ON GLOBALIZATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY: MEDIATING SPATIAL PRACTICE IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LATIN AMERICA

by

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Abstract

“On Globalization and Civil Society: Mediating Spatial Practice in Twenty-first-century Latin America” explores the tensions between globalization and civil society from a multi-geographical and multidisciplinary angle. The dissertation is informed by theories of space, power, identity, citizenship, and postmodernity, as well as mediatic and socio-political analyses of conditions that have consistently challenged democracy and the formation of a just civil society specifically in the Colombian and Mexican contexts but throughout Latin America as well.

I argue that national institutions fundamental to the formation of knowledge and the construction of identity--namely national citizenship, geopolitical and symbolic borders, and the national media--impose undue limits and power on globally affected individuals. After acknowledging and analyzing the dehumanizing way in which these national institutions limit individual freedoms and participation within local and global public spheres, I take a more hopeful stance as I explore humanizing instances that transcend victimization through the imagination and creation of alternative social orders that destabilize traditional apparatuses of authority through agency-enhancing initiatives.
Through close readings of contemporary Colombian and Mexican narrative by Héctor Abad Faciolince, Jorge Franco, Heriberto Yépez, and Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, and a case study of *Un Pasquín*, Vladimir Flórez’s independent alternative Bogotá media project, I call for a new understanding of the possibilities of the twenty-first-century public sphere in Latin America. I contend that by subverting dominant paradigms of power, these alternative spheres provide a new model from which to think and advance a just global order. In short, I argue that, despite globalization’s mostly deleterious consequences for the world’s most at-risk local populations, the formation of a more humanizing spatial and mediatic practice that fosters alternative public spheres responsive to the human need for individual agency and subjectivity, though seemingly unattainable, is in fact possible.
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Introduction

On Globalization and Civil Society

Globalization and civil society are two concepts whose theoretical, symbolic, and very real ethico-political and spatial patterns have undergone significant changes in the final decades of the twentieth-century and beginning of the twenty-first. Increasingly accelerated and diffuse globalization processes, which both bridge and fissure local-global divides, have changed patterns of human interconnectivities in civil society and the public sphere, thus altering individual actors’ prospects for agency. Recognized as “the realm of everyday life in which social matters and matters of state are discussed, where people learn about the world and express their ideas, in sum, where national sentiments and public opinion are formed” (Remedi 519), the public sphere is fundamental to the personal, social, cultural, and political life of a people. Moving beyond Jürgen Habermas’s original conceptualization of the public sphere as a singular public space composed by an elite (western bourgeois) private people who come together in public dialogue to legitimize dominant public opinion and thereby influence political action, in the contemporary social imaginary, a more just public sphere is far more diverse, inclusive, and contestatory. Taking participatory or radical democracy as its starting point, an ethical twenty-first-century public sphere is attentive to the personal and political agency of autonomous individuals traditionally excluded by the state. Neither wholly conventional nor subaltern, national nor postnational, this public sphere engages various social actors in dialogue to negotiate socio-political participation and representation in and beyond the confines of the nation-state.
Despite the mostly destructive social consequences of globalized capitalism, encouraged by the democratizing and equalizing potential of globalization processes to foster a common respect for humanity across natural geographical divides and constructed socio-territorial limits, proponents of a transnational social order emphasize the possibilities of contesting and rearranging established paradigms of power, politics, and dominance to strengthen civil society from both a local and global optic. The twenty-first-century social order is thus most optimistically re-imagined by some as a borderless world in which individual actors come together to exercise their human right to a humane existence, the foundation of a new cosmopolitanism rooted in the Kantian tradition. Based on the assertion that personal agency vis-à-vis mobility is a fundamental human right, moral philosophers and human rights advocates campaign for global justice via renewed democratic structures that call into question territorial borders and related nationalist ideologies. However, despite largely incontrovertible arguments about the universal right to humanity, that global justice remains an elusive aspiration is due in large part to the failures of justice at a localized or national level.

Notwithstanding the transnational reality of the contemporary social order, because normalizing technologies of power remain firmly entrenched in national paradigms, local conditions must be probed. In this dissertation I argue that national institutions fundamental to the formation of knowledge and identity--namely national citizenship, geopolitical and symbolic borders, and the national media--impose undue limits and power on globally affected individuals. I approach my study from a localizing Latin American perspective mindful of Latin America’s historically peripheral or Othered position vis-à-vis dominant western powers, a condition exacerbated by the global capitalist ideology galvanizing
contemporary neoliberal globalization processes. Through close readings of twenty-first-century Colombian and Mexican literary and journalistic texts, I examine the dehumanizing effects of contemporary globalization processes alongside an exploration of humanizing instances that transcend the victimizing stance through the imagination and creation of alternative public spheres that subvert dominant paradigms of power. In short, I argue that, despite globalization’s mostly deleterious consequences for the world’s most at risk local populations, the formation of a more humanizing spatial and mediatic practice that fosters alternative public spheres responsive to the human need for individual agency and subjectivity, though seemingly unattainable, is in fact possible.

In my study I explore the tensions between globalization and civil society from a multi-geographical and multidisciplinary angle. Though I concentrate on the Latin American context, and more specifically contemporary Colombia and Mexico, I rely on a broader field of critical theoretical work produced not only in Latin America but in North America and Europe as well. As such, I engage theories from subject areas as diverse as nationalism and transnationalism (Anderson, Fraser, Habermas); globalization, migration, and border studies (Anzaldúa, Appadurai, Balibar, García Canclini); moral and political philosophy (Arendt, Badiou, Beitz, Kant); sociology (Bauman); psychology (Gottschalk, Levin); anthropology (Augé, Kearney); journalism (Herbst, Rincón, Waisbord); geography and spatial practice (Lefebvre, Soja); and critical cultural studies (Agamben, Foucault, Virilio). Framed by these disparate theories, my cultural analyses of literary and journalistic texts from Colombia and Mexico question the implications of citizenship, international borders, mobility and immobility, restrictive spatial practice, and compromised mediascapes that normalize public opinion within an officialist doctrine. The texts I analyze confront the moral complicity of
elite individuals, corporations, and state governments in the growing disparities between rich and poor, rights bearers and rights seekers, human and inhuman. This condition is particularly evident in illiberal democracies like Colombia and Mexico, where endemic poverty, crime, violence, paramilitary and narco-culture, human rights abuses, impunity, and lack of governmental accountability and action serve to heighten not only socio-economic inequalities but also societal fear and indifference. My readings thus move beyond simply exposing instances of dehumanizing or pathogenic socio-spatial practices manifested in the texts to emphasizing cases of subversion as an indicator of the possibility for more humane modes of social ordering.

I offer close readings of two Colombian novels, Héctor Abad Faciolince’s Angosta (2003) and Jorge Franco’s Paraíso Travel (2001), one Mexican novel, Heriberto Yépez’s Al otro lado (2008), and one Mexican short story, Luis Humberto Crosthwaite’s “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte,” published in his 2002 collection Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera, alongside more tangential analyses of other contemporary Baja Californian narrative. In addition, I include a case study of an independent Colombian publication, Vladimir Flórez’s newspaper of political opposition, Un Pasquín, published in Bogotá between December 2005 and May 2010.

In sum, the dissertation proceeds with three primary goals in mind: i) At a basic cultural level, I want to highlight the critical literary and journalistic work being produced in contemporary Mexico and Colombia, drawing parallels among the social critiques these texts make of the spatial, psychological, structural, and/or symbolic violence perpetuated by dominant national institutions. ii) At a theoretical level, I aim to contribute to the dialogue in contemporary critical theory and cultural studies that challenges national governments’
totalizing, exclusionary, and morally complicit discourse and practice. If territorial and symbolic borders are relentlessly fortified as a conspicuous show of sovereign power, other national institutions like the mainstream media are equally, though more circumspectly, influenced by dominant powers and ideologies. Without completely discounting nationalism or the productive role of the state, I find alternatives to the dominant order in sub-, trans-, and supranational paradigms, as manifested in the texts under study, committed to fostering social democracy, civil society, and an inclusive twenty-first-century public sphere in Latin America and beyond. iii) Finally, at the risk of sounding overly romantic, at a humanistic level, I intend ultimately to emphasize the meaningful account of being human at the locus of my primary texts by focusing not simply on understanding the contemporary human condition but, more importantly, on identifying what needs to change in order to improve the human condition in the twenty-first century. Despite the varied nature of my cultural analyses, these three goals give my close textual readings a unifying purpose.

Chapter Descriptions

Each of the four chapters included in this dissertation are distinct and could stand alone as self-contained articles insofar as they deal with diverse subject matter and texts. I move from theorizing globalized space’s effects on the Latin American social order to literary analyses of border narratives and their commentaries on borders as biopolitical technologies of domination to an interrogation of the role of the mainstream and alternative media in constructing and deconstructing dominant paradigms of power and conceptualizations of national identity via the production of dominant and alternative public spheres. Though distinct, the four chapters belong together insofar as they are guided by the
conceptual repertoire of postmodernity yet question postmodern society’s growing detachment from politics and humanity. Against this background, each chapter looks at the tension between globalization and civil society and reaches varying conclusions as to the possibilities for human coexistence within and beyond borders in the twenty-first century.

Chapter one, “Social Ordering and the Public Sphere in Twenty-first-century Latin America: The Question of Ethics and (In)Humanity in a Globalized World,” sets the theoretical background to the entire dissertation, outlining the paradoxical tensions of twenty-first-century globalization processes, namely the concurrent opening and closing of international borders. This globalizing/localizing tension is most clearly distinguished in global neoliberal policies that promote the advantages of international trade and commerce while upholding territorial borders’ interdictory functions against the free movement of human beings. Concentrating specifically on the United States-Mexico border, Joseph Nevins rightly refers to these dual tendencies as simultaneous processes of “NAFTAization” and “militarization” of the border region (6), processes that are felt not only at this localized border but at most other global territorial and symbolic borders as well. Emphasizing the capitalist potential of progressively more accelerated and dispersed fiscal “space of flows,” versus the “space of places” that in fact imprison the majority of the world’s populations to conditions of immobility (Coleman, Pauly, and Brydon 5), neoliberal globalization theory has presupposed the end of the state and hailed trans- or postnationalism as the new paradigm.

Conversely, as Paul Hirst reminds us, though globalization has reformulated the state’s functions within an emergent web of extra- and supranational governance institutions, as the only entity with sufficient authority to engage, enforce, and legitimate (or, on the flip
side, to ignore and castigate) these external organizations, the state remains the primary political actor across borders (45). With this in mind, I locate my analysis within state borders without discounting the important role taken on by supranational organizations committed to improving the living conditions and life prospects of the world’s most abject citizens. Thus, though I argue in chapter one that power must be reframed from a global, transnational, or cosmopolitical consciousness, I do not lose sight of the important role played by the state, which, in the current context, is largely one of moral complicity vis-à-vis continued disparities and inhuman global conditions that challenge the respect, dignity, and worth of human subjects.

In the Latin American context, the failure of states to account for their citizens is manifested in their democracies’ largely illiberal status (Smith and Ziegler 46). Though no longer characterized by dictatorial regimes, elected governments throughout the region use similar technologies of power and domination to the same ends: to curb civil liberties and retain their hold on power. The disjunctions among democracy, human and judicial rights, and civic participation and representation are evident in contemporary Mexico and Colombia, two countries devastated by long and ongoing histories of violence, poverty, crime, paramilitary and narco-culture, impunity, and governmental corruption. Despite having established electoral systems that ostensibly protected Mexico and Colombia from the dictatorships that swept through the continent in the 1970s and 1980s, elections during the Mexican PRI dynasty (1929-2000) and the National Front years (1958-1974) in Colombia were largely authoritarian. Though both nations are now said to benefit from “free” elections, a weakened civil society in both continues to place democracy, and thus social justice, in crisis. In fact, the instability brought about through escalating drug and organized
crime-related gang violence in Mexico has led some politicians, media pundits, and academics to question whether it should be classified a failed state. Notwithstanding the outcome of the failed state debate, that both nations have spurred a growing diaspora of citizens who take flight (mostly north) in search of survival and opportunities is both predictable and understandable.

As I outline in this first chapter, the decisive task for the present is thus to rehabilitate the national and global public sphere via a battle for personal and political agency, security, and freedom, the basis of social justice. Informed largely by moral and political philosophy, I endorse a neo-Kantian-inspired cosmopolitanism as an effective mode of global social ordering that links the welfare of one to the welfare of humanity as a whole (Kant, “Perpetual Peace” 107-108). Once again, without negating the continued power of the state and territorial borders, this perspective finds an alternative to the current hegemonic order in global or transnationally minded local public spheres composed of “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere” 123) that are both recognized and represented in the global and local socio-political arena.

I use the theoretical foundation developed in chapter one throughout the remainder of the dissertation as a guide to inform my cultural analyses of the coercive biopolitical effects of dominant national institutions on civil society and the enactment of personal and political agency, as manifested in Colombian and Mexican literary and journalistic texts. In chapter two, “Postmodern Pathologies: The Disintegration of Humanity, Politics, and the Public Sphere,” I argue that the postmodern self is psycho-socially affected by contemporary society’s increasingly regulated, alienating, and pathogenic spatial practice. I draw a link between delimited mobility options at the lower social strata and the concomitant threat of or
need for constant surveillance at all levels of society and decentering pathological tendencies or mental disorders such as anxiety, insecurity, fear, and indifference that have come to define the twenty-first century’s postmodern landscape. I illustrate my point through close textual readings of three twenty-first-century Colombian and Mexican novels—Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta*, Yépez’s *Al otro lado*, and Franco’s *Paraíso Travel*. All three can be characterized as “border narratives” insofar as they directly confront the personal and political conflicts and contestations played out along site-specific and more generalized borders. Given that more and more people are forced to contest borders as they (attempt to) migrate in search of a better life across one or several lines, understanding the evolving biopolitical function of the border is essential to understanding the contemporary human condition.

In Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta*, characters are challenged by socio-economic and spatial rights and exclusions enforced through regulated borders within the fictional city of Angosta. In this space, a localized (post)metropolis acts as an easy metaphor for the contemporary global order, where regulated space is utilized as a technique of power that determines the mobility and therefore potential agency of the city’s populations. The disconnect and tension between globalization’s mobile elite and the imprisoned majority is obvious: those in the higher strata are free to move while those below are imprisoned in their Inferno or Purgatory, completely excluded from crossing the border into Paradise. In my analysis of *Angosta*, I examine these tensions and identify the psycho-social effects such spatial regulation of the body has on the individual, local society, and the national (or international) consciousness of the Other.
Heriberto Yépez’s *Al otro lado*, located on the United States-Mexico borderlands, emphasizes the harsh reality of (non-)life on that site-specific border. A commanding marker that differentiates the First from the Third or the developed from the developing worlds, the border is a barrier to be surmounted by those born on the wrong side of the divide. My analysis of *Al otro lado* looks at the contradictions of life on the line manifested in the actions, thoughts, and interrelationships of the three Quintero brothers. I argue that this spatially confined and grotesque border existence, with all it implies in terms of violence, crime, poverty, and drugs, engenders socially destructive pathogenic behaviour in the populace, who, despite making attempts to improve or escape, are unable to cross the metaphorical border that signifies salvation.

Finally, moving beyond the struggle to cross the border, Franco’s *Paraiso Travel* depicts the challenges of the migrant experience from the other side of the international divide. By representing the struggles of the undocumented or illegal migrant in the United States, this novel emphasizes the juridical power of a more diffuse and thus inescapable “biopolitical border” (Vaughan-Williams *passim*). Not protected by constructive biopolitical technologies concerned with maintaining the overall financial, health, and educational well-being of citizens, unauthorized migrants experience only the coercive elements of biopower via disciplinary technologies associated with the border and its ubiquitous synecdochic representations in the urban (post)metropolis. Nonetheless, as I make clear in my analysis, despite having to defy inhuman conditions in their adopted environment, over time, some migrants (both legal and illegal) eventually do transcend their non-life position by reclaiming personal (and political) agency.
Chapter three continues chapter one and two’s exploration of geopolitical and symbolic borders from a different optic, that of the mainstream media. In this chapter, I contend that the mainstream national media constructs and perpetuates dominant national positions on the border, leading to quite distinct coverage of border identities, border crime, and migration-related news in the Mexican and Unitedstatesian media. Encouraged by *Paraíso Travel’s* slightly more optimistic reading of transnational diasporas, I use the United States-Mexico border to make the case for a more humanitarian approach to global migration policies that considers how borders can, within a global framework, be re-imagined not as a divisive wall but as a bridge that instead fosters integration, cooperation, and development amongst and between nations. The violent history of U.S. border and immigration policy, initially heightened after the 1994 signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and subsequently intensified in the wake of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 and the consequent U.S.-led “war on terror” against all foreign bodies, starkly illuminates the fatal and dehumanizing consequences of border functions, which are partly constructed and perpetuated through the mainstream media. Unitedstatesian media thus frames its border and migration coverage within the same security, terror, and legality paradigm expounded by its government. The problem is quite different on the other side of the border, where powerful crime syndicates control media coverage of violent crime in the region by using coercive tactics to manipulate and censor journalists. In this third chapter, I analyze how mainstream media is symbolically managed by numerous stakeholders, namely the state, media owners, advertisers, and, increasingly in the Mexican context, organized crime and drug cartels. I explore this extra-journalistic management of the media as it is manifested in contemporary Baja Californian literature.
The main literary analysis undertaken in chapter three is a close reading of Humberto Crosthwaite’s short story of migration along the Tijuana-San Diego corridor, “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte.” By juxtaposing the short newspaper clips from both the Mexican and North American presses that compose the text, I argue that each national media constructs distinct media realities of the border and the migration phenomenon by carefully selecting, interpreting, and presenting the “facts.” Furthermore, I contend that, because dominant national ideologies influence how these “facts” are chosen—and even though they may be private enterprises--, the mainstream media continues to serve the state by acting as another national institution that propagates hegemonic meanings to form public knowledge, public opinion, and a national collective consciousness. Yet, despite this conclusion, I find an opening for alternative voices in the opinion and editorial sections of mainstream newspapers, intimating the possibility of alternatives outside the mainstream marketplace of ideas.

Chapter four explores the potential of alternative media markets through a case study of the independent Colombian monthly newspaper Un Pasquín. Enabled by new communications technologies and the democratizing potential of the changing twenty-first-century mediascape, this publication is important on three levels: i) from a politico-democratic perspective, it offers a much needed voice of opposition amidst the Colombian mainstream media’s historical partisan tendency to comply with and advance the dominant government position; ii) from an archival perspective, the newspaper stands as tangible proof that, against the mainstream media, a contestatory public sphere in opposition to Alvaro Uribe Vélez’s presidency (2002-2010) did in fact exist; and iii) from an alternative media perspective, it is an example of how contestatory independent media projects can not only
exist but find success in the contemporary Colombian mediascape. An independent publication, *Un Pasquin* illuminates the potential for alternative media projects to critique and question conventional regimes of truth and power in contemporary society. In this chapter, I begin by outlining the Colombian media’s historically compromised position vis-à-vis the state to create appreciation for the value and dangers confronting alternative media in the country. A form that “emerged as a need to counterbalance the state and/or commercial mass media” (Gumucio Dagron 46), practitioners and readers regard it as a tool that can be used to promote social change and civic participation by stimulating the agency of traditionally non-powerful actors. Of course, to avoid being tainted by the long arm of the state and its symbolic management of the media, financial and partisan political independence is essential.

Vladimir Flórez’s *Un Pasquin* meets these requirements. Considered an idealistic media project and civic duty by its creator and director, the newspaper attempts to deconstruct the national consciousness manufactured by the mainstream media. Through close readings of illustrations and articles published in *Un Pasquin*, I show how this contestatory project vindicates freedom of expression, strengthening the ideal watchdog role of journalism. Even if *Un Pasquin* is not meant to rival the mainstream press, as an alternative publication, it has proven to be influential in setting dominant media agenda by exposing stories that can then no longer go unnoticed or ignored by the country’s largest news organizations. In short, I maintain that, by creating an alternative, critical media reality wherein alternative social communities or public spheres critical not only of governmental (in)action but also of mediatic consensus about the effects of that action come together, *Un
*Pasquin* epitomizes the democratic and agency-enhancing potential of alternative media in Colombia, Latin America, and beyond.
Chapter 1. Social Ordering and the Public Sphere in Twenty-first-century Latin America: The Question of Ethics and (In)Humanity in a Globalized World

1.1 Introduction: Globalization and Humanity in Contemporary Latin America

While still young, the twenty-first century has already begun to display characteristics that are interrelated yet distinct from twentieth-century forms of capitalist accumulation and time-space compression. While global flows in themselves are not a new phenomenon, accelerated globalization processes have changed how people identify with global connections, in particular, how they perceive their potential role, power, and agency within these interactions in both global and local terms. If globalization has been (appropriately) castigated for its neo-imperialist agenda, it has, paradoxically, also diminished global United States hegemony, ostensibly paving the way for developing nations to participate more fully in the development of a consensual international world order (Chari 2). On an extranational level, as Eric Hobsbawn notes, twenty-first-century rapid globalization processes, which have generated both a world economy based on transnational private firms operating outside the confines of the nation-state and a citizenry sceptical of state and national government legitimacy, are reversing the twentieth-century trend of state development and control (“War, Peace and Hegemony” 17-18), thus allowing for the possible rearrangement of established paradigms of power, politics, and dominance in the current global context.

Notwithstanding the potential for a strengthened civil society and the mobilization of alternative actors amidst these shifting interconnections and power relations, entrenched
global and local disparities continue to define our contemporary world (dis)order. The escalation of global capitalism and neoliberal globalization, understood as liberalism reduced to market economics in a deterritorialized world (Opello Jr. and Rosow 248), has not only necessitated the creation of transnational ties and global networks amongst nations, governments, businesses, and elite individuals who move about more or less freely in a reordered “space of flows,” but has concomitantly restricted movement away from the more traditional “space of places” that house the world’s poorest populations (Coleman, Pauly, and Brydon 5), ultimately imprisoning the poor to their abject existence. When peripheral actors do participate in the “space of flows,” they tend to reveal the most inimical aspects of human displacements, namely insecurity, marginalization, abuse, poverty, and the loss of a sense of place or place-based identity. Though leery of the fatal repercussions of itinerancy, migrants knowingly endanger themselves as they search for an often unattainable security and autonomy rooted in political, social, and economic freedom. The failure of states to provide citizens with basic security, political rights, and just social conditions has de-legitimized the state, resulting in increased legal and illegal migrations, the latter of which have become increasingly dangerous since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to which world governments have responded with an intensified security rhetoric, transforming the border from being a site of law enforcement to one of national security (Payan 13). However, because the dangers of illegal border crossings and, if one makes it to the other side, of being undocumented, “illegal,” or “stateless” become tolerable when juxtaposed with the dangers of remaining in place, poor Latin American migrants continue to take flight north into neighbouring nations en route to the perceived utopia of the United States. Ironically, these
migrants willingly tolerate inhuman conditions in their search for humanity on the other side of the border.

According to Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), in contrast to animality, humanity, or the universal citizenry, is endowed with reason and is thus capable of overcoming the limitations of immediate existence to rationally defend and encourage sympathy, identification, and belonging through communicative sociability (Critique of Judgment 231). Kant’s humanity formulation is thus grounded in human rationality, which is taken as a distinguishing feature that sets typical human beings apart from all other known beings. From a Kantian formulation, given that humanity requires respect, individuals deserve to be valued for the inherent worth and dignity conferred to them as rational human agents. From a contemporary social sciences perspective, humanity is generally regarded as “the bearer of dignity, freedom, sociability, culture, or political life, and therefore as an ideal project that needs to be actualized” (Cheah 3, emphasis added). As yet unrealized on a global scale, the ideal of humanity is thwarted by inhumanity and the current global order’s general disrespect for the human subject. Philosopher Pheng Cheah defines the inhuman, humanity’s antipode, as “a finite limit of man [sic], a defective feature of human existence that is not proper to the true end of man but that we have thus far failed to control” (4). Though beyond the confines of human reason, all too familiar figures of the inhuman are manifested in images of worldwide poverty, undernourishment, displacement, unemployment, exploitation, injustice, and human rights violations. Somewhat perversely, Alain Badiou locates the key to humanity in the “immortality” of the human subject insofar as it is only in such a state that the individual can surmount his identification as victim (10-12). Thus, given that the inhuman is correlative to the victimized subject, the re-
humanization of humanity resides in de-victimization, which rests fundamentally in the freedom to exert personal and collective agency as a member of the social order.

The enormous disparity between rich and poor nations and the implications of attendant inhuman conditions on the well-being of the universal citizenry raise questions about the ethics of nationality, citizenship, and international border crossings, particularly in an era characterized by global capital flows dependent on human migrations. The changing social order resulting from increased interconnectivities between and amongst nations has ignited the debate between national sovereignty and global cosmopolitanism: In a globalized world, is it possible and just for the nation-state to retain its sovereign power? Can cosmopolitan “borderless modes of belonging” (Cheah 20) transcend the local claims of nationalism and stimulate a global consciousness rooted in respect for a common humanity beyond that of the “imagined community” of the nation (Anderson)? While the end of the nation-state is not in itself in question, it is difficult to refute the dissolution of its sovereign power and legitimacy. In Brett Levinson’s view: “The ‘end of the state’ does not refer to the state’s disappearance. It alludes to the demise of the sovereign state, which now must compete with other domains, such as the global market, international political organizations, human rights groups, transnational terrorism, . . . and so on, for its position” (1). Transnational interconnectivities brought about via globalizing processes have unquestionably debilitated the nation-state; however, as philosopher and historian Arturo Andrés Roig points out: “el Estado-nación ha sido debilitado, pero en la periferia, no en el centro” (44). Concentrating on Latin American-Unitedstatesian relations, Roig defines Latin American globalization as the imposition of Unitedstatesian neoliberal policies over Latin America, policies that have undermined local civil society and the Habermasian ideal of an
inclusive, participatory, and dialogic public sphere as a consequence of increased levels of poverty, delinquency, human displacements, violence, and social and environmental insecurity. From this optic, Latin America maintains its traditional position as the victimized peripheral Other subject to the demands of United States hegemony.

The positioning of Latin America as Other is certainly not a new development. Latin America has been defined by its victimized position from the time of its conquest and colonization in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, its independence and modernization movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through to the evolution of twentieth-century nationalism as a modernizing project and the present-day context of twenty-first-century neoliberal globalization. According to Eduardo Espina, leaders of the so-called twenty-first-century new socialist turn on the continent utilize this sentiment to garner support for their cause: “The start of the 21st century reveals in Latin America a collective interest in instituting an ideological establishment, something that is evidence both of fanatical behaviour and a tendency of political and cultural manipulation. . . . It is a new and expansive version of Third World victimhood that now is clothed in populist and cheap demagogy” (77). Leaders, the most notorious being Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, fetishize populism and use an anti-American and anachronistic rhetoric dating back to the social movements of the 1960s and, in the case of Chavez, to the nineteenth-century liberation of Latin America headed by Simon Bolivar,¹ to emphasize the poor’s marginalized position vis-à-vis Latin American and Unitedstatesian elite.

¹ Chavez aligns himself and his professed Bolivarian Revolution with the Bolivarian ideal of liberty and justice. In line with Bolivar’s anti-colonialism, Chavez announces his twenty-first-century socialism as an anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchic, and anti-American project. On an ideological level, it proclaims to eschew neoliberal capitalist models in favour of more humanistic, ethical, and participatory modes of governance that
Espina finds support for this stance in Pascal Bruckner’s “Anti-Americanist” theory, which posits anti-Americanism as a scapegoat for European (in particular French) guilt and, to a certain extent, failure. In essence, anti-Americanism distinguishes Europe from the United States, Europe’s main rival in its quest for modernity, excellence, and domination (Bruckner 15, 21). In a similar manner, anti-American sentiment runs rampant in Latin America, “which sees the West to the north as being responsible for all the ills of humanity, at least that part of humanity that lives bogged down south of the equator” (Espina 78). Despite U.S. President Barack Obama’s less hostile tone than his predecessor’s and early embrace of an equal partnership with Latin America, United States policy towards the region has remained more or less static, shattering expectations and propagating anti-American rhetoric on behalf of national governments and political commentators. For Espina, such “decidedly unscrupulous ideological opportunism” (77) is intolerable insofar as it simply victimizes Latin America and Latin Americans without conceiving of new parameters based on thinking, which, according to Bruckner’s philosophy, “constitutes the opening of a door toward a rational innocence to be discovered” (Espina 79).

Although approached from a different philosophical and social perspective, Bruckner’s rejection of victimhood as opportunism corresponds with Badiou’s dismissal of favour social inclusion, social equality, and social justice. In essence, Chavez envisions a Venezuela, and by extension a Latin America, defined by social equality and new paradigms of humanity. Eustoquio Contreras defines Bolivarianism as follows: “Ser Bolivariano no es haber nacido o vivir en las naciones que Simón Bolívar libertó. Es el vínculo real con la obra inconclusa de Simón Bolívar de libertad y justicia. Un Bolivariano debe ser en la vida práctica un militante de la dignidad. El Bolivariano debe amar a Venezuela, ser honesto, poseer alto grado de desprendimiento por la riqueza material y luchar por el bien común”(118-119). For more on Chavez’s Bolivarian Revolution, see Díaz Rangel, Dietrich, Llorens, Medina, and Sanz, amongst others.
the logic of victimization of the Other at the hands of the dominant. Undoubtedly influenced by Michel Foucault’s inquiry into discourses of power/knowledge, the micropolitics of domination and subordination, and his call for a new “politics of truth” (“Truth and Power” 133), these two French philosophers begin with similar critiques of victimhood/victimization: Badiou defines ethics as “fidelity” to an event, which, by “compel[ling] us to decide a new way of being” (41), leads to innovative thought and action. Similarly, for Bruckner, the twenty-first century demands a return to thinking as a means of explaining the incomprehensible (Espina 75), which I would argue includes the inhumanity and irrationality of twenty-first-century neoliberal globalization processes that erode respect for humanity, civil society, and basic human rights. As Andrea Díaz Genis explains: “Estamos ante la racionalidad de lo irracional, una maquinaria al servicio de la maximización de ganancias al servicio de ‘Dios mercado,’ en cuyo altar se sacrifican millones de vidas humanas” (149-150).

Following Badiou and Bruckner, I will attempt in this chapter not only to explain the incomprehensible dehumanization processes related to the current global order, by way of Latin America and the Colombian and Mexican contexts in particular, but also to deliberate more equitable and ethical patterns of non-victimizing political spaces and global social ordering mechanisms for the twenty-first century. Guided by the growing recognition that power relations are most effective when exercised within a global and morally consensual framework (Chari 2), I propose a cosmopolitan model that eschews victimizing the Other in favour of empowering peripheral actors to assert their own agency as members of a local and global transnational community. Following Elaine Scarry, this move requires the perceptual ability to imagine the Other, an arduous task considering that “[t]he human capacity to
injure other people has always been greater than its ability to imagine other people” (Scarry 284). The recent work of Nancy Fraser is particularly instructive in this regard as she shifts her attention beyond simple calls for recognition of cultural difference and redistribution of wealth to a more politicized framework for justice in a globalizing world concerned with this “imaginability” and, more specifically, the dimension of political representation centred around the question of participative parity vis-à-vis power, membership, and social belonging in the public sphere (“Reframing Justice” 17).

1.2 Globalization and Migration: Changing Relations of Power and Politics

1.2.1 Global Flows: Winners and Losers

While it has become commonplace both within and outside the academy to speak of globalization and transnational processes as a universally accepted reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, no one unanimous definition or explanation has prevailed over another. Despite being one of the most commonly used words in the social sciences, there is a limited understanding or consensus as to what it actually is (Jha 65). The late sociologist Paul Hirst’s self-defined “common-sense” definition of the term as “processes of growing international interconnectedness” (21) does little to quell the debate, for such a definition specifies neither actors nor consequences, yielding many unanswered questions, including: Who or what controls and inversely is controlled by such processes? How are different actors affected by these processes? What are the effects of growing interconnectivities on a personal, community, cultural, national, and global level? How does
globalization affect the patterning of social and political space? As these queries suggest, globalization remains a contested and complex concept full of contradictions and tensions, in particular between proponents of a wholly economic, technical, and mercantile approach to the phenomenon and those who call for a more nuanced, humane, cultural, and ethical assessment. In this way, the definition of the term changes according to the speaker’s perspective and ideology: the former perspective is generally adopted by technocrats and economists while the latter remains the focus of critical cultural theorists, who expose the tensions inherent in the mechanics and tactics of globalization either as a means of emphasizing the precarious state of an exceedingly victimized humanity vis-à-vis the growing impact of global flows and limits or, alternatively, as a way of theorizing the possibilities of human agency and the reassertion of humanity and human rights in the current transnational global conjuncture (Smith 19; Cheah 80-95, 172-177). According to Arjun Appadurai, despite the many possibilities globalization has for human justice and democratic and emancipation movements, given its deep connection to global markets and hegemonic forces, “[it] is certainly a source of anxiety in the U.S. academic world” (“Grassroots” 1) and beyond, among labour, poverty, and human rights advocates as well as in many national and transnational public spheres both at the centre and in the peripheries. To be sure, the tensions between centre and periphery, global and local, Same and Other at the heart of this debate reflect the fundamental paradox of globalization as a concurrently liberating and repressive phenomenon that on the one hand weakens territorial borders but on the other limits human liberties of freedom and movement.

The pain and suffering associated with national and transnational dislocations has been obscured in traditional theories of exile and displacement, as suggested by cultural
theorists of the 1980s and 1990s, who exhibit a proclivity towards postmodern theory and speculation concerning the aesthetics of fragmentation and the loss of identity (S. Hall), the politics of “travelling theory” and travelling theorists (Clifford), the poetics and subjectivity of exile and interculturality (Said, “Reflections”), and the agency of hybridity (Bhabha) and hybrid cultures in times of globalization (García Canclini). Their focus on theories of the imaginary and the poetic over outcomes of real-life experiences evades the historical particularity of the traumatic moment of banishment, crisis, anguish, and loss, which is, “in some cases a violent action directed at the person and, in others, an indirect violence originated in the sudden and radical transformation of the surrounding world and the expectations of ordinary life” (Torres 56). While it is true that conditions of displacement can have intrinsically positive outcomes, such as the exposure to a plurality of cultures and a “contrapuntal” awareness of simultaneous dimensions otherwise unrecognized (Said, “Reflections” 172), the physical and psychological pain of separation from one’s land, people, and culture cannot be glossed over. These incongruous visions of migration accurately expose its problematic, namely the underlying discord that extends beyond the simple local/global binary towards a dialectics of conflicting and irresolvable tensions among globalization, nationalism, transnationalism, counternationalism, and antinationalism (McClennen 2).

Not surprisingly, these tensions have escalated analogously in response to the intensification of transnational dislocations at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. Human dislocations are, to be sure, not a new phenomenon but a feature of human history: the narrative of human evolution is a narrative of great migrations, from the time of the early hominids and the spread of homo sapiens from Africa throughout
the eastern hemisphere to the contemporary migrations of national diasporas, post World War II stateless refugees and asylum seekers, internally displaced peoples, and political and economic refugees.  

By 2004, one in every thirty-five people was an international migrant motivated, in large part, by the basic need for survival (Akers Chacón 89). In contrast to present-day jet-setters and adventure enthusiasts who travel voluntarily for business, educational, and entertainment purposes, political and economic migrants take flight involuntarily as they search for employment, refuge, security, and, in some cases, basic critical survival. Evidently, as Doreen Massey has observed, an enormous disparity exists between the many divergent actors involved in migration processes, depending on the amount of control and agency they exert over the process (“Global” 65). If mobility increases the freedom to govern oneself, and agency is organized through the control of

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2 For more than 200,000 years, *homo sapiens* have migrated throughout the globe, adapting to changing biological, environmental, and cultural conditions. Beginning in Africa in the period around 60,000 BCE, humans travelled eastward, colonizing the present-day tropics of Asia, Australia, and New Guinea, where they remained until about 40,000 BCE. By 30,000 BCE, having developed techniques for living in colder climates, northern expansion to Eurasia and from there the Americas began.

In more modern times, during the three centuries of the early modern era, marked by Christopher Columbus’s voyage and subsequent “discovery” of America in 1492, some 2 million explorers, colonizers, and slaves crossed the Atlantic and settled in the Americas. Improved transportation technologies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries aided transcontinental travel, mobilizing some 50 million Europeans internally throughout Europe and externally towards North and South America, some 80 million Asians across East and South Asia, and some 4 million Africans throughout the globe. The urbanization processes of the second half of the twentieth century, effects of two world wars and, in the final decades, accelerated globalization processes, have since combined to further intensify world migration flows (Manning).

3 Doreen Massey takes a social approach to the study of global flows and the phenomenon of time-space compression, considering the “power geometry” that differentiates the different actors involved and affected by the trend: “Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyways differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it” (“Global” 65). Massey outlines a spectrum of groups involved in this differentiated mobility: i) those controlling and participating in the movement such as business executives, academics, and journalists; ii) those for whom moving is the only option, including undocumented migrants and refugees; iii) those on the receiving end of time-space compression who interact with international migrants without travelling themselves; and iv) those who simultaneously contribute to and are imprisoned by time-space compression, like the inhabitants of Brazilian *favelas* who contribute to the success of international football players and musicians without leaving the confines of their limited environments.
mobility, as Lawrence Grossberg postulates (Packer 140-141), limits on global transit can only be understood as a form of discipline over a specified population insofar as such limits circumscribe not only an individual’s place in the world but also his or her ability to act, react, and resist in place.

In sum, if contemporary globalization processes have accelerated time-space compression and all types of national and transnational migrations, they have correspondingly extended limits over the “who and where” of such global flows, particularly over the past two decades. In his seminal text Modernity at Large (1996), Appadurai outlines a model of global cultural flows rooted in growing disjunctures amongst people, money, machinery, images, and ideas that produce social problems at both local and global levels (33-37). Effectively, our understanding of the world has taken on a new global dimension within the very confines of the local: “globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven and even localizing process” (Appadurai, Modernity 17). Human agents constantly renegotiate the local/global dialectic in an evermore chaotic and interconnected world.

According to Coleman, Pauly, and Brydon:

Globalization is the transformative growth of connections among people across the planet. In the contemporary era, many of these connections take a supraterritorial form. In ever more pronounced ways, globalization ties together what people do, what they experience, how they perceive that experience, and how they reshape their lives. In short, individuals and communities begin to see the world as one place and to imagine new roles for themselves within it. (4-5)
While this working definition of globalization emphasizes human agency and, following Appadurai, the role of imagination in conceptualizing new roles and methods of social ordering in a transnational frame, it fails to highlight the differences amongst divergent global actors and their exercise of or subjection to power structures in the face of universal politics and global hegemonic forces.

1.2.2 Post-9/11 and the Power of Terror

The anti-terrorism rhetoric provoked by the September 11 attacks and the ensuing global “war on terror” declared unilaterally by the United States has exerted great influence on the international political arena, converting security into the new dominant social paradigm embraced and exploited by national leaders the world over. Fear and terror, the demonization of the Other, the privatization and militarization of public and private space, and the soaring deterioration of human rights, civil liberties, and civil society characterize this new post-9/11 world order (Redfield 131-132). As Neil Hicks explains, increasing normative support for international human rights standards in evidence from the end of the Cold War in 1989 through to the beginning of the new millennium was halted after the September 11 attacks and the subsequent focus on “security” over rights, a posture advanced through the use of an anti-terror rhetoric that increasingly pits human rights promotion and

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4 According to Hicks, the 1998 adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders by the United Nations General Assembly is proof of the then-growing international promotion of normative standards for human rights and fundamental freedoms at both a national and international level.

John Wallach draws a similar conclusion, pointing to the emergence of human rights discourse in international relations and internal state politics during that time, a claim substantiated by an almost threefold increase in human rights issues in The Economist and Newsweek in the last decade of the twentieth century.
justice claims against security and even goes so far as to equate human rights defenders with terrorism and terrorist organizations (209-210). A compelling case in point is former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez’s use, in 2003, of the “war on terror’s” populist rhetoric to liken human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Colombia to terrorist groups: “Las llamó ‘profetas del desastre,’ ‘traficantes de derechos humanos,’ ‘voceras del terrorismo’” (“La ira presidencial”)--, while praising his own politics of security as a defence of human rights, democracy, and civil liberties. In this manner, Uribe successfully co-opted the dominant post-9/11 rhetoric to his advantage, suggesting that his professed “Democratic Security” policy, characterized by the country’s growing militarization and in particular the U.S.-funded Plan Colombia, a military campaign against a burgeoning drug trade fronted by guerrilla groups involved in the country’s 45-year long civil war, was, in fact, in line with the U.S.-led “war on terror”: “Referring to antiterrorism measures passed in the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Spain, [the Colombian government] stated: ‘For those countries, the measures are to defend democracy, liberty, and the citizens’ rights, but in our country they are called authoritarian measures that violate human rights treaties, when we are clearly working towards the same ends’” (Hicks 215).

5 A bilateral initiative initiated between the governments of Colombia and the United States in 1999 and officially approved in 2000, Plan Colombia adopts a predominantly military approach to combating Colombia’s civil war, reviving its economy and immobilizing its burgeoning narcotics trade. While the Plan outlines ten major strategies, including a human and social development component (economic, fiscal, military, judicial and human rights, counter-narcotics, alternative development, social participation, human development, peace, and international strategies), its primary emphasis has been the strengthening of Colombia’s armed forces. A primary objective is to strengthen government control of its territory, with the proposed end of increasing national and international security by eradicating terrorist (mainly Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC) and paramilitary-controlled regions used mainly for coca production.

6 As Eduardo Posada Carbó notes, while Daniel Pécaut and others have debated the use of the term “civil war” to describe the present condition in Colombia, proposing other terms such as “war against civilians” and “uncivil war,” according to its traditional definition as a violent internal conflict within nation-state borders, Colombia has been unequivocally mired in civil war since La Violencia erupted in 1945. Though La Violencia officially came to an end in the mid 1960s, the subsequent rise of guerrilla movements and paramilitary forces has propagated a lingering state of war in the country.
Though his government’s egregious human rights record is clearly antithetical to the promotion and protection of human rights,\(^7\) by aligning Colombia with the counter-terrorism rhetoric and politics espoused by the established hegemony, Uribe justified the suffering of his nation’s civilian populations as a necessary consequence—collateral damage—of the worldwide threat of terrorism, thereby escaping inter-state and inter-governmental criticism and global “peer pressure” to change (Hicks 214).

The post-9/11 security rhetoric is nowhere more manifest than at the increasingly militarized U.S.-Mexico border, where governmental politics of “securization” have converted the border and immigration policies from matters of law enforcement to matters of national security (Payan 101). Increased personnel, including members of the National Guard, military technology, and physical infrastructure (i.e., border fences and walls) at the border are designed to keep the menacing Other and would-be terrorist off United States soil. However, while the 9/11 Commission Report (2004) diagnosed intelligence failure as the major culprit of the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York, considerable attention continues to be given instead to the more politically fuelled “problems” of immigration, trade, and border security, thus conflating undocumented migration with questions of national security and domestic terrorism (Payan 94). More specifically, despite the fact that the U.S.-Mexico border has not been directly implicated in the attacks, post-9/11 Unitedstatesian border politics have established a fictitious link between border crossers and

\(^{7}\) Amnesty International identifies the living conditions of rural Colombians as amongst the world’s poorest. As the internal armed conflict continues to grow in Colombia, so too do incidences of forced displacement, civilian deaths at the hands of guerrilla and paramilitary groups, extrajudicial executions committed by the Colombian armed forces, and continued impunity for human rights abusers. From July 2007 to July 2008 alone, 1492 civilian deaths and 182 disappearances were reported, an increase from the previous year’s 1348 deaths and 119 disappearances (“La tragedia humanitaria”).
terrorists that continues to pervade the national consciousness even today. Paralleling Uribe’s co-option of dominant post-9/11 rhetoric to justify his administration’s questionable politics, U.S. politicians and media outlets invariably utilize a rhetoric of terror manifested in the repeated use of words such as “‘invasion,’ ‘war,’ ‘threat,’ ‘crisis,’ ‘disorder,’ ‘chaos,’ [and] ‘frontlines’” to similar ends (Payan 126). In the words of Justin Akers Chacón: “In a micro-flash, the tragedy of September 11 allowed right-wing forces to regain the initiative against an advancing immigrant rights agenda. The policy of immigrant containment dovetailed with the domestic component of the protean ‘War on terrorism’” (215). In fact, the immigrant rights mobilization movement that took hold of major United States cities in the Spring of 2006,\(^8\) evidence that a nascent pro-immigrant civil rights movement was emerging even in the shadow of September 11, has since been suppressed. Arizona’s proposed immigration bill SB 1070, for instance, which would authorize police officers to stop suspected illegal immigrants and demand proof of citizenship, is a retrogressive, police state tactic that would most certainly lead to racial profiling and increased harassment of the

\(^8\) In March and April of 2006, immigrant and civil rights activists representing and supporting the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States made their voices heard in a series of marches from Washington, Chicago, Phoenix, and Milwaukee to Los Angeles before culminating in a 3-million strong May Day (May 1) march and strike in hundreds of cities throughout the country. With this action, demonstrators manifested an awareness of the Latino and immigrant community’s power and individual agency as valid “citizens” and legitimate members of the U.S. public sphere. See Charles Bowden and Julián Cardona for a journalistic and photographic documentary of the marches.

On a global level, similar protest marches against immigrant discrimination and exclusion were held four years later throughout Europe, in France, Italy, Greece, and Spain. According to organizers, the goal was to raise awareness of the positive and important role of immigration on these countries’ economic and cultural landscapes (“Un día sin ellos”).

Most recently, on March 21, 2010, hundreds of thousands of immigration supporters (estimates range between 200,000 to 500,000) marched in the streets of Washington, D.C. in the largest rally to date of the Obama administration. Chanting “justice now/justicia ahora,” the marchers called for urgent immigration reform in the United States in the wake of Arizona’s proposed immigration bill.
Hispanic/Latino population in the state. By defining illegal migration as a security issue, U.S. anti-terror rhetoric has not only accelerated the closing of the border, it has also silenced discourse around questions of social and global justice as well as the underlying political, economic, and social policy issues that trigger such massive human migrations in the first place.

In short, as the repercussions of September 11 indicate, globalization cannot be theorized independent of power relations or, to use Foucauldian terms, without an understanding of the technologies of power that regulate discourses of knowledge and normative behaviour in modern society. As outlined above, whereas Colombia has garnered the political and financial support of the U.S. administration by mirroring Unitedstatesian neoliberal policies, notwithstanding the Merida Initiative, Mexico has had limited support in dealing with the so-called migrant crisis and next to no voice in U.S. border policy. In both cases, however, the Unitedstatesian position as a hegemonic force is unquestionable. Nonetheless, in line with Antonio Gramsci’s definition of hegemony as manufactured mutual consent, Prem Shankar Jha maintains that U.S. hegemony has been in decline since 2003 and its unilateral invasion and occupation of Iraq, a move that generated consternation among many of its traditional allies, who have since publicly questioned U.S. motivations and distanced themselves from U.S. policies (63). Louis W. Pauly echoes this same estimation: in his view, the multipolarity of the world makes continued U.S. and European dominance of

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9 Though the bill was passed on April 13 by a 35 to 21 vote in the state House of Representatives, its most controversial aspects were subsequently blocked by a federal ruling in July 2010.

10 Similar to Plan Colombia, the Merida Initiative is a joint agreement between the United States and Mexico focused heavily on weakening crime and the cross-border drug trade via increased training and funding for the Mexican military and law enforcement operations.
world institutions inconceivable (274). To that end, the global economic crisis has further weakened international U.S. hegemony, as has, in the Latin American context, the emergence of new leftist-inspired governments that openly question the moral authority of the United States and the efficacy of the entire global capitalist system. However, despite their ideological claims, save for Venezuela, other Latin American governments have failed to initiate structural changes that demonstrate a refusal of global capitalism as the norm. As James Petras provocatively writes: “[There is] ample documentation to argue that Latin America has taken multiple roads to 21st century capitalism, not socialism or anything akin to it.” The task for theory, then, is to imagine a new framework that can destabilize entrenched power relations that promote financial exploitation over humanitarian considerations.

While some globalization scholars, especially those who emphasize the changing political and juridical role of the sovereign territorial nation-state under cultural and economic globalization processes, have (prematurely) announced the demise of the nation-state itself, a more empirical and nuanced approach reflects on the state’s new political reality as one institution in an emergent web of diverse global flows. One obvious effect of “disaggregating the state” (Coleman, Pauly, and Brydon 18) as such is evident in current

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11 The continent has witnessed a growing push towards social-democratic politics and policies emblematic of a leftist transition that began with the election of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 1998. Numerous other socialist or leftist-leaning governments have since been democratically elected: Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brasil in 2003 and 2010 respectively, Néstor and Christina Kirchner in Argentina in 2003 and 2007 respectively, Tabaré Vázquez and José Mujica in Uruguay in 2005 and 2009 respectively, Evo Morales in Bolivia in 2005 and 2010, Michelle Bachelet in Chile in 2006 (though her successor, elected in 2010, is conservative Sebastian Pinera), Rafael Correa in Ecuador in 2007 and 2009, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in 2008, and Mauricio Funes in El Salvador in 2009.

12 See, for instance, Camilleri, Jarvis, and Paolini; Hirst and Thomspson; Hobsbawm (Nations and Nationalism); Porter; and Van Creveld, amongst others.
debates over the political legitimacy of the state as an autonomous actor in a new world order defined by territorial and political interconnectivities amongst national governments and between national governments and trans- and supranational organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of American States (OAS), Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and political unions such as the European Union (EU) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Similarly, as William Coleman, Louis Pauly, and Diana Brydon observe: “a new global order is today being built on the recognition that addressing many of the most pressing problems of the age—environmental degradation, human security, systemic risks associated with globalizing finance, continuing abuses of human rights—requires systematic interaction and cooperation among political authorities at various levels” (18). Yet, however cognizant of its international restrictions and obligations, as the only entity with sufficient authority to engage, enforce, and legitimate supranational governance, the state continues to be the primary political actor across borders (Hirst 45).

1.3 Transnational Governmentality

Accepting the state as the key locus of global governance, however, does not undermine the pertinence of transnational and supraterritorial organizations in our postmodern or supermodern world commonly identified with the time-space compression of late capitalism (Harvey), post-Fordist neoliberal globalization processes (Fraser, “From Discipline”), or non-places of transit (Augé), amongst other definitions. On the contrary, the potency of globalization and the growing ubiquity of transnational corporations and institutions necessitate a reframing of the question of nationally circumscribed power. In her
article “From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization” (2009), Fraser attempts to “globalize” the Foucauldian concept of *governmentality* to account for these new postmodern modes of social ordering.\(^{13}\)

Essentially, “governmentality” refers to the “governmentalization” of the state, wherein tactics of power are defined and utilized to persuade and/or coerce normative behaviour within the population, understood in modernity no longer as a sovereign subject but rather as a political object of civil society that requires governmental management and intervention to ensure mechanisms of security (Foucault, *Security* 353). In his lecture of the same title, Foucault defines the term, in part, as: “[t]he ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principle form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security” (102). Although Foucault locates the emergence of this new art of governance in the eighteenth century, similar conditions of governing impact the present landscape: “Society, economy, population, security, and freedom are the elements of the new governmentality whose forms we can still recognize in its contemporary modifications” (*Security* 354). As Fraser outlines, Foucault is commonly recognized as the great theorist of power and modernity,\(^{14}\) and, more unconventionally, of “fordist modes of social regulation”

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\(^{13}\) Fraser does not explicitly use the oft-problematic term “postmodern,” opting instead to draw a distinction between Fordist modernity and contemporary, post-Fordist processes of neoliberal globalization.

\(^{14}\) For Foucault, the two pure functions of modern society—discipline of the body and regulation of the population—coalesce in the biopower apparatus, which is used by the state to administer the life of its citizens and create a normative society. The first strand—anatomopolitics—refers specifically to the disciplining of the body secured through coercive means of control and punishment. The second strand—biopolitics—refers to the regulation of the collective population (*The History of Sexuality* 139).
Fraser draws a link between structures of Fordist discipline and Foucault’s modern disciplinary apparatus and theory of governmentality, both of which, Fraser contends, are nationally bound: “The result was that disciplinary powers were socially concentrated yet horizontally arrayed within a national frame” (121). However, because the contemporary landscape has transcended a wholly national framework, a new “multi-layered system of globalized governmentality” (124), for which I propose the term transgovernmentality, is emerging alongside national modes of social ordering. Thus, Fraser concludes, in order to preserve and honour Foucault’s relevance to current scholarship on the contemporary deployment and operation of power within a transnational frame, we must begin by identifying the new ordering mechanisms and political rationality of emerging post-Fordist modes of regulation, globalized governmentality, or transgovernmentality.16

As Fraser herself indicates, our contemporary world order, which is characterized by dispersed powers, international arrangements, multi-layered political authorities, and transnational governmental structures, challenges the sovereign power of the nation-state. However, because the nation-state is both central to and complicit in the power structures of

15 Fraser historicizes Foucault in light of the political rationality of Fordist modes of production, regulation, and accumulation, ultimately drawing a link between the grammar of Foucauldian biopower and Fordist discipline: “Organizing individuals, arraying bodies in space and time, coordinating their forces, transmitting power among them, this mode of governmentality ordered ground-level social relations according to expertly designed logics of control. The upshot was a historically new mode of social regulation—a Fordist mode suited to nationally bounded societies of mass production and mass consumption” (“From Discipline” 119). For Fraser, the same three defining features of Foucauldian discipline and social regulation also govern Fordist discipline, namely totalization, social concentration within a national frame, and self-regulation.

16 Fraser initiates the dialogue on this front by outlining three essential tasks for globalizing governmentality: i) to conceptualize the transnational character of post-Fordist governance structures, which have already begun to operate within a web of multi-layered regulatory apparatuses and dispersed powers that transcend the sovereign power of the nation-state, ii) to theorize its growing reliance on neoliberal ordering mechanisms or “marketized” mechanisms of social control that are essentially a form of “de-statized governmentality;” and iii) to analyze its new political rationality, focusing on the subjectification of the subject responsible for managing his or her own capital (“From Discipline” 125-28).
these new regulatory apparatuses and modes of transgovernmentality, lending authority and legitimacy to supranational modes of governance, it remains the primary political actor across borders. Accordingly, the political rationality behind twenty-first-century ordering mechanisms does not pose a challenge or undermine the nation-state per se, but is, rather, guided by a new transnational saliency (Hirst 42). Simply put, we do not live in a borderless world; borders will likely retain their function as demarcations of territorial, national-based boundaries that must, at some level, regulate flows of people and goods. Somewhat aporetically then, the task is to imagine borderless modes of belonging within a territorially defined globalized world. The notion of moral cosmopolitanism (as opposed to institutional cosmopolitanism), defined by two distinct strands, namely the belief that we have obligations to others by the nature of our common humanity--“universal concern”--and that we must, at the same time, move beyond a mere focus on the same to respect the differences that define peoples and cultures the world over--“respect for legitimate difference”--(Appiah xv), invoked within a framework for the defence of international human rights, provides an initial foundation to reconceptualize our emergent global, transgovernmental world order. This idea will be explored further in section 1.5.

17 Kok-Chor Tan distinguishes between cosmopolitanism as a moral claim and cosmopolitanism as an institutional claim. The first is a moral ideal premised on the equal moral status of individuals whereas the second is an institutional ideal that espouses a system of global institutions governed by a world state (Justice 10).
1.4 Globalization and Latin America: National and Transnational Articulations

1.4.1 Hybrid Histories

To speak of globalization and transnationalism in the Latin American context requires an examination of the intercultural exchange and conflict that has come to define Latin American culture and identity. The history of Latin American colonization and the homogenizing drive of colonialist regimes have provoked critical reflections not only on the historiography of cultural syncretism in the region but also on contemporary conditions. Tendential globalization processes manifested in existent migrations and dislocations, networks of global capital and labour regimes, and the advancement of telecommunication technologies have undoubtedly increased cross-cultural pollination in the contemporary landscape. This reality has created, on the one hand, concern for the global “contamination” of the local or regional and, on the other hand, a celebration of multiculturalism, hybridity, and difference. The “cosmopolitan discursive practice” of Latin American postcolonialism understood as a counter-hegemonic politics and historiography attentive to the dialectic of cultures in contact (Moreiras 29) calls for an interrogation of such concepts as mestizaje, transculturation, heterogeneity, and hybridity, terms central to Latin American history, cultural, and literary studies; conceptions of Latin American modernity; and, of most relevance to the present study, articulations of culture, identity, and justice in a transnational frame.

The category of “transculturation,” first articulated by Fernando Ortiz in 1940 as an antipode to acculturation, describes the process of cultural contact and transformation from a
non-neocolonialist perspective, emphasizing not the loss of one culture and the dominance of another but the new dialectical cultural phenomenon that arises out of the active engagement of cultures in contact (Rama 158). Angel Rama’s description of “cultural plasticity” echoes the critical foundations underlying Ortiz’s concept of transculturation:

In [cultural plasticity], most relevant is the attitude of those who do not limit themselves to a syncretism that merely brings together aspects from each culture, but realize that each brings a structure, the incorporation of new elements from external sources can be achieved only through the entire re-articulation of their own (regional) cultural structure whilst appealing to new ways of looking and focusing in their tradition. (158)

For Rama, modernity in Latin America is thus not defined as an exclusion of tradition in favour of “new” ideologies espoused by the so-called civilizing missions on the continent, but rather a coexistence of mestizo or hybrid traditions: “Latin American modernities were therefore, in Rama’s view, always more than replicas of the dominant ones” (Kraniauskas 154). If Rama refers only cursorily to the “ongoing hybridization” (163) of European models of modernity, in his influential work Culturas híbridas (1989), Néstor García Canclini explicitly designates the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions inherent in the concept of intercultural hybridity as the very mark of Latin American modernity.

For García Canclini, by now exhausted and totalizing binaries—premodern vs. modern, popular vs. learned, local vs. cosmopolitan, national vs. transnational—are not necessarily exclusive and must therefore be reconceptualized in a dialectical fashion to account for the ambiguous relationship in Latin American modernity between elite and
popular cultures as well as the renewed interaction among local, national, and transnational products and actors: “En medio de estas tensiones se constituyen las relaciones complejas, nada esquemáticas, entre lo hegemónico y lo subalterno, lo incluido y lo excluido. Ésta es una de las causas por las que la modernidad implica tanto procesos de segregación como de hibridación entre los diversos sectores sociales y sus sistemas simbólicos” (40). In consonance with F. Ortiz and Rama’s estimation that traditional indigenous and regional cultures are not necessarily decimated by cross-cultural contact, but are instead endogenously transformed, García Canclini’s concept of hybridity emphasizes the dialectical relationship between global and the local forces, which interpenetrate one another without negating the other’s distinctiveness. From a contemporary global perspective then, despite perceived “North Americanization” or U.S. imperialism of Latin America, the strengthening of a global or transnational culture and the concept of a global public sphere or global social order does not, as a matter of course, have to signify the end of local, regional or autochthonous identities. As Renato Ortiz unambiguously states in his study of globalization in Latin America: “El mundialismo no se identifica pues con la uniformidad” (44). That is, globalization does not negate the local because, as discussed above, the national and the regional continue to play an important albeit changing role in the process in both localized and deterritorialized environments.

A commonly held assertion about globalization, particularly under a postmodern rubric, is its (confounded) association with ends. Alongside the premature announcement of the end of the state discussed above are proclamations of the end of modernity, the end of art, the end of literature, and the end of space. However, as R. Ortiz postulates, this obsession effectively exposes our confusion with changing social relations that generate new
configurations of social ordering on a global sphere (293). In short, globalization does not erase limits. To the contrary, globalization creates new limits between, among, and within the so-called First and Third Worlds, resulting in new forms of inclusion and exclusion that demand a rethinking of the Other/Same binary from a contemporary, non-centralist, global perspective (R. Ortiz passim). The nation-state, art, literature, and space are not at their ends but are, instead, being transformed and transfigured by changing global relations and interactions, giving way to new forms of governance, social ordering, social movements, and modes of artistic and spatial expressions: international governing bodies such as the UN, regionalized unions such as the EU and UNASUR, deterritorialized borders, transnational NGOs, new literary genres such as testimonio, net art, social networking sites, and new forms of alternative media and global media technologies, amongst others.

In these changing relations, the Latin American Other is no longer necessarily the peripheral, distanced and orientalized Other constructed and differentiated by hegemonic discourses in the West as a mystificatory tool of western domination and authority (Said, Orientalism), but a reciprocal being more aligned with the Same. To be sure, increased mobility and interconnectivities alter our understanding of humanity vis-à-vis our moral responsibility to the Other/Same:

Por eso, la noción del otro se transforma. . . . El viaje deja de revelar lo distinto, lo extraño y se constituye en una extensión de ‘nosotros’. Un ‘nosotros’ difuso, complejo, que se insinúa en los lugares, a despecho de sus idiosincrasias, de sus historias. El mundo, al volverse único, aproxima sus partes, fundiéndolas en un proceso civilizatorio común a todas. (R. Ortiz 294-95)
While it is true that globalization has increased intercultural contact and made us increasingly aware of our moral responsibility to reciprocal Others, Ortiz is not suggesting that globalization has likewise erased inequalities, limits, and borders. He is well aware of the fact that the neoliberal policies guiding national and global economies continue to heighten global disparities amongst peoples and nations on both economic and political terms. This truism is particularly evident in Latin America, where fundamentally undemocratic conditions of supposedly democratic republics reveal the tensions between claims of political inclusion and obvious conditions of economic exclusion, raising concerns about the state of democracy and the legitimacy of civil society as a matter of politics and, more importantly, as an interrogation of the state of humanity itself.

1.4.2 Colombia and Mexico: Democracies in Crisis

Social and economic inequalities, a consequence of policies that reinforce the disjunctures amongst democracy, human and judicial rights, and civic participation throughout Latin America is nowhere more evident than in the Colombian context, where a prostrate democracy has coexisted dialectically with an internal armed conflict for over fifty years. While other regimes on the continent have transitioned or are in a state of transition from a “non-democracy” or “illiberal democracy” to a “liberal democracy,” as in the cases of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, the Colombian regime shows little evidence of such a transition (Smith and Ziegler 51-52). Despite being hailed as one of the strongest and

18 The overthrowing in Honduras of democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya on June 28, 2009 and uprising against Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa on September 30, 2010 jeopardize this trend.
longest-running political democracies in Latin America, its enduring illiberal status puts the value of such a claim in question. While it is true that Colombia has experienced persistent electoral democracy since the end of the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship and subsequent military junta of 1958, in pragmatic terms, Colombia’s history is defined more by endemic violence, civil war, classism, socio-economic inequity, extreme poverty, militarization, insecurity, and, at least since the final decade of the twentieth century, increased human displacements than by a specious claim of democratic rights. As Gonzalo Sánchez appropriately writes: “What is immediately apparent—in contrast to this established view of democracy—is that Colombia has been a country of persistent and endemic warfare” (789). Spectres of civil war and La Violencia (1945-1965) continue to haunt the social imaginary. Though La Violencia may have officially come to an end in 1965, peasant guerrilla forces initiated during the conflict, inspired in large part by the successes of the concurrent Cuban Revolution (1953-1959), continue to circulate throughout the country, despite having lost their ideological doctrine.

According to María Helena Rueda, no consensus on the facts surrounding La Violencia have yet been reached because the conflict has not yet been transcended and can therefore not yet be considered “history” (352-353). In other words, the legacy of enduring and normalized violence in the country has hindered the nation’s ability to surmount the

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19 General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla assumed power in 1953 after a military coup deposed the repressive regime of Conservative president Laureano Gómez. Protests and a general strike forced Pinilla from the presidency in 1957, whereupon members of the opposing Conservative and Liberal elite implemented a power sharing agreement known as the National Front, which saw the two parties alternate four-year presidential terms from 1958 to 1974.

20 Colombia’s deadliest civil war was initiated in 1946 but further galvanized by the April 9, 1948 assassination of Liberal leader and presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. The assassination instigated the Bogotazo riots not only in the streets of Bogotá but throughout the countryside as well. The conflict continued well into the National Front era and saw upwards of 200,000 dead.
phantasm of La Violencia. In response to this lack of official historiography, there has been, Rueda contends, ample discursive production around these events, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. The former is centred around the growing field of “violentology”--the study of the phenomenon of violence in the Colombian context, from the events of La Violencia, the rise of guerrilla movements and paramilitary groups, and the violent tactics employed by those involved in the coca trade to newer forms of urban violence such as the sicariato, young, professional assassins recruited from the city’s marginalized neighbourhoods--21 while the latter concentrates on the study of novels of “La Violencia,”22 which emphasize the suffering and dehumanization not only of the subalternized victim, but also of the one who victimizes (Rueda 356). If novels of La Violencia rely on the topos of orality and the oral tradition to create a testimonial archive of the phenomenon from a mostly ruralized optic (Escobar Mesa 23), contemporary novelists re-establish the topos of violence, social entropy, and human degradation from an urban imaginary.23

To say that the quintessentially inhuman condition of La Violencia is just as prevalent in contemporary Colombia is not a novel idea; for, the genealogy and very identity of the country is enveloped in a pernicious ritual of violence: “Colombia se consume trágicamente en la violencia, ya heredada, ya familiar, nacional. Hoy, los colombianos atestiguan un ritual trágico y espectacular, por no decir cotidiano y trivial, y es que toda mirada vuelve a su

21 For an incisive critique of the changing role of violentologists in contemporary Colombian society, see Santiago Villaveces-Izquierdo.

22 Some of the most commented novels of La Violencia include El coronel no tiene quien le escriba (1958), La mala hora (1960), and Cien años de soledad (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez; Marea de ratas (1960) and Bajo Cauca (1964) by Arturo Echeverri Mejía; Viento seco (1953) by Daniel Caicedo; Viernes 9 (1953) by Ignacio Gomez Davila; and La casa grande (1962) by Alvaro Cepeda Samudio.

23 Some of the most prominent “writers of violence” in Colombia today include Fernando Vallejo, Alonso Salazar, Jorge Franco, Laura Restrepo, and Alfredo Molano.
sentido etimológico—admirarse—para tratar de comprender las posibilidades que aún ofrece la vida. Y la violencia es una de ellas” (Cedeño and Villoria-Nolla 333). The politics and bipartisanism that characterized the violence of the 1950s have since evolved: the armed peasant guerrilla movements of the era initially motivated by revolutionary ideology and calls for social justice were soon contaminated by power and capital, in particular with the rise of the coca and opium poppy trade in the 1980s and 1990s, and the concomitant rise of a dirty war of terror waged against civilians by military, paramilitary, neoparamilitary, and guerrilla forces. Continuing the legacy of La Violencia, contemporary massacres are carried out by all actors predominantly in small rural and indigenous towns, whose surviving populations suffer from the physical, economic, and psycho-social effects of forced internal displacement, a growing phenomenon that saw some 270 thousand Colombians affected in 2008 alone, an increase from the previous year’s number of 191 thousand (“La tragedia humanitaria”). This trend, fuelled by the political, social, and economic effects of the internal armed conflict, highlights just one facet of the human rights crisis in Colombia. As reported by Amnesty International, the crisis has worsened over the last year: the country has witnessed, alongside increased instances of forced internal displacement, continued impunity for human rights abusers, extrajudicial executions, civilian kidnappings and homicides, and increased and generalized poverty and insecurity among the country’s most marginalized groups, namely rural, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities (“La tragedia humanitaria”).

Because persistent violence incapacitates the rule of law and the protection of human rights, it has been identified as one of the greatest challenges to democracy in Latin America (Bonner 167). In effect, if social justice, which incorporates security, human rights, juridical
structures, and the upholding of the rule of law, is coterminous with democracy, in Latin America, democracy remains an unrealized ideal. Colombians, for their part, have learned to survive as bystanders of a dirty war that has invalidated not only civil society but also the role of democracy and the nation-state itself: “The failure of the nation-state to incorporate and enforce its primary functions as provider of justice and security has led the way for the consolidation of parallel systems of order, security, and justice which, while often illegitimate, operate as real alternatives in the interstices of the nation-state” (Villaveces-Izquierdo 321). In consonance with what María Victoria Uribe writes, the effects of the present internal conflict are in many ways characteristic of the twenty-first-century globalization processes theorized by the likes of Appadurai insofar as they create an “atmosphere of suspicion, uncertainty and paranoia . . .” (89). The terror caused by the government’s post-9/11 anti-terror rhetoric and increased militarization of public and private spaces, in conjunction with endemic violence and insecurity that renders the self prostrate, has ultimately debilitated the potential of civil society and the emergence of an inclusive, agency-centred public sphere at the national level. If the decisive task for the present is to rehabilitate the national and global public sphere, the battle for political agency and a democratic ethic must simultaneously be a battle for security and freedom.

In a comparable yet distinct manner, the history of twentieth-century Mexico is one marked by violent outcomes of political tensions and civil war, from the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) and the Cristeros War (1926-1929) to the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968, U.S. President Richard Nixon’s declaration of the war on drugs in 1969, the Zapatista uprising in the late 1980s and 1990s, the 1994 implementation and subsequent socio-political and economic ramifications of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the late
twenty-first-century war on immigration, and the interminable drug war at the border, which has intensified in recent years with the escalation of violence and insecurity linked to rival drug cartels, prompting concerns particularly from the United States that Mexico has entered a state of siege and has become a so-called “failed state.” Despite having transitioned from an authoritarian regime to a political democracy in the final quarter of the twentieth century, and being officially defined as a liberal democracy in Peter Smith and Melissa Ziegler’s study on the state of democracy in Latin America, flagrant socio-political and economic inequalities have weakened the role of civil society in the country. Over the past ten years, civil society has deteriorated, with the centre of power moving away from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) dynasty towards fragmented drug cartels and “narcogangs” (Bowden, “We Bring Fear” sec. 8). Significantly, even in circumstances in which civic and political participation appear to thrive, they tend not to grant citizens very much autonomy, further debilitating their potential as political agents.

In addition, the conflictive elections of 2006, which culminated in the election of right-wing National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN) candidate Felipe Calderón, a result contested by leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) opponent Andrés Manuel López Obrador, expose weaknesses with the very institutionalization of the party system in Mexico (Bizberg 38). As Ilán Bizberg makes clear, democracy requires a robust civil society: “es posible afirmar que

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24 Smith and Ziegler identify 2002 as the year of transition from an illiberal to a liberal democracy in Mexico, creating a link between liberal democracy and former president Vicente Fox, whose 2000 election win ended seven decades of Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) rule in the country (52).
la profundización de la democracia en nuestros países ha de medirse tanto por la institucionalización del sistema de partidos como por la densificación de la sociedad civil” (38). Thus, Mexican democracy and civil society, much like the case of Colombia, is undeniably in a state of crisis. For innumerable citizens of these nations, transcending the limits imposed by an inhuman quality of life can involve both fleeing and staying in place: while some may opt to migrate (legally or illegally), others reconstruct humanity through locally-based civic, global, and transnational agency-centred empowerment and human rights movements (both “from below” and “from above”) with the help of local social service organizations, church groups, alternative media producers, transnational networks and NGOs, and, in some limited cases, national government initiatives.

1.5 Global Cosmopolitanism and Universal Human Rights: Reclaiming Agency and the Right to Politics

1.5.1 Cosmopolitanism Then and Now

The preceding discussion of transnational migrations and twenty-first-century globalization processes from the optics of disaggregated power relations, weakened democracy and civil society, and life in the Latin American margins intimates the lure of a new cosmopolitanism as an effective mode of global social ordering. While the concept dates back to the Cynics of the fourth century BCE, who understood the term to mean

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25 See Michael Peter Smith’s Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization for a compelling study of how agency-oriented transnational urban networks across borders can affect cities, local power structures, and ordinary people’s lives.
“citizen of the cosmos” in the paradoxical sense of belonging to the universe in contradistinction to an earthly community, and the Stoics of the third century BCE, who were known for their cosmopolitan doctrine of the oneness of humanity (Appiah xiv), the modern understanding of cosmopolitanism is grounded in eighteenth-century humanism, and is generally attributed, more specifically, to Immanuel Kant, whose proposed “league of nations” or “world federation” composed of allied sovereign republics is ground in the notion of a universal cosmopolitan right of humanity across borders. As the world began to grow more and more interdependent, Kant’s normative reasoning and moral concept of right lay the groundwork for his understanding that the welfare of one person is ultimately and inextricably tied to the welfare of humanity as a whole:

The peoples of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere. The idea of a cosmopolitan right is therefore not fantastic and overstrained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a universal right of humanity. Only under this condition can we flatter ourselves that we are continually advancing towards a perpetual peace. (“Perpetual Peace” 107-108)

26 Etymologically, the term cosmopolitan is derived from the Greek kosmopolites, a combination of “world” and “citizen,” and generally designates an intellectual ethic that transcends the particular and contingent in favour of the universal. Essentially, cosmopolitanism can be conceived as an embrace of the entire human community and the desire to facilitate “conversation,” in the sense of living together, across peoples and cultures. Pheng Cheah makes a distinction between the eighteenth-century cosmopolitan concern for difference across cultures, territories, languages and, to some extent, races, but not across nations, which postdates cosmopolitanism itself: “The regional particularism opposed by cosmopolitanism may be defined territorially, culturally, linguistically, or even racially, but it is not defined nationally as we now understand the term, because in a Europe made up of absolute dynastic states, the popular national state did not yet exist. Nor, indeed, had the doctrine of nationalism been fully articulated. Cosmopolitanism thus precedes the popular nation-state in history and nationalism in the history of ideas” (21).
These words, which are now utilized to support neo-Kantian cosmopolitan theories of international ethics and global justice such as those advanced by Kok-Chor Tan, Thomas Pogge, and Charles Beitz, amongst others, do not explicitly negate the state. For, inasmuch as Kant considers individuals’ moral rights and obligations to a common humanity within a global frame, the universal state of humankind that he envisions neither interrogates nor threatens the position of the sovereign state as the foundation of the political system. Quite to the contrary, the purpose of his perceived universal community is the very regulation of states: “Kant’s vision of cosmopolitical right asserted in the name of a common humanity attempts to provide an ideal institutional framework for regulating the anarchic behaviour of states. It is not anti- or postnationalist” (Cheah 22). Thus, Kantian cosmopolitanism challenges neither nationalism, which was not yet fully articulated as a political doctrine at the time, nor state sovereignty, which legitimized and ordered inter-state interaction and commerce.

Obviously, Kant’s eighteenth-century moral-political conception of globality cannot and should not be conceived of in contemporary neocapitalist terms, nor should it be framed by an anachronistic lens reflecting present-day globalization processes and related effects and concerns, namely time-space compression; radically increased flows and migrations across territorial borders; controversies over the supposed end of the state; and calls for the eradication of national borders, nationality, and state-defined citizenship. James Ingram is unequivocal in his assertion that Kant did not promote the right to settle in another country, only the right to enter and visit, known as the right of hospitality, a distinction of relevance to contemporary debates on inclusive, multinational, and/or transnational citizenship: “Kant recognized only one universal, cosmopolitan, and in that sense human right: the right to visit,
though not to settle in, other countries, which he felt would promote ‘commerce’—not only trade, but, in the broad, eighteenth-century sense of the term, ‘interaction’ and thus cosmopolitan understanding and solidarity” (406). Indeed, the right of entry is linked to the Enlightenment concern for commerce, understanding, and expansion and, in this sense, has little to do with contemporary concerns over global justice and human rights, as we understand them today: “Kant’s formulations of cosmopolitan rights are not concerns for the needs of the poor, the downtrodden, the persecuted, and the oppressed as they search for safe haven, but rather the Enlightenment preoccupation of Europeans to seek contact with other peoples and to appropriate the riches of other parts of the world” (Benhabib, Rights 37). Thus, from a purely Kantian or Enlightenment perspective, world trade and an incipient capitalism, not human rights, form the basis of cosmopolitan unity and interaction among still-sovereign states, who band together in a proposed “league of nations” to ensure their own freedom and the freedom of constituent states by impeding physically and financially coercive attacks from within or outside the federation, thereby protecting constituent states’ political, cultural, and financial power and hegemony.

Notwithstanding the particularities of the Kantian legacy, since the late 1990s, contemporary cosmopolitan projects framed within political, social, and moral philosophy as well as in international ethics and human rights theory have tended towards vacuous binary reasoning that sets cosmopolitanism in opposition to nationalism, a trend that has weakened the cosmopolitan position vis-à-vis the rise of nationalisms in response to accelerated
globalization processes in recent years (K. Tan, *Justice* 1).²⁷ Whereas proponents of this approach rely on Kant’s moral ideal to make institutional claims for global citizenship and a world state “without borders,”²⁸ as K. Tan explains, an important distinction exists between moral cosmopolitanism and institutional cosmopolitanism: the former refers to moral commitments that morally justify institutional impositions upon individuals while the latter refers more specifically to that institutional system commonly conceived of as a world state (*Justice* 10). This distinction is relevant to the present discussion insofar as it ruptures the seemingly inherent connection between a world state and cosmopolitanism as a moral and normative ideal: “as a moral ideal, cosmopolitanism is not necessarily committed to the notion of a world state and global citizenship; rather it is premised on an account of the equal moral status of individuals. . . . . [A] defense of cosmopolitanism is not straightaway a defense of world statism” (*Justice* 10). Consequently, following K. Tan, new cosmopolitanisms can exist alongside the demands of liberal nationalisms and national-territorial states while, at the same time, heeding the demands of our progressively interconnected, transnational and transgovernmental geopolitical order. The point is that a cosmopolitical project need not demonize the nationalist doctrine as wholly restrictive, mystificatory, and pathological as long as it safeguards, on a moralist account, international

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²⁷ According to Cheah, new theories of cosmopolitanism are reducible to three propositions: i) it is post-national in the sense that it transcends the traditional sovereign functions of the territorially-bound nation ii) it is inextricably linked to processes and effects of globalization, which have culminated in a web of transnational global networks, and iii) it is normatively superior to nationalism insofar as it is more in line with principles of global solidarity and global democracy (19).

²⁸ For more on global citizenship see Harty and Murphy, Hayden, Kabeer, and Sor-hoon Tan.
human rights standards. The dehumanizing consequences of the current system of postmodern development and neoliberal globalization practices, understood by Jean-François Lyotard as an effect of a properly inhuman system (The Inhuman 2), thus demand an appeal to human rights and a concomitant examination of human rights discourse and its normative implications.

In the normative arena, the concept of human rights is inscribed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the preamble of which reflects Kant’s philosophical assertion that our very humanity, our ontological constitution as human beings, is the basis of our moral right to a dignified and just existence: “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (United Nations). As a matter of

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29 Of course, this stance does not ignore the nation-state’s historically bellicose aspirations, not does it discount the dangers of an ideological, entrenched, and essentialist nationalism conceived of as a unique and homogeneous community at the expense of marginalized groups.

30 The United Nations, largely considered the most important institution of post-war reconstruction, was formed as a response to the paroxysmal events of the Second World War and the evident political ineptitude and failure of its predecessor, the League of Nations, to prevent such a calamity. It officially came into existence on October 24, 1945, when the UN Charter was signed by 51 original member states. With the most recent signing of the Charter by Montenegro in 2006, the UN now boasts a total of 192 members. The historic UDHR was officially adopted on December 10, 1948, proclaiming human rights norms as the centrepiece of the post-war era. Under this declaration, rights are divided into six major categories: security rights, due process rights, liberty rights, political rights, equality rights, and social or welfare rights (Nickel sec.1).

It should be noted, however, that the legitimacy of the United Nations as a morally just institution at the service of humanity has been questioned, particularly due to the inherent inequalities between member states, member states’ disproportionate representation and leadership roles in the organization and its affiliated councils, and the disconnect between UN treaties and member states’ domestic legislation.

31 According to Kant, there are categorical imperatives of morality that dictate what we morally must do, according to the command of reason. Kant outlines three formulations of the categorical imperative in Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals (1785/2002). The second formulation, his most famous, is considered the highest principle of morality to which all other maxims are subject: “Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means” (46–47). Known as the principle of humanity, this formulation outlines our fundamental moral obligation to treat every person as someone of inherent worth and dignity and never as a mere thing to be used for personal gain.
justice, human rights define how individuals, on account of their very humanity, ought to be treated. In other words: “[h]uman rights are claims that set the standards of achievement of a society” (Sengupta 325). They are thus guided not only by nation-states’ politico-legal apparatuses but also by the international community, international law, and international human rights treaties and proclamations such as the UDHR.

However, rights not only determine how an individual ought to be treated by fellow individuals and national and transnational organizations and institutions, but also how an individual recognizes and asserts his or her own political and personal agency. In this manner, for Alan Gewirth, human action underlies and justifies the very concept of human rights (221). Given that rights are primarily a moral concept (which is not to deny that they are duly enshrined in some countries’ legal systems and are therefore a juridical concept as well), and that moralities require specific action, human rights must likewise be based on conditions of human action and agency. Thus, to speak of human rights is, in effect, an appeal to human action: “The aim of human rights in this context is, in important part, to equip human beings with the abilities of agency that derive from the generic features of action and that give them the power to ward off the hardships of political oppression and severe economic deprivation and to attain their opposites” (Gewirth 228). While Gewirth is referring specifically to principles of economic redistributive justice, his valuation of agency can be extended to the broader human rights arena so as to be considered a central tenet to the achievement of both civil and political human rights (first-generation rights) and social,

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32 Bernard Gert defines normative morality in reference to “a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons.”
economic, and cultural human rights (second-generation rights). For, without human agency, there is no real subjectivity, which is essential for self-determination, resistance, and revolution, understood as change. The concept of agency is inextricably linked to the question of action and responsibility at both the personal and societal levels: “a central concern is how we should—and to what extent we even have an ability to—change society through concerted individual action, and the ways that cultural representation can, does, or does not abet those changes” (D. Hall 5). In short, concerning the question of human rights, a degree of subjectivity and the freedom to exert individual human agency is fundamental not only to maintaining an adequate standard of living and dignity, but also to challenging hegemonic structures as part of the task of rehumanization in an increasingly dispersed and unjust global order.

Accordingly, the concept of human agency harks back to the central question of power and (trans)governmentality at the crux of social ordering. As Ingram postulates, the international human rights regime faces political challenges associated with questions of power and normative legitimacy at the national and institutional level (401-402). Numerous legal and human rights theorists have already noted that current human rights declarations and international law treaties are not wholly enforceable under the parameters set out by the dominant Westphalian system, which is based on the dual principle of state sovereignty and territorial exclusivity: “The most glaring deficiency, however, in the protection and

33 The heterogeneous concept of human rights is commonly divided into first-, second-, and third-generation rights: negative civil and political rights rooted in western liberal democracies; positive social, economic, and cultural rights rooted in twentieth-century socialist ideology; and the right to development rooted in principles of decolonization.

34 See Arendt (The Origins), Benhabib (The Rights of Others), Cheah, and Wilson.
enforcement of human rights is their paradoxical link to the civil rights provisions of individual nation-states and, therefore, their natural dependence on citizenship within a sovereign state” (Cheah 5). Under this rubric, the nation-state assumes the role of sole guarantor of rights in its jurisdiction, enabling national governments to abuse declarations like the UDHR and invoke a state of exception to attain its ends: “‘human rights’ and ‘human rights abuses’ appear in public discourse mostly to mark occasions when nation-states have reneged on their basic obligations under ‘the international human rights regime’—when they have exercised their sovereignty as an exception to political power” (Wallach 117). Thus, fulfilling human rights and equalizing human dignity remains, as a philosophical and moral issue, a joint obligation between nation-states and the international community; yet, normative enforcement remains principally in the hands of the state, the exclusive provider and custodian of human rights in a national context.

In our post-9/11 world order governed by a rhetoric of fear and a heightened security apparatus, migrants and border crossers find themselves particularly susceptible to “exceptionally” justified human rights abuses. The persistent abuse, criminalization, and exclusion of Latino migrant workers in North America, epitomized in Arizona’s proposed immigration bill SB 1070, is a case in point: exclusionary immigration and citizenship policies tacitly endorse “illegality” as a tool of social and economic dominance. That is to say, illegal or undocumented migrants not only provide a cheap and unlimited source of labour for the North American economy but also, because they are excluded from the social bios, remain socially and politically powerless vis-à-vis the state, which assumes limited responsibility over the administration of the life of the non-citizen. Devoid of secure membership in a national community, this non-citizen or “ambiguous,” “illegal,” or
“unauthorized” resident cannot benefit from a nation’s social welfare or political structures, which are typically not extended to those at the bottom end of the risk-filled “citizenship gap” (Brysk and Shafir 6). Furthermore, as Richard Falk writes: “the illegal migrant is a figure of acute vulnerability, exposed to risks of deportation, manipulation, and abuse, as well as often denied the opportunity to partake of the full benefits of legal residence and citizenship” (72). In response, Scarry suggests discarding the non-citizen (“stranger”) category altogether as a solution to immigrant defencelessness: “Being a stranger, in other words, is itself a form of injury. An immediate strategy for diminishing the debility is to extend hospitality to the stranger. A longer-lasting strategy (a more radical hospitality) is to eliminate the status of stranger altogether by granting the rights of citizenship” (281). The point I am making, in short, is that under a Westphalian model, the undocumented migrant’s exclusionary “illegal” status ensures his or her defencelessness and normative impotence vis-à-vis the state.

Theorizing about the rights of stateless refugees in the wake of World War II, and more specifically, the concept of the “right to have rights,” Hannah Arendt warned, as early as 1951, of the tension between universal human rights declarations and the sovereign,

35 In The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), Arendt outlines the conditions that have sanctioned the ongoing suffering, exploitation of “humanness,” and limiting of citizenship rights and nationality status of national minority populations in Europe before, during, and after the Second World War. For Arendt, when states failed to protect so-called “minority populations,” they stripped them not only of their national status but, more perniciously, of their human rights, rendering them both stateless and rightless, a condition that illustrates the “disintegration of political life” (268) itself. Of particular relevance to the present study is Arendt’s contention that the catastrophes of war, including the loss of the “Rights of Man” or the “right to have rights,” have not yet been surmounted but have, rather, endured into the present: “[…] the quiet of sorrow which settles down after a catastrophe has never come to pass. The first explosion seems to have touched off a chain reaction in which we have been caught ever since and which nobody seems to be able to stop” (267). While she advocates a neo-Kantian universal right of humanity, Arendt despair of the possible impossibility of such a redemption: “the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself. It is by no means certain whether this is possible” (298).
Westphalian state system. Paradoxically, while the “Rights of Man”\textsuperscript{36} are reducible only to the humanity of man (sic) himself, the enforcement of these supposedly “inalienable” human rights is reducible to the state. Again, the point is that, under a Westphalian frame, human rights are inextricably tied to citizenship and nationality, or civil rights, a reality that becomes even more problematic in an increasingly mobile and transnational world:

For, contrary to the best-intentioned humanitarian attempts to obtain new declarations of human rights from international organizations, it should be understood that this idea transcends the present sphere of international law which still operates in terms of reciprocal agreements and treaties between sovereign states; and, for the time being, a sphere that is above the nations does not exist. (Arendt, \textit{The Origins} 298)

While we are, more than a half-century later, in an era characterized by increasing transnational ties amongst states, governments, institutions, and individual citizens, a postnational “world state” or “world governmental order” has not emerged. As a point of clarification, it must be noted that Arendt did not consider a “world government” a solution to the above-stated tension inasmuch as it would not, in itself, transcend the established hierarchical paradigms of power. As Ingram astutely observes, however, her criticism is not directed at the idea of a global system per se but the form in which power is exerted over people as opposed to constituted by them (409). Arendt’s critique notwithstanding, international treaties and declarations like the UDHR, while admittedly not fully enforceable on an international scale, have successfully delegitimized Westphalian sovereignty and

\textsuperscript{36} “Rights of Man” is a reference to the 1789 \textit{French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen}, which, according to Arendt, was a turning point in history insofar as it declared Man (sic), and no longer God, to be the source of Law (\textit{The Origins} 290).
claims to complete control over state borders (Benhabib, *Rights* 12), an encouraging sign that we can transition towards a more equitable and ethical cosmopolitical social order in the twenty-first century.

One particularly contestatory aspect of the Westphalian framework within human rights discourse is its reliance on the normative legitimacy of territorial borders as markers of national belonging and, consequently, determiners of an individual’s agency, autonomy, and overall well-being. My literary analyses of Colombian and Mexican narrative in chapters two and three will interrogate this function of institutionalized site-specific and more generalized territorial borders, focusing on how national borders, by regulating the movement of bodies in space, limit individual freedoms and participation within local and global public spheres. Historically, the border has served to differentiate between individuals both within and beyond the nation: between individuals from different social classes in the internal context, and in the external context, between citizens and non-citizens, converting the latter into threats against human and national security. In both cases, borders are utilized as “instruments of discrimination and triage” (Balibar 82). Certainly, as indicated above in section 1.2, the border carries different connotations for the jet-setting executive whose passport grants him or her the right to circulate more or less freely throughout the globe, and the poor, undocumented migrant, for whom the border is instead, in Gloria Anzaldúa’s famous formulation, an open wound or site of struggle between the so-called First and Third Worlds (25). Likewise, according to Étienne Balibar:

not only is it an obstacle which is very difficult to surmount, but it is a place he [the poor person] runs up against repeatedly, passing and repassing through it as and when he is expelled or allowed to rejoin his family, so that it becomes, in the end, a place
where he resides. It is an extraordinarily viscous spatio-temporal zone, almost a home—a home in which to live a life which is a waiting-to-live, a non life. (83)

An apparatus of social control and exclusion, the border subjugates the poor or undocumented migrant to unjust conditions, confining him to a liminal existence, to a bare life devoid of human value, to that zone of indistinction between life and death theorized by Giorgio Agamben.

The title character of Agamben’s seminal text *Homo Sacer* (1995), the “sacred man” is personified in the image of a prisoner in the concentration camp. An enigmatic figure of archaic Roman law characterized by the unpunishability of his killing and his exclusion from sacrifice, he is set outside of human jurisdiction by this double exception: “What defines the status of homo sacer is therefore not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed” (Agamben, *Homo* 82). In short, he exists in a state of juridico-political exception, entering into death without actually entering the world of the deceased. Agamben uses this character to reflect on the failures of humanity in contemporary society, in particular the Nazi regime and its enforcement of a state of exception over those whose lives were deemed unworthy of value or humanity. While the prisoner in the concentration camp is the quintessential embodiment of the sacred or bare life, the experiences of refugees in refugee camps and detained migrants at airport detention centres are equally relevant to our current discussion of human rights in a transnational order:
The refugee must be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link, and that thereby makes it possible to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights. (Agamben, *Homo* 134)

Agamben’s concern for the plight of the refugee and his or her subjection to the sovereign powers of the territorial nation-state echoes Balibar’s earlier conceptualization of the non-life of the poor migrant at the border. Both concepts challenge the political implications of the border and the systematic disconnect between “human” rights and “citizens’” rights.

In today’s unequal economic and political landscape, subjection to bare life is, in many cases, determined by one’s nationality, which is, in turn, determined by territorial borders. Growing global disparities caused by unequal distribution of global resources undermine the universal human rights of those born in developing countries that cannot or do not provide its citizens with fundamental rights to security and subsistence (K. Tan, *Toleration* 161-162). According to John Rawls’s egalitarian liberalism, outlined in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), the social and economic equality of opportunity of the least advantaged can be achieved through principles of distributive justice that mitigate discriminatory effects of morally arbitrary particularities like race, gender, talent, and wealth (K. Tan, *Justice* 62).  

37 Rawls’s two principles of justice are as follows: “First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all” (*A Theory of Justice* 53).
Despite the fact that Rawls frames his liberalism within a resolutely national context and advocates for basic liberties and social and economic equality within territorial borders, other theorists have attempted to globalize Rawls by adapting his principles of justice to a cosmopolitan position. Thomas Pogge, for instance, argues that nationality and citizenship are two more morally arbitrary particularities, two more institutional inequalities that, like the abovementioned race, gender, talent, and wealth, should not determine an individual’s potential for human dignity (K. Tan, Toleration 163). Álvaro de Vita, for his part, underscores the absurd influence of the border on an individual’s well-being: “As a matter of moral argument, it is difficult to make sense of the idea that a person being born a few miles to the north or a few miles to the south of the Mexican-American border should make such a huge difference in her opportunities to have a good life” (109). The implications are obvious: arbitrarily drawn national borders exert a disproportionate influence, from a normative point of view, over an individual’s life prospects, limiting his or her struggles for autonomy, potential deployment of agency, and imagining of subjectivity.

1.5.2 Ethics and Human Rights Discourse

Given that human action and demands for autonomy underlie and justify the invocation of human rights as a central condition of justice (Gewirth 221, 225), human agency must be of central concern to human rights theory. Gewirth defines human agency as

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38 In The Law of Peoples (1999), published almost 30 years after A Theory of Justice (1971) in response to the changing globalized world order, Rawls explicitly rejects the concept of a duty of global distributive justice that systematically narrows the gap between rich and poor in favour of a duty of humanitarian assistance, which requires that people’s basic needs be met and that people be able to support their own decent institutions (K. Tan, Justice 65-66).
a combination of freedom and well-being. The former assumes the autonomy to control one’s own behaviour while the latter “consists in having the abilities and conditions that are at least minimally needed for all successful action” (222). While there is little doubt that the dehumanizing effects of economic globalization and international neoliberal policies restrict and in some extreme cases destroy the potential for productive human agency, the human rights regime itself has not been similarly scrutinized. Inextricably linked to power politics, human rights are a political and not just a philosophical or metaphysical concern (Ingram 402). Herein lies their contradiction: whereas the human rights regime purports to empower the least fortunate or oppressed, dominant structures tend in fact to disempower those whose rights are contested as they are subsumed under the aegis of powerful states and international NGOs: “rights and their beneficiaries depend on a superior, external power. This contradicts the idea that rights express the principles of autonomy and equality” (Ingram 405). From this perspective, the human rights regime does not necessarily transcend the dehumanizing power politics they claim to condemn. In fact, many NGOs assume a parallel position as a shadow of dominant power structures, becoming in a sense “doubly corporatist and profoundly reactive” (Saul 102). Accordingly, the present discussion of human rights takes into account the politics and power relations inherent to the concept of agency via an inquiry into the ethics of human rights.

Any discussion of the ethics of human rights requires an initial reflection on the quality of ethics itself and its impact on the contemporary politico-cultural landscape. Etymologically derived from the Greek ethos, the disposition or character that informs the purpose of a person’s actions and ways of life, ethics emphasizes the question of purpose and cannot, therefore, simply be reduced to a morality defined by a set of principles or a moral
imperative: “Unlike ‘morality,’ ethics concerns the practical realization of human purposes. As such, it essentially involves power and politics” (Wallach 111). Nevertheless, there is, unmistakably, an inherent connection between ethics and morality, which exerts influence over both political and legal apparatuses: “The ethical realm has also been characterized as the political morality of the state and its (national) public sphere” (Cheah 150). In transnational times, this conception can be globalized around the demands of an international political morality guided by an inclusive, democratic international public sphere. Following this formulation, ethics must be considered not just a theoretical concept but, on a pragmatic level, as applicable to the real world and daily life; that is, ethics as practice or ethics as a public matter (Saul 65-67). As mentioned above, while there is evidence that increased interest, dialogue, and, most importantly, normative support for international human rights standards in the final decade of the previous century fostered an emergent culture of ethics, world governments’ post-9/11 rhetoric of terror utilized to justify apparent public safety and security concerns over justice claims and human rights has marginalized and distanced ethical considerations and obligations to the Other from our daily lives.

If ethics are inherently political and imbued with power, so too are human rights. Following the work of Balibar and Jacques Rancière,\(^\text{39}\) Ingram roots the politics of human

\(^{39}\) In his 2004 essay entitled “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man,” Jacques Rancière posits an escape from Arendt and Agamben’s “ontological trap” that equates politics with state power, insisting that politics must be claimed by those to whom they are denied. In opposition to Arendt’s claim that the rights of man [sic] refer either to the rights of those who have no rights or the rights of those who do have rights, Rancière proposes the following: “the Rights of Man are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not” (302). This double negation has two forms of existence: rights are both written and predicated upon by a subject. In short, rights must be put to “use” by political subjects (303). James Ingram explains it as follows: “Rancière insists that the politics of human rights consists precisely in the activity of claiming them. For him, rights become political when they are denied and this denial is contested; they must be put to work to be realized” (412).
rights in the practices of rights-bearers, with an emphasis on autonomy, as opposed to more conventional interpretations that either combine universalistic moral aspirations with statist conceptions of politics or that seek to bridge morality with laws and institutions.  

John Wallach makes a similar argument, promoting the democratic agency of human beings as a central tenet of human rights discourse in global politics, as well as the need to acknowledge the connection between “human rights as an ethics of power and a political ethics for the governed” (129). In contrast to purely philosophical or metaphysical approaches to human rights, political or pragmatic approaches are concerned with the practical implications of human rights and how such rights can be effectively realized and claimed in a universal or globalized frame. That an ostensibly universal right need be “claimed” at all by rights-bearers underscores the politics of human rights discourse, for such a demand destabilizes established relations of power and networks of authority (Balfour and Cadava 292). Basing his argument on Arendt’s famous formulation of the most basic right of all—“the right to have rights”--, Ingram explicitly imbues moral rights with politics: “[its] effect is to turn the idea of human rights into a practical-political challenge: moral rights must become positive rights” (403). That is, moral rights require correspondent action. In this way, Arendt’s claim for rights becomes a claim for politics or a “right to autonomous political action,” which is, in effect, a universal claim for an “emancipatory logic of modern politics” beyond an institutional frame (Ingram 410-411).

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40 Ingram cites Michael Ignatieff and Michael Walzer as primary theorists of the first proposition and Kant, Habermas, and Seyla Benhabib as proponents of the second.

41 As Ingram notes, Seyla Benhabib outlines the tension of the two “rights” invoked in the Arendtian proclamation as follows: the first is a generalized moral right that lacks effective enforcement practices while the second is a positive right whose violation has effective recourse: “On a political view, only positive rights are ‘real’ rights. Moral rights, in contrast, are merely ideal” (Ingram 403).
This conception of politics, alongside Rancière’s interpretation of politics (understood as the “rights of man” or human rights) as contestation, lays the foundation for Ingram’s argument for an active bottoms-up politics of human rights attentive to the autonomous activity of rights claimants: “On this view, the politics of human rights is a creative, democratic politics of contestation, challenging particular exclusions and inequalities in the name of the open-ended principle of equal freedom, which acquires its particular contours only through this contestation” (Ingram 413). Angelina Snodgrass Godoy echoes this position in her call for a more equal distribution of power in society: “The key to making democracy ‘real,’ then, lies in citizens’ mobilization—not in the formal institutions themselves, but in the substantive struggles they enable” (10). Such a view aims to democratize politics by seeing power transferred to rights claimants, as opposed to powerful government and non-governmental institutions that in many instances not only silence the voices and desires of the powerless and violated they claim to stand for but also propagate relations of colonialist dependency as they advance their own, generally Eurocentric or western visions of “progress,” “development,” and “modernity”.42 Extending this critical stance, Badiou writes: “the theme of ethics and of human rights is compatible with the self-satisfied egoism of the affluent West, with advertising, and with service rendered to the powers that be” (7). He goes even further, denouncing the predominant ethic of human rights for its nihilistic logic of victimization, which subordinates the moral subject to the fragility that comes with the possibility of death (35). This focus on the fragility of the

42 According to Cheah, rights claims are naturally performative in nature to the extent that oppressed groups are forced to assume dominant modes of representation in order for justice to be done: “an irreducible because systemic contamination occurs in the very court of claims in which the voice of the oppressed can be heard, although it is in this court alone that justice can be done, and we cannot not want this justice-in-violation” (167).
human condition, of the exposure to bare life or submission to an inhuman existence of life as death as personified in Agamben’s image of the *homo sacer*, fails to empower the so-called victim with neither personal or political autonomy nor the capacity for resistance or radical innovation. While the potential for a break from the ordinary paradigm lies, for Badiou, not in an ethic of human rights but rather an ethic of truths grounded in fidelity to a situation-specific event, according to Bruno Bosteels, this event starts from the site of the least protected and victimized (16). Bosteels’s point is, in essence, that Badiou does not completely negate the Other: despite having been criticized for his apparent indifference to the victimized Other, Badiou’s event (understood as contestation) occurs at the very site of victimization.

Acknowledging that the human rights regime is inexorably political, Ian Balfour and Eduardo Cadava caution that it runs the risk of being perverted and undermined by the power structures that govern it, structures which, Badiou and others would argue, serve to further victimize the exploited Other as a means of ensuring his or her conformity. Referring to Walter Benjamin’s claim that documents of civilization are at the same time documents of barbarism, Balfour and Cadava draw a link between humanitarianism and inhumanity:

If Benjamin were alive today, he might remind us that there is no document of humanitarianism that is not at the same time a document of inhumanity, inequality, and violence, and that the human rights activist should therefore dissociate himself or herself from it as much as possible. If the projects and discourses of human rights do not wish to throw this counsel to the wind, they will have to define themselves continuously against the inhumanity, inequality, and violence that threaten them from within as well as from without. (293)
Though Cheah is correct to claim that contemporary human rights discourse is contaminated by the technologies and politics of global capitalism, I contest his subsequent motion for a consideration of inhumanity as a vehicle for humanizing our current global conjuncture (via inherently inhuman technologies such as the biopolitical apparatus, for instance) (183). Rather, I support Balfour and Cadava’s call to define and defend human rights (or to invoke humanity) against inhumanity via the defence of a participatory, democratizing, and non-victimizing agency-centred political apparatus.

1.6 Conceptualizing a Global Public Sphere: Reclaiming Local Civil Society

Based on the reasoning that because existing conditions of extreme poverty, oppression, and exclusion are avoidable, they must be considered inhuman and thus politically unacceptable, K. Tan, echoing Kant, argues for a new social order governed by moral and democratic imperatives necessary for the functioning of our compressed world: “In an increasingly interdependent and interconnected global arena, social, economic, and environmental failures and exploits are no longer the confined problems of isolated states but have repercussions beyond state borders” (Toleration 211). Building on these foundations, as well as Ingram and Wallach’s autonomy-centred human rights theories described above, I can begin to outline a preliminary model for an inclusive and just global order based on the concept of the public sphere most famously theorized by Jürgen Habermas.

In his seminal text, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), Habermas outlines the emergence and transformation of the western bourgeois public sphere,
from its rise in the liberal democratic tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with its focus on active political participation, to its decadence in the twentieth-century transition to state capitalism and politics characterized by elitism, privatization, and the rise of powerful corporations. In this sense, the text is emblematic of the Frankfurt School’s brand of critical theory and can be read as a critique of contemporary society, which has transformed the political actor or agent into a simple consumer of culture docile to the demands of government and, more prominently, big corporations. As I will discuss in chapters three and four, the mainstream media participates in both arenas: an increasingly state-influenced and commercialized marketplace, it constructs public opinion by disseminating official or dominant ideologies for consumption by the masses. The public sphere idealized by Habermas is, in contrast, conceptualized as an inclusive space that encourages individual participation in public debates that, far from being futile, exert influence over critical public opinion:43 “[It was] a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion” (Habermas, Structural 26). Habermas emphasizes access to rational-critical debate and popular participation, alongside the public’s awareness of itself as a potential opponent of the state as fundamental aspects of the public sphere, which emerged as a project of modernity insofar as it bound the individual to the political environment.

Notwithstanding the criticism mounted against Habermas for focusing solely on the bourgeois public sphere to the exclusion of the proletarian public sphere that was likewise emerging, a criticism Habermas himself has acknowledged (“Further Reflections” 426), the

43 Contrary to the sense of judgment and uncertainty associated with the term “opinion,” Habermas defines “public opinion” as “the critical reflections of a public competent to form its own judgments” (Structural 90).
notion of a socio-politically integrated public operating both within and outside the state apparatus retains its value even today: “Unlike the ancient notion of the public [as synonymous with ‘state-related’], therefore, the modern notion depended on the possibility of counterposing state and society” (Calhoun 8). In short, a modern conceptualization of the public sphere can thus be antagonistic to the state as a way of reaffirming and reinforcing democracy.

In this manner, Habermas’s public sphere remains relevant to the contemporary socio-political context. As Craig Calhoun asserts, *The Structural Transformation* has present-day repercussions: “it aims to reach beyond the flawed realities of history to recover something of continuing normative importance. This something is an institutional location for practical reason in public affairs and for the accompanying valid, if often deceptive, claims of formal democracy” (1). Accordingly, Seyla Benhabib sees the participation of autonomous individuals in public debate as a necessary precondition for realizing the emancipatory aspirations of new social movements (“Models” 95). While it may appear somewhat dated to utilize the concept of the public sphere to theorize mechanisms of twenty-first-century social ordering, according to Fraser, the concept of the public sphere is in fact essential to the task of imagining an alternative, post-bourgeois, transnational social order:

Habermas’ idea of the public sphere is indispensable to critical social theory and democratic political practice. I assume that no attempt to understand the limits of actually existing late-capitalist democracy can succeed without in some way or another making use of it. I assume that the same goes for urgently needed constructive efforts to project alternative models of democracy. (“Rethinking” 111)
I extend Habermas’s concept limited to the western bourgeois public sphere to the contemporary global environment as a means of evaluating the current state of democracy and outlining a framework for an inclusive global public sphere that takes humanity, participatory democracy, strong (local) civil society, and the personal and political agency of autonomous individuals as its ultimate goals. Without announcing any aporetic ends, this alternative social order questions the limits imposed by nations and national institutions—borders, nationalism and citizenship, and the national media—as it advocates for a cosmopolitan, dialectically local and global, transgovernmental order attentive to the changing relations and responsibilities of nations brought about through intensified globalization processes.

While I take the Habermasian ideal as a starting point, I must also acknowledge its faults and problematic assumptions, in particular its exclusionary nature. In her article “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” (1992), Fraser reconceptualizes a more nuanced public sphere open to alternative models of actually existing democracy in late-capitalist society concerned with the institutionalization of democracy, global justice, and an international human rights project. Against Habermas, Fraser calls for a public sphere characterized by open access to all socio-economic, ethnic, racial, and socio-sexual groups; for, it is only through a system of participatory parity that social inequalities and relations of dominance and subordination can

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44 In this article, Fraser identifies four questionable assumptions underlying Habermas’s bourgeois, “masculinist” model of the public sphere: i) societal inequality is not a necessary precondition for political democracy, ii) a single comprehensive public sphere is more desirable than a multiplicity of competing counterpublics, iii) public discourse should focus on the common good and remain separate from private interests, and iv) a functioning public sphere requires a strong separation between civil society and the state (117-118).
be eliminated (121). Based on this argument, Fraser outlines an explicit task for contemporary critical theory: “to render visible the ways in which societal inequality infects formally inclusive existing public spheres and taints discursive interaction within them” (121). Furthermore, Fraser questions the Habermasian ideal of one single, comprehensive public sphere, advancing, on the contrary, a vision of competing multiple publics or “subaltern counterpublics” that exist in “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (123). Subaltern counterpublics thus assume a contestatory role, taking control of formulating their identities not only within their own communities but in the larger global sphere as well, a position that mitigates but does not necessarily eliminate their subordination under dominant groups. Because a formerly inclusive public sphere has never existed on a global scale, societal inequalities taint discursive interaction amongst nations, multiple publics, and individuals across borders. As stated above in section 1.5, arbitrary borders and claims of citizenship influence the potential life prospects and agency of the world’s populations, an assertion that brings us back to the global justice and international human rights project. It would seem that a global order committed to an egalitarian liberalism would initiate more inclusive, transnational discourse amongst peoples, the very foundation of an inclusive global or cosmopolitan public sphere.

The advancement of personal agency and autonomy of rights bearers or rights-claimants as central tenets of human rights theory is echoed in discourses of global justice, which are concerned with the philosophical and practical advancement of equality guarantees in national and transitional justice processes. Fraser’s three-dimensional theory of justice, which adds political representation to her previous dualistic frame calling for recognition of
cultural difference and *redistribution* of wealth, similarly advocates for a definition of justice as “parity of participation” in a global public sphere (“Reframing Justice” 16). Fraser centres her attention not only on the always contestatory debate over what claims for global justice encompass, but also questions who it includes or excludes in a transnational era when notions of citizenship and nationality are being contested and how post-Westphalian democratic justice and injustice is best framed in a globalizing age (“Reframing Justice” 21). By calling for the participatory representation of multiple political actors at multiple political stratum, we move towards a more politicized dimension of democratic justice that deliberates over who counts as a member of the public sphere and, more importantly, over who is entitled to make justice claims. The task, then, is to legitimate the idea of a world public sphere that not only mediates between international laws and claims of injustice, but also reshapes debate around the very processes of inclusion in a post-Westphalian frame.

Of course, the ideal of participatory parity within a global public sphere composed of multiple contestatory counterpublics can best be realized in liberal democracies, which are defined not only by free and fair elections but, more importantly, by constitutional protection and reinforcement of citizens’ rights (Smith and Ziegler 31). A destabilized nexus between law and politics, or law and justice, constrains, on a personal or micro level, the political autonomy and rights of individuals as well as, on an institutional or macro level, the achievement of civil society itself. The personal and the institutional, the individual and the state, are deeply interconnected. As Marx and others would later contend, civil society is not extraneous to the state and is therefore affected by dominant ideology and power apparatuses. A global civil society, composed of strong local civil societies, by extension, must be conceived of in similar terms and not as a sphere completely separate from the state, as John
Keane seemingly defines it: “Global civil society is a vast, interconnected, and multi-layered social space that comprises many hundreds of self-directing or non-governmental institutions and ways of life” (23). Notwithstanding his eagerness to transcend a state-centric model of governance, Keane rightly cautions against making a definitive distinction between the state and non-governmental organizations which are in large part funded, protected and legitimated by national governments, many of whom have downloaded state-related functions such as education and healthcare of the most vulnerable onto willing NGOs. However, because they are conceived as being anti-governmental and apolitical, and are often equated with civil society itself, NGOs may actually serve to depoliticize the notion and effects of civil society, which, in turn, restricts the potential for so-called victimized groups to assert their own political and human agency (Chandhoke 45-47). From this perspective, civil society should neither be equated purely with NGOs nor detached completely from market and governmental forces; for, civil society is inextricably connected to international politics, world economies, and stable states (Chandhoke 49-51).

Accordingly, Keane writes: “global civil society should not be thought of as the natural enemy of political institutions” (36) but as one among a network of actors and counterpublics that comprise the foundations of a nascent global public sphere.

In the Latin American context, before considering the benefits of a global civil society or a global public sphere, an interrogation must first be made of civil society and liberal democracy on a local and continental scale. To assume that, with the exception of Cuba, political-institutional democracy can be taken as a given in a post-Cold War, post-dictatorial Latin America is, at its core, a reductionist postulate that veils the existing reality of life on the continent, where social democracy, understood as respect for civil rights and
basic liberties, cannot be so easily assumed. The 2009 coup of democratically elected
Honduran president Manuel Zelaya is just one indicative example of how Latin American
democracy continues to be threatened. Whereas free elections may serve to legitimize a
government as democratic in the eyes of trading partners, such supposedly “democratic
regimes” tend to favour capital-centric, neoliberal economic development on a national level
over citizens’ actual well-being, marking a gross distinction between political and social
democracy, formal and real democracy, or electoral democracy and citizen rights.

Building on French sociologist Alain Touraine’s theory of democracy as respect for
minorities and human rights, Yamandu Acosta defines democracy not as a political regime
but as a way of life or condition that makes equality and the achievement of human rights
possible: “Propongo caracterizar provisoriamente a la democracia como un modo de vida que
actual y tendencialmente hace la vida posible y, en consecuencia, se trata de un modo de
articulación y reproducción de la vida humana” (221). In the present conjuncture: “[La
democratización] es obviamente necesaria para quienes actualmente padecen la negación de
su posibilidad de vivir por la profundización y extensión de la exclusión, la marginación y la
precarización de su existencia” (Acosta 229). As the aforementioned cases of weakened
democracy and civil society in Colombia and Mexico clearly illustrate, just as marginality
has always been linked to precariousness, so too has Latin American democracy, which, to
be sure, has only ever been political in nature. As the dissemination of neoliberal policies,
justified as a response to globalization, deepen social and economic disparities on the
continent, “the possibility of viable democracies in Latin America seems to be slipping
away” (Villaveces-Izquierdo 321). In other words, Latin American democracy, characterized
more by gross inequalities and injustice than by a genuine concern for humanity, is at once politically fragile and socially ineffective as a “way of life.” As Lucía Sala writes:

basta un examen superficial de la actual situación para advertir cómo en muchos de nuestros países no rige efectivamente la democracia política más escueta, se viola la Constitución aunque se realicen elecciones y no son respetados los derechos humanos. . . . Se multiplican fenómenos como la violencia ciudadana, la corrupción, el papel privilegiado del comercio de armas y el narcotráfico. . . . (179)

Because the normalization of violence, corruption, poverty, and human rights violations brings increased insecurity and weakened trust in community and government (Bonner 175), one obvious effect is decreased civic participation, weakened civil society, and reduced agency, a condition that, as Fraser postulates with her three-dimensional theory of justice, shatters the very hallmark of a democratic participatory system.

1.7 Conclusion

That today’s accelerated globalization processes have the potential to contest established power relations within a global framework explains the largely repressive, nationalistic responses countered by nation-states interested more in defending their own political legitimacy than in protecting the human rights of their citizens. The ongoing resistance to global cosmopolitan models of politics and humanity exposes the moral complicity of elite actors in the propagation of growing disparities between the wealthiest and the most abject peoples and nations throughout the globe. Following the call made by Colombian anthropologist Santiago Villaveces-Izquierdo, an alternative vision of our current
social (dis)order is necessary for an alternative and more plausible future (322). Clearly, this future cannot be realized via morally complicit, illiberal, or quasi-democratic regimes that, despite bearing the title of “democracy,” actually inhibit the achievement of strong local civil societies defined by participatory parity and expressions of agency and autonomy of rights-bearers and multiple counterpublics. Thus, before considering how cosmopolitical modes of social ordering may be implemented transgovernmentally across borders and nations, the mobilization of extra-governmental agency-enhancing initiatives attentive to human rights norms need be explored first at the national and local levels. Because the capitalist order demands a certain degree of opposition for its own survival, it creates room for spaces of subaltern resistance that may, by generating enough power, eventually free themselves from the established (dis)order (Zimmerman and Baeza Ventura xix). In this manner, when disentangled from the institutional frame of the established hegemony, politics, understood in Rancière’s terms as human rights, can be co-opted to combat repression via contestatory action, as witnessed by the mobilizing base of new social movements and alternative media models that question the hegemonic positions taken by state, regional, and local governments.

As Alberto Moreiras suggests, the subaltern does not have to accept his or her Othered, non-hegemonic position but should, instead, contest the social and political order that (mis)frames his or her people as Other (262). In short, building on García Canclini’s definition of Latin American modernity as a hybrid of interactions among local and global, popular and elite actors, an inclusive, participatory transnational public sphere must be based in human action, agency, discourse, and participatory parity among these same local and global; hegemonic and non-hegemonic; state and post-state; and cosmopolitan, national, and
transnational actors who come together as a civil society to challenge established parameters of power, (dis)order, and politics. Despite the rise to power of several leftist and left-of-centre parties throughout Latin America, few structural changes have been implemented throughout the region as entrenched neoliberal policies continue to give the elite and multinational corporations a stronghold on power (Petras). Nevertheless, incipient social movements and alternative media models that empower civil society and the human rights agenda have emerged in the shadow of neoliberal globalization. In the following chapters, I will analyze specific literary manifestations of globalization’s dehumanizing effects on national institutions and thus citizens in Latin America alongside examples of agency-centred politics that mobilize the construction of alternative public spheres on the continent.
Chapter 2. Postmodern Pathologies: The Disintegration of Humanity, Politics, and the Public Sphere

Nothing is less innocent, [Pierre] Bourdieu reminds us, than laissez-faire. Watching human misery with equanimity while placating the pangs of conscience with the ritual incantation of the TINA (‘there is no alternative’) creed, means complicity. Whoever . . . partakes of the cover-up, or worse still, the denial of the human-made, non-inevitable, contingent and alterable nature of social order, notably of the kind of order responsible for unhappiness, is guilty of immorality—of refusing help to a person in danger. (Bauman 215)

Están allí, arrinconados, sin posibilidad alguna de mejorar sus vidas, con la entrada prohibida en todo el mundo, empezando por los demás sectores de su propia ciudad. . . . Entre los tercerones hay de todo, en bondad y en maldad, en talento y en coraje, pero los segundones y los dones prefieren pensar que están condenados a pudrirse allá y que no tienen salvación, como si sus tareas fueran genéticas o como si ellos pertenecieran a una distinta especie subhumana. (Abad Faciolince, Angosta 199)

2.1 Introduction

The above epigraphs serve to illuminate the pathogenic state of our current world order, in which indifference and defeatism—the so-called TINA creed--prevail over humanity and our moral responsibility or, to use Kantian terms, categorical imperative to treat the human Other with dignity and respect. In his Afterthought to Liquid Modernity (2000), Zygmunt Bauman reflects on the task of sociology and the sociologist, articulating the need to question society and its meanings, particularly their effects on the human condition. For Bauman, “the prime concern of sociology made to the measure of liquid modernity needs to be the promotion of autonomy and freedom; such sociology must therefore put individual self-awareness, understanding and responsibility as its focus” (213). Contrary to this ideal, which can be extended from a purely sociological to a broader cultural, political, and humanistic realm, contemporary society instead reveals an inability or disinclination to question the status quo or accept one’s responsibility to the Other, a
condition that is indicative of an ailing, morally vacuous social order in which increasing socio-cultural, juridico-political, and economic disparities are magnified by technologies of segregation and dissociation such as territorial borders,\(^1\) politics of citizenship and nationality, and divisive nationalist rhetoric. In terms of the social contract, because labelling someone (consciously or unconsciously) a foreign, unknown, or “unimaginable” Other delegates him or her to a debilitating and even “injurious” condition (Scarry 281), to be apathetic is to assent to an immoral order. In Héctor Abad Faciolince’s 2003 novel Angosta, characters grapple precisely with this question of apathy manifested as exclusion formalized through a politics of segregation enforced by way of physical borders and regulated controls on movement within the fictional city of Angosta. Spatially divided into three zones analogous to Dante’s Paradise, Purgatory, and Inferno, Angosta’s tripartite space is arranged according to climate and social caste. Three climates—cold, temperate, and hot—create natural borders between Sektor C, T, and H, where the upper (dones), middle (segundones), and lower classes (tercerones) reside respectively.\(^2\) Notwithstanding the fact that these divisions are based on socio-economic status, racial distinctions are an imagined part of the formula: those in the upper strata consider themselves to be white, even though they may have indigenous, African, or more likely mestizo or mulatto roots, while those in the lower echelons are imagined to be Indian or Negro by those above, regardless of their actual racial...

\(^1\) For Foucault, “technologies” are arrangements or apparatuses of power that may either facilitate or limit possibilities of freedom, depending on their relationship to discourses of power/knowledge: “how or whether technologies facilitate and limit the exercise of power is never guaranteed because, while power may be everywhere, it must be practiced, exercised, and carried out through conduct and through technical procedures and the deployment of particular technologies at and across specific sites” (Hay 167).

\(^2\) In the original Spanish text, the three sectors are Tierra Fría, Tierra Templada, and Tierra Caliente, or Sektor F, Sektor T, and Sektor C. The “k” in Sektor is the result of a bureaucratic mistake, signalling both the incompetence of Angostan governmental and administrative systems as well as the challenges of working within a transnational and multi-linguistic political framework.
or ethnic background. With such a demarcated arrangement, it is no surprise that racism and xenophobia permeate the collective consciousness.

Even a cursory analysis of the text would reveal regulated space, and by extension an exclusionary public sphere, as a technique of power that impacts the lives, identities, and potential for agency of the population of Angosta, particularly those who live below in Sektors T and H and either negotiate and endure border crossings for familial or professional ends or, in the case of the majority, are imprisoned in their Inferno or Purgatory and completely excluded from crossing the border into Paradise. In this chapter I analyze the psycho-social effects of such spatial regulation of the body (and more commonly, in a transnational frame, of the menacing foreign body or Other) in an increasingly pathogenic and dehumanizing twenty-first-century world order: What impact does the panoptic or synoptic gaze, or the threat of constant surveillance and delimited mobility, have on our personal and collective psyche? How does spatial practice disable and/or enable participation in dominant and alternative public spheres? Are there distinct pathological tendencies related to the uncertain climate of the contemporary postmodern landscape, and how are these manifested in the everyday world? Close readings of three twenty-first-century Colombian and Mexican novels—Abad Facioulouse’s Angosta, Heriberto Yépez’s Al

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3 As Foucault outlines in Discipline and Punish, the Panopticon refers directly to Jeremy Bentham’s principle of architectural construction for establishments where people are to be kept under inspection—namely prisons, schools, hospitals, and asylums--, whereby a central tower enables a supervisor to oversee the entire institution and its inhabitants. According to Foucault: “the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). Thus, power itself is made visible: what is vital is not the act of surveillance itself, but rather the inmate’s consciousness and awareness of being watched; for, it is this cognizance that persuades disciplined action.

Zygmunt Bauman suggests that coercive panopticism has been replaced in the contemporary landscape by an enticing and seductive synopticism, an order in which the many watch the few. Notwithstanding this inversion, the fundamental disciplining power of surveillance remains unchanged in a post-panoptic or synoptic society.
otro lado (2008), and Jorge Franco’s Paraíso Travel (2001)--form the basis of my analysis, which takes an interdisciplinary approach by merging ideas and theories from the fields of sociology, philosophy, and cultural and literary studies with psychology and cultural epidemiology to comment upon the inhuman, pathogenic state of our contemporary dislocated world order.

2.1.1 The Postmodern Condition

Before moving to my close readings of these texts, it is necessary first to outline my understanding of postmodernity and the postmodern condition; non-clinical pathologies congruent with the destabilizing effects of an accelerated pace of change, intensified global and diasporic flows, and uneven globalization processes; and the nexus between the two. Like the concept of globalization, which, as I outlined in chapter one, is at once a process too divergent and too elusive to define in absolute terms yet fundamental to the analysis and understanding of the contemporary global order, no single definition of the postmodern or postmodernity exists. Amongst the most cited is François Lyotard’s now canonical understanding of the postmodern “as incredulity towards metanarratives” (The Postmodern xxiv), a concept that contests conventional apparatuses of legitimation tied to totalizing signifiers, knowledges, discourses, and truths. Other postmodern critics commonly referenced alongside Lyotard and his critique of the hermeneutics of signs and meanings include Michel Foucault and his decentring of the (post)modern subject effectuated through a questioning of discourses of power and knowledge, Jacques Derrida and his deconstructionist or poststructuralist attack on objectivity, and Jean Baudrillard and his contention that, because signs are represented simulacra void of any meaning or referential reality, the new
politico-socio-cultural order is in fact characterized by a false “hyperreality”. Terry Eagleton offers the following succinct definition of the concept:

By ‘postmodern’, I mean, roughly speaking, the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge. Postmodernism is sceptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity.

(13)

From the late 1950s through to the present, these and other critical theorists have critiqued our understanding of the self and subjectivity, agency and identity, conventional discourses of knowledge, and ideas of modern truth and progress, exposing in this way society’s unease with the human condition in a post-World War II late capitalist order characterized by globalization processes, increasingly ubiquitous and complex technologies, changing time-space relations, and shifting patterns of mediation and representation.

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4 See Baudrillard, Derrida, and Foucault, particularly The Archaeology of Knowledge.

5 Intricately interrelated, subjectivity, agency, and identity all probe conditions of position and positionality, representation and representationality of the social subject. According to Donald Hall:

[O]ne’s identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short-or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity. . . . Subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of control. . . . Thus, in exploring subjectivity we are in effect exploring the “self” as a text. (3-5)

The concept of agency adds a further level of personal responsibility to our capacity to act, construct, and change the “self”: “For in probing agency, we are, in effect, tackling the fundamental question of responsibility: in personal action, in aesthetic creation, in inter-personal norms and social valuation” (D. Hall 5).
Though Jorge Larraín correctly cautions that “[t]he existence of Postmodernity as the
definitive supersession of Modernity cannot be necessarily derived from the existence of Postmodernist discourse” (80), inverting the aporia may prove more accurate insofar as postmodern thought, postmodern discourse, or postmodernism can be conceptualized as the critical-theoretical response to the historical epoch of postmodernity (or high or late modernity [Giddens], late capitalism [Jameson], liquid modernity [Bauman], or supermodernity [Augé]) and its socio-cultural, economic, and political processes.6 According to David Harvey, the geo-historical condition of postmodernity corresponds to the rise, initiated during the global recession of the mid 1970s, of late capitalism and the transition from rigid Keynesian-Fordist modes of production towards more flexible neoliberal modes of accumulation in the political economy, a development that destabilized political, socio-cultural, and economic practices and ultimately reformulated the relationship between time and space (Condition 284). Similarly, Edward Soja draws a link between historical postmodernity and the urban crises of the 1960s and beyond, which were sparked in large part by the polarized inequalities resulting from the flexible modes of production characteristic of the “postfordist industrial metropolis” (174). These definitions are particularly apt for the present study insofar as they link postmodernity and the postmodern condition to the changing time-space nexus associated with destabilizing globalization processes.

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6 While there has been much debate over the slippage between the historicism of postmodernity and the cultural designation of postmodernism, I follow Fredric Jameson’s theorized correlation between monopoly capitalism and postmodernism/postmodernity. See Jameson and Linda Hutcheon for more on the usage of the term.
Concerning the Latin American context, to the extent that accelerated global flows have intensified the socio-economic disparities already characteristic of the underdeveloped modern constitution of culture on the continent and, as García Canclini acknowledges, because the contradictions in Latin American modernity and postmodernity lie in the continent’s uneven socio-economic development, the confluence of the postmodern, the economic, and the hegemonic/subaltern tension is fundamental. Without entering into the debate over whether a hitherto underdeveloped yet at least partly lettered Latin America has entered modernity, let alone postmodernity, I follow Jesús Martín Barbero’s position that we are experiencing a “Postmodernity that instead of coming to replace comes to reorganize the relationship between Modernity and tradition. This is the space in which our ‘differences’ are played out—differences . . . that are neither formed by regressions to the premodern nor fall into irrationality by not being part of the unfinished European modern project” (“Modernity” 36). Similarly, as Nelly Richard writes, “Latin American Postmodernity would never be [nor is it] the conclusive ‘afterward’ of an all too unfinished Modernity. It is the translinear exacerbation of what this Modernity already contained as heteroclite and mixed—the figural paroxysm of its variegated multitemporality of disconnected references and fragmented memories” (229). Postmodernity, from this optics, is located at the hybridized nexus of Latin American modernity’s decentring contradictions: “the crisis of Modernity as both the announcement and the commencement of Postmodernity” (Martín Barbero, “Communications” 40). In short, Latin American postmodernity reconsiders, re-evaluates, and revises the values of modernity through a prism of accelerated technological advances,

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7 Concerning this debate, see José Joaquín Brunner; George Yúdice, Juan Flores and Jean Franco; and Emil Volek, amongst others.
increased mass media consumption, evermore diffuse post- and transnational displacements, concomitant re-and de-territorialization processes, and exacerbated social disparities that escalate the proliferation of the margins.

In response to this state of “uneven,” “partial,” “polarized,” or “peripheral” Latin American (post)modernity, which is, in the words of Renato Ortiz, “perversa [y] salvaje, pero real” (242), the promise of twenty-first-century Latin American cultural studies is the promise of a postmodern politics attuned to “the deconstruction of the hegemonic subject and the empowerment of previously marginalized subjectivities” (Den Tandt 198). That is, the postmodern politics motivating contemporary Latin American literary and cultural studies not only announces the existence of the Other but also, more importantly, attempts to ascribe agency to the marginal subject by demythifying traditional hegemonic representations of the Other. Of course, this interest in representing the marginal is not an idiosyncratic marker of twenty-first-century Latin Americanism. An interest in the marginal subject has in fact guided Latin American literary production at least since the end of the nineteenth century, when writers imposed on themselves the modernizing task of mapping out a heterogeneous Latin American space marked by divergent and contradictory subjects (Legrás 1). Furthermore, critical discourse on postmodernism in the Latin American context has engaged this question of the Other since the second half of the twentieth century. As Cynthia Tompkins explains, this discourse adheres to two major tendencies: i) a critique of the rearticulation and reproduction of hegemonic Euro-North American paradigms manifested in the homogenization and subsumption of indigenous and African cultures under a “whitened” and “modernized” Latin American identity and ii) a celebration of heterogeneity and cultural adaptation (10) initiated by Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation and extended
further in Angel Rama and Néstor García Canclini’s theories of hybridity. On this second point, Horacio Legrás writes: “No criticism of transculturation can disregard the fact that the establishment of hegemonic states in Latin America was a positive and democratic step that opened venues for the action of subaltern and oppressed people” (18). While controlled by the lettered elite as a technique of domination, the politics of transcultural integration that cast an emancipatory element to Latin American modernity continues to be negotiated in postmodernity.

To be sure, developed and underdeveloped or developing worlds have different histories of economic, socio-cultural, and political development and thus experience temporality and (post)modernity in distinct ways. While some of the most theorized problematics associated with contemporary globalization processes--namely time-space compression, increased global flows, and transnational mobility--have received growing critical attention over the past thirty years, we must at the same time recognize that the majority of the world’s populations are not mobile and do not necessarily participate in social acceleration processes, particularly in underdeveloped countries coping with poverty, violence (physical, psychological, structural, and/or symbolic), and political illegitimacy, but also true of the most marginalized populations living in the peripheries of the developed world (Rosa and Scheuerman 6). Nevertheless, lack of direct participation in accelerated economic and geographic flows does not necessarily exempt populations from the worldwide effects of modernization and globalization processes, whose obviously global reach is felt even in the most isolated communities.
If, as Paul Virilio contends, power is inextricably linked to mobility and one’s capacity to move quickly through physical space, then one’s mobility must be re-conceptualized as the paradigmatic contemporary expression of progress. Following his “survival of the fastest” logic, those who do not advance fast enough are either eliminated or, more commonly, dominated by those who do: “Stasis is death, the general law of the world” (Virilio 68). Bauman offers a similar though less bombastic metaphor of the speed/power nexus: “The game of domination in the era of liquid modernity is not played between the ‘bigger’ and the ‘smaller’, but between the quicker and the slower. Those who are able to accelerate beyond the catching power of their opponents rule” (188). Because “agency is organized through the control of mobility” (Grossberg, qtd. in Packer 141), the excessive velocity of contemporary global capitalism weakens individual freedoms of the non-mobile as a new global totalitarian ethic or “globalitarianism” takes hold (Virilio, qtd. in Armitage 29). Power is thus held squarely in the hands of freely mobile individuals, of the new nomadic elite generally from advanced, modernized, capitalist states who impose their high-speed will and technology over static cultures and peripheral global populations. In other words, global mobility restricts human agency and destabilizes human identity whether we participate directly in accelerated spaces of flows or are trapped, as the majority of the world’s populations are, in inhuman conditions of poverty, inequality, and disadvantage.

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8 In *Speed and Politics* (1986), Virilio outlines his thesis that “dromocratic progress,” understood as movement, flows, or “the benefit of moving-power” (47), has superceded the power/knowledge nexus outlined by Foucault. Although he concentrates specifically on the industrialized war machine, Virilio extends his analysis of the “dromocratic revolution” to the contemporary political and socio-economic realms.

9 According to Virilio, “globalitarianism” is, alongside speed, the most politically significant feature and the singularly greatest menace of the contemporary era. Coined as the “new totalitarianism, a totalitarianism of totalitarianisms,” the term is meant to highlight and warn against the dangers of globalized technologies of control and surveillance (Armitage 29).
granted by the “birthright lottery” (Shachar 3). Under this rubric, “there is a wide and growing gap between the condition of individuals de jure and their chances to become individuals de facto” (Bauman 39); for, human agency and both individual and collective autonomy are undermined not only by abated conditions of well-being, but by our individually-minded, hyper-accelerated society. By diminishing meaningful human interactions, postmodern society weakens our sense of self, our sense of ethics, and our sense of moral responsibility to the Other.

2.1.2 Postmodern Pathologies

If the postmodern socio-economic and political realms have destabilized modern ideals of equality, power, and freedom, its corresponding psycho-social dimension has similarly had to contend with ruptured notions of identity and subjectivity. As early as 1927, John Dewey warned of the disturbing effects of accelerated mobility on relationships and personal attachments: “Acceleration of mobility disturbs them at their root. And without abiding attachments associations are too shifting and shaken to permit a public readily to locate and identify itself” (62). Hartmut Rosa and William Scheuerman thus caution against the potential for “time pathologies” caused by social acceleration (16). Referring to the self’s interactions with increasing global, electronic, and visual flows in contemporary society,

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10 In *The Birthright Lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality* (2009), Ayelet Shachar delves into current debates surrounding global justice and the legitimacy of citizenship by highlighting the conceptual legal commonalities between property rights and citizenship rights, an entitlement inherited through one of two principles: *jus soli* (“the law of the soil”) or *jus sanguinis* (“the law of blood”), that is, through territory or ancestry. Such an inheritance-based transfer mechanism of birthright regimes, argues Shachar, defines prospects for a person’s well-being, security, and freedom, entrapping the majority of the world’s population into conditions of persistent poverty and suffering.
Dwight Fee suggests that “positioning one’s self as a stable unit with rational grounding in the world becomes difficult and perhaps purposeless” (6). This accelerated dislocation (understood in both geographical and psychological terms) expresses itself pathologically through disorders such as anxiety, uncertainty, insecurity, fear, radical indifference (Gottschalk 25-26, 35), and detachment or depersonalisation (Krasojevic 7) as we attempt to cope with an evermore discombobulated world: “conditions called ‘mental disorders’ . . . become dynamic, interrelated, interpersonal and even sequential strategies (ways of feeling, perceiving, thinking, and acting) we develop in our attempts to proceed across the landscape—or through the labyrinth—of everyday life, called the postmodern” (Gottschalk 22).11 The fragmentation of knowledge and the self, alongside the emergence of provisional, polyvocal, or schizoid identities so commonly associated with the postmodern, shatters any notion or possibility of a harmonious, fixed identity, which is instead torn apart by “shearing forces” that ultimately expose its fluid disposition (Bauman 82-83), leaving the self to contend somehow with the ensuing volatility of a seeming lack of wholeness. Of course, while the socio-cultural trends and conditions of a historical era influence patterns of human suffering and the presence of distinct pathologies (Levin 5), it would be wrong to draw a simple cause-effect sequence between the two. That is to say that exposure to the postmodern landscape will not necessarily cause “postmodern pathologies” in its subjects.

11 These pathologies are amplified in contexts of war and other unstable crime and violence-plagued environments where permanent scars of death and disappearance are outwardly manifested in an underlying fear, depression, and mistrust, rupturing an already fragile sense of community. In the Colombian and Mexican contexts, towns ravaged by the internal conflict mourn the murdered and disappeared and grieve for the tortured and kidnapped. Having had their confidence in other human beings broken, victims of kidnappings and torture withdraw from human interaction, detaching themselves from their family and friends. Referring specifically to the Colombian context, psychologist and philosopher Silvia Diazgranados suggests that for any sort of psychological reparation to take place, victims of violence require not only increased access to clinical treatments and psychological therapies but, more importantly, an end to the fear of violence (“Grieving Country”).
Rather, as Simon Gottschalk stresses, postmodern socio-cultural trends induce pathological “trends” (24), “tendencies” (36) and “affinities” (24), which should, in turn, be considered in socio-cultural and not individual terms.

That the pathological becomes one more condition to be questioned under a postmodern rubric in which the seemingly anomalous or abnormal becomes normalized reinforces Gottschalk’s recommendation that pathologies be considered socio-culturally. If the abovementioned pathologies are indicative of the postmodern landscape itself, then they may not be so pathological after all. That is to say that what may have once been considered a deviation from a normal condition can be subsequently transformed into a normative technology of domination and control. Referring to the ubiquitous and insidious presence of low-level fear in postmodern societies, Gottschalk writes:

> It is in this climate (both internal and external) that postmodern selfhood unfolds, breathes, and engages the everyday. The ‘diagnoses’ assigned postmodern individuals thus constitute psychosocial strategies that are deployed in response to this condition of permanent low-level fear. These strategies are grounded in it, informed by it, and, with varying degrees of success, manage it. (26)

Thus, a once-irrational paranoia, anxiety, panic disorder, fear of public space (agoraphobia), and fear of victimization at the hands of the Other have become characteristic of the self in contemporary, postmodern times, clearly an effect of an evermore regulated spatial and security apparatus and an intensifying anti-terror rhetoric that reinforces a disengaged public sphere by restricting movement and human interaction in both public and private space. Not simply an unfortunate side effect of the contemporary social order, postmodern pathological
tendencies are both anticipated and desired outcomes of such spatial violence; for, a fearful
and anxiety-ridden public is more likely to conform to the hegemonic doctrine than is a free,
autonomous, and healthy public.

Our current order thus underscores Doreen Massey’s Lefebvrian argument that the
social constitution of space influences the spatial construction of the social, implicating space
and the spatial in the production not only of history but also of politics (*Space* 254).
Accordingly, a spatial practice defined by detachment and segregation will breed an anxiety
ridden populace fearful of the unknown Other, in this way compromising the development of
human agency and public dialogue so central to the ideal of a democratic, inclusive, and
engaged public sphere. To use Soja’s terminology, space in the “postmetropolis” has
become a “carceral archipelago” of “normalized enclosures and fortified sites that both
voluntarily and involuntarily barricade individuals and communities in visible and not-so-
visible urban islands, overseen by restructured forms of public and private power and
authority” (299). Initially conceived as a response to urban fear, the “enclosure movement”
(Mitchell 150), epitomized on a spatial or architectural level by gated communities, border
walls, restrictive public spaces, and other forms of geographical segmentation, and on a
juridico-political level by increasingly normalized restrictions on supposedly free movement
rights via national politics of citizenship, border crossing, and immigration, has, instead of
lessening levels of fear and paranoia, in fact heightened a consciousness of insecurity and
underlying fear of the Other in both local and global contexts.

The imprisonment in space of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable populations
has been at once a response to and a propagator of this underlying social fear of the Other.
Following Claude Lévi-Strauss’s anthropoemic strategy of avoidance for dealing with the
Other, whose “forms . . . are spatial separation, urban ghettos, selective access to spaces and selective barring from using them” (Bauman 101), marginalized alien “Third World” populations are restricted entry into developed “First World” nations, contradicting freedom of movement rights enshrined in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country” (United Nations). Underlying all other human liberties, freedom of movement is the “first and most fundamental of man’s [sic] liberties. Without it, other rights are precarious. . . . The world order depends on freedom of movement” (Juss 289); for, it is this freedom that promotes individual self-determination and self-realization within an individual. In other words, freedom of movement is the basis of human agency or subjectivity, a term intrinsically connected to individual self-consciousness about one’s identity and place in the world. Nevertheless, as evermore rigid migration policies reveal, “what is an ‘indispensable’ human right is increasingly seen by developed states as an ‘inconvenient’ human right” (Harvey and Barnidge 1).

Because the contemporary physical environment caters to the paranoia and fear of the elite classes by imprisoning marginal actors to spaces of squalor and subordination on the other side of the gate, fence, or border wall, it is implicit in the propagation of postmodern pathologies. This conclusion brings us back to the question of ethics and moral responsibility towards the Other begun in chapter one: In a globalized landscape, how does the Other paradoxically become more distanced even as the accelerated pace of flows seemingly brings the world together? The fundamental question is not how to treat or “cure” individuals with so-called pathological conditions but, instead, how to repair society itself of its psychologically devastating political and socio-economic policies and institutions.
Indeed, Bauman considers the underlying fear at the centre of the pathology of the Other to be “a pathology of public space resulting in a pathology of politics: the wilting and waning of the art of dialogue and negotiation, the substitution of the techniques of escape and elision for engagement and mutual commitment” (109, emphasis added). For Bauman, the self-identified, contemporary public space is void of politics and public issues and is therefore not conducive to the cultivation of a genuine public sphere characterized by public dialogue and a concern for the public good: “Public power has lost much of its awesome and resented oppressive potency—but it has also lost a good part of its enabling capacity. . . . Any true liberation calls today for more, not less, of the ‘public sphere’ and ‘public power’. It is now the public sphere which badly needs defence against the invading private” (51). Because it constrains genuine human connectivities and thus the development of legitimate public spheres, postmodern spatial practice jeopardizes our modern understanding of human rights and expectations regarding civil society.

An important consideration of the destruction of public space is the historical space-rights nexus, which sees civil rights destroyed alongside deteriorating public spaces: “With the destruction of geographical space, civil rights, which were always bound to a particular territory, disappear” (Breuer 235). Additionally, the very notion of the public sphere and an active polity runs counter to the trend of contemporary social acceleration, which promotes speed and busyness over such time-consuming requirements of citizenship and the public sphere as public deliberation and debate (Scheuerman 296). In short, the spatial arrangement of the postmodern twenty-first-century built environment negates the promotion of a common humanity central to the ideal of a Habermasian inclusive public sphere as it serves instead to separate and segregate. A corollary of quelled communal and personal agency,
these isolating spatial conditions aggravate sensations of fear, anxiety, detachment, and indifference towards the Other, who remains disconnected in an inhospitable zone outside the boundaries of a defined community, like the *segundones* and especially *tercerones* in Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta*. In the following section, I turn to this text in order to discuss the intersection of contemporary society’s politics of fear and exclusion with the consequent and growing feeling of indifference and detachment from the Other, an individualistic postmodern pathological trend par excellence.

### 2.2 Tripartite Space and the Politics of Exclusion in Héctor Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta*

The Colombian novel *Angosta*, written by Medellín native Héctor Abad Faciolince, is in many ways representative of the varied and dispersed landscape of twenty-first-century narrative production in Colombia and Latin America. Characterized by such topoi as fragmentation of the self and society; decentred and diasporic identities; revisionist and alternative histories; a return to realism and the tangible; and an ever-expanding interest in representing the struggles, realities, and testimonies of marginalized and abject characters that inhabit the peripheries of society (i.e., women, the indigenous, homosexuals, migrants, the poor, the displaced, victims of violence), contemporary literature in the region captures the social vicissitudes and human consequences of an increasingly unequal and disordered social geography. Whereas humans have difficulty imagining the Other and his or her pain, literature has a greater capacity to represent just that (Scarry 287). As discussed above, while the inclination to represent Latin American heterogeneity via the marginal subject is rooted in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary production, it acquires a particular nuance in
contemporary times. In contrast to writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who propagate hegemonic discourses in their construction of the Other by authorizing a nationalist “historical project” that demands “the symbolic incorporation of peoples and practices persisting in the margins of society or nation into a sanctioned form of representation” (Legrás 4) vis-à-vis national identity, a movement culminating in the institutionalization of the hypermodernist novels of the Boom (Levinson 22), twenty-first-century Latin American literatures transcend this nationalist project as they engage instead with globalization’s decentred trans- and postnationalist problematic. Texts of the new millennium are distinguishable in this way even from late twentieth-century post-Boom projects such as testimonio, exile writing, and revisionist historiographies, which are motivated by a postmodern ethics to rewrite national history from the victim’s perspective (Gugelberger and Kearney 6). Undoubtedly influenced by decentring globalization processes, which evoke “a shift from two-dimensional Euclidian space with its centers and peripheries and sharp boundaries, to a multidimensional global space with unbounded, often discontinuous and interpenetrating sub-spaces . . . [that refocus] attention from communities bounded within nations and from nations themselves to spaces of which nations are components (Kearney, “The Local” 549), twenty-first-century literary production from Latin America reflects this trans- or postnational, indistinctly local or global unbounded perspective.

Writing of the ubiquitous instability, turbulence, and rupture of limits emblematic of contemporary Colombian society and narrative production, poet and critic Luz Mary Giraldo’s insight is applicable to the wider field of contemporary Latin American literary and cultural production: “Las situaciones y los personajes responden a un mundo dislocado: están
en todo aunque se sienten exiliados de sí mismos y excluidos de todo; en algunos sus signos son lo provisorio, la indiferencia, la inacción y la ausencia de rebeldía; en otros, la angustia y la perplejidad” (“Después” 15-16). While she does not utilize the term “pathology,” these geo-socially and psychologically decentering tendencies can be considered pathological insofar as they run counter to the task of humanism, which, if understood as “the development of our individual and collective potential as human beings” (Levin 3), requires a strong global, transnational public sphere attentive to the needs and well-being of humanity, including the peripheral Other. Characters in Angosta suffer not only from a postmodern instability brought about through poverty, corruption, violence, and an impotent state—outcomes of our contemporary neoliberal capitalist society--, but also from postmodern pathologies of indifference; unquestioned acceptance; and sensations of fear, anxiety, and paranoia, which are propagated and exacerbated by the politics of exclusion underlying the spatial arrangement of the city (a metaphor for the global) itself. In response to Bauman, who, recalling Cornelius Castoriadis, cautions that “society is ill if it stops questioning itself” (215), the following analysis attempts to question the (il)logic of an immoral, inhuman, and pathogenic world order.

2.2.1 La divina comedia

The fictionalized capital of Colombia, Angosta resembles Bogotá or Medellín, in distinct geopolitical terms, but can easily be interpreted as a metaphor for any Latin American and even global metropolis reeling from the destabilizing effects of evermore
widespread political, economic, and socio-cultural disparities. Once a vast territory evoking halcyonic images of fertile lands, lush vegetation, and a vibrant ecosystem, Angosta had the potential of being great. Through the years, however, the land was developed and transformed into a site of environmental decadence amidst cultural and humanistic decay. An inter-textual reference to a geographical study of the city by the same name, adding a further signified to the “Angosta” signifier, describes it as such: “Salvo el clima, que es perfecto, todo en Angosta está mal. Podría ser el paraíso, pero se ha convertido en un infierno. . . . Hoy todo el territorio está ocupado por una metrópoli de calles abigarradas, altos edificios, fábricas, centros comerciales y miles de casitas de color ladrillo que se encaraman por la ladera de las montañas” (14). Lured by the promise of progress, the once-pleasant “pueblo aburrido y casi arcádico” (14) obliterated its past, significantly altering spatial form and practice in a short span of fifty years, as the German geographer tells us, in a decisive act of creative destruction so central to the project of modernity. That a three hundred-year-old city could change so drastically in the span of fifty years is at once impressive, on a purely architectural and infrastructural level, and tragic, on an environmental and societal level. Affirming García Canclini’s conclusion that Latin

12 According to Faciolince himself, the city of Angosta resembles numerous world locales, including Israel, Berlin, Medellín, Bogotá, and Paris:

Angosta quiere ser el resumen de muchas ciudades. Se parece a Israel, por el muro que divide en Cisjordania a palestinos e israelíes. Se parece en cierto sentido a Berlín, por el muro anterior que había y el checkpoint. Se parece a Medellín porque es un valle estrecho y por la mitad va un río. Se parece a Bogotá porque ese río termina en una gran catarata, el Salto de los desesperados. Se parece a París porque hay un barrio donde no entran ni la policía ni los bomberos y donde viven personas de otro color. Se parece a cualquier ciudad latinoamericana. (“Angosta es el resumen de muchas ciudades”)

13 See Óscar Osorio’s “Angosta y el ancho caudal de la violencia colombiana” for a close analysis of the role that violence plays in the city’s socio-spatial transformation.

14 As Volek notes, Latin America’s “magical” natural beauty has been undermined and transformed by war, a population explosion, and economically-motivated ecologically-hazardous practices such as deforestation, the
America has experienced an uneven modernity located in the continent’s socio-cultural heterogeneity and racial and economic divides, the majority of residents in Angosta have not benefited from the transformation of their city, which has witnessed a combination of urban gentrification alongside spatial and community deterioration. While the “white” dones live in an enclosed and apparently paradisiacal society with First World conditions, amenities, and concerns, remaining residents vie for space and survival in inferno-like Second and Third World conditions.

The Dantean allegory is obvious in the spatial distribution of the city, which is imagined as a vertical construction, a narrow home with three levels built one atop another due to lack of space: Paradise (Cold Land or Sektor C), the rooftop terrace, is cool, spacious, and inviting while the Inferno (Hot Land or Sektor H), the humid, dilapidated, and overcrowded basement down below, is a site to be avoided or, at best, and even then only from time to time, explored during a fun and daring night of adventure out on the town.  

From a literary perspective, Mexican Francisco Martín Moreno’s 2003 novel *Mexico sediento* paints a dystopic view of a drought-ridden Mexico City of the future, where citizens refuse to heed warnings against their over-consumption of water or accept responsibility for their city’s ecological destruction until it is too late.

15 The theme of crossing socio-geographical thresholds to seek adventure in the lower classes of society is found in other contemporary Colombian texts. In Jorge Franco’s *Rosario Tijeras* (2005), two young men from the established oligarchic class seek adventure in their relationship with the eponymous sicaria or hired assassin. The two are physically attracted to Rosario but also find a sense of exhilaration in their interactions with people from the Medellín comunas. As Antonio, the protagonist, explains: “Me metí con ellos porque los quería, porque no podía vivir sin Emilio y Rosario, y porque a esa edad quería sentir más la vida, y con ellos tenía garantizada la aventura” (35). Similarly, in Fernando Vallejo’s *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994), Fernando, a Colombian émigré who returns to his hometown of Medellín after years abroad, is shocked by the spatial and linguistic transformation of his city. An old man ready to face death, he submerges himself, and the reader, who he essentially guides through the streets of Medellín, in the new culture of violence, death, and destruction associated with the infamous sicariato through his sexual relationship with Alexis, a young sicario from the Inferno-like comunas.

15 The cultivation of drugs, and the expansion of pollution-emitting *maquiladoras*. See Volek’s introduction to *Latin America Writes Back* for more.
Purgatory (Temperate Land or Sektor T), the in-between, liminal zone, is less abhorrent and crowded than the Inferno, but is increasingly plagued by destruction, poverty, unemployment, and violence. The main characters in Angosta reside in Sektor T, on the geographical main floor of the city, in the run-down La Comedia hotel. Undermining Angosta’s segregation-based politics, some residents of the hotel could live above in Sektor C but choose to remain in T while others have moved up from the lower strata. All are itinerant and negotiate travel between zones for various reasons, namely family, work, survival, and leisure.

From a Dantean perspective, lying between the two poles of Paradise and the Inferno, Purgatory is a transitional society or limbo “where individuals learn to become citizens of the ideal space” (Ferrante 198). Accordingly, residents of Sektor T must negotiate their in-between, liminal position in society. Whereas ethnographer Arnold van Gennep considers liminality an intermediary process,16 anthropologist Victor Turner posits its potential for permanence: “Turner, in effect, supplements van Gennep’s temporal, processual view of liminality with a spatial one. While for van Gennep the limen is always a threshold, for Turner it can also be a place of habitation” (Pérez Firmat xiv). In this manner, for the majority of second castes, Purgatory is an inescapable habitat. Though it is true that Sektor C is theoretically open to all who achieve financial success, making it possible to overcome the liminal position, this only occurs in the most unusual circumstances. The protagonist Jacobo

16 Van Gennep coined the term “liminal” in his seminal text Rites de passage (1909) as a metaphor for the social boundaries one crosses during ritual ceremonies. After a process of separation from the previous state, the individual passes through a liminal phase, where he or she belongs neither to the previous state nor to the new condition, which is reached only after the final phase of incorporation.
Lince’s ascension is a case in point: he is granted residency in Sektor C upon receiving an inheritance from his mother in the amount of one million dollars, the minimum bank balance required to become a *don*. While Jacobo is free to exercise his human agency by making a conscious decision to remain a resident of Sektor T, and the *La Comedia* hotel, for most citizens of Purgatory, imposed limits and laws act as controlling mechanisms that emplace them in a permanent limbo. In section 2.2.2, I will detail the causes and effects of Angosta’s divisive politics of space.

A spatial microcosm of Angosta, the nine-floor *La Comedia* hotel mirrors the decadence and vertical caste-based structure of the city in terms of its spatial practice, albeit inverting the ascent to paradise from a bottom-up structure to a top-down structure: “En La Comedia, cuanto más se sube, los habitantes más bajan de categoría, los clientes reciben menos atenciones y son tratados con menos consideración” (50). The second floor, which is divided into four apartment-studios reserved for “personas de cierta categoría” (48–49), has two permanent tenants, including Jacobo; the third to eighth floors have fifteen rooms to a floor, some of which have been condemned and others of which are rented on a more or less permanent basis; and the most undesirable ninth floor, termed the “*gallinero*” or “*chicken coop,*” is reminiscent of a Dickensian boarding house. The small, crowded space accommodates the hot water tank, the laundry room, shared showers and lavatories, and nine tiny rooms generally rented to single people, young couples, or senior citizens abandoned or forgotten by their families. The juxtaposition of the second and ninth floors parallels that of

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17 Abad Faciolince writes himself into the novel through the protagonist’s last name and in an explicit self-referential nod to his 1996 work *Tratado de culinaria para mujeres tristes* (*Cookbook for Sad Women*). While not an autobiographical novel, there are many points of contact between *Angosta* and Abad Faciolince’s 2006 memoirs *El olvido que seremos* as well as his 2009 hybrid text (story, essay, autobiography) *Traiciones de la memoria.*
Sektors C and H, or Paradise and the Inferno. A close reading of the descriptions of both Sektor H and the chicken coop reveals symmetries at the level of language and imagery:

Huele a sangre y a muerte por las calles; también a fritanga, porque viven friendo cosas—buñuelos, plátanos maduros, chorizos o empanadas si hay bonanza. No hay ni un instante del día o de la noche en que no suene música. . . . La vida es azarosa en el Sektor C [H], y muy amarga, porque está todo el tiempo salpicada de muerte. Casi todas las noches aparecen mujeres violadas, niños con tiros de fusil en la frente y muchachos asesinados, a veces decapitados, con las partes repartidas en distintos costales. (198-199)

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En el gallinero, el hotel cambia de olor (el señor Rey no quiso acompañarme, <<Yo por allá no subo, joven, lo lamento>>), . . . se vuelve una mezcolanza de ajos y chorizos fritos, rancios ya, un vaho de fritanga, tabaco negro, orina fermentada y cuerpos sudorosos, con las hormonas en franca decadencia. (72)

Both sites are thoroughly grotesque and mount attacks on the senses: it is not only the unbearable heat that suffocates but the likewise unbearable smell, noise, and visual field. This suffocating quality is so abhorrent that these spaces are generally avoided and ignored not only by residents lucky enough to inhabit the above spheres but also by the juridico-legal apparatus. Señor Rey (literally “king”), the owner of the hotel, is curiously absent from the disorder of the ninth floor, allowing Carlota, the de facto manager of the chicken coop, herself a grotesque figure described as a menacing “masa de grasa” (72), to maintain order in her space by employing whatever draconian tactics she sees fit, in much the same way as the
police do not patrol Sektor H.\textsuperscript{18} Notwithstanding the arbitrary deployment of police power via organized raids and the imposition of semi-regular states of siege in H, which are of course enacted not to protect residents of H but to hunt down terror suspects charged with plotting against Sektor C, the police leave (dis)order and (in)justice in the hands of street gangs.

The transformation of the \textit{La Comedia} hotel from a five-star luxury hotel catering to movie stars, bull fighting champions, politicians, and royalty in transit to a deteriorating boarding house that shelters a motley crew of characters in limbo brings to light the changing role of the hotel in contemporary society. Following Robert Davidson’s suggestion that the hotel has transitioned from the archetypal modernist \textit{space} of travel, “decompression,” and upper class transculturation to a postmodernist \textit{non-place} with the latent political potential of both interdiction and exclusion (12-13), in the Angostan context, an exclusionary apparatus prohibits travel and instead contains the hotel’s residents to a permanent non-place. No longer a temporary stopover for the upper classes, who avoid the evermore-rundown Sektor T, the \textit{La Comedia} hotel becomes a permanent limbo for the middle class. However, while the hotel’s degradation parallels the historical spatio-civil decadence of Sektors T and H and Angosta’s class-based socio-spatial distribution, it does not conform entirely to the city’s exclusionary and repressive politics, partially subverting the city’s geography of exclusion and depersonalization.

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\textsuperscript{18} The absence of law and the police in the Colombian context is further critiqued in Laura Restrepo’s \textit{La multitud errante} (2001), in which the 9\textsuperscript{th} of April refuge center for displaced migrants is left to fend for itself amidst increasing violence in the region: “Sabíamos que no era fácil llamar la atención o pedir una mano en medio de un país ensordecido por el ruido de la guerra. Y si era casi imposible lograrlo desde una de las ciudades grandes, más aún desde estos despeñaderos ariscos hasta donde no arrima la ley de Dios ni la de los hombres, ni sube la fuerza pública, . . . ni asoma el interés de los diarios, ni se estiran los bordes de los mapas” (118).
Unlike the insularity of the three sectors of Angosta, residents from the hotel’s stratified floors interact freely and willingly with one another and with hotel employees. Jacobo develops new and maintains established friendships with residents from all social strata: the proprietor Arturo Rey and his wife Catalina; miss Luisita, an older woman who also resides on the second floor; Professor Dan, a first caste Hungarian immigrant who has chosen to live on the third floor of La Comedia; the gay hairdresser Antonio, and his boyfriend Charlie, who live together on the fifth floor; and from the chicken coop, Angosta’s most celebrated bohemian cultural commentator, Agustín Quiroz; recovering alcoholic and cocaine addict, Dionisio Jursich, both of whom also work in Jacobo’s bookstore; a young poet undergoing an ultimately fatal process of personal and social awakening, Andrés Zuleta; and the brazen tercerona Virgina Buendía. Select residents interact with one another at Señor Rey’s monthly dinner parties, where they mingle and discuss literature, culture, history, and politics, enacting conditions inherent to a strong public sphere. Somewhat paradoxically, while Señor Rey attempts to preserve some of the decorum previously accorded to his high-society clients through these parties shrouded in the nostalgia of days gone by, his guests hail from all floors of the hotel, including the chicken coop. In fact, that Quiroz is invited to the monthly affairs causes great chagrin to Catalina, who, conforming to the exclusionary tactics of Angosta’s socio-spatial politics, avoids socializing with the poor and badly dressed: “Ese barbudo no come, se viste como un mendigo, envuelve los aromas de los platos en tabaco y en tufo de aguardiente, fuera de que termina borracho y hay que llevarlo al cuarto en andas, es el colmo” (96). Despite her vociferous objections, Señor Rey overrules her class-based prejudice. From his perspective, Quiroz lives in the chicken coop only because of financial constraints and not as a reflection of his intelligence, his character,
or his position as an inferior or subordinate human being, a viewpoint that stands in sharp
contrast to Sektor C’s, and to a lesser extent Sektor T’s, engagement with moral exclusion
facilitated by Angosta’s discriminative economic imaginative geography. So, while Catalina
would like to uphold Angosta’s exclusionary politics, Señor Rey, positioned as the “king” of
the hotel or sovereign leader of the microcosm, undermines the conventional geoethical
politics of class-based, economic separation.

Moreover, despite its sensually grotesque nature, the chicken coop is not a wholly
oppressive space. Although it is a bound space, the young Andrés finds a sense of freedom
in his admittedly disgusting little room: “Era un pésimo cuarto, más pequeño que el mío en la
casa, en un piso hediondo, pero yo me sentía libre y contento” (72). For him, the hotel, and
his room in particular, is decidedly heterotopic insofar as it provides him with a space of
liberation from his repressive home life, away from the reproaching gaze of his family, a
space in which he has the liberty to write freely: “Me siento rico. Tengo un espacio todo mío
y puedo escribir sin temor a que me lean y que se burlen. Me parece increíble no tener que
escribir con alfabeto cifrado. Al fin escribo también en libertad” (91). If Foucault
appropriated the medical term heterotopia to describe spaces of otherness open to alternative
attitudes and behaviours (“Of Other Spaces”), David Harvey politicizes the concept within
postmodern thought in his reformulation of heterotopias principally as sites of resistance and
freedom in a repressive world. In another yet related approximation, Kevin Hetherington
defines heterotopias as spaces where alternate forms of social ordering emerge in contrast to
the status quo. It is in this sense that the hotel becomes a site of resistance against the
exclusionary politics of the city wherein the established social order is questioned and
subverted, demonstrating the potential for alternative public spheres and modes of social
ordering. That the hotel offers Andrés the opportunity to write is significant considering Mihai Spariosu’s redefinition of “literary discourse not as marginal, but as liminal—that is, as a threshold or passageway allowing access to alternative worlds that may subsequently become actualized through communal choice and socio-cultural practice” (32). Following Spariosu, who builds upon Turner’s theory that liminality implies not only transition but also the potentiality of alternative social arrangements (Spariosu 33), it is through writing in liminal space that Andrés first questions and later attempts (albeit unsuccessfully) to reorder Angosta’s spatial politics of exclusion.

Beyond the name and spatial practice of the *La Comedia* hotel, further references to *The Divine Comedy* are explicit throughout the novel, particularly in the names of people and places: Paradise, Purgatory, Inferno, Beatriz, Virginia, the Hill of Virgil, and the Devil’s Rock. The metaphor is not analogous however. To the contrary, Dante’s characters appear in Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta* in antithetical roles. Like Dante the pilgrim, who is led through the three realms of the afterlife, Jacobo journeys through the three spheres of Angosta’s seemingly immoral space; however, Jacobo is not so much in search of personal, societal, or spiritual salvation as he is in search of adventure and a sense of freedom in a society stifled by poverty, violence, and legal restrictions on free movement throughout the city. Jacobo, a quintessential postmodern soul, is lost in his “limbo de indiferencia” (136), concerned more for his own sexual escapades and conquests than he is about moralizing society. Beatrice, the personification of faith, grace, and pure love, who guides Dante

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19 Fernando Vallejo’s 1994 novel *La virgen de los sicarios* displays a similar trope of a geo-political Dantean cityscape. In this novel, the Medellín comunas incarnate the same infernal decadence of Angosta’s Sector H, a once-paradisiacal terrain converted into a sensorially offensive Inferno far removed from order, the law, and/or human rights discourse.
through the celestial realm in *The Divine Comedy*, is recast in *Angosta* as Jacobo’s young and beautiful first-caste lover—“la belleza encarnada” (77), according to the omniscient narrator’s footnote. While physically stunning and angelic, this Beatriz lives a privileged life of opulence, consumption, and self-interest. A typical young Colombian elite, the daughter of a powerful senator, she plans to do her postgraduate work in the United States, and it is for this reason that she hires Jacobo as her English tutor. As Luis Felipe Valencia Tamayo notes, in Sektor C, English is the new standard: “el inglés ya no admite aquí subtítulos y es la esperanza de contacto con otros mundos.” That English, a global symbol of power, is the key to global ventures like Beatriz’s further underscores the increasingly potent power/mobility nexus.

Notwithstanding the importance of English, Beatriz is attracted to her tutor mostly as a diversion. To this end, her curiosity is peaked upon discovering that Jacobo, a *segundón* no less, had successfully duped her powerful father and his henchmen by claiming that his last name was Wills and that he had originally come from Scotland, a role he assumes to give himself authority as a native speaker of English: “la fascinaba que un segundón hubiera podido burlar por un tiempo la vigilancia de su padre, el senador, y hasta meterse en el corazón mismo de su casa, una de las más custodiadas de Tierra Fría, con otro nombre y una identidad distinta a la real” (177). On another level, having had very limited previous contact with a *segundón*, for Beatriz, a relationship with Jacobo represents subversion. On a sexual level, she wants to experience what it would be like to sleep with a *segundón*, as though a *segundón* were a different species altogether:

Beatriz le dijo, en regular inglés: <<This is the first time that I have a real contact with a segundón, you know. I never have had a lover from down Angosta. Many
dones, you know, I’ve had many dones, but no one segundón or tercerón. From that part of the city I know only the maids, the car driver, maybe Gastón,²⁰ that’s all, but I don’t want to fuck with killers like him, even if he would, you know>>. (178)

This language and manner of thinking reduces Jacobo and other non-*dones* to foreign, exotic curios, expendable objects to be consumed. A prime example of the postmodern pathological trend towards detachment and depersonalisation, Beatriz and Jacobo’s sexual relationship is based purely on individualistic urges and desires. That commodification and avarice replace morality and virtue in Angosta’s so-called Paradise, however, is not surprising considering the city’s imaginative geography and, more specifically, Paradise’s glorification of economic globalization, including the concomitant liberalization of borders for purely economic means versus humanistic or humanitarian calls for the free movement of peoples.

Whereas Virgil, the allegory of human reason and Dante’s pagan yet venerated escort of the underworld, is generally interpreted as a wholly tragic figure whose place is usurped by the gracious Beatrice, who subsequently guides Dante into Paradise (Toynbee 642), Virginia, Jacobo’s third caste friend-cum-lover, not only leads him through the depths of Sektor H but remains the central feminine figure in Jacobo’s life. Although her life is tragic in the sense that she was born into the depths of the Inferno to parents who, like millions of others, were displaced and forced to resettle in the slums on the outskirts of Angosta, Virginia learns to survive and even thrive in her inherited circumstance. She slowly makes

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²⁰ Fearsome and murderous, Gastón is Beatriz’s father’s head security guard and active member of the paramilitary group known as the Secur, an obvious reference to the AUC, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia or the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia.
her way out of the Inferno, moving up to Purgatory and then Paradise before emigrating entirely from the country. While there are tragic tones to her forced geopolitical dislocation, Virgina is empowered by her mobility, which presents itself as a valuable option to the certain death of staying in place. Known as Candela because of the bright red colour of her hair, she is attractive not in the same seductive sense as the angelic Beatriz, but in a more spellbinding or magnetic way: “Hay algo en su cara que se parece a un imán y que impide a todo el que la ve quitarle los ojos de encima” (146). She is feisty and irreverent, and not afraid to voice her opinion about the ramifications of Angosta’s politics of exclusion or even to test its spatial boundaries. It is Virginia who stimulates Andres’s consciousness to the politics of exclusion and emplacement, an ultimately fatal awakening that regrettably leads to further destruction, death, and dispersion.

As these short character portraits demonstrate, Angosta categorically challenges and subverts the traditional Dantesque binaries associated with heaven and hell, namely the characterization of paradise as an ideal or utopian space and hell as entirely corrupt. In revealing the corrosive, dystopian, and pathological elements that operate within the supposedly ideal space of Paradise, the novel questions the ideologies of exclusion underlying the contemporary social order. Tragically, while residents of the La Comedia hotel attempt to subvert Angostan spatial practice, they cannot escape it and are thus prone to suffer from the social consequences and evermore “normal” pathologies associated with the postmodern public sphere.21

21 Though Jacobo and Virginia flee from Angosta to Argentina, one of the few remaining countries willing to accept visitors from Angosta without a passport, they are likely to encounter similar technologies of social control in their new environment. Angosta is, after all, a metaphoric microcosm of the global sphere.
2.2.2 The Angostan Postmetropolis

Angosta’s Dantian cityscape imbues the metropolis with an exclusionary political ideology based on hegemonic power structures concerned with maintaining the status quo, namely securing the comfort and security of the minority above at the expense of the majority down below. While the name of the city itself, literally translated as “narrow,” evokes an image of a constricted and claustrophobic space, suggesting that overcrowding and overpopulation may be innate qualities of the space itself, as Henri Lefebvre tells us, space is not natural, scientific, and apolitical but “a product literally filled with ideologies” ("Reflections" 31). To this end, space is an active, contested and wholly political social construct fundamental to the play of power politics, an idea Lefebvre outlines more completely in *The Production of Space* (1974), where he suggests that space relations serve Gramsci’s politics of hegemony. In other words, state control by the dominant classes, particularly in contemporary capitalist milieus, is propagated through the very organization and manipulation of space in society. Informed by Foucault, James Tyner succinctly summarizes the link between space and population as follows: “The meanings and uses of space are never separate from the contestations over bodies and populations: Who, or which group, is granted or denied access to certain spaces? What activities are deemed acceptable or not? And who has the authority, the ability, to define such spaces?” (34). In the Angostan context, while the natural environment determines socio-political space to the extent that geographic boundaries between the three sectors of the city are natural--“La ciudad no se dividió de un día para otro; ya, en parte, había nacido separada por la geografía y por la riqueza de los habitantes de los distintos sitios. Los tres niveles, o los tres pisos de la ciudad, hicieron que esta división fuera más clara y nítida que en otras partes del país y del mundo”
space is nonetheless politicized and sharpened by the built environment, whose territorial borders and ubiquitous security apparatus restricts freedom of movement throughout the city.

Angosta’s spatial practice, understood as “a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice” (Lefebvre, *Production* 8), is captured in its Dantean distribution. Beyond simply dividing the city into three clearly demarcated zones, the Dantean cityscape provides a visual conceptual framework from which to approach the space/society dialectic in Angosta. For Dante, the city is society’s most basic and essential political unit: it requires a governing authority towards which citizens must act subordinately if the city’s goals of peace and prosperity for all are to be met. According to Dantean scholar Joan Ferrante, *The Divine Comedy* reveals three distinct models of society: “The corrupt society based on greed and selfishness without order or justice (Hell), the transitional society of men working together to rid themselves of disruptive elements and to achieve a common goal (Purgatory), and the ideal society, based on love, wisdom, and justice, in which all share in the joy and harmony, presided over by the supreme Emperor, God (Paradise)” (42). In Dante’s allegorical conceptualization, Paradise is the only space in which the city can achieve its goals. Angostan society propagates a similar mythology of paradisiacal harmony insofar as the tranquil, idyllic life of Sektor C is offered as a paragon or model of what society can achieve. That this harmonious ideal is rooted in a mythic tradition points to its feigned reality. In other words, the achievements of Paradise obviate the abjectness of the Inferno and the veritable iniquity of Angosta’s spatial politics.

From the raw optics of Andrés, who is granted a pass to work above in Sektor C, Paradise is a utopic land far removed from his own reality: “La vida en Paradiso es una copia
de la vida en Soho. . . . Los hospitales funcionan, los dones no se mueren de bala, sino de viejos, de cáncer o de infarto, como si vivieran en Zurich o en Tokio, porque arriba los forajidos de la Secur no matan o matan mucho menos, y las explosiones de los kamikazes tuercen la vida, pero no modifican las estadísticas” (226). Sektor C is positioned as a contemporary metropolis that could rival any First World European or North American city. In this respect, it is imagined as a globalized First World in the Third World, an image that accentuates the growing disparities not only between the first and the third or developing worlds, but also amongst populations within a national context. Just as Sektor C is unattainable for a second caste like Andrés, who must instead negotiate his survival in Sektor T, the poor and disenfranchised who live on the peripheries of major First World cities do not actually operate within First World conditions, reflecting the global trend towards a “peripheralization at the core” (Kearney, “The Local” 554). Manuel Castells similarly refers to “a new geography of social exclusion” (168) or “Fourth Worldization” brought about through informational, global capitalism. Clearly, Angosta destabilizes the ecclesiastical notion of a Paradise for all citizens and replaces that ideal with an exclusionary and fragmented secular model that expels the majority and restricts entrance to the few with sufficient economic power. Like Thomas More’s island utopia, Sektor C has to remain self-contained and for that reason outsiders from T and H are restricted. While it is true that some second and third castes are granted access to C for reasons of employment, as in Andrés’s case, the majority work in menial jobs to which no first caste would relegate him or herself. The parallels with Latino and other cultural minority cleaners, cooks, farmhands, and garbage collectors struggling to survive in Europe and North America are unequivocal. From
this perspective, Paradise is an extreme example of a gated community, or “carceral city” (Soja), which relies on the politics of exclusion to maintain its First World standing.22

Following the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, the art or science of governing the state and population via coercion, suasion, and the regulation of space, state power in Angosta is propagated through fear-inducing technologies of discipline and surveillance, juridico-legal regulations on movement, and a spatial politics of exclusion that emplaces people in their demarcated zones. In Angostan society, space is absolutely imbued with power: the most powerful have freedom of movement while the least powerful are enslaved, an apt metaphor considering the analogy between the politics of exclusion and

22 Within the context of contemporary Colombian narrative, an even more obvious example of a gated community designed to separate the First and Third Worlds is found in Laura Restrepo’s La novia oscura (1999). Another community transformed by modernity’s promise of progress, Tora (Barrancabermeja) places its hopes for salvation in the Troco (Tropical Oil Company), which sets up a refinery on the outskirts of the city. Openly exploiting Colombia’s natural and human resources, the Troco unsurprisingly maintains its distance from the Colombian people, segregating their North American workers and their families from the locals. The staff base, with its cultivated lawns, swimming pool, and tennis courts, stands in sharp contrast to the quality of life experienced in Tora, the red light district of La Catunga, and more acutely, Colombian Troco workers. The gated base for North American staff is conceived as a mini United States, “una réplica reducida del American way of life” (236), that, like the United States itself, is off limits to poor Colombians. Todos Los Santos attempts to explain Unitedstatesian engagement with moral exclusion to her young godchildren:

--¿Y por qué tienen a una pobre gente encerrada detrás de esta malla?
--Los encerrados somos nosotros, los de afuera, porque ellos pueden salir y en cambio a nosotros no nos dejan entrar.
--¿Y por qué no nos dejan entrar?
--Porque nos tienen miedo.
--¿Y por qué nos tienen miedo?
--Porque somos pobres y morenos y no hablamos el inglés. (238).

This final line is echoed in Angosta by Andrés as he begins to understand the injustice of the city’s spatial practice: “Este muro no estaba para impedirnos salir de la Tierra Templada—de hecho no existía la prohibición de salir—, sino para impedirnos entrar en Tierra Fría” (190). Like the lower sectors of Angosta, which are prohibited and inhibited from entering modernity, Tora, and more specifically La Catunga, falls into a Benjaminian detritus before it is completely destroyed by a government-run initiative to sanitize and gentrify the neighbourhood.
South African Apartheid. As Jacobo explicitly puts it: “¿qué podemos decir de una aldea que no deja libertad de movimiento a sus habitantes? Simple: que practica una política de Apartamiento, es decir, de Apartheid, para ser más claros, así éste no sea racial sino estrictamente económico” (240). This spatially and technologically segregated society mirrors in many ways the “intensification of social and spatial controls brought about by new developments in the privatization, policing, surveillance, governance and design of the built environment and the political geography of cityspace” (299) that Soja explores in his influential text Postmetropolis (2000). Postmetropolitan space is obsessed with security and is motivated by a desire to create secure spaces via physical and ideological barricades designed not only to block out danger and violence but also to minimize contact amongst divergent social classes, reducing the potential for an inclusive public sphere and an empowered civil society. Fortified spaces such as privatopias and gated communities give residents within the so-called fortress a sense of security from the outside world not only by repressing the movement of those on the outside but also by obviating the pain of the excluded Other by rendering invisible his or her suffering. Angostan society can be classified as postmetropolitan in this regard: the upper classes demand spatial and social exclusion from the masses and see increased segregation, privatization, and surveillance as their tool against perceived threats to their tranquil aesthetic and material existence. In effect, though juridical restrictions on movement are unidirectional inasmuch as there are no physical barriers or legal apparatuses restricting top-down movement through the city, residents from above rarely, if ever, venture downward to the underclass, which is, in their

23 Considered the quintessential edgecity, privatopias are private housing developments administered by independent homeowners’ associations. See Dear and Flusty and MacKenzie for more information on the rise of privatopias in North America.
view, not only dangerous, insecure, and contaminated, but viscerally and aesthetically repulsive.

As Bruno Palacio, one of Angosta’s most celebrated architects, acknowledges, while the first castes in Sektor C may recognize the injustice of the city’s politics, they are not prepared to make changes or concessions to provoke justice. Unlike great modernist urban development projects in Latin America that, despite their failure, were at least motivated by the ideal of national progress and social transformation beyond the confines of localized spatio-architectonic projects (Read 612), Palacio’s stance reflects a typically privileged and self-interested postmodern spatial ideology of exclusion. Unwilling to share his inherited fortune and privileges, Palacio chooses instead to rationalize exclusionary technologies of power as a necessary, inevitable, and unalterable evil, a stance that recalls Bauman’s indictment of immorality and the TINA creed in this chapter’s opening epigraph:

No era un problema de querer o no, simplemente en Paradiso no cabía tanta gente, y si los dejaran entrar terminarían con el paisaje, con las normas de convivencia, amenazarían de plano toda una cultura construida lentamente y con muchos sacrificios a lo largo del tiempo. Por eso consideraba necesario el Check Point, el 
obstacle zone
que estaba construyendo el gobierno sobre la cresta del altiplano, y los controles feroces para que nadie se colara. (238-239)

\[24\] In his article “Axes of Projection: Poetics of Urbanization and Globalisation in the Americas.” Justin Read refers specifically to Lúcio Costa’s and Oscar Niemeyer’s Brasilia project, which linked modernist architectural functionalism with political-economic development or modernization. While the project was spatio-architectonically localized in Brasilia, metonymically, the vision of a modern First World Brasilian body politic was to be extended to the whole of Brazil: “Brasilia was to be the microcosm of what Brazil as a whole was to become after 1960. . . so that the master plan of the city would become the master plan of the nation” (615).
This type of moral exclusion, which “rationalizes and excuses harm inflicted on those outside the scope of justice” (Opotow 156) through established and accepted social conventions, effectively displaces *segundones* and particularly *tercerones* from the juridico-legal apparatus. In line with social psychologist Susan Opotow’s contention that “[e]xcluding others from the scope of justice means viewing them as unworthy of fairness, resources, or sacrifice, and seeing them as expendable, undeserving, exploitable, or irrelevant” (156), *tercerones* are dehumanized by the upper sectors, who consider them a genetic flaw, “una distinta especie subhumana” (199). In Palacio’s imaginary, he is more deserving of comfort, beauty, and a good quality of life than the offensive alien Other across the border. The Check Point akin to an international border crossing between Sektors C and T, which separates the *dones* from the masses and safeguards the first castes from the apparent dangers lurking down below, plays into the *dones*’ engagement with moral exclusion as it spatializes difference, diminishing the potential for meaningful interaction amongst residents of the three sectors. The border wall legitimizes moral and structural violence by designating particular spaces as “ours” or “theirs,” in turn marking particular groups as normal versus foreign, Same versus Other. In Angosta, the Others are banned from Paradise and contained in “their” Inferno, “their” designated space in which they are, in theory, free to behave as they like. According to Palacio: “Los de abajo también pueden construir su propio espacio ideal, y prohibir la entrada de nosotros los de F [C], si quieren” (239). Of course, this is, simply put, neither feasible nor reasonable. Palacio’s contention that it is is a further example of upper class engagement with moral exclusion.

The Check Point, the most pronounced example of an exclusive postmetropolitan fortified enclosure, is protected by guards who demand identification and government-issued
provisional or permanent passes before granting residents entry into C. That the English term “Check Point” is injected into the Spanish-language text is worth noting: the use of English creates a rupture in the flow of the novel comparable to the disruption and sense of estrangement imposed on characters not only by the physical border crossing itself but also by the stressful and degrading process associated with the act of crossing. In the event that computers are not working, not an infrequent occurrence, residents are required to submit to humiliating strip searches, once again calling into question fundamental human rights. The entire process is dehumanizing and inescapable for a second caste like Andrés, who works in the upper sector: “No podría tener una hoja más limpia, y sin embargo cada mañana es la misma tortura: media hora de fila, un cuarto de hora de escáner e inspección, dos horas cuando las máquinas están descompuestas. Entonces nos tocan todo el cuerpo con las manos y a veces nos desnudan para inspecciones completas” (133). While these borders are undeniably permeable, as are all borders, residents who travel through the Check Point system know that they will be surveilled and act accordingly, actualizing the panoptic effect. They take responsibility for acquiring all requisite documentation and paperwork, as defined by state-controlled and state-defined parameters, and in that way are forced to operate within the system. To be sure, the point of the border crossing and its related bureaucratic requirements is not only to regulate but to discipline, distribute, and locate bodies in space (Foucault, Discipline 143) to the degree that, even for those who denounce the system, it acts as a normalizing and disciplining tool.

The wall under construction comparable to the Great Wall of China, the obstacle zone referenced above, further extends the panoptic schema of Angosta. The border wall recalls the image of the panoptic surveillance tower at the heart of Foucault’s assertion that
discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space and that regulated movement is fundamental to the maintenance of social order (Discipline 141-49). Although originally envisaged as a model penitentiary, the panoptic framework is applicable to all spatial practice: “Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used” (205). The elevated wall will provide a higher surveillance vantage point, allowing for more intense vigilance over the border crossing, Sektor C, and beyond. Reflecting on his city’s panoptic security apparatus, Andrés writes:

Aquí los dones de Angosta, que son los aliados de los países ricos del mundo, tratan de mantener a raya a la horda de pobres que quisieran emigrar a esos países. Los encierran, los enjaulan en grandes campos de miseria. . . . [H]ay que encerrar y dominar a las masas innumerables de los pobres como yo, que si pudiéramos, emigraríamos al mundo de los ricos. (229)

As outlined in chapter one, this “panopticization” parallels the growing trend, particularly in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, towards increased surveillance and the use of increasingly intelligent tracking technologies the world over. Considered a threat to normative systems and established relations of power and domination, the poor masses are restricted in an imbalance and, should they attempt to subvert the disparity, are hunted down like animals. Gloria Anzaldúa provides an apt description of this oppressive reality in her seminal text exploring the United States-Mexico borderlands: “[The U.S. Border Patrol] set traps around the river bends beneath the bridge. Hunters in army-green uniforms stalk and track these economic refugees by the powerful nightvision of electronic sensing devices. . . . Cornered by flashlights, frisked, . . . los mojados are handcuffed, locked in jeeps, and then
kicked back across the border” (34-35). Despite having been published more than twenty years ago, Anzaldúa’s description remains accurate, save for improved, twenty-first-century surveillance and military technologies. Both a cause and an effect of heightened immigrant/immigration anxiety, the fortification movement has undoubtedly benefited from a largely misconstrued and one-sided post-9/11 security rhetoric (Payan 126).

If the effects of Angosta’s spatial arrangement materialize in obvious ways in the lower classes—poverty, hunger, anger, violence, distrust—, the upper classes are likewise yet dissimilarly afflicted by the postmetropolitan security apparatus. In pathological terms, residents of Paradise exhibit an underlying anxiety, paranoia, and fear, manifested in calls for more fortified spaces (the ongoing construction of the border wall and obstacle zone is an indication that these calls have been heard and heeded), and radical indifference towards the Other, manifested in an openly xenophobic sensibility that is reinforced by an anthropoemic strategy of avoidance and detachment:

Viven en unidades exclusivas encerradas en mallas de seguridad que acaban siendo como cárcceles dentro de la gran jaula de oro que es el altiplano. La paranoia y el miedo los define (esta frase se la oí al doctor Burgos), y de ahí el Check Point, los

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25 The passing of the Secure Fence Act by the Unites States congress in 2006 paved the way for the construction of an iron border wall in the south-western United States, extending from Texas through to New Mexico and Arizona. New 100-foot-tall high-tech patrol towers with ground radars and wireless infrared, motion, and sonic imaging cameras rise high above the desolate desert landscape, further politicizing the borderlands’ spatial arrangement. For a visual of this “virtual fence” see <http://thewalldocumentary.com>. For a socio-historical account of the border’s new surveillance network for the twenty-first century see Gaynor, especially Chapter 12 “The Future of Border Policing.” Also, see Dunn for an engaging study of the growing tension between human rights norms and the new “prevention through deterrence” paradigm undertaken by the United States Border Patrol.
Andres’s description of people from Sektor C recalls Sharon Zukin’s concept of the “politics of everyday fear,” which has been paraphrased by Bauman as “the blood-curdling and nerve-breaking spectre of ‘unsafe streets’ [that] keeps people away from public spaces and turns them away from seeking the art and the skills needed to share public life” (94). Although the streets of Paradise are ostensibly clean and sanitized (by easily identified and identifiable badge–wearing tercerones), an institutionalized culture of fear pervades the imaginary in C, which has become a community defined more by the governmental rationality of the built environment—namely the border wall and security apparatus—than by its people, culture, or public sphere, the latter having been more or less eradicated by Angosta’s spatial practice of exclusion and enclosure. Notwithstanding attempts to attenuate feelings of fear in the dones vis-à-vis the lower classes by erasing segundones and more inexorably tercerones from the visual plane, it is clear that Angosta’s segregated spatial practice actually breeds paranoia and fear, and as a consequence, detachment and indifference.

Even family attachments, it would seem, cannot transcend the limitations of such a highly bound postmodern society, whose changing family dynamics point to increasing detachment and instability brought about in large part through parental disappearance (Gottschalk 26), an area I will explore further in section 2.3. When Jacobo’s mother Rosa leaves him and his father for a don and life in Paradise, she suspends all contact and communication with her son, who receives no news from his mother until her death, when he collects his inheritance: one million dollars and a pass to Paradise. Having been seduced by previously unattainable capital and social rank, Rosa displaces family, domestic obligations,
and familial bonds for the lure of comfort and commodity, ultimately attempting to atone for her abandonment and absence in the only language she understands: economic capital.

Accentuated by his father’s vocal resentment towards Rosa, to whom he referred constantly throughout Jacobo’s childhood as a dead shroud of thorns--: “Se llamaba Rosa, tu madre la difunta, y era un puñado de espinas” (35)--, Jacobo’s indifference towards women, externalized in his constant objectification of the female body and the female conquest, can be correlated to his mother’s abandonment. For this reason, it is not surprising that Jacobo, who demonstrates a bitterness and visceral antipathy towards *dones*, Paradise, and the injustices of the political rationality of exclusion, would deliberately frustrate his mother’s attempt at reconciliation by choosing to remain a resident of Sektor T even after receiving his pass to reside above in C. However, despite this apparently equalizing stance, Jacobo’s status as a *don* nonetheless simplifies his life by mitigating the restrictive constituent of socio-spatial barriers, which in turn enables action (the deployment of personal agency and mobility) not generally accessible to residents of Purgatory.

In conclusion, as a social commentary, *Angosta* reads as a criticism of twenty-first-century globalization processes and migration policies that imprison the poor and most vulnerable citizens to inferno-like realities. An affront to the basic human right to liberty of movement, site-specific geographical borders inhibit the human agency of the majority of the world’s individuals, who participate in globalization processes while remaining conspicuously immobile. According to Abad Faciolince himself: “Los países del primer mundo hablan mucho de libertades, de libertad de todo tipo, de libertad de comercio, de libertad de capitales, de libertad de inversión; aconsejan abrir las fronteras, pero cuando se trata de la libertad primordial de que las personas circulen, que emigren para sobrevivir,
guardan un silencio incómodo” (Brito Ramos 22). *Angosta* breaks this silence, questioning the inequalities propagated by the interstices of strengthened globalization processes and a weakened body politic and public sphere, namely poverty, violence, delinquency, corruption, and migratory restrictions that increasingly emplace people in Third World conditions. The text questions, furthermore, the effects that these social miseries have on the identities of the people of Angosta, and by extension Colombia and Latin America: “Los angosteños, al no sentir su ciudad como un refugio seguro, padecen una especie de desarraigo, o exilio interior, y no han podido asumir con tranquila pasividad y con sereno espíritu imitativo el viejo tópico del elogio a la propia tierra” (308). This feeling of displacement, referenced by Giraldo at the beginning of this section, surpasses the politics of exclusion in the sense that it affects all citizens of the country, not just those in the lower social castes. Residents of Paradise are also affected by the city’s spatial practice, the consequences of which are particularly evident in the unethical and immoral erasure and disregard for people at risk manifested in an irrational, pathological fear of the Other.
2.3 The Migrant Experience: The Disintegration of Self, Family, and Society in Heriberto Yépez’s *Al otro lado*

Pienso a veces, ciudad, que voy buscando sin linterna tu ruta: City, I sometimes think I’m searching through soy el ave que devora los vientos del retorno con hambre verdadera, hambre infinita. I’m the bird that devours the returning winds con hambre verdadera, hambre infinita. soy el ave que devora los vientos del retorno con hambre verdadera, hambre infinita. Trato de armar tu voz, tus escondrijos, I arm your voice, your hideouts, salto puertas, sí, no: deshogo margaritas; I trespass through doorways, or not; I strip daisies; desmancho identidades, cataduras I clean up identities, glances que descubren tu máscara frontera; que descubren tu máscara frontera; navegante febril, me desvelan tu esencia, you name and your being keep me awake, tu apellido.

(Francisco Morales, From “La ciudad que recorro”/“The City I Cross”)

In the Latin American context, nowhere is the contestation over land, national autonomy, cultural identity, and human rights more evident than at the United States-Mexico border. Though much has been written about this specific border dynamic over the past three decades, the progressively overwhelming power that this boundary yields over both nations and, more generally, world citizens demands its continued study. Marked by a long and violent history of war and conquest, United States-Mexico relations have always been characterized by an asymmetrical power relation that privileges the industrially developed United States over the much weaker Mexican state. This same advantage is what compels thousands of Mexicans to abandon their homeland and take flight north in search of the American Dream’s promise of a better quality of life. If making the decision to migrate is not difficult enough, the act of border crossing is dangerous on both a juridico-political and personal safety level. I am thinking not only of the hundreds of illegal migrants who die every year as they attempt to cross the border but also of those who successfully cross the line only to find that they essentially have no rights or mechanisms for denouncing
mistreatment and abuse as “illegal” migrants in the United States. If the two nations’ imbalance has engendered a so-called immigrant crisis in the U.S., the catastrophe lies not in the purported loss of Unitedstatesian business interests, but more accurately in the exploitation and human rights abuses of Mexican migrant workers, whose legalization perpetuates their subordinated position vis-à-vis not only their North American employers but also the North American state. On this point, according to Michael Kearney, the border’s politics of exclusion regulates not only the border crossing itself but the larger undocumented migrant presence in the United States: “the de facto immigration policy of the Unitedstatesian government is not to make the U.S.-Mexican border impermeable to the passage of ‘illegal’ entrants, but rather to regulate their ‘flow’, while at the same time maintaining the official distinctions between the ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ nations” (“Borders” 58). That is to say that while the border continues to play an important interdictory role, it also allows for the illegal entry of easily criminalized, victimized, and exploitable migrant workers in the name of bolstering the Unitedstatesian economy.

As the extension of the border’s exclusionary technologies demonstrates, the border is much more than contested territory: “In recent years the Border Area . . . again becomes contested terrain. Now, however, it is not territory per se that is being contested, but instead personal identities and movements of persons, and cultural and political hegemony of peoples” (Kearney, “Borders” 58). If on the one hand the border excludes, on the other hand, it beckons and lures. This is just one of the many tensions at play along the border and between Mexican and Unitedstatesian politics and culture. Few people have experienced, understood, conceptualized, and philosophized the border and border poetics from a keener or more perceptive optic than that of Tijuana, Baja California-based artist, poet, novelist, and
philosopher Heriberto Yépez. Living and writing self-consciously on the United States-Mexico border, Yépez not only moves freely between well-classified and documented binaries—north/south, global/local, English/Spanish, perceived imaginaries/lived experiences, Paradise/Inferno—but, more effectively, particularly from a postmodern rubric, merges these absurd contradictions to reveal the everyday tensions that define life on the border. While Yépez constructs worlds using poetic and figurative language; dream sequences; and other such literary tropes as symbolism, personification, and metaphor, a gritty realism exposing the harshness of life on the border prevails in his writing. Abandoning the “wordsmithing” and “rhetorical narcissism” of the Boom in favour of the real and the distressing (Giardinelli 221), Yépez exhibits what Mempo Giardinelli classifies as a “Postmodern writing [style that] works with quite unpleasant topics that are in no way treated in a pleasant manner: death, violence, . . . as well as desperation, alienation, brutalization, and the indifferent contemplation of the world’s collapse. Everything is more real and tangible (Carver’s style); death is something suffered, seen and palpable” (223).

In his impressive and prolific multidisciplinary and multilingual oeuvre, Yépez is guided by an “ethnopoetics” understood as a theory-praxis that challenges him to question homogenizing tactics of globalization and globalized consumerism; to think from a glocal point of view; to contest traditional histories, discourses, and dominant poetic practices; and to transcend the ethnic to the point where “ethno” becomes “the permanent prefix of every poetics. ‘Ethnopoetics’ not just applying to the poetics of the ‘Other’” (Yépez, “A Sketch” 3). This ethnopoetics is evident in Yépez’s 2008 border narrative Al otro lado, which explores the effects of globalization, global flows, and migration processes from a very localized perspective, that of the border city of Ciudad de Paso (an obvious allusion to
Tijuana), whose cultural and economic identity is intrinsically connected to Sunny City (San Diego), its northern neighbour. The city’s globalized complexity juxtaposes opposing bi-national cultural repertoires: on the one hand, the trendiest clubs in the entertainment district, which is divided along cultural lines, cater exclusively to foreign (mostly Unitedstatesian) tourists in search of diversion and transgression, relegating “the locals” to cheaper and seedier, yet equally transgressive establishments; on the other hand, the city’s transnational factories (maquiladoras or ensambladoras), which relentlessly belt out the “canción de cuna industrial” (32), supposedly symbolize progress and modernity for Ciudad de Paso. That these factories are commercially profitable is without question, considering the structural economic violence, perpetrated particularly against its female workforce, that governs their operations. More dubious however is their claim to benefit the Mexican socio-economic landscape, which remains mired in poverty, uncertainty, and insecurity. The decrepit nightclubs only spiral further into decay as the trendy ones become more and more exclusive.

The traditional premodern/(post)modern dichotomy between north and south is thus extended south across the border into a globally affected local milieu. In this text, Yépez creates a world defined by instabilities of time, space, language, culture, and the self, reflecting what Arjun Appadurai theorizes as “a new order of instability in the production of [post]modern subjectivities” (Modernity 4).

*Al otro lado* chronicles the struggles and contradictions of life in Ciudad de Paso through the experiences of protagonist Tiburón Quintero and the people, animals, things, and places with which he interacts. The middle child of a dysfunctional and fragmented family of professional border crossers or *coyotes*, Tiburón (literally “shark”) turns to drugs, sex, and criminal activity to escape from the drudgeries of life and survival in Ciudad de Paso’s
grotesque and infernal urban environment, to flee from his perpetual state of liminality, his quasi-life/quasi-death existence: “Tiburón no sabía si estaba muerto. O estaba vivo. . . . Lo que Tiburón quería era antes de la muerte, encontrar la vida. Encontrarla intensa, rabiosa, total, dar con su cúspide, maldita sea, su cúspide. Volver a sentirse hasta el tope” (9). These opening lines of the novel, which incidentally demonstrate Yépez’s use of free indirect discourse to convey distinct characters’ ideas, thoughts, and feelings throughout the novel, highlight the inherent tensions within Tiburón vis-à-vis the city: they expose both a desire to live intensely in the city and, at the same time, a desire to escape the intensity of the city and life itself. With its irreconcilable complexity, the decadent city can be easily interpreted as a metaphor for Tiburón, whose similar conflictions have sent him down an analogous path of self-destruction. In Ciudad de Paso, where death is ubiquitous on a very real and not simply symbolic or metaphorical level, self- and socially-destructive pathogenic behaviour is the norm. Journalist Charles Bowden’s introspective words are aposite in this regard. Reflecting on his own process of investigating and writing on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, he states: “I spent a lot of the past decade in the business world of drugs and I wrote three books about that, a kind of record of our deep hungers, our deep appetite for homicide, and our endless emptiness as we prowl the midnight streets looking for the thing we are certain will fix us. . . . [It is] licit and illicit, an industry of chemicals and hungers and dreams that never seem to be enough” (Some of the Dead 242).

In Ciudad de Paso, the chemicals emanating from multi-national ensambladoras and drug labs permanently cloud the sky. The new drug of choice is phoco, “la coca de los

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26 The novel is focalized primarily from Tiburón’s perspective, but shifts at times to expose the point of views and concerns of other animate and inanimate characters.
miserables” (78), which is fabricated in ersatz laboratories located mainly in the peripheral
neighbourhood of el Matamorros by combining residues of the coca plant with rat poison,
pseudoephedrine, acid, antifreeze, and caustic soda. The geospatial practice and sensory
assault of el Matamorros resembles Angosta’s grotesque Sektor H. To enter el Matamorros
is to wage war on the senses, to put one’s life in danger, and to run the risk of death: paved
highways give way to dirt roads; the space’s rough and craggy geography retains and
intensifies the sun’s heat; the noise of factories and music blaring out of makeshift homes
and street corners is deafening; the smell of chemicals is insupportable; police cease to patrol
the streets; and children roam about ostensibly unaffected by the spectres of death that
surround them. In one of Tiburón’s many forays into this neighbourhood, his car is shot at, a
warning that he is not welcome there; in another, a phoco lab explodes, sending people
running madly through the streets; in yet another, he innocently helps a group of young kids
roll a tire over a cliff, unaware that a dead body is wrapped in a blanket inside the tire.
Whereas he was only moments before happy to see kids playing around, relieved to see that
“[t]odavía existía la infancia, el juego, la inocencia” (74), he soon realizes that innocence has
been replaced by self-involvement and indifference: “A los niños no parecía preocuparles el
descobijado” (75). This murky and grotesque spatial landscape of violence, death,
indifference towards the Other, and detachment from humanity parallels the darkness and
confusion within Tiburón, a condition manifested through his pathogenic behaviour. In other
words, Tiburón, who is confined not only by geographical borders but also by more
generalized psychic and biopolitical borders, interiorizes the city’s liminal, pathogenic status.
This scene clearly delineates Bauman’s above quoted argument that the waning of public
space reproduces and reflects the waning of politics and the public sphere. The following
two sub-sections examine the links between postmodern pathologies of indifference, fear, and detachment and the disintegration of the self, the family, and society via an analysis of the Quintero family and the transnational spatial practice of the Ciudad de Paso/Sunny City corridor.

2.3.1 Border Narratives/Border Identities

While much has been written about the border and border identities since Anzaldúa’s iconic and groundbreaking book *Borderlands/La frontera* was first published in 1987, her text remains a seminal source for understanding the hybrid identities, violent realities, political contestations, and (in)human relationships constructed along the border. Notwithstanding Étienne Balibar’s admonition that “we cannot attribute to the border an essence which would be valid in all places and at all times” (73), Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of the U.S.-Mexico border as an unnatural boundary, a marginalized and divided site of contradiction, ambivalence, and unrest well-acquainted with loss—namely the loss of life, family, culture, and language—, seems to epitomize the most opprobrious aspects of a more generalized border, a concept which can, of course, be extended to include disparate “third spaces” and sites of cross-cultural contact beyond the physical border crossing itself. For Anzaldúa, the United States-Mexico borderland is “una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (25). Focusing particularly on the position of women at this site vis-à-vis dilemmas of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, language, and origins, *Borderlands/La frontera* seeks to validate Chicana subjectivity by advancing a new hermeneutics of *mestiza* consciousness meant to break with traditional dualistic paradigms of power. That Anzaldúa writes from an unapologetically feminist lens
does not relegate her analysis simply to the field of “feminist” or “Chicana” studies. To the contrary, her work has been and continues to be relevant to the fields of border studies and border narratives, and in an even broader sense, Latin American, literary, cultural, immigration, and globalization studies, amongst other fields, all of which expose a similar drive to contest and break with traditional totalizing binaries by focusing instead on the dialectical relationships among the very real tensions at play along tangible, site-specific and symbolic borders.

Border narratives, for their part, tend to expose the at-times contradictory tensions of this in-betweenness on a geographical, cultural, and linguistic level:

La proximidad de una cultura contraria siempre violenta el modo de ser, de hablar, de desear y de pensar en cualquier hombre [sic] . . . Si sus personajes nacen de esta realidad, serán seres en constante tensión, con inclinaciones a los desgarramientos internos. Por una parte, está el rechazo al american way ...; por otra, el anhelo de ser como ellos, la envidia de lo que poseen, el resentimiento por lo que nos arrebataron.

(Antonio Parra 73)

Without a doubt, Baja California is this reality: in cartographic terms, the state occupies both a northern and a southern position. A culture and landscape separated from the south of Mexico, which tends to look at the northern state with disdain, considering it “something of a step-child . . . [that] is still seen as not quite ‘Mexican’” (Weiss 12), Baja California is likewise shunned as the chaotic, violent, and underdeveloped playground of its northern, First World neighbour, leaving norteños little choice but to inhabit the liminal threshold of
the border itself (Weiss 16). The name “Ciudad de Paso” explicitly accentuates Tijuana and Baja California’s threshold consciousness.

Unlike the new mestiza, who understands that “rigidity means death” and thus struggles to develop “a tolerance for contradiction, a tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa 101), Tiburón resists the pervasive discord that surrounds him. While he incarnates the contradictions that define the border, his discomfort with the dialectical tensions of his in-between reality makes it impossible for him to transcend a wholly binary logic or synthesize competing ideologies. As though his poor eye caused tunnel vision, obstructing his observation and understanding of the visual field that surrounds him, his perception of the city is veritably clouded. Everything is seemingly definitive, delimited by hard and real boundaries: white versus black, life versus death, light versus darkness, truth versus falsity, hope versus despair, good versus evil. He thinks in explicitly binary, absolute, black and white terms, reflected materially and visually in his most cherished possessions: Christa, his white Ford Cougar with a black hood; his black and white dog Cholo;27 and his black and white striped “Zebraphone.” With the unexpected arrival of Cholo, Tiburón begins to feel a keen sense of belonging with the black and white: “el perro era de cuero blanco y negro, ¡como Christa! Esto era ya una auténtica tribu” (43). His penchant for dualities is, moreover, expressed in his categorical, yet at times vacillating, manner of thinking. With this inherently paradoxical statement, I mean to highlight Tiburón’s all or nothing nature, without ignoring the fact that he oscillates between opposing stances. My point is that

27 As the omniscient narrator of the novel informs the reader in a footnote, “cholo” is the term used to refer to the vagabonds, street people, and gang members from the northern border area whose roots, according to the experts, go back to the 1930s and 40s zoot suit and pachuco cultures.
precisely because he is uncomfortable with the murky in-between dialectic of border identities, he wholeheartedly adopts and embraces whatever belief he holds at any one time, ephemeral or inconsistent though it may be.

Tiburón, for instance, fluctuates between local and global sentiments, between absolutely loving and absolutely hating Ciudad de Paso and wanting either to experience the city to its fullest (ironically, with the help of phoco, an apparatus of erasure and escape, as will be discussed below), or to escape it completely by fleeing to the United States, the so-called “Greatest Country in the Whole Wide World” (53), as Tiburón sardonically designates it. If in one moment Tiburón eschews Baja California’s norteño music as the melody of melancholy losers crying over lost women and lost pasts, in the next moment, the same music affects him so deeply as to cause him practically to swear allegiance to his country. Likewise, in terms of the flow of symbolic capital, though he disparages English-language music as pompous in one breath, in another he happily extols its virtues, particularly its celebration of whatever life brings, “both despair and love, canciones para gritarle sí a la vida” (104). Curiously, he appreciates the dialectical tension between love and despair found in English language music while remaining unwilling to accept similar tensions in his own life. Despite epitomizing the inconsistent essence of contradiction and antithesis, with his absolutist doctrine, Tiburón effectively demonstrates his own intolerance for ambiguity.

Tiburón’s love and hate relationship with Spanish norteño and English language music reflects a more generalized struggle against his liminal border identity. The constant tension between staying in a bound “space of places” and taking flight to the more expansive “space of flows” (Coleman, Pauly, and Brydon 5) is evident throughout the novel. Following Tiburón’s understanding of border philosophy, he has three options: enter the drug trade,
commit to working with his older brother Tobías in the family hotel and border crossing business, or migrate north. He attempts all three. Despite professing to hate everything about narcos, except of course the phoco they produce, Tiburón attempts to become a drug dealer but quickly fails, giving his merchandise in a moment of panic to Lucio, a crooked police officer. Thereafter working with Lucio, he garners business for his brother’s migrant boarding house, but is never truly interested in assuming responsibility over the space, which he associates with his deceased mother, his family, and his past, not his future. Notwithstanding its unattainability, in one sense or another, migration to the U.S. has always been the only escape route for Tiburón. From a young age, his now absent father, himself a subject of migration, taught Tiburón that English was the means to salvation: “Mi padre me dijo que hablar en inglés me sacaría de este sitio. Y también él decía que si uno habla en inglés lo que sentimos, no lo sentimos tanto, sobre todo no tanto dolor. Don’t you think so?” (146). In this way, following his father’s footsteps, migration becomes Tiburón’s ultimate (though ultimately frustrated) destiny: “Pronto, como su padre, tendría que irse. Sooner or later life has to really begin” (46).

However, as with everything else, Tiburón vacillates and resists the temptation to flee. Unlike many would-be migrants who naively imagine the United States as a paradisiacal utopia, as we will see in my analysis of Paraíso Travel, Tiburón is not foolish in this regard. He understands the consequences of crossing the border in characteristically definitive terms: “las consecuencias de nortearse son graves, definitorias, jodidas, nada más miren a los inmigrados, lo que les pasa a los paisanos cuando van al otro lado, trabajan allá de criadas, jardineros, limpiabotas, barrenderos, meseros, achichincles de los americanos y regresan hechos una cagada” (237). Thus, unlike his younger brother Yulay, who makes his
fatal exit north shortly after deciding that he must leave Ciudad de Paso, Tiburón opts to postpone his departure and stays in place as long as possible, largely out of fear of change and the uncertain.

Unwilling and/or unable to leave in physical terms, Tiburón alters his perception of reality with phoco. In a perpetually reinforced feedback loop, if the pathogenic condition of Mexico’s twenty-first-century border landscape induces his drug addiction, that same habit, in turn, produces further pathological conditions, manifested in bouts of delirium, hallucinations, and heightened tendencies towards fear and depersonalisation. In a rare moment of lucidity, Tiburón recognizes that phoco has become a substitute for the other side insofar as it provides an escape from the abysmal city: “Pensó, en el fondo, mucho de los adictos de Ciudad de Paso, incluso él mismo, usaban droga sencillamente porque no se atrevian a cruzar al otro lado y la pinche droga era con lo que se conformaban” (87). Much easier than taking flight across the desert, taking drugs becomes a surrogate form of evasion. Phoco makes his life tolerable by altering not only his conscious state, but also his unconscious condition: after a phoco binge, Tiburón sleeps for days on end, eluding the reality around him. A conspicuous “señal de su enfermedad” (66), his addiction or “illness” is best understood as a wholly pathological response to the city’s entropic social order. Yet, while it may take him away, at least psychically, from this abject space, Tiburón’s drug addiction prevents him from asserting his agency to mobilize and physically displace himself. Spiralling through this same vicious cycle, the drug renders him prostrate, causing him to reject and abandon everything, thus making it impossible for him to act and truly confront reality. This is significant particularly in light of Lawrence Grossberg’s earlier quoted postulation that agency is organized through the control of mobility (Packer 140-141).
Physically unable to move, Tiburón places even more limits on an already heavily disciplined and regulated global mobility mechanism.

At this point I think it apt to recall Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the *homo sacer* as a metaphor for bare life. As outlined briefly in chapter one, the *homo sacer*, personified in images of prisoners in concentration camps, migrants in refugee camps, and travellers at airport detention centres, is confined to a power paradigm that emplaces him in a liminal zone of indistinction between life and death, where his (or her) life is deemed unworthy of value or humanity. Inhabitants of the borderlands’ “third space” incarnate this life/death duality at the border crossing and beyond. The physical border crossing, with its security apparatus and enforcement technology, symbolizes death itself: every year, hundreds of migrants perish along the journey, long before realizing their dreams. Tiburón’s brother Yulay meets such a fate: “Siguió su huida, su búsqueda y poco después, cayó Yulay en La Pasadera, como caen siempre los que cruzan solos la tierra de nadie, sin guía, primero desplomándose en el suelo, luego lentamente haciéndose cadáver, huesos a ras de piedra, polvo amarillento, luego puro silencio, soplo de viento seco” (221). Of course, the terror and death at play at the barren and desolate borderlands is not contained there but is, rather, extended to life in the cities on both sides of the border and beyond.

Death is (bare) life in Ciudad de Paso, and escaping its relentless grip is a veritable challenge. Tiburón is constantly pulled back into the labyrinthine city and particularly feels its lure during his second attempt to cross the border: “De todos modos, parecía que la ciudad entera conspiraba para que él no pudiera alejarse. La ciudad quería atraparlo” (256). In the end, while he does manage to escape the city limits and make his way into the equally
labyrinthine dessert, with its countless metal and concrete border walls, Tiburón eventually ends up back where he began:

Y a falta de phoco y a falta de éxito, Tiburón comenzó, de nuevo, a perder su realidad y a recobrar la realidad general, y el laberinto, lentamente, fue transformándose, casi de modo imperceptible—sin que Tiburón terminara de darse cuenta de aquella metamorfosis—en otro lugar. Ese lugar era otra ciudad. ¿Sunny City? No, no parecía esa ciudad que Tiburón no conocía, aquello no era la California que él había imaginado. En esas calles iniciales había un caos del Sur de la frontera. . . . La estructura amurallada de La Despedida comenzó a desaparecer para ceder el paso a otra realidad, y esa realidad eran las calles céntricas de Ciudad de Paso. (303)

Of course, the labyrinth is a recurring leitmotiv in Hispanic cultural production. As Ilan Stavans notes, from Cervantes (Don Quixote) through to Gabriel García Márquez (The General in His Labyrinth), Jorge Luis Borges (Ficciones), and Octavio Paz (The Labyrinth of Solitude), it has been utilized as a metaphor of metaphysical ambiguity that invokes a Hispanic identity rooted in multiplicity, confusion, and orderly chaos: “We’re unstable: frágiles de espíritu. We simultaneously incorporate clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity” (108). Tiburon’s circular journey is rooted in this same tradition.

Epitomizing the ambiguous Hispanic condition, Tiburón is unable to escape his labyrinthine fate even in his dreams. In one dream sequence he walks through a door meant to take him to paradise only to discover that he was already in paradise and that he had just in fact walked back into the inferno—“En el sueño, Tiburón estaba jubiloso por haber entrado al otro lado de la puerta, pero unos segundos después, al mirar a su alrededor, se daba cuenta
de que antes, cuando pedía que le abrieran la puerta, ya estaba adentro. Y ahora estaba afuera” (94). This circular imagery is indicative of a determinist doctrine: Tiburón will never escape the peripheral space he currently inhabits; he will never surmount his liminal or reductive status as “alien” or “non-human” (Kearney, “Borders” 62). That Tiburón is contained in place is symbolic not solely of his spatial plane but of Mexico’s socio-cultural and political positionality vis-à-vis Unitedstatesian regimes of power. He will never leave behind his Mexican identity; though he may want to, he will never escape being “Mexican” and the contradictions that signifier entails. Whether in Ciudad de Paso or in Sunny City, he will continue to be the peripheral, marginalized Other whose bare life is deemed inconsequential, simply a consequence and requirement of global neoliberal policies. In the end, as the hallucinatory coyote that Tiburón sees in the desert makes clear, “no hay diferencia entre estar adentro y estar afuera” (281).

As he journeys unsuccessfully through the desert only to arrive back in Ciudad de Paso, Tiburón slowly begins to accept his localized position. Despite all his suffering, life remains unchanged. While he will likely not go to jail for having killed his ex-girlfriend’s lover, he remains figuratively imprisoned not only by his city, but also, on a transnational stage, by his citizenship and nationality: “Y vio la verdadera jaula por todas partes” (320). Having exhausted his three options for life on the border, Tiburón’s only remaining escape route appears to be the postmodern response par excellence: rejection, avoidance, and depersonalisation. Predictably, Tiburón turns to *phoco* to detach from reality as the police prepare to raid the migrant hotel, the only place Tiburón has ever known as home. Motivated by this powerful image of the home in ruins, the following sub-section interrogates the changing function of home for a progressively mobile, dislocated, and dispersed peoples,
probing the role of the postmodern family and the ensuing psycho-socio-cultural repercussions of evermore diffused globalization processes for those on the peripheries via an analysis of the Quintero family dynamic.

2.3.2 The Quintero Family: A Case of Postmodern Detachment

While admitting at the outset that the family unit has certainly never been that idealized site of stability, nurturing, acceptance, and belonging that we all supposedly seek and desire, I contend that the unequal globalization processes fuelling the twenty-first-century global economy have made the attainment of such an ideal a veritable impossibility for families living in conditions of poverty, insecurity, and forced mobility the world over. Without resorting to risky sentiments of nostalgia for the imaginary child-centred nuclear “modern family” of the past as a response to the current failure of the individual-centred “postmodern family” to advance the socialization and well-being of children, there is little doubt that the contemporary order has debilitated parents’ and caregivers’ ability to nurture the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social health and development of their children. As Keally McBride so bluntly states, “[i]f families don’t eat dinner together anymore, it is not because no one values families, but because too frequently parents are working” (56). My point is not to criticize parental neglect or question the ability of contemporary parents to care for their children but rather to understand the effects that detached and constantly transforming parent-child relationships and the concomitant erosion of family bonds brought

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28 According to David Cheal, the term “post-modern family” was first used by Edward Shorter in the 1970s as a contrast to the modern nuclear family, which was at that point undergoing a state of transition characterized by weakening links between the generations, declining commitment to marriage as an ideal and permanent union, and increased questioning of gendered identities and duties (10).
about through poverty and dislocation have on children, families, and the potential for vital public spheres in postmodern society.  

From a cultural epidemiological lens, a link exists between troublesome childhoods and the schizoid pathology so often associated with postmodernity. As family detachments de-harmonize and invalidate a child’s emerging sense of self, he or she learns to eschew already limited or non-existent familial validation in favour of depersonalisation: “Characterized . . . as lack of desire for close relationships, inability to experience pleasure, and emotional coldness and detachment, the schizoid diagnosis often assigned the postmodern selfhood is usually linked to problematic childhood dynamics” (Gottschalk 33). Socio-culturally, the dissolution and fragmentation associated with the postmodern schizoid (Jameson 63), rooted as it is in challenging childhood experiences and family breakdown, is duly reflected in the growing transformation of contemporary, postmodern society. By reinforcing social apprehension and civil disengagement, the erosion of familial bonds places the potential for an effective public sphere at risk. Finally, from an economic perspective, once a site of socialization, the kinship network has since been rearticulated under capitalism as a site of value responsive to intense hierarchical processes (Joseph 149, 159), a transition that has been mostly ignored and/or overlooked due to our ongoing fetishization of the family as a site of ideal, human, non-economic attachments (Joseph 165).

Given that capitalism is built around organized inequalities and a winner-loser dyad, as Jody Heymann postulates, the capitalist economies and ever-advancing socio-economic

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29 Cheal references Judith Stacey’s definition of the “postmodern family revolution” as revolutionary only insofar as it is in a constant state of flux. The outcomes of these changes, however, do not necessarily succeed at improving dominant structures and institutions, as the term “revolution” would imply (11).
globalization processes that have transformed families over the past half-century have potentially positive and negative outcomes:

During the past fifty years, three striking forces have led to major transformations of family life that offer the potential to either lift families out of poverty or place children at heightened risk. A labor force transformation has increasingly drawn fathers and mothers worldwide into the formal labor force—simultaneously providing more opportunities and creating new obstacles to caregiving. Urbanization has pulled nuclear families toward new job opportunities and away from extended-family support. And all of this has occurred in an era of increased economic globalization, which has brought with it access to lower-cost goods and services but also less ability to bargain for decent wages and benefits. (6)

In the Latin American context, transformations in the global economy and labour force have had mostly deleterious consequences that put the majority of the population at risk. Parents are forced to participate in illegal activity; to work long hours in factories, leaving children at home to fend for themselves; or, particularly in the borderlands, to cross the line in search for work as exploited and underpaid unauthorized migrants in the United States. At its most fundamental level, Mexican and other South and Central American migration to the United States is best understood as a response to the global transnational economy, which is “characterized by a gross incapacity of peripheral economies to absorb the labour that is created in the periphery, with the result that it inexorably ‘flows’ to the cores of the global capitalist economy” (Kearney, “Borders” 57). That economy is, in this case, the United States, whose infamous Border Patrol is a disciplinary technology and tool of exclusion used not to eliminate completely but in fact to regulate the illegal entry of migrant workers across
the border, a technique used to discipline unauthorized migrants to work hard, expect abuse, and accept low wages (Kearney, “Borders” 61). In many cases migrants leave their families behind and make the dangerous journey north in hopes of escaping their birthright destiny and earning enough money to support their families back home.  

The devolution of the Quintero family in *Al otro lado* reflects this transformation of the family dynamic from an idealized modern institution of stability, unity, and belonging to a dispersed, displaced, and economy-centred postmodern entity that, in contrast, undermines human attachments. Following the communitarian logic of the family as cradle of civilization metaphor, “a weakening family system almost certainly signals a weakening civil society” (Blankenhorn, qtd. in McBride 49). This sentiment echoes Stefan Breuer’s previously quoted argument that weakened public spaces signal weakened civil rights, drawing an important link between the family and public space. In other words, if a weakened family structure weakens the potential of civil society, which in turn diminishes civil rights and debilitates the place- and community-building potential of public space, our capacity to create and foster a nexus of personal, human attachments must be called into question. This sequence is played out in *Al otro lado*, where societal degeneration (weakened Mexican civil society) effectuates a familial rupture (Quintero family dispersion),

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30 As indicated in chapter one, the economy of emigration in Latin America is central to the economic development of Mexican and other Central and South American economies. Remittances have become an indispensable revenue stream for families and governments on both a macro and microeconomic level, increasing, on the one hand, these governments’ GDP and foreign investment levels and, on the other hand, individual families’ net annual incomes and communities’ standards of living. While the current global economic slowdown slowed the previously steady growth of remittances by as much as 20% between January 2008 and January 2009, money continues to flow south across the border and is expected to increase once again as the global economy enters a period of recuperation. For more information on the impact of emigration and remittances on Latin American economies, see García Zamora and Orozco and the collection *El impacto económico de la emigración en América Latina.*
which in turn propels the collapse of a quintessentially public space (migrant hotel). In fact, the hotel space is converted from a public hotel into a quasi-private safe house for illegal migrants, further emphasizing the important connection between civil society and public space, both of which are, in this instance, reciprocally challenged.

Following this logic, the slow disintegration of the Quintero family and their migrant hotel can be interpreted as a metaphor of a weakening civil society in Ciudad de Paso and, by extension, Mexican, Latin American, and contemporary or postmodern society. Marked by a struggle for familial validation played out in two distinct yet interrelated ways in the novel—i) the three brothers’ internal power struggles over the family home and business and ii) their need to seek out the approval of their absent mother—, as I will outline below, the dissolution of the Quintero family seems to be an ineluctable destiny, an inevitable consequence of a morally vacuous and ethically catastrophic globalized social order that sentences the majority of humanity to the lifelong death of ongoing terror manifested in such ways as poverty, insecurity, civic apathy and disengagement, discriminatory spatial practices, and other modes of dislocation and depersonalisation.

i) Sibling Rivalries

Tobías Quintero, the eldest of the three brothers, is the legal owner and boss of the migrant hotel and border crossing operation. Both hotel administrator and desert coyote, he is the only one who truly cares about the business, which, for him, signifies power on both a socio-economic and familial level. On the socio-economic plane, he is celebrated as one of the best coyotes in the region and is respected for successfully operating a profitable
business, illegal though it may be. On the familial plane, Quintero, as he is called, assumes a likewise superior position vis-à-vis his brothers demonstrated clearly in his appropriation not only of the family business, which he inherited from their mother, but also the family name itself. The “heredero único, jefazo, absolute king” (28) of the hotel, he extends his sovereignty over the family unit. His younger brothers must operate within Quintero’s parameters if they want to secure their position not only in the business, which is in large part inconsequential to both, but in the home and family structure itself. In his parents’ absence, Quintero embraces the hierarchic machista ideology behind his assumed patriarchy:31 “El hombre de la casa es el jefe, sea como padre, esposo o hermano y teóricamente desempeña varias funciones ‘masculinas’ en la familia. Tradicionalmente, las principales han sido tres: debe mantener a su familia, protegerla y fungir como autoridad máxima” (Castañeda 195).

In terms of supporting and protecting his family, Quintero’s primary concern is fiscal: his brothers’ economic value to the business is commensurate with their value to the family, which are, for Quintero, one and the same.

Unlike his older brother, Tiburón has no real interest in the family or the family business, a predictable posture considering his mother’s decision to bequeath the business to Quintero, a move that effectively alienates Tiburón from his lineage and further ignites his desire to flee. As he tells Quintero: “es tu negocio, Tobías. No el mío. Hasta hace tiempo,

31 In broad terms, machismo is defined as a gendered power relation wherein masculinity must always be asserted not only over femininity but over other masculinities as well. Although generally thought of as a wholly gendered concept, machista ideology penetrates deep into a culture’s identity, beyond simple man-woman relationships and traditional societal gender roles. Marina Castañeda offers the following definition of the term: “El machismo se puede definir como un conjunto de creencias, actitudes y conductas que descansan sobre dos ideas básicas: por un lado, la polarización de los sexos, es decir, una contraposición de lo masculino y lo femenino según lo cual no sólo son diferentes, sino mutuamente excluyentes; por otro, la superioridad de lo masculino en las áreas consideradas importantes por los hombres” (20).
te ayudé, pero ya no me interesa. No es lo mío. . . . Voy a acabar yéndome de este sitio” (32). In this scene, Tiburón evidently feels no sense of entitlement or even attachment to the space in which he grew up. In other words, his home (specifically the hotel but more generally Ciudad de Paso) proffers no illusion of place-based belonging or identity. If Quintero already alienates Tiburón from his home, Tiburón distances himself even further to exert his own personal agency and ravage his brother’s dream of building a unified family business. Construction, as it were, goes against the grain of the imminent destruction surrounding the family, the hotel, and Ciudad de Paso.

Tiburón’s contempt for Quintero and disinterest in the family business notwithstanding, inasmuch as Quintero is the only quasi-consistent and extant paternal/parental figure Tiburón has in his life, it is not surprising that Tiburón would yearn for his brother’s approval. Of course, to admit this (either to himself or to Quintero) would mean feeding into his brother’s sense of superiority, a condition Tiburón avoids at all costs. A close examination of the opening chapter of Part II of the novel reveals the magnitude of the power struggle between the two brothers. The chapter begins with Tiburón’s unsuccessful attempt to evade his brother the morning after indulging in a night of phoco. After peeking into the dining room and seeing Quintero seated there, Tiburón returns to his room, not wanting to turn himself into a spectacle on display for Quintero, who would reproach him for his addiction by deriding his behaviour and mocking the physical side effects of his phoco withdrawal. In terms of the hotel’s spatial practice, Quintero’s menacing presence converts the commonly inviting and communal space of the dining room into an unattractive site of hostility. Wanting to avoid a confrontation with his brother in such a public space, Tiburón waits five long hours before reappearing, dazed and hungry, and
finally submitting to defeat. Quintero is clearly the one with the power, and though Tiburón
tries his best to antagonize and belittle his brother, Quintero’s detachment and lack of
validation pains Tiburón: “So what?, murmuró Tiburón, con los ojos más abiertos que
nunca antes. ‘No me duele nada’, se decía en silencio, como si estuviera blindado” (29).
Unable to convince himself that he is immune to Quintero’s reproaches, Tiburón attempts to
break off whatever minimal ties he has to his brother to secure his own future.

Nonetheless, while Tiburón may want to leave, he has no other home and is by
necessity tied to Quintero and the hotel. Confirming my earlier point that the family is a site
of economic attachment under a capitalist rubric, when it becomes obvious to Quintero that
Tiburón no longer has any intention of helping with the family business, Quintero gives him
an ultimatum: do his part to bring migrants into the hotel or leave it all behind. Choosing the
latter, Tiburón is kicked out of the hotel and finds himself alone on the mean streets of
Ciudad de Paso. Though newly emancipated from Quintero’s panoptic eye, as his first night
out of the hotel falls over him, Tiburón wraps himself in a blanket that elicits nostalgia for an
imaginary paradise lost--: “Esa cobija lo había protegido durante muchos años, desde que
podía recordarlo, en su antiguo cuarto; Tiburón sintió dolor por no haber sido capaz de
preservar esa zona de seguridad” (81). Bemoaning his decision, Tiburón casts aside the
reality of the hotel’s claustrophobic, dark, rancid, and grotesque space, particularly the
“habitación con pestilencia a muerto” (135-136) in which he spent most of his time. That the
migrant hotel is considered a “safe house” (28) by local police is ironic considering the
dangers awaiting those who stay there. Even so, while it is not a safe place of refuge in the
traditional sense, for Tiburón it comes to symbolize the ideal of home.
If Quintero reinforces his position of dominance over Tiburón by banishing him from
his home, Tiburón redeems some of his autonomy and power (at least in economic terms) by
returning to the hotel with a busload of clients, a move Tiburón sees as his ticket back into
his dystopic paradise. While the hotel does not offer Tiburón that supposedly safe place of
belonging and acceptance (erroneously) associated with the home, it is nevertheless a much
safer option than the threatening streets of Ciudad de Paso. In partnership with Lucio,
Tiburón garners more business for the hotel than Quintero has seen in years, making Tiburón
feel as though he has usurped his brother’s position as the economic power head of the
familial network: “Tiburón se volvió casi intocable. Se sentía el nuevo rey de la pensión”
(100). So, the power struggle between the two brothers continues. As expected, Quintero
does not easily cede to Tiburón’s growing accession of his space, a point reinforced by
Quintero after a client refers to him as Tiburón’s employee: “acuérdate quien es el jefe,
Tiburóncito, no andes con mamadas, porque te pongo de puntitas” (134). The diminutive in
this quote is utilized ironically, as an indicator not of affection but of enmity and antagonism.
The reference to mamadas, the slang term for fellatio, is another way for Quintero to
emasculate his younger brother, this time on a sexual plane, and thereby assert his own
masculinity, understood, of course, as power.

In an ongoing attempt to further reclaim his dominance over Tiburón and the hotel
space, Quintero tells Tiburón that he will be surveilling him, resorting to panoptic
technologies to maintain the status quo. In this sense, Tiburón and Quintero’s power
struggles over the defined space of the hotel can be read as an easy metaphor for the ongoing
conflict over territory at the United States-Mexico border. In both circumstances, Tiburón is
the unwelcome interloper, the menacing Other, who is on the one hand a necessary element
to the economics of the hotel and, in the case of unauthorized Mexican migrants in the United States, to the United States economy, and on the other hand, a perceived threat to hegemonic power structures.

Because upholding traditional hierarchically based paradigms is so imperative to Quintero, it is no surprise that Yulay, the youngest of the three brothers and the family’s black sheep, is overlooked as a possible inheritor of the business. Not only is he fathered by a different man than his brothers, an outsider from the United States, no less, Olga, the Quinteros’ mother, dies during childbirth, effectively trading off her life for Yulay’s. As a consequence, Yulay not only personifies the trace of an adulterous stain on the mother, he is a constant reminder of her death and the subsequent destruction of the imagined unity of the Quintero family. A concrete and very real symbol of familial separation, disunity, and immorality (at least from a patriarchal Judeo-Christian perspective), Yulay’s presence tarnishes the family name: “Para Quintero, Yulay no cuenta. Lo desprecia porque le recuerda que su madre no era de un solo hombre” (35). Well aware of his secondary position, Yulay self-segregates himself from his brothers and, like Tiburón, feels no real connection or sense of duty towards his home space: “He knew he didn’t belong here at all. But had no guts to jump to the other side. It wasn’t about that fucking fence. It had more to do with ‘something’ he kept secret, hidden, here inside of the house” (35). Unlike Tiburón, however, his disconnection extends farther than the family to the entire social plane.

Whereas his not belonging has to do not only with his mother’s death and betrayal but also with Quintero’s rejection and lack of overall familial validation, the “something” in the above quote alludes to Yulay’s sexuality. If it is not dangerous enough to be gay in Latin America, where homosexuals are beaten “because effeminacy and/or homosexuality are
Yulay knows that coming out of the closet will further fuel Quintero’s contempt towards him, which is in effect what happens. That Yulay embraces his identity as a gay man is seen as a further reproach to Quintero’s patriarchal hegemony; for, a gay man cannot procreate and carry on the family name. For Quintero, a gay man is no longer a man, and, following patriarchal, *machista* ideology, only a man could possibly keep the business afloat. After all, “dejar la pensión en manos femeninas no es buena idea” (23). In a fit of rage, Quintero demands that Yulay put on an old dress of their mother’s and proceeds to almost fatally beat him. Compelled to assert his phallic supremacy over his brother, Quintero uses brute, physical force to further subordinate Yulay into a feminine position. Now doubly persecuted, Yulay has no choice but to abandon his (non-) home and heads out across the border in an ultimately fatal search for freedom and approval in a less threatening homosexual space.

ii) Locating the Absent Mother

If Yulay seeks validation in the homosexual relationship he forges with Rae, his Unitedstatesian lover, Quintero and Tiburón are more conventional in their conflation of

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32 Though still vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, in some larger urban centres in Latin America, through continued protest and social action, gay men and women have constructed alternative communities where gay (sub)cultures are no longer hidden but are instead celebrated. Supported by new constitutional rights in some countries, gay and lesbian behaviour, though not quite embraced by traditional doctrines, is more and more likely to be ignored, condoned, or even openly accepted. The recent (July 2010) legalization of same sex marriage in Argentina is exemplary of this trend.

From a literary perspective, Colombian Alonso Sánchez Baute’s provocative debut novel, *Al diablo la maldita primavera* (2002), revels in Bogotá’s gay cultural scene, taking the reader to Drag Queen shows, beauty contests, steam baths, and gay club districts in the city. Though a “gay novel,” the novel is a typical story of youth uncertainty and self-doubt, chronicling protagonist Edwin Rodríguez Buelvas’s mostly frivolous yet very human search for love.
masculinity, power, and female sexual conquest. Nonetheless, in all cases, the desire for unity, for the supposedly lost home voided by the absence of the mother, is sought out in the sexualized Other, who assumes the gendered hue of the feminine. Conventionally interpreted as an ideal site of nurturing and belonging, the home has been idealized as the static, feminine space of the family, in contrast to the mobile, masculine space of business and politics. Often conflated with the feminine because of the myth of the womb as the paradigmatic safe place, the mother becomes the surrogate of home, belonging, and identity. Though such a discourse absolutely essentializes nurturing as a wholly feminine practice and the home as a wholly feminine space distinct from the male-centred public sphere, as outlined in numerous feminist critiques exposing the patriarchal assumptions underlying the myth of the feminized home, it is a myth that continues to prevail in contemporary society. This paradox is manifested in Al otro lado, where the imaginary absent mother is omnipresent in the male characters’ desire for acceptance and belonging despite her veritable absence, which brings with it clear feelings of abandonment, resentment, and even indifference and disdain towards her and women in general.

For his part, Yulay has no memory of his mother and because Quintero’s scorn has estranged him from his family and thus his sense of home and belonging, he is less wavering in his decision to leave Ciudad de Paso behind than is Tiburón. Approaching twenty years of age, that critical point of adulthood at which potentially life-changing decisions must be

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33 Bonnie Honig expels the myth of the womb as a site of blissful harmony and stability by referencing evolutionary biologist David Haig, “who argues that the relationship between fetus and mother during pregnancy is not after all ‘a delicate process of cooperation between a woman and her fetus’ but is instead a series of genetic conflicts, a set of struggles over the resources needed for survival” (583).

34 See Bammer, Honig, Marangoly George, McDermott and Sarup, amongst others.
made, at least in his mind, Yulay decides that his only option is to leave his known life behind and cross the line: “And he was ready to take the decision. It was just a question of weeks, maybe days. Was he going to let the others know? Maybe, but maybe not. They weren’t ready for that. . . . They still lived in Mom’s time. This crummy fortress was all about that. Still living inside of mom” (37). While he may want metaphorically to cut the umbilical chord that ties him to his mother, that her spectre haunts Yulay is evident in two significant scenes in the novel: the dress scene briefly commented above, in which Quintero makes Yulay wear their mother’s dress in admonishment before attacking him for being gay, and Yulay’s desert trek scene.

In the first, we learn that this is not the first time Yulay has seen his mother’s clothing, which has been locked up in her now-museumified bedroom that Quintero has conserved intact since her death, evidence of Quintero’s attachment and Yulay’s previous failed attempts to connect with the mother figure. If Quintero’s show of aggression is meant to shame and effeminate Yulay, the scene that unfolds has an opposite effect. Standing now in front of an audience as an outted and unapologetic homosexual absorbed in the image of himself in his mother’s dress, Yulay senses a connection to his mother for the very first time in his life: “Por un segundo acarició su propio vientre, palpando suavemente aquella tela, pensando en ella, contactándola a través de aquella textura y, realmente, por primera vez en su vida, se sintió unida a su madre” (215). The use of the feminine form of the adjective “unida” instead of the masculine form “unido” that rightly corresponds to Yulay as a gendered male emphasizes his growing comfort with his non-conventional sexual identity.

In the second scene, despite his growing self-confidence and autonomy, during his fatal journey through the dessert, Yulay invokes the image of his mother to ask for her
guidance in getting to the other side. Though he wants to believe in the nurturing power of the maternal figure, her rejection demythifies the idealized image of the mother as saviour:

—Madre?—intuyó al verla por primera vez en su vida, con un llanto fruto ambivalente de la alegría porque su madre hubiera aparecido en su auxilio y de la desesperación por el extravío--. Madre mía, ayúdame.


--¿No vas a ayudarme? ¿Y si me muero?

--Si te mueres, mejor. (220)

A professional coyote, she can surely assume a motherly role and point Yulay in the right direction, maybe even escort him to the border, as any dignified coyote would. However, as she did in life, she privileges Tobías and abandons Yulay also in death, leaving him to fend for himself and ultimately perish in the desert. In contrast to representative contemporary Mexican “homosexual literature,” in which gay men amble subversively throughout the city in a process towards knowledge and self-awareness (Anzaldo González 152), in Yépez’s typically masculine novel, the gay man is characterized as lost and confused before being negated and erased completely from the social plane.

35 Somewhat surprisingly, in Tijuana, the most renowned coyotes are women. According to one hypothesis, women rely on their mothering and nurturing skills to shepherd needy and defiant, child-like migrants across the line (Gaynor 67).
Even before his birth, Quintero was already granted a present and privileged position as the first male child of the family. Following Hebrew tradition outlined in the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers (*Good News Bible*, Gen. 37-50), Quintero enjoys special hierarchically-based advantages in the areas of parental affection, authority over younger siblings, and the right of family succession upon the death, or in the Quinteros’ case, the abandonment, of the father. Although Olga appears in phantasmagorical fashion in Yulay’s desert hallucination, which is focalized from the younger son’s perspective, she still chooses Tobías over Yulay. Even in his own delusion Yulay receives no support, guidance, or validation from his mother. In life, Olga taught Tobías, and only Tobías, how to be a *coyote*; in death, she continues to guide him, and only him, on his journeys through the desert, fulfilling her role as nurturing mother with at least one son. As mentioned above, Tobías assumes responsibility not only for the family and the family business, which Olga leaves under his complete authority, but also the family name, which he appropriates as his own.

The recipient of his mother’s capital and affection, Quintero excuses her absence in response to Tiburón’s resentment: “Ella tuvo sus fallas. Casi no hablaba con nosotros y nunca tuvo una muestra de cariño, un abrazo: nada. Tenía sus motivos” (33). While Quintero does not try to negate her absence and aloofness, he does legitimize it by placing the blame on their father’s abandonment, thereby ensuring that Olga does not fail in her role as a mother. Thus, because she is not innately inept or indifferent as a mother, and because she passes on to Tobías the only two things she possesses—her knowledge as a *coyote* and the migrant hotel—, he forgives her shortfalls and places her on a pedestal up to which he looks for approval.

The migrant hotel and border crossing business is fundamental not only to Quintero’s superior sense of self but also to his financial and familial stability. He seeks his mother’s
approval through the success of the business with which she entrusted him; for, if it were to fail, the family would fall apart, which is, in effect, what occurs before his, the other characters’, and the readers’ eyes through the diagetic course of the novel. For Quintero, failure signifies not only the obliteration of his sovereign power over the family and the hotel but, perhaps more importantly, the destruction of his mother’s constant presence. There are clear indications early on that the hotel is a site of desperation for its inhabitants, whose abandonment is almost imminently certain. The border crossing business, like all illegal and underground economies, has undergone transformative change over the past decades: with border crossers less willing to make the long and arduous trek through the desert, a new generation of coyotes and business people from the other side of the border turn to faster, more profitable methods, crossing car and truckloads of people hidden in clavos, trunks and other hollowed out compartments, at the border itself,\(^{36}\) the manner in which Marlon and Reina cross in Paraíso Travel, the Colombian novel analyzed in the fourth and final section of the present chapter. Quintero, however, is unwilling to explore these other avenues and remains dedicated to crossing via the desert, the way his mother taught him. Unsurprisingly, his business recedes as a result. Two-thirds into the novel, two of the five residents of the hotel have already left (Yulay and Quintero’s mistress Carmen), and with Tiburón making plans to head north and Quintero’s wife Marisa dropping hints that she, along with her and Quintero’s son, would soon be returning to her family down south, Quintero recognizes the precarious state of the hotel, an outcome of the slow disintegration of his family:

\(^{36}\) For more information on the changing methods of Tijuana coyotes, see Gaynor, especially Chapter Three, “Welcome to Tijuana.”
Quintero cerró los ojos. Deseaba soñar. Salir de este lugar. Irse a otro, aunque fuese unas pocas horas. Le hacía falta Carmen. Y, al parecer, le haría falta, pronto, el dinero que Tiburón le había generado en los últimos tiempos. Y le hacía falta, sobre todo, sentir que la pensión no se iba a derrumbar. Pero sentir eso era difícil en este momento. Todos parecían querer abandonarla. (251)

By the end of the novel, the family is no longer fetishized for Quintero, who sees a broken and physically deformed Tiburón no longer as a kin but simply as a source of revenue. Without asking Tiburón about his long absence or showing concern for his injuries, incurred in his failed border crossing attempt, Quintero gives Tiburón some phoco in an attempt to persuade him to go out and garner more business for the hotel. This marker of the complete destruction of the Quintero family coincides with the destruction of the migrant hotel. Having been exposed, the “safe house” is being watched by undercover police operatives there to raid and “apoderarse de la pensión” (322), giving Quintero his final blow. The use of the verb “apoderarse” is significant to my analysis of societal and familial power struggles in Al otro lado: losing his grip on the hotel effectively castrates Quintero and signals his social and economic demise.

Finally, in line with his liminal familial and border identity, Tiburón’s relationship with his mother (and the family business) shares elements of the resentment, gratitude, and desire felt by both Yulay and Quintero. Like his younger brother, Tiburón acknowledges his mother’s failure to guide and provide for him, to give him the stability associated with the idealized concept of home. As he tells Quintero, Olga was, simply put, not a present figure in his life. Ironically, in line with Quintero’s legitimation of their mother’s deficiencies, and despite her absence, Tiburón searches for security in the ideal of the feminized home through
his connections with other female figures: his ex-girlfriend Elsa; his new love interest Liz; and the United States, which he personifies as a woman. If Tiburón cannot create an alternate reality out of *phoco*, he attempts to find an alternative space of redemption, hope, and belonging in his relationships with women. On a large scale, the famed “otro lado” south of the border is imagined as the paradigmatic feminine Other that opens herself up to Tiburón—“La frontera había abierto sus piernas” (163)—when his own mother and later Ciudad de Paso fail to protect him any longer: “Tiburón sentía *he wasn’t welcome in his own house, he didn’t belong in his old uterus. He was being pushed back. Turned away from his own self*” (51).

For Tiburón, salvation is always found buried deep down in the space of the female Other, and he seems appeased by whoever is happy to serve that purpose. That is to say that it is not the individual woman that symbolizes salvation per se, but the objectified body of the any-woman, who will eventually propel him to cross the border, and thereby recuperate his sense of self, autonomy, and agency as the superior man and human being. For Tiburón, the sexual union serves a similar purpose. While standing alone in the centre of Ciudad de Paso’s busy downtown, he becomes anxious and senses an urgent need to have sex, to ejaculate his excesses into any body that would accept him, if just momentarily. Having had his manhood rejected by a disinterested woman standing close by, his now violent desire is re-directed towards the city itself: “estaba tan caliente que tenía ganas de meterle la verga a toda la metrópolis, meter la verga en la primera alcantarilla que se encontrara, metérsela hasta el fondo, metérsela hasta que esta cabrona ciudad chillara” (86). A metaphor for the feminine and the abandoned space of the mother, the city also rejects Tiburón. His desire to
rape it is therefore not simply a gratuitous image, but one that points to his resentment towards his mother, who, like Ciudad de Paso, has banished him from his only known home.

Indicative of his objectification of the feminine, this same sexual urgency is repeated in his relationship with Liz, a migrant who stays at the hotel and with whom Tiburón later attempts to cross the border: “lo primero en que pensó fue en la chicuela, bajar a buscarla y cogérsela a como diera lugar” (134). In Tiburón’s estimation, the woman is converted into an object to be used for his own end, be that to relieve his sexual tension or, on a larger level, to fill a gap in his sense of self and belonging. Liz fulfils the feminine role missing in his life. Not simply a replacement for his dead mother, she is a replacement for his ex-girlfriend, Elsa: “La chica de la sonrisa se le había metido en la cabeza a Tiburón. . . . Y detrás de ella, veía a Elsa” (111). And later: “Tiburón cayó en la cuenta de que jamás podría estar con Liz. Pensó en Elsa” (178). Because Liz is only a transitory desire and not a real life alternative for Tiburón, he goes back to el Matamorros in search of Elsa and their son Jacinto, for whom he says he is now prepared to care and protect as much for their sake as for his own: to be sure, thinking about himself as an active father and provider makes him feel “fuerte, real, macho” (176).

In this respect, and in the wake of the destruction of the hotel and the Quintero family, Tiburón has the opportunity to remake himself as head of his own family, to assume a position of power as the provider for Elsa and Jacinto. He imagines himself as the powerful and competent patriarch (previously Quintero’s role) in contradistinction to Elsa’s weak and miserable feminine image, recollecting Edward Said’s central critique in Orientalism, namely that hegemonic discourses dominate and maintain authority over the Other in an effort to define themselves via contrasting images. Similarly, from a gendered perspective, according
to Elizabeth Bronfen, “Woman functions as a sign not only of the essence of femininity but also of the Other in whose mirror or image masculine identity and creativity finds its definition. Femininity is also installed in representations as the material through which and as the barrier against and over which, the hero, society, culture and their representations are constituted” (209). Tiburón seizes the control and power that has so often eluded him in his hierarchical kinship relationship with Quintero over Elsa, whom he defines as “una bugambilia [que] se estaba pudriendo . . . . Estaba cerca de su desplome. Era momento de que alguien la ayudara a salir del abismo” (210). Tiburón takes it upon himself to assume that powerful role, to return to his past as an escape route from the present.

In the same way that the “modern” family is celebrated as the epitome of the kinship network, from a wistful postmodern lens, Tiburón tries, unsuccessfully, to return to the nostalgic past via Elsa: “Venir con Elsa, es cierto, había significado regresar al pasado, pero al pasado no vuelves y lo encuentras intacto, no, las cosas no eran como Tiburón hubiese querido” (203). Elsa’s phoco addiction, like Tiburón’s, has intensified over the years, converting her into a barren, rotten, dried out flower in need of water and nourishment, in need of his rescue. That Tiburón imagines himself to be her saviour, however, is not a wholly philanthropic act; for, he cannot bear to let another woman die and abandon him yet again: “Tiburón no quería soltarla. Sentía que iba a morirse en cualquier momento. Y no sabía si eso era cierto o si sólo lo sentía porque cada vez que él quiere a alguien—como de niño quiso a su madre—Tiburón siente que va a morirse pronto” (210). Somewhat ironically, while the feminine subject and space of the home has eluded him and even let him down in the past (curiously, the only feminine figure that even attempts to care for Tiburón and offer him a safe site of refuge is his inanimate car Christa, who guards over Tiburón until her
untimely ruination), he still yearns to play out the paradigmatic role of the male protector of the supposedly nourishing feminine space.\footnote{A similar theme is evident in Colombian writer Laura Restrepo’s 2001 novel \textit{La multitud errante}, where the perennially displaced protagonist, Three Sevens, finds a sense of home and rootedness in a quintessentially feminine space, a shelter for displaced migrants run by nuns. A peripheral, solitary, and quiet outsider abandoned by his mother and later separated from his adoptive mother, Three Sevens dedicates himself to saving the shelter, recuperating his own identity as the male protector over the feminine space in the process and propagating traditional cultural patriarchal paradigms. See my article “El desplazamiento: espacio, hogar e identidad” for a more detailed analysis of this condition in the novel.}

Notwithstanding his desire to do right and care for Elsa and Jacinto, Tiburón, like his mother and his brother before him, essentially fails. Not to mention the hotel and his immediate, nuclear family, everything around Tiburón is eventually annihilated: his attempt to cross the border ends in near ruin; Elsa disintegrates before his eyes; Jacinto is killed by Tiburón’s own shot, thwarting his dream of family reunification; Cholo abandons (or is abandoned by) Tiburón in the desert; and even Christa, his car, is dismantled and completely destroyed. Upon finally acknowledging that he cannot escape the labyrinthine city of Ciudad de Paso, Tiburón crashes his stolen United States Immigration Services jeep at full velocity into the ever-expanding border wall—“contra aquella maldita muralla de contención” (304)—cracking the barrier enough to break, at last, into the other side. His unauthorized residency is, however, short lived. Tiburón wakes up two days later to find two border guards staring at his mutilated face and overall state of atrophy, a degenerative pathology characterized by a wasting away of the body. In short, in that moment, Tiburón embodies bare life on display: “Los agentes de migración no podían dejar de mirar aquel espanto despanzurrado en el suelo” (307). After spending some time at a temporary detention centre for undocumented migrants, a quintessential twenty-first-century non-place understood not in Marc Augé’s conception of it as a non-political site of transit for the supermodern subject but, as Davidson
suggests, as a physical site whose “latent political potential is realized through calculated state intervention in the movement of individuals and groups” (4), Tiburón is deported back to Ciudad de Paso.

Determined to find Elsa and his son now that he believes he has a second chance at making things right—“Iba rumbo a Elsa. Si la vida lo había regresado aquí, ¿para qué era?” (310)—, Tiburón does not yet know how impossible it is to escape the past. The moment he learns that he inadvertently killed his own son in an earlier altercation with Elsa’s lover, that he sealed Jacinto’s fate, leaving him with a broken face much worse than his own, Tiburón is converted into the grotesque image of *el Matamorros* itself, the personification of life in the Mexican peripheries: “No quiso hacer ningún gesto ante ese mundo grotesco, porque necesitaba estar aquí, en este lugar que, sin embargo, era menos bestial que el mundo del que venia. . . . Aquí, además, sus marcas se volvían normales” (315). An indication of things to come, earlier in the novel the omniscient narrator, focalizing Quintero’s thoughts and fears of losing contact with his own son David, foreshadows Tiburón’s outcome: “Los Quintero siempre terminan separándose de sus hijos” (214). In the end, the death of Jacinto and the imminent separation of Quintero and David, who will surely head back south with his mother following the destruction of the migrant hotel and likely incarceration of Quintero, symbolizes the ultimate demise of the Quintero family. While there is still hope for future procreation of the Quintero lineage via the young David, with very limited or no contact with his father, the Quintero bloodline is sure to lose its significance.

A further metaphor for the separation and destruction of the Quintero family is evident in Christa’s abandonment and destruction. Having been abandoned by Tiburón on the side of the highway, the car is taken by a gang and stripped completely for parts, leaving
no remnants of her former self intact: “Sin una sola de sus partes unida a otra fue que ella supo qué era. Justo cuando casi terminaban de desarmarla, cayó en la cuenta. . . . Y no fue la muerte lo que conoció. Fue algo superior, o más humillante. Fue algo menos humano. Fue algo desconocido, algo que Christa deseó algún día ocurriera a cada uno de los malditos humanos” (268). It appears as though Christa will get her will.

Unlike the spatial practice of the La Comedia hotel in Abad Faciolince’s Angosta, with its potential to be a heterotopic site of alternative social ordering, the migrant hotel in Yépez’s Al otro lado is a wholly traditional and repressive space characterized by hierarchical power structures. Even if the illegality of the so-called safe house could be interpreted as an attempt to subvert the established juridico-political order, it is done so within the same repressive socio-economic paradigms that compel unauthorized migration to the north in the first place. From this optic, the hotel is just one more enterprise in a long line of institutions and illegal industries that seek to profit from the Mexican state’s inability to provide adequately for its citizens, who are forced to flee in search of more humane conditions. As the inanimate Christa ultimately recognizes, the unmitigated inhumanity of humanity fuels the socio-cultural dystopia of the contemporary global order, and in that sense can be considered another quintessential postmodern pathology.
2.4 The Immigrant Experience: Disaporic Identities in Jorge Franco’s *Paraíso Travel*

Whereas Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta* stresses conflicts and inequalities on a broad national and international level and Yépez’s *Al otro lado* emphasizes the liminal Tijuana or *norteño* identity and the geographical, cultural, and linguistic contestations that take shape at the specifically delimited and localized U.S.-Mexico (and more specifically California-Baja California) border, Jorge Franco’s *Paraíso Travel* transcends the classic model of the localized border narrative to a transnational realm by extending the imagery of the borderlands and the tensions in play along the border to the other side of the divide.³⁸ This outward expansion of the borderlands supports Balibar’s contention that territorial borders are interiorized by those who cross them only to find that they are then bound not by specific, territorial divides but by “invisible borders, situated everywhere and nowhere” (Balibar 78). That is to say that the terror and inhumanity of the border is not contained to the physical crossing but is, rather, extended to the core and, more broadly, to U.S.-Mexico relations. As Claire Fox writes, “[t]he synecdochic way of seeing the border, . . . in which the border signifies the whole U.S.-Mexico relations in microcosm, has been quite prevalent in NAFTA and post-NAFTA media coverage” (120). In this sense, the border, and its much broader non-site specific signifiers, has become a powerful showcase for Unitedstatesian socio-economic and political hegemony. If the hunting and killing of migrants begins on the border, the United States’ long history of fear of the Other now infiltrates Unitedstatesian consciousness on a much larger spatio-cultural level:

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³⁸ Though I classify the novel as a border narrative, as Julio Peñate Rivero argues, it can also be classified as travel fiction for its engagement with travel as a disorienting process that fosters introspection and ultimately alters the worldview of the protagonist-traveling subject.
But what is happening on our southern border is no longer really happening there. It has penetrated our entire country and the border is simply a point where we watch the world race toward us at flood level. The issue is not securing a broken border, any more than the real issue in New Orleans is building a better levee. Storms are rising at sea and they will come ashore and the walls and levees are simply points where we taste their initial force as they move inland. (Bowden and Cardona 95)

Because this formidable force causes fear in the populace, hostile reactions, initially played out along the border by groups such as the Minutemen, percolate throughout the country, where hegemonic paradigms and technologies of power persist in response to the potentially contestatory “global implosion” of the peripheries into the centre (Kearney, “The Local” 550-54).

Though much writing on the border and the so-called immigrant problem in the United States (typically understood as a “Mexican” or “Latino” problem) comes from the Mexican context due to its geographical proximity to the U.S., the impulse and consequences of migration are equally valid from a greater Latin American perspective. In the Colombian context, for instance, a half-century of armed conflict continues to compromise and rupture the physical security and integrity of the Colombian populace, provoking the double phenomena of internal and external displacement. If the plight of the almost 5 million internally displaced peoples in the country has garnered significant attention and criticism at

39 A volunteer-run civilian border control militia, the Minutemen sprang up in the wake and confusion of September 11, 2001. For a detailed history of the movement, see Gaynor, especially chapter eleven, “The Minutemen.”
both a national and international level,\textsuperscript{40} the trend towards increased transnational flows in the twenty-first century has made emigration part of the national consciousness. Of course, I am not suggesting that emigration is a new phenomenon in the country,\textsuperscript{41} only that its consequences have begun to receive more critical attention within institutional and governmental structures since the new millennium.

Of greatest concern is the ongoing emigration of young families and professionals, which undermines the Colombian government’s investments in national education and training programs. Since June 2003 and the launching of the program \textit{Colombia nos une}, the Colombian Ministry of Exterior Relations has documented the Colombian diaspora in an effort to understand better not only citizens’ reasons for migrating but also the socio-political and economic impacts of their emigration on a national level. According to the Ministry website, the program is “una suerte de ruta para la vinculación permanente del Estado colombiano con las comunidades residentes en el exterior.”\textsuperscript{42} While some of the program’s stated objectives are to assist the Colombian diaspora in labour and social security matters, Colombian and other unauthorized migrants north of the border continue to experience gross injustice at the hands of the very capitalist system of which they so-often leave in search.

\textsuperscript{40} Non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), and on a national level the Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES) research the phenomenon and put forth policy recommendations to guide Colombian and international governmental policies related to the internally displaced.

\textsuperscript{41} Concerning Colombian emigration, López, Restrepo, and Restrepo identify three major periods of emigration in the Colombian context: i) 1965-1976, driven by flexible migration policies in receiving countries; ii) 1975-1985, triggered by Colombia’s high unemployment rate; and iii) 1995-2005, prompted on the one hand by a fledgling economy and on the other by increasing security concerns.

\textsuperscript{42} For more information, see the \textit{Colombia nos une} website at \textit{<http://www.minrelex.gov.co/wps/portal/colnusone>>}.\textsuperscript{42}
As discussed in my earlier analysis of Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta*, that our contemporary, postmodern era is defined in large part by migratory flows and international displacements challenges conventional functions of territorial borders. Utilized as apparatuses of control, borders differentiate and discriminate between the rich and the poor, the authorized and the unauthorized, citizens and non-citizens, converting the latter in each binary into a national security risk. Such criminalization of the poor, unauthorized migrant-Other confines him or her to the limits of a wholly inhuman “non-life” (Balibar 83) outside of the national and global *bios*, as we see in the bare life on display of *Al otro lado*’s Tiburón. Removed from the forces of biopower, which have, alongside an intrinsically coercive element, redemptive and constructive technologies concerned with the overall financial, health, and educational well-being of citizens to the ends of a healthy, productive community, the non-authorized migrant is denied the opportunity to realize his or her full personal, social, and political agency.

One of the few examples of recent Colombian literary production in dialogue with the country’s history of displacement to tackle the phenomenon of external migration and the Colombian diaspora,43 *Paraíso Travel* exposes the inhuman side of these interiorized, invisible, or ubiquitous borders vis-à-vis the story of Marlon Cruz, a young man from Medellín who makes the near fateful decision to follow his equally young, naïve, and sexually manipulative girlfriend, Reina, across the border (in fact, many borders) to the

United States. Beyond the agonizing preparations and the horrifying journey itself, the novel narrates Marlon and Reina’s arrival in New York City, their separation, and Marlon’s struggle to live and survive as a solitary, unauthorized migrant condemned, like the estimated more than 12 million migrants who currently live and work illegally in the United States, to a peripheral space monitored by the state’s panoptic eye. As Giovanni, a friend and co-worker of Marlon, understands it: “Aquí lo que funciona es la observación: tenés que mirar y seguir, mirar y luego imitar, y obedecer, así creás que no te están vigilando, porque siempre están mirando” (86). The following analysis interrogates the seemingly immutable allure of the “American Dream;” the immigrant paradox of diasporic identities manifested in the abiding tension between home and abroad; and the physical and psycho-pathological effects such fragmented identities have on the individual psyche, the self’s potential for agency, the social order, and spatial practice. To this end, I will utilize Augé’s concept of the non-place as a temporary site of transit to understand how, with a decidedly less celebratory tone, such temporal spaces of transit and mobility are re-imagined in the contemporary diasporic landscape as permanent sites of liminality, fragmentation, and solitude. In short, if “[t]he space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude” (Augé 103), then those relegated to a perennial non-place are essentially condemned to Balibar’s non-life or Agamben’s bare life. Considering the characteristic mobility of our contemporary, postmodern epoch, the fundamental question we must ask is how to reconcile the solitary non-place of mobility with the morally constitutive social space of humanity, politics, civil society, and the public sphere. The following analysis initiates this dialogue.
2.4.1 The American Dream

Like many fundamentally just ideals subsequently co-opted by an economic capitalist doctrine, the concept of the American Dream has not always coincided so faithfully with the cult of consumerism, the relentless pursuit of material wealth, and the fetishization of commodity consumption on which capitalism is contingent. Historian James Truslow Adams, who coined the term in his classic 1931 work *The Epic of America*, defines the American Dream as:

> that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man [sic], with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. . . . It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (404, emphasis added)

Interestingly, this idealistic conception of the equalizing potential of “America” to enhance the lives of all its residents resonates with the equally unrealized principles of humanity outlined in the preamble to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which stresses the “inherent dignity” and “inalienable rights” of all humanity (United Nations). While Adams acknowledges the monetary and materialistic aspect of the American Dream, he clearly emphasizes the more humanistic side of the concept embodied in that dream of an inclusive public sphere attentive to the needs, well-being, and agency of humanity, or, to quote David Levin once again, a social order conducive to “the development of our individual and collective potential as human beings” (3). However, contrary to the UN’s vision and Adams’s own conclusion that “that dream has been realized more fully in
actual life here [in the United States] than anywhere else, though very imperfectly even among ourselves” (405), in the present conjuncture, the degree of individual and collective agency of members, authorized or unauthorized, of the American (Unitedstatesian) public, is absolutely bound to an individual’s familial and socio-economic circumstances to the degree that the “birthright lottery” (Shachar), and not the inalienable rights of humanity itself, continues to determine, to a great extent, the prospects for a person’s well-being, security, and socio-economic and political freedom.

Notwithstanding these constraints, or the fact that the ideal of the American Dream has metamorphosed from a mechanism for an ethics of humanity into an apparatus of capitalist ideology, the equalizing promise of the American Dream remains central to the Unitedstatesian imaginary. That the American Dream is so alluring to would-be migrants the world over is not surprising considering the great disparities amongst the world’s richest and poorest nations. For those constrained to lives of abject poverty, ubiquitous insecurity, and political illegitimacy in the peripheries, the United States remains the ultimate mecca, despite its well-documented internal problems with socio-racial segregation and poverty.

Unfortunately, this seeming escape from uncertain futures rarely results in much more certainty, as the cases of Reina and Marlon demonstrate. For her part, Reina, who succumbs fully to the mythic allure of the American Dream, is convinced that the United States is the ultimate land of opportunity, the purveyor of prosperity and well-being denied her by her homeland. So assured is she that Paradise awaits her in New York City that she is unwilling to let anything stand in her way. In her words: “Nadie va a desbaratar mi sueño” (48). To be sure, when the United States government denies her an entry visa, she simply finds an alternate, illegal method of entry with an illicit border crossing agency, the eponymous
Paraíso Travel. A theme explored more fully in *Al otro lado*, following a capitalist doctrine, illicit border crossing is big business, and Reina buys into it wholeheartedly: “A Reina se le iluminó un ojo más que el otro, y no era para menos: acababa de comprar un sueño” (157).

Imagined as an antipode to her Colombian existence, New York City is fabricated as “el paisaje promisorio de destellos y rascacielos” (88). In Reina’s fantasy, the shine from the city’s brilliant skyscrapers, the paradigmatic symbol of urban-industrial capitalist modernity and the promise of progress, would surely extend to the personal space she envisions for herself and Marlon: “es un apartamento blanco con vista al río y a la Estatua de la Libertad, en un piso alto con una terracita que tiene un jardín chiquito y dos sillas para sentarse a mirar el atardecer . . . [y] una cocina muy limpia, llena de electrodomésticos, y un baño blanco con bañera blanca y grande” (11). This description of cleanliness as whiteness mirrors turn of the twentieth-century ads for domestic hygiene products such as soap that imply the preservation of the white (typically male) body from the contamination of cross-cultural contact during the imperialist project (McClintock 208). Reina likewise equates imperial progress and capitalist civilization with the United States, the “clean,” modern neighbour to the dirty, premodern south. She promises to sleep with Marlon once they arrive in the United States, where they will make honest money that will propel them into the strata of a whitened middle class. In this way, the description of her imagined apartment as a wholly sanitized space juxtaposes a glamorized, enlightened, and genteel New York City with a dim, vulgar, and callous Medellín. The Dantean binary is as evident here as it is in *Angosta*’s tripartite spatial practice or *Al otro lado*’s contrastive border dialectic.

In Reina’s consciousness, New York is the only option for a worthwhile future. Staying in Colombia would mean certain death, if not from the insecurity and violence that
overwhelms the country then at her own hands, something Marlon simply cannot
comprehend: “Era fácil entender que quisiera irse: todos queremos irnos, es mejor estar lejos
que muerto o secuestrado o empobrecido. Pero menos fácil era entender su <<mejor
matémonos>> o su <<matate y me dejás tranquila>>; era difícil comprenderlo porque tenía
que ver más con ella misma que con nuestro país asesino” (84). What Marlon does not know
is that Reina is not only fleeing from Colombia, as we learn further on in the novel, she goes
out in search of her mother, who, like Jacobo’s mother in Angosta, and Tiburón’s mother in
Al otro lado, abandoned her family for a new man and new life on the other side of the
border. Perhaps fearful of having to assume the matriarchal role in the absence of her
mother, Reina abandons her aging father without a word of notice. Inverting the paradigm of
the abandoned child, Reina forsakes the father, leaving him behind to suffer in her absence.
Interestingly, interpretable as a subversion of patriarchal expectations, in all three cases
traditional gender roles are contested as the female abandons the needy male, disavowing her
conventional role as nurturer.

In contrast to Reina’s steadfast resolution to flee, Marlon had never contemplated
leaving his homeland behind until Reina creates an image of their would-be idyllic life
together too seductive for him not to follow. If he had never before thought of leaving
Colombia, Reina’s arguments against the degenerate state of the country leave him without a
rational defence: “Yo siempre me quedaba sin argumentos para alegarle. Qué podía decir de
un país donde en cualquier esquina está acechando la tragedia, lista para enlutarte” (159).
Importantly, this tragedy is not manifested only in the physical poverty and violence that
characterizes the spatial practice of the city but in the state’s inability to meet the
Foucauldian requirements of governmental biopower, namely to foster a normative and
productive society through the administration of both the individual and the population. As Reina argues, although Marlon would like to go to university (to study either Philosophy or, to appease his family and earn a decent living, Engineering), because he is neither privileged enough to be accepted into the public universities nor wealthy enough to pay for a private university education, it is unlikely that he will ever realize his dream. This frustrates an ingenuous Reina, who believes that such things occur only in Colombia. She rhetorically asks Marlon: “decime en qué país que se respete lo dejan a uno sin estudio”-- , before providing her own answer: “¡Solamente en un país de brutos!” (89). This question of education is central to the emigration discourse in Colombia and other countries on the peripheries who lose a large percentage of their highly educated population to North America and Europe, creating a “brain-drain” wherein the “departure of a large proportion of the most competent and innovative individuals from developing nations slows the achievement of the critical mass needed to generate the enabling context in which knowledge creation occurs” (Gore Saravia and Francisco Miranda 608), leaving behind, as Reina suggests, an uneducated, incompetent population to run the country.

In addition to Reina’s socio-economic arguments, she consciously utilizes her sexuality to beguile a reluctant yet infatuated Marlon into accepting her plan. Evident from the very first pages of the novel, she exploits her sexuality as an effective mechanism of control to convert Marlon into a complicit participant of her plan to flee: “—Nos vamos los

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44 Based on the 2000 United States Census, 30% of Colombian immigrants 25 years of age and older have a technical, undergraduate or graduate education and choose migration as a viable employment option. See Rosa Evelia Sánchez for more.

In addition, according to Gore Saravia and Francisco Miranda, to further highlight this phenomenon with a specific example, the 2000 Colombian scientists working in research and development abroad is equivalent to one-half of the 4000 Colombian scientists working in research and development in Colombia.
dos—. . . Lo dijo bajito, con los labios pegados a mi cara, apretando el cuerpo, exhalando aire caliente por la nariz, sin rabia pero resuelta, clavándome los pechos con cada respiración, para que yo sintiera lo que me iba a perder si me quedaba” (10). Whereas she begins in this scene with a fairly innocuous sexual insinuation, as the narrative progresses, her allusions to sexual consummation as reward for Marlon’s participation in her dream become less ambiguous. In her description of their would-be apartment, Reina tells Marlon of the white bathtub in which they would make love every night, arousing his desires and consolidating his complicity. Further on, as it becomes apparent to Reina that their only option is to enter the United States illegally, she turns up her sexual prowess:

ella comenzó a recompensar mi apoyo con besos mojados y afanados por la boca y por el cuello, respirando duro, metiendo sus manos entre mi camisa y tocándome, ya sin recato, el bulto que se agrandaba por sus caricias bruscas . . . . Yo quería quitarle la ropa pero ella se resistía, aquí no, me dijo alcanzada, aquí no, y mientras forcejábamos yo me restregué como un perrito de salón contra su muslo hasta que me vine. Luego nos soltamos, y antes de que asomara la mancha en mi pantalón, Reina me dijo entre espasmos:

--En Nueva York nos empelotamos. (49)

With this and other “anticipos” or advancements of what is to come, namely the consummation of their love, Marlon is rendered powerless in the face of Reina’s sexuality. Animalized not as a wild creature (like Tiburón in Al otro lado) but instead as a domesticated pet, he assumes a completely docile role, even as he walks down the street with Reina, whom he follows a few steps behind, as any man would his “queen.” Despite his misgivings, his
fears, his anxiety over not speaking English, and his recognition that he is extremely tied to his native land—“Yo soy muy de acá” (12), he thinks to himself, but refrains from sharing this sentiment with Reina for fear of upsetting her—, the allure of Reina’s sexuality alongside the lustre of her romanticized materialistic and sanitized American Dream, juxtaposed with the limited opportunities available to him in Colombia, ultimately motivate Marlon’s entry into the growing Colombian diaspora.

2.4.2 Diasporic Identities: The Liminal Non-Place

Historically conceived as a term to describe the expulsion and the dispersal of the Jews outside Israel in the sixth century BCE, the term diaspora has since been extended to include other “forced” human displacements across national, linguistic, geographical, and cultural boundaries. From a postmodern optic, diasporic communities are commonly interpreted and celebrated for their deterritorialized, transnational, and even postnational status. Appadurai, for instance, praises “diasporic public spheres” and their transnational social projects or “new mythographies” of the collective imagination for their potential to

45 The concept of “forced” displacement is contentious insofar as it assumes relatively little agency on the part of the displaced. In the Colombian context, on the one hand, displacement is propelled by violence, crime, and threats that leave the displaced subject with little choice but to leave his or her home and community behind. On the other hand, the country’s high level of fear, insecurity, and illegality cause thousands to flee seemingly of their own accord. Although Marlon and Reina are not obligated to leave their country through forceful tactics, the commonplace violence, insecurity, and lack of opportunity propel their displacement. While they leave of their own accord, their voluntarily act cannot be understood as the same kind of voluntary emigration freely chosen by an adventure-seeking expatriate.

46 In some cases, diasporic and deterritorialized communities can be interpreted as contrastive concepts considering the ability of national governments to extend their hegemony over citizens outside the bounds of the territorialized nation-state itself, fostering a new form of “post-colonial nationalism” that reinforces global territorial divides. This type of deterritorialization contrasts with the concept of diaspora as inherently postnational (Kearney, “The Local” 553).
mobilize concrete action and social change; that is, for their promissory capacity to act as “the crucibles of a postnational political order” (Appadurai, *Modernity* 6, 21-22).

Notwithstanding this celebration of “travelling cultures,” to reference James Clifford anew, with etymological roots in the Greek “diaspleirein,” the term in fact juxtaposes the image of dispersion (from “dia”) with that of stasis (from “spiro”–“to sow the seeds”–, suggesting an image of roots and rootedness in place) (Sideri 33-34), highlighting the concept’s intrinsic relation to the dialectics of time and space; that is, to the inherent complexities and contradictions implicit in, amongst others, the problematics of historical time, the imagination of utopic and dystopic spaces vis-à-vis national and trans- or postnational identities, and theories of migration (McClennen 2-3). According to Eleni Sideri, “[t]he two dimensions [time and space] shape the horizon upon which diasporas conceive themselves as communities, emerge as alternative national Others and rise in everyday discourses as part of the ways people perceive their past and future” (33). Naturally, human displacements of peoples across national territories problematize, particularly in an era of increasing migration and globalization processes, the efficacy of national institutions such as territorial borders, nationality, and citizenship, not to mention questions of personal and national identity, identification, representation, and participation in civil society and the public sphere.

Returning to *Paraiso Travel*, Marlon’s struggles with the dialectics of diaspora and the innate contradictions of migrant identities are analogous, in many aspects, to *Al otro lado*’s Tiburón’s conflictive border identity. Like Tiburón, Marlon wrestles with the irresolvable tension between wanting to leave in search of the American Dream, albeit Reina’s chimerical, sanitized, and sexualized version, and wanting to stay in place. Unlike Reina, who appears to be completely detached from her home and “postmodern” family
characterized by the abandonment of her mother and her own earlier, mysterious displacement (the reader is told that Reina left the neighbourhood one day with her mother only to return some ten years later with her father), Marlon is keenly attached to his “normal” or “modern” family dynamic. As stated above, while he recognizes that his sense of self and identity are rooted in place in Colombia, and is hesitant about leaving everything behind, he is powerless against Reina’s desire. If she sees in New York a route to happiness in the possibility of sowing new roots by starting a family and creating a home with Marlon, he sees the opposite: his migratory uprooting means leaving behind a unified family and place of belonging for an unknown and uncertain future. Curiously, though Reina is the one whose eyes are two different colours, an easy metaphor for duality and incongruity, Marlon is noticeably more afflicted by cultural dualities and personal fragmentation.

Apropos of this theme of migration, a metaphor of movement underlies the entire narrative structure of Paraíso Travel at both a diegetic and extra-diegetic level: Marlon narrates his story of migration from Medellín to New York City in the form of flashbacks, speaking of his motivations for leaving; the challenges associated with the journey, from the decision to leave, finding a coyote and the money to pay the ten thousand dollar a head charge, to the actual border crossing itself; his first discombobulated days lost and alone on the streets of New York City, where he experiences bare life at its most grotesque and horrifying level; his unwavering and incessant search for Reina; and his struggle first to understand immigration politics in the United States and finally to integrate into his new culture, as he travels on a Greyhound bus from New York to Miami, where he hopes to

47 For Johann Rodríguez-Bravo, Reina’s contrasting eyes are indicative of her feminine-macho duality.
reunite with Reina after an excruciatingly long year, three months, and five days. This temporal play of the double journey is not simply a narratological trope but, as Julio Peñate Rivero rightly notes, a mechanism used to emphasize Marlon’s transformation from a helpless accomplice and minor character to an empowered actor, protagonist, and legitimate narrator: “Ese doble itinerario reviste una función primordial: la de permitirnos comprobar que el viajero del segundo trayecto ya no es el del primero” (180). Moreover, an icon of North American pop culture, the Greyhound bus, an image commensurate with the great “American” cross-country road trip, romanticizes the freedom of travel. While on the bus, Marlon lives the quintessential experience of the non-place, manifested mainly in his solitary introspection and disconnection not only from the landscape but also from other passengers on the bus.

Following Augé, a non-place is recognizable in part by its distanced, fleeting, and temporary landscape: travellers pass by, not through, places, and are aware of their surroundings not by experiencing them but by the information offered on road signs and billboards. Marlon’s “supermodern” experience of the landscape is indicative of such an “invasion of space by text” (Augé 99): “las ciudades no se ven, sólo se ven sus nombres, toca imaginarlas a medida que pasa cada letrero. Richmond, Baltimore, Petersburg” (41). In this manner, he crosses the North American landscape, marked by recognizable symbols of capitalism and enterprise—“No me sorprende el paisaje plagado de emes gigantescas de McDonald’s o de conchas plásticas de Shell, igualmente grandes” (83)—, without truly interacting with places or fomenting relationships with the people who inhabit them. Neither does he foster any relationships with his fellow travellers, as a close reading of the few scenes that make mention of his travel companions makes evident. To the contrary, if he
starts off his bus trip engaging, though somewhat reticently, with Charlotte, the bigger-than-life gregarious African-American woman sitting next to him, he recoils from human contact as the trip continues. Charlotte, who leaves traces of herself behind in the muffin crumbs left on her seat, is replaced by Gerardo, a slim Salvadorian migrant whose unkempt appearance reminiscent of Marlon’s earlier grotesque state, in a curious reversal of roles, repulses Marlon to the point of not wanting to touch him: “Gerardo me ofrece su mano para sellar nuestra presentación. La tiene sudada, igual que toda su piel. Apenas me suelta, me limpio la mano en el cojin” (112). Marlon rejects Gerardo outright, responding to his queries with one-word replies, and even using a fake name to distance himself further. The final passenger, a young boy who talks incessantly even though Marlon refuses to look at or engage him in games or conversation, is even smaller in stature and status than the previous adult travellers, reinforcing the progressive insignificance of human contact and engagement in our individually-minded postmodern society. We can imagine that Charlotte’s crumbs have fully disintegrated from the seat, nullifying her presence, by the time the young boy leaves. Finally, during the final leg of the trip to Miami, the seat beside Marlon is completely empty, allowing him, once again, to embrace his undisturbed and solitary journey.

If the traveller’s space of transit, the archetypal non-place of supermodernity, creates a society of fragmented and detached selves, what are the implications for the travelling or migrant subject? While Augé celebrates the non-place as a temporal escape from reality that allows the traveller to surrender to “the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing” (Augé 103), his dualistic schema contrasting non-place with dwelling, or routes with roots, fails to account first for the experiences of those employed by the non-place, and secondly, for the problematic permanency of non-place for migrant
subjects such as Marlon. In effect, Augé’s transitory and solitary non-place is transformed in the contemporary social order into a permanent site of isolation for the migrant subject, who exists on the peripheries of the public sphere, excluded from the bios by ubiquitous interior or invisible borders (Balibar 78) that transform the migrant into a vulnerable subject exposed to abuse and manipulation. Although he has successfully crossed the border into the United States, fear of deportation binds the migrant to the border’s exclusionary techniques: the bound border crossing itself is thus re-imagined as a series of deterritorialized points that extend the dangers and threats of the border to the practice of everyday life.

This fear is manifested in concrete ways in Marlon’s fear of state authority, synechdochically represented in the figures of the police and border patrol or “Migra.” In fact, the terrifying arm of the law is what initially separates Marlon from Reina on their first day in the city: when a police officer, likely wanting only to reprimand Marlon for having thrown a cigarette butt onto the sidewalk, “innocently” puts his hand on Marlon’s shoulder, overcome by fear and panic, Marlon takes off running through the streets of New York City, where he loses himself both literally and figuratively. This loss and fragmentation of the self, a quintessential postmodern trait, shatters Marlon’s sense of unity and identity, leaving him to contend with a seeming lack of wholeness. Indeed, after an unidentified time of living on the streets, he finally confronts his new bare life migrant identity when he sees the appalling reflection of a man he does not recognize in the mirror:

De haberme visto antes no hubiera entrado, o si tan sólo hubiera sabido lo que me iba a encontrar en el espejo, que era pequeño como todo lo del baño, pero suficientemente grande para ver lo que horrorizaba a los otros, y lo que en ese instante también me estremeció. . . . Allí estaba el que alguna vez no fui, pero que
comenzaba a hacerlo a comienzo de esa tarde, así fuéramos distintos, porque nunca antes ni después vi a alguien tan distinto a mí en el mismo reflejo. (56)

The embodiment of Agamben’s bare life, Marlon had at that point degenerated into a wholly grotesque figure, unkempt and unwashed, “untado de mierda de la cintura para abajo” (56), unaware of his own putridity. Like the border subject who resides at the tyrannical “herida abierta” of the physical borderlands (Anzaldúa 25), the migrant subject exposes and endures bare life at the omnipresent invisible border, a now permanent liminal zone between life and death.

While it is true that Marlon begins to reconstruct himself and his life as a member of the large Colombian and Latin American diaspora in New York, he never gets to the level of “citizen,” and is therefore not respected as a member of its socio-political and cultural community. To the contrary, his unauthorized status intensifies the symbolism of the border as a marker of difference, segregation, and abuse: he is a figure deprived of human value, reified into techné, a technical object of labour not protected by the normative laws of the national bios (Cheah 202). That Marlon is expected to celebrate his good fortune when given the “opportunity” to work as a janitor for under minimum wage clearly exposes the unjust duality facing undocumented labourers in the United States and Western nations in general. Utilized solely as cheap labour, they exist on the boundary between Paradise and the Inferno: they live in deplorable conditions to make Paradise more accessible to others. To say that Marlon lives physically on this Paradise/Inferno divide is not just a symbolic trope but a veritable reality: he rents a bed in the apartment of another unauthorized migrant in a run-down building next door to an up-scale sports club. In terms of its spatial practice, the neighbourhood is undergoing a process of gentrification that is slowly displacing the
peripheral subject; that is, it is being converted into the kind of “genteel” neighbourhood Reina imagines for herself and Marlon: white and sanitized and free of menacing illegitimate Others.  

The politics of space fostering this iniquitous spatial practice is manifested in the struggle for land being played out not only in Marlon’s neighbourhood but throughout the entire city. In simplistic terms, Giovanny explains the contiguous meeting of classes to Marlon as follows: “—Los ricos quieren comprar pero los pobres no quieren vender. Los ricos ofrecen poco y los pobres piden mucho. Todavía no hay acuerdo entre ricos y pobres” (132). To say there is no mutual understanding between the rich and the poor is an understatement. As one particular scene in the novel demonstrates, the clash of classes can have deadly consequences: when the incessant sound of racquetballs hitting the wall throughout the night becomes too much for apartment dweller Papá Dionisio to bear, he enters the sports club and shoots down two men innocently starting their day with some would-be invigorating morning exercise. The shooting sets off a commotion at the club and next door in the dilapidated apartment building, whose residents, mostly all undocumented migrants, hurriedly flee the scene as the sirens in the distance approach, emphasizing, yet again, the visceral everyday threat and fear of the police. Though it commanded the death of two seemingly innocent men, we can assume that this consequential cleaning out and

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48 Although the term *gentrification* has undergone a process of transition since British sociologist Ruth Glass ironically coined the term in 1964 to describe the urban change brought about in inner London by the upper and lower middle class or new “urban gentry” invasion of working class quarters, which led to the displacement of the working classes, similar dynamics of invasion and displacement continue to characterize gentrification in the twenty-first century. For an interdisciplinary, socio-historical account of urban gentrification see Lees, Slater, and Wyly.
dispersal of the apartment migrants will make the sale of the apartment and the ensuing
gentrification and socio-spatial segregation of the neighbourhood more likely.

This segregationist mark, the defining feature of diasporic identities, accurately
characterizes Marlon’s immigrant experience. His solitary bus journey functions as a
metaphor of travel and the entire trajectory of the migrant subject, who remains in a
peripheral state of permanent flux even after the initial journey is completed. In other words,
we can extend the metaphor of the solitary non-place associated with the spaces of bourgeois
transit to the migratory experience of the peripheral migrant subject, whose intermediate
condition of travel does not end with the act of border crossing itself but is instead extended
to the processes of adaptation, resettlement, and integration into the new environment.
Although Augé declares that the non-place does not necessarily negate fixed places or sites
of more permanent relationships and identities, in regards to his or her relationship to the
State, the unauthorized migrant exists almost exclusively in an intermediary and solitary non-
place. As a non-citizen, his or her personal and political-democratic potential is limited to
the peripheries, away from the authoritative Unitedstatesian public sphere. Having had to
throw away his identity documents on the journey, Marlon is effectively stripped of his
Colombian identity and must assume the role of third-class citizen. As Appadurai argues, in
our globalized world, the existence of second- and third-class citizens is an inevitable
consequence of neoliberal politics and policies: “Thus second-classness and third-classness
are conditions of citizenship that are inevitable entailments of migration, however plural the
ethnic ideology of the host state and however flexible its accommodations of refugees and
other weakly documented visitors” (“Sovereignty” 346). With these words, Appadurai
exposes the inherent tensions among the ideal of diasporic pluralism, the migratory reality, and the divisive aspects of national citizenship.

These tensions can be extended, furthermore, to the realm of global justice vis-à-vis contemporary transnational trajectories confronted in chapter one, and the ensuing pathologies instigated by globalization processes. For nations to maintain their power and positionality in the international order, territorial borders will never cease to be mechanisms of control and differentiation, leading Álvaro de Vita to question the ethicality of the border’s influence over a person’s potential agency and well-being: “One wonders why, from a normative point of view, national borders should be allowed to have such vast implications for life prospects of people throughout the world” (109). Recalling Bauman’s words quoted in this chapter’s opening epigraph, a defeatist laissez-faire attitude to human misery reflects an ongoing pathology of politics that corresponds to the weakening of public space, the public sphere, and human attachments, conditions that ultimately undermine the potential of the human agent to provoke justice and change within the social order.

Beginning with its title and continuing throughout the diegetic and extra-diegetic levels of narration, Paraíso Travel emphasizes the dialectic and contradictory aspects of contemporary society and their potentially pathogenic effects on the migrant subject in the United States. Nevertheless, Marlon’s journey offers some indications of hope. Unlike Tiburón, who never recovers from his failed border crossing attempt, Marlon constructs a new life and identity for himself in New York City. Notwithstanding the economic abuse he endures at the hands of his employer, Marlon manages to earn a living, to make a new network of friends, to pick up some survival English skills, and to make sense of the labyrinthine city in which he initially loses himself. Furthermore, while his reunion with
Reina is not as propitious as he had dreamed and imagined, he recuperates a degree of personal agency by finally walking away from her. While the reader does not know whether Marlon will stay in the United States or return to Medellín, a real possibility considering that the end of the novel effectively signals the end of his journey and, in his own words, he often feels “unas ganas imparables de regresar” (20), what is most fundamental is the fact that he has the option. In other words, though his immigrant experience does not resemble in any way the American Dream Reina constructed for him, it does open up new opportunities for Marlon, perhaps auguring in the realization of Adams’s epic dream or the arrival of that promissory capacity of the new postnational socio-political order Appadurai imagines.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the effects of localized and globalized spatial practices on the self and society in the twenty-first century. Alienating socio-economic and geospacial exclusions formalized through a politics of segregation underscore the fundamental role of space in the construction of a just public sphere and social order. As a consequence of accelerated globalization processes, namely growing mobility and intercultural and interclass contacts that have effectuated a peripheralization of the core or a Third Worlding of the First World, omnipresent borders and associated panoptic and synoptic technologies of surveillance and control have infiltrated the contemporary landscape, creating a divisive and fragmented society on both a geospacial and psycho-social level. The effects of accelerated dislocations, felt on personal, familial, social, and political levels, are manifested through decentring pathogenic tendencies such as anxiety, uncertainty, insecurity, fear,
depersonalisation, indifference, and disengagement, undermining the task of humanism encapsulated in the acknowledgment and show of respect for the Other.

The three novels studied in this chapter work from an “ethnopoetic” lens by questioning the effects of twenty-first-century spatial practice on the (peripheral) self, society, and the public sphere. With its Dantesque problematic, *Angosta* examines the growing global disparities amongst and within nations, and the evermore-savvy technologies of security and surveillance that entrap the majority in their Infernos only to enable the few to enjoy their Paradise with relatively little interference or thought of the peripheral Other. *Al otro lado* emphasizes these disparities from a localized position, that of the United States-Mexico borderlands, and more generally from the bound perspective of the marginal south, while *Paraíso Travel* takes a more transnational approach by focusing on the migrant experience on the other side of the border. Without ignoring or downplaying the challenges of borders, border crossing, Latin American migration to the United States, or the consequences of migrants’ unauthorized or illegal status, *Paraíso Travel*, the most hopeful of the three texts, depicts a protagonist who overcomes adversity and whose assertion of his personal agency is not, in the end, defeated by the hegemonic norm, as occurs in *Angosta*. Chapter three continues this exploration of border narratives and the border as a site of suffering and law enforcement, looking specifically at how meanings of migration, national identity, and the U.S.-Mexico border are distinctively constructed and embedded in Mexican and Unitedstatesian media contexts.
Chapter 3. Mediating Displacement: Fear and Suffering on the United States-Mexico Border

3.1 Introduction: Border Ethics

The largest contiguous international border between an economic superpower (and world’s leading immigration country) and a developing nation (and world’s leading emigration country), the United States-Mexico border provides a cautionary case for re-imagining the geographical border’s functions in a world characterized by a globalizing-localizing tension that welcomes economic cooperation alongside a rejection of the human right to free movement. As Fernando Romero suggests, a twenty-first-century discussion of borders is best framed from a “humanitarian perspective” that not only accounts for borders’ regulating functions within a Westphalian system but also considers how borders can, within a global framework, foster integration, cooperation, and development amongst and between nations (16). In other words, against the physical and metaphorical walls that currently divide and antagonize, what we need are metaphorical bridges that instead work to connect and unite.

Though borders are repeatedly celebrated in critical cultural theory as utopian spaces of transgression and deterriorialized flux in a post- or transnational global order,1 as I note in

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1 According to John Welchman, this tendency is particularly evident in the poststructuralist turn in philosophy and critical cultural theory, where theorists such as Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, and Hutcheon utilize border tropes and discourses to interrogate textual and intertextual points of entry and exit; symbolic transgressions as deterriorializations; liminal subjectivities; symbolic bounds, thresholds, crossings, margins, and edges; personal and cultural flows; and multipositionalities. In short, “[the] border, then, has become ceaselessly available for critical theory, so that in its differently formulated constitutions we are dazzled by the transgressive rhetoric of a would-be new radicality” (173).
chapter one, decontextualized renderings of abstract and metaphorical limits tend to disregard the realities at play at site-specific geographical border crossings. Against this trend, I reiterate the need to revisit and reconsider the border dynamic from an experiential and not merely theoretical outlook. As Sophia McClennen notes, “[b]orders are real concerns for the exile [or migrant], even in the postmodern age of advanced hypercapitalism. The exile does not float free, but must worry about such practical things as visas and prohibited reentry into his or her nation” (191). The principle site of the cultural production of citizenship, geopolitical borders are inscribed in national historiographies of conflict and state regulation (Hernández 96). Simply put, border spaces and border subjects disrupt and deform citizenship by transcending national specificities, a condition tied to the growing dimension of cultural panic and fears leading to institutional aggression and societal despondency (Hernández 88). Going further, John Sanbonmatsu, in his stimulating critique of the continued disaggregation of progressive ethico-political movements, connects postmodernist aesthetics of fragmentation, boundary crossings, and the “fetish of the ‘diaspora’” (70) to the logic of late capitalism and the social pathologies that accompany it. From this optic, critical discourse and knowledge is affected by market pressures and, as yet another commodity of the academic marketplace, is concerned more with “selling theory” than deconstructing structures of power, or its corollary, mobilizing social change. As Sanbonmatsu writes, “The theorist who turns away from or neglects the practical dimensions of human life, whether in

As noted in chapter two, a similar celebratory tone is evident in exile theories of the 1980s and 1990s. See, amongst others, Stuart Halls’s work on the aesthetics of fragmentation, James Clifford’s politics of travelling theory and travelling theorists, Edward Said’s reflections on the poetics and subjectivity of exile and interculturality, and Homi Bhabha’s writings on the agency of hybridity.
politics or culture, may be in danger of losing sight of the normative and ethical values that
drove him or her to conduct the research in the first place” (98). Uneasy with the theoretical
celebration of ubiquitous thresholds and idealized flux, I engage instead with the more
practical dimensions of spatial practice. My analysis thus confronts the disintegration of
ethics at the crux of the dual phenomenon of dislocation and confinement from a real human,
territorial, and socio-political perspective.

Baja California, Mexico’s northernmost state bordering California and Arizona,
embodies the many polyphonies and antagonisms of life on the border: free movement and
forced containment, wealth and poverty, north and south, non-Mexican and Mexican, and
(post)modern and premodern, to name only a few. Reflecting on the urban imaginary of
Tijuana, Baja California’s largest city located at the base of the world’s busiest international
border crossing, Humberto Félix Berumen notes its liminal status as the north of the Mexican
south and the south of the Unitedstatesian north: “El discurso que piensa en una ciudad
diferente supone la existencia de un espacio paulatinamente desligado, cultural y
socialmente, del resto del país. Llámesese Tercera nación, Tercer país, Mexamerica,
Amermexico, Nepantla, Ecotono… Los nombres varían y en su misma diversidad sólo
revelan las dificultades para afrontar la singularidad de una ciudad que es frontera en sí
misma” (38). Characterized as a border itself, as I outlined in chapter two, the city’s
extended threshold position is reflected in the overarching hotel metaphor of Heriberto
Yépez’s *Al otro lado* and, even more explicitly, in Yépez’s 2006 collection of creative essays
*Tijuanologías*, where he writes, “[Tijuana] tiene la vocación de pertenecerle a todos y se
respira en ella un orgullo extraño, acaso el de ser un gigantesco hotel sin puertas” (98).
Though it is conceptualized as an easily traversed temporal space of transit even for those

who, like Yépez’s protagonist Tiburón Quintero, remain entrapped by the border’s labyrinthine rhizome, Berumen acknowledges the city’s potential for rootedness, referring to it not simply as a hotel but as its conceptual opposite, a home furnished with memory and history (36): “Primero como tierra de paso, a la que no obstante—y acaso sin desearlo del todo—se terminó por aceptar como el último refugio disponible; después, y sin que tal situación hubiera cambiado en lo fundamental, como destino voluntariamente elegido” (175).

Consistent with all conditions of tension, in the case of the U.S.-Mexico border, the always-shifting characterization of Baja California, and by extension Mexico, as attractive or repellent, ephemeral or stable, utopian or dystopian serves opposing forces and interests, who battle for control of the message in an effort to shape national (and international) consciousness around issues of identity, nationality, migration, and the border. One of modern society’s most effective means of shaping public opinion, the media plays a fundamental role in focusing public attention on one or the other side of the conceptual “border war” divide.

In chapters one and two I outlined some of the many reasons behind global displacements and the inhuman inequities propagated by something as arbitrary as place of birth or, to use Ayelet Shacher’s effective metaphor, the “birthright lottery,” with a specific focus on literary manifestations of geopolitical displacements in the Latin American context in the latter. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the role of the mainstream media and the dissemination of information/misinformation along and about the United States-Mexico border. In section 3.2, drawing upon communications theory and literary texts of Baja California, I explore the media/nation nexus and how the extra-journalistic unmitigated and symbolic management of today’s mainstream media affects the Mexican, and more
specifically Baja Californian media’s potential “watchdog” role. I include a brief history of the Mexican press in this section to locate current trends within a diachronic framework: How do today’s media models extend, contest, and/or surmount traditional forms? In section 3.3, I reflect on the history and present reality of the “border wars” and the real human and socio-economic consequences as well as the symbolic implications of U.S. border policy before examining, in section 3.4, how national media frame and report on migration and this so-called war from either side of the divide. After probing the possible consequences of mediating text and images of human suffering, I offer a close reading of Luis Humberto Crosthwaite’s short story “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte,” a story of migration set on the Tijuana/San Diego border. In this text, news stories from both the Mexican and North American press construct distinct media realities of migration, raising questions of legitimacy, cause, agency, culpability, victimization, suffering, shame, and pity. In particular, I point to the different stances (i.e., reportage, censorship, prioritization, interpretation of facts, mediation of suffering) taken by the Unitedstatesian and Mexican media and the connections between this coverage and the formation of meaning, public knowledge, public opinion, and a nationally based collective consciousness surrounding crime and migration at the border. In short, how does the media produce competing ideological visions of the migrant, the border, and by extension the nation? Implicit in this analysis is the idea that while global media infrastructure may have moved away from a public model towards a private, market-centred model removed from the state apparatus, the state continues to exert influence over the media. There are, furthermore, other stakeholders who hold undue power and influence over the media, including media owners, advertisers, and, increasingly in the Mexican context, organized crime and drug cartels. As a result,
acute peculiarities in coverage, perspective, interpretation, and criticism are to be expected when juxtaposing one nation’s national and international news coverage with that of another.

3.2 Media and the Nation

In the contemporary social and cultural theoretical landscape, perhaps the most important conceptualization of the seemingly inherent link between the media and the nation is Benedict Anderson’s theory of the nation as *imagined community.* In his seminal text of the same name, Anderson locates the origins of (an imagined) national consciousness in the development not of any one vernacular print-language itself but of print-capitalism, and more specifically in the industrial production and dissemination of the novel and the newspaper. For Anderson, these standardized forms provided the framework for a new national consciousness: by creating “unified fields of exchange and communication” (44), print-languages built solidarities and a sense of connectedness among fellow readers that “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36). This relational sense of “fraternity” and affiliation with a mostly unknown population is extended to the collective national populace, explaining the deep patriotism that incites citizens to take up arms and potentially die for the nationalist cause: “it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many

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2 Not the first to consider the connection, Anderson built upon the work of other theorists of social communication and nationalism, including Jürgen Habermas, T. H. Marshall, Karl W. Deutsch, and Ernest Gellner, amongst others.
millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7).

While Anderson’s theory has been duly criticized for its exclusive veneration of elitist print culture over other cultural texts and its essentializing characterization of the nation-state as a sovereign, homogeneous, and territorially-delimited entity, the concept of a nationally imagined community does not abrogate the potential for alternative or subaltern similarly imagined communities and subjectivities (Pabón 301-11). In other words, the assertion of a correlation between nationalism and the mass media does not of necessity negate the formation of sub- or extranational spatial and cultural relations (Rosie et al. 328). Given that Anderson’s theory directly implicates the media and related communications technologies in the construction of national identity, might it then follow that transnational media technologies can foster a transnational, global, or cosmopolitan consciousness? Without denying that this potential exists, media forms and institutions, even those published in a more globalized communicative space, remain distinctly localized (Gasher, “Mapping” 102).

That is, global agendas are (de)constructed for local audiences within a framework of the everyday (Martini 128). While the idea of a “national” media tied to the sovereign state is being reconsidered at both a theoretical and fiscal level--not only because of the ideological weight of the “national” in postmodernity but also due to the financial consequences of globalization processes on media industries, namely the growing power of multinational media conglomerates in a market once dominated by domestic enterprise--., the “national” label retains its relevance at a cultural level (Waisbord, “Media” 381). According to Silvio Waisbord, “[the idea of national media] is a question of media capacity . . . to nurture and perpetuate cultural identities and outline boundaries between in-groups and out-groups rather than their crystallization of cultural sovereignty” (“Media” 382). That newspapers are tied
more strongly to local, regional, and national contexts than to international ones, even in our transnational (and even sub- and supranational) milieu, reinforces the media/nation nexus, providing a legitimate rationale for the local newspaper’s continued exploration.

3.2.1 Fictitious Freedoms: A History of the Mexican Media

Given the power of the media to imagine or construct a common national identity, control of mass communications has always been a central concern for ruling authorities. Throughout its history, a largely autocratic model has presided over the Mexican press, minimizing, though not completely eliminating, journalism’s essential function as a democratizing medium of information and locus for critical public debate. Mexico’s position in the history of communications and the media in Latin America was cemented early on, in 1539, when German printer Juan Cromberger sent the first printing press of the New World from Seville to Mexico in the care of Italian Giovanni Paoli, or Juan Pablos. An essential element of the colonial Christianizing mission, the press was initially used to publish and disseminate religious texts but quickly expanded its scope to include literary, scientific, and historical content as well (Caloca Carrasco 43). In early mediatic practice, the press facilitated the creation and distribution of occasional newsheets and flyers (hojas volantes or relaciones), which appeared sporadically as events warranted, leading Humberto Musacchio to refer to them as “un periodismo sin periodicidad” (19). An indication of the people’s desire to consume information, these precursors to newspapers and serialized periodicals appeared a mere two years after the arrival of the printing press, in 1541, and included not only local news and information from the Empire, mostly about the Spanish Royal Family,
but also reproductions of etchings, art, and poetry. These ephemeral texts circulated as such for some four centuries in Mexico, where they were utilized even after the appearance of periodical leaflets (folletos) in the seventeenth century and the first serialized newspapers (gacetas) and dailies (diarios) in the eighteenth century to disseminate not so much news as manifestos and other political documents and propaganda (Musacchio 20).

Mexico and New Spain’s first bona fide newspaper, La Gaceta de México y noticias de Nueva España, appeared in 1722, under the editorial direction of Zacatecan Theologian Juan Ignacio de Castorena y Ursúa. The paper was modeled on the European tradition and, according to what Castorena writes in the Gaceta’s first edition, was guided by the dual need to inform about “America” both at a local level and, with a more didactic intent, in the European context: “Pues a más del general motivo de las Gacetas, siendo éstas una fidelísima relación de lo que acaece en estas dilatadas regiones, puede sin trabajo cualquier discreto, con la diligencia de juntarlas, formar unos anales en lo futuro…’; con lo cual se logra ‘complacer a los que en Europa piden noticias de la América, para enriquecer con novedad sus Historias’” (qtd. in Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres 45-46). The paper was largely informative, publishing political, economic, and international news; religious information; and cultural themes. Perhaps an indication that Mexican society was not yet ready for a monthly periodical, this publication folded after only half a year and a

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3 This monthly was short-lived, publishing only six editions between January and June 1722. See Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres and Caloca Carrasco for more.
new monthly did not appear for another six years. A second Gaceta de México circulated between 1728 and 1742,⁴ and a third Gaceta was printed from 1784 until 1809.⁵

Surely a sign that the people sought more timely and reliable information, the nation’s first daily, El Diario de México, appeared in 1805 as a social project for the public good.⁶ As the newspaper’s inaugural editorial states, “queremos hacer este bien a la humanidad. Nos pareció que el diario sería útil en esta famosa Capital, y que a la proporción del gusto que diésemos al público podría ser útil para nosotros” (qtd. in Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres 75). The Diario was expansive in scope, publishing stories on religion, publicity, governance, literature, arts and science, commerce, and culture. Highlighting the historically coeval nexus between the media, power, and politics, as the independence movement began to take hold in early nineteenth-century Mexico, manifestations of repression and (self-)censorship were activated and loomed over the publication’s columnists, the majority of whom were from the elite Creole classes and sympathized with the ideals of the emergent campaign:

En lo tocante a la política colonial, los diaristas se ven imposibilitados para opinar libremente, por lo cual optaron entre eludir el tema o tratarlo asumiendo una actitud

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⁴ This monthly Gaceta was founded by Father Juan Francisco Sahagún de Arévalo and reached a total of 157 editions before changing its name, in 1742, to Mercurio de México. The Gaceta took a two-year hiatus between 1739 and 1741 due to a paper shortage. See Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres and Caloca Carrasco for more.

⁵ This Gaceta was founded by printer Manuel Antonio Valdés and remained in circulation until December 1809. In 1810, Valdés changed the publication’s name to Gaceta del Gobierno de México, which was published until 1821 and the official end of the colonial order in Mexico. The publication began as a bi-monthly project but changed to a monthly in 1797 before converting to a bi-weekly in 1806. For more information see Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres and Caloca Carrasco.

⁶ El Diario de México circulated for 12 years, until January 4, 1817.
condescendiente; en ocasiones escogieron el camino intermedio refiriéndose
sutilmente al verdadero estado de cosas de la colonia. A pesar de la discreción de las
alusiones, muchas veces epigramáticas, el *Diario* despertó de inmediato la suspicacia
de las autoridades virreinales. (Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres 82)

In response to mediated criticism, the Spanish Viceroy wielded his authoritative power over
the *Diario* by firing and denouncing its director, who was forced into exile because of these
personal attacks, and personally censoring every edition of the paper (Ruiz Castañeda,
Torres, and Cordero Torres 90). Nonetheless, despite these constraints, the Mexican media
continued its politicized turn, further escalating its antagonism against colonial powers
during the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821).

The dissemination of political information and ideology thus became the primary
motivation behind the printed press. It was during this time that a new pro-independence
combative press appeared in Mexico, guided by national hero of independence Miguel
Hidalgo, who founded the nation’s first insurgent newspaper, *El Despertador Americano*, in
December 1810. Though not particularly successful in mobilizing an insurgency
movement, under the direction of Francisco Severo Maldonado, this paper ushered in a new
political press in Mexico, a characteristic that, according to some, continues to characterize
Mexican journalism and theoretical expression even today (Secanella 10). Yet, as Robert N.
Pierce notes, though journalists may have since been granted the legal right to be critical and
contestatory in their political coverage, freedom of the press remains a largely incomplete
process in Mexico and Latin America: “Teóricamente, nuestros periódicos pueden decir lo

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7 Because of its contestatory nature, the paper survived for only four months, until April 22, 1811.
que quieren; en la realidad práctica, dicen lo que pueden. Y lo que pueden decir es lo que el gobierno desea que digan. O lo que desean que digan los grandes intereses que dominan el país…desde las grandes empresas privadas hasta las poderosas burocracias políticas y sindicales” (qtd. in Caloca Carrasco 104).

The disconnect between legal declarations of press freedoms and lived reality has always been evident in Mexico. That journalists were imprisoned, exiled, and executed for insulting and denouncing the viceroyalty during the colonial era is to be expected, considering the autocracy’s open opposition to a free press. However, repressive tactics against journalists and newspaper directors continued even after press freedom was promulgated into law in the Spanish Constitution of October 5, 1812.8 After suffering direct attacks in the media from José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi and others,9 Viceroy Venegas suspended press liberties on December 7, 1812, a mere 63 days after they were decreed into law. Still, after independence was won, press freedoms did not advance as partisan newspapers followed one of two competing tendencies: reformist liberal versus traditionalist conservative ideologies. Because of the press’s militancy amidst the nineteenth century’s sustained political volatilities, ruling governments adopted repressive tactics such as censorship, imprisonment, and press closures in an attempt to minimize the media’s power over public opinion, regardless of political affiliation (Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres 116). Whereas, by the mid nineteenth century, there was evidence of incipient public

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8 The document reads: “Todos los cuerpos y personas particulares, de cualquier condición y estado que sean, tienen libertad de escribir, imprimir y publicar sus ideas políticas sin necesidad de licencia, revisión o aprobación alguna anterior a la publicación, bajo las restricciones y responsabilidades que se expresan en el presente decreto’ (qtd. in Musacchio 28).

9 Known most famously as Latin America’s first novelist for his El Periquillo Sarniento (1816), it was Lizardi’s journalistic writing, published in his El Pensador Mexicano, that induced his imprisonment.
debate via an increasingly plural and independent press that, according to Maria del Carmen Ruiz Castañeda, enjoyed “una absoluta libertad de expresión” (161),\(^\text{10}\) this freedom was short lived as conditions decayed significantly under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910).

If Díaz allowed press freedoms to flourish during his first years in office, the highly vigilant and combative press inherited by his administration was subsequently decimated. Diaz took a threefold approach to regain power over the printed press: i) he utilized newspapers as a propaganda machine to circulate his government’s official interests and ideology, offering privileges, subsidies, and bribes to government-approved publications; ii) he used repressive tactics such as threats, exile, persecution, and imprisonment to censor opposing points of view; and iii) he reformed the 1868 legislation granting press freedom and independence, setting up a special tribunal to oversee offenses that effectively placed the power to interpret “press freedom” in the hands of government-influenced judges (Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres 209-11). Díaz’s tactics devastated the oppositional media, which was relegated to the peripheries both politically and geographically as resistance was either limited to local or regional governments or published outside of Mexico, in the North American press (Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres 231). This transnational trend is significant and will be taken up in more detail in the following section.

Though the end of the Porfiriato signaled a transition back to a more nuanced press, evidence of a modernizing turn to a journalism modeled on Unitedstatesian publications like

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\(^{10}\) A combative press was particularly evident during the polarizing Liberal Reform era (1858-61) and Benito Juárez’s subsequent presidency (1861-72).
The New York Times was apparent mostly at an aesthetic level and therefore did not translate into the kind of freedom of expression that has come to characterize the twentieth-century press in the United States.\textsuperscript{11} On the contrary, government control and repression of journalists continued, both directly through violence, deportations, and censorship and less conspicuously through corruption manifested in economic subsidies, bribes (\textit{embutes}), and socio-political favours (\textit{prebendas}). The long PRI dynasty (1929-2000) demanded a compliant and normative mediatic arena, which it manufactured by supporting the success of elite pro-government media families through the aforementioned patronage and culture of \textit{prebendas} as well as, more shamelessly, through \textit{gacetillas}, generously paid government publicity or propaganda. Though “press expenses” were systematically included in the national budget, there was always a lack of transparency as to the specific definition of those expenses. Based on this practice, as Petra M. Secanella succinctly puts it, “El Estado mexicano—o mejor decir, el Gobierno—[fue] el verdadero promotor de la prensa” (101). In other words, with government support, pro-government newspapers were awarded for their loyalty while more critical publications had a choice either to adopt a censural stance and continue publishing or to struggle financially and, in the majority of cases, cease to exist.

Though the PRI dynasty did not end until 2000 and the election of PAN candidate Vicente Fox to the presidency, the socio-political transition to democracy began much

\textsuperscript{11} This so-called “modernizing turn” was spurred in large part by the introduction of the industrialized press in Mexico, which was inaugurated in 1896 with Rafael Reyes Spindola’s \textit{El Imparcial}. Enabled not only by modern technologies but also by government-supported subsidies, \textit{El Imparcial} was able to increase its production and decrease its cost, making it the first truly “mass media” publication in Mexico (Ruiz Castañeda, Torres, and Cordero y Torres 223). For his part, Petra M. Secanella refers to it as the first step towards a “prensa empresarial” in Mexico (11).
earlier, at least by the late 1970s, when two noteworthy reforms took place: i) state-sponsored electoral reform that sought to support and increase the political participation and representation of opposition parties both centrally and at the municipal level and ii) the 1977 amendment of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, which added a clause to Article 6 implicating the state in the right to information: “The expression of ideas shall not be the object of any judicial or administrative action except insofar as it offends against morality or the rights of other parties, provokes criminality or disturbs public order. The right to information shall be guaranteed by the State” (qtd. in Article 19 iv). These amendments capture society’s changing discontent with the PRI government’s authoritarian model and, at least on a symbolical level, the PRI’s acknowledgment of the need for change.

Whereas the modern media tends to play a fundamental role in advancing social transformations, in Mexico, because it has been traditionally co-opted for use by the state, the media has the same potential to perpetuate the status quo: “Los medios de comunicación ejemplifican, y propician, una de las paradojas más embarazosas de la transición mexicana: se han convertido en actores imprescindibles de los cambios políticos pero, al mismo tiempo, son una de las causas de rezago y atraso de la sociedad” (Trejo Delarbre 207). Because of, on the one hand, the PRI’s continued hold on power and the media industry’s financial reliance on government aid and, on the other, the incursion of non-state influence over the media, principally by market economics and powerful crime and drug syndicates, media transformation during this transition did not take hold as assiduously as anticipated. In fact,

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12 Some political scientists such as Gustavo Vega Cánovas interpret 1988 as the start of the democratic transition in Mexico, signalling the 1988 elections as an important precursor to Fox’s 2000 victory. However, it was the 1977 political reform that paved the way for the both the 1988 and 2000 election results.
due in large part to Mexico’s economic crises of the 1990s, following a neoliberal paradigm, market forces virtually supplanted decreased state reliance and support of the national media.

Notwithstanding this neoliberalizing trend, as Sallie Hughes concludes in her study of Mexican journalism throughout the nation’s transition to democracy, there is evidence to support the appearance of “civic journalism” in Mexico as an antipode to both “authoritarian journalism” and “market-driven journalism” during that time (passim). Supported by the democratizing push and the concomitant upsurge of human rights groups and civic participation in Mexican society in the 1980s and 1990s, the civic model embodies the characteristics of the ideal watchdog press: “Mexico’s civic journalism communicated information between citizens and governors, and monitored government like a ‘watchdog,’ thus facilitating two political dynamics of central importance to democracy: representation of citizens and government accountability to the public” (Hughes 5). Though this is an important observation, Hughes acknowledges limitations to civic journalism, noting that civic change in Mexican media coverage has been limited largely to the electoral-governmental realm (84), thus challenging its capacity as an effective public-sphere building enterprise.

Despite Mexico’s democratic and civic advances over the past two decades, going on ten years after the official end of PRI rule, the Mexican media remains mired in a changed though similarly corrupt web of power: “la prensa nacional podría ser mejor calificada como económicamente co-dependiente, políticamente pro-autoritaria y conservadora, y filosóficamente deshonest a y carente de valores” (Torres A. 142). Though published in 1999, before Fox’s victory but also before Mexico’s polemic 2006 elections, which put the structural strength of Mexico’s democracy and civil society in question once again,
introductory words to Francisco Javier Torres A.’s study on the press in Mexico have become even more relevant in today’s climate of increased corruption, violence, death, and impunity:

De hecho, debido a las nuevas circunstancias que vive el país, como el aumento del tráfico de drogas, la aparición de grupos armados tipo guerrillas, la existencia de una sociedad civil más politizada que demanda mayor igualdad y justicia, y la corrupción e impunidad aún imperante en la sociedad, México encara más problemas relacionados con la recolección y diseminación de noticias. (12)

If journalism reflects society not only informationally but also in its mediatic practice, then it is only reasonable to assume that a nation on the verge of becoming a failed state would have a media on the verge of becoming a failed media. In other words, if an upsurge of civil society and citizen participation in the public sphere spurred a civic journalism in postauthoritarian Mexico in the 1980s and 90s (Hughes 5), what are the journalistic implications for a highly militarized, quasi-democratic or illiberal, and increasingly ungovernable state characterized not by vigorous public spheres but by fear, terror, violence, and death?

3.2.2 Compromised Mediascapes: Baja California

A symbiotic relationship exists between powerful national and international stakeholders and the mass media: from its hegemonic position, national mainstream media influences the national consciousness, and by extension political processes, by steering public opinion towards industry’s and the government’s “official line” (Louw passim). The
insinuation is that the mainstream media legitimizes and thus naturalizes the dominant worldview through a compromised discourse that recreates reality from a largely consensual paradigm: “El compromiso es un compromiso institucional, un compromiso deshistorizado, que asume a la perspectiva consensual (identidades institucionales) como punto de partida para pensar lo social. Quiero decir entonces que en ningún momento las instituciones aparecen cuestionadas; al contrario, son éstas las que se buscan defender” (E. Rodríguez 197). As has been historically the case, today’s mainstream media has been co-opted as a regulating biopolitical tool deployed by government to foster normative behaviour.

Apropos of Esteban Rodríguez’s claim that “no hay exclusión social sin consenso social, y ese consenso lo aportan los mass media” (192), in his study of the relations between government, the state, and the media, Erik Neveu labels new free market state interventionism in the media “symbolic action” or “symbolic management,” a strategy made blatantly obvious in Unitedstatesian media coverage of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, wherein the mainstream media uncritically mirrored its government’s intense rhetoric of heroism and patriotism in their reportage (341). As a result, the U.S. media was much less critical of then-President George Bush’s so-called anti-terrorism policies and justification for the Unitedstatesian invasion of Iraq than it should have been (Beckett 61). Perversely, independent journalists who did not comply with their government’s official position were labelled “un-American” and unpatriotic ostensibly to lessen their potential influence on public opinion. One only has to look at the culture of embedded journalism instituted during the second Iraq war, whereby journalists lived, travelled with, and otherwise depended on the United States army, the very subject of their observation, as proof of the incontrovertible co-optation of the mainstream media in the wake of 9/11. According to Ángel Manuel Ortiz
Marín, this type of symbolic management was likewise characteristic of the twentieth-century press in Mexico, where government inclinations almost always took precedence over the right to free expression set out in the 1917 Mexican Constitution (18, 26). Not simply a condition of the past, similar circumstances continue to counter press freedoms in Mexico today.

Notwithstanding the “civic” turn in postauthoritarian Mexican journalism outlined above, which was incidentally strongest in the northern states (Hughes 17), evidence of “symbolic” interventionism in the mainstream media persists. If, on the one hand, the media/politics/market nexus continues to determine coverage and set the public agenda, on the other, increasingly powerful crime syndicates use threats and shows of violence to silence authorities and journalists in an effort to control not only the flow of weapons, drugs, and money across the border but also, on a national mediatic level, the flow of (mis)information. The assassinations of Excélsior investigative journalist Manuel Buendía in 1984, Héctor Félix Miranda, co-founder of independent Tijuana-based newspaper Zeta, in 1988, and Zeta editor Francisco Ortiz Franco in 2004 are among the most publicized and denounced crimes against journalists in Mexico, whose impulse to report on crime has since declined not only because of the very real fear of violence and death but also, and equally distressingly, because of the apparent futility of their labour. As Zeta co-founder Jesús Blancornelas explains, rarely do journalistic exposés result in juridical action against crime syndicates, whose power extends beyond control of the media to control of government officials (27). Journalist deaths are therefore met largely with impunity. A characteristic of the twentieth-
century mediascape, newspaperistic fear and (self) censorships have extended, in the Mexican border context, into the new millennium as rivalling drug cartels become increasingly merciless in their battles for territory. The violence has become more acute since President Felipe Calderon’s ascension to power in December 2006: faced with the reality that Mexico was displacing Colombia as the world’s dominant cocaine trafficking hub, Calderón mirrored Colombia’s military response to the problem, deploying, in cooperation with the United States, a major military offensive against drug trafficking operations along the border.

According to Carlos Lauría of the Committee to Protect Journalists, as a consequence, more than 30 journalists have been killed and disappeared since Calderón took office. With a 90% impunity rate for violent anti-press crimes and eight journalist deaths in the first half of 2010 alone, it is no surprise that Mexican journalists have become less willing to cover the drug trade or report on cartel violence in the region (“CPJ’s Lauría Tells Fox News about Mexico’s Press Crisis”).

A direct consequence of the debilitated state of journalism in Mexico today, a troubling trend has Mexicans seek out national news in foreign, mostly Unitedstatesian,

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13 Credited for coining the term, Arjun Appadurai understands mediascapes as one of five interrelated dimensions of global cultural flows alongside ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes that can be used to explore the disjunctions of the new global cultural economy. Specifically, mediascapes refer to the complex narratives of a mostly ‘imagined’ world created by the distribution and dissemination of images via electronic media:

‘Mediascapes’ . . . tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets of metaphors by which people live (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) as they help to constitute narratives of the ‘other’ and proto-narratives of possible lives, fantasies which could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement. (“Disjuncture and Difference” 299)

For more information on mediascapes vis-à-vis the other four dimensions of global cultural flows, see Appadurai, Modernity at Large.
media channels. As Mexican reporters are persuaded against reporting on government fraud and crimes committed by rivaling drug cartels, farther removed and therefore less compromised North American media outlets take up the slack. While this is an important and necessary conduit for the dissemination of information, that Mexican news is reported exclusively in foreign contexts raises significant questions of power and dependency: “nuestra situación de dependencia se ha hecho más evidente, de tal suerte que la prensa de Nueva York o de Washington es ahora la prensa más importante para la autoridad local y en general para el establishment de nuestro país” (Jiménez Lazcano 126). Disturbingly, that Mexican news is not only exported and translated for a foreign audience but doubly mediated as it is returned to a local audience places the important power of selection, interpretation, and framing of Mexico, and thus, following Anderson, of Mexican identity and solidarities, in foreign hands.

Criticisms of Mexico’s, and more specifically the border region’s, compromised media landscape are made explicit in contemporary Baja Californian narrative, which, characterized by strong regional identities, tends to emphasize the incongruity of the everyday urban border experience. Texts by Heriberto Yépez, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, Federico Campbell, and Luis Humberto Crosthwaite locate the border city, with all its contradictions, at the heart of their narratives, to the point where, as I discussed in my analysis of Yépez’s Al otro lado, the city becomes a central character and a metaphor for border identities. Though select characters demonstrate respect and even a sense of pride in their border city, as Berumen notes, a defining feature of contemporary Baja Californian literature is its painful testimony of urban violence:
la ciudad que se proyecta se asume de manera conflictiva y casi siempre en forma escéptica, enfatizando sobre todo sus rasgos más negativos. En la mayoría de los casos la ciudad es una realidad hostil, caótica, a la que solo puede percibirse a partir de una visión distópica de lo que constituiría la vida urbana contemporánea. Es, pues, el retrato de la ciudad actual, con sus vicios y sus miserias, con sus conflictos y con sus carencias expuestas a flor de piel; o, en todo caso, es la ciudad que ya desde ahora se avoriza con todas sus múltiples contradicciones y sin muchas esperanzas de salvación. (143)

Naturally, an urban landscape characterized by ingrained chaos, violence, and corruption limits the ideal watchdog role of the media as journalists are threatened and silenced by coercive state and para-state actors.

Without glorifying the violence and crime that accompanies the region’s narco-culture, as narcocorridos tend to do, border narratives turn to realism to expose the social consequences of an ethos that accepts organized crime, particularly the smuggling of drugs and people, as a logical life option (Ramírez-Pimienta and Fernández 15). Baja Californian detective fiction, unlike the North American tradition, confronts this culture of impunity not through the police detective, who is implicated in crime and corruption, but through the investigator-journalist, who is guided by an ethical imperative for social justice: “La norma en estas narrativas es el periodista que, ante la colusión de las autoridades y el miedo de prácticamente toda la población, es el encargado de buscar lo más parecido al equilibrio social del que hablaban las narrativas policiales clásicas” (Ramírez-Pimienta and Fernández 16). Yet, though some investigator-journalists may attempt to subvert the dominant order,
they are challenged by their mainstream colleagues, who are essentially controlled by the region and the nation’s compromised media landscape.

Trujillo Muñoz’s 2006 collection of previously published detective novels *Mexicali city blues*, which chronicles the cases taken on by human rights lawyer Miguel Ángel Morgado throughout the border region, tangentially criticizes the compromised state of the media in Mexico without making it a focal point of any of the five stories included in the collection. In fact, references to the media’s prostrate position are made matter-of-factly as though it were a wholly inevitable and thus expected condition. In “Tijuana city blues,” limited media coverage of a 1951 shooting death involving two U.S. citizens being investigated by Morgado is explained as a form of symbolic management of the media: “Y los periódicos informaron de lo mínimamente necesario porque fue un hecho que ocurrió a la luz del día y en plena avenida Revolución. No se podía ocultar, pero se le podían echar toneladas de tierra encima para evitar repercusiones negativas con el turismo, que aquí es lo único que importa” (37). Placing economic considerations over truth and justice, not only did the Mexican media limit its coverage of the shooting to avoid “bad press,” it also chose to report the “official story” constructed by the Tijuana police, namely that the two men involved in the shooting (one died; the other fled the scene) were drug traffickers caught up in illegal activity. In contrast to this demonized image of the fugitive, the San Diego press saw him as a victim, an innocent tourist entrapped by Tijuana’s seedy decadence: “Los gringos cerraron filas y solo les interesó proteger a sus ciudadanos” (38). Notwithstanding the real turn of events, that each national media spun the fatal events to their best advantage demonstrates the strength of the nation/media nexus, an insidious condition as natural in Mexico’s twentieth-century as its twenty-first-century media landscape.
Investigating another death, in “Laguna salada,” Morgado and a colleague castigate the press’s consensual coverage of the event:

--Estos diarios parecen hojas parroquiales. Sólo informaban lo que Dios les mandaba informar.

--Y Dios era el señor gobernador en persona.

--Ni más ni menos. (342)

Though the death and related newspaper coverage are from 1955, the government’s coercive biopolitical management of the media is not simply a relic of the past:

Morgado leyó un editorial: “¿Hasta cuándo, señor gobernador, hemos de soportar estas dentelladas de miedo, estas amenazas ambulantes que se escudan en una placa oficial para cometer fechorías?”

--Como si fuera ahorita mismo—sentenció el Jimmy--. Nada ha cambiado.

--La inseguridad pública al máximo. (340)

The 1955 events in many ways presage the present condition of symbolic management of the Mexican press, achieved through violence, a culture of sanctioned impunity, and other tactics of fear. Although the state’s financial support of the media diminished in the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), ostensibly lessening the government’s hold on media power by creating a new environment of autonomy, independence, and professionalization of journalism, as well as “civic” journalism, in Baja California, as Ortiz
Marín laments, the new millennium has witnessed a widespread return to a compromised partisan media in the state (*passim*). The fear instilled by crime cartels no doubt poses yet another challenge to independent and uncompromised media coverage.

Federico Campbell’s novel *Transpeninsular* (2000) goes one step further in its critique of the Mexican media by implicating greater society and the everyday citizen in the crisis. If state and crime syndicate manipulation of facts unquestionably compromises the socio-ethical function of the media, postmodern society’s apathetic anti-political indifference towards civil society and the ideals of deliberative democracy equally challenge the media’s potential to strengthen democracy and the public sphere. According to the unnamed first person protagonist of Campbell’s novel, a recently retired journalist who ventures into the desert to escape the futility of his profession, journalism in Mexico has all but collapsed into a futile mission:

No creía que siguiera teniendo sentido el ejercicio de una actividad que equivalía a trazar rayas en el agua. Los asuntos no cuajaban. Nunca se convertían en un reclamo político, en una protesta civil, no rebotaban. . . . Era perfectamente posible documentar un hecho, demostrarlo como si el trabajo de uno fuera el de un fiscal o un policía, revelar zonas desconocidas de la realidad del país, o desmontar los subterfugios, con que se encubría el autor intelectual del asesinato de un periodista, por ejemplo, y el aparato de la justicia no entraba en funcionamiento: ¿Qué sentido había tenido la vida de tantos reporteros eliminados que se entregaban a una labor que, viéndolo bien, el país no merecía? (14-15)
Mirroring Blancornelas’s argument, the distressing point here is that even if a journalist successfully circumvents the censoring apparatus or, more gravely, effectively sacrifices his life to expose a story, the effort is for naught, as the public remains essentially disengaged, calling into question both the value of the media and the strength of the public sphere and civil society in contemporary Mexico. If, in Transpeninsular the protagonist responds by renouncing his profession, what are the implications for greater society? Obviously, a society without an independent or socially supported media endangers the functioning of liberal democracy by allowing reigning institutions of power—governments, corporations, and organized crime syndicates—to operate in an unregulated and unaccountable environment largely out of the scrutiny of the public eye. Put simply, to renounce the watchdog and public sphere-building function of journalism is to accept and propagate one’s powerless and subordinate position vis-à-vis the state.

3.2.3 Journalistic Ethics: Mediating “Truth” and “Objectivity”

That facts are not secure in the hands of power is obvious. . . . [N]ot only truth and facts are insecure in its hands but untruth and non-facts as well. The political attitude towards facts must, indeed, tread the very narrow path between the danger of taking them as the results of some necessary development which men [sic] could not prevent and about which they can therefore do nothing and the danger of denying them, of trying to manipulate them out of the world. (Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” 258-259)

Any analysis made from a mediatic or journalistic lens merits an interrogation of the ideal versus actual role of the media in contemporary society. As the “chiefest democratic instrument of freedom” (Tocqueville Bk. 4, Ch. 7), or the alleged watchdog of government and civil society tasked with regulating and exposing abuses of power, the media has
traditionally assumed an ethical posture in the provision of news and information coverage. Despite the state’s continued influence and symbolic management of the media, the censoring influence of organized crime syndicates, the growing diffusion of the free market model, as well as the many challenges posed by emergent technologies, the view of journalism as a public service in support of liberal deliberative democracy and a strengthened public sphere continues to dominate media ideology and discourse. Charlie Beckett’s “networked journalism” manifesto *SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save The World* (2008) is a case in point. Moving beyond the debate between old (traditional, professional) and new (alternative, amateur, collaborative, open-sourced) media forms, Beckett finds potential for strengthened community linkages, freedom of speech, and civic engagement so necessary for a healthy public sphere in a dialectic between the two forms. Lauding the potential of twenty-first-century journalism to be a catalyst for the reform of major global problems like global warming, poverty, and weakened democracies, Beckett sees in networked journalism “the possibilities of ‘closing’ the distance between people, even on a global scale. It does this not just through the technology of communications, but by a more contextualized reporting that gives voice to the subject. Instead of simply reporting upon ‘the other’ we are able to report ‘with’ people who are separated from us by geography, class, or other social factors” (166). For Beckett, the media has an awesome politico-ethical potential to bridge divides and thereby re-humanize the lives of distant and not so distant suffering Others.

In more practical terms, the Colombian-based Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (fnpi), an organization dedicated to the promotion of journalistic excellence founded in part by Gabriel García Márquez, encapsulates this democratizing sentiment in its
mission statement: “Trabajar por la excelencia del periodismo y su contribución a los procesos de democracia y desarrollo de los países iberoamericanos y del Caribe, a través de talleres y seminarios de formación e intercambio entre periodistas, colaboración en redes y estímulos al desarrollo profesional.”

In this way, though economic and ideological concerns have usurped ethical considerations as the driving force of many traditional mainstream news industries, the question of ethics has not disappeared entirely from the newsroom, which must navigate carefully through the needs and concerns of numerous stakeholders—media owners, editorial boards, advertisers, governments, cultural norms, journalists, audience/consumers—without losing sight of journalism’s primary goal: to inform, report, and moderate public dialogue around issues of consequence to the public good.

As Beckett argues, new media technologies are changing the media landscape and the very role of journalism in society and popular culture by potentially democratizing media coverage, a debate I will enter into in more detail in chapter four. For now, in the simplest of terms, as Edward H. Spence and Aaron Quinn succinctly put it, “Good journalism is based—and to some extent thrives—on a diversity of perspectives from those who supply information and informed opinions to the public” (264). Yet, if a multiplicity of opinions is central, what guarantees this diversity of perspectives? More importantly, granting the existence of diverse angles and worldviews, what guarantees their dissemination? I argue that, alongside the ongoing neoliberalization of the global media, the long arm of the state and other stakeholders (including the influence of organized crime cartels) impedes a truly

14 See the organization’s website at <http://www.fnpi.org> for more information.
diversified and independent mainstream press. As Eileen Berrington and Ann Jemphrey assert, the growing trend towards concentrated media ownership in the hands of powerful elite with ties to the government and other state institutions of power such as the police and the judiciary limit the transmission of multi-faceted ideas and ideologies: “Relationships between the dynamics of ownership and the political–economic imperative are crucial within these growing monopolies of news production, narrowing the range of views expressed” (226). In other words, mainstream media agendas, and the consequential replacement of reality with a reconstructed “media reality” (Berrington and Jemphrey 225), are set and influenced by media owners, editors, government officials, and, in the Latin American context, organized crime syndicates. With this in mind, I would suggest that even journalists themselves no longer buy into the mythical catechism of complete objectivity; for, they are knowingly and wilfully influenced if not by personal, socio-cultural, and political considerations, then certainly by editorial constraints and other occupational norms. The result is a largely subjective and (symbolically) biased mainstream journalism that fails to express multiple perspectives.

Accordingly, the ethical implications of disseminating information are not as simple as Spense and Quinn would have us believe, namely that all information must be truthful: as a type of knowledge, they stress, information must obey the fundamental epistemological condition of knowledge, which is truth (267). However, insofar as truth is constructed through socially discursive practice, it does not necessarily amount to lived reality. Notwithstanding the specious aphorism that language reflects society, and therefore truth, as Michel Foucault has shown us, language/knowledge is a social construction bound to social hierarchies and structures of power. Thus, as Hannah Arendt pithily notes, “That facts are
not secure in the hands of power is obvious. . . . [N]ot only truth and facts are insecure in its hands but untruth and non-facts as well” (“Truth” 258-259). From a media perspective, facts are not wholly empirical insofar as they are carefully chosen, edited, arranged, and interpreted—or mediated—from personal, institutional, and editorial positions: “Facts are judged not just as a representation of things the way they are, but are molded and chosen according to diverse interests” (Waisbord, *Watchdog Journalism* 150). From this optic, facticity itself does not guarantee multi-perspectivity, accuracy, or objectivity.

On the border dividing rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, First World and Third World, the United States and Mexico, journalistic subjectivity and bias are manifested in distinct national media perspectives and coverage of news stories, evidenced in the above crime reportage versus tourism considerations example from Trujillo Muñoz’s “Tijuana city blues.” Apropos of the so-called migrant crisis and “border war,” given that one’s news source influences one’s attitude and opinion on socio-cultural matters such as immigration reform (Abrajano and Singh 23), the implication is that national mainstream media coverage of the border and the migration phenomenon shapes mainstream public opinion from an official nationalist lens. Before examining how these nationally mediated differences between the Mexican and Unitedstatesian press are manifest in distinct representations of migration, migrant rights, and the perils of the border in Crosthwaite’s “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte,” I will set the context by briefly outlining the causes and geo-human consequences of an increasingly militarized U.S.-Mexico border.
3.3 Unitedstatesian Border Policy: Death and Humanitarian Crisis in the Desert

Despite the growing ubiquity of forced human dislocations, misinformation and misrepresentation continues to shroud the migration phenomenon on both sides of the sending/receiving national divide. In the imaginary of the receiving nation, the unauthorized migrant is demonized at worst as a threat to national sovereignty and security and at best as an inconvenient lawbreaker. However, as Raymond Michalowski stresses, migration is not simply a personal decision: political and economic migrants do not capriciously choose to upend and endanger their lives but are instead propelled to do so by converging economic, political, and social forces (63). Human need and not human agency triggers (forced) displacement. Propelled by a justifiable search for social, political, and economic freedom, desperate migrants fleeing the oppression of poverty, violence, human rights abuses, tenuous rules of law, and questionable democracies do so despite the potentially fatal consequences of their dislocation.

Increased migrant flows and deaths at the United-States-Mexico border are just one vivid example of migration’s tragic dehumanizing effects. Since the implementation, on October 1, 1994, of Operation Gatekeeper, then-U.S. President Bill Clinton’s enhanced boundary enforcement and deterrence strategy focused primarily on the Tijuana-San Diego corridor, more than 5000 unauthorized migrants (mostly Mexicans but also Central and South Americans) are estimated to have died attempting to cross the divide (Jimenez 6). Looking beyond the U.S.-Mexico context, other transnational migrants die daily on the seas, crossing the North Atlantic from Africa to Europe, the South Pacific from Asia to America, or the Florida Straits from Cuba to the United States, to name only a few examples. For
those who survive the arduous journey, the prospects are usually only nominally better as poverty and the realities of illegality set in. Not sanctioned by their adopted state, undocumented migrants find themselves with very few rights as they exist on the margins, outside the juridical confines of state laws and a nationally-concentrated biopolitical apparatus.

If the chronology of death, violence, territorial and cultural appropriation, and political unrest at the United States-Mexico borderlands can be traced back to the land’s pre-conquest Mesoamerican roots, it is the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) that designates the geopolitical boundary between the two nations and establishes the asymmetrical power relationship that continues to characterize their contemporary bilateral relationship.

Powerless in the face of a surging U.S. army, as dictated by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, by the end of the war, Mexico had dropped all claims to Texas and had ceded the present-day states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and parts of Wyoming and Oklahoma, along with more than 125,000 Mexican citizens, to the United States (Akers Chacón 99-100). If Mexicans on the north side of the divide were originally accepted as a natural part of an isolated border culture, as “border people, as if border itself were their nationality” (Gordon 59), this began to change by the early 1900s, when, fuelled by a “Manifest Destiny” doctrine that proclaimed the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon and laid the foundation for an emerging ideology of “Americanization,” Mexicans in the United States were culturally alienated as a racial, socio-cultural, political, and economic Other.

The resulting Mexican inferiority ideology paved the way for institutional inequalities such as a dual wage system that paid Mexican labourers less for no other reason than
ethnicity (Nevins 104), a move that effectively converted Mexicans into a much-valued source of cheap labour. This unequal and unjust paradigm was further extended through the bilateral *bracero* programs forged between the United States and Mexican governments that sent more than half a million temporary migrant workers from Mexico to the United States between 1942 and 1964. Mexican workers were systematically exploited and abused by their North American employers but had little economic or juridical resources available to protest, a condition with stunning similarities to today’s unauthorized migrant workforce, whose legacy of vulnerability is undoubtedly rooted in the *bracero* programs (Bustamante 36). The only developing nation to border a major world power, the Mexican state is more or less prostrate in negotiations with its northern neighbour. Though conceived in cooperation between the two governments, bi-national mechanisms have been and continue to be constructed largely on U.S. terms (Nevins 174). In effect, the need for cheap labour exposes the inherent contradiction of Unitedstatesian politics of immigration: “Foreign labor is desired, but the persons in whom it is embodied are not desired” (Kearney, “Borders” 58). As they were in the past, illegal migrants today are converted into *techné* as cheap and exploitable sources of labour at the service of Unitedstatesian industry: “Not only are immigrants doing work that most would rather not, they are also often cleaning up the messes that Americans leave behind” (Traywick). To be sure, the undocumented migrant workforce is at the forefront of disaster response efforts within the United States, from the post-Katrina rebuilding of New Orleans to the dirty and hazardous task of cleaning up the BP oil spill site in the Gulf of Mexico (Traywick). From a neoliberal optic, “the state is acting primarily as an agent of capital, maintaining the functional equation of low wages and high profit margins for employers” (Huspek 52). Although it is illegal, under the U.S. Immigration and
Nationality Act (INA), to knowingly employ undocumented workers, due to sheer numbers, the risk remains relatively low for employers. If the state were truly serious about stemming the flow of unauthorized migration, it would take a firmer stance against those who employ and thus benefit most from unauthorized labourers, which it is largely unwilling to do.

In consequence, though they may have successfully crossed the border, as Étienne Balibar argues, undocumented migrants’ illegal status means they cannot surmount the function of the border as an ubiquitous apparatus of control, discrimination, and dehumanization. In other words, the tyrannies, dominations, violations, struggles, rebellions, and personal and geopolitical contestations characteristic of Gloria Anzaldúa’s site-specific borderlands have been metropolitanized: “the border is now to be found in any metropolis—wherever poor, displaced, ethnic, immigrant, or sexual minority populations collide with the ‘hegemonic’ population, which is usually understood to consist of middle- and upper-class WASPs” (Fox 119). As I detailed in chapter two, territorial borders extend their symbolic power over the imaginary of the nation and the citizen-subject, who interiorizes the border as an “invisible” and omnipresent segregationist mark (Balibar 78).

According to Nick Vaughan-Williams, the border has evolved from a static “geopolitical institution” to a portable and much more generalized “biopolitical phenomenon,” a conceptualization that stresses its disaggregating function: “In other words, rather than fixed, static lines on maps, borders are increasingly theorised as portable machines of sovereign power that are inseparable from the bodies they performatively produce and sort into different categories” (39). A generalized biopolitical border disperses its disciplinary power over the population far beyond the limited confines of traditional
border regions to a more ubiquitous localized and globalized terrain. In contrast to Claire Fox’s conceptualization of the interiorizing metropolitanization of the border, Vaughn-Williams locates an exteriorizing biopolitical border in the questionable practice of “offshore bordering” (32), of which the United States naval base turned post-9/11 terrorist detention centre in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba is a prime example. With the U.S. government and army basing their conduct on the specious claim that prisoners held at Guantanamo are not guaranteed the same rights as prisoners held within the territorial confines of the United States, detainees have been treated in a way that would be considered unlawful on U.S. (or even Cuban) soil, creating what Amnesty International has referred to as a “legal blackhole” (Vaughan-Williams 29). Beyond obvious ethico-juridical and human rights concerns, the Guantanamo example highlights the growing disaggregation of border technologies far beyond the national geopolitical border. Nevertheless, in order for these offshore and “invisible borders” (Balibar 78) to maintain their biopolitical symbolic and normative value within territorial limits, site-specific geopolitical borders are increasingly fortified and deployed as an exclusionary mechanism against a seemingly menacing foreign Other.

As the last vestige of the so-called American frontier, the U.S.-Mexico border is a concrete symbol of politico-ideological power and national containment (Hernández 86). Accordingly, mechanisms of interdiction and control have been put in place to regulate border flows. Written before the implementation of NAFTA and the treaty’s implications on the U.S.-Mexico border and bi-national relations--namely increased socio-economic disparities, migrant flows, surveillance technologies, and migrant deaths-- Anzaldúa’s iconic description of the borderlands has since been fortified. In the wake of NAFTA, the Clinton Administration implemented Operation Gatekeeper as a political response to growing anti-
immigrant sentiment and the concomitant anxiety of a seemingly “out of control” border. Tasked with reducing unauthorized migration mainly along the San Diego-Tijuana corridor, the main artery of unauthorized entries into the United States in the early 1990s, Operation Gatekeeper reified the border with a multi-pronged strategy that increased personnel (not only Border Patrol agents but also members of the National Guard), implemented advanced surveillance technologies (i.e., virtual fencing mechanisms like scanning towers, motion detection sensors, and thermal imaging devices), and fortified the border’s physical infrastructure (i.e., reinforced border fences and walls). Curiously, this closing of the border to unwanted human traffic coincided with the opening up of the border to increased flows of capital and manufactured goods, creating an odd complementarity between globalization and nationalization, or what Joseph Nevins refers to as simultaneous processes of “NAFTAization” and “militarization” of the border region (6). While these processes may appear to exist in a paradoxical tension, they are in fact fundamental to the nation-state’s sovereign identity insofar as both reinforce the essential function of state boundaries, namely to protect national territory and identity (Nevins 172-3). If NAFTA was the initial catalyst for increased border security, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States have resulted in an even more fortified post-9/11 security paradigm. On a symbolic level, the discourse and socio-spatial practice behind Operation Gatekeeper and post-9/11 border policies strengthen

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15 According to Madeleine J. Hinkes, the San Diego border was the preferred means of entry because of its populated neighbourhoods and transportation infrastructure. In addition, with an understaffed Border Patrol, migrants were able to take advantage of inadequate fencing along the border to gain easy entry.

16 Operation Gatekeeper is the largest and most well-known border enforcement initiative in the United States government’s broader border strategic plan. Simultaneous initiatives are in place along the Arizona border (Operation Safeguard) and the Texas border (Operation Rio Grande). With their focus on deterrence, these strategies compromise migrant safety by inserting death into the border security landscape. See Maria Jimenez and Hinkes for more on the humanitarian crisis at the border.
nationalist sentiment by defining and constructing difference and the Other, a conventional method of reinforcing authenticity and the Same.

Because borders (and thus nation-states) are by nature porous and contestable, as Madeleine J. Hinkes notes, the goal of Operation Gatekeeper was never to stop illegal migration altogether but to curb the flow of migrants passing along the California-Baja California border by “deliberately placing migrants in harm’s way through spatial redistribution eastward” (17). The once relatively easy route was converted into a dangerous and arduous passage through an isolated and hostile desert marked by rugged topography and extreme weather (sub-freezing temperatures in the winter and upwards of 40° Celsius temperatures, thunderstorms, and flash flooding in the summer). Insofar as the point was to make border crossing more difficult and dangerous in an attempt to dissuade would-be migrants from taking the risk, increased border deaths (due primarily to hypothermia and dehydration) came as no surprise. Though migrants themselves may not await such cruel conditions, as Maria Jimenez concludes in her study of the humanitarian crisis in the desert, human deaths have always been an anticipated consequence of post-1994 U.S. border policy:

The strategy concentrated border agents and resources along populated areas, intentionally forcing undocumented immigrants to extreme environments and natural barriers that the government anticipated would increase the likelihood of injury and death. The stated goal was to deter migrants from crossing. But this strategy did not work. Migrants have died crossing the border every day, year after year. Estimates of the death toll range from 3,861 to 5,607 in the last fifteen years. (5)
Despite the establishment of bilateral harm-reduction and rescue programs along the border, the risk of migrant death remains high, and has in fact increased by 50% since 2004 (Jimenez 6). Astoundingly, though the recent economic downturn has meant fewer attempted crossings, the number of border deaths continues to increase (Jimenez 7), exposing a culture of indifference to Mexican citizen well-being on behalf of both the United States and Mexican governments. According to Romero, U.S. government inaction to the crisis is directly correlated to the relatively limited media attention given to the issue of migrant deaths in the Unitedstatesian media (177).

To the extent that the Border Patrol can claim to have restored the rule of law by taming the once-chaotic southwest border, at first glance, it would appear as though Operation Gatekeeper were a resounding success. However, as Jimenez concludes, there is no clear evidence that the strategy has worked as a deterring mechanism. On the contrary, the growing number of migrant deaths along the border instead proves that migrants continue to take flight despite the increased dangers, confirming that, removed from external socio-economic and political factors, border policy alone does not affect the need to migrate. Though it is true that Mexican out-migration to the United States declined significantly in 2008 (Preston), the explanation for this dip can be found in the global recession and not strictly in U.S. border policy. In fact, all indicators suggest that numbers will begin to rise again as the Unitedstatesian economy begins to recuperate, evidence that the decrease is likely more a delay and not a disavowal of the search for the alluring and elusive American Dream.

17 The most recent statistics show that a record number of migrants (252) died in the Arizona desert between August 2009 and August 2010 (Foley).
3.4 Mediating Suffering: The Media/Nation Nexus in Luis Humberto Crosthwaite’s “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte”

In a hyper-mediated information and news landscape like today’s in which stories, headlines, and images of natural disasters and political and human crises are transmitted synchronously and endlessly replayed, what impact does such visibility (some say overexposure) of human suffering and misfortune have on the individual, regional, national, and transnational spectator? How do practices of mediation and representation, including the state’s symbolic management of the media, produce national and transnational reactions to close or distant suffering and the victimized/victimizer dyad? More specifically, in regards to the United States-Mexico border, how are shame, pity, fear, and/or indifference mobilized by the national media to mould public opinion about the border wars and the reified image of the unauthorized migrant?

As the most common arguments go, there are two main possible outcomes of increased visibility of suffering in today’s media: i) compassion fatigue and increased indifference and apathy towards the Other, the pathological postmodern reaction par excellence, or ii) the mobilization of shame and the ethico-political employment of reason. In the first, pessimistic view, saturation of the text and image disconnects the spectator from the victim and the world of suffering. A personal narrative or testimony retold and replayed hundreds of times with different yet seemingly homogenous protagonists becomes commonplace and ultimately loses its humanizing potential for pathos: “This overdose of misery, the argument has it, renders suffering banal, unimportant, and irrelevant to the spectator’s lifeworld: each piece of news on suffering is yet another story that reaches our
screen, only to disappear in oblivion as soon as we zap to another channel” (Chouliaraki 373). Distant suffering is thus made even more inaccessible and irrelevant as viewers detach themselves from the Other’s far-off misery, which is rarely contextualized in any meaningful way by the international mainstream media (Waisbord, “Media” 386). Though Lilie Chouliaraki refers specifically to the mediated television image in the above quotation, the argument can of course be extended to all conventional and emergent media technologies, including print media. As a point of clarification, in line with Waisbord, I am not suggesting that such indifference implies moral toleration of suffering and corruption on behalf of the media consumer, but that it is, rather, a reflection of socio-political apathy and disenchantment (Watchdog Journalism xxvii-xxviii).

The second, more optimistic view emphasizes the ethical cosmopolitical potential of the mediated text and image to enact agency and humanitarian action. Chouliaraki refers to the “democratization of responsibility” for the sufferer on behalf of the spectator, who, by assuming a degree of social solidarity and moral complicity in the sufferer’s pain, vows to take action to decrease the sufferer’s misfortune (373). Socio-cultural and geographic distances are typically bridged through displays of sameness and conditional agency rooted in a common humanity (Chouliaraki 377). However, as Chouliaraki notes, “the dream of cosmopolitanism is asserted, but the question of how we get there is essentially ignored” (374). In other words, though there is certainly a potential for the image to generate human action, best exemplified in international aid responses to singular emergencies such as natural disasters, images of sustained and perpetual human suffering rarely mobilize such action.
For his part, Thomas Keenan finds a potential means to achieving mediated cosmopolitanism in the mobilization of shame understood, from an Enlightenment perspective, as the transformative potential of the public use of reason. In this scenario, the focus of mediation shifts from representing the victim of suffering to exposing the agents implicated in said victimization, most commonly governments, corporations, armies, and militias (Keenan 435). Shame is triggered through the public gaze: by exposing scandalous or disgraceful acts, the media publicizes knowledge or consciousness of guilt on behalf of the implicated party. In effect, shame is best understood as publicly-imposed guilt or embarrassment, particularly when such publicity injures reputation to the point of redress: “The concept gathers together a set of powerful metaphors—the eyes of the world, the light of public scrutiny, the exposure of hypocrisy—as vehicles for the dream of action, power, and enforcement” (Keenan 438). Human rights NGOs and humanitarian aid groups commonly exploit the mobilizing shame metaphor, exposing disgraceful, scandalous, or “shameful” behaviour to public scrutiny in an effort to induce, beyond simple acts of symbolic punishment, voluntary compliance to largely unenforceable human rights norms.

A significant aspect of the mobilization of shame strategy is publicity and the (mass) mediatization of impropriety, to the extent that shame is the desired outcome of the mediatic scenario. Of course, the media not only informs and reports but can also set the agenda of public debate through its coverage firstly by choosing what is “newsworthy” and secondly by the angle that it gives to news stories and accompanying images. As Susan Sontag writes, “[b]ecause each photograph is only a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted. A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen” (105-06). Like words, images in news stories are carefully selected and positioned for a
specific end. Furthermore, as Sontag notes, captions frame the photographic perspective by giving the visual image a voice (108). Extending this photographic concept to the mass media, though an image or news story is meant to record, expose, and inform, the “truth” the media conveys is, by definition, “mediated” or constructed.

Notwithstanding the potential of new or alternative media to contest the powers of mainstream forms of communication, a topic that will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four, the mainstream press continues to occupy a privileged position as a relevant news source within a national context. In the case of the United States-Mexico border, Unitedstatesian mass media frames human suffering within a legality paradigm (versus a humanistic perspective) to cultivate apathy towards migrant hardship, alleviating the potential to conjure pity, shame, and cosmopolitical action. Following the official government posture, the mass media characterizes border policy, and consequential border deaths, as a necessary reaction to an out of control border, a posture that serves, furthermore, to normalize exceptional mechanisms of power, a common technique of government in contemporary politics (Agamben, State 2). As Nevins writes, “Gatekeeper’s greatest significance is that it embodies the pinnacle of a historical geographical process that has made the boundaries of the United States and their accompanying social practices seem increasingly normal and unproblematic, thus placing them largely beyond question” (9). Alongside increased media coverage of the so-called immigration and boundary enforcement crisis, aligned with government rhetoric and state construction of “the illegal” as a discursive category of social identity, the media’s now-exclusive use of the terms “illegal,” “undocumented,” or “unauthorized” over the previously used “wetback” (now recognized as derogatory) and “alien” is a clear manifestation of how this legality framework has shaped
public opinion and the Unitedstatesian collective consciousness on migration (Nevins 112). Whereas “alien,” the binary pair to “citizen,” absolutely highlights difference and exclusion within the *bios*, the term does not invoke the judicial apparatus insofar as the law does not forbid foreignness in and of itself. “Illegal,” “undocumented,” and “unauthorized,” in contrast, underscore the migrant’s illegitimate or criminal status. By focusing on the reinforcement of immigration laws, legality discourse turns the mobilization of shame strategy on its head by shaming the migrant-victim while exempting the state of any wrongdoing.

Mexican writer and journalist Luis Humberto Crosthwaite’s short story “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte,” published in his 2002 collection *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera*, contrasts the Unitedstatesian and Mexican mediatic responses to the migration phenomenon and the effects of Operation Gatekeeper by juxtaposing fragments of newspaper articles dealing with migration published in the span of one week in the Mexican and North American presses. A comparative analysis of these pieces reveals distinct differences in two major areas: i) the specific information disseminated and the framing of that information, and ii) the level of significance or prioritization of the news story itself. Before analyzing each category in detail below, I will begin with a brief summary of the narrative that frames the newspaper excerpts.

Significantly, the short story begins and ends with the same paragraph outlining the typical migrant consciousness. If the repetition of the paragraph, a commonly used literary trope that emphasizes circularity and perpetuity were not enough to highlight its importance, the paragraph anticipates and then later reinforces many of the text’s key themes: “Les
habían dicho que en Estados Unidos había grandes oportunidades de trabajo; más que en México. Les había dicho que no sería trabajo fácil; pero sí honesto. Les habían dicho que tendrían que viajar hacia el norte, que entrar a los Estados Unidos era complicado. Más ahora que antes, les había dicho” (45). That the story begins with and then repeats “les habían dicho” four more times in the opening paragraph alone emphasizes the blatant misinformation received by migrants prior to their departure. In grammatical terms, the use of the impersonal nullifies the acting subject: the seemingly omniscient “they” who gave the migrants this information is never identified because it is not one singular person but the collective migrant consciousness rooted in the tensions between Mexico and the United States, namely the desire to escape from the former in search of a decent standard of living in the latter.

In Charles Bowden’s poetic yet painfully realistic description, “[t]he blood on the line is merely the seepage from a global wound of people without futures, without work, without food (Exodus 128). Escaping already bleak and unconscionable conditions, migrants often have a false idea of what awaits them on the other side of the border: there are rarely any truly “great opportunities” awaiting them, and the “honest” work “they” refer to, though not necessarily nefarious, remains, in fact, illegal. This is not to say that migration does not have positive outcomes for some migrants, who, like Paraíso Travel’s Marlon, eventually adapt and learn how to survive and even thrive in their new environment. Nevertheless, if migrants are told that the journey is more “complicated” now than before, because of post-Operation Gatekeeper’s (and post-9/11’s) increasingly fortified panoptic surveillance technology, it is difficult to fully appreciate the desert’s fatal lure. To be sure, the repetition of “les habían dicho” creates a reproachful and accusatory tone and, at the beginning of the story,
foreshadows the tragic consequences of border crossing. While still critical, the same paragraph assumes a more despondent and pessimistic tone when repeated at the end of the story, which is in fact the beginning of a new story with a similar end. Other migrants are sure to take flight north, replicating the same cycle again and again: some will succeed; some will turn back; others will be caught and deported; and still others will perish in the desert.

As the story goes, migrants from all over Mexico (and Latin America) travel to Tijuana where, after finding a “coyote” or “pollero” who will supposedly guide them across the border, embark on their journey north, towards the American Dream and that famed “tierra de dólares y esperanzas” (45). Because of Operation Gatekeeper’s and related border operations’ increased surveillance technologies, these migrants are taken through unpopulated and unforgiving parts of the Southwestern desert “donde sería más fácil la pasada . . . [ya que por] ahí no había vigilantes” (45). While it is true that the Border Guard’s menacing presence is withdrawn in this remote space, the passage is no easier. In sharp contrast to the (mis)information migrants receive—that which “les habían dicho”--, stands the information they do not receive—“Nadie había mencionado el frío. . . . Nadie mencionó las bajas temperaturas. . . . Nadie mencionó la nieve. . . . Nadie lo mencionó” (45-6). To be sure, the narrator of Crosthwaite’s story is not the first person to have uttered these words. One would imagine that the growing number of migrants who have suffered and died in the desert have made similar reproaches. The difference being, of course, that the narrator’s condemnation can serve in part as a mechanism of shame exposing U.S. government

18 According to National Migration Institute (INM) statistics, in the first ten months of 2010, 56,566 undocumented migrants mostly from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were detained in their attempt to cross the border (Godoy).
complicity in migrant deaths while the migrants’ own voices have been effectively silenced. Curiously, in an attempt to discredit the coyotes who guide unknowing migrants through the desert, U.S. Border Patrol agent Mario Escalante repeats these same words almost verbatim: “They [migrants] weren’t told that they were gonna have to walk for days. They weren’t told that they were gonna have to go over mountain ranges. They weren’t told that they were gonna have to sleep in the hot desert or maybe the cold desert” (Foley). Despite the agent of blame, what remains clear is that misinformation and half-truths are endemic to the border crossing phenomenon.

There are obvious parallels between the “nadie” and the “les habían dicho” structures: firstly, like the use of the passive voice, the indefinite pronoun “nadie” removes any blame or agency from a human actor. Who did not mention the cold or who should have told them remains unclear. Secondly, the structure is repeated four times to emphasize the same accusatory yet fatalistic tone set at the beginning of the narrative: if, on the one hand, someone should have told them, on the other hand, it is doubtful that such information would have made a difference. That is to say that even if migrants are told of the real dangers of the desert, the impetus to flee remains strong, making them unlikely to believe the facts or change their minds. For the group in Crosthwaite’s story, the implication is that, had they been aware of the cold, they could have better prepared for it: “Nadie mencionó las bajas temperaturas; de haberlo hecho, se habrían traído por lo menos una chamarra” (45).

However, misinformation runs deeper than its linguistic level insofar as, in this case, the sign’s signifier does not communicate its authentic signified. A simple coat is not enough protection from the unknown harsh desert elements, something most poor Mexicans have never experienced and can therefore not fully comprehend. Having suffered and made it
across the physical boundary to the United States, at this point, convinced that the worst is over, migrants are rarely willing to turn back: “En ese momento ellos ya estaban en Estados Unidos, ya habían recorrido lo peor del camino. Lo demás tendría que ser lo de menos. ¿Qué nos hace una helada, un poquito de frío?” (46). Whereas the cold is regarded simply as a nuisance, the more accurate answer to this question is not discomfort but immobilization caused by frostbite, hypothermia, and, in the worst circumstances, death. In all cases, recalling Lawrence Grossberg’s argument that agency is organized through the control of mobility (Packer 140-41), a static subject seeking personal agency, the border crosser is thwarted as movement is, once again, restricted.

i) Information and Framing

Returning now to the correlation between national border policy and national press coverage of the plight of the migrant, in reference to the first category of distinction I identified above between the Mexican and North American press’s handling of the migrant experience in Crosthwaite’s text, at the level of specific information disseminated, whereas the Mexican press reports on the number of migrants found dead as well as those rescued from the same fate, the North American press oversimplifies the migrant condition and the very real humanitarian crisis at the border by censoring death and focusing instead on the number of undocumented migrants rescued by the U.S. government. Framing the news in this way fabricates an image of U.S. border policy, and more specifically Operation Gatekeeper, not as the purveyor of a humanitarian crisis but, to the contrary, as a humanitarian search and rescue mission. Against Keenan’s mediated cosmopolitan model,
this perspective instead suppresses suffering, shame, and thus any potential for humanitarian action.

Although both media disseminate “truthful” information based on verifiable facts, the North American position is clearly influenced by U.S. state policy on the border. North American press coverage, not including the editorial and opinion piece, which I will come back to shortly, mirrors the unadorned, bureaucratic language and discourse of official U.S. border security documents and press releases. The U.S. media celebrates the effectiveness of U.S. border policy as a juridical tool of interdiction while largely ignoring its more nefarious outcomes: “El servicio de inmigración está satisfecho por los resultado de Gatekeeper. Se han arrestado miles de trabajadores indocumentados; la mayoría fue deportada. El director del Servicio de Inmigración y Naturalización (INS) comentó: ‘Hemos descubierto los elementos básicos para que funcione nuestra frontera’” (48). The article’s triumphant discourse mirrors that of its official source, specifically the INS (now the Department of Homeland Security) and more generally all U.S. government communiqués. In effect, the article reads like a government sanctioned press release, emulating articles published in Frontline magazine, the Department of Homeland Security’s official Customs and Border Protection publication. According to Jason McCammock’s article on the southwest border published in the Winter 2010 edition of Frontline, “agents and officers must maintain a constant vigilance for criminals who will stop at nothing to illegally traffic humans, weapons, drugs and currency in both directions across the border” (13). Though this particular article focuses more on outbound operations at the border, the ideological backdrop and rationale for increased vigilance remains the same battle against criminality. In both instances, alongside symbolic censorship of the humanitarian crisis, a legalistic rhetoric is utilized to
normalize border technologies as a necessary apparatus that safeguards United States nationalism and independence. By employing policy discourse, the newspaper article conveys an officially mediated semblance of “truth.”

Bowden encapsulates the disconnect between reality and “media reality” at the border in his incisive border essay “We Bring Fear”:

There are two Mexicos.

There is the one reported by the US press, a place where the Mexican president is fighting a valiant war on drugs, aided by the Mexican Army and the Mérida Initiative, the $1.4 billion in aid the United States has committed to the cause. This Mexico has newspapers, courts, laws, and is seen by the United States government as a sister republic.

It does not exist.

There is a second Mexico where the war is for drugs, where the police and the military fight for their share of drug profits, where the press is restrained by the murder of reporters and feasts on a steady diet of bribes, and where the line between the government and the drug world has never existed.

By censoring death, the U.S. media upholds the vision of Bowden’s first Mexico and thus the government’s “official line.” That border deaths are not documented by the Unitedstatesian media reflects not only the media/nation nexus but also, on a humanistic level, the nation’s pathological detachment from the suffering Other: Mexican border deaths are deemed neither
tragic nor natural or unavoidable in the same way as death caused by a natural environmental
disaster such as a flood or hurricane. Insofar as reporting tragedy or crisis goes, there are
clearly hegemonic hierarchies at play that call into question the human value of the Mexican
migrant victim-sufferer.

In contrast, the Mexican press cited in “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte”
 attempts to present a more nuanced picture of the humanitarian crisis in an effort not only to
expose the tragic and shameful human consequences of Unitedstatesian border policy but
also better to inform would-be migrants about the dangers of the desert. The first excerpt
from the Mexican press is in fact a call to inform: “El consulado mexicano en Estados
Unidos expidió un comunicado en el cual se exhorta a los medios de comunicación de ambos
lados de la frontera a difundir las condiciones de alto riesgo que prevalecen en la zona de
Tecate y el este del condado de San Diego” (46). Because of the Mexican press’s relatively
low readership, beyond acting as a deterrent to would-be migrants, the publication of the
desert’s death count is better read as an attempt to mobilize shame: the goal is to expose and
call attention to the humanitarian crisis by placing U.S. border policy in the light of public
scrutiny, ultimately raising questions of blame and responsibility. Likewise, another of the
Mexican newspaper excerpts reports on an NGO initiative that connects Operation
Gatekeeper to desert deaths, contradicting the Unitedstatesian government’s position:
“Asociaciones de derechos humanos acusan al operativo ‘Guardián/ Gatekeeper’ por la
muerte de los migrantes. Desde octubre de 1994, fecha en que entró en efecto dicho
operativo, han muerto trecientas ochenta y seis personas. Las autoridades norteamericanas
acusan a los ‘coyotes’ de estas muertes” (47). More precise than the North American press
and U.S. government posture, the Mexican articles offer the reader diverse perspectives. If
the U.S. government is to blame for relocating migrants to the desert, coyotes must also take some of the responsibility for increased migrant deaths, as demonstrated by the coyote’s abandonment of the group of migrants in the short story. Not to be accused of simple anti-Americanism in its coverage, the Mexican press interrogates the role of the coyote in yet another article that reports on one family’s near-death experience after being abandoned by its so-called guide.

ii) Prioritization

There is great difference in the level of significance given to the migrants’ struggles. That all the stories taken from the Mexican press appear on the first page, as headline news, signals its importance to the greater Mexican social consciousness. Migrant struggles are headline news on a daily basis because the migrant experience and desire to flee north pervades the Mexican imaginary. In other words, the border is synonymous with Mexican identity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the lure of the American Dream is so omnipresent that most readers will have had contact with the border, if not in their own experience then certainly through that of a friend or family member. The Mexican press thus assumes an important ethical role in disseminating information about the human consequences of an increasingly fortified border. However, as Campbell’s *Transpeninsulares* suggests, societal and governmental responses, or lack thereof, to stories uncovered and published in the press are an entirely different matter.
North American press coverage of the border is more sporadic and never appears on the front page, which, insofar as the border goes, is likely reserved for more policy-oriented pieces. Of the five North American stories included in “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte,” two appear in the local section, one in the national section, one is an opinion piece, and one is an editorial. The two local stories reference the INS and Operation Gatekeeper’s successful rescue and deportation missions while the national story is more about the Kl-Klux-Klan and its proposed strategy to “eliminate” the Mexican migration problem altogether. Here, the news is not migrant mistreatment and death but rather the continued existence of the Kl-Klux-Klan and related ideology in the twenty-first century.

The opinion and editorial pieces stand out against the U.S. mass media’s official position insofar as they, like the Mexican articles, question the apparently successful results of Operation Gatekeeper and the U.S. government’s complicity not only in the migration phenomenon but also in the increasing number of migrant deaths at the border. The piece published in the opinion pages is the only North American article to reference death or to call into question the U.S. government’s collusion in the unauthorized migration and border death phenomenon: “Responsabilidad plena de Gatekeeper. Nueve muertos la semana anterior, cinco este fin de semana. . . . Curiosamente no se castiga a los patrones que contratan a los trabajadores. El año pasado sólo se les impusieron diez multas” (47). As stated above in section 3.3, if the government were serious about eliminating unauthorized migrants from Unitedstatesian soil, their easiest point of battle would be against those who hire migrants as cheap labour. An odd voice of dissent in the Unitedstatesian mainstream press, this article reveals the essential function and political potential of the mainstream press’s opinion pages as a mediatic space for alternative opinions and worldviews.
The editorial piece is more nuanced and attempts to add lucidity to the so-called problem by explicating the underlying social causes of Mexican and other Latin American displacement north: “La desesperación hace que los migrantes ignoren las leyes. Nadie culpa a los trabajadores. Si México no puede satisfacer sus necesidades de trabajo, los más necesitados recurrirán a los Estados Unidos, desafiando al clima y a la naturaleza” (48). Though the editorial has traditionally been valued as a space for free, partial, and subjective journalistic expression, this article’s objective focus on the facts reveals the editorial’s diminishing freedom. That the editorial is not quite as brazenly antagonistic to the mainstream ideological vision of migration as the opinion piece is not surprising considering the journalist’s likely ideo-political, professional, and financial connection to the newspaper. Nonetheless, amidst concerns of decreased editorial autonomy and the homogenizing effects of growing conglomeration, cross-ownership, and general neoliberalization of the media, the opinions and op-ed sections of the press do have the potential, though limited, to offer readers a space for alternative perspectives within the confines of the mainstream marketplace of ideas.

3.5 Conclusion

The United States-Mexico borderlands are among the most contested sites of cross-cultural, transnational, and political conflict in the contemporary landscape. As the repercussions of contesting the border’s evermore regulated spatial practice grow deadlier for those born south of the divide, critical cultural analyses ought to approach the conflict from a humanitarian perspective. With this in mind, in this chapter I have not only examined the
reality of suffering and death along the border, a direct consequence of post-NAFTA and post-9/11 Unitedstatesian border policy, but have also argued that national specificities influence how border suffering is interpreted and reported in the national mainstream presses. Whereas mainstream news coverage of the migrant border crossing phenomenon in the Unitedstatesian context largely demonizes the migrant with the use of a juridical illegality rhetoric that mirrors the government’s official stance, the northern Mexican press is more nuanced and critical of U.S. policy. Nonetheless, as we see in Crosthwaite’s “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte,” though the Mexican press directly links Unitedstatesian border policy to the increasing number of migrant deaths in the desert, as Yépez, Trujillo Muñoz, and Campbell articulate in their narrative texts, the migration phenomenon cannot be separated from Mexico’s greater socio-political and mediatic conflicts. Thus, while the Mexican media may openly criticize its northern neighbour, its freedom of speech and analysis is, not surprisingly, far more limited within an internal framework, so much so that national news is sometimes only covered and thus consumed through the foreign media. Suppressed not only by its traditional censors--national, regional, and local governments and institutions--the contemporary Mexican media must also contend with the growing influence of organized crime syndicates and drug cartels, a condition that, by discrediting the national mediascape, obstructs the functioning of civil society and ultimately places an effective public sphere and liberal democracy itself at risk.
Chapter 4. The Media/Politics Nexus: Censorship and Contestation in the Colombian Context

Se garantiza a toda persona la libertad de expresar y difundir su pensamiento y opiniones, la de informar y recibir información veraz e imparcial, y la de fundar medios masivos de comunicación. Estos son libres y tienen responsabilidad social. Se garantiiza el derecho a la rectificación en condiciones de equidad. No habrá censura. (Article 20, 1991 Colombian Constitution)

La actividad periodística gozará de protección para garantizar su libertad e independencia profesional. (Article 73, 1991 Colombian Constitution)

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. (Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

4.1 Introduction: Media and Democracy

If it is true that new and innovative forms of globalized or transnational, participatory, and citizens’ based media and communications technologies at the crux of the Information Revolution are changing the twenty-first-century mediascape, the quintessential role of the media as a public service remains unaltered: to expose and inform; to configure, analyze, and critique social reality; to mould a collective consciousness; and to create public dialogue and legitimize public opinion. As Dan Berkowitz argues, though technological advances are placing traditional forms of media (notably mainstream print and analogue broadcasting) in crisis and blurring the boundaries between journalism and popular culture, the task of the critic is not to decry the end of journalism but to better understand the meaning of (new) journalism and the implications of the twenty-first-century’s evolving mediascape (291). At its most basic level, the control and dissemination of information is what has propelled the continuing development of information technologies from Johannes Gutenberg’s 1440
invention of the printing press; Samuel Morse’s late nineteenth-century telegraph transmissions; the twentieth-century mass mediatization of newspapers, radio programs, and later television; to the twenty-first-century’s varied social and networked Web-based multimedia and cybernetic communications technologies. In other words, though technological innovations may have changed how we approach and interact with the media, as my analysis of the media/nation nexus in chapter three emphasizes, the same inveterate questions over who defines and interprets “news,” who controls the flow of information and cultural production, and who, in turn, shapes public knowledge and influences public opinion remain of central importance.

Following a Foucauldian framework of power understood as a horizontal web of interrelations between hegemonic and subaltern structures, a strong and independent media that articulates both dominant and peripheral positions and stimulates active debate among the citizenry is today taken as a sign of a strong democracy. For Brian McNair, journalism has been “a key ingredient in the social cement of liberal, democratic capitalism ever since the bourgeois revolutions. You cannot have one without the other, and for as long as democracy is accepted as a governing principle, liberal journalism will coexist with it” (348). In effect, the concomitant development of the mass media and mass democracy throughout the globe is not coincidental considering the media’s role not only in informing citizens about their democratic responsibilities and forming public opinion about the importance of democratic values but also in the free media’s own exemplary demands for a democratized mediascape open to critical debate on contentious points of view (Saeed 468). Ideally, according to Saima Saeed, “[t]he power of the media in a democracy comes from it being the watchdog of society . . . [and] providing the necessary checks and balances on issues that
concern the masses. Alternately, it also provides a site of contestation, where citizens can express their opinion freely without any fear of coercion or control by the state on important policy matters played out in the ‘public sphere’” (466). In Saeed’s vision, because the media acts on behalf of a Habermasian public sphere, mediating between society and the state, it implies equal access to power on behalf of members of that sphere. If Habermas’s original conceptualization of the public sphere is exclusively bourgeois, following Fraser’s critique of Habermas and Habermas’s own later recognition of the existence of contestatory public spheres I outlined in chapter one, the power of a free media resides in its ideal inclusivity and its potential not only to critique and question conventional regimes of truth but also to modify established relations of power between the state, media producers, and citizens-readers.

In the wake of an increasingly monolithic and symbolically controlled mainstream media model that serves the needs of powerful stakeholders (both legal and illegal), alternative forms of communication assume a fundamental role in the cultivation and dissemination of diverse perspectives within the public sphere. Without suggesting that the Internet is a messianic tool for fostering global tolerance and egalitarianism, which it is clearly not, on-line media sources and, more particularly, increasingly popular and influential citizen-directed or “amateur” forms of journalism such as blogs (web logs) and podcasts (ipod broadcasts) as well as interactive social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter at the vanguard of the new media democratization movement empower non-traditional media players to exert their agency as citizen-journalists. This participative element is indispensable to supplementing traditional media models of “consumers’ production” with forms of pubic sphere-building “cultural production”: 
In the face of cultural globalization, there seems to be a growing concern regarding the importance of democratizing the access to the means of cultural production for the construction and maintenance of truly democratic societies and polities. It is only such access that makes possible the meaningful exercise of the right to be informed and the ability to express oneself—a basic condition for the participation of citizens in decision-making processes—as well as the development of the human personality that results from these and other related cultural experiences. (Remedi 513)

The resulting socially mediated space is characterized by connected polyphonic voices that affect the public agenda by influencing what stories and cultural phenomena merit public attention. Yet, despite the growing influence of these and other forms of potentially democratizing media, the mainstream press has not relinquished its cultural-political influence over the public sphere. On the contrary, in an effort not to concede power in an increasingly congested media battleground, established media conglomerates instead seek to exploit new media forms to their advantage.

Accordingly, if the ideal of a free media, just like that of a free democracy, remains uncertain in strong or “liberal” Western democracies, it is even less certain in “illiberal” Latin American democracies like Mexico and Colombia’s, where fear, misinformation, uniformity, superficiality, blatant partisanship, and (self-)censorship characterize the media landscape. Historically, peril has always accompanied journalism in Latin America, from the Southern Cone’s dirty war tactics of silence and terror that reigned throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Shining Path’s and former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori’s kidnapping of journalists in the 1990s, the repression of information enforced in Mexico throughout the
long PRI dynasty, to the growing number of journalist deaths in present-day Mexico and the immediate scandal surrounding the Colombian intelligence agency’s (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* or *DAS*) reported espionage and threats against journalists, to name only a few examples. In the Colombian context, despite the freedom of press guarantees set forth in the Colombian Constitution (as quoted in the above epigraphs), authentic journalistic autonomy does not exist. Mirroring in many ways the challenging conditions facing journalists in Mexico, Colombian journalists, who are bound by numerous competing actors, namely the government,\(^1\) partisan media outlets, drug traffickers, guerrilla groups, and a resurgent paramilitary force, are by and large confined by the legitimate threat and fear of kidnapping, exile, or death.\(^2\) While the number of journalist deaths may have decreased since the election of Álvaro Uribe Vélez in 2002, killings have been replaced by flight into exile (Reporters Without Borders). Ranked 130 out of 196 countries worldwide in terms of press freedom in 2010 (Freedom House 34), Colombia continues to be one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists.

\(^{1}\) Though I am referring specifically to the internal condition of the Colombian media, government censorship crosses national borders and affects international journalists as well. Both national and foreign journalists covering the Colombian conflict feel pressure from the Colombian government as well as the United States Embassy in Bogotá to favour United Statesian policies on Colombia, due particularly to the United States’s funding and backing of Plan Colombia (Delacour). United Statesian influence over Colombian journalists was made particularly evident in July 2010, when the U.S., for the first time, denied entry to a foreign journalist accepted into Harvard University’s prestigious Nieman Fellowship program. Hollmann Morris is best known as the creator/director of the independent television program *Contravía* and its investigative stories on the FARC, right-wing paramilitary groups, victims of Colombia’s civil war, and, most recently, exposés on the abuses committed by the DAS, Colombia’s intelligence agency. Morris was an outspoken critic of former President Uribe’s supposed ties to paramilitary groups and the government sanctioned practice of extrajudicial executions. In a reversal of roles, following Uribe’s denouncement of Morris as "an accomplice to terrorism," the U.S. government denied Morris a visa under the "terrorist activities" section of the U.S. Patriot Act. Due to international pressures, Morris was eventually granted a U.S. Visa. See Robert H. Giles and Leo Palmer for more.

\(^{2}\) According to statistics released by the Fundación de la Libertad de Prensa, between 1977 and 1999, at the height of the country’s armed conflict, 146 journalists were killed in Colombia, an average of seven per year. Alarmingly, between January 1999 and December 2000, 19 were journalists were killed (Monsiváis 132).
Furthermore, with the increasing neoliberalization of the global media, economic interests such as stock value and evermore important ratings supersede the ideal of a watchdog media at the service of the public good. Veteran Colombian journalist Yamid Amat reiterates what many other Colombian and Latin American journalists decry, namely that in Colombia (and more generally Latin America), “la libertad de prensa es libertad de empresa: los periodistas estamos sometidos al poder económico de los propietarios de los medios” (qtd. in Rincón 586). Failing to meet its social and professional responsibilities to disseminate diverse public information; to describe, comprehend and make sense of a chaotic society; to induce critical reflection in the citizenry; and to behave ethically (Rincón 576), or more succinctly, according to once-exiled Colombian investigative journalist Daniel Coronell, to make public that which the powers that be want to conceal (“Daniel el travieso” 27), contemporary mainstream media in Colombia instead misinforms, censors, and trivializes information. Taking a resolutely critical stance, Fabio López de la Roche uses words such as “telenovelización,” “espectacularización,” and “farandulización” (61) to describe the state of the contemporary Colombian media. Speaking of the largely homogenous television news media in the country, the historian and media analyst concludes:

en Colombia . . . ha hecho carrera un tipo de propuesta que está convirtiendo a los noticieros en espacios publicitarios, deportivos y de farándula, con un cierto lugar para la emisión de cortas noticias informativas, que difícilmente pueden ayudarle a la opinión a comprender la complejidad de las cosas que en este país ocurren, más allá de los relatos escuetos y sensacionalistas de los hechos más trágicos y espeluznantes. (59)
That the Colombian media finds itself in such a state is understandable considering the country’s violent and often incomprehensible history.

To recapitulate, the roots of the contemporary media crisis are twofold: i) the country’s history of a politically-motivated and partisan media model conducive to journalistic fear, (self-)censorship, and limited press freedoms; and ii) the ever-increasing potency of a sterile, uniform, and non-critical neoliberal model bound by political agendas and economic pressures. Yet, despite these almost impossible working conditions, voices of opposition and denouncement can be heard, albeit faintly, on the Colombian mediascape. On a critical and practical activism plane, Omar Rincón and Martha Ruiz advocate for a free and open mainstream press as an opening towards democracy and civility, proposing a four-pronged journalism for the public good that: i) remains independent in the face of government and economic groups, ii) informs based on in-depth investigation and analysis, iii) creates an inclusive journalism based on credible sources and diverse points of view, and iv) promotes participatory information and public debate (85).³ To this end, they call for a “periodismo colombiano [que] debe recuperar el sentido pleno del derecho a la información al diversificar el acceso de visiones sobre la realidad y construir ciudadanos más que consumidores, escenarios públicos donde todos puedan participar de la comprensión del país” (85-86). Alternative models and publications take up this task in response to the mainstream media’s largely unanimous and non-critical stance. Award-winning journalists Hollman and Juan Pablo Morris’s Contravía television series demythifying the history of

³ Active members of Proyecto Antonio Nariño (PAN), Rincón and Ruiz work with other national and international academics and journalists to promote freedom of expression and information in Colombia. For more information on this organization’s mission and projects, see <http://www.pan.org.co/index.php>.
Colombia’s ongoing civil war is an exemplary case, as are the monthly left-wing populist independent print and on-line newspaper *Desde abajo*, in circulation since 1991, and recently launched (October 2010) *Aluna* newspaper, an indigenous publication written by and for the indigenous populations of the Sierra Nevada region of Santa Marta.

What follows is a case study of another alternative media project—*Un Pasquin* (along with its affiliate website [http://unpasquin.com/] and blog [http://blog.unpasquin.com/]), a monthly newspaper of political opposition published independently in Bogotá, Colombia from December 2005 to May 2010. My goal is to evaluate the merit of this publication as a “cultural ritual of communication” that disseminates and generates shared beliefs (Carey, in Gasher, Introduction i). Not simply a transmitter of alternative or contra information, I argue that, via this information and the very existence of the newspaper itself, *Un Pasquin* constructs an alternative geography of journalism that locates readers in an alternative social community or, in Foucauldian terms, in a heterotopic public sphere.

An anti-establishment and self-professed “politically incorrect” newspaper of opposition, this free monthly publication was born in December 2005 out of protest against then-President Uribe’s first re-election bid. An iconoclastic publication, its goals are journalistic excellence, independence, transparency, public debate, and socio-political change. Given that it places freedom of opinion and expression before purely economic and commercial motivations, I interpret *Un Pasquin*’s commitment to transparent and critical

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4 The newspaper is currently on hiatus as it reformulates its anti-uribista stance in the wake of Uribe’s departure from the presidency.

5 To extend his firm hold on power, Uribe modified the 1991 Colombian constitution in 2004 to allow himself to run for re-election in 2006. While there was some controversy surrounding the Constitutional Court’s decision, Uribe won the presidency in the first round of elections with a resounding 62% of the vote.
political journalism as a civic duty and an attempt to vindicate journalism vis-à-vis the political, supporting José Joaquín Brunner’s understanding of the essential functions of journalism, namely, to create informed communities, to represent these communities in the public sphere, and to strengthen the agenda around which politics should be organized (Rey 305). Before entering into an examination of alternative media and a textual analysis of the newspaper, I engage first with the history of print media in Colombia to comprehend the socio-historic role of both the mainstream and alternative presses in the country, thus avoiding an oversimplified analysis of the challenges facing alternative media and the role that a publication like Un Pasquín can play in the contemporary mediascape.

4.2 Politics, Power, and the Mainstream Press in Colombia

4.2.1 Of Politics and Partisanship

As in other parts of Latin America and the world, journalism in Colombia has, from its inception, been tied to information, power, and politics. The country’s long history of journalist presidents reveals a strong and enduring media/power/politics nexus: since 1886 (the year in which the Republic of Colombia was named), a total of twenty-three presidents have been former directors, owners, or editors of periodical publications in Colombia (Arango Forero et al. 71). In fact, the journalist politician tradition began much earlier than that, in the early 1800s, with both the inaugural president of Cundinamarca, Jorge Tadeo Lozano, as well as his predecessor, Antonio Nariño, and continues to this day with current President Juan Manuel Santos. A member of the influential Santos family, the second largest
shareholder of Casa Editorial El Tiempo, Santos was sub-director of El Tiempo, the
country’s most read and influential newspaper, from 1981 to 1991. Of particular interest to
the present study is the media’s (and by extension the government’s) role in crafting,
shaping, and controlling public knowledge and public opinion. Not surprisingly, the drive to
control information and thus power/knowledge has produced intrinsic tensions between the
vision of an ideal media watchdog and the blatantly and symbolically managed reality of the
contemporary Colombian mediascape, whose primary concern is the dissemination of
misinformation (versus information), concealment (versus discovery), confusion (versus
order), and consensus (versus conflict).

Media historians generally date the birth of journalism in Colombia to the appearance
of Cuban Manuel del Socorro Rodríguez’s 1791 Papel Periódico de la Ciudad de Santa Fe
de Bogotá, the first newspaper with the explicit goals of informing on matters of public
importance, advancing the public good, and supporting civil society (Santos Molano 28). A
print medium, this newspaper was directed at the intellectual elite class composed of
government functionaries, professors, students, clerics, and merchants (Soto Arango 165).
The newspaper folded in 1797, but Rodríguez returned to the scene in 1806 with El Redactor
Americano, described by Rodríguez himself as the nation’s first truly informative
newspaper: “Este no es un periódico literario como el del 91, sino un mero redactor de

6 Some historians accept June 16, 1785 as the birth of journalism in Colombia, citing the publication and
circulation of the first printed newspaper—Aviso del terremoto sucedido en la ciudad de Santa Fe de Bogotá el
día 12 de junio de 1785—, a notice of the earthquake that shook Bogotá four days prior to its publication.
However, due to its ephemeral nature, it fails to meet the characteristics associated with the serial press. In
contrast, the Papel Periódico had a vast and well developed circulation, sales, and distribution infrastructure. It
circulated between February 9, 1791 and January 6, 1797, reaching a total of 265 editions. See Emilio Juan
Ruiz and Diana E. Soto Arango.

7 El Redactor Americano circulated between December 6, 1806 and November 4, 1809, reaching a total of
seventy-one editions. For more information, see Soto Arango.
noticias” (qtd. in Ruiz 23). Given that *El Redactor Americano* was dedicated exclusively to recording important “newsworthy” information, Rodríguez published a parallel monthly entitled *El Alternativo del Redactor Americano* in which he printed scientific, philosophical, and literary articles (Soto Arango 169). With these didactic roots firmly established, in 1810, two newspapers that played a fundamental role in disseminating a patriotic and emancipatory spirit during Colombia’s struggle for independence began to circulate: Francisco José de Caldas’s *Diario Político de Santa Fe de Bogotá* and Diego Padilla’s *Aviso al Público*. While motivated by the need to inform, these newspapers were absolutely political in nature and served as a model for national hero of independence Antonio Nariño’s critical journalism condemning the government and politics of President Jorge Tadeo Lozano. Nariño’s mediatic criticism proved effective as Tadeo Lozano resigned from the presidency, amidst controversy, after fewer than six months in power, paving the way for the subsequent election of Nariño to the presidency.

Critical journalism played a similarly fundamental role in the politics of yet another national hero, Simón Bolívar, who directed both the pre-liberation *Correo del Orinoco* and the post-liberation *Gaceta de Colombia* to promulgate the ideals of independence outlined in the newly created Republic of Colombia’s first constitution. As with all movements of change, Bolivar’s revolution was not without its opposition. A decisively antagonistic

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8 The first circulated from August 27, 1810 until February 1, 1811, for a total of forty-six editions. The second had a shorter reach, publishing only twenty-one editions between September 28, 1810 and February 16, 1811. For more information, see Soto Arango.

9 Nariño’s *La Bagatela*, considered Colombia’s first political weekly, began circulating on July 14, 1811 and ran until April 12, 1812. See Eduardo Ruiz Martínez.

10 The first circulated between June 27, 1818 and March 23, 1822, for a total of 128 editions. The second circulated from September 6, 1821 until December 31, 1831, for a total of 566 editions.
relationship formed between bolivarianos loyal to Bolivar and santanderistas loyal to general Francisco de Paula Santander, sowing the seeds of Colombia’s long and deadly bipartisan model, a political bifurcation that intensified throughout the nineteenth century with competing newspapers advocating, promoting, and contesting either Conservative or Liberal party doctrines, ideologies, and presidential candidates. Newspapers and journalists identified closely with political parties and used the media as another weapon in their political struggles. As could be expected, this divisive environment was conducive to politically motivated sanctions against media critical of the ruling party. In 1887, for instance, Liberal newspaper El Espectador (the oldest newspaper in Colombia still in circulation today) was shut down for six months by Rafael Nuñez’s ruling Conservative regime. Similar partisan interests continued to characterize the Colombian media well into the twentieth century, a condition manifested blatantly in the deadly massacres carried out between Liberals and Conservatives during La Violencia. According to Emilio Juan Ruiz, the low point of Colombian journalism came on April 9, 1948, following the assassination of populist Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, when misinformation on behalf of the media (transmitted primarily via radio broadcasts) fuelled riots that led to the burning down of Conservative newspaper plants by Liberal supporters avenging the death of their leader (45). Not to be outdone, four years later, in 1952, during the height of La Violencia, Conservative party loyalists retaliated by torching the Bogotá offices of then-Liberal newspapers El Tiempo and El Espectador.

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11 See Emilio Juan Ruiz For a detailed account of nineteenth-century Liberal and Conservative party newspapers and the civil wars between the two factions in Colombia.
These already tense conditions worsened under the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, whose ascension to power in 1953 signalled a new stage in Colombian journalism (Ruiz 46). Under his decree, journalists were told to inform the reader without interpreting or analyzing the facts. To ensure his government’s hold on power/knowledge, Rojas Pinilla utilized press controls such as overt censorship, media closures, and news story restrictions and obligations. The politically charged nature of Colombian and Latin American society makes press controls and political co-optation of the media a seeming necessity for governments unwilling to cede their hold on power. To this end, beyond simply closing down Liberal newspapers, Rojas Pinilla inaugurated (government-controlled) television programming in Colombia to celebrate his first year in power, an exemplar of the country’s long history of a state-owned, politically and economically-motivated media model. However, even after the fall of Rojas Pinilla’s dictatorship in 1957, the bipartisan National Front, a power sharing agreement reached between Liberals and Conservatives,12 did little to advance press freedoms in Colombia as journalists continued to be bound by the ruling party’s political agenda. Furthermore, because of the link between the National Front and the appearance of left-wing armed groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and the National Liberation Army or ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), effects of the National Front years on journalists and the media persist to this day (Arango Forero et al. 64). According to Carlos Agudelo, the official censorship at this juncture turned into self-censorship, impeding serious critical journalism from taking hold in the mainstream media (13). Regrettably,

12 Following the Benidorm and Sitges agreements reached by Liberals and Conservatives, the two parties alternated the presidency and political power from 1958 to 1974. For more information on Colombia’s history of violence and the National Front, see Fabio Sánchez.
notwithstanding Silvio Waisbord’s claim that it was the Colombian press that ushered in critical investigative reporting on the continent in the late 1970s (Watchdog Journalism 43), fear of violence, impunity, and professional reprisal continues to characterize Colombia’s twenty-first-century mediascape.

The Liberal-Conservative hegemony established during the National Front years has continued well into the post-National Front era, with one of the two parties retaining power until 2002, when former Liberal-turned-independent candidate Álvaro Uribe Vélez was elected to the presidency under a conservative “Democratic Security” policy platform. Uribe’s popularity was later consolidated through the creation of a new political party, the National Unity Party (El Partido Social de la Unidad Nacional) or Party of the U, which united former Liberal and Conservative politicians loyal to Uribe and his successful 2006 re-election bid. Whereas Uribe’s election is said to have changed the reigning two-party system in Colombia, the Party of the U is essentially conservative, having worked in coalition with both the Conservative Party and the right-wing Radical Change Party under Uribe’s administration. The Party of the U’s main opposition was, as expected, the Liberal Party, along with the left-wing Alternative Democratic Pole. In this way, under Uribe, the fundamentally fractious bi-partisan landscape (and by extension mediascape) in contemporary Colombia remained essentially intact.13

13 In the most recent national elections to the Senate and House of Representatives held in March 2010, 9 parties successfully elected representatives. However, the majority of both the Senate and the House of Representatives is essentially conservative, with the Party of the U and the Conservative Party garnering approximately 25% and 21% of the Senate vote and 27% and 28% of the House of Representatives vote respectively. The Liberal party continues its role as the main opposition party, holding approximately 18% of the Senate and 19% of the House of Representatives.
The nascent post-Uribe political landscape appears to be one of continuity with the past. Though dissatisfaction with the Uribe administration’s “the end justifies the means” politics was manifested in the unexpected rise of the independent centrist Green Party of Colombia, whose presidential candidate Antanas Mockus garnered 21.5% of the first round presidential vote held on May 30, 2010 to force a run-off election with the Party of the U, the would-be alternative to traditional politics in Colombia could not surmount the political machinery of the U. Backed by traditional mechanisms of power, including the mainstream media, Party of the U candidate Juan Manuel Santos, who garnered 69% of the second-round presidential election vote, was well positioned to seize the presidency.

It is worth briefly mentioning the role the mainstream media played during the 2010 presidential election campaign. In line with the Latin American mediatic “journalism of opinion” tradition (Waisbord, Watchdog Journalism 121), one week before the elections, El Tiempo announced its official support for Santos’s candidacy in an editorial that not only underscores Santos’s ability to continue Uribe’s Democratic Security policy but also, somewhat peculiarly, praises his work as a former journalist with the newspaper:

Como es bien conocido, Juan Manuel Santos tuvo una larga e ilustre carrera en El Tiempo, el diario que perteneciera a su familia y del cual fue socio hasta hace poco. Fue en esta casa periodística donde, aparte de merecidos galardones a su tarea reporteril, se ganó el respeto y admiración de cuantos laboraron a su lado. Es precisamente porque conocemos de primera mano su capacidad de trabajo, su honestidad sin tacha, su inteligencia y su compromiso indeclinable con Colombia, por lo que recomendamos su nombre sin ambigüedades. (“El mejor candidato”)
As this quote demonstrates, the journalist-politician nexus is celebrated as though there really were an incontrovertible connection between the two professions. *El Tiempo*’s endorsement of Santos is, without a doubt, an unmistakable attempt on behalf of the media empire to intervene even more markedly in the democratic process and the rise and fall of political power than it already does, considering its singular position as the official or dominant newspaper in Colombia. According to Kimberly Meltzer, “the editorial board has the potential to wield power by directing the sentiments of its readers, particularly when it comes to endorsing candidates for political office” (83). While all editorial decisions are made with economic and partisan political considerations in mind, candidate endorsements in the editorial section are particularly powerful because of their unequivocal subjectivity. Extending James N. Druckman and Michael Parkin’s conclusions of their study on editorial slant and vote choice to the Colombian context, *El Tiempo*’s proud pro-uribista position and official endorsement of Santos more than likely influenced public opinion and political action on election day in the country.

4.2.2 Compromised Consensus

Colombia’s long history of journalist presidents and partisan media reveals the strength of the journalism/politics nexus in the country, highlighting the function of the media not so much as another democratic social actor but as a partisan and hegemonic national political institution committed to disseminating the ruling government’s official dogma. Enrique Santos Calderón, co-director of *El Tiempo* and cousin of Juan Manuel Santos, encapsulates this phenomenon as follows: “Politicians and journalists are the same
because national journalism is and has been the seeding ground for presidents and party leaders” (111). Unquestionably, journalists in Colombia tend to have extra-journalistic ambitions, with many pursuing parallel careers as writer-intellectuals and politicians. This sentiment is extended, in more theoretical terms, by Waisbord, for whom the “promise and ideal of an independent press uncontaminated by the down-and-dirty world of politics goes against the grain of standard research, which has shown that the press is, above all, a political institution whose functioning cannot be understood separated from a larger political dynamic” (Watchdog Journalism 5, emphasis added). In Colombia, where transparent politics has always been contentious and contestatory journalism always questionable, threats from guerrilla and paramilitary groups further problematize the media’s role in the socio-political zeitgeist. While globalization’s neoliberal model has accelerated the transition from family- and state-owned media towards private and corporate international media conglomerates, as outlined in chapter three, the state (and other parapolitical actors), continues to exert influence over media coverage: “globalization signals the consolidation of commercial media systems and the end of alternative models. But states and governments are hardly the losers in the process. They are still able to keep the media on a short leash by negotiating the terms of business practices and defining the workings of media markets” (Fox and Waisbord 20). In other words, the exploitation of fear (political, economic, professional, and/or personal) and the concomitant deployment of “invisible censorship” or “symbolic management” (Neveu 341) ensure that state power and prerogatives prevail even in our twenty-first-century conceptualization of a seemingly “free” and “participatory” media. While I agree absolutely with Waisbord’s general argument that an inherent link exists between the press and political power in national Latin American
democracies, as I will demonstrate below in my analysis of *Un Pasquín*, the ideal of a free and independent press driven by an alternative model is achievable (albeit on a small scale), even in a volatile journalistic and socio-political geography such as Colombia’s.

The media analysis undertaken in this chapter focuses exclusively on the printed press, which remains relevant despite the relatively low percentage of participation (readers or “consumers,” to use the prevalent mercantilist language) in comparison to radio and television broadcasting.\(^\text{14}\) Notwithstanding this commercializing trend, as Rodrigo Pardo, former director of Colombia’s now-defunct *Cambio* magazine states, “la evaluación de un medio no se puede limitar al aspecto económico. Hay que hacer otro tipo de consideraciones, como la responsabilidad social que implica el periodismo para la democracia y el fortalecimiento del debate público” (Orozco Tascón). Thus, though readership of printed media may be in decline, other considerations beyond statistics and market value must enter into a critical analysis of the form.

According to Germán Arango Forero et al., given that newspapers are said to be at a disadvantage in our fast-paced, multimedia, real-time information age, “some newspapers have turned to making their content more analytical, explaining causes and consequences of the facts addressed, and hoping to overcome the plain informative record by giving broader details to their readers” (74). Whether or not this is true, the printed form appears to have

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\(^\text{14}\) According to Germán Arango Forero et al., 32.8% of Colombians read newspapers, placing newspapers fourth in access and consumption after television, radio, and independent magazines.

Another recent study on the credibility of the media in Colombia undertaken by the Faculty of Communications at the University of La Sabana indicates that only 6% of respondents surveyed use newspapers as their primary source of news while 73%, 11%, and 9% use television, radio, and the Internet respectively. 20% of respondents use the newspaper as a secondary source of information while 18%, 36%, and 13% of respondents use television, radio, and the Internet respectively as secondary sources. See *La credibilidad de los medios de comunicación en Colombia*. 
retained its elevated position as the interpretive and analytical medium par excellence vis-à-vis the visual and electronic media, which is said to be too rudimentary and image-dependent. Thus, despite the printed press’s declining readership, newspapers and magazines are still judged by the majority of Colombians as the most “credible” and “responsible” forms of media communications (“La credibilidad” 39-51). Even so, the fact remains that while the mainstream press may be perceived as a trustworthy and dependable source of information, its credibility must be questioned under the political conditions and economic pressures described above.

Of particular relevance to the present study of the Colombian context is the high percentage of newspaper readers who rely on the same source: 43% of newspaper readers throughout the country read El Tiempo as their primary source of information, with that number rising to a resounding 77% in Bogotá (“La credibilidad” 21). Moreover, Internet-based versions of the newspaper are gaining in popularity: www.eltiempo.com, the most visited Colombian Internet website (Arango et al. 64), is the primary news website of 53% of Colombians and 71% of Bogotanos who seek national news information on the Web (“La credibilidad” 25). In conjunction with its successful marketing and distribution tactics, a lack of genuine alternatives accounts in large part for El Tiempo’s popularity. In accordance with Esteban Rodríguez’s dualistic journalistic paradigm of critical conflict versus compromised consensus (194), mainstream newspapers like El Tiempo fit into the latter category. They tend not to engage in critical debate, choosing instead to depoliticize politics by misinforming and misrepresenting reality in order to defend official images and histories and thereby legitimize a hegemonic public opinion: “La crisis de la representación es la crisis de la clase dirigente, pero también es la crisis del periodismo contemporáneo, del periodismo
empresarial, . . . la prótesis preferida del Estado” (E. Rodríguez 218-220). As the recent demise of El Tiempo’s weekly investigative political magazine Cambio illustrates, there is little room in the mainstream mediascape for polemic publications, making independent alternative publications the only truly reliable source of critical conflictive analysis in the Colombian press.

4.2.3 Revista Cambio: Death of a Critical Mainstream Press

Originally associated with the Spanish Grupo 16’s weekly Cambio 16, a political publication central to the Spanish transition to democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Cambio 16 Colombia began circulating on June 14, 1993. According to Dario Restrepo Vélez, the magazine’s inaugural director, the non-partisan publication would give journalists a proper space in which to write freely and exert a combative philosophy and investigative spirit to reveal the truth behind political stories: “detrás de Cambio 16 Colombia hay una filosofía, una manera desprevenida de mirar la vida, una forma desencadenada y fresca de escrutar a la sociedad y a los hombres, un espíritu alerta frente a las glorias y miserias del poder, un compromiso con los valores, una vocación por las libertades y una pasión sin treguas por el oficio de escribir" (3). When Grupo 16 found itself in financial troubles in 1998, the magazine was taken over by a group of well-know journalists (including Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez, who left the experimental Medellín paper El Ideal to join Cambio’s editorial team) committed not only to keeping the magazine’s fervent independent and critical spirit alive but also to modernizing the publication on the cusp of the twenty-first
century.\textsuperscript{15} Under its new leadership, the magazine expanded its circulation by emphasizing its non-partisan journalism, a position that distinguished it from other publications: “El segundo paso ha sido posicionar a la revista como la única de la categoría que ofrece al lector periodismo veraz sin lineamientos políticos, bajo el lema: ‘Sin compromisos, hacemos periodismo de verdad porque no estamos casados con nadie’” (“El fenómeno de \textit{Cambio}” 23). Despite its journalistic and economic success, however, the magazine eventually fell victim to the neoliberal trend overtaking the Colombian and global mediascape and was acquired by \textit{Casa Editorial El Tiempo}, national newspaper \textit{El Tiempo}’s publishing arm, in 2006.\textsuperscript{16}

Notwithstanding its changing ownership, for seventeen years this trusted investigative weekly exposed some of the country’s most polemic political scandals, including links between politicians and the mafia, drug lords, paramilitaries, and guerrilla groups; United States intervention in Colombia, most recently the seemingly illegal details surrounding proposed U.S. military bases on Colombian soil; and government ministers’ misuse of public funds; amongst other ignominies. However, on February 4, 2010, the magazine announced it would be taking a new direction, firing its director, Rodrigo Pardo, and editor, María Elvira Samper, and changing its format from a weekly investigative political magazine to a monthly cultural publication centred around less controversial topics such as travel, health, sports, and entertainment news (“Revista \textit{Cambio} será mensual”). Undoubtedly, this transformation

\textsuperscript{15} Although independent media is often unfairly associated with fledgling projects not tuned into economic realities, the editorial team that took over \textit{Cambio} was acutely business-minded and led the magazine to record growth even during the recession of the late 1990s. See “El cambio sí es ahora.”

\textsuperscript{16} With a majority share of \textit{Casa Editorial El Tiempo} owned by Spain’s Grupo Planeta, the magazine returned to its Spanish roots.
affirms López de la Roche’s earlier-stated argument that the contemporary Colombian mediascape is losing any remaining critical analysis in favour of trivial “spectacularization” of information.

If the official story is that Cambio was forced to change due to financial constraints amidst print media’s declining relevance and readership, the unofficial story points to implicit political censorship. In an interview between El Espectador (El Tiempo’s rival) and Pardo and Elvira Samper, the former director and editor question the impetus behind the magazine’s closure, citing the publication’s content and the editorial team’s independent (non-partisan), critical, and antagonistic stance, including explicit criticism of President Uribe’s second re-election bid, as the real motivation behind the change (Orozco Tascón). Again, this outcome is not surprising considering Colombia’s long history of politically motivated media. That El Tiempo has close ties to both the previous and current administration makes the suggestion of tacit government involvement in the closure both reasonable and plausible. In Elvira Samper’s words, “estábamos pisando callos en un país donde cada vez es más difícil la disidencia y donde la arrogancia del poder brota desde tantos flancos” (Orozco Tascón). With the closure of Cambio, Pardo, recalling Waisbord, openly questions the possibility of a free and ethical (mainstream) media committed to the ideals of democracy and open public debate in Colombia:

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17 Uribe’s quest for a third consecutive term as president of Colombia was interrupted on February 26, 2010, when the Colombian Constitutional Court deemed unconstitutional a planned referendum on the subject.

18 The Santos family, the second-largest shareholder of Casa Editorial El Tiempo, is known as one of the most powerful families on the Colombian political landscape. Francisco Santos was vice-president of the country from 2002 to 2010. Juan Manuel Santos was the Minister of Defense from 2006 to 2009 and 2010 President-elect. As some pundits have suggested, implicit in the closing of Cambio is the upcoming granting of a third private television channel in the country as some speculate that El Tiempo’s bid for the channel will surely be strengthened by their closing of the controversial magazine.
Me he estado preguntando hasta dónde el tipo de periodismo que practicábamos en 
Cambio, es decir, un periodismo investigativo, de denuncia, independiente, profundo, 
cabe en una casa editorial como El Tiempo, o en otros grupos que tengan una relación 
de dependencia con el poder político. Esto limita las posibilidades de existencia de 
una publicación como Cambio, porque mientras los propietarios necesitan cercanía 
con el gobierno, el buen periodismo necesita independencia y distancia. (Orozco 
Tascón)

As Cambio’s fate makes clear, a truly contestatory and critically conflictive media requires 
complete independence from government and mainstream publishing consortiums to 
effectively oppose dominant discourses of power and realize the democratizing functions of 
free political expression. Filling the void left by Cambio and, before that, the now-defunct 
but still noteworthy and influential independent magazine Alternativa,19 Vladimir Flórez’s 
completely independent alternative publication Un Pasquín, which lands clearly on the 
critically conflictive side of E. Rodríguez’s journalistic paradigm, assumes this task.

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19 A leftist magazine published between 1974 and 1980, Alternativa followed an alternative journalistic model 
based on four specific objectives—i) to counter-inform; ii) to investigate, analyze, and interpret; iii) to divulge 
the people’s struggles; and iv) to unify the left in Colombia. The magazine aimed to effectuate a lasting change 
in Colombian society and, even amidst a hostile environment, was successful in contesting official versions of 
news reported in the mainstream media by exposing instances of government corruption and human rights 
violations. Not surprisingly, the magazine and its staff were put at risk for taking this contestatory stance: in 
1976, Alternativa’s offices were bombed in an apparent state-sponsored show of force. According to Carlos 
Agudelo, the death of Alternativa in 1980, after 257 editions, left an enormous journalistic void in the 
investigative media landscape in Colombia, fuelling his subsequent call for a new independent and activist 
media in the country. For a detailed study on the genesis, development, and demise of the magazine, see 
Agudelo’s dissertation on the topic.
4.3 Alternative Mediascapes and the Potentiality of Alternative Public Spheres

4.3.1 “Alternative Media”

The question of what exactly “alternative” media is has no definitive answer. Like any evolving term, its meanings and uses change with emergent movements and technologies, which may also prompt the creation or appropriation of other terms thought to better describe the phenomenon: “participatory,” “citizens,” “networked,” “emancipatory,” “bottom-up,” “leftist,” and “radical” are just some of the terms used alongside “alternative.” Within a media context, the term has been cultivated particularly by contemporary social movements and communications activists seeking to challenge the dominant discourses of power governing the neoliberal globalizing media trend: “In a world surrounded by several thousand communication satellites, there is no shield that can wall off a culture against the culture globalisation brings with it. However, if this is impossible, the development of alternatives remains the only chance of counterbalancing its impact” (Gumucio Dagron 43). As Alfonso Gumucio Dagron indicates, in the contemporary mediascape, while community radio stations and alternative newspapers and magazines are still relevant, alternative forms of media communications are generally associated with developing Internet-based technologies that facilitate swirling flows of data and information through blogs; social networking sites; and participatory on-line media websites, including podcasts and on-line radio stations; amongst others. We should not forget, however, that in large parts of the developing world (as in peripheral segments of the developed world), access to new technologies remains limited, a condition that acts as a clear rationale for the continued production and study of the more easily distributable printed press. Offsetting the so-called
newspaper crisis of advanced capitalist societies, newspaper circulations are in fact expanding in many developing countries due to the medium’s relative affordability and efficiency (McNair 348). In any case, notwithstanding each medium’s technology, despite its form, the goal of alternative media is essentially to provide the public with information and opinions not covered in the largely unanimous corporate mainstream media: “Alternative media refers to communication experiences that emerged as a need to counterbalance the state and/or commercial mass media” (Gumucio Dagron 46). To act as this neutralizing force, an independent, non-partisan, non-hegemonic, and critical perspective is essential.

Alongside their nurturing of free and critical expression, alternative forms of communication also tend to cultivate social movements, social change, and civic participation. Gustavo Remedi refers to the public sphere and citizenship building potential of cultural media production, emphasizing the people’s “right to become cultural producers beyond the point of creative consumption and active reception” (533). Embodying the ideal of an ethical journalism in the service of the public good, alternative media or alternative “geographies of journalism” construct alternative social realities (Gasher, Introduction i). Thus, beyond the important task of subverting mediated consensus and “giving voice” to those whose contestatory or otherwise polemic opinions are silenced, excluded, or misrepresented in the mainstream, alternative media forms raise consciousness on issues of public importance, create critical public dialogue, and foster the capacity for social change amongst the populace. By taking public expression and the power to set the public agenda out of the hands of governments and powerful media conglomerates, alternative forms of communication challenge the traditional disjunction between producer and consumer. In this way, exclusionary and hegemonic boundaries of power are redefined, stimulating the
personal and political agency of traditionally non-powerful actors, who engage in democratic deliberation via the expression of polyphonic voices and opinions.

Colombian media and communications scholar Clemencia Rodríguez prefers the term “citizens media” to “alternative media” because it emphasizes the participatory element inherent to citizenship and radical democracy. C. Rodríguez quotes Chantelle Mouffe: “the theory of radical democracy advances a concept of a political subject as one who expresses his/her citizenship in multiple forms, including, for example, the collective transformation of symbolic codes, historically legitimized identities, and traditionally established social relations” (19-20). Mouffe’s theory thus links the present study of alternative media to Fraser’s concern for political representation centred around questions of power, participation, and membership in the public sphere outlined in chapter one insofar as, from Mouffe’s optics, citizens or alternative media can play a central role in the construction of heterotopic or alternative public spheres committed to supporting the human agency of non-hegemonic actors.

Notwithstanding the well-documented and accepted merits of alternative media communications, they still tend to be dismissed as of limited social impact for being too local, too marginal, too subversive, and, more often than not, too small. However, as Gumucio Dagron reminds us, alternative media cannot and should not be analyzed from a mass media lens, with mass media parameters, which are resolutely partisan, political, and economic: “The success or failure of alternative media cannot be measured by numbers and percentages of audience or income but in terms of the ability for open dialogue in the public sphere, be it at the community level or through existing social networks” (48). From a
cultural and media scholarship perspective, the study of alternative forms of media communications must go beyond mere statistics; rather, the point is to juxtapose marginal positions with dominant hegemonic ideologies not only to reach a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics and public opinion but also to expose the biases and the nature of political authority disseminated by the mainstream press (Herbst passim). As Susan Herbst concludes, “[s]tudies of . . . unconventional media invite us to adopt Nancy Fraser's assessment of the public sphere as composed of smaller publics, each with particular concerns and channels of communication” (“Public Expression” 131), channels that may not be as economically successful but which have other merits and indicators of success. In the face of mainstream media’s disavowal of its expository watchdog role, alternative media has assumed the public service model and become the new steward of democracy, cultivating a media democratization movement that has called not only for a free and independent press but also for the transparency and democratization of politics and both global and local civil society (Saeed 468). Accordingly, Remedi calls on cultural critics, educators, and activists to be attentive not only to these emerging local cultural practices but also the reception of these practices via a “second wave of reception studies” that examines alternative media’s contributions to the production of a democratic public sphere (534). In this vein, by providing readers with a local (national) heterotopic space for political critique and contestation, Un Pasquín fosters a democratic counter-public sphere that constructs and validates alternative voices and realities via an alternative geography of journalism.
4.3.2 Vladdo

*creo que tiene razón*
*soy parcial*
*de esto no cabe duda*
*más aún yo diría que un parcial irrescatable*
*caso perdido en fin*
*ya que por más esfuerzos que haga*
*nunca podré llegar a ser neutral*

(From Mario Benedetti, “Soy un caso perdido”)

That voices of dissent and opposition are few in a trenchant politically and economically motivated mediascape like the one in contemporary Colombia should not come as a surprise. On the contrary, that an alternative and independent newspaper of opposition like *Un Pasquín* not only exists but has found enough success and relevance on the mediascape to continue beyond four years is by all measures remarkable. The newspaper is a self-defined idealistic media project and civic duty conceived by respected and award-winning Colombian caricaturist and journalist Vladimir Flórez, better known by his pseudonym Vladdo. A twenty-year retrospective of his caricatures (1986-2006) exhibited in Bogota’s *Museo Nacional de Colombia* in the spring of 2006 is a testament not only to his prominence on the media, political, and cultural landscape in Colombia but, more importantly, to the value of his journalistic endeavours. While a seeming contradiction exists between his status as the “official” voice of political criticism in the mainstream media and his alternative media projects, it is precisely his position as a member of the dominant

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20 Vladdo began his professional career as a caricaturist and journalist in 1986 and has, since then, received numerous awards for his work, including, a Premio Nacional de Periodismo del Círculo de Periodistas de Bogotá (1988), five Premios Nacional de Periodismo Simón Bolívar (1988, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2003), a Premio de Excelencia awarded by the Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa (2002), and two design awards granted by the Society for News Design (1994, 2006).
establishment that grants him the space to proceed with non-conventional projects like *Un Pasquín*. To be sure, attaching his name to the project gives it more cachet; for, as McNair reminds us, the dominant model for journalism in the twentieth century was a journalism delivered by a consensually accepted authoritative public voice with a certain degree of professional and cultural status (347), a model that persists despite the democratizing potential of new, twenty-first-century media technologies. Paradoxically, in this sense, Vladdo recurs to authoritative twentieth-century journalistic parameters to advance an alternative twenty-first-century democratic social media project.

Distinguished for his humorous yet radically scathing political caricatures that explicitly ridicule politicians by emphasizing exposed yet largely ignored or downplayed political scandals, Vladdo is an anomalous critical voice on the Colombian mediascape. A genre identified closely not only with humour and criticism but with journalism and politics, caricatures can be read in historiographic terms as a testimonial archive that can be used to reconstruct and analyze the socio-political history of a country from an alternative or critically conflictive perspective: “Si bien los libros narran los acontecimientos y personajes relevantes de [la historia], es la caricatura el género que enuncia--y enunció--lo particular, lo subjetivo, lo mínimo, lo gracioso, lo subversivo desde las caricaturas que aparecían en gacetas y diarios del s. XIX contra los jefes españoles durante la reconquista, hasta las caricaturas de hoy” (“La caricatura en Colombia”). For Álvaro Montoya Gómez, “[el caricaturista] ha conquistado su libertad para opinar sobre esos sucesos cotidianos que uno a uno van formando eso que alguna vez se conocerá como Historia” (145). Despite the genre’s critical stance, the humoristic and exaggerated nature of the caricatured form, along with its erroneously perceived non-powerful status vis-à-vis the printed word, sanctions the free
expression of a contra point of view rarely accepted by the mainstream media in Colombia. This is explainable in part by the genre’s exclusive form: humour and irony demand a critical, well-informed, and highly educated public. In Vladdo’s words, “[e]l humor . . . es elitista, no es para todo el mundo, porque por más que el público lea o estudie, la gente necesita unos parámetros para entender tu mensaje, ciertos antecedentes encima, entender la ironía, el sarcasmo, conocer ciertos datos básicos, tener información. Y cuando uno hace humor de actualidad, eso restringe tu universo” (Cantero). In short, in contrast to print journalism, which exposes and informs, caricatures tend to exaggerate already exposed truths to vilify and criticize.

A case in point is one of Vladdo’s most controversial caricatures published in the influential weekly magazine Semana (and republished occasionally in Un Pasquín), which depicts the Casa de Nariño, Colombia’s presidential palace, with numerous interventions (characters, figures, logos, symbols) added as political scandals or absurdities surface (Figure 1). The caricature will only make sense to those informed readers who can decipher and interpret these symbols. A cursory analysis of changes made simply to the title of the caricature under Uribe’s administration reveals Vladdo’s critical, anti-uribista posture. If the first name change from “Palacio Presidencial” to “Palacito Presidencial” is a humorous jab at Uribe’s rhetorical overuse of diminutives,21 the second name change to “Paracio Presidencial” is a more critical and unequivocal reference to Uribe’s supposed ties to paramilitary forces in the country, a politics now dubbed “parapolitics.” In addition to

21 Similarly, in edition number two of Un Pasquín, Carlos Villa Borda makes the following pronouncement: “Los dos principales aportes del señor MicroBush [Uribe] en su primer mandato han sido el regreso a la época bárbara de la guerra a muerte y el uso de los diminutivos” (9).
emphasizing this parapolitical angle, the Casa de Nariño drawing calls attention to Vladdo’s other primary concern: the lack of freedom of expression and opinion in the Colombian media. In the illustration, local television and radio station RCN has a satellite mounted atop the palace while flags of El Tiempo and its major shareholder Planeta fly uninhibitedly out front. The assessment is obvious: no media outlet so closely connected to the government and the presidential palace, the authoritative and symbolic locus of centralized power, can pretend to be critical of that same government. On the contrary, under these conditions, the media is divested of its monitoring role and is instead converted into yet another cog in the ruling party’s powerful political machinery.²²

Figure 1. Un Pasquín, no. 51, February 2010, page 7.

²² With the change of guard at the Presidential Palace, Vladdo wiped the slate clean, removing all images and symbols related to Uribe’s administration in anticipation of President Santos’s missteps. The two media flags are the only symbols that remain. In reference to Santos’s name as well as his constructed image as a politician who does the right thing, the palace has been renamed “Santuario Presidencial.”
Like his acerbically bitter yet witty female character Aleida, Vladdo is himself obstinate and irreverent. Never one to back away from conflict or his constitutional and human right to free opinion and expression, he has twice fought against censorship of his own work. The first incident occurred in the late 1970s when El Tiempo published one of his caricatures but changed the accompanying text. After lodging a complaint, the newspaper’s director agreed to reprint the original but asked Vladdo for his resignation in return. The second incident occurred in 1995 at Semana, where he was asked to remove the text accompanying a caricature critical of then-president Ernesto Samper Pizano, a close friend of Semana’s owner. Vladdo refused and eventually came to a workable agreement with the publication. Obviously, his professional and cultural status as a respected and award-winning caricaturist/journalist and public figure grants him the flexibility to advocate openly for freedom of expression. Alongside his personal stand against censorship and both his mainstream and alternative journalistic endeavours, as his participation in the Primer Foro Internacional de Caricaturistas por la Paz y la Libertad de Opinión held in Bogotá in February 2010 illustrates, Vladdo’s mission for a free and open media in Colombia and around the world is multifaceted.

4.4 Un Pasquín: Filling the Void

Un Pasquín is a project borne out of a conversation among Vladdo and friends and colleagues about the decisively unanimous pro-uribista tone of the mainstream media during

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23 The now iconic Aleida was born in 1997 as a counterbalance to Vladdo’s political characters. In sharp contrast to those, Aleida comments more on personal relationships between the sexes than on the country’s political scene.
Uribe’s first re-election bid. In his words: “ Parecía que los periódicos, las emisoras y los canales de televisión se hubieran puesto de acuerdo no solo para cubrir la información desde un mismo ángulo, sino también para opinar en un mismo sentido” (“Crónica” 4). With Uribe having used his financial power and political machinery to persuade non-critical mass media support, there was seemingly no space for voices of dissent and opposition on the Colombian mediascape, a condition that needed to be rectified not only to vindicate freedom of expression and the ideal role of journalism but also to foster and strengthen democracy itself in the country. Edition zero of *Un Pasquín* hit the streets an astonishing twelve days after that initial conversation, in December 2005, with these enthusiastic yet cautionary words:

*Un Pasquín* no apoya propuestas que atenten de ninguna manera contra la democracia, a la que por el contrario quiere ayudar a fortalecer, mediante el debate abierto y la discusión sincera sobre la realidad nacional. Con esta edición cero iniciamos, pues, el duro reto de consolidar un proyecto periodístico y de opinión: más complicado todavía por ir contra la corriente continuista” (Vladdo, “Al fin de la calle” 2).

From its inception to the present time, as I will describe in more detail below, the project has been motivated by a civic duty to strengthen social justice and democracy through the mediated power of the image and the printed word.

### 4.4.1 Design and Circulation

Physically, the thirteen by sixteen-inch retro style black and white newspaper uses heavy topography and sporadic colour on the front page to create a visually eye-catching
product. The front-page design changes with each edition, with varying fonts, ratios of text to image, and uses of white space and colour. Numbers zero to twelve bracket off a space at the bottom or along the side to list the articles and contributors contained in each publication (Figure 2) while subsequent editions up to number fifty-two generally focus on just one cover story with limited textual accompaniment to the main headline and illustration (Figures 3 and 4). In May 2010, at the height of the Colombian presidential election campaign, with edition number fifty-three, Un Pasquin introduced a new logo and text-heavy design (Figures 5 and 6). While there are some recurring sections and columns, only one has been a permanent

Figure 2. Un Pasquin, no. 7, May 3, 2006.

Figure 3. Un Pasquin, no. 43, May 2009.

This front page won the 28th annual ‘Best of Newspaper Design Award’ granted by the Society for News Design in 2006.
fixture in all editions published to date: Antonio Jimenez Castañeda’s impertinent “Tres en Uno” opinion piece. The newspaper is distributed gratis primarily at libraries, universities, and independent bookstores and restaurants in northern and central Bogotá. The print run depends on the number of pages of each edition and generally fluctuates between 3000 to 5000 copies. Additionally, a PDF version is available for electronic download on the Internet via the newspaper’s website and blog. The newspaper has been on hiatus since edition number fifty-four and the election of Santos to the presidency but promises to return to the mediascape in a new form in the upcoming months.

Figure 4. Un Pasquín, no. 51, February 2010.  
Figure 5. Un Pasquín, no. 53, April 2010.
Seeming indicators of success are found in the newspaper’s continued expansion, evaluated not simply with regard to relevance and distribution numbers, but in terms of sheer size. The initial twelve-page publication increased to sixteen pages with edition number eighteen, published on February 16, 2007. Subsequent editions fluctuated between twelve and sixteen pages until edition number fifty-two, which was published with twenty pages in March 2010. Whereas the number of printed copies has decreased from 5000 when the publication stood at twelve pages to 3000 at twenty pages (to counter increased printing costs), an astonishing rise in website traffic and PDF downloads since the fiftieth anniversary edition and even more so immediately following the Constitutional Court’s February 26, 2010 announcement that Uribe could not seek a third presidential term verifies the periodical’s increasing relevance on the Colombian mediascape. Without falling into the statistics trap, numbers can and do reveal interesting readership tendencies. That a record 52,406 PDF copies of the March 2010 edition had been requested as of April 26, 2010 (in
comparison to 13,117 copies of edition 46, published only 6 months prior in September 2009) confirms the newspaper’s political relevance: readership increased concomitantly with the commencement of the presidential election campaigns and remained steady throughout. Though it would be premature to suggest a link between *Un Pasquín* and the rise and fall of political power in Colombia, a curious correlation exists between increased traffic to the *Un Pasquín* website and the independent Green Party of Colombia’s much (over)hyped “green wave,” which surged in large part over the Internet. In effect, Internet-based social media sites (in particular Facebook and Twitter) played a central role in Mockus’s campaign, which mobilized the so-called “opinion vote” enough to decimate the traditional Conservative and Liberal party vote and trigger a run-off election between the Green Party and the Party of the U. While these alternative electronic media forms played a pivotal role in the elections, in the end, they were not strong enough to rival the mainstream press’s support and endorsement of Santos.

### 4.4.2 Subjectivity and Independence

Unlike the alternative magazine *Alternativa*, which took a resolutely Marxist approach in its objective to initiate change by way of an insurrection by the working classes, aligning itself with the leftist politics of revolutionary guerrilla movements (Agudelo 277), *Un Pasquín* is completely independent in both financial and political terms, claiming complete autonomy from commercial, political, and guerrilla groups. It is worth mentioning that during the 2010 presidential campaign, *Un Pasquín* actively supported Mockus’s candidacy, which it endorsed in edition fifty-four’s editorial. If this move can be interpreted
as a contestatory act in the face of El Tiempo’s endorsement of Santos--having taken an opposing stance to the mainstream, Un Pasquín was simply continuing its legacy as the “official” newspaper of opposition--, it can also place in doubt the newspaper’s supposed independence. However, as Vladdo himself clarifies, independence should not be confused with objectivity. Expressing subjective, yet critical and well-informed opinions in support of a specific candidate is not necessarily “partisan” if and when a journalist does not allow him or herself to be swayed by partisan (versus ideological) interests:

Y aquí viene la confusión (¿o tergiversación?). El hecho de que uno sea subjetivo no quiere decir que deje de ser independiente. No es lo mismo respaldar a un político por simpatía o por convicción, que hacerlo a cambio de un contrato, un nombramiento o cualquier prebenda. Ningún político, funcionario o empresario puede decir que en mis casi 25 años de carrera he criticado o defendido a alguien a cambio de algún favor. (“Subjetividad e independencia” 6)

I think it essential to clarify this important point because of the centrality of independence to the merit of Un Pasquín and other alternative media forms.

In effect, according to Gumucio Dagron, independence is the main characteristic of alternative media (45). Appropriately, Un Pasquín is funded, directed, edited, designed, illustrated, and distributed by Vladdo himself. Not only do his many contributors collaborate ad honorem, the newspaper is absolutely free, with the price or “valor” listed as “civil,” a satirical touch that highlights Vladdo’s careful and effective use of humour and irony (a technique I analyze in greater detail below). That it is free is significant in light of the rising cost of “the printed press, books, computers, and higher education, [which] have been turned
into expensive commodities, inaccessible to an increasing segment of the younger population” (Remedi 533). Furthermore, as a project meant to advance civil society, the paper’s free cost is largely symbolic and can be interpreted as a metaphor for its journalistic freedom of expression and interpretation. According to Alejandro Santos, director of the Colombian magazine *Semana*:

> es precisamente ahí [en la independencia] donde radica su gran fuerza intelectual y periodística: no tiene las pretensiones económicas de las grandes empresas de medios, ni las amenazas de los violentos, ni las agendas políticas de tanto periodismo que posa de independiente. Es la fuerza de una voz disidente. Y en este punto es donde *Un Pasquín* deja de ser un pasquín y se vuelve una necesidad ciudadana. (11)

Without ignoring the many production and circulation challenges of maintaining complete economic and political independence, the very point of an independent alternative medium of opposition like *Un Pasquín* is to vindicate the watchdog role of the media in part by avoiding the trap of mainstream capitalist conformism that fetishizes news and information into a product of consumption. Notwithstanding this independent posture, under a capitalist structure, economic considerations remain a reality. Vladdo is explicit in affirming that though he is not a wealthy magnate with money to burn on a whimsical project, he is nonetheless able to finance *Un Pasquín* because of the relatively low cost of production (“Crónica” 5). Still, the fact remains that because the project is a financial burden,
advertising and subscription revenues, though limited, are used to offset partial production costs.  

4.4.3 Critical Conflict: *El periódico de la O*

In part to highlight the difference between itself and the mainstream press, *Un Pasquin* parodies prominent mainstream publications such as *The Economist*, *Cosmopolitan*, *El Tiempo*, and Colombian cultural and literary magazine *Malpensante* in a series that reproduces these publications’ easily recognizable front cover designs. Notwithstanding the adage that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, or perhaps in line with this ironic maxim, the name of the magazine and accompanying image, headline, and lead article subvert the mass media’s dominant ideology. The most rotund criticism is heralded at *El Tiempo*: in editions number thirty-three and thirty-nine, for example, *El Tiempo* is re-branded as *Le Miento*. If the font and design of the dominant paper were not enough to help readers identify the parodied form, the director is identified as “Pinocho Santos Calderón,” an obvious reference to the politically influential and morally questionable and dishonest Santos Calderon family’s control of the newspaper. The price: “1.000 disculpas.” In the first, mocking *El Tiempo*’s unyielding pro-uribista posture, the headline and lead story commend the Colombian government’s Democratic Security policy for something so ridiculous as

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24 A handful of national businesses have advertised on occasion in the newspaper, including the iStore, popular beer brand Club Colombia, Tango Discos, delivery service Servientrega, and hotel and convention centre Lancaster House. Harry Sasson, a local restaurateur, has been the only consistent advertiser since the newspaper’s inception. In addition, loyal readers are invited to help the publication by paying for a delivery subscription, which runs between $50,000 and $200,000 pesos per year. This is not a major source of funding as there are approximately only 15 to 20 subscribers at any one time.
erecting an anti-terrorism sign and then publicly declaring victory against the FARC. The Uribe administration is infamous for its inflated anti-terrorism and victory rhetoric, which it used to promulgate the illusion that the government was winning its “war on terror.” While the image of the country unquestionably improved under Uribe’s leadership, in light of the false positives (extra-judicial executions) scandal; the illegal actions of the DAS; continued human rights abuses, including the systematic intimidation and assassination of union leaders and increasing numbers of internally displaced peoples; and the government’s blatant disrespect for international law, amongst other scandals, it is not so clear that insecurity and injustice have been combated. In fact, according to the 2010 Global Peace Index, out of 149 countries, Colombia sits at 138, the lowest ranked of all Latin American countries (Institute for Economics 11). The Index cites low safety and security measures as well as high levels of militarism as the primary rationale behind Colombia’s low standing (15).

In the second, a caricature depicts the new director of El Tiempo declaring “El chisme que publicó Semana el Agosto pasado era falso (crossed out) positivo”. The “false positives” euphemism for extrajudicial executions refers to the systematic military practice of assassinating innocent civilians and dressing them as guerrilla fighters shot down in combat to manipulate public perception on the war against terror, the foundation of Uribe’s pleonastic Democratic Security policy. According to the United Nations, this practice has occurred in Colombia at least since 2003, though it was not reported publicly by the same organization until 2008 (“ONU documentaba”). The caricature not only criticizes this practice but also condemns El Tiempo’s “compromised consensus” with the government (or, inversely, the government’s symbolic management of El Tiempo) and the newspaper’s tendency to publish only the official, sanitized, or authorized version of events.
As Vladdo tells Wilber Rico from the Tribuna Latina, Un Pasquín is a necessary idealist and ideological project that needed to be realized to combat the mainstream media’s government complicity: “Es un trabajo que tocaba hacer. Era necesario que alguien lo hiciera y terminé haciéndolo yo. Era muy protuberante la falta de objetividad y de crítica que había en Colombia y que todavía persiste en el manejo de la información que tiene que ver con el presidente Uribe.” This sense of civic duty is manifested most cogently in the illustrations associated with the newspaper’s “civic campaigns.” A full-page faux-advertisement in number fifty-two depicts a finger pointing towards the reader with the text “¡No permita que las encuestas decidan por usted!” and, at the bottom of the page, “Campaña cívica de Un Pasquín” (20, Figure 7). In the Colombian context, poll results saturate daily election coverage, replacing in-depth analysis on candidate platforms with a comparison of poll results. Sponsored by mainstream media motivated more by opinion polling’s growing marketing value than by any questionable journalistic merit (Rosenstiel 698), the accuracy and inherent biases of these unregulated polls must be questioned. As Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro ask, “What is the impact of the old and new media’s large and ever-growing attention to polling? Does the press serve as a watchdog that ferrets out flawed polls and facilitates strong responsiveness to the public concern? Or does it do something quite different?” (636). The weakened position of the Colombian media points to something quite different. Having renounced its watchdog role, the media tends to over-utilize polls to mediate and influence public opinion in support of a specific, predetermined candidate. Curiously, during Colombia’s most recent elections, El Tiempo did not publish poll results from competing media outlets until their endorsed candidate, Juan Manuel Santos, began to lead in those same polls. Vladdo’s point in calling attention to this misuse of media polling
is, I believe, to urge citizen-voters to exert their own agency and come to their own competent and conscientious decisions. *Un Pasquín* gives readers a critically conflictive perspective of Colombia’s social reality meant to help them make those informed decisions.

Another example of a “civic campaign,” this time against cultural-historical amnesia, is found in editions numbers fifty-one and fifty-three (Figures 8 and 9). The full-page illustrations are subtitled at the bottom of the page with “CAMPAÑA CÍVICA DE *UN PASQUÍN CONTRA LA AMNESIA*” and depict a human skull with two bullet holes and an appended identity tag that reads “falsos positivos.” In number fifty-one, the text above the illustration states “retroceder no es Una opción (porque la vida no la devuelve nadie)” (16).

![Image](attachment:image.png)

Figure 7. *Un Pasquín*, no. 52, March 2010, page 20.
Effectively a parody of the incumbent Party of the U’s 2010 campaign slogan—“porque retroceder no es una opción”—it alludes to the false positives scandal surrounding Uribe and his former Minister of Defence and then-presidential candidate Santos. The bullet holes in the skull represent this violence, which is attributed to the party of the U with the capital U in “Una”. In number fifty-three, the accompanying text changes to “Yo no quiero volver a sentir ese miedo. Yo no quiero”. The point here is to dissuade readers from supporting the status quo by not allowing them to forget about the scandal. Implicit in the text is the belief that Santos, who supports a continuist doctrine, will perpetuate this and other similarly terrifying and shameful human rights abuses. Not an isolated instance of Un Pasquín calling attention to this much-ignored inhuman practice, in the same two editions alone, nine articles allude to the false positives scandal as yet another indicator of Uribe’s, and by extension the Party of the U and Santos’s, ethico-moral corruption.
A caricaturist at heart, Vladdo recurs to the same evaluative techniques of satire, irony, and exaggeration in his more serious critical writing as well. His opinion piece in edition number seven entitled “¡Sálvese quien pueda!” traces the crisis of Uribe’s Democratic Security policy and openly questions the (il)logic behind his proposal to arm threatened town councillors as a social security measure. With his familiar caustic style, Vladdo elucidates the absurdity of this suggestion:

siguiendo esa misma lógica, el gobierno tendría que armar a los casi 40 millones de colombianos para que puedan sobrevivir en un país inundado de armas ilegales, y acosado no sólo por los grupos guerrilleros y sus milicias urbanas, sino también por las bandas de narcos, paracos . . . y delincuentes comunes. Bien ‘mancados,’ los ciudadanos podrían entonces evitar los atentados, los secuestros, las diferentes modalidades de atraco y los temibles paseos millonarios, que cada vez son más frecuentes y se ven más a plena luz del día. (3)

With these words, not only does Vladdo paint an image of anarchy, at the same time, he calls into doubt the apparent success of Uribe’s Democratic Security policy. For, if it were so successful, why would citizens need to bear arms as a means of protection?

Along similar lines, Vladdo’s article “Muertos de risa,” published in April 2009 in number forty-two of Un Pasquín, mockingly questions the value of critical investigative journalism in a country that supposedly breeds the world’s happiest people: “Por eso resulta inútil, cuando no absurdo, que ciertos medios y periodistas llenos de resentimiento se pongan en la tarea de buscar razones para amargarles el rato a los lectores, oyentes o televidentes. Ellos deberían entender de una vez por todas que en el país más feliz del mundo no hay
“espacio para la crisis existencial ni el desencanto” (6). The ironic tone of his writing is obvious as he goes on to question the worth of a handful of journalists who have dedicated their lives, like himself, to exposing political scandals in an effort not only to create a more nuanced mediascape but also to restore a degree of ethico-morality to the socio-political fabric of Colombia. A criticism launched not against these few journalists committed to the truth but against the majority who distort the same, this article extols the very civic duty and watchdog journalism that Un Pasquín endeavours to achieve.

Without a doubt, irony is deployed most clearly in the title of the newspaper: derived from the classical tradition associated with the Pasquino statue in ancient Rome to which were affixed anonymous satirical notes against the government or pope, a “pasquin” is a newspaper of political denouncement and criticism characterized by the use of satire. In contemporary times, the term is generally used to refer to a sensationalist, tabloid-type publication of poor production and questionable literary quality. Popularized long before the installation of modern-era democratic ideals and the notion of the right to free opinions and free expression, for personal security reasons, pasquines were generally circulated anonymously. Countering this tradition, Vladdo proudly attaches his (well-known) name to his publication, risking not only his professional reputation but also his personal safety. While he has never spoken of having received threats of violence against the newspaper or his own person, in such a politically volatile environment indifferent to human rights and freedom of the press, not having been threatened cannot be taken as a safeguard. In other words, like those traditional anonymous pasquines, Un Pasquín is an inherently dangerous project.
Vladdo’s decision to use this name ironically as a preventative measure to neutralize disparaging criticism against the newspaper—“decidi que el periódico se iba a llamar Un Pasquín; pues de esa manera les salía al paso a los unanimistas que, de todas formas, iban a usar ese remoquete para tratar de ningunearlo” (“Crónica” 4)—fits within South America’s alternative media tradition of defining the publication’s mission through its title. Other indicative examples include Brazil’s Pasquim, Resistencia, and Crítica, as well as Colombia’s own Alternativa (Waisbord, Watchdog Journalism 28). The appropriation of the term pasquín at the same time vindicates free expression, marginal opinions, and the alternative press vis-à-vis the mainstream. Born out of a need for a free and alternative voice, the newspaper delivers on its mission: a self-titled newspaper of opposition, or “el periódico de la O,” as its motto goes, an antagonistic anti-uribista stance is evident in every edition published to date, beginning with edition zero, in which Vladdo unequivocally states the newspaper’s objective: “Sus páginas estarán dedicadas a romper el consenso alrededor del presidente/candidato [Uribe] y por lo tanto a buscar, promover y proponer otras alternativas” (2). In fact, the newspaper’s very first cover story and lead article—“Alto contraste”—outlines some of the Uribe administration’s most egregious acts to that date, which, having been largely downplayed by the mainstream media and thus ignored by the citizenry, had been met with indifference and impunity. The article reveals the inscrutable tension between Uribe’s high 65% approval rating and his government’s embarrassing achievements and human rights record, referencing would-be political scandals such as a 215% increase in the price of gasoline; the nation’s increasing poverty rating; civilian deaths at the hands of the military’s “war on terror;” the assassination of union leaders; journalist Daniel Coronell’s forced exile prompted by threats sent from the personal computer of
former senator Carlos Náder, a close friend of Álvaro Uribe; and a 40% increase in
government ministers’ salaries; to name only a few. This article, like so many others,
highlights Un Pasquín’s vindication of the media’s traditional watchdog role.

The anti-consensual nature of the newspaper is further manifested in Enrique Parejo
González’s opinion pieces in numbers eighteen and thirty-five. The title and byline alone of
the first article—“El presidente Uribe también debe ser investigado” / “Álvaro Uribe debe
reflexionar sobre su propia situación ahora que la justicia ha encontrado que sus más
cercanos amigos políticos tienen vínculos estrechos con los paramilitares”—explicitly call
for an investigation of Uribe’s relationship with paramilitary groups. While not necessarily a
catchy title, it effectively denounces Uribe’s actions in such a way that even a perfunctory
reader of the newspaper would understand the message. Likewise, if the title of the second
article—“La pequeñez de Uribe”—were not brazen enough, the article begins with a firm
condemnation of Uribe’s illegal attempt to cling to power: “Una vez más se suscitó en el país
un grave escándalo en torno a las actuaciones del Presidente de la República Álvaro Uribe
Vélez, quien ya no puede ocultar su propósito de deslegitimar la Corte Suprema de Justicia,
para impedirle que siga ejerciendo, sin su ‘permiso’, la función constitucional que le
corresponde” (5). Without entering into details about the scandal itself, it is obvious that
Parejo González is not only criticizing but also, perhaps more importantly, exposing Uribe’s
misuse of power. That Uribe challenges the constitutional and supreme court, necessary non-
partisan institutions of power charged with heralding justice and ensuring that the laws of the
land are respected and followed, is a clear sign of his blatant disregard for the law and belief
that, as president, he is above it all. Once again, these are not isolated instances of the paper
expressing its anti-uribista, critically conflictive position, but just three representative examples of many.

For Colombian journalist, caricaturist, and writer Antonio Caballero, “Un pasquín no es un periódico . . . práctico. Es un periódico ético” (12). Though Caballero makes a distinction between “practical” and “ethical” journalism, I would argue that an ethical project is at once a practical project if understood as a vehicle for the strengthening of democracy and civil society. In this manner, Un Pasquín follows Rincón and Ruiz’s parameters for an ethical, non-commercial press as a public good and instrument for critical thought, free expression, and public consciousness: “Hay que volver al imperativo ético que dice que los periodistas requieren con urgencia en sus practicas profesionales el ejercicio de la verdad, la independencia y la responsabilidad” (86). As outlined above, maintaining complete independence is essential to the newspaper’s success as an ethical medium; for it is only by remaining independent that Un Pasquín can counteract the manipulation of information and accommodating pro-government tone (or “compromised consensus,” in the words of E. Rodríguez) that characterize the mainstream press in Colombia. Moreover, as Vladdo outlines in edition zero, Un Pasquín harbours no illusions of journalistic objectivity or impartiality, which cannot truly exist: “Este periódico . . . no será imparcial, pero sí independiente; será crítico, pero no ofensivo” (“Al fin” 2). As a counterbalance to El Tiempo and other mainstream media, there is no need for the publication to publish pro-uribista articles. Quite the opposite, following Herbst’s earlier-referenced argument, alternative media should instead expose the biases and political authority of the mainstream press. Ultimately, despite the publication’s open anti-uribista, critical, contestatory, and “politically
incorrect” propensity, there remains an explicit commitment to be informative and truthful in its portrayal of alternative social realties.

The publication’s unabashed political incorrectness is quintessentially exemplified in edition number thirty-six, published in October 2008. Amidst the controversy caused by a Human Rights Watch report on the dismal state of human rights in Colombia, and more specifically, President Uribe’s war on indigenous groups (particularly those in the South-West department of Cauca who have mobilized themselves to claim their human right to ancestral lands),25 whom he accuses of having ties to terrorist and guerrilla groups, Un Pasquín published a caricature of Uribe stating “Es que yo me entiendo es con caciques, no con indios” directly above a photo published originally in El Espectador of Uribe kissing a young aboriginal girl on the cheek. The corresponding text reads “El beso de Judas. Después de lo que usted y su gobierno han hecho últimamente, ¿no le da vergüenza ver imágenes como ésta, Señor Presidente?” (3). I define this as politically incorrect firstly for the open disdain and condescension against the aboriginal population attributed to Uribe in his caricatured form, further highlighted by the use of the derogatory term “indian” over “aboriginal” or “indigenous,” and secondly, via the photograph, which directly attacks not only Uribe’s but also the mainstream media’s credibility. The photograph defends the official government image Uribe attempts to portray even though that image is clearly not aligned with his administration’s actions. Just like his diminutive rhetoric, Uribe is image-

25 Indigenous groups in Cauca have banded together in coalitions such as the Regional Indigenous Council of Colombia (CRIC), the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN), and the National Indigenous Organization of Cauca (ONIC) to demand the cultural, social, and economic rights granted them under Colombia’s 1991 constitution. In October and November 2008, numerous marches or mingas were organized throughout the country in solidarity with indigenous communities to celebrate indigenous teachings and traditions and, at the same time, to protest against Uribe’s mistreatment of indigenous communities.
conscious and fully aware of the value of the “photo-op.” Having been printed originally in a mainstream national newspaper, this particular image was meant to relay a completely different message than the counter-attack posed by Un Pasquin.

4.4.4 Heterotopic Mediatic Geographies

In the end, and against all odds, in line with Inter Press Service News Agency’s (IPS) Bogotá correspondent Constanza Vieira, the relative success of Un Pasquin over its four-year plus existence proves that a truly independent and critical press is in fact possible in Colombia: “Lo más importante de las 50 ediciones de [Un Pasquín] es que han mostrado que sí es posible un periódico independiente en Colombia; que la independencia y la libertad está en cada uno de nosotros” (13). While it may have taken Vieira fifty editions to declare such a victory, Vladdo was announcing the success of independent media as a purveyor of alternative opinions and an alternative geography of journalism in Colombia much earlier on: in edition number eight of the newspaper, published on May 25, 2006, Vladdo writes: “Han sido ocho ediciones, más la edición cero, en las cuales hemos querido demostrar que es posible dar otras opiniones, mostrar otros enfoques; salirnos del detestable consenso que predomina en la prensa nacional. . . . [H]emos conquistado un valioso espacio entre la opinión y en otros medios, que poco a poco han pasado de la apatía inicial a la aceptación de nuestra presencia” (“Después del 28-M” 2). According to the editorial published in edition nine of Un Pasquín, strong reader support is in large part what propels Vladdo’s mission: “Seguimos porque en estos meses hemos cultivado una cantidad importante de lectores, que, como usted, nos han animado constantemente en nuestro quehacer periodístico” (“Aquí
seguiamos” 2). While that unarticulated “cantiđad importante” does not pretend to rival El Tiempo’s readership, whatever it is is enough to nurture the continuance of the project. For, it is precisely this interaction with and among reader-citizens that creates an alternative social community or heterotopic public sphere.

As an alternative medium, this idealist project acts as a forum for diverse voices of dissent and opposition in the public sphere and is both “practical” and “ethical” in that sense. Though it is a tangible object “en blanco y negro,” as its tagline goes, Un Pasquín can also be conceived of as an opening, as a public space for the representation of “subaltern counterpublics” and the circulation of independent “counterdiscourses” (Fraser, “Rethinking” 123), counter-identities, counter-interests, counter-politics, counter-points of view, and counter-media, all necessary foundations of a strong democracy and informed public sphere. If on the one hand the tagline “oposición en blanco y negro” is a literal reference to newsprint, on the other hand the duality insinuates antagonism and opposition. A space where an anti-uribista, anti-establishment counterpublic can come together, the newspaper becomes heterotopic in David Harvey’s politicized sense insofar as it becomes a site of resistance and subversion against the hegemonic regimes of power that propel the unanimity of the compromised mainstream media. As Caballero rightly notes, the printed newspaper, along with its on-line content, brings people together and gives them a sense of place or community: “[Es para] gente que tiene información y opinión propia al respecto, y no se deja engañar, ni convencer tampoco, pero quiere a la vez sentirse acompañada” (12). As Benedict Anderson so clearly details, since the sixteenth century, print-capitalism has played a pivotal role in bringing and holding together large nation-based “imagined” alliances or communities by binding a vast and disparate readership. As a cultural ritual of communication, Un
Pasquin plays this community-building role, albeit on a much smaller scale, by framing an alternative collective consciousness. While it is true that states can govern through communities, I am more interested in the potential for communities, at the same time, to exert their personal agency and claim cultural and political autonomy, creating a space for identity and (self-) identification in which one is recognized by oneself and others as a member of a like-minded community with shared beliefs.

Beyond this participatory and community-generating role, Vladdo’s project is valuable in another sense: its very existence is tangible proof that opposition to the Uribe administration did in fact exist:

una vez que pase el uribato, . . . este periodiquito burletero y burlón servirá para mostrarles a los historiadores que estos años no fueron los del uribismo, sino los del anti-uribismo. Que el estado de ánimo del país era exactamente el contrario del “Estado de Opinión” de que el presidente hablaba en sus sermones autistas reproducidos por los periodicotes serios. (Caballero 12)

That the newspaper is being catalogued at the hemeroteca in Bogota’s Luis Ángel Arango Library is an indication that it will play a countering part in Uribe’s political historiography. Like political caricatures, the newspaper will act as an archive of an alternative geography of journalism. Eduardo Galeano’s insight into the historical value of art and literature as a tool of an alternative collective identity in opposition with the mass media’s oppressive construction of a “national culture” is instructive in this regard:
Cultura para masas, debería decirse, definición más adecuada de este arte desagradado de circulación masiva que manipula las conciencias, oculta la realidad y aplasta la imaginación creadora. No sirve, por cierto, a la revelación de la identidad, sino que es un medio de borrarla o deformarla, para imponer modos de vida y pautas de consumo que se difunden masivamente a través de los medios de comunicación.

(217)

By contesting the dominant “national culture” repertoire, *Un Pasquín*, like other products of art and culture, will be transformed into an enduring, official, historical record of a critical, non-consensual voice on the Colombian mediascape, a voice representative of an alternative socio-political community or heterotopic public sphere. As Galeano reminds us, “el acto de creación es un acto de solidaridad que no siempre cumple su destino en vida de quien lo realiza (222). If the value of *Un Pasquín* resides in its provision of a space for dissident voices and opinions, unlike the ephemerally oral (and virtual) form of community connections and public debates, the newspaper’s tangible form will survive as proof that alternative voices and opinions did and do exist, despite their attempted erasure by the mainstream press.

Along geospatial lines, the ethico-political community created via *Un Pasquín*, like diasporic communities, are not fixed in place. That is, readers/citizen-subjects come together from different communities both inside and outside of Colombia to participate in Vladdo’s project for the vindication of critical journalism, democracy, and free expression. Whereas the majority of *Un Pasquín*’s audience comes from Bogotá, where the newspaper is printed, the on-line component of the project assures a much wider reach. Not only is the Internet
gaining popularity as a primary and secondary source of news in Colombia and around the world, the blog component offers readers a chance to interact with other members (local or global) of the *Un Pasquín* community to initiate (virtual) dialogue and public debate via the public comments section. Interestingly, while the majority of Web traffic to the site originates in Colombia, other visitors are located in such disparate international locations as Mexico, Argentina, France, Spain, Russia, Germany, Brazil, and Canada. To be sure, the on-line component gives a very localized project a global scope. *Un Pasquín* can thus be classified as a “non-cosmopolitan form of globality,” or a “counter-geography of globalization,” which, according to Saskia Sassen, refer to “local initiatives and projects [that] can become part of a global network without losing the focus on the specifics of the local.” That is, though the affiliated website and blog open up a space for international participation and solidarity, including participation throughout the Colombian diaspora, the primary goal remains to strengthen democracy and civil society autochthonously from within Colombia, bridging socio-political but not necessarily geographical divides.

In view of this, I accept Carrie Buchanan’s definition of sense of place as “identification with a place engendered by living in it” (63). In other words, the sense of place created by *Un Pasquín* is resolutely local despite its global reach. In effect, while international news and politics (mostly Latin American and inter-continental relations) are covered in the pages of *Un Pasquín*, it remains focused on the internal socio-political situation in Colombia. Though it seems curious that a globalizing technology largely associated with global capitalism and corporate globalization is being utilized to enact local specificities, bridging the local/global divide, as Mike Gasher’s research into the on-line news world reveals, on-line editions of daily newspapers remain firmly rooted in the local
On a much larger scale, then, the localized use of globalizing technologies may be one way to potentially constrain the socially destructive tensions between globalization and local civil society.

4.5 Conclusion

Against the backdrop of censorship, political partisanship, uniformity, misinformation, and, more recently, the neoliberalizing trend that has come to characterize the mainstream media in Colombia, *Un Pasquín* stands strong as an alternative publication that vindicates the watchdog role of the media by defending and strengthening free speech, freedom of opinion, and open public debate in the Colombian socio-politico mediascape. In consequence, *Un Pasquín* strengthens democracy by creating a space, an alternative “geography of journalism” (Gasher, Introduction i), open to “critical conflictive analysis” (E. Rodríguez 194) of the socio-political reality of the nation. Proving that “compromised consensus” is not the only option, the newspaper does not shy away from so-called taboo topics and instead takes as its primary goals to inform, to critique, and to expose alternative social realities, subverting in this manner the hegemonic power structures of mainstream media’s official unanimous position. In short, the publication responds directly to the absence of a voice for a specific niche: a contestatory, non-partisan politics and a free and independent press. It is precisely in these broader calls for freedom of opinion and freedom of expression that the value of the project should be measured.

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26 Though Gasher’s research focuses specifically on three English-language newspapers—*New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times*—, a cursory look at Colombia’s primary newspapers—*El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*—reveals a similar local/national concern.
The continued growth and unprecedented success of *Un Pasquín* proves that alternative and independent voices and opinions can and do exist alongside traditional mainstream expressions in the Colombian mediascape. As my case study demonstrates, the newspaper relies on independence, humour, irony, and professional investigative journalism to counterbalance the partisan and often misguided and non-critical mass media. While it does not rely on readership statistics for financial longevity, as with any media project, its audience is central to its relevance, success, and existence. Indicative of alternative media, *Un Pasquin* not only nurtures free and critical expression, but, as a public duty, strives also to cultivate social movements, social change, and civic participation amongst its readership. To this end, the website and blog affiliated with the project give readers a space to dialogue freely and openly with other like-minded members of the *Un Pasquín* community. This participatory element gives readers a keen sense of belonging to an alternative or heterotopic public sphere or alternate collective consciousness and, in this way, fosters personal agency, political representation, participatory citizenship, or, following Mouffe, “radical democracy.” Though it is a singular voice of opposition and dissent, *Un Pasquin’s* ethical project exemplifies the potential of alternative forms of media and offers hope for an alternative future on the Colombian political, cultural, and media landscapes.
Conclusion

The mediation of spatial practice can essentially be reduced to a question of power. Returning to Henri Lefebvre, who defines spatial practice as “a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice” (*Production* 8), because space is ideological, it is organized and manipulated to propagate dominant or hegemonic paradigms that render the individual agent prostrate in the face of authority. Contestations over space, increasingly understood in the twenty-first century as the liberty or obstruction of free movement within nationally bound institutions and across both geopolitical and biopolitical borders, are normalized through processes of *governmentality*, the art or science of persuading and/or coercing normative behaviour within the population ostensibly to ensure mechanisms of security within civil society (Foucault, *Security* 353). As the case of the United States-Mexico border makes clear, the largely gratuitous security rhetoric deployed by the United Statesian government is meant to induce fear, and thus discipline, within a national (United Statesian) and transnational (Mexican, broader Latin American, and global) population, with little regard to the tragic human consequences actuated by its border discourse and related policies.

In part an inquiry into changing relations of power in a globally circumscribed twenty-first-century geopolitical landscape, my dissertation is motivated by the need to re-imagine power relations within a global justice framework. Without a doubt, more democratized, representative, inclusive, and just national and transnational public spheres are necessary preconditions for the expression of personal and political agency at the root of human freedom, survival, and overall well-being. Though the initial impetus behind my
doctoral project was to explore the potential of transnational relations to bring about a global public sphere attentive to international justice and universal human rights norms, through the process of researching and writing, it became unmistakeably clear that a democratized global, transnational, or cosmopolitical order requires strong autochthonous democracies and civil societies at the local, national level. These can be strengthened through transnational and global webs and relations but, because of the persistence of Westphalian paradigms, local contexts cannot be superseded by the global. Thus, given that new frameworks can discard neither local nor global forces, I have shifted back and forth between the local and the global to seek local and global origins and responses to the crisis of local democracies and local civil societies.

As the foundational thesis of my dissertation, I have argued that national citizenship, geopolitical and symbolic borders, and the national media impose undue limits and power over globally affected populations. I support my argument by framing theories of globalization, new cosmopolitanism, border relations, and power within an ethico-political global justice paradigm, which, of course, implicates local justice as well. In the Latin American context, as the cases of Colombia and Mexico clearly demonstrate, weakened civil society and public spheres place democracy itself in peril. Through close readings of twenty-first-century Colombian and Mexican literary and journalistic texts, I expose the pathogenic state of a contemporary world order characterized not by the value of humanity but by gross inequalities and uneven flows of globalization that are both cause and effect of a violent spatial practice that excludes and segregates. This spatial practice has one dominant outcome for the most marginalized populations: imprisonment in space, as is exemplified in Tiburón Quintero’s failure to escape Mexico in Heriberto Yépez’s *Al otro lado*, or the next-to-
impossible vertical mobility of *segundones* and *tercerones* in Héctor Abad Faciolince’s *Angosta*.

Despite the vast scholarship that exists on the border dynamic, that twenty-first-century accelerated globalization processes continue to generate untimely and potentially fatal flows and dislocations of people on a global scale demands further reflection on the ethicality of the border’s influence over the mobility, agency, well-being, and human dignity of individuals. Utilized as biopolitical tools of sovereign Westphalian power, site-specific borders enact normative behaviour in the population at and beyond these territorial limits, excluding the Other in an apparent attempt to protect national territory and identity. Yet, it is only the poorest and most abject who are constrained and segregated by these lines. One of the starkest examples of dehumanizing immobility is the bare life on display at the U.S.-Mexico border and the shockingly high number of migrant deaths at the divide, as encapsulated in Luis Humberto Crosthwaite’s “Muerte y esperanza en la frontera norte.” As I explained in chapter three, that these deaths are mediated, from a Unitedstatesian perspective, as a necessary precondition to preserving national sovereignty and security, is just one more example of nation-state and mainstream media complicity in the generation and advancement of inhuman conditions in both local and global contexts. Even in instances where migrants successfully cross the border, as in the case of Marlon Cruz in Jorge Franco’s *Paraiso Travel*, they are essentially ghettoized and kept in check by a postmetropolitan spatial practice that restricts the human right to free movement.

Nonetheless, as Marlon’s partial success in reclaiming identity and agency and the mainstream media’s limited openings to alternative opinions and perspectives (i.e., opinion
pieces and editorials) demonstrate, the dominant paradigms perpetuated through national institutions can be surmounted and even subverted for alternative ends. My case study of *Un Pasquín* in chapter four is an attempt to study and bring exposure to a public sphere-building media project as proof that humanizing heterotopic spaces can and do exist despite the abiding encroachment of dehumanizing politics and policies the world over. My analysis examines the value of *Un Pasquín* as an alternative media product within the cultural marketplace of ideas, taking account of its reception within mainstream and alternative media geographies. In this sense, my study is a direct response to Gustavo Remedi’s call for “a second wave of reception studies, devoted to the study of the reception of these emerging local cultural practices aimed at producing (resuscitating?) a democratic public sphere, in response to the sombre spectacle of cultural globalization” (534).

As is evident in my dissertation’s stated goals outlined in the introduction—to highlight the critical literary and journalistic work being produced in contemporary Mexico and Colombia, to contest the biopolitical power granted to national institutions, and to identify and break down barriers to improving the human condition in the twenty-first century—, my belief in an implicit link between writing (literary and journalistic), culture, and politics underlies my textual analyses. Without suggesting that writing is reducible to culture, the connection between the two is unequivocal. As Brett Levinson notes, “the literary is fundamental to the emergence of public culture” in modernity (3). In postmodernity, with the waning of hegemonic literatures as a privileged form vis-à-vis other cultural texts, different manifestations of cultural production, including media communications, assume a more prominent role in the strengthening of civil society and the establishment of dominant and counter public spheres. Thus, I expand Erin Graff Zivin’s
observation of the shifting function of literature in postmodernity to the larger field of cultural production: “The last several decades have witnessed a reorientation of the political and a globalization of the cultural in Latin America, shifting literature’s function as a homogenizing citizen-forming institution to a more dispersed, fragmented, and (potentially) democratic and liberating practice” (1, emphasis added). The texts I have chosen to study share this democratizing potential by, referencing Mihai Spariosu once again, “allowing access to alternative worlds that may subsequently become actualized through communal choice and socio-cultural practice” (32). Several of the texts included in this study thus emphasize the power of the written word as an agency-actualizing instrument necessary to the construction of strong and inclusive public spheres. It is through the act of writing that Andrés begins to understand and contest the inequities of Angosta’s political and spatial practice. For its part, through its criticism of the Mexican press, the Baja Californian literature explored in chapter three calls for a vindication of the civic role of the media in contemporary society. Finally, if Crosthwaite finds a modest opening for free expression in the mainstream press, Vladdo locates the same in an alternative media model.

On a practical humanistic level, it is not enough simply to read the texts under study as tools to understanding the geo-ethico-political implications of dominant spatial practice or to identify the need for an alternative or heterotopic social order. Moving from theory to praxis is essential. For this reason, I chose to end my dissertation on a hopeful note with my case study of Un Pasquín, an admirable exemplification of how agency-asserting counterpublics can come together in alternative public spheres to contest dominant technologies of power (in this case the mainstream media’s partisanship), and, more
importantly, to foster social change through the establishment of alternative paradigms
grounded in truth, justice, accountability, and respect for humanity.
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