar. Saeed Saeed, however, mostly contrasts with

[165] Perhaps, the bakery being named Queen of Tarts may allude to the British monarchy. Hence, in a sense, Biju—India—is still working for and benefiting the “good and old” British Empire.

Biju, embodying, to a certain extent, what the boy would like to be or achieve. One of the most striking aspects of this character is his double name, which can be construed as a parody of the immigrant that is willing to do almost anything to stay in the host country. Saeed Saeed is eager to become part of the American culture—for instance, he marries to get the green card—, albeit not completely neglecting his Zanzibari identity and Muslim background. In other words, on the one hand, there is one Saeed that sticks to his roots, whereas, on the other hand, a second Saeed[166] is open to the influence from the U.S. culture as long as it allows him to have a life in the United States. However, it seems that Saeed Saeed's experience in the U.S. is more successful than Biju's. Another possible interpretation of this character's name takes us to the old concept of "double consciousness," a term coined by W. E. B. Du Bois in his 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folks*.[167] Du Bois refers to the "two-ness" of the African American, who is "an American, [and] a Negro" (8). By double consciousness, he means a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others [the dominant white majorities], of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (8). In the case of Saeed Saeed, his double name refers as much to the others' bifurcated perception as to his internal conflict, hesitating as he does between embracing what is American and what is Zanzibari. He is an African trying to be(come) American while still resisting the change to a certain extent—to succeed in the United States, he is ready to do almost anything, although he refuses to abandon his Muslim beliefs.

[166] This duality of Saeeds echoes the motif of the double or the ethnic doppelgänger. One of the types of doppelgängers is the "split personality," which may represent a "dark half" of the character or a contrast between the two halves (Faurholt). In Saeed's case, his American self behaves in an opposite way to his Zanzibari half, intentionally changing and ignoring his values and traditions from his homeland, hoping to be able to stay in the U.S. Yet, his Zanzibari half occasionally clashes with his U.S. half, for example, in terms of religion, which he would never abandon.

[167] The term "double consciousness" had already been utilized in the field of psychology during the 19th century to refer to "cases of split personality" (Bruce Jr. 300). The term proves useful for Du Bois for it reflects the "internal conflict in the African American individual between what [is] 'African' and what [is] 'American'" (Bruce Jr. 301).

One of the several significant differences between Biju and Saeed Saeed is that the latter is introduced while working at the bakery. Unlike Biju, Saeed Saeed is not shown working in kitchen basements or living in terrible conditions, even if his apartment is full of other undocumented immigrants from his hometown. Furthermore, when the bakery is shut down due to health hazards, Biju seems to go back to square one all over again, while Saeed Saeed gets hired at Banana Republic, a store whose name echoes colonial times and exploitation, as well as the domination of the developing countries exerted by neo-empires. Moreover, the term "banana republic" refers to countries where private exploitation is carried out to make profits for the ruling classes, and private debts are taken care of with public capital. Consequently, Saeed Saeed, an African immigrant, works for this private exploitation; being at the bottom of the company, he may be exploited to a certain extent, earning a salary that is "insignificant" as compared to the benefits that Banana Republic reaps. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that he has almost become a "comprador" himself. He contributes to the company by selling the latest fashion to those who make enough profit to afford it: "Saeed quickly found employment at a Banana Republic, where he would sell to urban sophisticates the black turtleneck of the season, in a shop whose name was synonymous with colonial exploitation and the rapacious ruin of the third world" (Desai 102). Despite his "illegal" status, Saeed Saeed has more opportunities than Biju in the U.S. and it could be argued that he is rather successful; not only other Zanzibaris and undocumented immigrants, but also some Americans rely on and look up to him. This aura of success attracts Biju's admiration for Saeed Saeed, thus nourishing their friendship. This relationship is an oasis in a desert of loneliness, for Biju. Other than the sporadic phone calls and letters Biju exchanges with his father, his friend Saeed Saeed is the main source of help Biju has, to a certain extent, even if the Zanzibari often seems

to care more for his own well-being, in an "every man for himself" type of thinking. Therefore, Biju reflects that, in spite of the several interconnections in ensemble narratives, the characters often struggle to find "aid and comfort from those sources (personal, social, or institutional) we normally turn to in hours of need" (Hahn 53). Biju's experience in the United States is rather solitary—in spite of being in a city as populated and globalized as New York, the boy is mostly all alone.

Apart from receiving help from Saeed Saeed, Biju also learns from the Zanzibari. Saeed Saeed also shows himself as more mature and open to other cultures than Biju. Surprisingly for Biju, his friend is fond of Bollywood, dancing and singing songs from those films. The anecdotal presence of the highly profitable Bollywood—influenced by Hollywood's market model—exemplifies the fact that not only developed countries contribute to the global culture, developing countries do it to, even if less frequently. Saeed Saeed's appreciation of Indian popular culture allows Biju to value his own Indian background. Put differently, when someone from another culture values his own culture, Biju realizes its worth. This sort of mentor-apprentice relationship between Saeed Saeed and Biju redefines the boy in other ways as well. Being a Muslim, Saeed Saeed encourages Biju to challenge himself and question his Indian and Hindu upbringing, in particular his stereotypical hatred against Pakistanis and Muslims: "Saeed was kind and he was not Paki. Therefore he was OK? […] Therefore he liked Muslims and hated only Pakis? Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims? Therefore he liked Muslims and Pakis and India should see it was all wrong and hand over Kashmir? No, no, how could that be and—" (Desai 76). Biju's life in New York detaches him more and more from the community back in Kalimpong, thus

entering a "global diaspora"[168] and sharing experiences with immigrants from different places: "The more disconnected he becomes from his past, the more connected he feels both to this global diaspora of Indians and to other tribes of migrant workers from disparate parts of the globe" (Jay, *Matters* 121). In cosmopolitan and multicultural New York, Biju is finally able to experience and have contact with other cultures himself, thus breaking free from simplistic notions and prejudices acquired in India. Being on the other side of the globe, a "different world," Biju changes his conceptions and perspectives of almost everything that surrounds him; it is a new world for him.[169]

Another difference between the two friends is that Saeed Saeed is successful with women, whereas Biju is not. Women feel pity for Saeed Saeed's situation in the United States: along with his physical appearance, they find his struggle to have an income highly attractive. Saeed Saeed is considered "exotic," not a "simple" immigrant, a trait of which he takes advantage. The exotic component is a crucial difference in how he is seen as an alien: being deemed exotic is positive and desirable—in this case, for Saeed Saeed and members of the host culture—, while being "just" an immigrant is negative, fostering occasional rejection among the natives, thus reflecting structural and cultural violence against "regular" aliens. The fact that not all immigrants have the same chances to legalize their status in the U.S. marks yet another difference that favors the Zanzibari. Biju is unable to apply to the green card lottery, for the number of Indians in the States is simply too high (Desai 88). Consequently, the possibilities of becoming a "legal" resident in the country are rather slim; his existence in the country is unlikely to

[168] The experience Biju endures in the United States is not specific to the Indian diaspora or to immigrants who enter the U.S. Individuals from and in different locations share this immigrant experience globally.

[169] Biju sees representations of India in the United States, but these are "fake." These are commodities, the "exotic" Indian culture is marketed and seen from the U.S. perspective. Stereotypes influence this perception and conceptualization of both India and Indians, showing that our perception of others is affected by preconception. He wonders if he will have to make a fake version of himself as Harish-Harry did (Desai 268). Yet, Biju reproduces the pattern of the stereotypical tourist: he purchases commodities that cannot be found or are too expensive in India as well as usual American souvenirs, contributing to the "fake" and stereotypical perception of American culture and Americans in other parts of the world.

be accepted. On the other hand, Saeed Saeed is allowed to apply for the green card, and the Zanzibari does it every year.[170] The immigrants who may legally stay are filtered by country of origin, regardless of the time they have been living in the States or how they may contribute to the country. As a consequence, and due to their irregular situation, their activities as human beings are subjected to a structural violence: these "illegal" immigrants live in fear of being caught by the public forces, are unable to receive welfare or any other institutional assistance either, and only have a limited range of low-wage jobs available, which further encourages marginalization.

As anticipated above, Biju ends up choosing to return to India. The general lack of acceptance Biju suffers leads him to embrace his Indianness and refuse to adapt to the American culture, thus depriving himself of his chances to succeed in the new country. From a distance—both in time and space—, as frequently happens to emigrants, the boy only remembers the positive aspects of his homeland, ignoring the reasons that made him leave. It is significant, however, that this decision is made once his luck begins to change for the better. Biju is hired at Brigitte's, a restaurant full of mirrors in the financial district of New York, where costumers can feed themselves and their egos by observing "exactly how enviable they [are] as they [eat]" (Desai 133). Thus, the boy is able to witness aspects of the lifestyle of the upper classes, completely unattainable for him. The narrative therefore suggests that the highest aspiration Biju can have is to serve the upper classes in a nice restaurant. In part, these business people are also the ones in charge of the corporations that exploit his fellow country people in order to make large amounts of profit. Furthermore, Biju witnesses what he considers the hypocrisy of other Indians, when these bankers and executives eat beef against their

[170] In fact, even though Saeed Saeed is actually deported during an INS raid, he is able to make it back to the States, using a fake passport with the name Rasheed Zulfickar. Saeed Saeed can reenter the U.S. despite being checked by the same immigration officer that deported him before: "Thank God, to them we all of us look the same!" (Desai 79).

religious beliefs. These individuals acknowledge their sense of guilt, but, unlike Biju, they can differentiate the holy cow from the unholy one (Desai 135). These Indians are successful in the U.S., since they have been able to adapt and even abandon their values in favor of those of the host culture whenever necessary. Conversely, the boy rejects the idea of abandoning his traditions. At the very moment when his experience in the States seems to be improving, he realizes that, in order to find the better future he went looking for, he will have to forsake his very own Indianness. His unwillingness to do so spurs Biju's desire to return to India. This change of heart is first reflected by a new job he gets at the all-Indian Gandhi Café, where no beef is sold. Here, Biju, following his Indian boss's piece of advice, resorts to axioms to try to convince himself of the potential benefits staying in the States could bring: "Another day another dollar, penny saved is penny earned, no pain no gain, business is business, gotta do what ya gotta do" (Desai 149). Nonetheless, these formulaic phrases and maxims are to no avail, too far from Biju's reach. As Galtung mentions, those who are in the lowest ranks

> are deprived not only relative to the potential, but indeed below subsistence minimum. […] They are deprived because the structure deprives them of chances to organize and bring their power to bear against the topdogs, as voting power, bargaining power, striking power, violent power – partly because they are atomized and disintegrated, partly because they are overawed by all the authority the topdogs present. ("Violence, Peace" 177)

In spite of his relative improvement in his working conditions, Biju still lives in an unhealthy, subhuman apartment, basically at the mercy of his employer's "help." Biju's dependence evokes the influence that the context and the type of relationship may have on individuals in connection to violence (Christie and Wessells 1959). Biju's boss, Harish-Harry, albeit an Indian immigrant, also takes advantage of his employee's illegal situation, even if he claims to be helping the boy as much as he can. As Harish-Harry is

in a higher rank than Biju, due to his position of power, he abuses and exploits Biju as well as other immigrants and members of minorities just like white employers do.[171] The man lets his employees live below the kitchen, allowing them to have a roof—or is it a floor?—for free. However, by doing this, he cuts down the minimum wage paid to Biju and the other employees, claims the tips the workers get and exploits them in other ways. Put differently, not only do local Americans take advantage of ("illegal") immigrants, but also people from the same country as those immigrants. Additionally, since Harish-Harry's workers are undocumented immigrants, they cannot really complain: "By offering a reprieve from NYC rents, they [Harish-Harry and his wife] could cut the pay to a quarter of the minimum wage, reclaim the tips for the establishment, keep an eye on the workers, and drive them to work fifteen-, sixteen-, seventeen-hour donkey days" (Desai 146).[172] To make things worse, the place where Biju and the other immigrants are allowed to live is also deplorable, filled with rats. Living in such unhealthy and dire conditions seriously hinders the possibility Biju has to cover his most basic needs. In spite of having a boss and landlord that is Indian like him, Biju's accommodation does not improve one bit. When, later on, Biju breaks his knee while working, Harish-Harry blames the boy for the injury and refuses to pay the medical expenses. Biju's response is to demand an explanation and to ask for sponsorship to get a green card, but both requests are rejected by his boss. Here, the narrative seems to argue that everyone takes advantage of those who are in an inferior situation, or in need, no matter where they are from. However, it is also those in need

[171] This is reflected by his name as well. Harish adopts the English version of his name, denoting he is already Americanized and willing to take advantage of fellow Indians if necessary. The nature of this dual name is different from Saeed Saeed, who has not assimilated as much as Harish-Harry yet, which is implied by the absence of an English version of his name. Also, the Zanzibari is still struggling between maintaining his background and, at the same time, becoming as American as necessary to stay in the country. The hyphen in Harish-Harry suggests that he has already bridged his Indian identity to his Americanization.

[172] The immigrant employees are also animalized in this excerpt. By being compared to donkeys, it is implied that the main or even the sole purpose of these immigrants is to work.

who often allow the ones in power to enjoy that privileged position. In part, it is immigrants who help support the country: "'Without us living like pigs,' said Biju, 'what business would you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing because you know we can't do anything, making us work day and night because we are illegal. Why don't you sponsor us for our green cards?" (Desai 188). Should Harish-Harry follow Biju's advice, he would have to sponsor all his employees, which is impossible for him. He would have to prove that no American is able to do the job, which would be extremely unlikely. Nevertheless, this does not justify the abusive relationship he has with his employees. Even worse, Harish-Harry himself points out that he would be able to replace Biju in no time, stressing the lack of value of undocumented immigrants, particularly those who are not highly qualified: thousands would do the same job even for less money than the boy.[173] This situation echoes the logic behind the global capitalist practice of outsourcing: if a country and its workforce do not accept certain wages and working conditions, the TNCs will soon find a more convenient location.

The relationship between Harish-Harry and Biju thus denotes the reproduction of racist, abusive and hostile attitudes against immigrants that are present in the system. Interestingly, the boss acts both as the immigrant and the host culture, a host culture that often displays a negative attitude towards immigrants, occasionally leading to direct violence against them. Harish-Harry is both the victim and the perpetrator of that violence, a duality that is reflected by his decision of adopting the English version of his name too. By being in a position of power vis-à-vis Biju, whose possibilities are extremely limited by the lack of a green card, Harish-Harry makes use of his authority

[173] The way in which Harish-Harry treats Biju echoes the relationship between master and servant in India, exemplified by the judge and the cook in the novel. The employees' complaints are appeased temporarily, yet, eventually, the exploitation resumes.

and higher rank in the system to his own benefit. By depriving Biju from a higher wage and better accommodation, Harish-Harry truncates a potential equity and engages in a relationship of personal violence, which, in turn, is reinforced by structural violence when he is unable to sponsor the boy to get the green card.

Biju's negative experiences in the United States and his refusal to abandon his Indianness are not the only reasons why he decides to return to India. There is also a prospect of not being able to see his father ever again, a frequent experience among undocumented immigrants, for the Gorkha revolt that rises in his hometown puts his family in danger.[174] The physical separation between Biju and his father is highlighted when the boy phones his father to check on him. In spite of this technology that is meant to facilitate global communication, reshaping the conception of time and space, father and son are unable to talk, since phones do not work well in India (Desai 232). I would argue that this issue symbolizes the fact that father and son are not only far away from each other, literally speaking, but also, they have drifted away from one another, as if they were living in two different "worlds." This, in turn, alludes to the frequent distinction between the Global North and the Global South. In addition, it stresses the fact that Biju feels far from home, disconnected from India and his Indian background, represented by his father in this case. The immediacy of phone calls and technology is unable to bridge this gap and fill the void Biju feels because of his negative experience in the United States.

[174] The Gorkha revolt prompts the choice of violence over diplomacy, blocking roads and depriving people from having access to food and other basic needs, and implying a lack of communication in the country. For them, their extreme violence and crimes are "justified" by their efforts to attain an independent Gorkha nation. When Biju returns to Kalimpong at the end of the novel, the area is controlled by the insurgents. Death is all around: people stab each other to death, others are dismembered (Desai 276). Biju has to bribe the insurgents to be taken to his town. Along the way, they threaten, humiliate and strip Biju of all his belongings, souvenirs, savings to start anew in India, and clothes, making the readers fear for him. The boy ends up having much less than he used to before moving to the U.S. He loses everything. Biju being mugged by the insurgents after going back to India underscores the fact that it is as if the boy was never in the U.S.

The hardships Biju has to face due to his undocumented condition in the U.S. are also found in by González Iñárritu's *Babel*. Amelia, the maid and nanny of the Jones family, is shown to be working and living in the United States as an "illegal" immigrant, although this is not revealed until the end of the movie. "Fate" and an unfortunate decision result in her deportation back to Mexico. The fact that she has been living in the U.S. for sixteen years does not help her. With Susan and Richard Jones on a trip to Morocco and her son getting married in Mexico, Amelia has no choice but to take the children she looks after, Debbie and Mike across the border, to the wedding with her and her nephew, Santiago. Maids often have to take care of the employers' house and, sometimes, children. Yet, they also need to care for their own homes and families. Amelia also seems to be a live-in maid, meaning that her chances of seeing her family are more limited. It is also significant, Rosa Urtiaga underscores, that Amelia is shown to have a "subservient attitude" when talking on the phone with her boss Richard, whose tone is "authoritative," and who rudely "hangs up on her" (106).[175] The nanny is unable to complain or disobey Richard's commands or else she would lose her job.[176] When returning to the U.S., Amelia and Santiago are checked and interrogated at the border. The physical and visual contrast between the Joneses, who are all (stereotypically) white and blond, and Amelia, whose hair and skin are (stereotypically) darker is obvious. Therefore, the Border Patrol finds it conspicuous that the two children are not Amelia's relatives, thus asking for the parents' letter of permission, which the maid does not have. The interaction denotes hostility on the officers' part from the beginning, and the threat of violence is constant, emphasized by the explicit

[175] The viewers later find out that Richard's authoritative and intransigent attitude is mostly a consequence of the terrible situation he is living in Morocco, trying to save Susan's life.

[176] In *Crash*, the Cabots' Latina maid, Maria, is never given the opportunity to make her voice heard. As Vorris L. Nunley claims, Maria has to cope with her boss Jean's authoritative and "dictatorial" behavior, especially, after being carjacked. Maria remains "silent" when Jean unexpectedly tells her she considers Maria her best friend, hence denying the spectators the opportunity of knowing Maria's experience (342).

use the public forces make of their authority. In addition, the attitude of the officers and the pointing of the flashlight in Santiago's and Amelia's faces also constitute intimidating practices. The rigorous inspection of their car and belongings reflects the harsh measures taken to control immigration, smuggling and other activities across the border. Santiago, who had been drinking, recklessly decides to run away from the Border Patrol and leaves Amelia and the two children alone in the desert so that the police can arrest him but not her. At this point, Amelia hits rock bottom, not knowing what to do and how to help the children. Adding to this, one of the children blames her for what has happened: Amelia is "a bad person," which could further imply that undocumented immigrants, as a whole, are "bad people." Even though taking the children to Mexico without the permission of the parents is not legally condoned, Amelia would not truly qualify as a "bad person." She had little choice but to bring the children along in order to attend her son's wedding on the other side of the border. Amelia is thus isolated from the world, overwhelmed by the situation she is forced to face, very much like the other characters in the film. The unfortunate decision of taking the siblings to Mexico robs her of her life in the United States, and even of "her" children, who, as the officer tells her when she is deported, are not legally hers, despite her having looked after them for their entire life.[177]

The act of deportation thus makes Amelia a victim of structural violence, for she will have no second chance in the U.S. Albeit referring to the "illegal" Braceros, Nicholas De Genova's words seem appropriate here as well: the undocumented Mexican migrants, characterized by "vulnerability and tractability," represent a labor power that is deportable as well as "an eminently disposable commodity" (161). Amelia

[177] When Amelia loses Mike and Debbie, and when she is deported without having information about the whereabouts or well-being of "her" children, she is in tears, which echoes the character of La Llorona from Mexican folklore. Unlike La Llorona, Amelia does not kill her children. However, Mike and Debbie are forced to experience a life-threatening situation in the desert because of her.

is allowed to work and contribute to the United States for years until she is discarded. Deprived of the life and opportunities she had there, regardless of her contribution to the country and the Joneses, deportation is death in life for her. Besides, she is emotionally and psychologically harmed, not only due to having to leave the U.S., but also because of the immigration officer's refusal to give her information about Santiago and "her" two children. The responses given by the officer when she gives her reasons why she should stay in the country are impersonal. He does not care about her, the system does not care about her: he is simply enforcing the law, and the law justifies his actions, allowing him not to feel guilt—he is just doing his job. Amelia is forced to go on with her life, not knowing whether the two children she raised are alive and well or not, the ultimate act of violence perpetrated by the immigration officer and justified by the law.[178]

Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* also addresses the immigrant experience, undocumented or otherwise, in a similar vein to the previous narratives that have been discussed so far. Among the most important issues in Yamashita's works, J. Scott Bryson purports, are immigration and ecocatastrophe (713-14)—to these, I would add neocolonialism and multiculturalism in transnational settings. Therefore, violence is part of the exploration of immigration and other social issues that encourages the readers to approach the narrative, as well as their own context, with a critical perspective. By pointing out social injustices, Yamashita makes readers be "active participants rather than passive agents" (Quintana 217). When Arcangel finally crosses the U.S.-Mexico border along with several other immigrants that help him along the

[178] As underscored by Secor, "the violence of the police floats free from the constraints that bind lawmaking and law-preserving violence, the constraints that call upon the former to create a just order and the latter to refrain from setting itself new ends. The police institution thus operates outside of legal ends and means, outside of the critical evaluation to which the law is subject, and at the constitutive limits of the state" (46).

way,[179] these individuals warn him of the risks and obstacles that are waiting for him as an "illegal alien" (Yamashita 211).[180] As the crowd mentions, Arcangel should expect nothing from the United States, since he is an "illegal" immigrant and his presence there is "incorrect," even if the prophet wonders whether being a human being can be "illegal" (211). Due to the lack of a green card, his existence in the U.S. would not be officially recognized. Therefore, Arcangel has no access to security, welfare or any assistance from public institutions, health, and education. This contrasts with the frequent perception of immigrants crossing political borders in order to take as many resources as possible from the host culture. Arcangel faces the widespread hostility against immigrants, especially undocumented ones, who not only find themselves in an irregular situation but also tend to work blue-collar jobs that could be taken by a large percentage of the local population, as is the case with the aforementioned Amelia and Biju. Violence increases as life conditions worsen: "people may adopt destructive ideologies in which 'others' are viewed as barriers to need satisfaction. Taken to an extreme, the belief develops that those who constitute barriers must be eliminated" (Christie and Wessells 1959).

Nonetheless, Yamashita's narrative also explores other migrant experiences, including those of "legal" immigrants. *Tropic of Orange* offers the two sides of the coin: Rafaela, an immigrant that achieves a certain level of success, and her husband, Bobby, who, in order to secure professional and economic success, has to sacrifice

[179] The large group of immigrants trying to enter the United States resembles the "caravans" of Central Americans that currently cross Mexico on their way to the U.S. Furthermore, the existing solidarity among the immigrants echoes globalization from below, characterized by people joining together to "pursue their common interests" (Brecher et al. 16). Here, these immigrants would represent people organizing to resist the domination of the U.S. and the Global North in general as well as its TNCs, institutions, and elites.

[180] Oranges, including the one Arcangel takes with him to L.A., are labeled illegal alien oranges, thus echoing the issue of undocumented immigration into the U.S. and symbolizing those migrants. By claiming that the oranges are illegal aliens, "the media can scapegoat all the countries south of the US-Mexico border, effectively shutting down an entire industry on little more than paranoid suspicion" (Jansen 117). Blaming Latin America would allow the United States to keep exerting its neoimperialistic domination over the continent and Latin American markets and industries.

relevant aspects of his personal life. Unlike Biju in Desai's novel and Amelia in *Babel*, Rafaela enters the country with the required documentation thanks to her marriage to Bobby, who is a legal resident in the States.[181] Apart from the possibility of entering the country legally, Rafaela is able to get a college degree during her stay in the country. One can presume that she may not have had the chance of going to university in Mexico, an opportunity afforded by the new country. As a result, Rafaela's life in the U.S. seems more successful than Amelia's and, especially, Biju's: she is a "legal" immigrant, goes to college, gets married and helps Bobby run their janitorial business together. In Amelia's case, she seems to be a live-in maid, which might raise doubts regarding whether she accomplished what she went looking for in the United States. Unfortunately, little information is given about her life in the States. However, there are no signs of exploitation or abuse. It could be argued that the fact that she is not allowed to go to her son's wedding in Mexico at first is a limitation that is imposed on her, as if she were a prisoner in the Joneses' house, in charge of the children. The one immigrant that is certainly in a much worse situation than Rafaela is Biju. Even though Desai's protagonist is able to improve his lifestyle, compared to the possibilities he had back in India, he is certainly far from achieving the so-called "American Dream," what he was hoping to accomplish in the "land of opportunities." The little he gets comes at the expense of labor exploitation, discrimination, humiliation, and living in unhealthy conditions. The experiences both Biju and Rafaela have in the United States are too negative for them to cope with and they end up returning to their home countries: the former due to the reasons mentioned above; the latter because of her increasingly miserable relationship with Bobby, who becomes obsessed with work. Furthermore, Rafaela seems to prefer life in Mexico as opposed to what she had in the States. The

[181] This is similar to what Saeed Saeed does in order to stay in the country: he marries a coworker with the purpose of getting the green card.

woman considers using a broom to sweep Gabriel's house a "satisfactory thing, so much better than pushing the noisy vacuum over dull carpets from office to office. How could she explain this to Bobby? This wasn't just dust, it was alive" (Yamashita 10). Rafaela values sweeping the floors with a broom, since this represents Mexico for her, where she feels alive, as opposed to the vacuum cleaner, which, once again, stands for the U.S.

Another counterpart for Rafaela is González Iñárritu's character, Amelia. Both of them achieve certain success in the United States: Rafaela can study, for example, and Amelia has a job as a live-in maid and nanny. Nonetheless, there is a crucial difference between the two: Rafaela is a "legal" immigrant, whereas Amelia is not. This determines what they are able to accomplish in the U.S. Even though they both attain the better life for which they hope, Amelia's options are severely limited. Apart from attending college, Rafaela helps her husband, Bobby, run their janitorial business. It is clearly stated that Rafaela not only owns this business, but also a car. Hence, the couple reflects the "American Dream" to a certain degree: working hard, both Rafaela and Bobby are able to attain a better quality of life. However, this improvement is mainly economic. Notwithstanding their higher purchasing power, Bobby's obsession with working and increasing their income leads to their failure as a couple, making their lives miserable and prompting Rafaela's decision to return to Mexico. Back in her home country, Rafaela is the housekeeper of Gabriel's hacienda where she also looks after her own baby, Sol. This is a point both Rafaela and Amelia have in common. Both of these women work taking care of someone else's house and their role as caregivers is underscored.[182]

[182] The two activities have traditionally been among the main social functions of women. As Marie Françoise Colliere claims, one of the roles women have had is maintaining life. They were not only

Amelia's experience in the United States is rather different than Rafaela's, especially, because Amelia is an undocumented live-in maid. Consequently, it may be possible that, unlike Rafaela, Amelia is unable to pursue other goals apart from working for the Joneses. Moreover, the narrative does not mention or highlight any particular belonging of hers. It could thus be argued that, presumably, Amelia's purchasing power is not at the same level as Rafaela's. Amelia's working conditions are similar to that of other maids with whom she is acquainted, even though it is not specified whether the other maids are also undocumented immigrants or not. The narrative underscores that they cannot afford losing their jobs when they all refuse to look after Debbie and Mike while Amelia attends her son's wedding in Mexico, a favor that can potentially get them fired. This denial of help is thus prompted by the fear of being unemployed, which is emphasized by the possible irregular situation of the maids. Furthermore, it also points at the fact that Amelia is alone in the U.S., to a certain extent. She cannot depend on anyone, which implies that undocumented immigrants may have problems to receive and give support to others. Faced with the conundrum of going to her son's wedding without ignoring her responsibilities as the children's caregiver, Amelia decides to take them to Mexico with her. As we know, this decision eventually brings an end to her life in the United States. Unlike Rafaela, Amelia never intends to live in Mexico again. However, she is forced to do it against her will. After the incident Amelia, her nephew, Santiago, and the children have with the Border Police while returning to the United States, she is found to be an "illegal" immigrant. Subsequently, in spite of the sixteen years Amelia spends in the U.S., she is deported back to her home country.

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supposed to "promote growth and development of the children," but also look after the sick, the old and those who were dying (96). Women were "responsible for and cared for plants" too (96). Thus, Rafaela may allude to this traditional role by looking after Gabriel's hacienda and trees as well as her own son, Sol—e.g. she protects him from Hernando and his organ trafficking business.

Yamashita's novel, in addition, introduces a character that shares similarities with Biju: Bobby, who also goes through the "hard-working immigrant" experience, although with a few differences. The description of this character could be a celebratory "hybrid" identity, for he is a "Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnamese name speaking like a Mexican and living in Koreatown" (15). However, he would fit the stereotype of the Asian as a hard-working individual, a member of the model minority.[183] Furthermore, his mixed cultural background allows Bobby to embody the figure of a global and mobile immigrant.[184] Having arrived in the United States at the age of twelve, with the only plan of surviving, Bobby has to grow up too quickly to support his younger brother. Similarly, young Biju has the burden of taking care of himself in a rather unwelcoming foreign country and to help his father back in India whenever possible by sending remittances.[185] Therefore, the burden of those who leave is the ones who stay, people that need support from the emigrants.

Apparently Bobby's efforts do pay off, at least to a certain extent. Prior to his partial success, Bobby has engaged in violent and criminal activities along with members of a Vietnamese gang. However, he quits after some of his "homies" are shot to death or go to "juvey" (Yamashita 79-80). As can be seen, one of the options an immigrant has is to join a gang and become a criminal. The alternative Bobby has is to work dozens of blue-collar and underpaid jobs. It could be argued that he is rewarded

[183] Model minorities are groups of individuals often regarded as more successful than other minorities and/or the average population. This is the stereotype of the Asian Pacific Islander Americans: they are perceived to be hard-working, well-behaved, successful and "self-sufficient," for "they take care of their own problems within the family or the community" (Choi and Lahey 419). The stereotypical success of the model minorities, however, may be used by the dominant groups to claim that society is inclusive of minorities, and, on the other hand, to "blame those who lag behind for their individual failure to work hard," occasionally encouraging disputes among different minorities (Choi and Lahey 420).

[184] This representation of immigrants in general is emphasized by his name Bobby Ngu, Ngu being a common name among Vietnamese: "They all got Ngu names" (Yamashita 15).

[185] This responsibility is even heavier when Panna Lal asks Biju to help more people from the village, facilitating their migration to the United States, something that Saeed Saeed's mother also does by giving his phone number to half the population of his hometown—he is unable to help anyone else, since his apartment is full of men from his village.

when he finally opens his own janitorial business that he runs together with Rafaela. This is still a blue-collar job, which may not allow him to give Rafaela and Sol everything they need and want, but it does give him purchasing power, unlike Biju in Desai's narrative.[186] Hence, we could also say that Bobby is more successful than Biju and, presumably, Amelia.

However, Bobby's financial success certainly comes at a price. In spite of receiving some formal education at school, Bobby is unable to attain the kind of "American Dream" he desires. He increasingly devotes his life to work in order to be able to afford anything Rafaela and Sol could ever need, to buy the commodities Americans have.[187] This is his particular way of showing affection to his family, yet Rafaela rejects his fervent materialism, for it makes them grow apart from each other (Yamashita 116).[188] Having experienced poverty and a childhood without the most basic necessities, Bobby wants to give everything to his wife and son. He stands for the immigrants that work their way up, overcoming numerous disadvantages. In contrast with Biju, Bobby does accomplish what he was looking for in the U.S. and never ponders returning to Singapore. Amelia, on the other hand, is deprived of her chance to fully attain her goals in the States due to her deportation back to Mexico. Furthermore, even though the description of Bobby's apartment in Koreatown resembles that of a prison cell with bars outside the windows, denoting the insecurity of the neighborhood, he lives in his own home (Yamashita 231). Curiously enough, Amelia lives in a much

[186] The narrator gives a detailed list of names and models of the commodities Rafaela leaves in the U.S. when she returns to Mexico, such as her car or home appliances (Yamashita 80). The narrative is thus more realistic and indicates the financial opportunities she and Bobby had in the States. The detailed list of commodities contributes to the characterization of the protagonists too—e.g. Gabriel's car is old and battered, but he will not purchase a new one, since he is fond of traditional and old-fashioned things.
[187] Bobby has a Mexican counterpart, Rodriguez, who works non-stop fixing Gabriel's house in Mazatlán. This man reminds Rafaela of her husband, both men working with hardly no rest. Unlike her neighbor, Doña Maria, who seems to think Rodriguez should only rest once his work is finished, Rafaela believes the man deserves to leave early after his industrious labor (Yamashita 64-65).
[188] In Yamashita's *Trough the Arc of the Rain Forest*, the characters of Tania Aparecida and, to a lesser extent, Mané also become less happy when they achieve wealth and "success."

better middle-class house, in a safer neighborhood, although it is owned by the Jones family and she is indeed tied to her job of child care. In opposition to this, Biju ends up living in a building rented by another "illegal" immigrant. The construction is in ruins, with only one fuse box for the entire building, he shares the toilet with several other undocumented immigrants, and no one is there to solve any issues the tenants may have (Desai 52). It is significant that Joey, the local homeless, lives with Biju and the rest. Thus, the situation of these "illegal" immigrants resembles that of homeless people, a level of social and institutional invisibility that is also explored in Yamashita's novel, with characters like Manzanar, Buzzworm—both from racialized minorities that have suffered institutional racism or structural violence—or, in Romo's novel, with Tomasita. Nonetheless, where Bobby particularly fails or has little luck is in his personal life, at least it is not as successful as he hoped it would be. Working long hours to support his family—not only Rafaela and Sol, but also his younger brother, who, thanks to Bobby, is able to go to college—, Bobby ends up losing his wife and son, who go back to Mexico. He lives alone, drinks and smokes to cope with his feeling of misery and a pale reality that reduces Bobby's existence almost exclusively to his jobs. It is worth noting that his "one-dimensional existence" exemplifies the main (sometimes exclusive) role immigrants seem to have—and are sometimes rejected for—in a host country: working.

Before moving on to another narrative in our corpus, it is worth devoting a few lines to Bobby's and Rafaela's child: Sol. Although he is a second-generation American, Sol embodies hybridity—he is not only American-born, he also has Latin American and Asian blood running through his veins. Consequently, like Clara in Romo's novel, Sol suggests a new beginning, which is connected to Arcangel's goals of reclaiming Los Angeles for Mexico and Latin America: Los Angeles and the southwest

of the United States are mainly reclaimed by Latin America, but also by East and Southeast Asia. Sol, half Mexican and half Asian, but also American-born, mostly embodies Latin America, particularly, Mexico. However, he may also be regarded as a symbol of immigrants in general as well as nations under the supervision and control of the American neo-empire. This representation is conspicuous in the child's name. Sol, which means "sun" in Spanish, is connected to the special orange in the novel. As an allegory of the Tropic of Cancer, which stands for the U.S.-Mexico border, the fruit also represents the sun.[189] Therefore, the orange and the baby are intrinsically connected. Additionally, both travel from Mazatlán—or the Tropic of Cancer—to the City of Angels under the care of Arcangel, whose main goals are to push the U.S.-Mexico border northwards, take Los Angeles back and fight against the ruling power of the United States, embodied in the wrestler SUPERNAFTA. Arcangel intercepts Sol precisely when the baby and his mother are escaping from Hernando, who wants to sell Sol's organs. The fact that Hernando, who embodies the Spanish Empire, tries to hunt Sol down to make profit for himself echoes the exploitation and the colonial past of the European empires and the so-called New World. As a result, Sol has a double metaphorical burden. First, the baby stands for a new beginning, a new world in which the oppression of neocolonialism is finally gone. And second, the child is also haunted and hunted by the violence of organ trafficking and, figuratively, the violence of colonization. Thus, the baby has little option but to rely on the angelical superhero to guide his way into a new world.

Going back to the discussion of the immigrant experience, its difficulties are also addressed by Haggis's *Crash*. It could be argued that two of the main characters, Farhad

[189] The book cover depicts a giant orange that could be interpreted to be the sun (see fig. 5 in Appendix 1). Therefore, the chosen image supports the connection between the orange, the sun, and the Tropic of Cancer developed in the narrative.

and Daniel, must face a life of hard work and discrimination. Farhad, an Iranian American shopkeeper, is a victim of personal and structural violence. Even though he is an American citizen, he is discriminated against on many occasions because he is racialized as non-standard and speaks a language other than English. When Farhad and his daughter purchase a gun for personal safety—Farhad's wife is violently attacked—and to protect his shop, the owner of the gun store calls him "Osama."[190] Racism and verbal violence are spurred by the fact that these customers, who do not look "white," are arguing in Farsi about what gun they want. The triggering of this personal violence is also fed by the fear and rejection of immigrants, especially, Muslims and immigrants from the Middle East after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Farhad's experiences reflect "the post-September 11 anti-Muslim backlash" in the form of "a higher degree of violence than in prior years," including murders; hate crimes not only against Arabs and Muslims, but also against people "mistaken for them" (Cainkar 22), as in the case of Farhad.[191] Additionally, the gun Farhad buys alludes to the violence these weapons represent, a potential scenario that is certainly dangerous considering the fact that Farhad does not know anything about guns. Resorting to the purchase of a firearm in spite of his utter ignorance implies that Farhad's situation is desperate: it is not just he but also his family who have to endure discrimination, racism, and the eventual attack to his own shop as a result of a hate crime. Thus, the hopes of defending his family and himself are pinned on one of the main symbols of violence, a gun.

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[190] In fact, Farhad is not even Arab, as Osama Bin Laden was.

[191] Louise Cainkar adds that the general opinion among Americans after 9/11 was that the number of immigrants from Arab countries in the U.S. was too large, their admissions should be restricted, and they should be subjected to "special security checks before boarding planes" (23). Official responses from President George W. Bush's administration to 9/11 include the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act), signed into law on October 26, 2001. It increased the surveillance of the borders as well as of immigrant and nonimmigrant individuals, and facilitated the deportation of suspicious aliens. Also, those on student visas were tracked by SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) and visa applications were thoroughly checked, even by the FBI in certain cases (Powell 305).

The hate crime described above reflects the personal, structural and cultural types of violence that Farhad suffers. Structural violence is rather evident after the store is wrecked, since the insurance company refuses to cover for the expenses. The company blames Farhad for not having fixed his backdoor, which forces the man to close his shop.[192] Farhad's impoverishment, underscored by the fact that his door is ruined, echoes the fact that "the bulk of the poor are not indigent; they are workers" (Kapstein 103). Therefore, the Iranian American's experience in the U.S. is rather negative. He suffers the insecurity of the impoverished neighborhood in L.A. where he works and lives, implied by the purchase of the gun. Also, he is a victim of personal violence when his store is vandalized for racist reasons.[193] Hence, "well-being needs" (Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 292) are not truly covered here, since a sense of security is out of reach for Farhad and his family. Last but not least, losing his shop, his only source of income, forces him into the structural violence of unemployment. Consequently, even though his daughter, Dorri, works as a coroner, the narrative implies that, much like Biju, Farhad also loses everything and will have to start from scratch. Filled with rage and convinced that the culprit of his misfortune is Daniel, the locksmith that told him to replace the backdoor of his shop, Farhad decides to take the law into his own hand and seek revenge by killing Daniel.

Daniel is another character that shares similarities with the protagonists discussed so far.[194] This locksmith works a blue-collar job and has struggled to save

[192] In the movie, it is not mentioned whether Farhad seeks help from the authorities or if there is a police investigation to find the criminals behind the attack on Farhad's property. This lack of information might imply that the man does not call the police, possibly because it would be futile.
[193] Despite the negative backlash against Muslims, Arabs and people from the Middle East in general, most of these individuals received support from others, and "conversions to Islam in the US" increased after the terrorist attack, reflecting that "repression and inclusion [happen] at the same time" (Cainkar 29).
[194] It is interesting that the locksmith, who works fixing and taking care of doors—a symbol of borders—, is a Mexican American, a member of the largest group of immigrants living in the U.S.

enough money to move to a safer neighborhood with his family.[195] Furthermore, Daniel, as a Latino, is racialized and subjected to personal and structural violence. The most conspicuous example of this hostile behavior towards the locksmith takes place at the Cabots', a white upper-class family's house. The couple is carjacked by Peter and Anthony, two African American carjackers. In this situation, the rank these characters have in the social structure is inverted, since the criminals temporarily attain a position of power thanks to the violence they exert on the Cabots. However, the social position of the couple conspicuously returns to its previous state the moment Daniel is introduced. After being carjacked, Rick Cabot hires the Latino locksmith to change the locks of their house. The camera focuses on him while he is working on his knees. Moreover, he is seen behind the stairs, which resemble bars, as if it were a prison in which he is locked (00:11:56; see fig. 8 in Appendix 1). In the foreground, Jean Cabot comes downstairs to ask Daniel how long it will take him to finish his job. The camera follows her movement, yet always focusing on the locksmith. This might echo the fact that Daniel is the focus of Jean's worries, since she believes that he is a gang member who should not be trusted. Furthermore, only her feet and the bottom of her legs can be seen during this scene (00:12:03; see fig. 9 in Appendix 1). Therefore, Jean is "faceless," which could be argued to represent the elites and the white majorities in general who are above the minorities and the lower classes. This interpretation is supported by her interaction with Daniel. Even though her tone is calm and polite, she is in a position of power—he is working for her. Being on her feet while Daniel is on his knees emphasizes that Jean is once again in a higher rank in the social structure than members of different ethnoracial minorities—a position she had lost when she was carjacked. Daniel is not only under her feet and on his knees, she is also "free," not

[195] He mostly fears for his daughter's safety, for shootings were common in their previous neighborhood.

locked behind the bars/stairs. It is also interesting that the two shots used to show Daniel behind the stairs have different angles. Prior to the interaction between Jean and Daniel as well as before the Cabots' argument about a Latino changing the locks, the angle is neutral—an eye-level shot (see fig. 8 in Appendix 1). After said argument, Daniel makes noise with his toolbox, and Jean looks at something off-screen. The eye-line match reveals that it is the locksmith, who has overheard the conversation. Once again, he can be seen behind the stairs. Nonetheless, this time, a high angle shot is used, denoting that Daniel is in an inferior position as opposed to Jean—this is underscored by the fact that she is standing whereas he is still on his knees (00:14:06; see fig. 10 in Appendix 1).[196]

As anticipated, Jean does not trust Daniel. Once more, stereotypes, racism and violence intertwine, encouraging each other. The traumatic experience Jean lived when she had a gun pointed in her face triggers feelings of fear. With this life or death situation still too recent, she believes the locksmith is a (stereotypical) gang member. Daniel's appearance—especially, his tattoos—, and his looking like a Latino—instead of a white American—are the reasons why Jean displays hostility and disapproval, demanding to get the locks changed again in the morning. Thus, we could argue that the violence Jean experiences encourages her racist attitude based on stereotypes. This racist behavior translates into violence against the locksmith. Notwithstanding Jean's assumptions, the viewer will later out Daniel is not a gang member, but a hard-working and honest father who tries to give his family a better life, after living in dangerous and violent L.A. neighborhoods.

The limited access to professional opportunities that immigrants have is once more addressed by *El Puente/The Bridge*. Romo's novel devotes pages to Cindy, who

[196] Considering that Jean is on her feet while Daniel is on his knees, a high angle shot is also logical.

also works a blue-collar job as a waitress at a restaurant. Even though it is never explicitly said, her strong accent and non-standard pronunciation—"internachonal TB debut" (Romo 27)—hint at her Mexican origins.[197] Cindy seems to have more financial security than Biju, while her purchasing power as a waitress is more similar to that of Amelia, Bobby and Rafaela. In other words, it is not as low as Biju's, yet it is indeed restricted, for she only gets her clothes taken in, never cut, in case she regains weight. Moreover, it is mentioned that Cindy has eaten hundreds of doughnuts over the years, one of the most iconic pastries or desserts in the United States. Here, the narrative may imply that that she cannot afford healthier food than that. Thus, her diet—which takes its toll when she loses her tooth while eating a candy apple—alludes to the high consumption of sugar and unhealthy food in the U.S.[198] To fix her tooth, Cindy has no option but to cross the bridge to the Mexican side, where the dentist is significantly more affordable than in the States: "She can make it overnight. It'll be ready tomorrow. She's gooooood, really gooooood and faaaaaast! Gooooood faaaaaast, faaaaaast gooooood" (Romo 18). Cindy's words, which sounds as if it were an advertisement, and echoes the effectiveness and promptness that characterizes fast food and McDonaldization, reinforce the fact that labor in Mexico is cheaper than in the U.S. Another reason behind the lower price is the dentist's lack of experience and prestige as a recent graduate, which, as a consequence, limits her professional opportunities. The

[197] After getting her tooth fixed on the Mexican side, Cindy mixes the orders at the restaurant: "Instead of ham and eggs, she would order *chorizo con huevo*; instead of flour tortillas, she served her customers white toast" (Romo 26). Her confusion involves food in English and in Spanish. Mexican food—tortillas—and "American" food—white toast—suggest that Cindy herself is both Mexican and American. Alternatively, this could echo the fact that people who live next to the border are constantly mixing with each other on both sides, experiencing the "confusion" of such cultural hybridity.

[198] This unhealthy diet has been exported and popularized, thus becoming a "global" phenomenon. Cindy's possibility of regaining weight and her unbalanced nutrition imply an obsession with her looks, highlighted by the relevance she gives to her hairdo, clothes and makeup: "She had gone to the hairdresser the day before yesterday and had slept very carefully, on her back, not moving a bit—as if she were dead—for three consecutive days, until her next appointment" (Romo 19). In this sense, she is similar to Saeed Saeed, who spends what he can on his physical appearance too. Her obsession with her looks may also be a direct consequence of a sexist environment both in society and in her particular job as a waitress, which often requires people to look "good."

young dentist is unable to afford getting someone else to make the tooth, purchase film to take X rays, or even a proper office, which is located in the red-light district: "no sign, an old wooden door, a dog playing with a dead bird, just a simple 753 Pereida painted above the entrance in red paint that had dripped" (Romo 23). The description of the building certainly reflects the dire needs that a significant part of the population of the borderlands have to face.[199] Besides, the dripping red paint once more conjures up blood, a pervasive presence in Romo's novel. In the same way, the dog playing with the dead bird brings decay and death to the table. Death is part of the environment of the borderlands. The fact that the dog *plays* with the dead bird suggests that, on the U.S.-Mexico border, death is trivial, almost a game.

In order to underscore both the obstacles faced by immigrants and the drastic measures often taken in order to deal with immigration, some of the chosen narratives resort to natural symbolism, most often animals. In Yamashita's novel, Rafaela constantly sweeps the floors of Gabriel's Mexican house. By performing this action, not only does she clean the house, she also gets rid of different creatures—mostly birds and insects—that have dared to enter the building. Here, the figure of the animal prompts different interpretations. The possible constriction and restrictions of the house or country, which might allude to violence, may be represented by the fact that some birds desperately try to find a way out from this sort of trap—the house. Moreover, the animals could also be interpreted as echoing the conquistadors in colonial times, especially, since the hacienda stands for Mexico:[200] these creatures would invade the

[199] On the U.S. side of the border, there are *colonias* in California, New Mexico, Arizona and, primarily, Texas. The latter has a much larger number of *colonias*: 2294. The total population is half a million inhabitants of whom more than 40 per cent live under the poverty line. On the Mexican side, even if poverty is lower in the border states than in the rest of the country, it can be as high as 45 per cent of the population. For more information, see Jordana Barton et al., and Jorge Garza-Rodríguez.

[200] Under the giant orange that can be seen on the cover of the book, there is a large building in a rural area that stands for Mexico (see fig. 5 in Appendix 1). Considering that the orange is connected to the sun and to Mexico/Latin America in the narrative, the building might represent Gabriel's house in Mazatlán,

premises just like the conquistadors invaded the "New World," trespassing its fences and walls—its borders. Speaking of borders, another interpretation would construe the animals as a symbol of immigrants. Rafaela's rejection of these insects would then allude to the discrimination against "aliens," and sweeping them out would recall the violent measures to "get rid of" immigrants or to keep them out: deportation or, if we consider the trapped birds, imprisonment. Apart from representing Gabriel's Mexicanness, Mexico and Latin America, the hacienda is a microcosm in which humans and animals naturally cohabit. The house is the local and the global home—the planet. Yet, the somewhat violent act of sweeping out the animals suggests slow violence.

Rafaela's actions regarding the animals' "invasion" may be interpreted differently if we consider the fact that her baby, Sol, lives in the house too. A more literal interpretation of the passage would thus be that the mother is merely trying to protect her son from dangerous animals such as snakes and scorpions; dead or alive, they all have to leave. By inhabiting Mazatlán, these poisonous animals foreshadow the mutation of the oranges that later become poisonous, addictive and deadly.[201] This connection shows how details are also intertwined in the novel; everything is linked and intersects as in our globalized world, stressing the ensemble nature of the narrative too. As we saw in Part II, another connection that brings multi-protagonism to the fore is the one between the insects in the house and the homeless people throughout the novel. The former may also be argued to be "homeless" and that may be the reason why they

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since it is where the orange is located. On the other hand, it could be a *maquiladora* factory on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border, which would point at issues such as cheap labor, contamination, and domination exerted by TNCs.

[201] It is significant that oranges can cross the U.S.-Mexico border without issues, even though the fruit is indeed dangerous and addictive. In the novel, this contrasts with human migration. To save his Chinese cousin from sex slavery, Bobby has no choice but to pay human traffickers and smuggle the child into the U.S. across the border. As Ryan Palmer claims, "[w]here non-US citizens attempting to cross the border face grave risks such as death or being sold into sex slavery […] commodities of dubious legality [such as the oranges] pass without interruption across the border" (102).

invade Gabriel's hacienda, even though they are not supposed to be there. Likewise, the homeless in *Tropic of Orange* lack a "proper" home, although they invade and take possession of the cars abandoned in the traffic jam to build up a community there over time. The presence of the homeless community is also undesired, in this case by the government and by the owners of those vehicles. The literal and figurative sweeping of the insects thus has a counterpart in the massacre of the homeless ordered by the authorities, allegedly, to protect the interests of the elites and their own. This connection becomes more conspicuous when Manzanar and the other homeless are compared to insects for living off what is discarded by others. Both insects and the homeless are recyclers of waste, and Manzanar in particular recycles the sounds of the city to make music: "The homeless were the insects and the scavengers of society, feeding on leftovers, living in residue, collecting refuse, carting in this way and that for pennies. In the same manner, who would use the residue of sounds in the city if Manzanar did not?" (Yamashita 56). Sprung from this correlation, the structure of the novel can be argued to be circular, in which, both at the beginning and at the end, there is an elimination of unwanted inhabitants.

Similar to Rafaela's daily sweeping of insects, in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Lola chooses to kill the many insects that enter her house. Once again, violence is the preferred solution to the insect "invasion": "Each day of this fecund season scores of tiny souls lost their brief lives to Lola's poisons [Baygon spray]. Mosquitoes, ants, termites, millipedes, centipedes, spiders, woodworms, beetles. Yet, what did it matter? Each day a thousand new ones were born. . . . Entire nations appeared boldly overnight" (Desai 123).[202] Here, these insects would symbolize human beings, particularly,

[202] Baygon is the brand of pesticides produced by the American TNC S. C. Johnson & Son. This may imply the power of the American neoempire and the exploitation of India(ns) and other Global South countries.

immigrants, and, in this specific context, Indians. By being "tiny souls," whose deaths do not matter, their relevance is dismissed, reducing their lives to mere numbers and anecdotal existences. Immigrants are implied to be unworthy of receiving help or staying alive. The connection with India and other former colonies is clear when the insects born after others have died are compared to the birth of new nations after attaining their independence from colonial powers (Desai 123). These insects are like new nations such as India, and Indians are bold insects that will not die even if they are violently sprayed with pesticides.

Another episode of direct violence against animals in *The Inheritance of Loss* is perpetrated by Saeed Saeed. The man kicks a mouse to death when he finds it eating sugar and bread in the bakery where he works. The rodent is invading the bakery, taking the resources from the shop. In this case, animals can symbolize immigrants stealing the jobs, welfare, healthcare, men and women from the host society.[203] Interestingly, the mouse represents Saeed Saeed, Biju and other immigrants, mainly, undocumented ones. The mouse standing for aliens suggests that immigrants sneak in, invade, take resources from the host culture and cowardly hide. Considering the fact that, in the collective mind, mice and rats helped spread the Black Death in the 14th century, immigrants also bring destruction. Traditionally, Begoña Simal elucidates, these rodents have been a "threat to public health, not only" for being "considered filthy, but also because rats, the quintessential representation of harmful vermin," are able to reproduce "exponentially and" to "bring with them the most dreadful diseases" (*Ecocritical*). Thus, the animalization of immigrants as rats and mice also implies that they reproduce at fast

[203] During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese immigrants were the main target of racist animalization in the U.S. As Simal explains, "popular depictions of the undesirable Chinese" initially "imagined them as […] deceivingly friendly pets," a threat "if they were not controlled or expelled"—e.g. a playful kitten that later becomes a murderous tiger (*Ecocritical*). Once the Chinese immigrants gained more visibility, their perception "in the American popular imaginary […] shifted from pets to [unclean] pests," such as rats (Simal, *Ecocritical*).

rates, even uncontrollably. From such a racist perspective, this growth in the number of immigrants along with the expansion of their "inferior" culture are a threat for the host culture. Significantly, Saeed Saeed violently kills the mouse, reflecting the structural, cultural and personal violence with which immigrants are often treated by public forces, official institutions and host cultures.[204] At the same time, this shows that we are all similar, regardless of our origins; we all abuse those who are in a less favorable situation than us, those who are in a lower rank in the structure. In this passage, Saeed Saeed implicitly reproduces the racist and hostile attitudes against immigrants that are present in U.S. society. Similarly to Harish-Harry, the Zanzibari is also an ambivalent character: he is both an "illegal" immigrant—the mouse—and he also resembles the host culture, whose structure sometimes rejects immigrants and fosters personal violence against them. He is in a position of power as opposed to the defenseless mouse—i.e. an "illegal" immigrant—, and the intrusion of the animal/immigrant calls for a hostile reaction. Being represented by a mouse, the immigrant is thus dehumanized. Christie and Wessells comment that, in violent conflicts such as war, dehumanizing the enemy, the Other, is done to encourage and facilitate violence against them (1956). Following this idea, killing a mouse seems easier for Saeed Saeed than killing a human. Therefore, exerting violence on immigrants also seems to be easier if they are dehumanized and regarded as animals.

Much like Yamashita does in her novel, Romo also portrays trapped birds in *El Puente/The Bridge*. Carlota's pet, Lorenzo, lives in a birdcage next to the window, facing the Rio Grande from the U.S. side. In the same way the birds in Gabriel's house seem to lack freedom, this bird trapped behind bars suggests the imprisonment of immigrants who cross the border "illegally." This correlation between Lorenzo and

[204] Kicking the animal echoes images of public forces kicking not only immigrants but also other civilians.

immigrants seems more obvious when considering the fact that he is a mynah. Originally from India, these animals have been introduced in other places such as North America. Thus, they are considered to be an "invasive species." This is significant, for immigrants are, according to some, invaders, similar to what happens in Gabriel's house.[205] Immigrants are often regarded as a threat to the host culture, its values, traditions and language, partly echoed by the recurrent complaint: "they [immigrants] take our jobs, they take our women (or men)," which often fosters rejection and violence against these "aliens."[206] Then, mynahs are considered a noisy species, which would allude to the "noisy" nature of Latin Americans from an American perspective. These birds are scavengers too, similar to the insects in *Tropic of Orange*. Mynahs may feed on garbage and leftovers of human food or even steal food from people's plates—Lorenzo eats dry dog food, for instance (Romo 5). On the one hand, this echoes the stereotype of immigrants as criminals and as people that take whatever they can from the host society. On the other hand, this refers to immigrants often having few alternatives other than taking what is undesirable for the native residents—for instance, blue-collar jobs, exemplified by Bobby or Biju. Mynahs also adapt to different locations, even urban environments, which has become an issue in North America. Once again, immigrants frequently face the hardships of adapting/adopting traits of the host culture, in which a percentage of its members reject immigration, sometimes, violently. Following the adaptation argument, mynahs that are domestic pets are able to learn to imitate human speech or other sounds as in Lorenzo's case, which mimics the

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[205] Mynahs are territorial and aggressive when defending their nests, hence being a threat to other species. I will here disregard this aggressive trait but will focus on the bird being perceived a threat. For the analysis of the Mynah, I will hereafter refer to the Global Invasive Species Database.

[206] Mynahs have two nests—one to breed during the summer and another one for the entire year—which is threatening to other species, for mynahs occupy more space. Considering that these birds inhabit two places, they may represent not only immigrants but also the residents and the characters of the novel that live on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Another connection between mynahs and the events of the novel is that berries are a relevant ingredient in the diet of these birds, a fact that might be associated with the prominence of the mulberries in the narrative.

meow of cats (Romo 5). Here, the correlation lies in the learning of the language of the host culture, a process that is basically achieved through imitation. Furthermore, Lorenzo is mimicking its natural predator, hence they could be regarded as opposites. The implication this time is that the bird represents Mexicans whereas the cat stands for Americans, the former imitating the latter.[207]

The "food chain" present in Carlota's house is completed by a Chihuahua, a dog typical from Mexico. The animal barks nervously when Lorenzo "meows," suggesting the dangerous and invasive presence of a cat in the building. In choosing to interpret the cat as the United States, I suggest that this country is, to a certain extent, invasive and perceived as a threat to Mexico, represented by Lorenzo and also Carlota's twenty-three-room Spanish colonial house, a typical Mexican building much like Gabriel's hacienda. This threatening invasion becomes true with the advent of the *maquiladora* industry, the overwhelming spreading of products sold by American corporations, and the trade agreements and international institutions mostly controlled by the U.S. Nonetheless, the Chihuahua is not the only canine in the house.[208] The unnamed Chihuahua shares this privilege with two basset hounds, Cowboy—which sounds very American—and Gina. The three dogs end up fighting for the Kibbles 'N Bits, the dog food that Lorenzo was going to eat. This could imply that the basset hounds stand for the United States too, whereas the Chihuahua is Mexico. Consequently, both the Chihuahua and the caged Lorenzo would represent Mexico. However, I would argue

[207] Mynahs are sometimes purposefully used to control pests in farms, for they can feed on insects. Thus, the bird might recall the Bracero Program, in which millions of Mexicans were "purposefully used" to harvest crops in U.S. farms, as mentioned before.

[208] Dogs are given great relevance in Desai's novel too. Mutt, Jemubhai's she-dog, symbolizes the English/Western wife he never had—he even compares Mutt to the English actress, Audrey Hepburn. Mutt is what the judge loves the most, enjoying privileges that are unattainable for lower caste human beings such as the cook or Biju. However, the name of the dog is significant. The word "mutt" has two possible meanings: a mongrel dog—an interbred dog—and a stupid person. Moreover, "mongrel" has offensive connotations when used to refer to someone with hybrid backgrounds or descent. Thus, the allusion to Jemubhai in the dog's name is conspicuous. His background is a mixture of Indian and British culture. Also, his fervent and submissive desire of becoming English/Western at whatever cost, frequently resulting in his own ridicule, suggests a certain degree of stupidity and stubbornness.

that, on the one hand, the Chihuahua stands for the Mexican government and other institutions that fight the basset hounds—the U.S.—for profits.[209] On the other hand, considering that the other pets leave Lorenzo without any food, the mynah bird may allegorically refer to Mexico and its natural and human resources being slowly drained, while its population is pushed towards poverty in a case of slow violence.

3.3. Side Effects: Violence in the Borderlands and Globalization

The process of globalization, including global trade and economic agreements foster the circulation of goods and people across the U.S.-Mexico border. Surveillance, control and criminal activities such as drug trafficking or "illegal" crossings of the border are frequent elements in the borderlands scenery. This area tends to be associated with images of violence, corruption, rape, environmental issues, and overmilitarization, negative aspects that are often prominent and in the spotlight. Linda Allegro draws our attention towards the "alarming high rates of murders and rapes of young Mexican women in border towns," as well as the overpopulation and urban growth being partly responsible for a "climate of corruption and abuse," also reflected in the frequent murder of journalists due to their investigations on political corruption and drug trafficking ("Economy" 85). The area is violence-ridden, a structural violence that fosters thousands of cases of personal violence actualized as some of the worst crimes possible. These extreme levels of insecurity as well as different sorts of corruption are

[209] Another interpretation is that the basset hounds, originally from France and the United Kingdom, echo the Second French intervention of Mexico in 1861, supported by the U.K. and Spain. The European powers wanted to continue receiving payments from Mexico, foster free trade and have access to Latin American markets as well as to silver reserves in the country. The violent consequences of this military invasion could be implied by the "big, fat prints of the basset hounds" left on the courtyard of the house after the mulberries fall. The red color of this fruit, one of the main symbols in the novel, may also stand for the bloodshed of the war.

echoed in *El Puente/The Bridge*, particularly through the depiction of violent events. One of the protagonists of the novel, Lourdes, finds a dead man by the Rio Grande, a dangerous place, as described by a police officer that then sees her walking away from the river bank. In the narrative, this river usually takes lives, gives life or witnesses births. Water is the main source of life; however, lives are lost due to these waters: malformations caused by water pollution, corpses dumped in the river, and the symbolic reddened waters that represent blood, possibly that shed by the Mexican residents and immigrants along the U.S.-Mexico border.[210] The fact that the corpse Lourdes finds is wearing a black suit and a ruby ring suggests that he had high social status. Even though it is unclear what happened, it is likely that he was murdered or assassinated—perhaps he was a businessman, a politician, a member of a drug cartel, among several possible scenarios—since the corpse had not been robbed of anything until Lourdes takes the ring.[211] Hence, violence is openly reflected in this narrative. The concise way in which the finding of the corpse is narrated suggests that such an event is not shocking, but

[210] Violence is also reflected by the book cover, which focuses on the Rio Grande (see fig. 6 in Appendix 1). The stream of pinkish redness splits and separates two green areas on each side of the river/border. The river carries figures that are connected with one another. This could be interpreted as the lives of those who constantly cross the bridge. Conversely, they might be those who died either crossing the border or in the area. Hence, the figures would allude to the violence and crime suggested by the corpse Lourdes finds. In addition, the figures may be the characters of the novel, who end up being part of the river, since they drop or throw something into it. Alternatively, those figures could be the pollution of the river due to the *maquiladoras*. In a different vein, the mysticism that flows throughout the narrative—e.g. the reddening of the Rio Grande being a divine miracle according to some characters—might be reflected by the river coming down or rising up into the starry sky.

[211] In Pura's chapter, there is another reference to violence and insecurity. She does not wear any jewelry, for she remembers an article on the newspaper that covered the case of "an old woman, just like herself, [who] had had her finger chopped off for a simple band of gold" (Romo 81). Then, Lola and Lorena, who wear "blue jean miniskirts and tight, stretch tube tops" and a red Raspberry Cream lipstick (37), are sexually harassed by a taxi driver that whistles, insults and yells at Lola (45). Lola, not being submissive, insults him back and they engage in a fight. Linguistic violence becomes physical when he punches her in the face. The scene shows gender violence, in which the woman is abused verbally, physically and emotionally. The police show up only when they start fighting. Although the actual hitting and kicking is more notorious than an exchange of insults, the implication is that the officers do not deem verbal violence as relevant and worth their intervention. The violence with which the police act is underscored when they put Lola in a choke hold (45). Even though it may be standard procedure—the uncooperative Lola was fighting and disturbing the peace—, the solution to the altercation is more violence. Yet, this hostility is never aimed at the driver, only at Lola and Lorena—the latter being briefly chased by the police after she insults them for subduing her friend. When the women run away towards the Mexican side of the bridge, out of the jurisdiction of those cops, the officers laugh at the incident. They choose to ignore the violence that was exerted on the two friends, showing that sexism and derogatory attitudes towards women are often regarded as minor issues.

frequent in the borderlands: "Lourdes found a dead man by the river" (Romo 67). Besides, she does not even look at the man's face. By being faceless, a lack of identity, singularity and individuality characterizes the corpse, implying that this man is one more digit in the alarming numbers of murders and other crimes that are quotidian events in the area.

In relation to this violence, police corruption, another significant issue in the area, is also hinted at. Due to the overwhelming insecurity in the neighborhood, Tano gives free *pan dulce* to the officers that go to his bakery; and the police look after his shop in return. Once again, cohabiting with violence and insecurity is made explicit by the behavior of the inhabitants of the borderlands. The police are supposed to watch over the people, a role that is highlighted here; at the same time, police corruption may also be involved in Tano's offerings to the officers. It could be argued that, if Tano stopped giving free pastries to those cops, they would stop "looking after" his bakery and, possibly, even foster criminal activity against it. In other words, these free *pan dulces*, even though they could be literally interpreted as a token of appreciation for the officers' work, do imply a potential bribe or payment in exchange for not being targeted by criminals.[212] Thus, the police are implied to abuse the authority that a badge grants them, masking their corruption behind their surveillance over Tano's shop.

It can also be argued that, with this highly symbolic shop, Romo's narrative addresses the militarization of the border. The door of the bakery might allude to the hostile military presence on the border. The building exemplifies the poverty of the area: "The bakery's old, dilapidated screen door got stuck at the top every time Lourdes

[212] When Sofia's husband does not come back from work on the Mexican side, she considers calling the police for help. However, Mexico is out of the reach of the American officers. She rejects the idea of turning to the Mexican police though, for these forces are corrupted: "they would only try to get money from her; she knew that" (Romo 115).

pulled on the handle. The door would twist at the center, the bottom would pull out, and then the top corner would finally give way with a snap that always hit her" (Romo 74). We may say that the door represents the U.S.-Mexico border, especially, the center of the twisting door. This would leave the bottom and the top as symbols of Mexico and the U.S. respectively. Since this door is broken, so is the border, an entry that stretches before snapping suddenly and violently. Interestingly, it is the top corner of the door/border the one that snaps whenever someone wants to go through it. If Lourdes is Mexican, the top corner of the door snapping and hitting her might allude to a hostility against Mexicans entering the U.S. The bells above the door would then symbolize the *migra* or the Border Patrol, alerting when someone crosses the door/border. However, Lourdes is hit so hard by the door that she cannot even hear the bells: failing to hear those bells (the *migra*) can be read as having drastic consequences. Then, Tano also claims he is tired of fixing the door and that he will keep it broken, which is why he put the bells. It is implied that the border is broken and, in spite of the attempts to fix it, it is no longer feasible or even worth it. The issues present in the area—pollution, corruption, poverty, and insecurity, among others—have become part of the borderlands. Aware of this violence, Tano installs the bells—i.e. the military, the Border Patrol—rather than trying to make his door safe again, an effort that would be in vain; a temporary and partial solution rather than a definitive one.

Police corruption in the area is also addressed in *Traffic*, albeit in a stereotypical way and from a U.S. perspective. Regarding the War on Drugs, apart from the overwhelming corruption that involves public institutions and forces with drug cartels, Mexico is depicted to be in need of help from the United States. Deborah Shaw claims that, generally speaking, positive characterizations of Mexicans take the form of naivety, which leaves them little option but to wait for the Americans to lend them a

hand ("Representations" 211). In *Traffic*, Mexicans ultimately need guidance from the U.S. Charles Ramírez Berg explains that this insistence on stereotyping Latino characters responds to and

> justif[ies] the United States' imperialistic goals. […] [T]he Monroe Doctrine […] was based on the notion that the nation should control the entire hemisphere […] Movie stereotyping of Latinos, therefore, has been and continues to be part of an American imperialistic discourse about who should rule the hemisphere—a sort of 'Monroe Doctrine.' (4-5)[213]

In fact, as D. Shaw observes, Javier is only able to catch General Salazar after receiving American help from the DEA in exchange for information on the Mexican official's connections to the Juárez Cartel; by working alongside the DEA, "Javier becomes one of the film's main heroes" ("Representations" 219). The need for support from the powerful U.S. agencies shows the lack of means and effectiveness of the Mexican judicial system and law enforcers.[214] Moreover, the United States is represented as a "good neighbour and a benign patriarch," suggesting that, by helping Mexico and its people, the "United States can significantly curb Mexico's participation in the drug trade" (Carroll 87). Yet, as Susan Boyd highlights, the film does not address the issue of the "violence and instability in Mexico," to which the U.S. contributes by "providing aid to the police and military to fight the war on drugs" instead of "social and economic aid" (403). Instead, the film shows the U.S. authorities to be the ones fighting against the "evil" drug lords to help and protect U.S. citizens and save the day. According to Roberto G. Fandiño Pérez, *Traffic* delivers the frequent message of a chaotic and

[213] The Monroe Doctrine was supposed to be the American recognition of the new Latin American republics that had recently achieved their independence. In 1823, President James Monroe stated that the U.S. would not allow the European empires to intervene in the American continent whatsoever (Jenkins 74).

[214] Molten Gordon and Ray Castro—African American and Latino, respectively—fail to catch Carlos Ayala. Nevertheless, at the end of the movie, Gordon leaves Ayala's house triumphantly, after installing a "bug" under a table, suggesting that, sooner or later, the Ayalas will fall.

corrupt Latin America being the reason behind drug smuggling into the United States (332). However, it should be underscored that it is the demand in countries like the U.S. that makes drug trafficking so profitable. Even though the film mentions that the demand of drugs in the United States will contribute to the persistence of drug smuggling regardless of the actions taken by the authorities on the War on Drugs (TIME), the representation of Mexico in this narrative focuses on drug cartels and a corrupt system. As a result, the motion picture continues to blame the southern neighbor for the trafficking of illegal substances.

Traffic not only associates Mexico with violence exerted by both drug cartels and the public forces, but also contributes to the positive depiction of the U.S. neo-empire. The general violence present in Mexico and the alleged U.S. superiority are reflected on the way in which both countries are represented in the film. For Jack M. Beckham, "American celluloid [has] consistently worked to establish and strengthen the metaphorical border of difference between Americans and Mexicans" (131). In addition, Bernd Evers explains that popular American films began treating Latinos and their culture rather objectively in the 1980s; before that, "Hispanics acted primarily as opponents, obstacles that the Anglo protagonists had to overcome in order 'to realize their heroic identities'" (4). *Traffic* mainly focuses on the wealthy and technological United States, while only showing the impoverished, violent, corrupt, and illegal face of Mexico. Therefore, the viewers "are left to believe that greed, corruption, and violence are inherent in Mexican authorities and cartels that threaten US citizen's safety" (Boyd 403). Indeed, the violence and corruption of the Mexican forces and institutions is addressed in *Traffic*. The Mexican characters in Soderbergh's film fall under typical roles such as the violent drug dealers or smugglers, whereas the police are intrinsically

corrupted and hostile.[215] The movie opens with Javier and Manolo, two *policías judiciales*, who track down a truck full of drugs on its way to the United States. Both officers use violence to arrest the two smugglers that are on the vehicle, pointing their guns in the men's faces. Once again, personal violence is conspicuous and a way to punish those who disrupt social and structural order, hoping that they will refrain from repeating those actions. In the name of the law, the police act on a thin line between what could be considered justice—a justified use of violence—and abuse—unjustified and unfair violence. However, violence and intimidation among the public forces are also represented when General Salazar and his men point guns in Manolo's and Javier's faces, thus claiming the truck, the smugglers and the drugs for themselves. Reflecting the corruption of the Mexican law-enforcers, Salazar makes use of his authority and higher rank to get what he wants: taking down the Tijuana Cartel, for he is corruptly involved with the opposing Juárez Cartel. Also, Salazar's men are seen torturing prisoners, such as Frankie Flowers.[216] Only two state police officers are considerably honest, Javier Rodríguez Rodríguez and his partner Manolo Sánchez. Nonetheless, Javier is somewhat forced to work for Salazar, thus being an accomplice of the General's corruption. Then, Javier is the protagonist of one more case of corruption, although he does not accept any bribe. Two American tourists get their car stolen in Mexico.[217] When they ask him to find the vehicle, Javier tells them that they should talk to somebody else: the tourists would pay this man, who, in turn, would bribe the police to get the car back. This corruption is a form of structural violence that affects the

[215] Just as the negatively portrayed law-enforcers are Mexican, the main criminals on the American side of the border are also of Mexican origin, at least in name: the drug smuggler Carlos Ayala, his friend the dealer Eduardo Ruiz (Miguel Ferrer), and Francisco Flores/Frankie Flowers (Clifton Collins Jr.). Perhaps, the most interesting of them all is the latter, a hit-man working for the Mexican drug lord Juan Obregón, yet living in San Diego. His name has a Spanish and an English version, denoting his origin and activities in both countries. However, in spite of his American connection, he is a negative character.

[216] It can be argued that the prisoners are invisible, for they are concealed and isolated from the rest of the society—their invisibility is underscored in the film when Flowers is locked up and tortured in his cell.

[217] Even though the tourists are not physically harmed—it is not mentioned—, their property is. This does harm them psychologically and emotionally.

people. It is a significant limitation in the pursuit of the potential: corruption contributes to the unequal distribution of wealth, individuals' interests are directly affected in negative ways, satisfying basic human needs is often neglected, and so on. Besides, corruption as structural violence also encourages crime such as robbery, theft, and bribing, which are specific cases of personal violence.

One way in which Soderbergh emphasizes the contrast between the U.S. and Mexico in *Traffic* is the specific use of filters and colors, which serve to differentiate scenes that take place on either side of the border. In Andrew deWaard's terms, Soderbergh's film

> uses distinctive colour palettes to clearly distinguish its three plotlines: the East Coast scenes are shot in bright daylight to produce icy blue, monochromatic tones; the Mexican scenes are overexposed and use 'tobacco' filters for grainy, bleached-out sepia tones; and the San Diego scenes use the risky technique of 'flashing' the negative for a halo effect to complement the vibrant hues. (14)

However, it is worth mentioning that the use of these strategies seems to "backfire" to a certain extent. Mexico and Mexicans are all depicted as involved in crime and drug smuggling, since the "tobacco" filter is used for every single scene in Mexico, resulting in yellowish, saturated, "desert-like" colors, and highlighting the difference between the United States and Mexico.[218] Subsequently, Mexico is linked to deserted areas and shown as a more "backward" country, devoid of both an effective judiciary system and moral integrity. In addition, yellow is related to madness and its hues are not pleasant to look at, adding another negative connotation to the depiction of Mexico and its

[218] A classic antecedent of "border films" is Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958). This movie deals with conflicts on the U.S.-Mexico border like *Traffic*, and depicts Mexicans as criminals. For an analysis of this film, see Beckham's "Placing *Touch of Evil*, *The Border*, and *Traffic* in the American imagination."

inhabitants.[219] Unlike Mexico, San Diego is positively recreated as a city full of life and light, due to the Californian sun, whereas the blue in most of the scenes of Robert's plotline is strongly connected to the disunity of his family, as well as the coldness of the politicians in Washington D.C., who are described by Robert as beggars that wear fifteen-thousand-dollar suits and don't say "please" or "thank you" (00:29:46-00:30:00).[220] The clear difference in color-coding between the blue scenes in the U.S. and the yellow ones in Mexico, Christoph Schubert claims, suggests that "any contact between the two areas appears undesirable" (48). However, I would argue that the film depicts the U.S. authorities supporting and seeking support from the Mexican counterparts in the War on Drugs. Consequently, the U.S. is perceived as the ones taking the initiative to engage in the "heroic" deed of fighting drug trafficking. The scene when Robert goes to the El Paso Intelligence Center, from where he can see Mexico, is significant, since Mexico is in sepia, but the United States is in full color.[221] Furthermore, being a product mostly addressed to the American audience, how Mexicans or other Latin Americans would see or receive the film seems to be somewhat irrelevant from an American perspective. This lack of interest could imply a certain degree of "U.S.-centrism." Such a view is driven by the influential position of the

[219] This negative depiction of Mexico affects its institutions as well. While the Mexican forces are corrupt and violent, the violence of the U.S. police is never seen. Also, Wakefield is informed that his job position—President of the Office of National Drug Control Policy—is inexistent in Mexico, highlighting the contrast between the advanced political and judicial system of the U.S., and the backward Mexican system.

[220] *Traffic* constitutes an important step toward the integration of Spanish language in U.S. cinema, for most scenes that take place in Mexico are in this language. And yet, while a large number of characters are from Mexico—and the Mexican scenes are shot in this country, which is also positive—, most of the lead Mexican characters are not portrayed by Mexican actors: "Benicio del Toro (Javier) is from Puerto Rico, Tom[á]s Mili[á]n (Salazar) is a Cuban American, and Benjamin Bratt (Juan Obregón) is an American with a Peruvian mother; only Jacob Vargas (Manolo) is Mexican American" (D. Shaw 216). It is true, however, that, by including Latino actors, *Traffic* constitutes a better approach to a transnational plot and the portrayal of the border than if it had chosen Americans to play Latino characters, since, at least, these actors are or sound like native Spanish speakers. Moreover, we should not forget that this is Hollywood, and casting well-known actors would increase the odds that a film may be financially successful.

[221] This scene also denotes the American power, since Robert is informed that fifteen security agencies work together to surveil the smuggling of drugs all over the world. However, the budget that these agencies have is minimal as compared with the financial power of the drug cartels, making a victorious resolution in the War on Drugs unlikely.

United States as a world superpower. From this perspective, the American culture would be considered to be "better" than the rest: it places itself at the center of the world and as the standards to which other countries and/or cultures would be compared.

In addition to social and political violence, the borderlands experience slow violence, the trashing of the environment, which has negative consequences on the inhabitants. This slow violence is mostly caused by the rapid industrialization of the area and subsequent exponential growth in population. These issues are addressed in *El Puente/The Bridge*. It could be argued that there is a component of hostility in the crowd that witnesses the red river event from the bridge. Albeit not violent *per se*, the crowd and the frenzy TV reporters are certainly hectic, echoing the overpopulation of the border. Significantly, the crowd contributes to Pura's death. Her passing away is anticipated: she has a mild heart attack on the plane she boards in Mexico City, a place she visits to remember her childhood one last time, for she knows she will die soon. Once Pura gets to the border, she learns about the red river and, feeling better, she "decide[s] to battle the crowd" (Romo 94). However, while being among the suffocating group of people, her chest hurts again, and she dies on the bridge exactly when the eighteen-wheeler that is present in every chapter honks. This truck is "symbolic of industrial growth and the crossing of goods at the *frontera*" (Ibarraran 141). It may thus be implied that, ultimately, it is a combination of the overpopulation and the overindustrialization of the border that take Pura's life.

The overindustrialization of the border has also had a significant impact on the environment. The setting up of *maquiladoras* from the outset of the Border Industrialization Program in 1965 has been the main reason for the increasing pollution of the area. The resulting long-term effects of these factories settled by TNCs have "disproportionate influence over the terms of extraction with their third world state

partners, inhibiting democratic dispensations from developing while exploiting an environmental, health, and labor climate far more lax than the legislative controls corporations were subject to back home" (Nixon 71). However, the "birth" of these *maquiladoras* was not supported by an urbanization plan, proper infrastructure, sanitation, sewage system, and the migration of Mexicans from other regions of the country, who, in search for work, caused a variety of social, political, and environmental issues. These problems were also fed by NAFTA later on, through the introduction of more industrial growth and *maquiladoras* on the border, hence further moving the production of goods to the Global South, i.e. outsourcing. Furthermore, as a consequence of the increase in population, the U.S. and Mexican governments intensified the militarization of the borderlands: "surveillance technologies, border fencing, and […] Border Patrol personnel and funding" (Allegro, "NAFTA" 189). Nevertheless, this overmilitarization has not had positive effects on the area. Instead, it has forced migrants to change their routes in the desert of the borderlands, increasing the risk they face, "while maintaining a fiction of securing the border at tremendous cost to the US public" (Spengler 110). The *maquiladoras*, moreover, "determine the lives and destinies of those who work in/for them and induce unprecedented levels of environmental damage" (Ibarraran 134). Consequently, notwithstanding the job positions that the *maquiladora* industry has opened, the negative impact they have had on the area cannot and should not be ignored.

The lack of an urbanization plan to address the overpopulation led to the emergence of shantytowns along the border and near the assembly factories. The heavy industrialization of the border, Ibarraran notes, led to the "unplanned creation of working-class quarters, *colonias*, where even the most basic human living conditions are nonexistent" and the *maquila* workers, who earn the minimum wage or less, live in

wooden shacks with no access to basic human needs such as electricity or running water (135-36; italics in the original). Guillermina G. Núñez defines colonias as “burgeoning neighborhoods and communities located on the outskirts of large urban centers and in rural regions throughout the U.S.-Mexico border,” and they are the affordable alternative for many low-wage workers to own land or a home (57). These shantytowns are more likely to suffer from the deficient environmental regulation concerning *maquiladoras* and the inadequate disposal of the industrial waste, which allow for health issues such as malformations, as Romo’s novel reflects. If this were not enough, the working conditions in *maquiladoras* can be extremely unhealthy too, since many of these employees have to handle industrial waste and other toxic substances. Thus, this slow violence affects not only the environment but also the human population.

The effects of these factories on the borderlands are among Romo’s main concerns in his novel. The author denounces these practices particularly through the character of Tomasita, whose husband used to work with industrial waste in a *maquiladora* until he died of cancer.[222] The company rented them the house where Tomasita and her husband lived. Nonetheless, once he was no longer an employee, she was forced to leave. The fact that the company owns the house also implies that it owns the couple: “The novel addresses the factories’ symbolic and factual ownership of the lives and destinies of their workers, mirrored in the fact that, once Tomasita’s husband dies, she has to abandon the house the factory rented him” (Ibarraran 139). This is the first personal and structural violent instance Tomasita has to face. She is deprived of a home, unable to afford another, while the *maquiladoras* are supported by the

[222] Cancer here may allude to the drastic changes that the *maquiladora* industry has brought to the border area over the years similarly to the mutations suffered by cells when turning into cancer cells. Also, the excessive cell growth is reflected by the overindustrialization and overpopulation of the borderlands as well as their negative consequences. Furthermore, the narrative might imply that the *maquiladoras* themselves are a social and environmental cancer, expanding while exhausting the human and natural resources of the area just like cancer cells invade several parts of the body until a potential death.

government and corporations that systematically restrict the life opportunities of these workers. As a consequence, Tomasita does not have the means to fully cover her well-being needs, thus being forced into misery, and even her survival needs are put at risk, since the conditions in which she has to live are certainly life threatening. With barely no money and working in a convent on the U.S. side, ironing habits, Tomasita ends up living in a shack made of "wooden planks, cardboard, and green corrugated fiberglass sheets," built by her friends on the bank of the Rio Grande, with no access to electricity or running water (Romo 128). The river is her bathroom.[223] As one might expect, due to its pollution, the river does not provide any source of healthy, clean water. Thus, Tomasita is forced to wash herself with toxic water, exposing herself to the contamination even further. This character has to face an incapability of covering both her well-being needs and her survival needs, as described in section 1.2. Tomasita endures misery, poverty and potential death due to the unhealthy conditions in which she lives.[224]

The job opportunities offered by *maquiladoras* are briefly echoed in Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*. Arcangel goes to Gabriel's house in Mazatlán, where he ends up working for a bricklayer, Rodriguez, for one day, helping him to build a wall. However, Rodriguez considers Arcangel should stay working with him: "Where will you [Arcangel] go? A factory further north? The government has a long-range plan, but don't be fooled by that. A lot of big words about programs and production, but who

[223] Considering that she throws her own physiological waste into the river as well, it may be implied that not only corporations abuse and exploit the environment, but we all make use of it to our own advantage.

[224] The mixture of clay and mulberries might have a religious interpretation. The fruits here represent blood whereas clay, which resembles dust and can be used to mold and make objects, would be the dust God made humans from according to the Bible. Since we "turn from dust to dust," dust is not only life, but also death. Hence, by blending dried mulberries and clay, Tomasita mixes the flesh and blood that makes us humans, life and death. The red waters of the river thus receive and symbolize life and death. The religious connotations of the dark red river are more conspicuous when compared to the Nile turning into blood in the film *The Ten Commandments*—and, originally, in the Bible, Exodus 7.20 (Romo 130). The reddening of the Rio Grande, which also alludes to its pollution, is therefore a "plague," and the death of the *maquiladora* workers and the inhabitants of the borderlands could be argued to be a "curse."

does the work? They always forget the people who sweat for their bread. Unless it's an election year, there's nothing in it for people like us" (Yamashita 142-43). Rodriguez refers to the exploitative *maquiladora* industry, profitable only for the authorities and the companies, perpetrating structural violence. He also alludes to programs and agreements like BIP or NAFTA, implemented by the Mexican government, promising more employment. Yet, those who actually work are neglected by politicians who only remember the working-class when they need to get something in return, usually votes. The temporary nature of these programs contrasts with the "work for a lifetime" offered by Gabriel's rusty and crumbling Mexican house (Yamashita 142). The hacienda needs significant and time-consuming repairs and improvements, similar to Gabriel's Mexican background and Mexico as a nation. The fact that, as Rodriguez's son, "[p]oor people are doomed to work to their deaths. That we [impoverished people] eat and drink all our earning because anyway we will die," suggests that these individuals are neglected all their lives: they spend their earnings in order to survive and are only released from their work duties when they pass away (143). The resulting invisibility of those workers is interrupted when the interests of governments and corporations require so. Workers are exploited in the name of profit, enticed by the constant lip service of politicians. Once these individuals' capabilities to produce are exhausted, they are replaced by "new" ones, in an apparently inexorable vicious circle.

The pervasive precariousness of the life conditions on (or near) the U.S.-Mexico border is also reflected in *Babel*. Here, the contrast between the home of the Joneses in the United States and the neighborhood where Amelia's family live is significant. The Joneses have a typical middle-class house in a safe neighborhood, with modern appliances, a live-in maid and other typical "luxuries" of a Western lifestyle. On the other side of the border, Amelia's family live in an impoverished neighborhood in a

desert area with dirt roads, and simple buildings, some made of stones and brick. The drastic differences are reflected by the reaction of the two American children, Debbie and Mike, who are shocked at the sight. They also mention that their parents told them that Mexico—the borderlands in this case—is dangerous, which unfortunately responds to a stereotype based on reality, as has been discussed. Having a maid that takes care of them, with all their needs covered, safety included, the children seem to live in a bubble of overprotectiveness, remaining ignorant of the poorer realities of other people. This bubble pops when they get to Mexico and face the harsh life conditions there. In addition, Santiago kills the hen they are going to eat right in front of a group of children, including the siblings. This act of violence against the hen shocks and scares Mike and Debbie, confirming the dangers Richard and Susan had told them about, whereas the Mexican children celebrate the event. Arguably, this would confirm the fact that violence is "normal" and frequent in Mexico, while it is a rarity in the U.S.[225]

As mentioned before, one of the main concerns in *Crash* is the constant violent crashing among individuals in Los Angeles, particularly due to racist attitudes. The title of the film itself alludes to these interpersonal clashes, and the narrative uses car accidents as a symbol of the hostility and violence that racism fosters. However, it is significant that, unlike Manzanar's music in *Tropic of Orange*, inspired by the highway traffic that seems to bring multiple ethnoracial groups together, in *Crash* traffic and vehicles seem to have the opposite result: a lack of connection and empathy among the people living in the City of Angels. The opening sequence of the movie shows the lights

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[225] The film correlates the impoverishment along the Mexican border with that in Morocco. Abdullah's family live in precarious conditions, reflecting the structural violence of the unequal distribution of wealth and remaining largely invisible to society and the authorities. Living in a small house made of stones in the middle of the desert denotes this invisibility. Susan and Richard's thread, also set in Morocco, highlights the family's impoverishment, which is opposed to the (stereotypical) exotic and touristic places of the country. However, a similar isolation is experienced by the tourists after the accident. They are taken to a small village in the desert to help Susan. Here, they see the other reality of Morocco, the one Abdullah and others have to endure.

of dozens of cars on the highway. The viewer is not only introduced to some of the main elements in the narrative—cars and a highly populated urban location—, but also to the fact that these vehicles foster certain "disconnection" among people, hindering human contact, as Detective Waters reflects right after having a car accident. In addition, the film seems to claim that we are all racist or prejudiced regardless of our ethnoracial background, and that extreme, tense and even hostile situations bring out the worst in us. However, as Joyce Irene Middleton puts it, the film "replaces the term 'race' with the term 'prejudice,'" arguing everybody is prejudiced, adapting the message of the film to viewers that reject being "identified as 'racist'" (324). Therefore, the film portrays everyone as prejudiced individuals. Likewise, "redemption" is also "equally available" to "all racial groups," as Catherine Prendergast mentions (347). This "sameness" in terms of racism or prejudice is highlighted by this opening sequence: the lights of the cars all look the same in an impersonal way and they are the only thing visible on the highway at night, stressing the lack of individuality of the Angelinos, distanced from each other in a sea of vehicles. As those cars circulate on the road separated from one another, Angelinos have no real contact and connection among them, except for when they crash against each other. Therefore, violence seems to move around freely in an environment that the movie depicts as potentially hostile, where the chances of interpersonal communication are slim or non-existent.

Violence and the first "crash" are, in fact, promptly introduced to the viewers. Only a few minutes into the movie, Ria, Graham's Latina partner, gets out of their vehicle to discuss the accident with the other driver involved in it, an Asian-looking woman, and racist slurs are exchanged. This aggressive behavior is triggered by the accident, which in addition to actually being a threat to their lives, acts as a provocation to both parts. Obviously, strong negative emotions, most notably anger, influence the

manner in which both drivers address one another. The interaction becomes full of personal verbal violence, fueled by structural violence, in which the "other" ethnoracial community is perceived as the out-group. The use of racial stereotypes and slurs is thus a tool that facilitates or contributes to the perpetration of personal, cultural and structural violence. Furthermore, the presence of the police officer trying to mediate between the two parts might contribute to the hostility. While the police represent the law, which is meant to maintain social order and structure, in this film their presence implies violence or the possibility of violence in order to "restore" that social order. Here, even though the officer attempts to establish a peaceful interaction with and between both women, he would surely resort to more coercive measures in the name of order and peace, if necessary. Punishment would be justified in the name of justice—the end justifies the means. Additionally, Ria points out that she herself is a detective, underscoring the authority that society invests on her. This, in turn, would position her in a higher rank than the other driver, despite the fact that both are members of ethnoracial minorities.

3.4. (In)visible Voices: Violence and (In)visibility

The drastic worldwide changes brought by the advent of technological developments in the 20th and 21st centuries have allowed for the economies of the world and the global trade to be more interconnected than ever. The pursuit of profit fosters cheap labor, which is embodied in *maquiladora* industries, as seen in Part II of this dissertation. The activities of these factories pose a threat to the environment, producing high levels of pollution, which, in turn, affect the population in negative ways.

Furthermore, thanks to current technology, the mass media is able to cover events all over the world with more ease and promptness than ever before. The subsequent access to foreign cultures and social contexts fosters a visibility of economic, political and social issues. Nevertheless, in spite of technology and the instantaneity of communication, a large number of people remain invisible or ignored: the homeless and the impoverished. Aliens to the large amounts of capital that flow around the world, "the global economy has not yet brought either material gifts or the hope of a better life" to these individuals (Kapstein 16). Unable to give much or anything at all, these people are not recognized by the authorities, the media and society in general. Regardless of their literal visibility when begging in the streets, panhandlers are still denied the possibility of covering their basic human needs. Both the impoverished and the homeless suffer a lack of sociopolitical recognition and are pushed towards marginal areas, frequently shantytowns, away from the neighborhoods where the wealthy live. It is only when these "invisible" people, both the homeless and the impoverished, take action in some way—protests, demonstrations, and so on—that they do become visible or even extremely visible, turning into an "issue" to be dealt with. The measures taken by the authorities to find a solution to the problem tend to be of a violent nature and to the detriment of these unprivileged individuals. The selected corpus introduces characters that must face and endure this type of invisibility throughout the narratives.

Some of the characters included in the chosen corpus are indeed invisible to the rest of society. Yet, occasionally, they become too visible and too much of a problem for the elites, resulting in drastic measures to simply get rid of them. As such, it could be argued that they fall under the description of the "damné," discussed by Frantz Fanon. In addition, these characters are marginalized by the authorities and society in general to the point of not having a voice, in other words, they are "subalterns," to use

Gayatri Spivak's term. This concept, which emerged from the postcolonial study of colonial India, focused on a particular, "subaltern" group that was ignored and invisible. These subalterns are subject to the hegemonic power of the ruling classes both through "nonviolent stabilizing and consensus-building [ideological] institutions" such as school (Leitch 14) and through violent repressive measures, which seek to obliterate the marginalized Others (Spivak 76). Consequently, it can be said that "the subaltern enters official and intellectual discourse only rarely and usually through the mediating commentary of someone more at home in those discourses" (Leitch 2195). Furthermore, it should be noted that the subaltern is heterogeneous (Spivak 79). Nonetheless, the different subaltern groups have their "resistance to élite domination" in common (Ashcroft et al. 217). The concept of the subaltern can also be used to address the invisibility of the impoverished, thus echoing Gramsci's use of the term, which he originally applied to social groups "denied access to 'hegemonic' power" (Ashcroft et al. 215). As will be explored later, some of the characters in our corpus get to break from the chains of the subaltern, though, even if it is to eventually find severe punishment and their own demise. In some cases, these protagonists protest against their marginalization, thus attaining their own voice, which puts an end to their condition as subalterns. Nevertheless, they are never able to escape from being the Other, and the dominant groups represented by the government and protected by the public forces display their ruthless power against the (formerly) invisible voices.

As poverty is shown along the U.S.-Mexico border in some narratives, *Tropic of Orange* underscores the fact that the Global South can also be found at the heart of L.A.[226] David A. Snow and Michael Mulcahy state that the presence of the homeless—

[226] World poverty shockingly contrasts with the numbers of rich people. In *Social Invisibility and Diasporas in Anglophone Literature and Culture: The Fractal Gaze* (2014), Françoise Král mentions that the "84 richest people in the world are as wealthy as the poorest half of the world and that the wealthiest

and I would add the visibly impoverished—brought the "image of Third World cities" to U.S. neighborhoods, contrasting with the idea of the United States being the land of opportunities or the American Dream, as Lynn M. Harter et al. say as well (151; 322). The impoverished Vietnam War veteran, Buzzworm, is one of the few people that struggle to help his neighbors meet their well-being needs. This man fights against poverty, violence and the use and traffic of drugs in his L.A. neighborhood: "When I talk about surviving, I don't mean pushing a needle up your veins and waiting for the next time. That's dying" (Yamashita 26).[227] Having been born and raised in that neighborhood, and having spent all his money on drugs and cigarettes for a while, he is well aware of the needs of his community, where poverty, illegal substances and the violence of guns are pervasive, especially among the youth. As his card reads, he names himself or his 24/7 service "Angel of Mercy," offering all sorts of help: "rehab number, free clinic, legal services, shelter, soup kitchen, hot line" (Yamashita 26).[228] Indeed, he resorts to religion and the Bible to help those who want to quit drugs or crime. Significantly, Buzzworm is the one helping this community rather than the authorities, who ignore not only the neighborhood but also Buzzworm himself. The protagonist thus reflects the reality of several veterans of war that have no institutional support after the armed conflict is over. The invisibility of this subaltern/damné neighborhood is emphasized by not being able (or hardly able) to contribute to society, or even having the chance to do so. Due to this limited contribution, they rarely represent benefits or profit for the authorities. Thus, the impoverished and the homeless remain marginalized. Jean-Claude Bourdin defines invisibility as a minimal appearance of people who are

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have benefitted from the [current economic] crisis while millions have lost their homes, committed suicide or are dying" (5).

[227] Albeit a member of the lower class, Buzzworm owns his own modest house. His grandmother started paying for it, an investment he completed sixty years later. However, he cannot afford repairing it.

[228] Apart from living in an impoverished neighborhood, Buzzworm is also invisible due to his "job," helping his neighborhood out, apparently, without perceiving any sort of financial remuneration for doing so. His work is neither registered nor recognized as an economic activity, which fosters his invisibility.

present yet, at the same time, are inexistent (23). Being ignored and unacknowledged by other people is one if not the main reason behind social invisibility (Král 7; Bourdin 24). The absence of the authorities is highlighted by the following quotation: "Some poor nobody in trouble at three A.M. paged him, and he was there long before anyone, especially the police" (26). As can be seen, this echoes a possible lack of interest of the L.A.P.D. to serve this neighborhood. However, it might also reflect the violence of the neighborhood, which may hinder police intervention.[229] Either way, it has to be a member of the community the one who tries to bring change. In spite of Buzzworm's sporadic success, the veteran is unable to eradicate guns, drugs and violence from the neighborhood.

In spite of being concealed from the eyes of the authorities and the rest of the society, Buzzworm's impoverished and marginal neighborhood is marked by tall palm trees—Mexican fan palms or Washingtonia Robusta—, trees which some people consider a mistake that will eventually be cut down and turned into telephone poles. The trees are amenable to two possible interpretations, among others. Taking into account that Buzzworm likes those tall trees, it can be said that the plants may symbolically stand for him, for he is described as a "[b]ig black seven-foot dude, Vietnam vet, [with] an Afro shirt with palm trees painted all over it, [and] dreds"; furthermore, he is the one trying to make his community visible to the rest of the society (Yamashita 27). If the

[229] The possible violence of Buzzworm's neighborhood could be set against the hostility that sometimes characterizes the police, which is mentioned in *Crash* by Anthony and Peter. The thieves apparently come from a neighborhood that is similar to Buzzworm's, although they are introduced to the viewers walking on the streets of a white upper-class neighborhood, which they deem enemy territory. The scene reflects the idea of the in-group and out-group rather visually. They are the ones who do not belong there. Hence, Anthony claims that they are the ones who should be afraid of what may happen to them. They are in a place that could potentially be hostile towards them, due to the negative stereotypes associated with African Americans. Moreover, the presence of the infamous, violent LAPD in the area may be threatening—this police department has a record of abuse against African Americans. Yet, as African Americans, being in that neighborhood is enough for Jean Cabot, a white upper-class woman, to show fear after seeing them. Regardless of Anthony's claims, possessing guns allows the crooks not to be afraid and to actually attain a power position by using personal violence when carjacking the Cabots. The ranks of the couple and the criminals in the social structure are thus inverted.

palms are symbolically associated with Buzzworm, considering the trees an ugly mistake might be linked to rejection and discrimination against African Americans and "subaltern" individuals—another case of violence. However, since the trees mark the spot where the neighborhood is located, it is also possible that the palms symbolize the people living there. Once again, if the trees are deemed to be a mistake, then this marginalized neighborhood and its people are a "mistake" too. Moreover, the height of the palms allows the tops to "see over the freeway, over the hood to the other side" (32). The freeway acts as a physical border between the poorer and the richer sides of the city. The latter is inaccessible to the inhabitants of this neighborhood, they would only be able to see the other side as the palm trees do. The views from the freeway are strategic too, since people do not have to see this marginal neighborhood. The sight of it can be skipped, hiding the unwanted and "ugly mistake" of L.A. Despite the wealth, splendor and glamour of Los Angeles, the city has another face, where the protagonists are racism, homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and cheap labor: "Sawhney argues that under- or unrepresented inhabitants of Los Angeles represent Third World populations on whom the city's wealthy, making up the First World 'center zones,' depend for raw materials and cheap labor," which translates into "the lack of social investment in providing adequate health care, housing, and education to the city's poor; and LA sweatshops and the Southern California *maquiladoras* economy" (qtd. in Bryson 711). Nonetheless, the top of the palms can be seen from the freeway. Even if the misery, violence and poverty of the area are concealed from the eyes of those who travel on the freeway, they cannot be completely ignored; the trees remind everyone of the existence of this neighborhood: "That was what the palm trees were for. To make out the place where he lived. To make sure that people noticed. And the palm trees were

like the eyes of his neighborhood, watching the rest of the city, watching it sleep and eat and play and die" (Yamashita 33).[230]

With hardly any support, Buzzworm is aware of the fact that visibility is required to bring about changes. The voice of the invisible people, Bourdin explains, is unheard, unacceptable and irrelevant to those who are visible. The negative situation of the marginalized is only taken into account when it is made conspicuous and compared to the lifestyles of those who are wealthier (26). This is why Buzzworm wants his friend Gabriel to report on the reality of the neighborhood. Mass media would facilitate that visibility to have a chance of getting help from the authorities.[231] Consequently, his contribution reaches its climax when he takes control of the news cameras that were under Emi's supervision while covering the events in the creation of the community. By using the mass media, Buzzworm achieves his goal of giving impoverished and homeless people the opportunity of becoming socio-politically visible. In spite of Emi's disapproval, the network greenlights his proposal of broadcasting several shows made by the homeless themselves, encouraging a visit from politicians, who make the empty promise of helping the community.[232] Yet, the network only allows this visibility of the homeless to happen because it is beneficial for the company. Information and covering the development of the community is truly profitable. Hence, this visibility has a price

[230] The violence exerted on this community and the palm trees goes even further, since the plants may be turned into telephone poles, replacing nature with technology in another case of slow violence against the environment and the people. The neighborhood will be modified to serve the interests of companies, higher social classes, or the authorities, implied by the influence city bureaucrats had on the neighborhood years ago: "City bureaucrats come over to explain how they were gonna widen the freeway. Move some houses over, appropriate streets, buy out the people in the way" (Yamashita 82). These plans affect the entire neighborhood by preventing people from entering the area and by fostering the presence of drug dealers, homeless and prostitution, thus reducing the value of the properties.

[231] In addition, Buzzworm supports the homeless community, because, as Ryan Palmer puts it, "the invisibility of the roadside encampment matches the invisibility of Buzzworm's African-American neighborhood" (104).

[232] As outrageous as it may seem for the detached upper-middle-class Emi, this community is breaking news, and the audience is eager to know more about the events. Therefore, the network immediately finds Buzzworm's idea profitable—even giving him his own show, *What's the Buzz?*, and making posters of it.

and responds to the interests of companies that, through the lenses of the cameras, determine what should be in focus.

The increased visibility of the homeless community in the narrative has negative consequences, however, prompting the authorities to take drastic measures. After the two semi-trucks cause the massive traffic jam, people take possession of the cars that are stuck there. People act as scavengers in a first-come-first-served behavior that echoes colonization or the occupation of territory.[233] The homeless "invade" and claim these vehicles for themselves: "In a matter of minutes, life filled a vacuum, reorganizing itself in predictable and unpredictable ways. Occasional disputes over claims to territory arose, but for the moment, there were more than sufficient vehicles to accommodate this game of musical chairs" (Yamashita 121). By using the cars stuck in the traffic jam as their homes, the homeless disrupt the system and turn it upside-down, an example of what the "resourcefulness and strength of the marginal others" could do by carrying out an "assault on the high-tech Western centers" (Benito et al. 87). The homeless people's action, together with Arcangel's endeavor to reclaim L.A., contribute to the transformation of the city and the political and economic borders: "the homeless create their own space on the freeway in anticipation of the revolution to come" (87).

The scene, however, also reflects the popular perception of the presence of the homeless as undesirable. This is what Snow and Mulcahy claim to be the main issue with the homeless: the problem for other people is not homelessness itself, but the fact that more and more homeless individuals enter areas where the domiciled citizens live (155). Furthermore, the novel echoes the fact that the end of the 20th century witnessed a

[233] The most spacious vehicles—vans, trailers and big sedans—are the first option for the homeless, leaving the luxurious sport cars and convertibles for last or not even taking them, thus inverting the usual value and desirability of the vehicles. Luxury cars truly become a luxury, since they are not practical as potential homes. Hence, the usual social status and higher rank associated with sport cars are inverted.

significant increase in the amount of homeless in the United States, thus becoming more visible to the public eye. Lynn M. Harter et al. explain that current homeless people, particularly single men, are much more visible than in the past, when the homeless were locked up in institutions or even sentenced to death (306). Soon, the homeless become an organized commune, (re)naming streets—hence, claiming them their own—, trading goods found in trucks, and celebrating the events by singing on top of the cars.[234] The rejection towards the homeless rapidly increases. Buzzworm mentions that, for some people like the radio show host, the homeless should be killed, allegedly for not contributing to society or the system, which applies to addicts as well (Yamashita 92).

The expansion of the community attracts the attention of the authorities and networks that broadcast the event, bringing the revolutionary settlement to light and becoming "excessively visible." As the flames of the trucks get closer to the community, this destructive fire foreshadows the violence of the eventual massacre of the homeless, just like the thunderstorm and the screeching eighteen-wheeler echo the violence in Romo's novel. Manzanar reflects upon and knows the possible outcome of this hectic and violent situation on the freeway: "that the homeless were expendable, that citizens had a right to protect their property with firearms, and that fire, regardless of whether it was in your fireplace or TV set or whether you clutched a can of beer or fingered a glass of Chardonnay, was mesmerizing" (Yamashita 123). Furthermore, Manzanar realizes that more homeless individuals join him in his conducting of the music of the city. People start making L.A. their own. Nevertheless, the synchrony of their music is eventually disrupted by the repression of the military.[235] Institutional

[234] As usual, Manzanar is conducting the events happening on the freeway. However, due to the fires of the semi-trucks that exploded as well as the initial riot-like behavior of the homeless, the musician feels fear and, for the first time, he wants to quit conducting.

[235] Brecher et al. identify repression to be one of the most prominent ways why social movements fail. This repression—legal or not—may decrease the activity of the movement or eliminate it altogether (30).

violence thus suppresses the pacific uprising of the homeless and the impoverished as well as the claiming of their rights as human beings.

Indeed, the radio show host's wish to eliminate the homeless is indeed granted towards the end of the novel when the U.S. military forces massacre the community in a storm of gunfire and "red, white and blue smoke" (Yamashita 240), hence alluding to the drastic measures governments sometimes take when faced by unfavorable situations. The disruption in the social structure is a provocation, answered by the official institutions with the utmost violence to favor their own and the majorities' interests. As B. Ann Bettencourt et al. have argued, provocation is one of the main stimulus that triggers aggression. Depending on the situation, the context may represent a more or less significant provocation—high provocation or low provocation—that fosters aggression (753). The "invasive" community of the homeless is a high provocation for the authorities, representing the majority. This sudden visibility of the homeless, who are supposed to stay in the shadows and tangents of the social structure, disrupts this very same structure. Such a disorder calls for measures to return things to their prior state. Hence, violence in the form of punishment to reestablish the status quo of the social structure is perceived as justice, and, thus, justified.

The raid, therefore, eliminates the problem of the homeless and the impoverished gathering in large numbers and claiming the city also as their own, to the detriment of the majorities and the government.[236] Ultimately, however, the homeless remain unable to cover their well-being and survival needs—as reflected in their extreme poverty and death—, and their freedom needs, since they are brutally repressed

[236] Looking at the sky in the book cover of the 1997 edition of *Tropic of Orange*, there are three planes, all of them over an urban area (see fig. 5 in Appendix 1). The planes imply industrialization, wealth, and the global and transnational essence of Los Angeles, on the one hand. Nevertheless, they might also be foreshadowing one of the most violent events in the entire novel: the massacre of the homeless.

by the government. Thus, the homeless are invisible, at the bottom of the social scale, where they do not matter. From the point of view of the dominant groups, the homeless do not and are not able to add anything to society, only taking whatever is offered to them as charity. Nonetheless, there is a positive outcome for the homeless, albeit temporary: while, before, they used to be dispersed all over the city, here the homeless are united and manage to build a sense of community, where their paths cross each other, as is typical of ensemble narratives. The solidarity they have with each other creates a true communal feeling, a source of togetherness, thus echoing the meaning of the French word *ensemble*: together.

The violent end of the freeway community, although reminiscent of war and genocides, is rather democratic, in the sense that it does not discriminate individuals according to their social classes and backgrounds. Not only do homeless and lower-class people perish in the attack, but also upper-middle-class individuals such as Emi, who is shot to death, even if it is only as collateral damage. Moreover, the massacre necessarily evokes the extensive military power that the U.S. has and the large investment made to support it. The goal of restoring a so-called order seems to be achieved with the death of the homeless, individuals who, in turn, are perceived as not valuable enough to live and thus constitute the main target of destruction. This objective also deems Emi's life irrelevant from the point of view of the authorities—if she dies as a victim of collateral damage, so be it. Put differently, the structural violence that marginalizes and ignores the homeless becomes a brutal case of personal violence taken to the extreme, in a wave of terror that engulfs everyone in its path, be it homeless people, TV producers and anyone in between.

The invisibility of the homeless is also shared by Manzanar Murakami. However, this voluntary homeless seems to have chosen to conceal himself and go by

unnoticed. Manzanar, perhaps wanting the freedom that lacking a sense of belonging may give him, is deep in the shadows of society where he cannot be seen and, in fact, he even seems invisible while conducting the sounds of the L.A. traffic: "After all, he lived on the street; he conducted an orchestra no one could see and music no one could hear" (Yamashita 110).[237] As Chiyo Crawford points out, Manzanar is not willing to live in any specific location; instead, "he claims the entire city as his own through the power of his conductor's baton" (91). Manzanar is able to free himself from the constraints of society; as Gabriel states: "He might just look like one more crackpot homeless figure who got stepped on by the system. But this was a case where the man had side-stepped the system" (Yamashita 108). Rejecting the Japanese American stereotype of the model minority, Manzanar abandons his life as a surgeon to become the homeless conductor of the music made by the L.A. traffic, both activities requiring accuracy, technique and carefulness. In a city where cars are ever so present—as can also be seen in *Crash*—, he is inspired by the lives of those who drive on the freeways and the maps of L.A.[238] In addition, as a homeless person, he is compared to an insect: "The homeless were the insect and scavengers of society, feeding on leftovers, living in residue, collecting refuse, carting in this way and that for pennies. In the same manner, who would use the residue of sounds in the city if Manzanar did not?" (Yamashita 56). Manzanar recycles the leftovers of the sounds of the city in order to make music, which echoes the undesirable presence of insects and other animals in Gabriel's Mexican house previously discussed. With the accuracy of a surgeon, Manzanar stitches those sounds

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[237] Manzanar is the "first sansei born in captivity" (Yamashita 108). His name is a conspicuous reference to the U.S. concentration camps where the Japanese were imprisoned during WWII. Manzanar himself claims to have made up his name inspired by the "Manzanar Concentration Camp in the Owens Valley," where he was born (110). His connection to the camps, Chiyo Crawford states, is underscored by the fact that "his loss of a physical place to live parallels the actual loss of homes and businesses faced by internees returning home after the war" (91).

[238] The book cover of the novel shows an urban area that has all sorts of roads, among which highways stand out (see fig. 5 in Appendix 1). In turn, these roads are riddled with automobiles, depicting the great number of vehicles that circulate in the streets of Los Angeles, and denoting wealth, pollution, and the frantic lifestyle of the city—issues linked to structural and environmental violence among others.

up, bringing them all together and back to life. Saying that he is homeless might not be accurate, however, for he feels at home in Los Angeles. The city itself is his home.[239]

The city of Los Angeles does not feel like home for Farhad and Daniel in *Crash*. Farhad is invisible as a complex human being, because his visibility to the rest of the society is one-dimensional: he is only perceived as an undesirable immigrant. In spite of being a U.S. citizen, Farhad is constantly attacked for being an “alien.” Other than the attackers that single him out, Farhad is ignored by the rest of society and the authorities. No one seems to help him but his own family: after his store is wrecked by racist vandals, the insurance company refuses to cover the expenses, and the man loses his only source of income. Due to his own and his family’s invisibility to the authorities, Farhad purchases a gun, even if he does not know anything about these weapons. Taking into account his lack of knowledge and preparation to use a gun, this decision shows that he is desperate—in fact, Farhad makes this purchase after a man attacks his wife for being an immigrant, as he tells his daughter, Dorri (00:22:36-00:23:15). In addition to living in what is an unsafe neighborhood, at least for them, Farhad is an impoverished individual, as suggested by the broken backdoor of his shop. Therefore, he is confined to an area that is hostile towards himself and his family, who are unable to afford moving somewhere else.[240]

Like Farhad, Daniel and his family are pushed to living in dangerous neighborhoods, which are implied to be largely ignored by the authorities. These areas of the city are undesirable for more privileged individuals, who remain detached from the invisible individuals that live there. Daniel struggles to cover his and his family’s

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[239] For his music pieces, he includes instruments from different cultures. As such, his music echoes the cultural hybridity enabled by globalization.

[240] Considering that the film purports that everyone is prejudiced, it may be unlikely for Farhad and his family to find a welcoming neighborhood in Los Angeles or even the United States.

well-being needs, particularly, a sense of security. With the purpose of living in a safer area, Daniel offers a 24-hour service as a locksmith, which suggests a low salary. Eventually, Daniel saves enough money thus achieving his goals. Nevertheless, even though they move to a new area, this is still rather violent, as denoted by the gunshot that Daniel's daughter, Lara, hears. As in Farhad's thread, the presence of the authorities or the public forces in the neighborhoods where Daniel lives is not mentioned, at least, not in any significant way. However, unlike Farhad, the locksmith does not purchase any gun. After Lara hears the "bang" of a gunshot, Daniel makes up a story about an invisibility cloak which has protected him since he was five years old. Hence, the father gives this "shield of protection" to his daughter so that she is always safe. Aware of the fact that he and his family are invisible to the authorities and the rest of the society, Daniel knows that no one will address the violence in the area. Although he asks his daughter if they should go live somewhere else, moving again is not really an option either. Therefore, the invisibility cloak implies that, unable to actually protect his family, Daniel tries to "conceal" his daughter from the danger that reigns in the area, hoping to be invisible to this violence. Furthermore, the invisibility cloak might symbolically allude to how the authorities and the ruling classes "cover" and "conceal" the undesirable lower classes by pushing them to unwanted areas. The only solution Daniel might be able to afford involves playing by the rules that are dictated precisely by the ruling classes: save enough money again—and maybe improve his social status—in order to move to a safer area. However, the act of moving out is made impossible by the hegemony of the ruling classes. It could be argued that, never protesting or upsetting the authorities and the elites, as was the case of Tomasita or the homeless community, Daniel is submissive and seems to accept the hegemony of the ruling classes: the locksmith works hard every day, all day, hoping to earn enough

money so that he can also earn and deserve a way out of his violent neighborhood.[241] Nevertheless, this scenario is unrealistic. In order to protect his little daughter from the adult problem of violence and insecurity, Daniel resorts to an unrealistic, magical device: the invisibility cloak. This cloak emphasizes the contrast between the violent reality Daniel and his family have to face and their dream and hope for an unlikely and even impossible solution to their problem. For Daniel, hope seems to be nothing but an illusion that is as invisible as Lara's new cloak.

The lack of genuine interest in addressing the invisibility of the homeless and marginalized areas is akin to the situation of drug addicts, as reflected in *Traffic*. The film deals with the invisibility of drug addicts mostly in Robert Wakefield's thread. In a meeting, the Drug Czar, other politicians and representatives of the media discuss their goals on the War on Drugs as well as potential measures to decrease both the smuggling of illegal substances into the U.S. and the number of drug users in the country. Yet, the War on Drugs seems more of an opportunity to achieve their own political success, underscored by one of the attendees to the meeting, who claims that drug addicts do not vote. This would be relevant for them, since the more addicts there are, the fewer voters they have. However, since they are already addicts and they do not have an active political participation—they do not have a political voice—, drug users are not worth investing time on; it is implied that no efforts should be made to help them. They are politically marginalized, invisible and irrelevant; hence, they are denied any sort of value in the system, any right to actually be an item in the political agenda other than to satisfy the interests and needs of the authorities. The political invisibility of the addicts and the deliberate refusal to help them are not only displayed by U.S. politicians, but

[241] Daniel's "submissive" behavior is logical, however. Unlike Tomasita or the homeless community, the locksmith not only has a higher social status, a job, a van and a house of his own, he is also responsible for his family. Hence, were Daniel to enrage the authorities, he has more to lose than the other characters.

also by General Salazar in Mexico. During Wakefield's visit to the Southern neighbor to discuss measures to tackle drug trafficking, General Salazar suggests that no course of action is required to deal with addiction, only the production and smuggling of illegal substances should be addressed. For him, addicts treat themselves by overdosing: one less to care and worry about.[242] As such, addicts suffer structural violence, completely abandoned by the authorities, since they are neither profitable nor useful for politicians and the elites, and their addiction is undesirable for the rest of the society, who frequently rejects them.

Moving back to the borderlands, Romo's novel also addresses personal and structural violence against those who are invisible. As observed, the impoverished and the homeless are not given an opportunity to make their voices heard. Instead, they are pushed towards marginal areas where they will not be a "nuisance" to other citizens; if, by any chance they do protest or organize demonstrations, they are often silenced in one way or another. This is what happens to Tomasita, who is socio-politically invisible, "subalternly" living in her wooden shack in a marginalized *colonia* on the bank of the Rio Grande,[243] isolated from the locations of the domiciled middle and upper classes. Nevertheless, in a similar fashion to the homeless community in *Tropic of Orange*, fate

[242] The heartless manner in which Salazar states this denotes a more "primitive," undeveloped behavior than that of the American politicians, both in social and political terms. Once more, Mexico is shown to be more ruthless than the U.S. Even though the American politicians and Salazar share the same opinion regarding addicts, the former are portrayed to be subtler than the latter—perhaps, the former are more hypocritical than the shockingly honest General Salazar.

[243] On the bank of the river, she is literally pushed to an unwanted area of the city, the very limits of the land where she can build a house. Unable to significantly contribute to society, the narrative suggests that she is also dumped on the bank of the Rio Grande as if she were trash. As Simal points out, one of the aspects that garbage dumps and consumerism have in common is that both trash and commodities are usually "shipped and 'outsourced' to distant locales" ("Waste" 1)—thus, trash is effectively out of sight for those who are wealthier. The Rio Grande forcefully takes the waste the *maquiladora* industry—a symbol of the process of outsourcing—dumps, and it is next to that river where the "disposable" and "useless" Tomasita is thrown away, also being out of sight. Furthermore, living in a wooden shack stresses her invisibility. Susan L. Cutter et al. highlight the importance of the "quality and ownership" of housing to avoid social vulnerability and invisibility. The lack of both, wealth and adequate housing, puts individuals at higher risk of facing social, economic and environmental hazards (251, 253).

has a tragic ending ready for her too.[244] This character kick-starts the main event of the novel, the reddening of the river, by throwing dried mulberries mixed with clay into its waters close to where a *maquiladora* dumps its waste. The red waters get to the Gulf of Mexico, all along the border, and not only represent the blood and lives of those who suffer the consequences of the hazardous effects of the *maquiladoras*, they also aim to raise awareness of the danger that these factories mean to the environment. As we saw in section 3.3, the overwhelming levels of pollution caused by these factories is a case of slow violence, harming not only the environment but also the lives of those individuals who live nearby, particularly, those who work in them or are impoverished and live on the banks of the river like Tomasita. As Nixon claims, one of the main issues regarding slow violence is the fact that it is not regarded as violence due to not being a spectacle, with victims that are not clearly specified, as well as lacking attention from the media and, therefore, from the general public. The author remarks that, because of the almost invisible nature of slow violence, it is a challenge to bring such violence to the fore, "requiring creative ways of drawing attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects" (10). It could be argued that, in his novel, Romo has found a "creative way" of denouncing slow violence and putting in the spotlight the multiple issues present in the borderlands. In the narrative, Tomasita does the same: throwing dried mulberries into the river, next to the spot where a *maquiladora* dumps its industrial waste, acts as a form of protest against the slow violence exerted by these factories and supported by the authorities. She accidentally achieves a "creative way of drawing public attention" to the reddened river and, symbolically, to the polluted borderlands. Not only do crowds go to the bridge to watch the event, the mass media covers it from every possible angle as well. This event is

[244] Invisible people occasionally attain sociopolitical visibility due to some sort of disaster (Král 28).

indeed worth the attention of the corporate media, for it is spectacular nature. Thus, we can infer that, after the dumping of dried mulberries into the river, the slow violence exerted by the factories becomes rapid and episodic violence. This change is highlighted by the red color of the waters, associated with blood, which, in turn, echoes violence.

Albeit seemingly obvious, the effects the factories have on the environment and the inhabitants of the area are ignored, underscoring the invisibility of those who live there. The authorities, the media or the people in general never ponder the possibility of *maquiladoras* being the ones behind the red river in the novel: "almost no one sees it as a warning of the contamination and impending death of the river and human life provoked by the proliferation of *maquiladoras* in the border area" (Ibarraran 139). The pollution caused by factories is part of the ordinary, everyday landscape, it is "normal," as befits slow violence. It is so "natural," even logical, that it is not even mentioned. Instead, some individuals prefer more interesting, less plausible explanations, such as believing it is a miracle. Shockingly, people soon seem to forget about the contamination, as can be seen in Dora's comment to Perla: "People are drinkin' the water, the red water, and the sick people are getting better. I don't know if it's true, mind you, but they say it's a miracle" (Romo 62).[245] The red river triggers a police investigation and, after they find out that it was dried mulberries what tinted the waters and track this down, the cops register Tomasita's shack. When she realizes the police are going to her house, she escapes fearing for her life. The woman has indeed become visible to society and the government; as an issue, whose solution is drastic punishment, she needs to regain her invisibility. In order to do this, she literally conceals herself,

[245] Several diseases and malformations during pregnancy are consequences of the pollution of the water and the lack of or limited access to running water. This is reflected by Romo's novel when it is mentioned that Perla's granddaughter has a spinal defect, according to the American doctor, possibly caused by her mother drinking tap water (Romo 63). Another reference to the unsuitability of the water takes place when the dentist gives Cindy purified water to wash her mouth after fixing her tooth, since the water from the faucet may cause an infection (Romo 33). The reddening of the river is, in fact, investigated at one point by the "Department of the Interior and the Centers for Disease Control" (Romo 125).

hoping to be ignored by society once again. However, her efforts are to no avail. Ironically, the media and the authorities label her as an environmental terrorist. Apparently, what she did is more harmful and dangerous than the never-ending pollution caused by the *maquiladoras*.

Added to the dangers of the environmental degradation, Tomasita has to escape from the police, who soon manage to secure her photo. While attempting to cross the border to the U.S. side, where the Mexican public forces would not be able to arrest her, a Mexican soldier identifies her among the crowd on the bridge and tells her to stop. It is worth mentioning that the consideration of Tomasita as an environmental terrorist is so exaggerated that the orders received by the Mexican soldier are to "[u]se whatever force necessary," orders he has been trained to follow and never question, which is implicitly criticized by the narrative (Romo 145). The power granted to the public forces by the system and the law allows them to justify their actions and ease the possible sense of guilt for having to exert violence, especially on someone that is actually innocent like Tomasita.[246] In a tense moment for both Tomasita and the soldier, time almost seems to stop: she "slowly turned around to face her destiny. Just as she turned out around to face him, his sweaty, nervous finger slipped, and a shot rang out. […] Tomasita followed the slow motion of the bullet, like a comet on fire, coming toward her" (Romo 147).

Through Tomasita's death, the novel highlights the hostility of the Mexican forces as well as the violent environment that rules the highly militarized border, not only triggered by the industrialization, but also the *narcotráfico*, "*dangerous illegal crossers* and drug-smugglers [who] find refuge" in the area (Ibarraran 136). Both

[246] Snow and Mulcahy explain that the measures governments often take in order to address the excessive visibility of the homeless tend to "symbolize a get-tough approach to crime" and to show the citizens that the authorities are "responsive to their interests" (156).

governments should also be blamed, as Maialen Antxustegi states: violence is the consequence of the profitable policies of both the American and the Mexican governments throughout history (256). As Nixon mentions, "[c]onfronted with the militarization of both commerce and development, impoverished communities are often assailed by coercion and bribery that test their cohesive resilience" (4). Tomasita reflects the impoverished, invisible communities that are exposed to the threat of the militarization of the borderlands. Romo denounces the suffering that the most vulnerable are forced to endure, and Tomasita becomes one more victim of this violence. She is yet another case of individuals that are "invisible" and "irrelevant" for the authorities and society in general, and receive the morbid attention from the media only when it is too late: "On the front page of the morning papers, a close-up of Tomasita's face appeared resting on the blood-covered sidewalk of the International Bridge, a bullet hole in the middle of her forehead" (148).

The violence implicit in invisibility as well as the brutality with which the authorities act can also be seen in *Babel*. One of the main conflicts in González Iñárritu's film is the product of a coincidental event with a tragic ending, which resembles Tomasita's fate. The connections between Tomasita and Abdullah's family are plenty: they are all impoverished, even if Abdullah is able to afford the rifle; they are invisible to the authorities and society; and their unfortunate decisions cause accidents, turning them into problems that are too visible and require drastic solutions. Reflecting the increased communication facilitated by global mediascapes and technoscapes, the accidental shooting of Susan is covered by the media all over the world and labeled as a terrorist attack by the authorities—as happens with Tomasita. Abdullah's family become only too visible to the authorities and a target for those who enforce and protect the interests of the institutions and the elites. As Rosa Urtiaga points

out, *Babel* highlights “the fact that the war against terrorism, promoted by one nation-state, affects remote places, where innocent people are criminalized as scapegoats for the sake of protection of more privileged citizens” (100). Peace, justice and the law justify structural violence once again, which, in turn, justifies the use of personal violence made by the police when they torture Hassan, the previous owner of the rifle, to find Abdullah and restore social order. When the police get to the “terrorists,” Ahmed is shot and seriously wounded, provoking Yussef to shoot back at the police. Violence is answered with more violence. However, knowing that there is no escape, the boy surrenders and confesses his crime, asking the police to help Ahmed. Both narratives reflect how violence is used to restore the way of the world, especially, when those who are in the lower ranks of the social structure and should remain there become too much of a visible problem, detrimental to the interests that actually matter.

Even though González Iñárritu’s film echoes such differences in the social structure, it also encourages them to a certain extent. In *Babel*, there is a contrast between the treatment received by some of the characters: the Americans and the Japanese are “treated respectfully” in the narrative, whereas the “family of goatherds in Morocco and the Mexican undocumented immigrant [Amelia]” have to face “abusive practices” (Urtiaga 102). Indeed, unlike Amelia and the Moroccan family, who are defeated, the American couple, Richard and Susan, are able to return home, where she will recover from the accident, whereas Chieko, even though she faces losses in her life, seems to have a closer relationship with her father and a better future ahead. Therefore, even though the film may be criticizing the violence exerted against those who are in

the lowest ranks of the social structure, it also reinforces a negative consideration of the Global South and of invisible people that are marginalized.[247]

The thematic violence that has been analyzed here in relation to our globalized world is also echoed by formal narrative strategies. It is precisely this "narratological violence" what will be the primary focus in the following part. The puzzle-like structure of ensemble narratives is not only suitable to reflect a context marked by globalization but also to denote violence and friction through their separate and contrasting plotlines. In addition, issues such as social inequality, which has received particular attention here, is underscored at a formal level through the juxtaposition of the multiple threads that are characteristic of ensemble narratives. Invisibility is reflected in the narratives' numerous gaps as well. Information is withheld and it is the readers/viewers who have to fill in those gaps based on the information provided and on their own previous knowledge and experience.

[247] This different treatment may also be connected to the fact that *Babel* is a Hollywood film. D. Shaw points at the fact that the financial support for the movie came mainly from the U.S. distributor, Paramount Vantage. She underscores that the DVD version of the film is found in the mainstream Hollywood sections instead of being in the "world" section. Hence, D. Shaw argues that "*Babel*'s global reach is, in large part, conditioned by a North American perspective" ("Gaze" 16).

Part IV – Violent Synergies: Formal Narrative Violence

In the preceding chapters, we have explored how ensemble narratives are formally structured, addressing their particular fragmented narrative strategies and their multiplicity of protagonists, features that echo the interconnection of a globalized world. In addition, we have discussed the presence of different types of violence (in our societies and) depicted in the chosen corpus, a violence that is aggravated, to a certain extent, by the process of globalization, technological developments and an increase in the numbers of migrants, enabling a more widespread contact with individuals from varied backgrounds. In order to interconnect these two main issues from the first two chapters, this third and last part of the dissertation will be devoted to violence and narratives: how narratives represent violence not only through thematic content but also through—and in cooperation with—formal strategies with an emphasis on multi-protagonist works, and the possible roles and functions violence may have in narratives.

Violence is frequently included in narratives, especially, physical, personal violence. Borrowing R. Shaw's words, the "overwhelming historical presence of violence in folklore, mythical legends, nursery rhymes, lullabies, literature, theatre and film suggests that violence which is experienced receptively through a dramatized medium has some kind of allure" (131-32). Thus, violence is attractive for the audience of a wide variety of media. Focusing on films and literature here, genres and subgenres such as horror, adventure, and police procedural, to name a few, even have shocking, personal violence as a central element of the narrative in many cases. Yet, less shocking violence is also alluring. For instance, the melodramatic exaggeration of feelings has its audience as well and allows the viewers/readers to empathize with the suffering of the

characters, who often endure and exert emotional and psychological violence. Furthermore, the existence of violence is not independent of its context: "'real' violence comes from somewhere," and "[c]inema as a critical public culture [similarly to other narrative media] must be understood through its connections to other public spheres such as schools, religious institutions, popular culture, local communities, and the home" (Giroux 348, 351-52). Likewise, violence in narratives requires a background in order to have meaning and to be comprehensible for the audience: "it cannot exist on its own" (Neroni 5). In addition, fictional violence requires the existence of violence in what is considered to be the real world: the representation of violence in "literature (or film) implies that there is a preexistent something out there, called violence, which is then presented to us via language (or a camera lens) in a novel or a short story (a horror film or a documentary)" (Kowalewski 7). Nonetheless, it should be noted that, even though readers/viewers may perceive fictional violence as realistic, it is an illusion, for there is obviously no actual interaction between the audience and that fictional violence: in literary fiction, violence only has a verbal presence, it is "verbally mediated […] like everything else with which it share the page" (Kowalewski 4). This essential connection between background and violence underscores the similarities between narratives and our "real" world, and also the fact that narratives are part of the social context. Considering that the production of narratives has always taken place among human beings, violence is a key component of these narratives. This, in turn, reflects violence as a natural state for humans, thus being more frequent than peace.

If we consider Johan Galtung's broader definition or concept of violence, which would be the limitation or impediment of actualizing the potential—not being able to achieve what could potentially be better for the interests of the individual—as discussed in the Part I, most narratives, especially, conventional narratives would have a central

component of violence. This element of violence—of the potential that is limited, hindered or denied—would be part of the structure of the narrative, since the disruption that ends or alters the original state of affairs of the protagonist(s)' ordinary world is an attack against the potential of these characters as well as any other being negatively affected by the events and challenges that push the protagonist(s) towards the adventure. Todorov explains this process in his *Poétique de la prose* (1971): the initial equilibrium is somehow disturbed by a significant disequilibrium; then, the action of a force that goes against this disequilibrium is able to restore the initial state of affairs. However, the two equilibriums are not identical, but similar (50). As can be inferred, both the disruption of the initial state and the restoration of equilibrium involve confrontational forces that echo violence.

The violence exerted on the state of affairs, the protagonist(s) themselves or their world may be of different types: structural, personal and/or cultural. Nonetheless, the main point here would be the fact that whatever causes that disruption is denying the possibility of achieving the potential. Therefore, this implies that violence could be argued to be an intrinsic element in (most) narratives. This mimics the fact that violence is also intrinsic to our condition as humans and to our own world, in which violence is much more frequent—even constant—than peace, i.e. the absence of violence. We live in a continuous state of violence—structural, personal, cultural—, of limiting the potential to each other for a variety of reasons. As James Kendrick reminds us, violence is not only the "product of an individual causal agent," but it "can also be systematic or structural (for example, racism, sexism, and the like), and it can be targeted at human beings, the environment, or material things" (5). Adding to this, in the introduction to *Violence and American Cinema*, J. David Slocum underscores that the "*threat* of harm and injury can often be as disturbing as the [violent] act itself. [...] Still more basically,

aggression, sadism, or destructive behavior can be viewed as the result of the psychological or physiological tendency of human beings or social groups—that is, of human nature" (2). Furthermore, our own real-life experiences of violence are processed and understood through narratives. We utilize the same narrative devices used in movies and literature, for instance, to comprehend and communicate our episodes of violence: "Hence narrative is the primary function in our quest for the meaning of violence whatever its context" (R. Shaw 145). Addressing how readers respond to "realistic depictions of violence," Kowalewski states that "we often feel indignant for our own sake as much as for the character's. We feel vulnerable," on the one hand, "because the vulnerability of the human body has just been graphically emphasized" and, on the other hand, "because we feel that someone else has the power to shock us, the ability to capitalize upon our ways of imaginatively involving ourselves in fiction" (46-47). The author goes on to argue that, if we are unfamiliar with the violence that is represented in the narrative—if we lack experience of that violence "outside of novels"—, we need to work harder in order to "imaginatively translat[e] the sequence's verbal cues," which is what shocks us and makes us fear that violence (50).

The basics and the foundations of the narrative structure also reflect violence, since the characters are challenged and forced to seek change, violence being one of the ways to trigger this change. Additionally, people may also choose to watch or read violent narratives in order to test and identify their "threshold of violence," to find out what violent scenes they are able to tolerate, and to push those limits even further by repeatedly exposing themselves to those violent narratives (Hill 66).

Violence thus serves different purposes or has different effects on the viewers/readers depending on the narrative. As remarked by William Rothman, sometimes "we experience violence on film as something a person does, as something a

person suffers, hence as something we might wish to do or suffer and not merely view," but on other occasions, "film violence is a mere abstraction with no power to move us to act or to suffer" (43). Textual narratives also include violence that serves the purposes that Rothman mentions. Within our corpus, violence fosters critical thinking in the readers, denouncing racism, discrimination, exploitation, and environmental destruction, among other issues. Action scenes such as the battle between SUPERNAFTA and El Gran Mojado, which is brutally violent, can also be symbolic, as discussed in Part III. However, textual narratives may also include violence as pure entertainment.[248] Henry A. Giroux argues that violence in films—in narratives in general, I would say—can be a device that allows us to understand "tyranny and domination," on the one hand, yet on the other, it might strengthen pejorative stereotyping and foster a "cheap voyeurism" (335). Violence is, moreover, "a popular subject and visual strategy" and violence possibly emphasizes the vulgar pleasure it gives us (Hershfield 182; Giroux 335). However, even if the purpose of violence in a narrative is mainly to entertain, we should not dismiss the fact that, "[r]ealistic scenes of violence" are or "seem violent whether we like it or not" (Kowalewski 61). Therefore, the readers/viewers may display a variety of feelings often associated with witnessing violence, such as "[d]isgust, fascination, shock" and "even titillation," since that violent fictional event may be treated "as if it were real" (61).

Another purpose that violence in narratives can have is allowing the viewers/readers to "learn." Readers/viewers expose themselves to violent events that they could potentially experience in their own lives; hence, they can hypothesize what

[248] Giroux points out that, unlike narratives that reflect or depict tragic events such as the Holocaust in *Schindler's List* (1993), violence in action films often serves as "cheap entertainment," celebrating the "sensational and the gruesome" with "no redeeming value except to parade its endless stream of blood and gore at the expense of dramatic structure, emotional depth, and social relevance" (336). Popular literature also makes use of violence as a source of entertainment. For instance, the *Assassin's Creed* novels, largely based on or related to the homonymous videogames, include action scenes in which violence is the main focus. The primary function of this violence is indeed entertainment.

they would do in such a situation, empathize with the victims and their suffering, and exercise moral and ethical reflections. R. Shaw insightfully concludes from her study of the narrative meaning of violence that "experiencing violence via film [again, I would add literature] allows individuals to learn about violence in a pragmatic sense;" hence the viewers/readers are able to "speculate about human nature and the lengths different people will go to when faced with a violent situation," providing "an opportunity to experience something which is outside our usual everyday existence" (141). A connection with the theory of dramatic catharsis can be established here. The experiencing of violence in narratives allows the readers/viewers to purify their emotions "through pity and fear" (Aristotle 23). José Ángel García Landa points out that the notion of catharsis can be perceived as a "vaccine": "pity and fear are raised up where they did not exist before, and are then released," thus enabling "a kind of emotional education which will prevent them from overpowering the spectator in the circumstances of real life" (22). On the other hand, the author adds that catharsis can be a "safety valve," since "pity and fear which have been dangerously pent up or repressed in the mind of the audience are excited by the means of pathetic and violent action, and are then released" (22). Therefore, these emotions, particularly fear, could be construed as "violence" exerted on the reader/viewer as well. On some occasions, going through these emotions during the process of reading/watching a narrative may indeed be traumatic.

There are different kinds of violence present in narratives. For the distinction among the types of violence in narratives, I will follow Giroux's study of the aesthetic of hyper-real violence in film.[249] The author proposes three kinds of violence: "ritualistic violence," "symbolic violence," and "hyper-real violence." Let us begin with

[249] As has been done throughout this dissertation, I will apply Giroux's theory to literature as well.

"ritualistic violence." In this case, violence is of a ritualistic nature, since it is one of the main common traits in some genres such as horror, action adventure, and Hollywood drama. Its presence in narratives is predictable and masculine, with superficial content that does not challenge the audience more than necessary and does not explore or reflect on human behavior (336-37). Moving on to the second type, "symbolic violence" is not only visceral like the ritualistic one, but also reflective. It rejects "fast paced rhythmic frames" and delves into "human agency, the limits of rationality, and the existential issues" that connect humans (337). The third and last kind of violence is "hyper-real violence," which is similar to ritualist violence yet addressing controversial issues. Giroux states that it is a "form of ultra-violence marked by technological overstimulation, gritty dialogue, dramatic storytelling, parody, and an appeal to gutsy naturalism" (338).

The type of violence that mostly applies to the chosen corpus for this dissertation is the second one: symbolic violence. Perhaps, possible exceptions could be found in *Traffic* and *Crash*. Soderbergh's film seems to use violence in a hybrid manner: it is sometimes a spectacle as in action films, but, at the same time, it reflects the violence that drug smuggling entails, asking for some thinking and reflection from the audience. As has been mentioned, this narrative is not a conventional action film, even though it has some action scenes. Therefore, the movie combines both ritualistic and symbolic violence. In the case of *Crash*, violence is often of an emotional nature, highlighting the melodramatic traits of the movie. Violence is spectacular when Christine's car blows up, but it is not meant to be pleasurable or pure entertainment—it is not ritualistic violence. Instead, it intends to foster empathy and understanding in the spectators, since the accident also leads to her confrontation with Sgt. Ryan, who had molested her earlier in the film. The same could be argued about *Babel*, in which violence is not a

superficial and pleasurable spectacle, whose main goal is to entertain. The viewers are asked to connect and empathize with the suffering of the protagonists and to reflect on the violence depicted in the motion picture—e.g. Susan's accident and life or death situation, Amelia's deportation, Chieko's loneliness and discrimination, the Moroccan family's violent arrest. Similarly, the literary narratives make use of violence in a realistic manner. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, for instance, the negative and humiliating experiences endured by Biju and the judge, or the brutal violence of the Gorkha revolt are not pleasurable. Neither is the massacre of the homeless community in Yamashita's novel or Tomasita's death, shot by a soldier in *El Puente/The Bridge*. They all denounce the abuse among humans, and invite critical thinking. It is interesting, however, that *Tropic of Orange* includes the passage that narrates the wrestling match, whose humoristic tone could exemplify hyper-real violence. However, the goal here is not pure entertainment and escapism by showing the (somewhat exaggerated) gory nature of the violence both wrestlers exert on each other, instead it criticizes the ruthless domination of the United States over Latin America. As a result, the violence in these narratives does not—or is not meant to—appeal to our pleasure, but to the intricacies of our human existence, to raising awareness of the violence that others suffer and that we may suffer, and to give us an opportunity to relate to those experiences.

In these six narratives, most of the characters face some sort of challenge—the presence or absence of something whose effect is detrimental to the characters—that is either a violent experience by itself or one that pushes them towards enduring and exerting violence. Even though these ensemble narratives do not follow narrative conventions, as explained by Todorov, they do have some elements typical of traditional stories, such as a challenge or disruption in the initial status quo of the protagonists. However, this initial state of affairs or even the (violent) challenge that

triggers the characters' adventure or seek for change is usually excluded from the *syuzhet* in the selected corpus—that event happens at an earlier stage in the *fabula*, as will be exemplified in the following paragraphs. For example, in *Babel*, the reasons why Amelia embarks herself on the adventure of migrating to the United States are not mentioned. It may be possible that she lacked opportunities and faced poverty in Mexico, thus pushing her to migrate in a quest for a better life. However, when Amelia is deported, she is welcomed back by the lack of opportunities in Mexico, which triggered her emigration.[250]

Apart from a challenging event that sets the protagonists in motion in order to achieve their goals, the inclusion of heroes/heroines and villains is also connected to violence and its reflection in the narrative. The use of heroes/heroines and villains is fairly common in pulp fiction, as well as in certain types of narratives such as fairy tales or fantasy literature, which tend to follow conventional narrative structures.[251] This is the structure of the narrative that leads towards the resolution of a problem or conflict "characterised by the *opposition* between the hero and villain" (Lacey 65; italics in the original). As Vladimir Propp argued in his well-known *Morphology of the Folktale*, where he analyzes the types of characters present in Russian folktales, the role of the villain is to "disturb the peace," or to "cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm" (27). The conflict faced by the hero(ine) "produces and constructs" him/her and this conflict "is the battle to overcome the antagonist or opposition, and resolve the

[250] It could be argued that Amelia's initial status quo in the film—her life in the U.S., where she has more opportunities than in Mexico—is actually disrupted at the end of the narrative instead of at the beginning when she is deported. This would distance the film from a conventional narrative structure. Nonetheless, the disruption may also be her trip to Mexico in order to attend her son's wedding at the beginning of the movie, leading her to confront and escape the Border Patrol, face a life or death situation in the desert and, eventually, get deported. This point of view would be closer to a conventional narrative structure, although Amelia does not experience victory in the end.

[251] One could argue that the simplification of villains as "bad guys" is related to the "good guys" and "bad guys" in Western films, a typical genre in U.S. cinema. For an analysis of the Western genre in relation to the myth of the frontier, see Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.

transgressions that disrupt harmony, order, etc." (Fahraeus and Yakalı-Çamoğlu viii). Hence, the presence of a villain in conventional narratives is key to challenge the hero in some way, underscoring their opposition and creating conflict, confrontations and disrupting the initial state of affairs in the narrative. In fact, the "hero – who usually wins – cannot exist without an opponent in one form or other," and it is the villain who/which "embodies this opposition" (Fahraeus and Yakalı-Çamoğlu viii). When the villain causes harm, Propp defines those acts as "villainy," and it is this villainy what is "exceptionally important, since by means of it the actual movement of the tale is created" (30).[252] Thus, the villain is a threat to the protagonist either directly or indirectly and, in order to achieve this, s/he may take "advantage of some difficult situation in which his victim is caught," or deliberately cause the "difficult situation" (Propp 30). Violence, which is fostered by villains, is exciting for the audience "because violence marks moments of tension, and moments of life and death for the main characters" (Neroni 5). In some cases, the reasons why villains act in such a way may be explicit and they may have a chance to redeem themselves, yet pure villains do not have redeeming characteristics.[253] Either way, by including heroes/heroines and villains, narratives allow us to take part in the hero(ine)'s success over the villain, an allegedly deserved reward for his/her struggle, which does not always happen in our lives, where the "good" does not always overcome the obstacles:

> in mythical terms, the hero represents the triumph of what society (ideologically) holds to be good; whereas in the "real world" good does not

[252] This is recurrent in soap operas too, where the villain, apart from being a challenging obstacle for the hero(ine), harms someone close to the protagonist—e.g. the love interest, a relative, a friend.

[253] When characters are good or bad guys in absolute terms, they are somewhat simplified, making it easier for the viewers/readers to make moral judgments about them. However, a matter of perspective may also be involved. Although viewers/readers are expected to empathize with the (frequently) "good" characters, these "heroes" are negative from the villain's point of view—it is, after all, a conflict of interests. In relation to these opposite charactersthis Manichean opposition, Fulton et al. state that "[c]lassic Hollywood movies and realist television dramas reinforce such myths as the existence of innate morality and gender, the natural opposition between 'good' and 'bad', and between 'male' and 'female,' as clearly defined and unproblematic categories" (7).

> always or, maybe, even usually, win. Conventional narratives show us a successful struggle against opposing forces; whereas in life our struggles (for example to court a person we desire or to pass our exams) are never foregone conclusions, there is always uncertainty. This guarantee of success is part of the function of entertainment. (Lacey 67)

As a consequence, the audience is likely led to identify with the hero(ine), who is frequently a symbol of the social values and beliefs. As Fulton et al. explain, with the "good guys" being humans or humanized characters that always aim for what is right and the "bad guys" being the threat against the hero(ine) and what s/he represents, these narratives underscore "the darkness, power and malignancy of the story's villain, disaster or disorder, and underlines the goodness and undeserved suffering of the hero, by cutting back and forth between the two fields of action in such a way as to underscores this dualism as an opposition, a Manichean struggle between right and wrong, good and bad" (55).

Among the narratives analyzed in this dissertation, only *Traffic* has "true villains." Nevertheless, these are not central to any of the three plotlines, in spite of their relevance in the plot as a whole. In all cases, they are secondary characters. The most prominent example is Juan Obregón (Benjamin Bratt), one of the leaders of the Tijuana Cartel, who threatens Helena Ayala, promising to kill her little son, David, if she does not pay him a multi-million debt. Also, the African American drug dealer is presented in purely negative terms. He provides a sixteen-year-old Caroline with hard drugs in exchange for sex. The rest of the characters are rather in between "good" and "evil" from a point of view of simplistic morality. General Salazar, for instance, is a corrupt law-enforcer. However, he struggles to take down the Tijuana Cartel, even though it is only to benefit the Juárez Cartel, for which he works. Therefore, his actions are only partially positive, since he is still helping one drug cartel to the detriment of the other.

Unlike what we can see in *Traffic*, none of the characters in *Babel* can be considered as a "true villain." The violent or criminal acts in the narrative—the Moroccan children shooting Susan Jones or Amelia and Santiago taking the Jones's children to Mexico without the required authorization—are not premeditated, but unfortunate accidents. In these ensemble narratives, characters are largely in between "good" and "evil," clearly differing from more simplistic plots in most popular narratives. Thus, González Iñárritu's film presents the spectator with a situation in which it is not easy to fully question or judge the characters' actions.

Haggis's film, *Crash*, like *Babel*, features complex characters that tend to misguide viewers looking for easy identification. Anthony and Peter, the carjackers, may a priori be the best candidates for the role of "villains." Nevertheless, the movie introduces their perspective and it allows them to have a voice, showing that being crooks is a consequence of a society that is intrinsically racist. In addition, the duo are aware of how negative their criminal actions are; they are never shown enjoying crime as hardcore villains would possibly do. On the one hand, Peter has to look after his sick mother, and he ends up being accidentally shot by a white officer because he is black and "looks like a criminal." On the other hand, even though Anthony and Peter run over an Asian man and carjack his van, it is Anthony that frees up the Cambodian immigrants huddling in the back of the vehicle. These people had been victims of human trafficking, and the pair of thieves running over the Korean man that was exploiting the Cambodians could be interpreted as some sort of poetic justice.

Another character that is morally questionable is Sgt. Ryan, who orders Cameron and Christine to pull over and then molests her, abusing his power. Nonetheless, as aforementioned, he is given an opportunity to try and redeem himself when he saves Christine after she has a car accident. Although this does not justify his

racist and sexist actions, Ryan's life is rather miserable, since he has to take care of his father, who is seriously ill and cannot have access to the required medical assistance. Furthermore, Ryan's racism may come from his father's past experiences as a businessman prior to his illness. Albeit having behaved fairly with his African American employees, Ryan believes his father "end[ed] up being ruined by affirmative action initiatives that preferentially granted government contracts to black-owned businesses" (Hsu 146). To make things worse, Ryan speaks to an insurance agent, who is black. Following instructions from the insurance company, she is unable to provide the treatment Ryan's father needs, and Ryan takes it out on her in a clearly racist way. Therefore, as Hsu argues, "both the Ryans [are] victims of a kind of 'reverse discrimination' while exposing how political initiatives based on race unjustly neglect individual circumstances" (146). This situation may indeed influence Sgt. Ryan's decision to make Christine and Cameron pull over. The African American couple is driving an expensive SUV, which shows them to be more financially successful than white Ryan. Frustrated by how difficult his life is, Ryan takes it out on the couple and molests Christine, displaying and (ab)using the power that a badge has invested on him.

In *Crash* racism is the main nexus among the characters, and the Cabots are no exception. This white upper-class couple are not the typical "villains" either, but Jean's particularly racist attitude towards Anthony, Peter and Daniel does not garner empathy from the viewer. When Daniel is changing the locks of the Cabots's house, Jean complains to her husband about hiring a Latino that looks like a "gang member" (*Crash* 00:13:10) and will surely make a copy of the keys to rob them later. Daniel overhears the Cabots, which is precisely Jean's goal. Yet, Daniel chooses not to argue and he just leaves the keys on the kitchen counter. The viewer may find Jean's comments shockingly racist. However, as Corbin insightfully claims, "the spectator is also left to

judge on appearance and the film codes [Daniel's] appearance as a 'tough' character who is familiar with street life in contrast to the upper-middle-class domesticity of the Cabot home" (64). Daniel barely speaks to the Cabots and we do not know anything about his background at that point in the narrative. Hence, "the film pushes the spectator towards a stereotypical judgment," since Jean is given the opportunity to express her concerns, which are therefore acknowledged by the audience, whereas Daniel is not able to defend himself against those accusations (Corbin 64). At a later moment in the film, the viewer learns that Daniel is a caring, hardworking father, trying to afford living in a more secure neighborhood with his family. The movie thus underscores that a particular encounter with someone is "only a fraction of any person's life," giving us very limited information to judge that individual (Corbin 65).

The literary works in our corpus share with the movies a similar approach to villains: there are few or no characters that can be regarded as such. Even though *The Inheritance of Loss* does not have proper "villains" among its protagonists, the insurgents are mostly depicted as brutal individuals that take advantage of the social revolt to commit crimes and abuse the inhabitants of the area—for them, their efforts to achieve an independent Gorkha nation "justify" their actions. Apart from the insurgents, there are a few "abstract" villains: colonialism, neocolonialism and globalization are depicted in negative terms. Hence, the GNLF on one side and the global system of exploitation on the other may be considered to fulfill the role of villains in the narrative *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Neither *Tropic of Orange* nor *El Puente/The Bridge* include specific "villains" among their protagonists. Once more, the personal villain is largely replaced by an abstract entity or humankind as a whole, who allows sociopolitical and economic systems that exploit human beings and the environment for the sole purpose of financial

profit and personal interest. The U.S. and Mexican governments along with the *maquiladoras* may be labeled as villains too, for endorsing, supporting and actively engaging in an abusive relationship with people, especially, those who are of little value for the bigger political and economic schemes. Nevertheless, in *Tropic of Orange*, the allegorical SUPERNAFTA is an antagonist and, arguably, one of the "villains" in the novel. He may purportedly have some redeeming qualities, since he claims to protect children from all over the world. However, it is implied that, like many politicians, SUPERNAFTA is simply paying lip service to universalist humanism in order to gain popular support from the audience. The character that could be perceived as a "pure villain" in Yamashita's novel is Hernando, who smuggles human organs and, at one point, rapes Rafaela. Another (collective) character that is negatively portrayed in the novel is the American government,[254] in spite of apparently being "in the shadows" during almost the entire novel. While the narrative also addresses the U.S. exploitation of Mexico, Latin America and Asia, the harshest criticism of the American government concerns the massacre of dozens of homeless people towards the end of the novel.

As has been mentioned, the eventual victory of the heroes/heroines—usually expected in more traditional narratives—allows the viewers/readers to (vicariously) experience success, which may not be the case in their own "real" lives. In multi-protagonist narratives, however, heroes/heroines may not attain their goals, thus leaving the viewers/readers with a feeling of loss, frustration and disappointment, which is largely reflected by our corpus. These characters—and, through them, the viewers/readers—might end up failing faced by violence that can be neither ended nor overcome.

[254] Allegorical and collective antagonists are effective representations of the U.S. power here. However, since they are not specific individuals, such as the president—Bill Clinton back then—, responsibility and guilt are blurred and simplified by these antagonists. Hence, it might be harder for the reader to pass (moral) judgment on them.

As a result, perhaps, the presence of villains, opponents, and "shadows" in narratives alludes to the existence of violence in human nature. The villain tends to be what the hero(ine) or ourselves do not want, it is a representation of what we reject in or for ourselves, sometimes, reflected in a literal way in the narrative with characters that have double personalities—Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde being the epitome—or a similar strategy. A brief reference to the theories of the double/Doppelgänger and the uncanny is pertinent here. The uncanny is connected to negative feelings regarding oneself: it "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (Freud 123). The uncanny also involves the opposition between that which is "familiar and comfortable" (*Heimlich*) and "what is concealed and kept hidden" (*Unheimlich*) (132). Furthermore, the relationship between the self and the Doppelgänger presents itself as an exchange of power, an opposition of emotions and an attempt to control one another (Webber 4, 8). The villain is the primary obstacle between the hero(ine) and the original status quo—often peaceful as well in traditional narratives—, which needs to be restored. Consequently, the villain, pursuing his/her/its own interests, not only exerts violence against the hero(ine) and other characters, but also symbolizes and foreshadows the violence that will be exercised upon the very same villain, required to return to the original state of affairs, thus reaching a solution to the problem. The confrontation between the hero(ine) and the villain implies some sort of violence—personal, structural, cultural, environmental—, since whatever the outcome is or whatever decision is made, the consequences will usually be detrimental to some and beneficial to others. Therefore, the potential will not be actualized for some. Either way, when the hero(ine) or a character we identify with or consider "good" achieves his/her goals, it is implied that the violence that disrupted the status quo is thus ended. This may also be attained without conventional such archetypal characters. For instance, in

Babel, Ahmed and Yussef accidentally shoot Susan. The Moroccan children are not villains. However, this event does alter Susan and Richard's status quo: their peaceful holidays—apart from their relationship problems—turn into a life or death situation for her and, once she is safely taken to a hospital towards the end of the movie, the American couple goes back to a state of affairs in which she is healthy. Thus, violence and a potential death, albeit accidental, are defeated when Susan gets to live, and the spectators who identify with her experience her success as well. These viewers go through a cathartic experience, fearing for Susan's death and, to a certain extent, experiencing the life threatening situation themselves. Therefore, it could be argued that these emotions felt by the audience are violence exerted by the narrative on the spectators. On the other hand, unlike conventional narratives, *Traffic* does not offer the opportunity of overcoming and defeating the violence embodied by "villains." The audience may feel disappointment at this, since characters such as the African American drug dealer or the druglord, Juan Obregón, do not "lose." This, in turn, reflects the fact that the War on Drugs may never end.

The African American drug dealer and Juan Obregón have yet another connection to violence in a narratological sense. These characters are one-dimensional, only depicted in a negative way, and the African American dealer does not even have a name, hence being a generic drug dealer. In other words, these are flat characters. Coined by E. M. Forster, the term refers to characters that "are constructed round a single idea or quality" (48), or "very few," which is why they are predictable (Chatman, *Discourse* 132). The author also remarks that "[w]hatever fails to fit in with [the] specially chosen traits" of the flat characters "is eliminated" (50). Additionally, these characters can have "great vivacity or power," and, even though they are usually "typed," this is not necessary (Chatman, *Discourse* 132). Soderbergh's characters reflect

the danger represented by druglords and drug dealers as well as the world of trafficking. Likewise, in *Tropic of Orange*, Hernando, the organ smuggler, could be argued to be a flat character that also represents the menace that this business is. However, even if his primary function is to be a threat, I would underscore the fact that Hernando has more depth as a character, for he symbolically alludes to Hernán Cortés and the colonization of the American continent—the decimation of the natives is particularly reflected by the scene in which Hernando brutally rapes Rafaela, who stands for the native peoples. Consequently, the main trait that connects these three flat characters is that they are ruthless without any truly redeeming qualities: Hernando does not hesitate to smuggle babies' organs, Obregón threatens to kill a child, and the African American drug dealer abuses a teenager drug addict in order to obtain what they want—mainly money, sex, power. Nevertheless, as flat characters that only fulfill one function or reflect one idea, they are not given significant background details in the narrative. The reader/viewer does not have the chance to know what the perspective of these characters is or why they do what they do. The three characters are subjected to the audience's moral judgment and subsequent condemnation. However, flat characters are easy to remember and "provide their own atmosphere," Forster points out (49). Indeed, the three characters in question can be well remembered due to their violent actions. In addition, they set their own atmosphere. The viewers/readers instantly know that these three characters are dangerous and violent. Subsequently, they are limited to being negative forces that exert violence on others. They are denied the opportunity to grow and change, which is enjoyed by round characters. Therefore, these flat characters are silenced in the narrative, which is why I would argue that they are victims of a narratological violence.

The fact that flat characters only fulfill one function is reminiscent of the chain of production of commodities, especially, of workers that are employed in sweatshops. These employees also tend to perform one task during this chain of production. In addition, the process of outsourcing divides the production of goods with those involves performing their own roles. Nevertheless, all these "ingredients" are necessary to make the complex process of production a reality. Similarly, flat characters are often needed in narratives: "a novel that is at all complex often requires flat people as well as round" (Forster 51). Furthermore, the focus on functions of the characters reminisces the views of the Formalists. These "argue that characters are products of plots" and "that their status if 'functional,'" which is why they "analyze only what characters do in a story, not what they are—that is, 'are' by some outside psychological or moral measure" (Chatman, *Discourse* 111). Furthermore, they also classified types of characters according to their functions in plots—e.g. Propp's analysis of Russian fairy-tales—, although disregarding "differences in appearance, age, sex, life concerns, status, and so on" (111).[255] This focus on function might be extrapolated to the frequent consideration of many workers, especially, in large companies. The differences and particular traits that individualize employees tend to be disregarded and mainly low-skilled workers are easily replaceable while their tasks are still performed—in the pursuit of profit, what workers are able to produce is what matters. On the other hand, the absence of opportunities to grow that are characteristic of flat characters could be argued to echo the lack of opportunities endured by many of the protagonists within our corpus such as Tomasita and Biju, who, as discussed in Part III, are victims of structural violence—marginalization, unhealthy living and working conditions, among other issues.

[255] Seymour Chatman disagrees with the Formalists' views regarding the subordination of characters to the plot. The author purports that "[s]tories only exist where both events and existents occur. There cannot be events without existents. And though it is true that a text can have existents without events (a portrait, a descriptive essay), no one would think of calling it a narrative" (113).

The possible roles violence may have in narratives are complemented by strategies that can be utilized to infer the presence of violence in the narratives, either rather conspicuously or in a more obscure manner. In multi-protagonist films, cross-cutting or "short cuts" and the use of montage to link apparently disconnected sequences and event are fairly frequent. Regardless of whether it is an ensemble narrative or not, and albeit not intrinsically associated, the fast pace of the cutting and editing of some scenes in movies may be utilized to transmit the idea of violence, especially if this violence is direct or personal and physical, which is usually shocking. Slocum points out that "montage involves a collision between frames or images that, when edited in sequence, produce a distinctive and more intense response from viewers than the individual frames or images shown separately" (4). Borrowing Neroni's words, in order to highlight violence, films make use of "rhythmic editing that depicts acts of violence in a rapid montage sequence" (3). However, not only fast-paced techniques can infer violence. Slow motion may be preferred by the filmmaker (Neroni 3). Along with the freeze-frame technique, which "stops" or "freezes" what is shown on screen, slow motion would highlight the violent events, extending the time the spectators are exposed to that hostility by slowing down the progression of the story—a "descriptive pause" in Gérard Genette's terms. Another way to achieve the stressing of violence or a climactic moment in a violent event such as the impact of a bullet or an uppercut on the chin of the opponent could be repetition, showing the same scene several times, even from different angles in order to add to the drama, the goriness, the thrill or the shock of the presence of violence in the narrative. Repeating an event to stress its violence can also be done in literary narratives, albeit with the logical differences due to its written nature. A violent passage can be told over and over again, either from multiple or a single point of view, either with the same or different wording, yet the effect of focusing on violence

would be likewise achieved. Even without visual images, the shocking aspect of a violent event can be inferred through words, which may be more appalling, depending on the reader/viewer—some individuals may find (the description of) violent events in textual narratives to be more effective than in visual narratives and vice versa. All these editing techniques contribute to the representation of violence, which, in addition, facilitates the transmission and understanding of the message that is sent through the narrative. These works have an influence on the audience. The purpose of the representation of violence in these narratives is not only to "reflect reality," but also to teach with a "language of ethics and a pedagogy," and for that, there is a selection of certain techniques and aesthetics to be used as well as the ways in which characters are developed or specific groups of people are represented, for instance (Giroux 351).

Focusing particularly on ensemble narratives, one of the main possibilities these works open is the exploration of a single or a wide range of topics from different points of view. The main characters share a similar degree of relevance in the narrative and they may belong to varied social strata, with different social, cultural, economic and political backgrounds. Unlike the viewer/reader, who is aware of what is taking place in all the plotlines, these characters usually remain ignorant about the events of other threads, at least, until they intertwine with other protagonists—and even then, they may never know what happened before their crisscrossing. This greater knowledge achieved by the viewer/reader is more prominent when events are simultaneous—they coincide in the narrative chronologically speaking—or a single event is approached from different perspectives. The narrative may thus reflect how several characters with their own backgrounds face the event(s), perhaps, detrimental for some, advantageous for others.

The juxtaposition of plotlines that deal with characters that belong to different social strata and backgrounds in ensemble narratives is therefore another strategy that

can be utilized in order to highlight and address the issue of violence, especially, structural violence, since it tends to involve and affect a larger number of individuals in a longer period of time.[256] To exemplify this, Soderbergh's *Traffic* offers a depiction of wealthier location in the United States—San Diego and Columbus, Ohio—, which contrasts with the poorer city of Tijuana and the desert in the north of Mexico. All these three main settings in which the film comes to life are connected to the smuggling, dealing and consumption of illegal substances as well as the opposing War on Drugs that seeks to end this issue. By evincing the strikingly dissimilar realities of multiple locations and the individuals who live there, narratives may implicitly or explicitly underscore the existence of structural and personal violence. In the case of *Traffic*, Mexico is portrayed as an impoverished and backwards country, where crime is frequent and the people are unable to depend on the corrupt authorities and public forces, as in thus in need of assistance from the United States. As mentioned in Part III, these negative traits are emphasized by the yellow coloring of the scenes that take place in Mexico, in contrast with the other locations. On the other side of the border, the U.S. settings echo the country's modern and sophisticated judicial system as well as the wealth of several American characters. Only the neighborhood where an African American drug dealer lives is shown to be relatively impoverished, which emphasizes the structural violence some (African American) neighborhoods endure. Despite the fact that neither this character nor the ghetto are central to the narrative, ensemble narratives transcend "ghettos." Thematically speaking, they explore a wide range of contexts to attain a more comprehensive view. Formally, ensemble narratives include traits that are

[256] Similar to the juxtaposition of threads, the simultaneity of events might be utilized to achieve a comparable effect when violence is depicted, and to underscore clashes between characters. The fact that two or more different events would coincide chronologically speaking may accentuate that violence—structural or personal, differences between social classes, races, genders, and so on. Right at the same time, some may be benefitted by something that is detrimental to others thus bringing to the fore what could be deemed as an injustice.

common in conventional narratives while, at the same, they break away from these traditional structures, incorporating a variety of formal strategies, as analyzed in Part II. Consequently, it could be argued that the juxtaposition of the multiple threads in Soderbergh's movie allows for the underscoring of the different types of violence that affect individuals, such as the structural violence exerted by the United States on Mexico—which can be extrapolated to the Global North and the Global South respectively—, the structural violence that poverty entails, particularly in Mexico, but also in the States, and the structural and direct violence the Mexican public forces display, among other aspects.

This juxtaposition of threads which revolve around different locations or characters with significantly dissimilar backgrounds also brings violence to the fore in *Tropic of Orange*.[257] Jarring and friction are involved in the very formal nature of ensemble narratives, and one of the most prominent oppositions in Yamashita's novel is the relationship between the impoverished Vietnam veteran Buzzworm, and the upper-middle class TV producer Emi, two of the main characters linked by another crucial figure, Gabriel. The contrast between Emi and Buzzworm is indeed reflected by the fact that they do not get along during the time when she has to work covering the development of the homeless community that springs from a massive traffic jam on the freeway. Albeit not a homeless, Buzzworm, who devotes his life to helping the impoverished and the homeless from his lower-class neighborhood, is one of the individuals who seems to know and is aware of everything that happens in the commune. When Gabriel introduces his girlfriend to his friend, her apathy is

[257] The book cover reflects the "violence" of the ensemble structure mainly through the juxtaposition of the industrialized and rural areas separated by the wall or border (see fig. 5 in Appendix 1). This friction alludes to the multiple threads and characters that are separated from one another in the narrative, even to the point of confrontation. Further, the ensemble structure is referenced in the cover by the multiple elements that are present, all of them necessary in the image as well as in the narrative. Much like cover of *Tropic of Orange*, the "violent" structure of Romo's novel is also reflected by the juxtaposition and jarring between both sides of the river/border (see fig. 6 in Appendix 1).

conspicuous from the beginning: Emi, clearly not used to the lifestyle of the impoverished and the homeless, empathizes neither with Buzzworm nor the rest, even though she is forced to be part of the community through the lenses of the cameras. The social status of these two characters also underscores the radical opposition between them both. She owns an expensive sports car and has a well-paid job, which clashes with the needs of the homeless, who own hardly anything, as well as with Buzzworm's impoverished neighborhood, in which poverty, structural and personal violence, crime, and drugs are the ruling forces. Therefore, the description of Emi's lifestyle is certainly dissimilar to that of Buzzworm, who is the only one providing help to his neighbors—no support from official institutions or the government—and of the homeless, who rush to make use of the abandoned vehicles on the freeway, desperate to have something that they can consider a home. These drastic differences demonstrate the direct and structural violence suffered by the impoverished and the homeless—the invisible ones as discussed in the previous part. By presenting protagonists from opposing backgrounds and social strata, no one less relevant than the other, the novel seeks to increase the awareness of the ever present social injustices—structural and slow violence—and encourages the reader to reflect on the issue.[258]

When experiencing an ensemble narrative, the viewers/readers are able to get to know different characters and plotlines, and to know more about their situation, to have greater awareness of the narrative in its entirety, of the events that take place in the multiple threads. Hence, they also have the opportunity of being more aware of the

[258] The difference in importance of multiple plots or protagonists could also be used to imply some sort of violence. For example, characters that belong to the lower classes (e.g. a maid or a sweatshop worker) may be less relevant in the narrative than those of the middle or upper classes such as bosses, businesspeople and the like. Therefore, a "narrative marginalization" of characters whose voices may only be partially heard or not at all could potentially echo the violence suffered by the individuals that those characters represent. In *Crash*, the Cabots' maid, Maria, could echo this "narrative marginalization," since her experiences are hardly heard and she is a secondary character. However, *Crash* does have lower-class protagonists like Daniel.

potential violence depicted in the narrative. Moreover, the viewer/reader can relate the events of the narrative as well as the possible violence exerted on or by the characters to his/her own experiences and knowledge, which in turn may allow him/her to acknowledge and recognize different types of violence in real life. Thus, the narrative enables the viewer/reader to identify with the characters, the situations and the event, and, perhaps, become aware of the actual violence of which s/he is a victim.

Apart from the juxtaposition of plotlines, an element that is common in multi-protagonist narratives is fate, which tends to act as a ruling force that controls the lives of the characters in this type of narrative. The coincidences that make the different plotlines intersect and, occasionally, crash against each other seem to come from the whims of serendipity, as we saw in Part II. Sometimes, as can be seen in the narratives explored in this dissertation, the destiny or fate of the characters is, in some cases, fatal, resulting in their demise—e.g. Tomasita in Romo's novel or the homeless community and Emi in Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, to mention a few. Consequently, fate may act as a violent component in ensemble narratives, at least, in the ones analyzed here.[259] The fate-dictated narrative structure of the corpus highlights the characters' possible lack of choice. They are subjected to the mercy of fate, whose decisions seem inescapable. Therefore, this oppressive fate-bound narrative structure would constitute an example of narratological violence. This formal violence is then reflected at a thematic level. The crisscrossing of plotlines and characters caused by randomness in ensemble narratives is at times of a hostile nature too. The fact that they may crash against each other denotes the potential violence that may mark their intertwining and reflect the presence of all sorts of violence in the narrative and in human interaction at a

[259] Similar to fate, the same could be applied to other devices or elements in the narrative such as any ruling force like gods or luck. They may all be a source of violence, be it as perpetrators or favoring violent events.

variety of levels—political, social, economic, cultural—and spheres—public and private. From the selected corpus, *Crash* exemplifies this rather conspicuously. The movie makes the violent interweaving and contact among individuals its main theme: car accidents as well as several clashes between characters represent the differences among people, leading to hostile encounters, which imply the fact that everyone is prejudiced and racist.

An example of coincidental clashes between characters as well as what they symbolize is Sai and Gyan's relationship in *The Inheritance of Loss*. The former is an Indian teenager who, during her childhood, is educated according to British ideals, traditions and customs at a convent. Once at Cho Oyu, her grandfather Jemubhai's house, she is tutored by Noni, one of the neighbors, who is an upper-class, Anglicized woman. Therefore, Sai embraces both Western and Indian cultures. When Noni can no longer teach Sai, the Nepali math tutor, Gyan, with whom the girl has a romantic relationship, is hired. Their paths thus cross due to serendipity. However, the boy eventually joins the GNLF insurgent movement, which seeks independence for the Gorkhas. Hence, he gets closer to his Nepali traditions and values, rejecting everything that is British and Western as well as how Western culture influences Nepal and India. The cultural difference between Sai and Gyan is insuperable, which, in the end, leads the young couple to break up after heated arguments and hurtful words are professed. This separation symbolizes the conflict and violence between India and Nepal, India/Nepal and England, or the East versus the West. The fate-dictated narrative structure is thus translated into the relationship between Sai and Gyan, who also seem to be destined to confront each other.

In addition to Sai and Gyan's conflictive relationship, in Desai's novel we can find a combination of both juxtaposition of plotlines and fate in the coincidental

juxtaposition of the threads that revolve around the judge, Jemubhai, and Biju. The boy miserably fails in achieving a better future in the United States, where he is humiliated and discriminated against for being an immigrant, he has no choice but to submit himself to cheap labor, mostly due to the fact that he is an undocumented "alien," and to live in unhealthy conditions. On the other hand, the judge has to endure a similarly negative experience in England during the late 1930s. Also with hopes of improving their lifestyle, his father sends him to the British Empire in order to get a university degree and become a judge. Unlike Biju, Jemubhai is not an undocumented immigrant, but that does not save him from being mistreated and targeted for being Indian. Furthermore, Jemubhai is obsessed with becoming as English and Western as possible, yet to no avail. His Indianness is insurmountable and, no matter how hard he tries to hide it with white make-up powder or by changing his customs and values, he is always labeled as an Indian, which brings him misery. In the novel, it seems as if it is a coincidence that their plotlines echo the negative experiences of the unwanted immigrant, the Other, Jemubhai still during colonial times in the British Empire, and Biju in a postcolonial context in the American neo-empire. The juxtaposition of threads, as a result, reflects that, for the invisible, little if anything at all has changed. In this case, the fate-dictated narrative structure alludes to the fact that human beings are "destined" to exert violence on one another.

Equally important for the analysis of ensemble narratives is the realization that the very puzzle-form of this fiction involves narratological violence, so to speak. In puzzles, just as in ensemble narratives, the entire picture/narrative is split in several pieces. The narrative is thus "destroyed" and "torn apart" to a certain extent. The viewers/readers then need to put the pieces back together so that they can fully comprehend the narrative and "see the whole picture." For such a goal, readers and

viewers, based on the information that is given, are implicitly asked to utilize their imagination, knowledge about the narrative itself as well as other narratives and their experiences of what is perceived as real life. With this input, they can order the events that take place in the different threads in relation to the overarching plotline, figure out a chronological linearity even if the narrative breaks with it, and fill in gaps and ellipsis, among others aspects. These gaps, which will be discussed further later on, constitute pieces of information that are omitted from the narration. As a result, they could be argued to imply a violent invisibility at a formal level. The information that is subjected to ellipsis remains invisible in the narration. It is possible that these details are deemed not to be relevant and, therefore, they are excluded. Interestingly enough, as a case of formal narrative violence, this discrimination against information that is left out resembles the sociopolitical invisibility of the individuals that are marginalized and excluded, an issue previously addressed (section 3.4).

Ensemble narratives not only bring the juxtaposition of plotlines to the fore. In relation to the *syuzhet*, ensemble narratives usually give bits of information about the *fabula* as well, which may seem scarce. The multiple threads, however, include details and events that add up to the general plotline, encouraging the viewer/reader to be more active while inferring what is happening or when proving the hypotheses they make regarding the narrative. As mentioned in Part II, Bordwell speaks of a rarified *syuzhet*, which does not reveal enough information about the *fabula* (*Narration* 54). This can be applied to ensemble narratives, which, apart from giving this information in pieces, seldom include detailed backgrounds for their characters, mostly due to a lack of time or pages considering the large number of protagonists. It is this scarcity of information what I would like to link to the issue of violence. The rarified *syuzhet* could be utilized to reflect a character's lack of resources for instance, thus depicting structural violence.

For example, characters that are impoverished or belong to the lower classes would be victims of structural violence, hence the *syuzhet* in their plotlines could give little details regarding their backgrounds. In this case, therefore, not only what is told might highlight the presence of violence—the information that is indeed given would deliberately stress this violence—, but also what is chosen to be omitted, an absence that would hint at what the characters are deprived of.

Linked to this potential deprivation, the language used to narrate the events could allude to a lack of resources as well, ergo to the exercise of structural violence and/or personal violence. A character may have a somewhat limited vocabulary, with ungrammatical utterances, possibly—although not necessarily—denoting insufficient formal education. To exemplify the use of grammatically incorrect language to reflect violence, *Tropic of Orange* proves highly useful. Bobby's chapters in the novel are written using very short sentences, sometimes phrases, which are often ungrammatically and usually separated by periods. In terms of the violence he experiences, this is significant for multiple reasons. His ungrammatical sentences may, on the one hand, reflect the fact that he is an Asian immigrant living in the United States, hence English is not his first language. On the other hand, they might hint at a possible lack of formal education. Even though Bobby arrives in the U.S. as a preadolescent, he has little choice but to start working as soon as possible in order to provide for himself and his younger brother. Therefore, Bobby's education cannot be a priority—for him, his brother's education and well-being are of greater importance. The protagonist's formal education is thus lacking, and the condition of both siblings as impoverished immigrants make them victims of structural violence, particularly Bobby, who is unable to cover some of his needs. The short sentences in his chapters also echo the fact that, as an adult, he is constantly working as well, this time in order to support not only his brother but also his

wife and son. Hence, he has no time to waste or spend on other activities—no time to speak or write "properly." By utilizing such short sentences, the novel reflects his stressful and unstable life as an immigrant in Los Angeles. Furthermore, the fact that the sentences and phrases are mostly separated by periods with very few commas could be argued to imply his loneliness as well. The separation established by periods is certainly more abrupt than that of commas. Hence, this abrupt nature of the punctuation in Bobby's chapters may also echo the violence of being lonely. His sentences and phrases are rarely "bonded" or closely connected by punctuation marks such as the less abrupt comma. Instead, periods isolate these sentences even if thematically speaking they do have a connection—they deal with the same issue or topic. Consequently, this isolation in Bobby's sentences would point at his own isolation and loneliness. The fact that he works all day long weakens his family bond and wears out their relationship. Despite having a connection with Bobby, his obsession eventually leads Rafaela and Sol, his wife and baby son, to leave him and return to Mexico. Alone in Los Angeles, Bobby feels like he has failed and devotes his life to his job, cigarettes and some rented movies from time to time. The separation of the family and Bobby's subsequent failure and loneliness constitute structural violence, for this family are faced with a situation that is detrimental to them; their potential is truncated by their insufficient income, which is why Bobby wants to work so much. Having experienced the inability to cover basic needs in the past—structural violence—, Bobby wants to afford everything for his family. However, lacking enough formal education, he has to resign himself to having underpaid, temporary blue-collar jobs, all of which constitute structural violence as well.[260]

[260] The juxtaposition of Bobby's plotline with those of Gabriel and Emi, for example, highlights structural violence too. The former belongs to the working class, going from one blue-collar job to another, whereas the journalist and the TV producer belong to the (upper)-middle classes. Then, the language in Gabriel's

The multiplicity of protagonists typical in ensemble narratives may also reflect a component of violence itself. The fragmentation of the overarching plotline in several threads could be argued to isolate the main characters from one another. Therefore, could this fragmentation in multi-protagonist narratives be a sort of narrative dismembering or dissecting? Although ensemble narratives generally reflect the idea of everyone being connected to one another by coincidentally intertwining their protagonists, these characters and their threads seem to be isolated at first, detached from the others, even if these plotlines are part of a whole—the overarching plotline—and they eventually interlace and share events and elements in the narrative. By isolating the protagonists, ensemble narratives may echo the dismembering of groups of individuals. The idiomatic expression "there is strength in numbers," which is exemplified by the homeless community in Yamashita's novel, would thus be challenged. The separation of protagonists and threads would echo the weakening of the power and influence of a group by being reduced to isolated individuals. Resorting to the example of the homeless community, the authorities make use of ruthless personal violence to get rid of the problem this group of people represent. However, even if the plan of massacring the commune were not on the table, utilizing violence to disperse them would have likely put an end to the community as well—a similar result, albeit not as drastic and conclusive as killing the homeless. Faced with the fragmentation of the narrative, it is the viewer/reader the one who has to put the pieces together as if the narrative were a puzzle or as if the viewer/reader were a surgeon suturing the limbs of the body back together—the different plotlines and the possibly disordered and non-

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or Emi's chapters is grammatically correct. Sentences are longer, more complex and sophisticated, reflecting their formal education. It also highlights the difference between immigrants and subsequent generations. Gabriel and Emi are American citizens whose first language is English and who "belong" in the U.S., even if Gabriel feels Mexican and Emi does not seem interested in cultural issues. This may give them an advantage in social, economic and cultural terms. Hence, language can reflect the characters' background and social condition, and, in turn, echo the potential violence they may have to endure.

linear events of the narrative. R. Shaw mentions that "[p]robably the most elemental of traditional narrative features is the linear plotline. Hence, when this is taken away, chaos thrives, making a coherent understanding of events in the film extremely difficult to achieve" (137). Could it then be possible that the challenging structure of ensemble narratives is a sort of "mistreatment" of the viewers/readers, thus inflicting "violence" upon us? These narratives require an active viewer/reader, who has to make an effort in order to follow the multiple threads and avoid getting lost. Challenges, albeit an opportunity for growth and self-improvement, can also be argued to be an obstacle that may hinder, limit or impede the success of an individual. As we saw in Part II, goals and the potential lie behind the challenge that must be overcome. Challenges take the readers/viewers out of their comfort zone, introducing them to unfamiliar experiences (Iser, "Reading" 295). However, these challenges and unfamiliarity are essential, allowing the readers/viewers to actively and creatively engage with the narrative. Otherwise, if "everything [were] laid out cut and dried before," the reading/watching experience would be boring and unappealing for the viewer/reader (Iser, "Reading" 280). The complex and challenging structure of ensemble narratives could thus be an example of formal narrative violence against the viewer/reader. The viewer/reader has to solve the narrative puzzle that an ensemble narrative constitutes and go through the experience of watching/reading it in order to overcome the challenge—a kind of "narrative potential"—, which, in turn, would allow him/her to learn from it and become a better version of him/herself.

During the process of overcoming these challenges posed by the narratives, readers/viewers need to make use of their imagination to fill in gaps, an issue that was addressed in more depth in Part II. What I would like to tackle here is the difference between visual and textual narratives in relation to the audience's imagination and

formal narrative violence. Comparing film versions of novels, Wolfgang Iser remarks that, when reading the narrative, readers "may never have […] a clear conception of what the hero actually looks like, but on seeing the film, some may say, 'That's not how I imagined him'" (288). What can be concluded from this is that the visual nature of movies constrains the audience's imagination when it comes to the physical appearance of the characters or how settings or objects look like. The movie only offers "one complete and immutable picture" (288). Contrary to this, novels would allow for more imaginative freedom among readers, with numerous and quite unique visualizations of the characters in the minds of the different readers. Therefore, when watching the film version, readers may be disappointed by the cast, the way these actors are dressed, and so on, because they do not match how the readers imagined those characters. It is also true that the opposite might occur: the vision of the filmmakers coincides with that of the readers, who may thus be satisfied by this definitive—even reassuring—picture.

Disappointment may also be felt by readers/viewers in relation to the hypotheses they make as they read/watch the narrative. These hypotheses are constantly changed throughout the experiencing of the narrative, as pointed out in Part II. Nevertheless, the narrative itself may exert formal narrative violence on the readers/viewers by misleading them with the information that is given. For example, in detective narratives, it is frequent to include details that mislead the readers/viewers when trying to solve the challenging and intriguing case. The readers/viewers may also fall into the trap of "unreliable narrators," to use Wayne Booth's term (158-59). These narrators are confusing and provide information that may be mistaken. Hence, the readers/viewers are deceived, even to the point of questioning their own "interpretative decisions" (Iser, "Reading" 294). Throughout the process of reading/watching, the expectations the audience may have regarding the narrative are victims of modifications that range from

being reconsidered to being discarded, taken away and replaced by the new experiences provided by the narrative. Notwithstanding this influence that narratives have on the readers/viewers, narratives need their audiences in order to achieve their full existence and meaning. Even though the ideas found in narratives are the product of someone else's work, while reading/watching, it is the reader or viewer the one who "becomes the subject that does the thinking," (Iser, "Reading" 297), and the narrative is realized in "the reader's consciousness" (Iser, "Audience" 312). On the other hand, the readers/viewers also influence the narrative with their previous knowledge that aids them while reading/watching.[261] It can thus be argued that the relationship between narrative and readers/viewers is one of friction: the narrative imposes the unfamiliar, the challenge on the readers/viewers, yet, at the same time, the narrative is subjected to and dependent on the readers'/viewers' interpretation. Nonetheless, the challenged posed by the narrative is enriching, for new experiences are gained by the audience. Furthermore, I would highlight that the process of reading/watching is not complete without the presence of both parts, which are interconnected, thus echoing the structure of ensemble narratives where each and every thread is necessary for a full understanding of the narrative.

The formal narrative violence is also implicit in the three-stage process of identification with the characters, explored in Part II. On some occasions the identification between viewers/readers and characters may be hindered by the way in which the characters are depicted or introduced. This, perhaps, misguides the viewers/readers, whose first impression of the characters may be erroneous, leading them to misjudge and reject the protagonists. Therefore, a negative depiction of the

[261] As stated by Michał Głowiński and Wlad Godzich, "in reading, we not only introduce the work to our world, we also introduce our world into the work; we impose our categories upon it; we perceive in it especially that which links it to our world" (76).

characters would limit the possibilities they have of being "liked" and bonding with the viewers/readers. For example, in *Traffic*, Caroline is introduced consuming drugs with her friends, which may encourage some spectators to dislike or reject her, hence truncating the process of identification. Judging a book by its cover, the audience would likely be misguided by this negative first impression; she is actually an excellent student, even if we may not expect so. The absence of bonding with Caroline—or any other character—results in a lack of empathy or even in discrimination against her as well, with the audience potentially not caring for the girl. In the context of a narrative, as in real life, this denial of the process of bonding could arguably lead to personal violence: the character is rejected and discriminated against, hence limiting or impeding the actualization of their potential. Besides, the term used by Murray Smith to refer to the third stage in the process of identification, "allegiance," echoes the action of taking sides, which implies discarding other options—in this case, characters (or people). In this stage, furthermore, after receiving the information the narrative gives about the characters, the viewer/reader morally judges them, based on his/her beliefs, values, personal traits, and so on. Even though it is conspicuous that characters do not suffer consequences for being rejected or discriminated against during this bonding, our relationship with them is similar to the one we have with other individuals, for whom rejection may indeed entail negative consequences, such as marginalization, a case and a result of structural, personal and/or cultural violence. In addition, Smith underscores the fact that social class, age, gender, ethnicity, and nationality have an influence on this process of alignment with the characters. Hence, this implies a potential rejection of certain characters based on such prejudices. Therefore, personal, structural and cultural violence seem to be part of the relationship the viewers/readers have with the characters from its inception.

Formal techniques and thematic content may be connected in order to highlight or reflect the presence of violence. *Tropic of Orange* features an interesting example of visual (graphic) effects in one of Arcangel's political poems. Its content is significantly connected to the visual effect produced by how the lines and the words are arranged on the page. As Hee-Jung Serenity Joo remarks, "Arcangel's pan-historical vision is manifested spatially in the shape of the continent of South America, dotted with the continent's exported natural resources" (255):

> *Haitian farmers burning and slashing cane,*
> *workers stirring molasses into white gold.*
> *Guatemalans loading trucks with*
> *crates of bananas and corn.*
> *Indians, who mined tin in the Cerro Rico*
> *and saltpeter from the Atacama desert,*
> *chewing coca and drinking aguardiente to*
> *dull the pain of their labor.*
> *Venezuelan and Mexican drivers*
> *filling their trucks with gasoline,*
> *their cargos of crates*
> *shipped by train,*
> *by ship, and*
> *by air and*
> *sent away,*
> *far away.* (Yamashita 145)

Therefore, the poem is a calligram, for the arrangement of its text results in an image closely linked to the content of the poem. The combination of both the formal technique and the thematic content of the poetic piece emphasizes the ruthless exploitation of not only South America, but also Latin America in general at the hands of the Global North,

TNCs and the local market, which is a case of structural violence. This continent becomes a common space, where these peoples share the imposed submission mainly to the United States. Resources from Central and South America are drained by countries from the Global North, yet this map made of words unifies the different Latin American peoples in their struggle against their oppressors. In addition, it should be emphasized that the sentences of the poem are broken into pieces, torn apart whenever a new line begins. Consequently, the larger violence of the Global North is echoed by the "layout violence" that is exerted on the distribution of the lines of the poem.

Arguably, the multiple protagonists and plotlines typical of ensemble narratives can resemble the process of outsourcing in the production of commodities. Outsourcing has become one of the main features of the phenomenon of globalization in relation to the global market, sweatshops and TNCs—all connected to violence to a certain extent as discussed in Part I. The fact that all the threads are required to fully understand the narrative—which would be the final, complete product—echoes the chain of production in which outsourcing takes place.[262] Producing commodities depends on several stages, companies, public authorities, and individuals that contribute all together to this process. In order to obtain the final product, all of them are necessary, as if they were pieces of a puzzle. Therefore, even though companies compete against one another in tyring to make as much profit as possible, both the process of outsourcing and the

[262] The cooperation between plotlines may be echoed by the tagline included in some of the *Babel* posters: "Listen" (see fig. 7 in Appendix 1). While anticipating the narration of a story, the tagline also suggests communication. The structure of *Babel* alludes to the communication among people(s), since the different threads are essential to fully comprehend the film. As the viewers organize this fragmented narrative, the plotlines seem to be in dialog with one another, cooperating to allow for the full understanding of the movie. Conversely, it could also be argued that the puzzle-like structure highlights the opposite: a lack of communication, for the threads are separated from each other. This absence characterizes the narrative, whose characters are paradoxically connected by both the lack of communication and the resulting pain they all endure: "At the root of the director's ideas of filmmaking is a grandiose idea that humanity is united in suffering, and that his cinema, through a form of visual Esperanto underpinned by a globalisation of emotion, can bring people together" (D. Shaw, "Gaze" 17). Esperanto reflects communication among people(s), for it takes elements from different languages to create a new one. These languages cooperate in the development of Esperanto, which emerges as a "linguistic puzzle" that is also put together like ensemble narratives.

multiple plotlines imply cooperation in order to reach the intended goal. In addition, in outsourcing several locations are involved in the chain of production, from the inception to the commercialization of a product. Hence, outsourcing intertwines and "globalizes" both the objects and the agents involved in the process: the consumers of these global products become interconnected, for they share these commodities. Likewise, the multiple threads in ensemble narratives cooperate with one another throughout the entire novel/movie—the development of the narrative would not be possible without (some of) them, at least not with the same outcome. On the other hand, as commodities themselves, films and literary texts may be part of the global culture too. In fact, it could be said that narratives contribute to globalizing readers/viewers, as they are capable of connecting readers/viewers worldwide. Not only do we consume narratives as products, we also experience them, and this experience interlaces us and brings us together.

In this last part of the dissertation, therefore, we have seen how formal techniques and thematic content are intertwined, choing the very puzzle-like structure of ensemble narratives. The leit-motif of violence permeating this study is not only one of the primary themes addressed by the selected corpus, but is also represented through the different formal strategies that have been investigated here. As I have tried to prove, issues related to thematic violence, such as lack of communication, loneliness, separation from one another, friction and clashing against others, are reflected by formal techniques, thus working together as an ensemble in order to achieve fuller and richer narratives.

Conclusion: Putting the Pieces Back Together

The representation of contemporary globalization in ensemble narratives has constituted the core of the analysis in this dissertation. In relation to both globalization and ensemble narratives, which are argued to excel in the representation of globalization issues, special attention has been paid to the fact that violence is constantly exercised in our societies both at a personal and at a structural level, as echoed by the selected corpus. Thus, having violence as a leit motif in this doctoral thesis, ensemble narratives have been brought closer to the thematic violence present in the chosen literary and filmic narratives largely in relation to the process of globalization and to formal violence, with the endeavor of identifying possible ways in which narratives can infer formal narrative violence through a variety of strategies.

With these goals in mind, the first of the four parts in this dissertation has been devoted to a discussion of the issues of globalization and violence as well as a historical background that facilitates the understanding of the analysis of our corpus. The process of globalization has been argued to facilitate both a context marked by violence and, at the same time, one where a better understanding among individuals from varied backgrounds is possible. However, the focus of this dissertation has been the former scenario, which is largely reflected by the selected corpus as well. In these narratives, social interactions are shown to have violence at its core; therefore, for this analysis, the concepts of personal, structural, cultural and slow violence have proved useful. Technological developments have allowed for an increase in migration, travelling and access to information worldwide, which make the mainly structural and slow violence of social inequalities more noticeable than ever, especially, for those who must endure

the consequences of having pulled the shortest straw. Furthermore, the overwhelming influence of the global market as well as of the main players that rule not only over the Global South, but also the Global North—transnational corporations, world organizations and superpowers, mainly, the U.S. and the former colonial empires from Europe—contribute to an ever-present structural violence. Their domination is exerted through a variety of means in the field of economy, culture, or education, usually by the introduction or imposition of "products" that often push aside local alternatives. As a consequence, the global intertwines with the local in what has been labelled as the "glocal." At the same time, cultures are interconnected among themselves, and receive influence from the global culture, to which U.S. culture largely contributes. Even though the influence of the global culture leads to a cultural homogenization to a certain extent, the interaction between local and global cultures differ in each case, thus allowing for hybridity as well.

Due to the multiple perspectives that are involved in our globalized world, in which the intertwining and interdependence among the different agents is more significant than ever, this thesis has brought the issue of globalization and narratives together, considering the ensemble narrative as the type of narrative that is able to represent the issue of globalization in the most comprehensive manner. In the second part of the dissertation, I have carried out a formal analysis of the narrative structure of ensemble narratives, teasing out their main features. Both in literature and in cinema, these narratives have a long tradition, spanning several centuries and decades respectively, as elucidated in section 2.1. Furthermore, throughout their history, they have interacted with and received influence from other media and genres such as the short story cycle and the soap opera. In the following section, we delved into the main traits of ensemble narratives, which could be considered to be fiction puzzles, for they

are characterized by the large number of protagonists and individual plotlines. Each of these protagonists have a similar degree of importance in the narrative, thus also receiving a similar amount of discourse time. Moreover, the individual threads provide information that is necessary to fully understand the primary, overarching plotline of the narrative just like every piece of a puzzle is required to put it together.

The complex multi-protagonist structure of ensemble narratives, which constantly shifts from one plotline to another, not only poses a potential challenge for the readers/viewers, it also influences the identification process with the characters. As argued in section 2.3, shifting from one thread to the next postpones the confirmation of the hypotheses that the viewers/readers come up with while experiencing a narrative. In addition, having several similarly relevant threads and protagonists tends to limit the amount of information the viewers/readers receive about those characters as opposed to single-protagonist narratives, which often offer more detailed backgrounds regarding the hero(ine). Due to the generally scarce data about the characters in ensemble narratives, readers/viewers may need to make up for such lack by resorting to their own experience and imagination, so as to fill in what Iser labels as "gaps." On the other hand, the limited information along with the shared discourse time may hinder the process of identification with the protagonists, as suggested by Murray Smith: we spend less time with these characters; therefore, our relationships with them may not be as meaningful. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, as opposed to single-protagonist narratives, which only have one hero(ine) with whom we are expected to empathize, ensemble narratives give the audience more options to identify with.

The last section in Part II focuses on the issue of coincidences. Even though, at first, the characters in ensemble narratives are disconnected from one another, as the story progresses, these characters and their threads are brought together, usually, by the

inescapable whims of “fate,” which can arguably suggest that reverting or ignoring the process of globalization is not possible. As such, these narratives create small worlds where coincidences seem to reign. Involving common settings, themes or circulating objects, these coincidences interlace the characters and echo our shrinking globalized world, where we are also intertwined at individual and collective levels.

The intrinsic features of ensemble narratives where the interaction among the protagonists and plotlines is conspicuous thus prove adequate for the exploration of the issue of globalization, as has been claimed. Instead of focusing on one perspective and protagonist—that of the hero(ine)—, this fragmented narrative structure excels at offering a comprehensive and overarching representation of the increasing interconnections that are a consequence of our globalized world where sociocultural differences and boundaries are getting more blurred. It is precisely in Part III where we delved into the detailed analysis of how the selected narratives, set in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, address contemporary globalization as well as other issues that are interconnected such as migration, social inequality, racism, and the relationship between the Global North and South—all of them involving different types of violence. Regarding the relationship between the Global North and the Global South, I paid particular attention to the United States and Mexico. The violent rivalry between SUPERNAFTA and Arcangel/El Gran Mojado in *Tropic of Orange* was the focus of a lengthy discussion in section 3.1, for it proved especially useful to explore the neocolonial domination that the U.S. exerts over Mexico and Latin America.

Contemporary globalization has also upped the number of migrants moving around the world. The increased migration facilitated by modern technology and the process of globalization has also contributed to a more frequent and widespread contact among people from varied backgrounds. Albeit positive and enriching on some

occasions, this contact is also shown to foster clashes marked by racism, discrimination and marginalization, all of them examples and consequences of personal, structural and cultural violence. Section 3.2 explored the most relevant immigrant characters in the selected corpus. In relation to immigrants and ethnoracial groups, Haggis's *Crash* explores prejudice as its main theme, showing how racism largely dictates the clashing and crashing interactions among those who coexist in Los Angeles. Other immigrant characters in the corpus such as Biju, Bobby or Amelia portray the struggles that many "aliens," especially, undocumented ones, must face in the U.S. in their quest for a better future: low wages, unhealthy jobs, deportation, or being treated as disposable commodities.

This doctoral thesis has also addressed the issue of the *maquiladora* industry, a trademark in the production of commodities during contemporary globalization, and the subsequent violence associated with it. Section 3.3 tackles the negative consequences that these factories have had not only due to the low-wage jobs they offer, but also because of the unhealthy conditions forced upon many employees who work in contact with deadly toxic waste as well as upon the inhabitants of the area, as reflected in Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge*. The borderlands, where poverty, crime, overmilitarization and violence are not rare, are painstakingly depicted in the novel, primarily through Tomasita, who is subjected to sociopolitical invisibility, as elucidated in section 3.4. Similarly to the homeless community in *Tropic of Orange*, Tomasita becomes a problem for the authorities, which, in both cases, respond with violence and death. On the other hand, the overmilitarization of the U.S.-Mexico border aims at keeping the area under surveillance. Taking advantage of its multi-protagonist structure, *Traffic* largely portrays the actions of the public forces in the War on Drugs along with the consumption and the lucrative business of smuggling these substances from Mexico

into the U.S. However, as discussed, the film mostly depicts Mexico in negative terms, as a site where violence, corruption and backwardness reign, as opposed to the U.S.

The last part of this dissertation is an attempt to bring together the formal analysis of ensemble narratives and the thematic issue of violence. Part IV teases out the ways in which these texts and films may represent and echo violence through their narrative strategies and techniques. As purported, the basic narrative convention is premised on some sort of violence, for the characters are challenged and pushed towards the adventure in order to restore an original state of affairs that has been somehow disrupted. Furthermore, the use of heroes/heroines and "villains" in narratives allows for the viewers/readers to experience the victory of the former over the latter, a success that may not be possible in the "real" lives of the audience. Consequently, the defeat of the villains, archetypal characters that echo the violence and other negative aspects in human nature, paves the way for a temporary end of violence—in other words, "good" triumphs over "evil," especially, in conventional narratives, in which heroes/heroines are usually expected to win. Although the selected corpus does not present clear heroes/heroines and villains, characters like El Gran Mojado in *Tropic of Orange* or Javier in *Traffic* resemble heroes that (seem to) achieve success at the end of their respective narratives. Formal narrative violence, in addition, can be exerted on the characters depending on their type. It has been suggested that flat characters, which barely have background information to fulfill their function, are denied the opportunity to grow, develop and change. Examples from our corpus are Hernando in Yamashita's novel, or Juan Obregón and the generic and nameless African American drug dealer in Soderbergh's movie. These characters are not given the chance to reveal their perspectives and motives behind their actions; instead, they are only meant to be morally condemned by the readers/spectators. In relation to the process of outsourcing

in our globalized world, flat characters seem to echo those who work in sweatshops performing specific functions. These workers rarely have opportunities to grow and develop and are easily replaceable, for they are only relevant in terms of what they can produce; similarly, flat characters are neither unique nor complex enough, as they are constructed around one idea.

Furthermore, strategies related to the editing of the texts have been suggested to be cases of formal narrative violence. Montage can be utilized in films to represent violence through the fast editing and cutting of scenes. Slow motion or the freeze-frame technique may achieve the same goal, forcing the spectators to spend more time exposed to a violent event in the narrative. A similar effect can be attained through the repetition of violent events both in movies and in literary narratives. Likewise, the juxtaposition of plotlines has the potential to emphasize violence in narratives, especially, if the characters belong to opposing backgrounds, highlighting an inequality of which the readers/viewers may be more aware. Such a juxtaposition and its subsequent friction, which reflects violence, are intrinsic to ensemble narratives. Fate, also frequent in this type of narratives, implies formal narrative violence, for it denotes an oppressive and irremediable lack of choice for the characters. Additionally, the very puzzle-like structure of ensemble narratives is an example of formal narrative violence: on the one hand, the different threads, by being separated from each other in a fragmented overarching plotline, could indicate that the protagonists are isolated from one another; on the other, the narrative as a whole is "dissected," split into several plotlines/pieces that need to be put back together by the readers/viewers. Once more, the process of outsourcing is reminisced: the production of commodities is split into numerous stages, all of them necessary for the product to become a reality just like the multiple threads in ensemble narratives are required to understand the narrative.

The active participation of the readers/viewers necessary to follow the complex fragmented structure of ensemble narratives has been argued to imply formal narrative violence as well, this time exerted on the readers and spectators. The audience is expected to constantly develop hypotheses regarding the events in the narratives. For this, readers and viewers alike have to use their previous knowledge and imagination to fill gaps of missing information. Yet, the readers/viewers may be disappointed when their hypotheses are debunked. The narratives thus challenge their viewers/readers, who are essential for the narratives to achieve their full meaning. Hence, reminiscent of the intertwining of interdependent plotlines in ensemble narratives, readers/viewers and narratives are also interconnected and dependent on each other. Ensemble narratives may also hinder the reader's/viewer's identification with the characters. The limited information about the protagonists might mislead the viewer/reader or make them erroneously misjudge the characters. The audience may indeed choose to reject them based on insufficient details, and these characters could be said to suffer a "narrative" discrimination.

Violence is an intrinsic characteristic of human nature, and our globalized societies are not an exception. Even though putting an end to violence may be an impossible task, literature, films, and the critical reflection that they trigger keep and should keep striving for discernment and awareness regarding violence. However, some of the selected narratives end in a hopeful vein, suggesting that there is room for change. The final words in *The Inheritance of Loss* invite us to hope, but also—and I would say, more importantly—to act: "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent. All you needed to do was to reach out and pluck it" (Desai 324). I would like to do the same. Formal narrative violence and thematic violence can indeed encourage us to

(re)think the world we live in. These reflections should be the first step towards actions that make hope reachable. This dissertation thus humbly aspires to be one more piece in the puzzle of the studies of globalization, violence and ensemble narratives.

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Appendix 1 – List of Figures

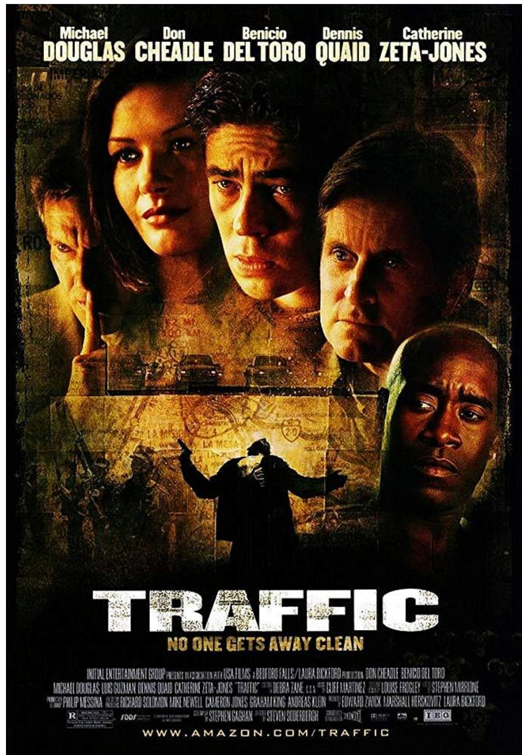

Fig. 1 – Poster of *Traffic* with the tagline "No one gets away clean."

Fig. 2 – Poster of *Crash* featuring Daniel and his daughter, Lara.

Fig. 3 – Poster of *Crash* featuring Christine and Sgt. Ryan.

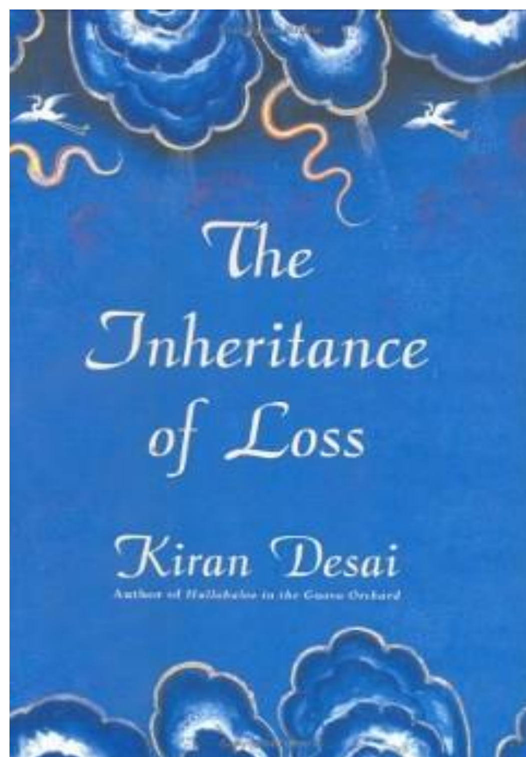

Fig. 4 – Book cover of the 2006 U.S. edition of *The Inheritance of Loss*.

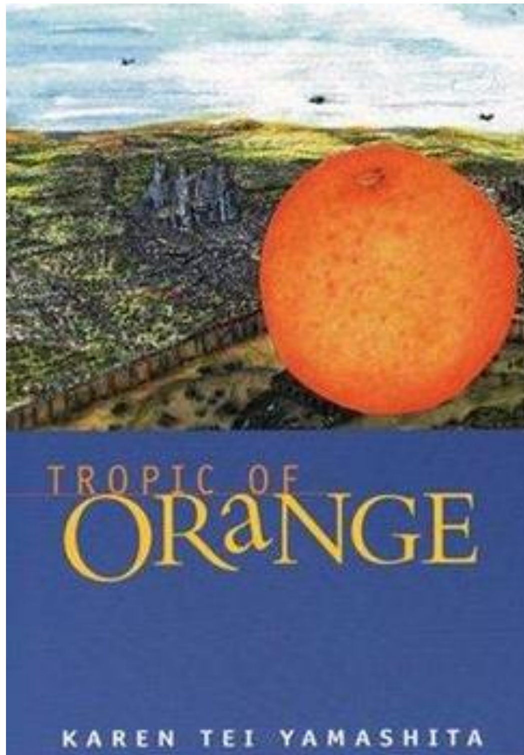

Fig. 5 – Book cover of the 1997 edition of *Tropic of Orange*.

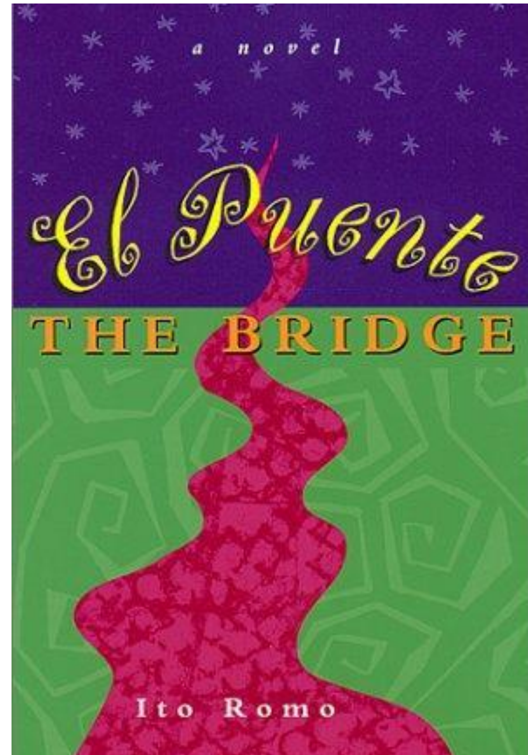

Fig. 6 – Book cover of *El Puente/The Bridge*.

Fig. 7 – Poster of *Babel* with the tagline “Listen.”

Fig. 8 – Jean walks downstairs while Daniel, who is seen behind the stairs/bars, changes the locks.

Fig. 9 – The camera only focuses on Daniel during his brief interaction with Jean.

Fig. 10 – Daniel can be seen behind the stairs/bars again. A high angle shot is used on this occasion.

Appendix 2 – Resumen

La representación de la globalización contemporánea en las *ensemble narratives* constituye el núcleo del análisis realizado en esta tesis doctoral. En relación con el tema de la globalización y las *ensemble narratives*, las cuales considero que constituyen un instrumento privilegiado a la hora de representar nuestro mundo globalizado, se le presta atención al hecho de que la violencia se ejerce constantemente en nuestras sociedades tanto a nivel personal como a nivel estructural, tal y como lo refleja el corpus seleccionado. Así, la violencia es uno de los temas principales de esta tesis, la cual acerca las *ensemble narratives* a la violencia temática presente en las narrativas elegidas, una violencia temática que está fuertemente relacionada con el proceso de globalización. Además, se establece una conexión entre la violencia temática de los textos y la formal, con el objetivo de identificar maneras en que las narrativas pueden insinuar o implicar violencia narrativa formal mediante diversas estrategias.

Con el fin de alcanzar estos objetivos, la primera de las cuatro partes que integran esta tesis doctoral se dedica al debate de los temas de globalización y violencia, por un lado, y por el otro, a un trasfondo histórico que facilita la comprensión del análisis del corpus. Se argumenta que el proceso de globalización contribuye en cierta medida tanto a un contexto marcado por la violencia como a uno que posibilita un mejor entendimiento entre individuos de distintos orígenes. Sin embargo, esta tesis se centra en la primera variante, la cual también se refleja en el corpus. En estas narrativas, la violencia se encuentra en las bases de las interacciones sociales; por ende, para este análisis, conceptos como violencia personal, estructural y cultural, desarrollados por Johan Galtung, y violencia lenta (*slow violence*), de Rob Nixon, son de gran utilidad. El desarrollo tecnológico ha favorecido un incremento en la migración, la movilidad y el

acceso a la información a nivel mundial, los cuales resaltan la violencia estructural y la violencia lenta que caracterizan a la desigualdad social, sobre todo, para aquellos que salen menos beneficiados. Asimismo, la influencia del mercado global y de los que dominan no solo al Sur Global sino también al Norte Global—las transnacionales, las organizaciones y potencias mundiales, sobre todo, los EEUU y los antiguos imperios coloniales europeos—contribuyen a una interminable violencia estructural. Su dominio lo ejercen de diversas maneras en el campo de la economía, la cultura o la educación, generalmente, introduciendo o imponiendo "productos" que buscan suplantar a las alternativas locales. En consecuencia, lo global se entrelaza con lo local, resultando en lo "glocal". Al mismo tiempo, las culturas también están entrelazadas y reciben influencia de la cultura global, a la cual la cultura estadounidense contribuye de forma significativa. A pesar de que la influencia de la cultura global favorece una homogeneización cultural hasta cierto punto, la interacción entre la cultura global y las culturas locales difiere en cada caso, dando lugar a que las culturas también sean híbridas.

Debido a las numerosas perspectivas involucradas en nuestro mundo globalizado, en el cual la interdependencia y la interconectividad son más significativas que nunca, esta tesis abarca el tema de la globalización y las narrativas, considerando a las *ensemble narratives* como el tipo de narrativa que representa o aborda la globalización de una forma más exhaustiva. En la segunda parte de la tesis, realizo un análisis formal de la estructura narrativa de la *ensemble narratives*, explicando sus principales características. Como se explica en la sección 2.1, las *ensemble narratives* tienen una larga historia en la literatura y en el cine. Por un lado, este tipo de novelas se origina en los romances del Santo Grial del siglo XII y en obras tales como *El Decamerón*, de Giovanni Boccaccio, o *Los cuentos de Canterbury*, de Geoffrey

Chaucer, ambas del siglo XIV. Posteriormente, la novela realista de finales del siglo XIX también se erige como uno de los pilares en el desarrollo de las *ensemble narratives*. Por el otro lado, películas mudas como *Intolerance* (1916), de D. W. Griffith, son el punto de partida de este tipo de narrativas en el cine, donde han ganado popularidad desde finales del siglo XX. Además, a lo largo de la historia las *ensemble narratives* interactuaron y fueron influidas por otros medios y géneros como las colecciones de relatos (*short story cycle*) o las telenovelas y series televisivas. La siguiente sección (2.2) se adentra en las características más significativas de las *ensemble narratives*, las cuales se pueden considerar como rompecabezas de ficción, ya que se caracterizan por tener un gran número de protagonistas y tramas individuales. Cada uno de estos protagonistas goza de un grado de importancia similar en la narrativa, por lo que también recibe una cantidad o duración similar del tiempo del discurso. De igual modo, las tramas individuales aportan información necesaria para comprender la trama principal de la narrativa tal y como todas las piezas de un rompecabezas resultan imprescindibles para poder armarlo.

La compleja estructura multi-protagonista de las *ensemble narratives*, que cambia constantemente de una trama a la otra, representa un posible desafío para los lectores/espectadores, por un lado, y por el otro, influye en el proceso de identificación entre lectores/espectadores y personajes. En la sección 2.3, se explica que el cambio de tramas pospone la confirmación de las hipótesis desarrolladas por los lectores/espectadores mientras leen o ven la narrativa. Igualmente, el hecho de que los protagonistas y sus tramas tengan una relevancia similar suele limitar la cantidad de información que los lectores/espectadores reciben sobre esos personajes; a diferencia de las *ensemble narratives*, las narrativas mono-protagonista generalmente ofrecen más datos sobre el héroe/heroína. Debido a la escasez de información sobre los protagonistas

en las *ensemble narratives*, es posible que los lectores/espectadores necesiten compensar esa ausencia haciendo uso de sus experiencias previas e imaginación. De este modo, son capaces de llenar lo que Wolfgang Iser llama “espacios en blanco” (*gaps* en inglés; la traducción del original en alemán, *Leerstellen*, no es exacta). Por otra parte, la limitación en los datos recibidos y la distribución del tiempo del discurso entre todos los protagonistas pueden dificultar el proceso de identificación con dichos personajes, como sugiere Murray Smith: nosotros, los lectores/espectadores, pasamos menos tiempo con estos protagonistas, por lo cual es posible que nuestras relaciones con ellos sean menos significativas. No obstante, cabe recalcar que, al contrario de las narrativas mono-protagonistas, que solo tienen un héroe/heroína con el que se supone que vamos a empatizar, las *ensemble narratives* ofrecen más opciones con las que el público se puede sentir identificado.

La última sección de la Parte II se centra en el tema de las coincidencias. Aunque, en un principio, los personajes de las *ensemble narratives* están desconectados entre sí, estos protagonistas y sus tramas se terminan cruzando al avanzar la narrativa. Dicha interconexión suele ser posible gracias a los ineludibles caprichos del “destino”, lo cual podría implicar que revertir o ignorar el proceso de globalización no es factible. Es así como estas narrativas crean mundos pequeños donde la serendipia parece reinar. Mediante escenarios, temas u objetos en común, estas coincidencias hacen que los protagonistas se crucen. Esto recuerda a nuestro mundo cada vez más pequeño, en el que nosotros también estamos conectados tanto a nivel individual como colectivo.

Las características intrínsecas de las *ensemble narratives*, donde la interacción entre los protagonistas y las tramas es obvia, resultan adecuadas para la exploración de la globalización, como se mencionó anteriormente. En lugar de centrarse en una única perspectiva y protagonista—la del héroe/heroína—, esta estructura narrativa

fragmentada destaca al ofrecer una representación exhaustiva y abarcadora de las interconectividades que son consecuencia de nuestro mundo globalizado, donde las diferencias y fronteras socioculturales están cada vez más difuminadas. La Parte III, justamente, se adentra en un análisis detallado de cómo el corpus seleccionado, que está ambientado a finales del siglo XX y principios del XXI, explora la globalización contemporánea junto con otros asuntos con los que está íntimamente relacionados: migración, desigualdad social, racismo, y la relación entre el Norte Global y el Sur—todos ellos marcados por distintos tipos de violencia. Respecto al Norte Global y Sur Global, esta tesis presta especial atención a los Estados Unidos y a México. Por este motivo, la rivalidad descrita en *Tropic of Orange* entre el luchador estadounidense, SUPERNAFTA, y su oponente mexicano/latinoamericano, Arcangel/El Gran Mojado, es sujeta a un largo debate en la sección 3.1. La violenta relación entre estos contrincantes, quienes mueren durante su pelea de lucha libre, resulta particularmente útil para explorar el dominio neocolonial que los EEUU ejercen sobre México y Latino América.

La globalización contemporánea también incrementó el número de individuos que migran alrededor del mundo. Esta mayor migración facilitada por la tecnología moderna y por el proceso de globalización, que contribuyó a que el contacto entre personas de diversos orígenes sea más frecuente y extendido. A pesar de ser positivo y enriquecedor a veces, este contacto también fomenta choques y conflictos marcados por el racismo, la discriminación y la marginación, todos ejemplos y consecuencias de la violencia personal, estructural y cultural. La sección 3.2 analiza los personajes inmigrantes más importantes del corpus. En relación con la inmigración y los distintos grupos etnoraciales, *Crash* explora el tema del prejuicio, demostrando cómo el racismo influye en gran medida en las conflictivas relaciones entre los habitantes de la ciudad de

Los Ángeles. Otros inmigrantes del corpus, tales como Biju en *The Inheritance of Loss*, Bobby en *Tropic of Orange* o Amelia en *Babel*, reflejan la lucha a la que deben enfrentarse los inmigrantes (especialmente, los indocumentados) en los EEUU con la esperanza de un futuro mejor: salarios bajos, trabajos insalubres, deportaciones, o ser tratados como mercancía desechable.

Esta tesis doctoral también plantea el tema de la industria de las maquiladoras, una seña de identidad en la producción de mercancía durante la globalización contemporánea y en la violencia asociada con esta producción. La sección 3.3 aborda las consecuencias negativas que estas fábricas han tenido no solo por los bajos salarios que ofrecen, sino también por las condiciones insalubres en las que miles de empleados son forzados a trabajar. En ocasiones, los desechos tóxicos producidos por estas maquiladores llegan a ser mortales para los trabajadores y para los habitantes de la zona, donde la contaminación medioambiental alcanza niveles alarmantes, como denuncia *El Puente/The Bridge*. La zona fronteriza entre EEUU y México, donde la pobreza, los delitos, la excesiva militarización y la violencia son habituales, es fielmente representada en la novela de Romo, especialmente a través del personaje de Tomasita, quien es sometida a una invisibilidad sociopolítica, como se explica en la sección 3.4. Del mismo modo que la comunidad de personas sin hogar que toma posesión de vehículos abandonados en un embotellamiento en *Tropic of Orange*, Tomasita se vuelve un grave problema para las autoridades tras ocasionar accidentalmente el enrojecimiento de las aguas del río Grande (río Bravo en México), hecho por el cual Tomasita es tachada de una terrorista medioambiental. Velando por los intereses de las clases dominantes, en ambos casos dichas autoridades responden con violencia y muerte. Por una parte, la comunidad de personas sin hogar es brutalmente masacrada por las fuerzas militares, en una escena que se asemeja a un conflicto bélico y resalta el poder militar

de EEUU. Por la otra, Tomasita, al intentar cruzar el puente internacional hacia Estados Unidos y así escapar de las fuerzas mexicanas que la persiguen, recibe un impacto de bala en la cabeza al ser identificada por un soldado mexicano. Así, la novela también se hace eco de la fuerte militarización que mantiene a la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México bajo vigilancia. Relacionado con esta zona fronteriza, *Traffic* aprovecha su estructura multi-protagonista para explorar no solo las acciones de las fuerzas públicas en la Guerra contra las drogas, sino también el consumo y el tráfico de estas sustancias desde México a EEUU. No obstante, tal y como se dilucida en esta tesis, la película por lo general representa a México de una forma negativa: como si fuera un lugar donde la violencia, la corrupción y el atraso reinan, al contrario de los Estados Unidos, donde sí se intenta luchar contra las drogas y la violencia está recluida a ghettos/barrios empobrecidos.

La última parte de esta tesis doctoral aspira a acercar el análisis formal de las *ensemble narratives* y el asunto de la violencia. La Parte IV explica las formas en las que estas novelas y películas pueden representar y hacerse eco de la violencia mediante técnicas y estrategias narrativas. Tal y como se expone, la convención narrativa básica parte de algún tipo de violencia, dado que los personajes son desafiados y empujados hacia la aventura con el fin de restaurar la situación original que fue alterada. Además, el uso de héroes/heroínas y "villanos/as" en las narrativas permite que los lectores/espectadores experimenten la victoria de los primeros contra los últimos, un éxito que puede no ser posible en la vida "real" del público. En consecuencia, la derrota de los villanos/as, personajes arquetípicos que se hacen eco de la violencia y otros aspectos negativos de la naturaleza humana, deja paso a un fin temporal de la violencia—en otras palabras, el "bien" triunfa sobre el "mal", especialmente en narrativas convencionales, en las que se espera que los héroes/heroínas venzan. Aunque

el corpus no presenta claros héroes/heroínas y villanos/as, personajes como El Gran Mojado en *Tropic of Orange* o Javier en *Traffic* se asemejan a héroes que tienen o parecen tener éxito al final de sus respectivas narrativas. La violencia narrativa formal, además, puede afectar a los personajes. Como sugiero en esta Parte IV, los personajes planos, cuyos orígenes tienen los detalles justos y necesarios para que puedan cumplir su función en la narrativa, no reciben una oportunidad de crecer, de desarrollarse y de cambiar. Ejemplos del corpus seleccionado serían el traficante de órganos, Hernando, en la novela de Yamashita, o Juan Obregón y el narcotraficante afroamericano sin nombre en el film de Soderbergh. A estos personajes no se les permite revelar los motivos de sus acciones o expresar sus puntos de vista, sino que existen para ser moralmente condenados por los lectores/espectadores. Con respecto al proceso de subcontratación (*outsourcing*) en nuestro mundo globalizado, podría decirse que los personajes planos reflejan a los empleados de las maquiladoras, que se dedican a realizar funciones o tareas específicas. Estos trabajadores rara vez gozan de oportunidades para crecer y desarrollarse profesionalmente y pueden ser reemplazados con facilidad, ya que su importancia depende de lo que sean capaces de producir; de igual modo, los personajes planos no son únicos ni complejos, al estar construidos en torno a una sola idea.

La violencia narrativa, por otro lado, también se puede reflejar mediante estrategias de edición de los textos fílmicos. Es posible utilizar el montaje en las películas para representar violencia a través de cortes y *fast editing* con varios planos de breve duración. La cámara lenta y la técnica del *freeze frame* son capaces de alcanzar el mismo objetivo, forzando a los espectadores a pasar más tiempo expuestos a un evento violento en la narrativa. Un efecto similar se puede conseguir mediante la repetición de eventos violentos tanto en las películas como en las obras literarias. Del mismo modo, la yuxtaposición de tramas ofrece la posibilidad de resaltar la violencia en las narrativas,

sobre todo, si los personajes provienen de orígenes opuestos, resaltando una desigualdad de la que los lectores/espectadores pueden ser más conscientes. Tal yuxtaposición y su consiguiente fricción, la cual refleja violencia, son características intrínsecas de las *ensemble narratives*. El destino, cuyo uso en este tipo de narrativas también es frecuente, implica una violencia narrativa formal, ya que supone una falta de elección para los personajes—una ausencia que es opresora e irremediable. Igualmente, la estructura de las *ensemble narratives*, que se asemeja a la de un rompecabezas, es otro ejemplo de violencia narrativa formal: por una parte, las distintas tramas, al estar separadas entre sí en una trama general fragmentada, pueden indicar que los protagonistas se encuentran aislados los unos de los otros; por otra, la narrativa en su conjunto es "diseccionada", dividida en numerosas tramas/piezas, que tienen que ser reordenadas por los lectores/espectadores. Una vez más, el proceso de subcontratación y *outsourcing* típico de la economía del mundo globalizado viene a la mente: la producción de mercancía es dividida en varias etapas, todas necesarias para que el producto se haga una realidad del mismo modo en el que las múltiples tramas en las *ensemble narratives* resultan indispensables para poder entender la narrativa de forma completa.

En esta última parte de la tesis, también se argumenta que la participación activa de los lectores/espectadores, necesaria para seguir y comprender la compleja estructura fragmentada de las *ensemble narratives*, implica cierta violencia narrativa formal, esta vez ejercida sobre los lectores y espectadores. Se espera que el público esté continuamente generando hipótesis sobre los eventos que suceden en las narrativas. Con este fin, tanto los lectores como los espectadores deben hacer uso de su conocimiento previo y de su imaginación para llenar los vacíos ocasionados por la información ausente. No obstante, los lectores/espectadores pueden sentirse decepcionados cuando

sus hipótesis son negadas. De esta manera, las narrativas desafían a sus lectores/espectadores, quienes resultan esenciales para que las mismas narrativas alcancen su significado completo. Por ende, reflejando la interconexión de las tramas interdependientes en las *ensemble narratives*, los lectores/espectadores y las narrativas también están interconectados y son dependientes los unos de los otros. Por otro lado, es posible que las *ensemble narratives* dificulten el proceso de identificación del espectador/lector con los personajes, tal y como dijimos anteriormente. La escasa información sobre los protagonistas podría llegar a engañar a los lectores/espectadores o inducirlos al error, haciendo que juzguen a los personajes de forma equivocada. Efectivamente, el público puede llegar a "rechazar" a esos protagonistas basándose en datos insuficientes, por lo que se podría decir que estos personajes padecen de una "discriminación narrativa".

La violencia es una característica intrínseca a la naturaleza humana y nuestras sociedades globalizadas no son una excepción. A pesar de que poner fin a la violencia sea, posiblemente, una tarea inalcanzable, la literatura, el cine y la reflexión crítica que estas favorecen continúan y deben continuar fomentando el discernimiento y la toma de conciencia respecto a la violencia. Algunas de las narrativas seleccionadas tienen finales esperanzadores, invitándonos a recordar que hay lugar para el cambio. Por ello, me gustaría transmitir este mismo mensaje para finalizar este estudio doctoral. Tanto la violencia narrativa formal como la violencia temática son ciertamente capaces de animarnos a (re)pensar el mundo en el que vivimos. Estas reflexiones deberían ser el primer paso en un camino que conduzca a acciones que dejen lugar a la esperanza. Si el conocimiento y la reflexión constituyen el primer paso para cambiar el mundo, esta tesis doctoral no aspira sino a ser una pieza más en el rompecabezas del estudio de la globalización, la violencia y las *ensemble narratives*.